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The Narrative Representation of Memory in Recent Fiction and Autobiography

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ABSTRACT

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by Nicola King

This thesis explores the ways in which a group of autobiographical and fictional narratives are informed by theories of, and assumptions about, the operations of memory. The process of memory becomes most interesting and problematic when the site of its foundation is traumatic: all the narratives I discuss reconstruct lives marked by individually painful pasts which, in some cases, are also part of collective historical trauma. The models of memory which I have found most useful and productive are psychoanalytic, but throughout I interrogate the application of psychoanalysis to very different cultural memories and to the analysis of culture itself.

In the first chapter, I analyse two models of memory which originate in the work of Freud: one imagines the past as an archaeological site to be excavated and reconstructed, assuming that memory can provide unmediated access to the past. The other foregrounds the work of reconstruction and theorises memory as a continuous process of retranscription and retranslation. The Freudian concept of *Nachträglichkeit* or 'afterwardsness' is explored and developed as a tool for the analysis of narratives which, inevitably, reconstruct the past with hindsight, with knowledge and understanding acquired only belatedly.

The second chapter analyses two autobiographical narratives - Ronald Fraser's *In Seach of a Past* and Carolyn Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman* - which show the process of reconstructing the past as one of continuous and always provisonal retranslation. In the third chapter these are contrasted with Sylvia Fraser's 'Memoir of Incest and Healing', *My Father's House* and Margaret Atwood's novel, *Cat's Eye*, both of which are constructed on the assumption that the past lies waiting to be rediscovered by the remembering subject, untouched by the translations to which time and changing consciousness subjects it.

Chapter Four analyses Georges Perec's *W Or The Memory of Childhood*, a text which acknowledges the impossibility of reconstructing absent memory. Perec lost his mother in the Holocaust, and here I discuss the relationship between the Holocaust, memory and representation. My final chapter is a reading of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* in which I foreground the notion of 'rememory' and its relation to history, and the way in which the text articulates the cultural nostalgia for the always already lost memory of the pre-oedipal relation with the mother's body.

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Everyone, it seems, is interested in memory, and over the past five years I have had countless fascinating discussions on the subject with friends, colleagues and members of my family. It would take too long to list them all, but I would like to thank everybody who made me feel that what I was doing was connected with the real world.

This thesis is dedicated to my parents; to the memory of my grandmother; to Angela Dewar, Sally Gutierrez and Susan Gladstone; and to David.

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Note

The Pelican Freud Library has been used where works by Freud are available in that edition. Otherwise *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* has been used, and both editions are cited in the Bibliography.

Introduction

'But we didn't know that then'

Leon Greenman is a British Jew who survived Auschwitz: he now talks about his experiences at Anti-Nazi League meetings, making connections between the persecution and murder of the Jews by the Nazis and the racism of the present. He narrates his story with precise attention to facts and details, including the ironic chain of circumstances that led him to Auschwitz: he was married to a Dutchwoman and happened to be in Holland when it was occupied by the Nazis. He was initially imprisoned in a transit camp; procedures to free him were set in motion but the camp commander did not open his mail and read the letter authorising Greenman's release until after the train taking him and his wife towards the East had left. Greenman describes the moment when, after arriving at Auschwitz, he saw his wife being taken away on a truck - to the gas chambers, although, as he said, he 'didn't know that then'. This phrase haunts his narrative, repeated several times: it marks the moments when emotion broke through what is otherwise a rather detached, dead-pan delivery. His memory of that moment seems to have been deeply affected by what he didn't know at the time of the event: what he also has to remember is the painful fact of his own ignorance, as if not knowing was in some way culpable, as if it deprived him of a degree of moral responsibility, or of human agency. His memory has been forced to assimilate later knowledge which now also belongs to the wider realm of 'history': what he can never recover is the 'innocence' of the time when he 'didn't know'. [1]

Greenman's account raises key issues about the function of memory and the way in which it is reconstructed in narrative. His experience is an acute example of the fact that much human experience or action takes place under the mark of 'what wasn't known then': what we remember are events which took place in a kind of innocence. All narrative accounts of life stories, whether they be the ongoing stories which we tell ourselves and each other as part of the construction of identity, or the more shaped and literary narratives of autobiography or first-person fictions, are made possible by memory; they also reconstruct memory according to certain assumptions about the way it functions and the kind of access it gives to the past. There are moments when we feel

[1] I heard Greenman speak at an Anti-Nazi League rally at Winchester Guildhall on 9th March 1994. About a year later, he was interviewed on a BBC Radio 4 programme about the rise of anti-semitism: he no longer speaks in public and is forced to barricade his doors and windows against racist attacks.

as if our memory is giving us a 'pure' or unmediated access to the past; these memories tend to be suffused with a sense of loss, the nostalgia out of which they may be at least partly created. We long for a time when we didn't know what was going to happen next; but memory can only be reconstructed in time, and time, as Carolyn Steedman puts it, 'catches together what we know and what we do not yet know'. [2]

This paradoxical 'knowing' and 'not knowing' is the position of the autobiographical narrator, for she possesses the knowledge that she did not have 'then' when she narrates the story of her life. Several of the narratives I discuss also represent the subject of trauma as at once 'knowing' and 'not knowing' what happened to her. Cathy Caruth speaks of 'the delay or incompletion in knowing, or even in seeing, an overwhelming occurence that then remains, in its insistent return' (Greenman's 'but we didn't know that then') 'absolutely *true* to the event'. [3] The texts I discuss all deal with traumatic or painful memories, and raise the question of the narrative representation of memory in interesting and contradictory ways. Some assume that the past still exists 'somewhere', waiting to be rediscovered by the remembering subject. Others foreground memory's gaps and errors -its 'delay and incompletion' - and represent it in the process of continuously revising and reconstructing the past. These narrative strategies embody contrasting assumptions about the nature of memory, ideas which are developed more theoretically within psychoanalysis, philosophy and cognitive psychology, and which have given rise to fierce debate about the status of early or recovered memories. A parallel debate is taking place within historiography and cultural theory over the nature and limits of historical knowledge, and these debates also find expression within popular culture. Assumptions (often untheorised and taken-for-granted) about the functioning of memory underpin the ways in which a culture positions itself in relation to the past. Hence I explore not only the question of how and what individuals remember and how they represent their memories, but also contrasting models of memory and their role within culture, the ways in which we construct the very means and possibility of remembering. I explore articulations of memory as nostalgia within cultural and historiographical discourse: nostalgia expresses itself not only as a mode of remembering the past as lost, but also as a regret for the passing of a

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[2] Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives* (London: Virago, 1986), 141.

[3] Cathy Caruth, 'Introduction' to *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 3-12; 5.

'true', 'spontaneous' or 'organic' form of memory. [4] The pervasiveness of such notions in popular culture is well illustrated by an Italian tourist brochure for the Lake Trasimeno district: 'Each one of us bears inside, even unwittingly, the memory of a very remote era, of things experienced by former generations, of lost sounds and rhythms'. Modern life 'produces in our ego a sense of tenuous and penetrating absence'. [5] I argue that such nostalgias are informed by the psychoanalytic 'memory' of the imaginary plenitude of the pre-oedipal, the lost 'oceanic' unity of mother and infant - what Laura Mulvey has described as 'the pre-oedipal as Golden Age'. [6]

The texts I have chosen to discuss are those which have themselves shaped the ways in which I have come to think about the function and representation of memory. My interest in the ways in which particular moments of the past were appropriated within political and cultural discourse (including the novel) in the 1980s led me back, as it were, to the complex question of how individuals situate themselves in relation to the past, the past of their own memory or of painful historical memory to which they find themselves connected in complex and various ways. All the texts I discuss could be described as narratives of the self, thus immediately raising the question of the relationship between the 'I' who narrates and the 'I' who is narrated - or, as Christa Wolf puts it, 'the memory of ourselves ... and ... the voice that assumes the task of telling it'. [7] But none are straightforwardly autobiographical, one is entirely fictional, and one a novel which takes a historical event as its starting point: what is foregrounded by this juxtaposition is the nature of narrative 'truth'. Sylvia Fraser's autobiography *My Father's House* [8] uses the 'techniques of the novelist' to recreate a traumatic past - her experience of sexual abuse by her father - according to the trope of repression and recovery, the rediscovery of the buried past. Margaret Atwood's novel *Cat's Eye*, whose 'form is that of an autobiography' although 'it is not one', uses a similar

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[4] Terms used by Pierre Nora in 'Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, *Representations* 26 (1989), 7-25.

[5] 'Discover the Hundred Faces of the Trasimeno', *Azienda di Promozione Turistica del Trasimeno*, 1995.

[6] Laura Mulvey, 'Changes: Thoughts on Myth, Narrative and Historical Experience', *History Workshop Journal* 23 (1987), 1-19; 11.

[7] Christa Wolf, *A Model Childhood* (1976), trans. Ursule Molinaro and Hedwig Rappolt (London: Virago, 1983), 4.

[8] Sylvia Fraser, *My Father's House: A Memoir of Incest and Healing* (1987; London: Virago, 1989).

structure to enable its subject-narrator, who has also 'forgotten' a traumatic childhood, to 'see [her] life entire'. [9] The autobiographical texts of Ronald Fraser, Carolyn Steedman and Georges Perec are structured on the principle that it is impossible to recover the past 'as it really was': in different ways, they demonstrate memory as subject to a continuous process of what Freud calls 'retranscription' and Jean Laplanche 'retranslation': memories are revised and reconstructed in the light of later knowledge. All three autobiographies are oblique and de-centered in that they approach their subjects indirectly: through oral social history in Fraser's *In Search of a Past*; other texts and lives in Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman*; and narratives of fantasy and adventure in Perec's *W Or the Memory of Childhood.* [10] All three deal with painful childhoods marked by loss and lack which cannot be compensated for in memory: Fraser's in the upper-class country house of England between the wars; Steedman's on the shaky borderline between working and lower-middle class South London in the 1950s; Perec's in France under German occupation in the 1940s. These three texts also articulate the relationship between individual and cultural memory, the psyche and the social, as does my final text, Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved.* [11] Her purpose is to 'make some memorial, somewhere where these things' - the unspoken and unspeakable history of the Middle Passage - 'can be thought'. [12] Morrison is thus in a different relationship to her material from that occupied by the other narrators I discuss, both in terms of historical distance and in the fact that Sethe, the character who confronts a traumatic past, is both subject and object of the narrative. This novel's coinage of the term 're-memory' draws together the central concerns of this thesis: the representation of traumatic memory, both personal and historical; the notion of memory as a continuous process of 'retranslation'; and the appeal and danger of memory as nostalgia for the imaginary plenitude of the pre-oedipal mother-infant relation .

Morrison's novel address the historical trauma of slavery, Perec's autobiography, more obliquely and indirectly, that of the Holocaust. Atwood, Steedman, Ronald Fraser and Sylvia Fraser are concerned with personal histories of childhood trauma or conflict. To what extent can such different memories be dealt with using the same theoretical tools?

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[9] Margaret Atwood, *Cat's Eye* (1988; London: Virago, 1990), 398. The disclaimer is printed on the page of the text which gives publishing details and acknowledgements.

[10] Ronald Fraser, *In Search of a Past* (London: Verso, 1984); Carolyn Steedman, op. cit.; Georges Perec, *W Or the Memory of Childhood*, trans. David Bellos (1975; London: Collins Harvill, 1989).

[11] Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (1987; London: Picador, 1988).

[12] Toni Morrison, *South Bank Show* (ITV) , 11. 10. 1987.

I question the conflation of the two by Shoshana Felman, who refers to the Holocaust as the 'primal scene' of Western history, [13] and look closely at the ways in which psychoanalytic concepts of mourning, melancholia, repression and narcissism have been used - in fascinating and productive ways - by Eric Santner in his analysis of post-Holocaust German society. [14] I examine whether traumatic memory can be theorised as paradigmatic of all memory functions, and further, the validity of the claim made by Cathy Caruth and Shoshana Felman that the structure of trauma provides a way of thinking about the nature of historical understanding itself. This will involve some consideration of the place of the Holocaust in theories of postmodernity, and also of the contradictory interpretations of postmodernism: one defined by Lyotard as 'anamnesis', a productive re-remembering, the other theorised by Fredric Jameson as a forgetting or avoidance of coming to terms with the past. [15] For Eric Santner, the discourse of postmodernism provides the possibility of mourning the 'refusal to mourn' the myth of lost organic community and totality. [16]

Problems arise in using psychoanalytic concepts as tools of analysis for culture in general, and for the experiences of people within cultures with radically different family structures, as under slavery, or in extreme circumstances such as the concentration camp: these are acknowledged and discussed, but my main theoretical approach is psychoanalytic because it is within psychoanalysis that the most productive and interesting models of memory have been developed. In the work of Freud two contrasting ways of thinking about memory exist in some tension with each other. His frequent use of the analogy between the work of the analyst and the excavation of an archaeological site suggests that the past still exists 'somewhere', waiting to be recovered by the remembering subject; he also suggests the idea of memory as a process of 'retranscription and 're-arrangement in accordance with fresh circumstances'. [17] Part of this 're-arrangement' involves the structural principle of

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[13] Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 194, 224.

[14] Eric. L. Santner, *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory and Film in Postwar Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

[15] Jean-François Lyotard, 'Defining the Postmodern' in Lisa Appignanesi, ed., *Postmodernism: ICA Documents* (London: Free Association Books, 1989), 7-10. Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', *New Left Review* 146 (1984), 53-92.

[16] Santner, *Stranded Objects*, 7.

Nachträglichkeit: translated by Strachey as 'deferred action' and by Laplanche as 'afterwardsness', this is a key term for my thesis. I explain and explore it in my first chapter, and, following Jean Laplanche and others, show how it can be developed into a tool of analysis for the operation of memory in time, the structure of narrative and the nature of interpretation. [18] For Cathy Caruth it provides the structure which enables historical understanding of the event characterised by 'immediacy and belatedness'. Its three-fold structure is suggested by Greenman's story: the event which he could not fully experience because of his incomplete knowledge; his re-living of that event in memory with full knowledge; his narration of the event in the light of that knowledge.

Any use of psychoanalytic theories of memory must confront the question of the kind of truth which psychoanalysis seeks to establish, and the difficult issue of the relationship between the event, fantasy and narrative reconstruction. The recent controversy over 'recovered' or 'false' memory of sexual abuse is the most difficult area to deal with because of the painful realities involved and the absolute claims about memory made by either side. Parents who believe that they have been falsely accused deny the possibility that memories of abuse can be totally repressed for many years, and use well-researched psychological and psychoanalytic material to substantiate this claim; leaving aside the vexed question of therapeutic suggestion, many survivors - including Sylvia Fraser - claim that they have recovered such repressed memories. Freud's model of the past as an archaeological site waiting to be excavated presumes the reality of such repression or 'preservation' of the past: his technique and theory depended on this belief, although in the 'Wolf Man' case history the reality of the primal scene is brought into question. Without attempting to resolve this dispute, I will attempt to throw some light upon it by analysing what exactly is implied by the term 'repression', suggesting that it may be precisely that 'knowing' and 'not knowing' discussed earlier, and also by using Laplanche's concept of the 'enigmatic signifier', the unconscious seductive message transmitted to young children by the adult world. In the case of Sylvia Fraser my intention is not to disprove the abuse she claims to have suffered but to analyse her narrative reconstruction of her memory and its recovery.

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[17] For the use of the archaeological analogy, see 'The Aetiology of Hysteria', (1986) *SE* II. For 'retranscription', see the letter to Wilhelm Fliess, December 6, 1896, in Jeffery Masson, ed., *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess, 1887-1804* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1985), 207. Both these models of memory are discussed in detail in Chapter 1.

[18] John Fletcher and Martin Stanton, eds., *Jean Laplanche: Seduction, Translation, Drives* (London: ICA, 1992).

'Memory's problem', claims Jonathan Morse, is 'the inability ever to say, through time, in changing words, what we have seen, and having seen, know as such, forever. As we speak, our words only footnote other words, deferring meaning margin by margin'. [19] The question of memory is inevitably bound up with the question of representation: I address this issue in my analyses of texts, both in terms of the ways in which assumptions about memory inform their narrative structures and also in terms of what is often claimed as the incommensurability of language and memory, particularly traumatic memory. For Morse it seems almost appropriate that the belatedness of memory should find its inevitable mode of articulation through the belatedness of language: for Donald Spence, however, language can only ever be an inadequate means of describing memories conceived of as primarily visual. [20] Paradoxically, of course, it is argued that the narrative articulation of traumatic memories in the therapeutic setting is essential for psychic healing: this is the assumption of Sylvia Fraser's *Memoir* and many of the critics of *Beloved* who analyse Sethe's experience in these terms. I question this assumption in the light of Lyotard's analysis of the possibilities of representation of the Holocaust , which has been described as an 'extreme limit case' of of memory which 'probes the limits' of representation. [21] Perec's *W* is a text which foregrounds these questions.

We remember in different ways at different times: the same memories can be recalled voluntarily, and resurface involuntarily. Moments of the past can be invoked by words, smells, tastes, and sounds: we represent these moments to ourselves in visual images, in stories, in conversations. When people try to articulate the *ways* in which they remember, metaphor seems inevitable: one person will talk in terms of photographs, or of video-tape; another will describe a 'black box' inside her containing traces of all the

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[19] Jonathan Morse, *Word by Word: The Language of Memory* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 158.

[20] Donald P. Spence, *Narrative Truth and Historical Truth: Meaning and Interpretation in Psychoanalysis* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1982).

[21] David Carroll, 'Foreword' to Jean-François Lyotard, *Heidegger and "the jews"*, trans Andreas Michel and Mark S. Roberts (1988; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), vii. Saul Friedlander, ed., *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution"* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992)

events she has ever experienced; a third might say that he can only remember when he tells himself a story about what happened. Freud's 'protective shield', archaeological site and 'mystic writing pad', psychology's filing cabinets and information retrieval systems, neuroscience's engrams and 'neural networks', Derrida's textual metaphors of footnotes and supplements: all these metaphorical accounts of memory indicate that it cannot be thought or represented except in terms of something that already determines how we conceive of it. For David Farrell Krell, 'it seems that 'writing is of memory and memory of writing before there is writing in the usual sense - since time immemorial, as it were'. [22] It is the relationship between memory and writing that I explore in this thesis: it is in and through writing that memory constructs itself as inevitably 'belated', but it is through writing that its 'immediacy' is also recreated.

[22] David Farrell Krell, *Of Memory, Reminiscence and Writing: On The Verge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 49.

Chapter One

Memory in Theory

Memory can create the illusion of a momentary return to a lost past; its operations also articulate the complex relationship between past, present and future in human consciousness. I begin by analysing two contrasting models of memory within psychoanalytic theory which inform the different ways in which the processes of memory are reconstructed in narrative. The first is suggested by Freud's frequent use of the analogy between the recovery of the buried past and the excavation of an archaeological site; the second by his reference to the 'retranscription' of memories and the structural principle of *Nachträglichkeit. Nachträglichkeit* (and its adverbial form *nachträglich*) is a term used frequently by Freud but never developed by him into a consistent theory: it is usually translated by James Strachey in the *Standard Edition* as 'deferred action', [1] and, more recently, by Jean Laplanche as 'afterwardsness'. [2] This model of memory makes explicit the fact that memory, operating as it does in the present, must inevitably incorporate the awareness of 'what wasn't known then'; when memory is reconstructed in narrative, a further process of reconstruction comes into play. When the subject 'reads' her life, she reads in 'anticipation of retrospection', Peter Brooks' definition of the experience of the *reader* who also reconstructs a narrative in the process of reading. [3] These complex operations are obscured by the assumption that memory can give us direct access to the preserved or buried past, an assumption which nevertheless retains a powerful hold on our culture. [4]

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[1] In the discussion of the experience of Emma in *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, for example: 'We invariably find that a memory is repressed which has only become a trauma by *deferred action*' *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, trans. and ed. James Strachey, 24 Vols., (London: Hogarth Press, 1953-1974), Vol. 1, 356. Henceforth abbreviated to *SE*.

[2] Laplanche discusses the question of translating the term *Nachträglichkeit* in 'Notes on Afterwardsness' in John Fletcher and Martin Stanton, eds., *Jean Laplanche: Seduction, Translation, Drives* (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1992), 217-223.

[3] Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 23.

[4] My thinking on this question was clarified by reading Lis Møller's penetrating study, *The Freudian Reading: Analytical and Fictional Constructions* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991).

Memory as archaeological excavation

The archaeological analogy appears in Freud's writings of the 1890s and, although modified during the course of his work , is never entirely abandoned, emerging finally in 'Constructions in Analysis' in 1937. In *Studies on Hysteria* Freud describes his 'first full-length analysis of a hysteria': 'This procedure was one of clearing away the pathogenic psychical material layer by layer, and we liked to compare it with the technique of excavating a buried city'. [5] In 'The Aetiology of Hysteria' he says that 'the fact that the scenes are uncovered in a reversed chronological order ... justifies our comparison of the work with the excavation of a stratified ruined site'. [6] Here the site is described as *ruined*, but in the 'Rat Man' case history of 1909, burial of memory entails its *preservation*. Freud told his patient that

> ... everything conscious was subject to a process of wearing away, while what was unconscious was relatively unchangeable; and I illustrated my remarks by pointing to the antiques standing about in my room. They were, in fact, I said, only objects found in a tomb, and their burial had been their preservation: the destruction of Pompeii was only beginning now that it had been dug up ... The unconscious, I explained, *was* the infantile: it was that part of the self which had become separated off from it in infancy, which had not shared the later stages of its development, and which had in consequence become *repressed.* [7]

Here many important controversies raised by psychoanalytic theories of memory are signalled: the timelessness of the unconscious; the splitting of the ego; the implied identification of the 'infantile' with earlier stages of human civilization; the theory of repression; and the idea that the past still exists, 'somewhere', to be rediscovered by the remembering subject. 'Repression' here suggests an apparently complete forgetting, the burial of aspects of the past in the unconscious, as if behind closed doors: it is a model

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[5] Sigmund Freud, 'Case History of Fräulein Elisabeth Von R.' in Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria* (1893-1895), Pelican Freud Library Vol. 3 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), 202-255; 206. This edition henceforth abbreviated to PF.

[6] Sigmund Freud, 'The Aetiology of Hysteria' (1896), *SE* Vol. III, 189-221; 198.

[7] Sigmund Freud, *Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis* ('The Rat Man') (1909), PF Vol. 9, 33-128; 57-8.

upon which Sylvia Fraser very clearly depends in her account of memory recovery. In 1907 Freud claimed that there was 'no better analogy for repression, by which something in the mind is at once inaccessible and preserved, than burial of the sort to which Pompeii fell a victim and from which it could emerge once more through the work of spades'. [8] But even in 'The Aetiology of Hysteria' he implicitly acknowledges that interpretation must come into play to complement the 'work of spades', and that memory is textual as well as spatial: 'the numerous inscriptions, which, by good luck, may be bilingual, reveal an alphabet and a language, and, when they have been deciphered and translated, yield undreamed-of information about the events of the remote past'. [9] Walter Benjamin develops Freud's digging metaphor, whilst also insisting that language is

> the medium of past experience, as the ground is the medium in which dead cities lie interred. He who seeks to approach his own buried past must conduct himself like a man digging ... He must not be afraid to return again and again to the same matter; to scatter it as one scatters earth, to turn it over as one turns over soil. For the matter itself is only a deposit, a stratum, which yields only to the most meticulous examination what constitutes the real treasure hidden within the earth: the images ... that stand - like precious fragments or torsos in a collector's gallery - in the prosaic rooms of our later understanding.[10]

In the case of Dora, Freud uses the archaeological analogy, but adds: 'like a conscientious archaeologist, I have not omitted to mention in each case where the authentic parts end and my constructions begin'.[11] In fact, in the case histories Freud does not always distinguish the material presented to him by his patients from his own summaries which inevitably involve some interpretation. To use the terms employed by Peter Brooks in his analysis of the 'Wolf Man' case history, *fabula* (the story, or events) and *szujet* (the plot, or narrative representation of the events) are conflated, as

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[8] Sigmund Freud. *Delusions and Dreams in Jensen's* Gradiva (1907), PF Vol. 14, 27-118; 65.

[9] Freud, 'The Aetiology', 192.

[10] Walter Benjamin,'A Berlin Chronicle' (1932) in *One Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London: New Left Books, 1979), 293-346; 314.

[11] Sigmund Freud, 'Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria' ('Dora') (1905 [1901]), PF Vol. 8, 31-164; 41.

they are also in Sylvia Fraser's autobiographical reconstruction.

According to Freud, the analyst is in a much better position than the archaeologist because in the unconscious of the patient 'all the essentials are preserved; even things that seem completely forgotten are present somehow and somewhere, and have merely been buried and made inaccessible to the subject.' [12] Through the process of her own analysis, Marie Cardinal became convinced that 'the mind picks up everything, files it, classifies it, and keeps it all ... Every event , ... no matter how ordinary, ... is catalogued, labelled, and locked away in oblivion, but marked in consciousness by a signal which is often microscopic.' Her analysis, she says, gave her a means of access to this past: 'first of all I understood the system of signals, then I found the secret for opening most of the doors, and, finally, I discovered the doors which I thought were impossible to open, and in front of which I stood, desperately marking time'.[13] The work here involved recalls Benjamin's insistence upon repeatedly 'digging over' the same ground: as for Sylvia Fraser, Cardinal's 'discovery' that nothing in the past is lost, that all experience is 'filed away' somewhere, waiting to be rediscovered by the remembering subject, is both painful (when memories are of trauma or loss) and comforting (wholeness and integration are possible). According to this model, traumatic memory can be recovered by means of a long process of what Fraser calls 'detective work', a willed and painful effort: but such remembering is incomplete for Fraser without the involuntary physical re-experiencing of her abuse. Proust's involuntary memories of childhood evoked through sensual 'signals' - his foot on an uneven paving stone, the taste of a madeleine dipped in tea - are positive and joyful versions of this, but both depend upon the idea that it is possible to reinhabit the past, that past experience 'lives on' in the body. [14] As with Freud's hysterical patients whose bodily symptoms revealed that they were 'suffering from reminiscences', the body itself is here imagined as an archaeological site which preserves memory as 'pure', untouched by the reworkings to which time and retranslation subjects it.

But such experiences are inevitably reconstructed in language, and the term '(re)construction' as Lis Møller points out, is 'suspended between different understandings of psychoanalytic interpretation in Freud's work', and, I would add,

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[12] Sigmund Freud, 'Constructions in Analysis' (1937), *SE* Vol. XXIII, 255-269; 260.

[13] Marie Cardinal, *The Words to Say It* (1975), trans. Pat Goodheart (London: Picador, 1983), 125-6.

[14] Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past* (3 Vols.), trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff, Terence Kilmartin and Andreas Mayor (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989), 48-51, 897-900.

between different models of memory and its 'recovery'. It suggests the idea of the accurate archaeological reconstruction of the past, but is also 'the mark of the fictionality of the psychoanalytic interpretation' - and of any narrative 'reconstruction' of 'lost time'. [15] In 'Constructions in Analysis' Freud makes it clear that an inevitable part of the analyst's role is, precisely, 'to make out what has been forgotten from the traces which it has left behind or, more correctly, to *construct* it'. Later he adds: 'We do not pretend that an individual construction is anything other than a conjecture which awaits examination, confirmation or rejection'. [16] The provisionality of such construction suggests that it will remain open to later *re*construction, not in the sense of the rebuilding of a ruined city, or of restoring the past 'as it really was', but as a continuous process of revision and what Laplanche calls 'retranslation'.

Nachträglichkeit

The double meaning of 'reconstruction' reveals that Freud finds it almost impossible to 'preserve' his model of memory as preservation: it is inevitably undercut by another model, that indicated by the term *Nachträglichkeit*. On 6 December 1896 Freud wrote to Wilhelm Fliess:

> I am working on the assumption that our psychic mechanism has come into being by a process of stratification: the material present in the form of memory traces being subjected from time to time to a *rearrangement* in accordance with fresh circumstances - to a *retranscription*. Thus what is essentially new about my theory is the thesis that memory is present not once but several times over, that it is laid down in various kinds of indications. [17]

This passage is often quoted but is, it seems to me, highly problematic because of the context in which it occurs - an exposition of Fliess' theory of periodicity which Freud was attracted by at this time, based also upon a physical model of the mind which he never entirely abandoned and upon which much of his theory depends. The context suggests that he is here talking about the *physical* reinscription, at three different levels

[15] Møller, *The Freudian Reading*, xi.

[16] Freud, 'Constructions in Analysis', 259, 265.

[17] Jeffrey Masson, ed., *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess 1887-1904* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 207.

of 'registration', of memory traces - what neuroscientists have since called 'engrams' - upon the cortex. Laplanche and Pontalis include this quotation in their entry for 'deferred action' in *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, suggesting that this account can be assimilated to the process of *Nachträglichkeit*. If the 'fresh circumstances' according to which memories are 'retranscribed' are read as the *actual* fresh circumstances of the life of the subject, including those circumstances in which the events of the past are remembered, this becomes a productive model for memory, and one which I would argue is close to the structure and effect of narrative itself.

Freud himself did not develop *Nachträglichkeit* into a consistent theory, although he uses the term frequently and often underlines it. Laplanche and Pontalis describe it thus:

> [E]xperiences, impressions and memory-traces may be revised at a later date to fit in with fresh circumstances or to fit in with a new stage of development. They may in that event be endowed not only with a new meaning but also with psychical effectiveness ... It is not lived experience in general which undergoes a deferred revision but, specifically, whatever it has been impossible in the first instance to incorporate fully into a meaningful context. The traumatic event is the epitome of all such unassimilated experience ... Human sexuality, with the peculiar unevenness of its temporal development, provides an eminently suitable field for the phenomenon of deferred action. [18]

The clearest example of the ternary temporal structure of *Nachträglichkeit* is the case of Emma, described in the 'Project for a Scientific Psychology'.[19] This patient had an acute fear of going into shops alone, apparently caused by an incident at the age of 12 when she went into a shop and was laughed at by two male shop assistants; she thought they were laughing at her clothes. Her phobic response seems out of proportion to the event: in analysis, she remembers an earlier scene, which took place when she was eight. She had gone into a shop to buy some sweets, and had been sexually assualted by the shopkeeper who had grinned at her and grabbed her genitals through her clothes. This incident had been 'forgotten' - or not 'registered', according

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[18] J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: The Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1973), 111-2.

[19] *SE* Vol. I, 283-397.

to Lyotard's reading [20] - but the trauma which had not been experienced as such at the time was triggered by the second event with which it had certain similarities. The connection between the two scenes was made during the analysis. In the case of the Wolf Man, Freud explains: 'At the age of one and a half the child receives an impression to which he was unable to react adequately; he is only able to understand it and be moved by it when the impression is revived in him at the age of four: and only 20 years later, during the analysis, is he able to grasp with his own conscious mental processes what was then going on in him'. [21] The first 'impression' was the 'primal scene', the sight of his parents copulating *a tergo*, like animals: the impression was revived at the age of four with the dream of white wolves in the tree outside his bedroom window. In between occurred his 'seduction' by his sister and a threat of castration from his Nanya, and what Freud refers to as his 'sexual researches' which precipitated the phobia apparently caused by the dream. Freud's own later footnotes, or supplements - *Nachträg* also means 'supplement' - themselves represent his 'reconstructions' of his own constructions: the 'primal scene', he suggests, may have been at least in part a fantasy, constructed out of the child's observation of dogs copulating, or a 'primal phantasy', phylogenetically inherited, or even a construction produced within the analysis, as the patient could produce no clear recollection of the scene. Here the concept of *Nachträglichkeit* problematises the truth status of the first event, the 'primal scene', although such scenes remain powerful fantasies at both individual and cultural levels. As Linda Williams puts it: 'The child sees or hears *something*, but the material is itself only gradually inserted into a narrative or a coherent picture as it is actively reworked in memory - a reinterpretation and reinscription of the scene, taking place over time in the development of the subject '. [22]

Freud did not limit the operation of *Nachträglichkeit* to cases of infantile sexual trauma, or even to individuals: in the case history of the 'Rat Man' he claims that: 'We must above all bear in mind that people's "childhood memories" are only consolidated

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[20] Jean-François Lyotard, *Heidegger and "the jews"*, trans. Andreas Michel and Mark Roberts (1988; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 11-17. Lyotard also analyses the case of Emma in *Nouvelle Revue de Psychoanalyse* 39 (1989), 43-70; this essay is discussed by Anne Tomiche in 'Rephrasing the Freudian Unconscious: Lyotard's Affect-Phrase', *diacritics* 24, 1 (1994), 43-62.

[21] Sigmund Freud, 'From the History of an Infantile Neurosis' ('The Wolf Man') (1918), PF Vol. 9, 227-366; 278.

[22] Linda Ruth Williams, *Critical Desire: Psychoanalysis and the Literary Subject* (London: Edward Arnold, 1995), 16.

at a later period ... and that this involves a complicated process of remodelling, analogous in every way to the process by which a nation constructs legends about its own history'. [23] In *Moses and Monotheism* (written between 1934 and 1938) he describes the foundation of the Jewish religion as a belated response to and later reworking of an original trauma. John Forrester suggests that Freud developed the idea of the deferred or belated nature of trauma from Charcot's work with victims of accidents which were insufficient to account for the degree of neurosis suffered later. In such cases he observed an initial lack of affect, and a period of 'psychical working out': a similar structure was observed after the First World War in sufferers from war neurosis. [24] Freud also describes the process in the case of a woman who nursed several close relatives on their death beds: she was only able to 'experience' and work through her own suffering some time later. [25] Such cases differ from those of infantile sexual trauma in that the element of not *understanding* a sexual meaning is missing, as is the idea of a second event triggering the unconscious memory of the first, although this has been noted in sufferers from post-traumatic stress disorder. What is involved here is the difference between two kinds of 'not knowing': the sexual ignorance of the child who does not 'know' what he or she is seeing or experiencing, and the 'not knowing' of the subject who 'knows' at the level of mere information what is happening but who is unable to fully experience it at the time. Dori Laub, a psychoanalyst who works with Holocaust survivors, says that when they narrate their experiences within a therapeutic setting it is as if they are bearing witness to them for the first time: 'the emergence of the narrative which is being listened to ... is ... the process and the place wherein the cognizance, the "knowing"' of the event is given birth to.' [26] Laplanche and Pontalis make clear that what is involved here is not merely a 'delayed discharge' caused by a gap between stimulus and response, but 'a "work of recollection" which is not the mere discharge of accumulated tension but a complex set of psychological operations.' [27]

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[23] Freud, 'Rat Man', 87.

[24] See John Forrester, *The Seductions of Psychoanalysis: Freud, Lacan and Derrida* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 193-198.

[25] Freud, 'Fräulein Elisabeth Von R.', 232-235.

[26] Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (London: Routledge, 1992), 57.

[27] Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, 114.

Nachträglichkeit and narrative

This 'complex set of psychological operations' at play in the 'work of recollection' has recently been extended by Laplanche and others into 'a general psychic - and textual - mechanism' which is central to the construction and reading of narratives, particularly those which narrate the life of a fictional or autobiographical subject. For Laplanche

> analytic interpretation consists in undoing an existing, spontaneous and perhaps symptomatic translation, in order to rediscover, anterior to the translation, what it so ardently wished to translate and possibly to permit a 'better' translation: that is to say one that is more complete, more comprehensive and less repressive ... the human being reaches towards a future only because he is auto-theorising and auto-translating: each important circumstance of his life is ... for him the occasion to call into question the *present* translation, to detranslate it by turning towards the past and to attempt a better translation of this past, a more comprehensive translation, with renewed possibilities. The fundamental moments of human temporalisation are those in which this reworking takes place through the afterwards effect (*dans l'après-coup*). [28]

This process is evident, he says, not only within the psychoanalytic process but 'in the strategies of mourning, of deferral, fantasising or daydreaming' [29] - and, I would argue, in the narrative reconstruction of life stories. Andrew Benjamin has suggested that *Nachträglichkeit* 'can be articulated in relation to the presentation, deferral and subsequent re-presentation of narrative': what he calls 'the ternary structure of time articulating repetition' [30] can be clearly demonstrated in the case of autobiography, where we have, firstly, the event; secondly the memory of the event; and thirdly the writing of (the memory of) the event. Clearly, in some texts the process of 'retranslation' will be more consciously acknowledged than in autobiographies where the 'I' who speaks is assumed to be one and the same as the 'I' who is spoken of; the texts of Georges Perec, Carolyn Steedman and Ronald Fraser demonstrate the 'present

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[28] Jean Laplanche, 'Psychoanalysis, Time and Translation' in Fletcher and Stanton, *Jean Laplanche: Seduction, Translation, Drives*, 161-177; 176.

[29] Laplanche, 'Psychoanalysis, Time and Translation', 167.

[30] Andrew Benjamin, 'The Unconscious: Structuring as a Translation' in Fletcher and Stanton, *Jean Laplanche: Seduction, Translation, Drives*, 137-157; 139, 149.

imperfect translation ... ceaselessly ... push[ing] for renewed translation', the 'dynamic of a self-presencing that is always, and of necessity, incomplete'. [31] Peter Middleton has suggested the term 'afterward*ing*ness' as a better translation of *Nachträglichkeit* in that it suggests precisely this ongoing potential for reworking and retranslating. [32] Memory as anamnesis, as a continuous process of re-remembering, is also close to the narrative movement of Morrison's *Beloved*, which dramatises 're-memory' as a cyclical return to an earlier traumatic moment which is re-remembered in the present, in greater detail and with greater affect at each recurrence. The texts of Sylvia Fraser and Margaret Atwood, by contrast, are structured on the principle of the recovery of memory that has remained unconscious and therefore 'untranslated'; the narrative structure of these texts attempts to hold past and present apart rather than acknowledging the mutual transformations which each exerts upon the other - although this is a recognition which these narratives cannot ultimately evade.

The narrative reconstruction of a life 'history' provides the opportunity for a rereading of those events which '*would have been* recognized as a purpose and *would have* determined the action, had it been anticipated.' 'Analysis' - including the self-analysis which takes place in these texts - 'seeks those intentions which *would have been* determinate of the good fortune, or misfortune, of the subject, *had they been recognized as such*'. [33] Autobiographical narratives reconstruct the events of a life in the light of 'what wasn't known then.' Peter Brooks has suggested that all narrative is constituted by an act of memory: the reconstruction of a narrative in the act of reading depends upon the memory of the reader, who reads in 'anticipation of retrospection'. 'What remains to be read will restructure the provisional meanings of the already read'. [34] Ricoeur argues that the reconstruction of a narrative - in itself the 'retroactive realignment of the past' - in the act of reading disrupts the common sense notion of time:

> As soon as a story is well known to follow the story is not so much to enclose its surprises or discoveries within our recognition of the meaning attached to the story, as to apprehend the episodes which are themselves

[31] Benjamin, 'The Unconscious', 146.

[32] In a personal communication.

[33] John Forrester, *The Seductions of Psychoanalysis*, 210. Forrester is quoting Aristotle in the *Physics*.

[34] Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, 23.

> well known as leading to this end. Finally, the repetition of a story, governed as a whole by its way of ending, constitutes an alternative to the representation of time as flowing from the past towards the future, following the well-known metaphor of the "arrow of time". It is as though recollection inverted the so-called "natural" order of time. In reading the ending in the beginning and the beginning in the ending, we also learn to read time itself backwards, as the recapitulation of the initial conditions of a course of action in its terminal consequences. [35]

Ricoeur is talking about the reading of a narrative: an autobiography is a reading of a life, and I shall argue that this is exactly how Sylvia Fraser and Margaret Atwood's fictional narrator Elaine read and reconstruct their own life stories, in terms of what Mark Freeman has called the 'reciprocal determination' of 'endings and beginnings'. [36] The other autobiographical writers I discuss resist the over-determination which highly reconstructed narratives can produce by deliberately leaving their texts fragmentary and provisional. Dominick LaCapra suggests that 'the narratives of historians may be opened to some extent by the attempt to explore alternative possibilities in the past that are themselves suggested by the retrospective or deferred effects of later knowledge': [37] autobiography as history *can* preserve what Ricoeur calls 'the space of contingency that once belonged to the past when it was present', and avoid 'the retrospective illusion of fatality'. [38] For Brooks, narrative 'has to do with the recovery of the past, and ... the attempted rescue of meaning from passing time': it is a 'dynamic of memory and desire that can reconnect, however provisionally and tenuously, time lost and time continuing.' [39]

Lyotard would seem to agree when he claims that 'writing ... always is of some restorative value to the soul because of its unpreparedness, which leaves it an infant. Writing repairs to the extent that it uses word or thing representations'; but he goes on to warn of the danger of forgetting 'once again that there is no salvation, no health, and that time, even the time of work, does not heal anything'. [40] These, however, are

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[35] Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* Vol. 1, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984), 67.

[36] Mark Freeman, *Rewriting the Self: History, Memory, Narrative* (London: Routledge, 1991), 176.

[37] Dominick LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 18.

[38] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* Vol. 1, 157-8, 188.

[39] Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, 321, 285.

precisely the claims made for the therapeutic effect of narrative in the wake of traumatic experience: 'This work of reconstruction actually transforms the traumatic memory, so that it can be integrated into the survivor's life story'. [41] In Morrison's *Beloved* Sethe's story becomes bearable when she is able to share it with Paul D. - 'to tell, to refine, and tell again'. [42] In the context of Freud's account of the case of Dora, Steven Marcus suggests that we are forced to conclude 'that a coherent story is in some manner connected with mental health ... On this reading, human life is, ideally, a connected and coherent story, with all the details in explanatory order and with everything ... accounted for, in its proper causal or other sequence'. [43] Narratives such as *Beloved* and Perec's *W* recognise, however, that some events cannot be fully reconstructed or integrated into a coherent story, that something in them will always resist recovery or 'passing on'.

Talking not about the narrative reconstruction of a life within the analytic process, but about the production of narrative representations which will be read by others, Lyotard argues for a form of narrative that preserves the disruptive chronological effect of *Nachträglichkeit* : he argues that most narrative is

> the setting into diachrony of what takes place in a time that is not diachronic since what happened earlier is given at a later date (in analysis, in writing), and since what is later in the symptom (the second blow) occurs "before" what happened earlier (the first blow) ... Narrative organization is constitutive of diachronic time, and the time that it constitutes has the effect of "neutralizing"an "initital" violence, of representing a presence without representation, of staging the obscene, ... and of staging a recollection that must be a reappropriation of the improper, achronological affect. [44]

Lyotard is here arguing against a kind of narrative which recuperates violence or

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[40] Lyotard, *Heidegger and "the jews"*, 33-4.

[41] Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: From Domestic Abuse to Personal Terror* (London: Pandora, 1992), 176.

[42] Morrison, *Beloved*, 99.

[43] Stephen Marcus, 'Freud and Dora: Story, History, Case-History' in *Representations: Essays on Literature and Society* (London: Macmillan, 1976), 247-310; 276-7.

[44] Lyotard, *Heidegger and "the jews"*, 16.

atrocity into a chronological sequence which negates the disruptive effect of that violence on the nature of time as 'common-sense' imagines it: he argues instead for a form of writing which 'does not forget that there is the forgotten'; which, instead of 'saving the memory', tries to 'preserve the remainder, the unforgettable forgotten'. [45] Lawrence Langer's analysis of the oral testimonies of Holocaust survivors reveals the need of *listeners* to recuperate and assimilate their often bleak and fragmentary accounts into comforting narratives of courage and redemption, narratives which attempt to heal the breach between the self of the camps and the self of 'now'. [46] The German historian Martin Broszat argues 'for a certain primacy of the pleasure principle in historical narration even, paradoxically, when it comes to narrative events the traumatic impact of which would seem to call the normal functioning of that principle in question'. [47]

Memory of trauma: trauma as memory

My discussion of the relationship between memory and narrative shows it at its most complex in cases of trauma, a concept whose definition is in itself problematic. The psychoanalytic theorisation of memory arose out of analyses of patients who 'suffered from reminiscences' of traumatic experiences, and the models of burial and preservation and of *Nachträglichkeit* were both developed as ways of describing memories of trauma. Definition of trauma is often implicitly circular: in the absence of a specific 'list' of events which might count as traumatic, trauma can only be defined in terms of the individual's later response; nonetheless, I would still want to claim that events such as the Holocaust do have a historically traumatic specificity. When Ronald Fraser says in an interview with *History Workshop Journal* that '[i]t's not usually the event - unless, of course, it's traumatic - that's significant, but the meaning we give to it', [48] he seems to be suggesting that what counts as trauma is categorically fixed, and excluding his own childhood experiences from this category. The reader of his text might disagree. The 'Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder' published

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[45] Lyotard, *Heidegger and "the jews"*, 26.

[46] Lawrence L. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975). See especially pages 1-12, 58-60.

[47] Eric L. Santner, 'History Beyond the Pleasure Principle: Some Thoughts on the Representation of Trauma' in Saul Friedlander, ed., *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution"* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 143-154; 149.

[48] 'Review Discussion: *In Search of a Past*: a dialogue with Ronald Fraser', *History Workshop Journal* 20 (1985), 175-188; 184.

by the American Psychiatric Association in 1987 defined trauma as 'an event which is outside the range of human experience'. Not only is this entirely illogical - if it is outside the range of human experience, no human *could* experience it - but also, as Laura S. Brown points out, leaves out experiences such as childhood sexual abuse because they were judged as 'too frequent', thus falling *within* the range. [49] Once large numbers of people have suffered from appalling experiences of war, or 'natural' or 'man-made' disasters, they would, by this definition, also cease to count as traumatic. By this definition the Holocaust would not be defined as traumatic, although, of course, the ongoing debate about its memorialisation, historicisation and representation shows that it *was* - and still remains - in some sense 'outside the range of human experience.' In individual cases, 'social context, and the individual's personal history within that social context, can lend traumatic meaning to events that might only be sad or troubling in another time or place'. [50] For Cathy Caruth, it is precisely the *'structure of its experience or reception'* which constitutes the event as traumatic, its 'immediacy and belatedness', 'the delay or incompletion in knowing'. [51] For Caruth, trauma has become the paradigm of *all* historical events in terms of delayed effect and understanding:

> I would propose that it is here, in the ... widespread and bewildering encounter with trauma - both in its occurrence, and in the attempt to understand it - that we can begin to recognize the possibility of a history which is no longer straightforwardly referential (that is, no longer based on simple models of experience and reference). Through the notion of trauma... we can understand that a re-thinking of reference is not aimed at eliminating history, but at resituating it in our immediate understanding, that is, of precisely permitting *history* to arise where *immediate understanding* may not. [52]

Whilst it would seem clear that both personal and historical events are often only

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[49] Laura S. Brown, 'Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma' in Cathy Caruth, ed., *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 100-112; 100-1

[50] Brown, 'Not Outside the Range', 110.

[51] Cathy Caruth, 'Trauma and Experience: Introduction' to Part One of *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, 3-11; 4-5.

[52] Cathy Caruth, 'Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History' in *Yale French Studies* 79 (1991), 181-192; 182.

understood in retrospect, this does seem to deny what might be *specific* to the experience of trauma - and, indeed, to the Holocaust, which has become an 'extreme limit case of memory' and of representation. [53] At least in the West, it has become *the* traumatic event of recent history which problematises our relationship to the past, to the Enlightenment and to modernity, and to our sense of what it means to be human. A term coined by Shoshana Felman, 'history as Holocaust' suggests that, post-Holocaust, *all* history, including that of the pre-Holocaust, is rewritten by that knowledge. [54] This acknowledges the extent of the damage wrought on our sense of history and on language by this event, but runs the risk of de-particularising the Shoah as such, of turning it into what Eric Santner has called 'the ostensible violence of a universal linguistic operation'. [55] Whilst remaining aware of these dangers, many of my examples (and one of my central texts, Perec's *W*) are drawn from the experience of the Holocaust because it is here that much of the most interesting work on memory and its representation has been done: the case of the Holocaust also foregrounds many of the dangers inherent in assimilating very different kinds of event to the psychoanalytic paradigm.

Laub's experience with Holocaust survivors has led him to claim that 'massive trauma precludes its registration: the observing and recording mechanisms of the human mind are knocked out, malfunction'. The idea of 'non-registration' is problematic: if an event is not registered at all, how can it then be 'given birth to' in narrative? What Laub does describe is the monotonous, factual, affect-less narratives of some survivors for whom 'the trauma - as a known event and not simply as an overwhelming shock - has not been truly witnessed yet, not been taken cognizance of.' [56] Other survivors, such as Charlotte Delbo, describe the effect of trauma in terms of a split between the self who experienced it and the self who 'survives':

> I have the feeling ... that the 'self' who was in the camp isn't me, isn't the person who is here, opposite you. No, it's too unbelievable. And everything that happened to this other 'self', the one from Auschwitz,

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[53] David Carroll, 'Foreword: The Memory of the Devastation and the Responsibilities of Thought: "And let's not talk about that"' in Lyotard, *Heidegger and "the jews"*, vii-xxix; viii.

[54] Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 152.

[55] Eric L. Santner, *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory and Film in Postwar Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 32.

[56] Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 57.

> doesn't touch me now, *me*, doesn't concern me, so distinct are deep memory [*mémoire profonde*] and common memory [*mémoire ordinaire*]. [57]

Here the function of memory itself is described as 'split' between the way in which 'ordinary' events which proceed in 'normal' time are recorded, and the dislocating, achronological nature of the memory of experiences of extremity. Therapists who have worked with survivors of other traumas describe a mode of remembering which retains facts, images and events as a series of photographs which can be looked at briefly but with the emotion to which they might give rise still held at bay. Linda Williams quotes Mrs Oliphant in her analysis of her autobiography: 'All my recollections are like pictures ... not continuous, only a scene detached and conspicuous here and there'; she describes 'a picture ... which got itself hung up upon the walls of my mind'. [58] This mode of remembering - or forgetting - is close to that described by Freud in 'Remembering, Repeating and Working Through': in neurosis, 'forgetting is mostly restricted to dissolving thought-connections, failing to draw the right conclusions and isolating memories ... Forgetting impressions, scenes or experiences nearly always reduces itself to shutting them off. When the patient talks about these "forgotten" things he seldom fails to add: "As a matter of fact I've always known it, only I've never thought of it"'. [59] This idea of 'repression' is quite different from the idea that the subject retains *no* conscious memory of traumatic events: it is closer to the vivid yet dissociated violent images that Sethe (in *Beloved*) cannot prevent her mind from admitting than it is to Sylvia Fraser's total amnesia of years of abuse. As Christopher Bollas puts it, 'these individuals suffer not so much from an unknown thought, as from an unthought known'. [60] Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich and Eric Santner have argued that culture - specifically German culture - still stands in this relationship of distance and 'dissociation' from the Holocaust and the Nazi period in general: it has not been worked through in a process of mourning, largely because of a failure to recognise the 'collective narcissism' upon which it depended. [61] Later I explore the

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[57] Quoted by Lawrence L. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies*, 5.

[58] Williams, *Critical Desire*, 146.

[59] Sigmund Freud, 'Remembering, Repeating and Working Through', *SE* Vol. XII, 145-156; 148-9.

[60] Quoted by Richard B. Gartner and Dodi Goldman in their letter to *The New York Review of Books* (' "Victims of Memory": An Exchange': 12 January 1995) in reply to two articles by Frederick Crews, 'The Revenge of the Repressed', 16 November and 1 December, 1994.

[61] Santner, *Stranded Objects;* Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich, *The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective Behaviour*, trans. Beverley R. Placzek (New York: Grove Press, 1975).

operations of this narcissism in a particular form of memory, expressed in terms of a nostalgia for the lost imaginary unity of mother and pre-oedipal infant.

Lyotard uses Freud's concept of the *Reizschutz* or 'protective shield' which protects the psyche from excessive stimulus (set out in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*) to argue for the 'non-registration' of trauma:

> An "excitation" - that is, a disturbance of the system of forces constituted by the psychic apparatus ... affects the system when it cannot deal with it: either at the point of entry, inside, or at the point of exit ... It is an excitation that is not "introduced": it affects, but does not enter; it has not been *introduced* ... and remains unpresented ... It is thus a shock, since it "affects" a system, but a shock of which the shocked is unaware, and which the apparatus (the mind) cannot register in accordance with and in its internal physics; a shock by which it is not affected ... It is "in excess" like air and earth are in excess for the life of a fish ... Something, however, *will make* itself understood, "later". [62]

Lyotard goes on to explain how '[t]he *double blow* includes a first blow, the first excitation, which upsets the apparatus with such "force" that it is not registered. It is like a whistle that is inaudible to humans but not to dogs, or like infrared or ultraviolet light ... it does not give rise to a *mise-en-scene*. This force is not set to work in the machine of the mind. It is deposited there'. [63] He is here suggesting that there is something in the nature of traumatic experience which prevents its *representation* in the mental life of the subject. As Anne Tomiche points out: 'For Lyotard there is a continuity of stakes in thinking the political, the aesthetic and the psychic apparatus ... and the immemorial in history: in Lyotard's rephrasing, the historico-political and the psychical function analogically.' [64] The whistle inaudible to humans reminds one of Lyotard's analogy between the historical trauma signalled by the word 'Auschwitz' and an earthquake which destroys the instruments capable of measuring it. [65] In *Heidegger and "the jews"* this unassimilable and unrepresentable 'blow' is defined as

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[62] Lyotard, *Heidegger and "the jews"*, 12.

[63] Lyotard, *Heidegger and "the jews"*, 15.

[64] Tomiche, 'Rephrasing the Freudian Unconscious', 43.

[65] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. Georges van den Abbeele (1983; Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1988), 56.

sexual difference, 'the case of an excess, of an initial overflowing': but "the jews" is also 'the name...that the Occident has given to the unconscious anxiety' which must be annihilated and the fact of its annihilation forgotten. [66]

This formulation may seem to elide the psycho-pathological and the historico-political, but there will always remain something 'in excess' about the Nazi extermination of the Jews: as Jacqueline Rose has put it, '[f]ascism is ... one of the few historical moments which historians have generally recognized as needing psychoanalytic concepts of desire and identification in order for it to be fully understood ... in fascism, the realm of politics reveals itself as massively invested with the most private and intimate images of our fantasy life', [67] not least with the elimination and 'forgetting' of the unassimilable Other. If the Jews were once the unassimilable, the Holocaust which attempted their destruction now functions as what cannot be assimilated into historical understanding - or which is 'forgotten' all over again by attempts to 'neutralise its violence' into comfortable narratives of cause and effect, pain and redemption.

Santner has also used the concept of the *Reizschutz* in his analysis of post-Nazi German identity:

> The events in question may represent for those whose lives have been touched by them ... a degree of over-stimulation to psychic structures and economies such that normal psychic functioning ... may be interrupted and other, more "primitive" tasks may take precedence, ... [such as] repairing what Freud referred to as the *Reizschutz,* the protective shield or psychic skin that normally regulates the flow of stimuli and information across the boundaries of the self.

His point is that this 'psychic skin' can be repaired so effectively and harden itself to the extent that no effective memory-work or mourning can take place. He asserts the *textual* quality of his version of the *Reizschutz*: it is 'made from symbolic materials, ... it is a culturally constructed and maintained organization of individual and group identities', and has resulted in 'narrative fetishism', 'the construction and deployment of a narrative consciously or unconsciously designed to expunge the traces of the trauma or loss that called that narrative into being in the first place'. He analyses this

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[66] Lyotard, *Heidegger and "the jews"*, 20, 27.

[67] Jacqueline Rose, *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath* (London: Virago, 1991), 7.

'narrative fetishism' in the historian Andreas Hillgruber's *Two Kinds of Ruin: The Shattering of the German Reich and the End of European Jewry*, whose title makes explicit the equation of these two losses, and in some scenes from Edgar Reitz's film *Heimat*, which, he argues, recuperates the ideal of the lost German homeland. [68] The premature closing-off of traumatic history into patterns of repemption is also enacted in the closing scenes of Spielberg's film *Schindler's List*, in which Schindler is transformed into the sentimental hero weeping over his failure to save more than a few thousand Jews, and the Jews he saved walk en masse towards the camera as they are liberated. These are narratives which represent a premature healing of the breach in the metaphoric shield and a denial of the rupture created in our sense of time and history by this event: Lyotard argues instead for a 'kind of history that does not forget that forgetting is not a breakdown of memory but the immemorial always "present" but never here-now, always torn apart in the time of consciousness, of chronology, between a too-early and a too-late - the too early of a first blow dealt to the apparatus that it does not feel, and the too late of a second blow where something intolerable is felt'. [69]

Reality and fantasy

The idea of the 'first blow' not being felt is problematic, and also has implications for the difficult issue of the reality of (especially early childhood) trauma: Lyotard admits that there is something 'monstrous, unformed, confusing, confounding' in what he calls the 'unconscious affect'. [70] The case for 'non-registration' could perhaps be made in the case of infantile exposure to the primal scene, but for those who experienced the Holocaust or other atrocities it seems presumptuous, to say the least, and signals one of the problems involved in assimilating psychoanalytic theory of sexual trauma to very different kinds of event. The problem of the relationship between reality and fantasy is highlighted quite crudely in a discussion between Jeffrey Masson and a group of psychoanalysts, reported by Masson to Janet Malcolm and included in her *In the Freud Archives*. [71] Masson attacked the group on the grounds of denying the difference between fantasy and reality, which they confirmed they did not consider of fundamental importance within the analytic encounter. He then asked them: 'Surely

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[68] Santner, 'History beyond the Pleasure Principle', 148-152.

[69] Lyotard, *Heidegger and "the jews"*, 20.

[70] Lyotard, *Heidegger and "the jews"*, 16-17.

[71] Janet Malcolm, *In The Freud Archives* (1984; London: Fontana, 1986), 53-6.

you're not going to tell me that the reality of Auschwitz doesn't matter - that all that matters is how people experience it? You're not going to tell me that there are different ways of experiencing Auschwitz, are you?' One analyst gave the example of a patient who told him that 'Auschwitz made a man of me' and Masson was horrified: the argument devolved onto the issue of 'reality', about which there seems to have been confusion on both sides. Masson said to Malcolm: 'They were arguing that there is no such thing as reality - that there is no single Auschwitz. That is the worst thing that analysis has left the world: the notion that there is no reality, that there are only individual experiences of it.' But these two statements do not say the same thing: the fact that every individual experiences an event slightly differently is not the same thing as saying that there is no reality. The analysts were not denying the reality, or the atrocity, of the Holocaust: what they were arguing was that in analysis it is the patient's memory of his own experience that is important, and the process of finding words for and working through the trauma as experienced by that person. In spite of the fact that part of the Nazis' project was the destruction of the individuality of their victims, resulting in a response that might be described as shared or collective, the writings of Primo Levi, Tadeusz Borowski, Bruno Bettelheim and Elie Wiesel [72] show that survivors *do* think and write about this event quite differently. Analysts such as Henry Krystal who work with survivors have observed the operations of fantasy even within - or in the later reconstruction of - the experience of the camps, linking it to the fear of separation and annihilation stemming from the experience of early infancy. [73] Masson is right to be concerned about the dangers of relativisation and 'normalisation' (raised in a different context by the German *Historikerstreit*) but using the example of an undisputed historical event (undisputed, that is, except by neo-Nazi revisionists) in a discussion about the truth status of the early memories reconstructed in psychoanalysis is both too easy and too problematic. [74] He uses the Holocaust as the extreme event

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[72] See bibliography for details of these texts.

[73] Henry Krystal, ed., *Massive Psychic Trauma* (New York: International Universities Press Inc., 1968). In this volume Robert J. Lifton suggests that 'Holocaust experience is distinguished by the living out in actuality of what is usually confined to psychotic fantasy - that is, an end-of-the-world experience [whose] imagery must attach itself to very early imagery from childhood ... the earliest fear of separation, particularly separation from the mother, perhaps originating with birth itself' (181). Gustav Bychowski further suggests that this may lead to 'a yearning for an "oceanic" reunion with the lost but not renunciated infantile objects of primary love' (83).

[74] For the *Historikerstreit*,see Charles S. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust and German National Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988) and Richard Evans, *In Hitler's Shadow: West German Historians and the Attempt to Escape from the Nazi Past* (London: I.B.Tauris, 1989). For Holocaust denial, see Deborah Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust* (London: Penguin, 1994).

whose atrocity it is absolutely vital to acknowledge, implying that any blurring of the boundary between reality and fantasy in psychoanalytic theory or practice has the same implications as the denial of the reality of Auschwitz. Masson's focus soon shifted to Freud's abandonment of the seduction theory and what he sees as the denial of the reality of childhood sexual abuse: [75] this is much more problematic ground than the reality of the Holocaust, but the elision of the two traumas suggests that questioning the reality of the one (sexual abuse) is tantamount to denying the reality of the other (the Holocaust).

In a much more theoretically sophisticated way, Shoshana Felman also elides the difference between the (possibly imaginary) event which is reconstructed in psychoanalytic dialogue, and the historical event, in her claim that the Holocaust is a 'historically ungraspable *primal scene* which erases both its witnesses and its witnessing'. [76] The fact that the Nazis tried - but did not entirely succeed - in creating 'an event without a witness', and Laub's concept of 'non-registration', are here conflated into the notion of an event which was possibly never experienced: the 'primal scene' of psychoanalytic theory, defined by Ned Lukacher as 'an ontologically undecidable textual event'. [77] The dangers of this are obvious, but the practice of Laub and Felman succeeds where their theory presumes failure, in giving voice to the witness in the therapeutic setting and acknowledging it in the case of Simon Srebnik in Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah*. [78] Such articulations, however, always attest to the silences, resistances and the 'immemorial' (always and yet never fully remembered) quality of the event. There is a fundamental difference between the retroactive construction of a trauma which cannot be recovered by the memory - the psychoanalytic or textual 'primal scene'- and historical events whose occurrence is not in dispute, but which require a delay for fuller understanding to develop, and a lapse of time before their full - and possibly traumatic - import can be revealed. The more generalised use of

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[75] See Jeffrey Masson, *The Assault on Truth: Freud and Child Sexual Abuse* (1984; London: Fontana, 1992).

[76] Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 194.

[77] Ned Lukacher, *Primal Scenes: Literature, Philosophy, Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 24.

[78] Lanzmann takes Srebnik back to Chelmno, where he was imprisoned as a young boy; he sings again the song he was made to sing to entertain his captors - 'A little white house/lingers in my memory/Of that little white house/each night I dream'. Felman writes: 'The uniqueness of the voice restores the signature to the repeated melody and to the cited lyrics, and transforms them from anti-testimony into a compelling and unequaled testimony' (277).

the concept of *Nachträglichkeit* to the fields of narrative, historicisation and temporalisation should not obscure this important difference.

Masson is assuming that the discourse of historical report is, or should be, the same as the discourse of psychanalytic truth: John Forrester has recently pointed out the importance of recognising the fact that psychoanalytic and legal discourses deal with different conceptions of truth. [79] When Freud reached the position (in 'Constructions in Analysis') that truth about the past depends on the explanatory power of the construction, its power to convince the patient and its curative effect, he was not envisaging his patients producing this 'truth' in a court of law. When this happens, a total impasse is revealed between those who believe that long-repressed memories of sexual abuse in early childhood can be recovered in later life, and those who deny the possibility of such total repression and recovery, arguing instead that these 'memories' are more likely to be the result of suggestion by therapists using dubious methods such as hypnosis. The latter group includes not only accused parents, but psychologists such as Elizabeth Loftus who use laboratory research on memory to argue that it is 'inherently sketchy, reconstructive, and unlocalizable ... easily corrupted', if not with a therapist's unwitting intervention, 'then with a normal "retrospective bias" that accomodates one's sense of the past to one's present values.' She argues that 'gradual avoidance and atrophy of painful recollections' is a much more likely response than total repression. [80] This account of memory seems much closer to the model I have been defending, but even here 'avoidance' and 'atrophy' might well produce the effect, within the therapeutic setting, of the patient 'giving birth to' painful events 'for the first time'. The model of *Nachträglichkeit* retains the possibility that traumatic events, particularly those of early childhood, are 'not registered', and hence 'forgotten', until later events trigger their recollection and give them meaning. Writing in the context of the 'false memory' debate, Beatrix Campbell says that 'clinicians working with "shell-shocked" soldiers and concentration camp survivors have documented *forgetting*, or *the postponing of psychic pain*, as a survival strategy' (my italics). [81] Here it is assumed that the effect of early childhood sexual trauma is the same as that experienced by adults in other settings; 'forgetting' and 'postponement' are also elided in a way that avoids the complex question of what, precisely, is meant by 'forgetting'.

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[79] Forrester, *The Seductions of Psychoanalysis*, 80-82.

[80] Quoted by Crews, 'The Revenge of the Repressed' Part 1, 55. The British False Memory Society also publishes a newsletter and keeps a database on the phenomenon of 'false' or 'recovered' memory.

[81] Beatrix Campbell, 'Mind Games', *Guardian*, 11.2.1995, 23-27.

One way out of this impasse and out of the often sterile argument over Freud's 'abandonment' of the seduction theory, has been suggested by Jean Laplanche's concept of the 'enigmatic signifier'. It is also a concept which illuminates some of the problematic memories of Steedman and Ronald Fraser, although I do not propose it as an alternative 'truth' to that claimed by Sylvia Fraser. According to Laplanche, seduction is 'an actual situation of children in relation to the adult world they are entering': he uses the term 'primal seduction' to describe 'a fundamental situation in which an adult proffers to a child verbal, non-verbal and even behavioural signifiers which are pregnant with unconscious sexual significations'. These signifiers are enigmatic because they excite and mystify and can only belatedly be symbolised: 'the *enigma* is in itself a *seduction* and its mechanisms are unconscious ... The "attentions of a mother" or the "aggression of a father" are seductive only because they are not transparent. They are seductive because they are opaque, because they convey something enigmatic'. Such messages are unconscious on the part of the adult, and imperfectly understood by the child - the *in fans* who, by definition, is incapable of speech or of representing these messages or images to herself: as such, they are ripe ground for later elaboration, fantasy and 'retranslation'. [82] Linda Grant has recently suggested that *some* 'recovered' memories of sexual abuse may be the result of confused and seductive situations in a family where sexual boundaries are unclear and mutual father- daughter attraction results in inappropriate behaviour which stops short of abuse. What is required here is 'tolerance of uncertainty' in the therapeutic relationship and an acceptance within the family of 'difficult and ambiguous truths'. [83] As Frederick Crews points out, however, the alternative, '[t]he very idea of repression and its unraveling, is an embryonic romance about a hidden mystery, an arduous journey, and a gratifyingly neat denouement that can ascribe our otherwise drab shortcomings and pains to deep necessity.' [84] Here he makes explicit the link between a particular model of memory and the satisfactions of narrative.

Metaphors of Memory

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[82] Jean Laplanche, 'The Drive and its Object-source: Its Fate in the Transference', in Fletcher and Stanton, *Seduction, Translation, Drives*,179-195; 188-9. 'The ICA Seminar: New Foundations for Psychoanalysis', ibid. 65-89; 85. John Fletcher, 'The Letter in the Unconscious: The Enigmatic Signifier in the Work of Jean Laplanche, ibid. 93-120; 107, 110.

[83] Linda Grant, 'From Here to Uncertainty', *Guardian*, 16.1.1990, 10-11.

[84] Crews, 'The Revenge of the Repressed' Part 1, 55.

It will already have become apparent that it is impossible to imagine or formulate memory and its operations without the use of metaphor. The dominant metaphors employed - often quite unconsciously - within a culture then come to seem part of 'common-sense', and to determine the ways in which memory can be thought. Two dominant and distinct ways of imagining memory are by means of the photographic metaphor one the one hand, and as a form of language or narrative on the other.

For some, these models are incompatible: according to Donald P. Spence, narrative always involves a kind of 'forgetting' since 'the complex visual scene represented by a dream or an early memory can probably never be completely realised by language', and '[w]hat is sayable may pre-empt what is really remembered'. Claiming that early memories are visual (as does Herman in the case of traumatic memory, which persists as 'a series of still snapshots' [85]), he says:

> Once expressed in a particular set of sentences, the memory itself has changed, and the patient will probably never again have quite the same vague, nonspecific and unspoiled impression. Thus the very act of talking about the past tends to crystallize it in specific, but somewhat arbitrary language, and thus serves, in turn, to distort the early memory. More precisely, the new description *becomes* the early memory. [86]

Primo Levi agrees: 'It is also true that a memory evoked too often, and expressed in the form of a story, tends to become fixed in a stereotype, in a form tested by experience, crystallised, perfect, adorned, which instals itself in the place of raw memory and grows at its expense'. [87] Spence assumes that early memory is visual: Walter Benjamin describes an early memory (of a school leave-taking ceremony) which is already textual.

> Here, as in several other places, I find in my memory rigidly fixed words, expressions, verses, that, like a malleable mass that has later cooled and

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[85] Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 175.

[86] Donald P. Spence, *Narrative Truth and Historical Truth: Meaning and Interpretation in Psychoanalysis* (New York: W.W.Norton and Co., 1982), 28, 92, 280.

[87] Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (1986), trans. Raymond Rosenthal (London: Abacus, 1989), 11-12.

> hardened, preserve in me the imprint of a collision between a larger collective and myself. Just as a certain kind of significant dream survives awakening in the form of words when all the rest of the dream content has vanished, here isolated words have remained in place as marks of catastrophic encounters. [88]

Benjamin's metaphor does, however, also evoke the notion of memory as an - almost visual - 'engram' or 'trace' physically inscribed on the brain which has its roots in the philosphy of Aristotle and is developed much later by Derrida. [89] Edward Casey has described the *body* as a 'memorial container', holding memories of joy (Proust) or pain (Sylvia Fraser, and the survivors of torture described by Elaine Scarry) which can be relived involuntarily. [90] For Casey the body *is*, precisely, embodied memory in that it is constitutive of our experience of living in time. Combining the metaphors of inscription and bodily memory, James Young describes the desire of some Holocaust survivors for their writing to function as a pure 'trace' - and therefore proof - of their experience, without the inevitable mediation of language or the tropes of narrative. Just as their experience is inscribed on their memory, so their desire is to inscribe their experience upon the world. 'Their impossible task is ... to show somehow that their words are material traces of experiences, that the current existence of their narrative is causal proof that its objects also existed in historical time'. [91]

Whilst it seems likely that different *events* are remembered in different ways - some almost immediately represented in narrative, others remaining 'snapshots', others still remembered only 'in the body' - and that different people remember in different ways - some visually, some in language, very young children differently from adults - it will also become apparent that assumptions about the nature of memory shape both the relationship of culture to its past, and the nature and structure of the narratives that reconstruct the past.

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[88] Benjamin, 'A Berlin Chronicle', 303.

[89] See David Farrell Krell, *On The Verge: Of Memory, Reminiscence and Writing* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); Jacques Derrida, 'Freud and the Scene of Writing' in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 196-231.

[90] Edward S. Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 173.

[91] James E. Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 23.

The Memory of Culture and the Culture of Memory

Ned Lukacher has suggested that the dilemma of the postmodern world is 'to recognize that "mourning is in error" but to be nevertheless condemned to mourn; to be unable to remember the transcendental ground that would once again give meaning to human language and experience but also unable to stop mourning the putative loss of an originary memory and presence that doubtless never existed'. [92] The 'originary memory' is the quest for the memory of a moment of origin, Crews' 'arduous journey' towards the 'hidden mystery' which would reveal the source of our pain: it is also the mythical memory of human origins, the Golden Age of the collective past and the time before loss and separation, described by Laura Mulvey as 'the pre-Oedipal as Golden Age'. [93] Even narratives of the worst kind of abuse and suffering demonstrate the need to find such a memory 'before' the memory of pain: 'In my earliest memory', writes Sylvia Fraser, 'I am an infant lying on my father's bed, being sexually fondled but blissfully unaware of any deception. Then I was treated with tenderness. That was my Garden of Eden'. [94] This evocation of early bliss and innocence demonstrates the way in which individual psychic and collective cultural myths mutually reinforce each other: they are so powerful because the pre-oedipal is precisely what we *cannot* remember, but what we *need* to remember as what has been lost. 'Mourning is in error' because this 'transcendental ground' is at least in part a myth, constructed out of the needs of the present.

The 'post' in 'postmodernity' signals a relationship to the past which is under dispute in theories of the postmodern: for Fredric Jameson, it relates to the past only in terms of parody and pastiche, treating it as a shopping-bag of images or plundering it for

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[92] Lukacher, *Primal Scenes*, 11. There is not the space here to enter the complex debate over definitions of the 'postmodern' and whether this is an appropriate term for describing contemporary Western culture. Using the term as a kind of shorthand runs the risk of reifying and over-simplifying a complex configuration of social and cultural processes and products; in the discussion which follows, I use it as a convenient way of referring to certain tendencies within Western cultures which foreground the notion of coming *after-* whether this is formulated as after modernity, the Second World War, the Holocaust, the collapse of 'grand narratives', or other significant historical or cultural 'breaks'. According to George Steiner in *Language and Silence*, 'We come after, and that is the nerve of our condition' (1967; London: Faber and Faber, 1985), 22. See also David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989).

[93] Laura Mulvey, 'Changes: Thoughts on Myth, Narrative and Historical Experience', *History Workshop Journal* 23 (1987), 1-19; 11.

[94] Fraser, *My Father's House*, 241.

'heritage'. Rapidly changing fashions, often for styles that have only just gone 'out of fashion', new technologies of communication which change the way we think of space and time, the dominance of the simulacrum, a preoccupation with space and surface rather than depth and time: all of these, it is argued, make it impossible to maintain any ongoing sense of connection with the past. [95] Lyotard, on the other hand, argues that it was *modernity* which effected a radical break with the past: 'The idea of modernity is closely bound up with this principle that it is possible and necessary to break with tradition and to begin a new way of living and thinking. Today we can presume that this "breaking" is, rather, a manner of forgetting or repressing the past'. It is the *postmodern* relation to the past as 'anamnesis', a process which comes close to Laplanche's 'retranslation', which enables the 'working through' of the 'repressed elements of the past'. 'If we give up this responsibility it is certain that we are condemned to repeat, without any displacement, the modern neurosis, the western schizophrenia, paranoia, and so on. This being granted, the 'post' of postmodernity does not mean a process of coming back or flashing back, feeding back, but of *ana*lysing, *ana*mnesing, reflecting.' [96] Some discourses of modernity (and movements such as National Socialism which constructed themselves in *opposition* to some aspects of modernity) expressed the desire, not for a break with the past, but for a return to earlier, idealised versions of it. Eric Santner claims that the discourses of postmodernism 'invite readers to mourn the shattered fantasy of the (always already) lost organic society that has haunted the Western imagination ... These discourses propose a kind of perpetual leavetaking from fantasies of plenitude, purity, centrality, totality, unity, and mastery ... the postmodern discourses of bereavement - of the "no longer possibles" - ... invite readers to mourn these refusals to mourn'. [97]

In his introduction to *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, the French historian Pierre Nora mourns the loss of 'real' memory, 'a memory entwined in the intimacy of a collective heritage'. 'True' memory, according to the opposition he sets up, is spontaneous, organic, passed down by unspoken traditions, and thus collective and 'objective': 'false' memory is individual and willed, and ends up in the archive as a 'gigantic storehouse of

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[95] See Fredric Jameson, 'Progress Versus Utopia; Or, Can We imagine the Future?' in Brian Wallis, ed., *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation* (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art in association with David R. Godine, 1984), and 'Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', *New Left Review* 146 (1984), 53-94.

[96] Jean-François Lyotard, 'Defining the Postmodern' in Lisa Appignanesi, ed., *Postmodernism: ICA Documents* (London: Free Association Books, 1989), 7-10, 10.

[97] Santner, *Stranded Objects*, 7-9.

a material stock of what it would be impossible for us to remember, an unlimited repertoire of what might need to be recalled'. [98] *Lieux de mémoire* - archives, libraries, tape and video recordings, computer files, monuments, even historical fiction and drama - have become necessary because *milieux de mémoire* - which consitute 'real' memory - have been lost. Edward Casey also suggests that '[w]e may already have lost our anamnesic souls to the collective amnesia embodied in machine memory' ... we may have 'lost touch with the "earth" of memory itself, its dense loam'.[99] Nora argues that although the relationship of 'traditional' cultures to their pasts may have involved the sense of a break, this was 'not so much a separation experienced as radical difference as it was a lapse experienced as a filiation to be restored'. [100]

What is being expressed here is not only a nostalgia for a particular version of the past, but also a nostalgia for *a certain kind of memory*, one which would enable an unmediated access to the past and the restoration of lost continuities. Nora is critical of the attempt to recover 'the ephemeral spectacle of an unrecoverable identity' evident in postmodern culture's attempts to reconstruct exact replicas of the past, but his argument is dependent on the idea that earlier epochs *did* have unmediated access to the past and an unfragmented identity. 'In the history-memory of old, accurate perceptions of the past were characterized by the assumption that the past could be retrieved. The past could always be resuscitated by an effort of rememoration'.[101] Nora here makes clear that the myth and hope of full and immediate recovery of the past is as much a part of social ideology as it is of certain therapeutic practices - even in a discourse which professes to be innocent of ideology. Maurice Halbwachs, who believed that 'the mind reconstructs its memories under the pressure of society', asked: 'Is it not strange then that society causes the mind to transfigure the past to the point of yearning for it?' [102] He was observing here the way in which certain social formations do transform memory into nostalgia, but ignored the way in which such yearning is also informed by the individual psychic 'memory' of the 'pre-Oedipal as Golden Age'. The ecology, animal rights and environmental movements; 'New Age' practices such as re-birthing,

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[98] Pierre Nora, ' Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*', *Representations* 26 (1989), 7-25; 8, 13.

[99] Casey, *Remembering*, 3-4.

[100] Nora, 'Between Memory and History', 16.

[101] Nora, 'Between Memory and History', 17-18

[102] Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* , trans. and ed. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 51.

shamanism and 'natural' healing; a mysticism which elides the difference between past, present and future; the idealisation of 'traditional' cultures such as native American Indians; all of these are manifestations of this longing to return to some earlier state of innocence. Such desires echo Marcuse's challenge to the Freudian theory of repression: in *Eros and Civilization* he argues for a rehabilitation of recollection as liberatory, as a means of access to the memory of the time of 'the dominion of the primal pleasure principle, the *temps perdu* which was the time of gratification and fulfillment' which civilisation teaches us to forget. [103] Politically, such longings can be harnessed for liberatory but also for deeply conservative ends: Lewis Lapham has recently argued for a similarity between 1960s liberation movements and the American New Right, one of the main points of connection being 'romantic arcadianism'. [104] A return to the community of land and *Volk* was one of the deepest appeals of Nazi ideology: in Britain, socialists and conservatives have appealed to different moments of the past for the construction of their Golden Ages.

'Making the most remote past coefficient to our most intimate depth is a way of refusing loss and separation': [105] this refusal locates itself in what Mary Jacobus has described and deconstructed as a myth which 'reinterpret[s] the pre-history of the gendered subject in the light of a theory of origins which we are in the habit of calling mother'. [106] The discourse of Casey's and Nora's 'true' memory is (apparently unconsciously) feminine: the 'earth' or 'dense loam' of memory, 'organic', 'bodily', 'instinctive', 'spontaneous', 'non-verbal' - all these terms line up on the feminine side of an undeconstructed opposition. As such, they clearly suggest that it is in the imaginary plenitude of the pre-oedipal that the socio-political longing for a lost 'unity' or community' locates itself. Teresa Brennan locates 'originary memory' even further back: she postulates a 'fleshly memory' of 'inter-uterine communication', of a time when there was no delay between need and satisfaction, as the basis of language - 'The experience of call and answer exists in utero in bodily codes'. [107] 'True' memory is here imagined as memory of the body of the mother: Freud claimed that '[w]henever a man dreams of a place or country and says to himself, while he is still dreaming, "this

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[103] Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (London: Sphere Books, 1969), 185-6.

[104] Lewis Lapham, 'Reactionary Chic, the Right Thing for the 1990s', *Guardian*, 11.3.1996, 29.

[105] Møller, *The Freudian Reading*, 44.

[106] Mary Jacobus, 'Freud's Mnemonic: Women, Screen Memories, and Feminist Nostalgia', *Michigan Quarterly Review*, Vol. XXVI, 1 (1987), 117-139; 123.

[107] Teresa Brennan, *The Interpretation of the Flesh: Freud and Femininity* (London: Routledge, 1992), 171-2.

place is familiar to me, I've been here before", we may interpret the place as being his mother's genitals or her body'. [108] Freud develops this from the idea of love as 'homesickness'; Bachelard has argued that in the West 'the house is one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories, and dreams of mankind ... Something closed must retain our memories ... memories of the outside world will never have the same totality as those of home'.[109] In Morrison's *Beloved*, the ironically named 'Sweet Home', where Sethe was a slave, and '124', the house where she lives alone with her daughter Denver and the ghost of the murdered Beloved, are the 'containers' of emotionally-charged memories which enclose and isolate their inhabitants. For Walter Benjamin, the 'dark joy' of discovery of new memories is 'accessible only if one is willing to cross the Oedipal threshold and dare to look upon the image of the maternal body.' [110] The feminist reclamation of this memory of the mother's body as the site of plenitude and dyadic union runs the risk of assuming 'postures of infantile dependence in creation myths that both idealize and blame her'. [111] As Jacobus points out: 'Division engenders desire', and 'desire engenders a retroactive fiction of unmediated mother-daughter relations whose sign is nostalgia.' She goes on to argue that '[t]here never was a prior time, or an unmediated relation for the subject (whether masculine or feminine) except as the oedipal defined it retroactively. The mother is always/already structured as division by the oedipal; no violent separation can be envisaged, except with an aura of pathos, because separation is inscribed from the start'. [112] Our relation to the past is, as Stuart Hall puts it, 'like the child's relation to the mother, ... always already "after the break" '. [113]

One way out of the trap of nostalgia based on the imaginary identification of the pre-oedipal is to argue for a model of memory in terms of intersubjectivity, the mutual recognition of self and other which Jessica Benjamin argues characterises the mother-infant relation from the start. [114] Casey suggests that '[m]emories are formed from the

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[108] Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', PF Vol. 14, 335-376; 368.

[109] Quoted by Casey, *Remembering*, 215.

[110] Quoted by Lukacher, *Primal Scenes*, 284.

[111] Helene Moglen, 'Redeeming History: Toni Morrison's *Beloved*', *Cultural Critique* 24 (1993), 17-40; 28.

[112] Jacobus, 'Freud's Mnemonic', 135.

[113] Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora' in Jonathan Rutherford, ed., *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 222-237; 226.

[114] Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination* (London: Virago, 1988).

first *in the image of* the other, primarily the caretaking parent; also *in view of* the other, though not just the literal view. It is a matter of keeping the other in mind'. [115] Similarly, Albert Solnit suggests that 'the earliest memory functions arise in the refinding of the needed and later of the beloved object. Out of this matrix all memory functions emerge.' [116] Although both stress the primacy of the parent/beloved object, what they describe is the process of negotiating *separation* as well as reciprocity, as Freud's grandson did in the *fort-da* game. Jessica Benjamin and others have argued against the opposition, both in theory and practice, between the 'mother of attachment' and the 'father of separation', suggesting rather that the mother-child relation is, precisely, one of negotiating attachment *and* separation, of learning to recognise the other *as* other. [117] If the Oedipus complex is imagined as a journey, Laura Mulvey suggests that the doubts and contradictions it throws up are 'stabilized around a resolution in which the temporal process is split into a spatial opposition, structured around the mother/father (a mythic condensation with mother as past and father as future, that suppresses a possible dialectical relationship between the two)'. [118] The desire for a return to the imaginary oceanic unity of the pre-oedipal is played out and finally shown for the danger it is in Morrison's *Beloved*, where Sethe and Beloved reenact the mother-infant dyad to the point where Sethe is nearly destroyed. The (absent) memory of her father enables Denver to step over the threshold of the house which functions as the container of the family's memories, both painful and pleasurable, and seek for help and contact in the outside world. *Beloved* thus enacts the restorative function of narrative in the parallel movements of the reenactment of the lost mother-infant relation and the trauma of the 'forgotten' history of the Middle Passage, but finally recognises that 'rememory' cannot be the literal repetition that traps us in the past, but a 'retranslation' that allows a movement forward and the recognition of the past as past. These are recognitions embodied by the narrative structures and provisionality of the two autobiographical texts I discuss in the next chapter, Carolyn Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman* and Ronald Fraser's *In Search of a Past*.

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[115] Casey, *Remembering*, 244.

[116] Albert J. Solnit, 'Memory as Preparation: Developmental and Psychoanalytic Perspectives' in Joseph Sandler, ed., *Dimensions of Psychoanalysis* (London: Karnac Books, 1989), 216.

[117] See Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love*, 31-50.

[118] Mulvey, 'Changes', 9.

Chapter Two

Present Imperfect Translation: Ronald Fraser's *In Search of a Past* and Carolyn Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman*

Introduction

This chapter explores two autobiographical texts - Ronald Fraser's *In Search of a Past* and Carolyn Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman* [1] - in the light of the concept of the temporal structure of *Nachträglichkeit* and of Laplanche's development of Freud's 'construction' in analysis as a continual process of translation and retranslation. In these two texts we witness what Laplanche describes as the 'undoing' of an 'existing ... translation' of the past in order to 'attempt a better translation of this past, a more comprehensive translation, with renewed possibilities'. [2] In these texts 'the present imperfect translation ... ceaselessly ... pushes for renewed translation': we are witness to 'the dynamic of a self-presencing that is always, and of necessity, incomplete'. [3] Fraser's and Steedman's autobiographies are, in different ways, provisional, hesitant and incomplete: both writers also reinterpret their personal histories in the context of other histories, other lives, as is indicated by their subtitles. Fraser's initial project was an oral history of the period of his own childhood from the point of view of the servants who worked for his family; his subtitle, *The Manor House, Amnersfield, 1933-1945* seems to claim this history as its chief or only subject. Steedman says: 'Before I could write the account found in *Landscape for a Good Woman*, I had to find a history, or rather, I had to find the very stuff of historical practice: a document, a text, some trace of the past, to work on'. She finds this in Kathleen Woodward's *Jipping Street*, 'ostensibly a working-class autobiography', and reinterprets her own life story, and reflects upon possible ways of telling it, through the stories of others, including that of her mother, who is the other

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1 Ronald Fraser, *In Search of a Past: The Manor House, Amnersfield, 1933-1945* (London: Verso, 1984); Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives* (London: Virago, 1986). All references will be to these editions, and cited in the text.

2 Jean Laplanche, 'Psychoanalysis, Time and Translation' in John Fletcher and Martin Stanton, eds., *Jean Laplanche: Translation, Seduction, Drives* (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1992), 161-17; 176.

3 Andrew Benjamin, 'The Unconscious: Structuring as a Translation' in *Jean Laplanche*, 137-157; 146.

'life' referred to in Steedman's subtitle, *A Story of Two Lives* . But both writers also acknowledge the necessity for the kind of memory-work which psychoanalysis can provide: Fraser makes explicit use of his own experience of psychoanalysis, which enabled him to undergo a process of 'retranslation' and which leads him to question the kind of 'truth' established by his historical practice, and Steedman uses 'the structure of psychoanalytic case study' which 'allows the writer to enter the present into the past, allows the dream, the wish or the fantasy of the past to shape current time ...' (20-21). My analysis of these texts will show how they employ the more general notion of *Nachträglichkeit* advanced in Laplanche's recent work - the way in which, as Steedman puts it, '[t]ime catches together what we know and what we do not yet know' (141) - and its more specific workings in particular instances of recovered or reworked memory.

Both writers attempt , in different ways, to articulate or negotiate the relationship between individual and collective histories, the psyche and the social. Fraser's motives for the series of interviews he conducted in 1967-8 with the former servants of his childhood home already demonstrate the necessary conjunction of the two: he tells his analyst in their initial interview that he 'set out ... to discover how the others had lived in the past' because he could not 'find the myth or lie that brings the past into focus' (6): as such, the recourse to his discipline of social history was both an avoidance of the personal and a recognition that the two are inseparable, as he indicated in an interview with *History Workshop Journal.* Asked if he was aware of working from a 'script' or a particular set of narrative conventions, he replied:

> Class divisions are without doubt what I wanted to explore with the people who had worked at the Manor and who, I felt, could tell me most about them. But of course, I had also lived these experiences intimately as a child. If I had a 'script', I used to think, it was one that came to me not so much from outside but one that I had elaborated from this experience. A myth. So much so, that the underlying purpose of setting out to interview the servants was to destroy this myth once and for all. Feelings of hollowness, passivity, isolation, that the world was made by others, not me ... would be revealed for what they were: self justificatory fantasies which, in the course of being revealed would, I hoped, be sloughed off like an old skin ... What happened was the opposite: their testimonies seemed to confirm the myth. [4]

Part of the book consists of a re-reading of the interview transcripts whilst he was undergoing analysis in 1979-84, and it is during that analysis that his own memories and interpretations of his place in the class-structure of the house and within the dynamic of his family are reconstructed and retranslated.

Carolyn Steedman sets out more consciously to show how '[t]he past is re-used through the agency of social information, and that interpretation of it can only be made with what people know of a social world and their place within it' (5). Her text is in part a critique of the dominant narratives of working class autobiography and sociology and of psychoanalysis, and of the kind of autobiography which effaces the place of its subject/author in the text: it demonstrates Halbwachs' concept of memory as at least in part collective, in that remembering involves 'a process of reconstruction whereby memories are resituated in the wider context from which their significance may in part derive ... a remembered incident, image or impression will often disclose an interlocking network of experiences, rooted in particular places and social groups'. [5] Steedman's dream of the woman in the New Look dress, and her later interpretations of it, are a good example of this process, and of her grounding of the circumstances - even the dreams and fantasies - of her own early life firmly within the social.

It will already have begun to emerge that the structure of both texts exemplifies the temporal process of *Nachträglichkeit* in the more generalized sense of the term as a process of revision and retranslation of earlier events in the light of later knowledge, what 'wasn't known then'. As Andrew Benjamin suggests, because '[m]eaning depends upon narrative time' it is possible to theorize narrative itself as dependent upon, or in itself constituting, the temporal structure of *Nachträglichkeit* as 'the ternary structure of time articulating repetition'. [6] The process of retranslation in the light of later knowledge - or within the process of analysis - will be much more obvious when the writer or narrator - and his own life or experience - are the subject of his own text,

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[4] 'Review Discussion: *In Search of the Past:* a dialogue with Ronald Fraser', *History Workshop Journal* 20 (1985), 175-188; 180.

[5] Michael Sheringham, *French Autobiography, Devices and Desires: Rousseau to Perec* (Oxford: Clarendon Press,1993), 74. Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

[6] Benjamin, 'The Unconscious', 147-9.

as in autobiographies such as those of Perec, Steedman or Fraser, or in complex embedded narratives such as Conrad's *Heart of Darkness:* but even in the realist novel with an omniscient narrator the *reader* is in the position of constantly revising, reinterpreting and retranslating in the light of what s/he 'didn't know then'. Andrew Benjamin suggests the 'possibility that *Nachträglichkeit* could harbour - harbour by providing - the temporality of interpretation itself'. [7] I will show later that, because of the 'incompleteness' of Steedman and Fraser's texts, and their recognition that interpretation, or the narration of a life history, is necessarily provisional, the reader is also here in the position of constructing and in a sense continuing their stories. In doing so, however, the reader needs to be aware of the difference between retranslating the *author's* experience - only the author/subject, not the reader/analyst, is in a position to do that - and retranslating his or her *own* experience of the *text.*

In the first chapter I discussed the relationship between Freud's use of the concept of *Nachträglichkeit* in the specific context of the sexual development of children, and its more general application as a principle of temporality and interpretation. In cases such as that of Emma in the 'Project', it involves an event which has a sexual meaning but which is not experienced as sexual at the time, because of the belated development of human sexuality. A later event which is not necessarily sexual will trigger a neurotic or hysterical response which seems out of place or proportion, but whose 'real' cause is the earlier sexual experience which is now experienced as such because of the onset of puberty. Specific events in the reconstructed lives of Steedman and Fraser embody the 'afterwardsness' of sexual affect (without necessarily also involving 'hysterical' or 'neurotic' responses): they are also illuminated by Laplanche's development of the concept of the 'enigmatic signifier', also discussed in chapter one. Laplanche says that 'the *enigma* is in itself a *seduction* and its mechanisms are unconscious ... The "attentions of a mother" or the "aggression of a father" are seductive only because they are not transparent. They are seductive because they are opaque, because they convey something enigmatic'. [8] Steedman and Fraser are both engaged in the process of 'retranslating' the enigmatic messages of their parents, and analysing their own changing responses to these retranscribed memories.

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[7] Benjamin, 'The Unconscious', 149.

[8] Quoted by John Fletcher from Jean Laplanche, *New Foundations for Psychoanalysis* (1987; Oxford: Blackwell, 1989) in 'The Letter in the Unconscious: The Enigmatic Signifier in the Work of Jean Laplanche' in *Jean Laplanche*, 93-120; 110.

Ternary temporal structure

Both texts are structured on the narrative or temporal principle of *Nachträglichkeit* : both demonstrate an awareness of the psychic and structural gaps between the event, the memory of the event, and the writing of (the memory of) the event. This is most evident in Fraser's text, which Laura Marcus has recently suggested is modelled on Andre Gorz's *The Traitor*. In his introduction to Gorz's book, Sartre writes: 'This book is organised like a feedback machine: the present ceaselessly metamophosizes the past from which it issues'. [9] This is also the process we witness in *In Search of A Past* (its title also obviously a rewriting of Proust's *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*) with its reworkings and rereadings of the transcripts of Fraser's interviews with the servants, the notes he made after each psychoanalytic session with his analyst, and the transcripts of his taped conversations with his brother Colin who he visited in Rome in 1983, towards the end of the period covered by the book. The structure of the book demonstrates not just the threefold structure of *Nachträglichkeit* but a continuous, ongoing and necessarily incomplete process of translation and retranslation: to show this, it will be simpler to number the stages of the temporal process which the book later 'emplots' in a somewhat different sequence:

1. The events of Fraser's childhood from 1933-1945, some of which can be thought of in terms of Laplanche's 'enigmatic signifiers'.
2. The interviews which Fraser conducted and recorded in 1967-9 with the people who worked at Amnersfield in 1933-45, during which some of his childhood memories re-surface as he re-visits the village. He keeps an 'interview diary' and a secretary transcribes the tapes.
3. His rereadings of the transcripts during the summer of 1979, before he begins his psychoanalysis with P.
4. His analysis with P., Sept.1979- ? (the last session used in

[9] Jean-Paul Sartre, Foreword to Andre Gorz. *The Traitor*, trans. Richard Howard (1958; London: Verso, 1989), 18. Laura Marcus, *Auto/biographical Discourses: Theory, Criticism, Practice* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994). Marcus suggests that in Gorz's text 'there is no sense of a secure standpoint from which the past can be recounted as something already known and complete ... the beginning, as a structure determining the shape of a life, is given a location, only to be undone as the analysis proceeds and pushed further and further back into the past, to the point where its real existence may even become unsustainable' (276).

the book is May 1983). He makes notes after each session. During this period he also visits his brother in Rome in April 1983 and tapes his conversations with him: he also takes his father to a nursing home where he dies.

5. The writing of the book, which involves another rereading of all the material collected in interviews and the analysis: it was published in 1984.

It was a book which he found himself unable to write for ten years - the ten years between the completion of the interviews and beginning the analysis - because the interviews with the former servants functioned neither as an adequate *avoidance* of the personal, nor as an *exorcism* of the past which he was hoping to dispose of by this method. On the one hand, as indicated above, Fraser felt that he lacked a *myth* by which to confer meaning on the past - 'I couldn't reach the fundamental understanding which would give meaning to it' (6): on the other, the interviews only served to *reinforce* what he had hoped was a myth, that of his hollowness, isolation and passivity. What he took to the interviews and to his initial psychoanalytic sessions was an explanation of this feeling largely in terms of class: in his second session with P., after the summer break during which he has reread the transcripts, he says: 'I've been through all the evidence and it confirms what I told you when I first came last month. The house was divided and so was I' (90). In his rereading/rewriting of the transcripts he has highlighted the way in which his questions were attempting to push Bert the gardener, for example, 'into a corner of total consistency' (39) in his attitude to 'the gentry': he fails in this, as he fails to get the 'right' response from Carver, the groom, with the question 'Did it never strike you that in a year you didn't earn the price of one of their horses?' (44). This is a construction which, at the time, he was trying to force onto the material in order to foster the 'myth' of a split founded on class divisions - which of course has some foundation in reality but is not the whole story. We learn that Fraser kept an 'interview diary' from which he occasionally quotes his 'translations' or constructions of what he has heard: 'And I was the little master ... a being of innate superiority who, for no certain reason ... felt condemned to an equally profound sense of nullity. The former came as a fact from the world; the latter was an innate flaw that gnawed at the vitals of a superiority which derived simply, as Doris saw, from being' (75). It is this construction which he continues to bring to the analysis, summarising the beginning of the next session thus: 'Today I went straight to the heart of the matter: on the one hand, objectively a member of a privileged class, I was, on the other, unable subjectively to fill the role into which I was born. This split, I said, was foreshadowed

in my parents ...' (91), but even as he is speaking he has a sense that P. feels all this is somehow irrelevant, or at least too 'theoretical'. P. helps Fraser to at least partly deconstruct this construction and work towards one which is more complete, less defensive, and which, as I shall show later, necessitates a particular kind of recovery of certain early childhood experiences.

It is important to note at this stage, however, that there is, as Olivia Harris notes in her review of *In Search of a Past* and as Fraser has admitted in the *HWJ* interview already mentioned, a fundamental evasiveness in the text, an absence of self. The structural analysis offered above makes the temporal gaps clear: we know nothing about Fraser's life between 1945 and 1967 or between 1969 and 1979, except what we may know of his work as a social historian outside of the text, and the very brief allusions he makes to his solitary life and to his son. The book is, in part, as Harris suggests, 'an investigation of its own evasiveness' in its foregrounding of the writer's problem in finding an 'I' with which to speak or write. [10] It demonstrates what D.W. Winnicott describes, in a quotation used by Fraser as his epigraph, as the subject's 'urgent need to communicate and the still more urgent need not to be found'. Georges Perec, in a text which is also both revelatory and evasive, describes himself as 'a child playing hide-and-seek, who doesn't know what he fears or wants more: to stay hidden, or to be found'. [11] What is also lacking in Fraser's autobiography is a clear indication of how the writer has selected and organised his material, something the reader is much more aware of in Steedman's text. We do not know how much selection and reorganisation went into the presentation of the interview transcripts, how much they were retranslated in the light of later knowledge for the purposes of re-presentation in the book (although we are witness to the process of retranslation within the analysis). Fraser has the oral historian's respect for the testimony of his subjects - he says in the *HWJ* interview that to use the author's 'vantage point to comment on respondents' lives and memories when they do not have the chance to reply has always seemed to me an excessive privilege'. [12] But in the sense that he is at least partly using the interviews as a way of investigating his own past, and then using them as part of a text which has his search for an 'I' as its main focus, he is obviously using the author's vantage point, if not in the form of direct comment. The oral testimonies of the former servants mostly appear

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[10] Olivia Harris, 'Of All His Exploring: a review of Ronald Fraser, *In Search of a Past*', *New Statesman*, 9.11.1984, reprinted in *History Workshop Journal* as part of the 'Review Discussion'.

[11] Georges Perec, *W Or the Memory of Childhood*, 7.

[12] 'Review Discussion', *HWJ*, 179.

in the sections headed 'They', 'She/He/She' and 'You': here he uses a sometimes confusing blend of presumably direct transcription and summary, in which the shifting pronouns - the 'I' of direct speech, the 'he' or 'she' of reported speech and the 'you' by which the ex-servants address Fraser the interviewer and 'master Ronnie' the child, and which Fraser uses to refer to himself - signal on the one hand the uncertainty Fraser feels about his own identity and on the other the collective nature of the reality he is trying to establish and of the history he is trying to write: it also involves the reader in the reconstruction of the process of rereading and rewriting the interviews. The movement from 'They' to 'You' via the triad 'She/He/She' of his mother Janey, his father and his nanny Ilse also indicates a structuring principle at work by which Fraser seems to get closer to himself by means of the ex-servants' memories of his parents and Ilse and his relationship with them (Ilse is also one of his interviewees): again it is not clear whether this is a process which took place at the time or which has been constructed in the rereading. [13] Occasionally we are made aware of the writer in the 'present' rereading and commenting on the interviews: on page 25 he describes his first visit to Bert, the responses of Bert and his wife to seeing Ronnie after so many years, the atmosphere of their cottage and the memories of the past it evokes. He summarises and reconstructs their initial conversation up to the point when Bert asks 'Is that thing on? Come on mother, say a word ...' At that point there is a break in the text and Fraser repeats Bert's question about the tape recorder in the italics of the transcript, 'faithfully transcribed' by the typist. He continues: 'Two hundred dusty pages of Bert, preserved in red folders, survive. In the last a series of 8 x 5 cards, each under a different heading, forms an index of his experiences scattered through the transcripts. For once your need for order, clarity, served a useful purpose' (27). Here we are made aware of the ways in which the interviews have already been reworked - sorted into folders and organised onto cards under headings, as well as commented upon in the 'interview diary' mentioned earlier. What also arises is the question of where the 'you' here is speaking from: it sounds as if he is rediscovering and rereading the transcripts for the first time, whereas we know that he reread them in the month before his analysis started, and that he went into analysis having been unable to write the book. Here he goes on: 'Let's see, it's not until the second interview that he [Bert] says ...' as if the first rereading and the writing of the book were simultaneous. What I am highlighting here is the way in which any narrative reconstruction of a life - even one which

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[13] The chapter headings of Gorz's *The Traitor* also chart a movement from 'We' to 'They' to 'You' to 'I'. Towards the end of the text, he says that he has spoken of himself in the third person throughout because 'he' (still using the third person) 'has a horror of "I"' (249).

foregrounds the *fact* of reconstruction - must inevitably elide some of the processes of that reconstruction.

Fraser does not maintain a firm narrative separation between the temporal stages of his investigation - the interviews of 1967-8, the analysis of 1979-1983, and the visit to his brother in April 1983 - although the structure largely follows this temporal sequence. It is through Colin that the paradoxical idyll of the war years at Amnersfield is recalled, and here Fraser uses the testimony of the ex-servants to add their view of him, newly returned from boarding school, to Colin's account of his own happiness of that period. It is through Colin that he 're-discovers' Lizzie, the daughter of their cook at that time, a Jewish refugee from Austria, who was his playmate and partner in sexual explorations which she refuses to discuss in the interviews which Fraser here inserts. She is also used to add to the developing picture of the relationship between Janey and her sons which is to emerge as central to Fraser's childhood and later sense of self. When it comes to the final 'crash', Janey's affair with Teddy Leroy and their departure for Europe, which is reconstructed in the final analytic session in the text, Fraser juxtaposes brief sections from the interviews and from his conversation with Colin with his own memories and the dialogue of the analytic session in order to create a composite account of the event which is at once collective and fragmented:

> 'And so I cut her out. And that was the end' [Fraser]
> In the back of my mind I hear Colin again. He didn't
> understand ...The whole thing was a total surprise.
>
> Once I got over the shock I wasn't unhappy about it
> because I liked Leroy, but I was worried enough to want
> to talk to you about it ... [Colin]
>
> And I could have knocked him bloody flat ... And I still believe
> that if he hadn't ever come, your mother and father would be
> at the Manor House now ... [Bert]
>
> That was the end...So I just made up my mind and we
> left. [Cookie]
>
> 'So that was how it all ended at the Manor' [Fraser] (182-3)

Fraser's technique here demonstrates his sense of 'the past as a collective experience'(6) and the ways in which the past which has already taken the form of a narrative or a construction can continue to modify and be modified by the present.

Before I move in closer to Fraser's text to analyse specific, intensely recalled memories, I want to compare the structural *Nachträglichkeit* or afterwardsness of *In Search of a Past* which I have here been analysing with that of Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman*, which exemplifies its threefold temporal structure in a different way. One of her epigraphs comes from John Berger's *About Looking:* 'The present tense of the verb *to be* refers only to the present: but nevertheless with the first person singular in front of it, it absorbs the past which is inseparable from it' (3). Steedman's narrative foregrounds the way in which the 'I' of the present has been constructed out of, but also continues to rewrite, the 'I' of the past.

The most obvious structural feature of her text is the fact that she is telling two life stories, her own and her mother's, which modify and interpret each other. There are other stories too -those of her father, of Freud's Dora, Mayhew's watercress girl - but structurally hers and her mother's are the most important. Steedman interprets her own sense of difference and exclusion partly in terms of her mother's life history, and shows 'the way in which my mother re-asserted, reversed and restructured her own within mine' (8). Her book is 'about how people use the past to tell the stories of their life' (8): it is 'about interpretations, about the places where we rework what has already happened to give current events meaning' (5). She makes frequent use of a term which suggests a process parallel and complementary to that of *Nachträglichkeit*, 'brought forward'. Her dream of the woman in the New Look dress - a central piece of material which will be discussed more fully later - exists 'as an area of feeling' which 'is *brought forward* again and again to shape responses to quite different events' (my italics): she is also aware that the meaning of the dream (and possibly also the details of what is 'remembered', although she does not make this explicit) has developed over time, 'taking on meaning later, from different circumstances' (28). In her reworking of the explanatory 'myth' of psychoanalysis, she is always concerned to situate its processes firmly in the social particularity of the subject: hence '[b]oth my mother and my sister *brought forward* an earlier sense of psychological loss and abandonment - the first exclusion - and interpreted it, still as young children, in the light of social information and exclusion' (118). This is clearly the process Steedman herself is

engaged in in her book, in which the oedipal is rethought in terms of class. As has been suggested, the subject of Fraser's text reverses this process, being forced to partly retranslate his earlier class-based constructions in terms of the oedipal and pre-oedipal. Both these processes will be examined in more detail later on.

In terms of structure, the titles of the sections of Steedman's text to some extent suggest the temporal structure of *Nachträglichkeit*, although the separation between the 'before' of experience and the 'after' of interpretation or construction and subsequent reconstructions is less marked than in the case of Fraser. The first section, 'Stories', already suggests the ways in which Steedman's understanding of her own and her mother's lives has been shaped by the 'interpretative devices' (5) - fairy tales, other working-class autobiographies, psychoanalysis - which she explores, reworks and sometimes rejects because of their simplifications or distortions: the elimination of individual subjectivity in discussions of working-class life, for example, or the universalist assumptions of the oedipus complex within psychoanalysis. Within this section she says that she intends to use the 'structure of psychoanalytic case-study' in the second, 'autobiographical section of the book' (20-21), but in fact, this second section, 'Exiles', is as much about her parents as it is about herself, telling the stories of their lives as she was able to reconstruct them in the light of later knowledge, as well as conveying the 'ebb and flow' of her childhood memories and fantasies. Several scenes which might be called 'primal' or which could be seen as examples of Laplanche's 'enigmatic signifiers' are at the centre of this section of the book: her dream of the woman in the New Look dress, her visit with her father to the bluebell wood, what she calls a 'seduction scene' between her parents in the basement, and her fantasy of her mother cutting herself across the breasts with a knife. It is her re-interpretations of these which demonstrate the process of 'retranslation' in terms of the social, and, to some extent, of her own later personal experience: much of her childhood experience had to be re-interpreted in the light of her later discovery of her illegitimacy. What the text does not give us are the actual moments of remembering these scenes, as Fraser's does during his analysis: it is as if the writer has always known or remembered them, although they are given to us as if they have remained unchanged over time. This is in spite of the fact that, commenting on the little girls' story she edited in *The Tidy House*, she writes: 'Unknowingly at that time, I interpreted their text in the light of the seduction scene in the cellar, - my father's seduction in the basement in Hammersmith in 1950 - *that I had not yet recalled to*

mind' (80). Given that she was three at that time, and that this sexual scene later accumulated so much meaning, the absence of the moment of remembering is striking. In this sense a vital part of the 'psychoanalytic case-study' that she claims to be using is missing. The last section, 'Interpretations', re-examines some of these scenes, and the lives of herself and her mother, in the light of the socio-political: the social history of the mill towns where her mother grew up; studies of 'patriarchy' (Gayle Rubin) and child-rearing practices (Alice Miller); her own analysis of little girls' stories in *The Tidy House*; Freud's interpretation of the life of Dora and Mayhew's of the little watercress seller. These stories further contextualise but obviously do not alter those of Steedman and her mother: as Steedman makes clear, they are contexts which would usually be excluded from psychoanalysis, and I shall go on to suggest that they may indeed demonstrate a residual avoidance or evasion. The repetitions or reworkings which are a necessary part of the structure of *Nachträglichkeit* are here literary, historical or cultural, not given to us in the form of the remembering moment or their working through in the *process* of analysis, although, as Steedman says, she does make some use of the *model* of the psychoanalytic case study.

The dark joy of the place of finding

In one of his psychoanalytic sessions Ronald Fraser becomes aware that he is 'not free-associating, only recalling memories' (106), evoking the distinction made by Laplanche in his analysis of Freud's 'inventory of memory' when he distinguishes between 'preconscious memories' and 'unconscious memories', which are 'not reworked, susceptible only of resurgence'. [14] Using the archaeological metaphor for the processes of memory, Walter Benjamin contrasts the 'real treasure hidden within the earth' with 'the prosaic rooms of our later understanding'. 'It is to cheat oneself of the richest prize to preserve as a record merely the inventory of one's discoveries, and not this dark joy of the place of finding itself'. [15] In his commentary on Benjamin's autobiographical fragment Michael Sheringham suggests that 'it is often the memory just discovered or never previously examined which seems to disclose being'. [16] The awareness of the paradox that memory may be 'lost' by being too frequently recalled or related is one shared also by Primo Levi: 'a memory evoked too often, and expressed in

[14] Laplanche, 'Psychoanalysis, Time and Translation', 167.

[15] Walter Benjamin, 'A Berlin Chronicle' (1932) in *One-Way Street*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (London: New Left Books, 1979), 314.

[16] Sheringham, *French Autobiography*, 308.

the form of a story, tends to become fixed in a stereotype, in a form tested by experience, crystallised, perfected, adorned, which installs itself in the place of the raw memory and grows at its expense'. [17] Benjamin compares the school he attended as a child which he still passes by every day, and which has ceased through overfamiliarity to give any access to his childhood self, to a newly observed detail of the moulding on the building which does open the way to a new chain of associations. [18] In Fraser's text we are witness to both these discourses of memory: those which read like the often-recalled and familiar facts or stories which have ceased to bear, or have yet to bear meaning: and the 'raw' or newly 'resurgent' memories where new meanings may be found or 'retranslated'. 'This dark joy of the place of finding' suggests exactly the process undergone by Fraser during his analysis when two childhood memories resurface in such a way that they are re-experienced - repeated - in the body of the remembering subject.

Some background and explanation is necessary in order to put these memories in context and account for their force.Tracing their emergence and their associations with other events and memories is a complex process and will involve re-visiting points of the text and the memories themselves several times, because of the way Fraser follows the freely-associating process of his analysis and uses his interviews and conversations as material during his sessions. [19] These recovered memories involve the complex relationships between Ronnie, his mother, and his nanny Ilse, and are prepared for by means of a reconstruction of these relationships. We learn from the interviews with the former servants that as a young child in an upper-class family living in England (his mother Janey was American, his father a Scot) between the wars, Ronnie had only intermittent contact with his parents, his nanny caring for his daily needs. His mother was very young - about 21 - when her first child, Ronald, was born, and her husband some 13 years older. The family moved to Amnersfield in 1933 from Hamburg, when Ronnie was three, and a second son, Colin, was born a year or so later. The former servants recall Janey's youth, beauty and love of horses and hunting, but especially her distance from her young children - and even from the life she herself was living: Ilse agrees with Fraser that there was something 'nebulous' about her.

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[17] Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (London: Abacus, 1989), 11-12.

[18] Benjamin, 'A Berlin Chronicle', 337-8.

[19] I shall refer to the author as 'Fraser' when referring to his adult self, the subject of the analysis and the writer of the text, and as 'Ronnie' when it is the child who is the subject.

> Although she always seemed happy and gay, there was a remoteness, a distance about her that I could never bridge... She seemed still to be under her mother's tutelage, too young to be a mother herself (Ilse, 63).
> Even at the Manor I don't remember your mother kissing you, there was no physical contact ... perhaps she felt you had come too soon because she had been married only a year when you were born (Ilse, 73).
> In the end I felt she was as much a stranger when she left as when she arrived (Mrs. Carver, 66).

In his analysis, Fraser tells P. that Janey once said to him: 'I wish we could be more like dogs and children didn't need us for more than a few months' (92).
Ilse also tells him that he was 'an easily worked out, well behaved child' (82) who never complained or showed his feelings: she reminds him of his 'early lack of relationship' with his father who seemed to be training him to become a 'little soldier' (72). Commenting on these early experiences to Ilse in a passage which represents the indeterminacy of the point from which these observations are made, Fraser says and later writes:

> Mmm ...Well, all children go through things of the sort, you commented, things which left scars barely visible to others but which the child never forgot. More interesting were the things you couldn't remember, had perhaps repressed, the invisible scars as it were. Blankness - the blankness between the distance and closeness of your mother - revealed more important, forgotten scars, possibly. Because, on the one hand she was like a distant goddess who could work miracles while, on the other, she was paradoxically powerless to change those steps that lay, like granite, before you on the ascent to adulthood. What lay in that blankness, Ilse? (73)

At this stage there seems to be a theoretical or intellectual understanding of the split he experienced as a result of his mother's fluctuating closeness and distance, her occasional goddess-like power but general powerlessness in relation to her husband (as well as the split resulting from the expectation that he would be a 'little gentleman' and

his own inability to fulfil that role). [20] But the 'blankness' can only be filled by a fuller, or more authentic, reliving and reworking of the moments which traced the 'more important, forgotten scars'.

Ilse (who was German, thus signalling another split in the experience and within the imaginary of the young child) comes over in her own account and in Fraser's memories of her as a strict but loving mother-figure who was concerned primarily with keeping her charges clean and toilet-training them. In the present of the text, she reproaches herself with not trying to understand more of what Ronnie might have been feeling, and what also emerges from her account and from that of the other servants, and which is later developed by P. within the analysis, is her rivalry with Janey (possibly at least partly unconscious) over possession of the child. Mrs. Carver says: 'She'd order your mother out of the nursery or keep her from coming in if she didn't want her there'... [she] let her know who was in charge in the nursery' (57). The 'scar' left by this split between his two mothers is only excavated much later, during the analysis. The final extract from the interview transcripts which is used in the section entitled 'You' is Ilse's reply to a question of Fraser's about whether her previous experience of working in an orphanage was useful to her in her new situation. She replies:

> In feeding and cleanliness, yes. Perhaps I concentrated a little more on toilet training than normal. When you were four months old I had you sitting on a pot in a small chair, tied with a nappy, so I could clean the room while I talked to you. Later, I tied you on your pot to the end of you bed until you produced ... She laughed. I used to tie you to a laundry pole or a tree in the garden if I had something to do close by. It was my way of training you. Many people think it deprives a child of its freedom and they just let it run around. But I don't think it hurts, do you? (85)

It is left unclear until later as to whether Fraser has any previous or independent memory of this early experience, and the information is left 'untranslated' apart from the defensively ironic comment he made at the time: 'I wouldn't claim any privilege that an orphan wasn't entitled to' (85). The description shocks the reader accustomed to

[20] In *The Traitor* Gorz describes how his parents and other adults 'expected him to play a role. He did not understand them, he did not understand his role ... His entire childhood was spent under this tyranny of identification, for he was always required to identify himself with the role, with the ego his mother wanted him to play and necessarily imputed to him because that was how she wanted to see him' (252).

more enlightened child-rearing practices and the lack of response or affect is so striking that we almost expect a return to this scene. When the analysis begins Fraser talks about his feelings about his mother, agreeing with P. that he never had enough time with her, how on the one hand she was 'omniscient' and on the other never listened to him, and also how he still feels about Ilse: 'Despite all that' (the insistence on cleanliness and toilet training), 'I was happy with her, she gave me a comfort and a security I've never forgotten. When I went to interview her, after a time I fell into a sort of hypnotic trance, like a child finding comfort in her mother's voice ... As I said it, I realised that I simultaneously longed for and hated the hypnotic passivity I'd recalled' (94). When he sees Ilse again after many years Fraser experiences a repetition of the child's passivity which he both longs for and resents: this passivity and powerlessness is then reawakened during the analytic session in his relationship with his analyst, and to some extent retranslated and 'worked through' when he remembers 'in the body' the experience of being bound, wanting to be bound and needing to be free.

The session of March 2, 1980 seems to have been the first time that Fraser was able to 'free-associate' within the analysis, and this is what he sees and experiences:

> Behind closed lids, an unformulated image haunts me; the image of a bundle, curved or bowed, with something or someone next to it on the left. A person: Ilse? Is the bundle me, bowed? *Doblegado*. Everything is totally motionless, almost lifeless. Are the indentations in the blanket cords hidden by the material? Ilse watching a silent bundle, intentness mingled with pride in her eyes. Don't move: her pride is my stillness, silence ... Don't move and everything will be all right. If I retreat into myself, lie absolutely still, she will go away ... She will go and I'll stay. And when she goes I can move.

P. asks 'Where to?' and Fraser replies:

> 'To my mother ... I can't go while Ilse is there. She says "you musn't bother mummy now. Mummy is busy, mummy is talking to daddy, mummy is getting ready to go out." 'I don't know if it really happened, but it feels like it' ... Out of the darkness

> surges a need to hold my mother; a bond, the warmth of an embrace.
> Since her death I have hardly thought of her. 'I musn't tell Ilse
> I love my mother for fear I may lose her, Ilse' ... (96).

The memory enacts the splitting of the child between two mothers, but also, as it develops, between 'this wanting, needing to be bound ... Needing, wanting to be free'(98). As he and P. discuss the memory (which Fraser actually denies *is* a memory) the image changes:

> A tightness like a band of iron encloses my head and with
> it the bundle image returns - but now without the stillness.
> Ilse seems to have gone. I can move, one of the cords is
> undone; but instead of moving I am overwhelmed with panic.
> Ilse will think I've undone the bond deliberately. I am even less
> able to move than when tied ... (98)

His frustration and anger at this 'double bind' give way to the image of a prisoner paralysed by indecision when his cell door is opened, and the understanding that 'I couldn't leave her' (Ilse) 'because I was frightened that my mother wouldn't be there to replace her ... The role of the prisoner was more profitable than the alternative' (99) because also, paradoxically, it gave him some inner space in which to be free. When he gets up to leave at the end of the session, he feels 'I am a man again, nearly fifty, where a minute ago I was a child' (99). This memory, and the second one to be discussed in a moment, do seem to demonstrate the potential for a certain kind of memory to 'resurrect past time' which Steedman says 'memory alone' cannot do (29): the 'resurgence' of previously unconscious memories to which Proust also bears witness does seem to make the past live again, if only for a moment, and the repetition within analysis presents the possibility of a fresh 'retranslation'. Fraser seems to disclaim this possibility when he says: 'It's not a memory at all. I didn't know about it until I interviewed Ilse' (98), but here he seems to be limiting his definition of 'memory' to that which has already been remembered: what he gives us in his account of his analysis is a different kind of memory, that which has been previously known about in very general terms but never before re-experienced or re-lived. The three stages of *Nachträglichkeit* are evident here: the first event is the child being tied to the pot; the second is the reminder of this in the interview with Ilse, although no reactivation of the affect is evident; in the third, the subject relives the originary event within analysis,

experiences the affect and constructs and reconstructs its meaning.

Fraser's comment - 'I don't know if it really happened, but it feels like it' (96) - raises the question of the truth-status of what might be defined as memory but also as fantasy or hallucination which nevertheless embodies what is felt to be the truth of a particular experience, its 'structure of feeling'. [21] When P. questions Fraser's concern with the testimony of others, he is reluctantly made to agree that '[w]hat actually happened is less important than what is felt to have happened' (95): in his *HWJ* interview Fraser says: 'I feel also that an unnecessary dichotomy is sometimes created between the event and the fantasy. It's not usually the event itself - unless, of course, it's traumatic - that's significant, but the meaning we give to it' (184). This raises the question of the definition of trauma which I raised in my first chapter: Fraser seems to imply that a 'traumatic' event is one of a separate and special kind which is easily recognised as such, and also that the events of his childhood were not traumatic. Objectively described they do seem the material of possible trauma, but the point surely is whether they were *experienced* as such, and the way in which they are recalled and described by Fraser seems to suggest that they were. We know from Ilse that he was regularly tied to the pot, that he saw little of his mother and that he was the object of rivalry between Janey and Ilse. What he seems to be reliving within the analytic process is not one discrete experience or moment of being tied on the pot while Ilse said those particular words, but an event which embodies or makes concrete the entirety of the feeling of passivity and powerlessness, and the awareness of conflict experienced by the child and bodied forth in this particular image, which may well also include elements of fantasy. It embodies what Fraser has subsequently referred to as the 'truth' which he discovered during psychoanalysis, the fact that he had 'two mothers'. [22]

During their discussion of this memory-image, Fraser says 'I know this business of being tied to the pot is so classically Freudian that I can't take it seriously myself', and P. suggests that it's a 'screen-memory which can represent many things' (98). This is initially puzzling: a screen memory as discussed by Freud is usually vivid but trivial or apparently meaningless, screening the memory of another more disturbing, traumatic or sexual event. [23] The experience of being tied to the pot and the conflict it embodies

[21] This is a phrase of Raymond Williams' which Steedman frequently employs.

[22] 'Review Discussion', *HWJ*, 184.

[23] See Sigmund Freud, 'Screen Memories' (1899), *SE* Vol. III, 301-322. The concept of screen memories is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, in the context of my analysis of Perec's *W*.

between the desire to please Ilse and to reach his mother, the need to be bound and the desire to be free, is in itself of sufficient apparent meaning and importance not to be the screen for anything else, as is the manner of its recall. However, his meeting with his brother Colin and their joint remembering of the war years at Amnersfield lead to the recovery of another, linked memory for which the 'pot' memory could be said to be a 'screen'. His talks with Colin extend and confirm his impression of his mother as 'at once elusive and inescapable', offering and then withdrawing her attention and her power to 'save' them, and lead him towards remembering within his resumed analysis the perhaps more deeply buried trauma of the 'crash', his mother's affair with Teddy Leroy and the end of life at Amnersfield. Again, it seems as if the facts of this event have always been available to memory, but their deeper meaning and effect not previously realised or dealt with. Fraser begins his resumed analysis by telling P. about a dream he had whilst staying with Colin:

> I was in a room separated from another by a narrow passage. Outside, the night sky was suddenly filled with planes in combat. As I struggled to shut the window there was a loud crash in the other room. A pilot, evidently wounded or shocked, appeared and I went across to comfort him. As he turned his face to me, I returned, still solicitous, to the other room. In the corridor a woman stood silently watching ...' (176)

Asked by P. for his associations, he discusses the polarities of East and West and his idea as a child that his mother might have been a spy: then 'an urgent desire to urinate comes over' him. He begins to say that it was Colin who used to wake up every night, but then:

> Floating off the back wall of my mind a memory forces its way through the words and I find myself saying that, after my return from Pinewood, I would often wake in the middle of the night and be unable to find the door to get to the bathroom. 'Although I'd slept in that room half my life by then, it was as though I was shut up in a dark box and couldn't see my way out' ... Out there, in the corridor beyond the bedroom, there's a darkness so intensely black and threatening that in my mind I recoil from it. Who or what do I fear meeting out there? My mother in a hidden role? The darkness seems totally taken up by

her menacing presence. (176)

The language which is used here to describe the reactivation of the memory trace - an image 'floating off the back wall' of the mind - makes clear the difference between the visual nature of the newly-remembered memory and the 'words' or narrative form taken by the already-remembered and often-retold. They discuss the child's unconscious splitting of his mother into witch and fairy godmother, his desire to touch her and then his other adolescent sexual feelings and experiences: when P. brings him back to the dream a link is again made with the memory - 'Then I see the corridor outside the guest bedroom along which I cautiously tread in the night so as not to be heard, wanting not to hear and yet fascinated by what I heard' (177). The text - and the analysis? - then veers away from the dream/memory to the other discourse of the ex-servants' memories of the 'crash', but returns to an associated memory during the next session when Fraser expresses his frustration at going 'round and round, passing the same point again and again from a different angle' (182). Here he relates again an often-recalled and narrated memory of his mother telling him she is going to marry Leroy while they (she and Ronnie) are playing chess: his only response at the time was to say 'It's your move' because '[t]he truth was too big to tell ... I'd keep silent in future. There wasn't anything I wanted to say. And that's how it remained until the end of her life'. Reminded by P. that his remark is self-defensive, Fraser realises for the first time that it had another meaning: 'It was her responsibility, her choice what she did' (182). This 'retranslation' of a familiar memory was possibly enabled by the fuller recall of the circumstances of her 'betrayal' and his own feelings about it, and leads towards the painful realisation that he could, and never will, have her totally, that he had no power over her, that he must 'accept the destruction and start again' (184). The more deeply buried memory of his mother's betrayal is recovered by means of the conversations with his brother, the dream, and the analytic process, including also the recovery of the earlier memory of being tied to the pot with which it is linked by the desire to urinate and the inability to reach his mother.

Neither P. nor Fraser make the link between the two memories explicit: whilst I would still suggest that the two memories are equally significant, so that one cannot be seen entirely as a 'screen' for the other, it is the reader who does the work of bringing the two into some sort of relationship, of further retranslation or reconstruction - as he or she continues to do when the text ends, the analyst's face 'impassive' and the analysis presumably set to continue. Although these two central memories *are* explored and

their meanings and associations developed, the text also leaves them in a space where they continue to resonate and to strike the reader with the force of freshly recovered impressions - which of course they could not have been by the time Fraser wrote his book. We do not know how many 'revisions' they went through in the writing, nor whether they have been 'lost' for the writer in the writing, as suggested by Primo Levi in the passage quoted above. Fraser is aware of a similar paradox within the process of psychoanalysis itself: he agrees that 'in reconstituting one's subjective history one is simultaneously giving up the possibility of actually journeying back into the past oneself, and changing that' : this is painful but necessary, he says, because the real change takes place in our internal objects and our relationship to them. 'It is in this sense, it seems to me, that psychoanalysis, in sacrificing versions of the past, transforms present reality'. [24]

Enigmatic signifiers

I suggested above that some of the early childhood experiences of both Fraser and Steedman might helpfully be seen in terms of Laplanche's 'enigmatic signifiers', messages which the young child receives from the adult world which bear unconscious (on the part of the sender) sexual signification but which the child is incapable of interpreting as such. Formulating 'seduction' in such a way avoids what Laplanche sees as the unecessary debate over whether 'seduction' is a real or fantasised event: it is now seen as an inevitable part of human development. Breast-feeding is, for Laplanche, the prototype of the 'enigmatic signifier':

> Can analytic theory afford to go on ignoring the extent women unconsciously and sexually cathect the breast, which appears to be a natural organ for lactation? It is inconceivable that the infant does not notice this sexual cathexis, which might be said to be perverse in the same sense in which that term is defined in the *Three Essays*. [25]

Fletcher explains: 'The maternal breast, apart from satisfying needs and stimulating pleasure is an agent of maternal fantasy, transmitting a sexual excitation with a hidden or unconscious meaning, a lost signified, and so posing a question for the infant which

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[24] 'Review Discussion', *HWJ*, 182.

[25] John Fletcher, 'The Letter in the Unconscious', 110 (quoting Laplanche, *New Foundations*).

it is constitutionally ill-equipped to answer'. [26] We learn that Janey breast-fed Ronnie for a few weeks only: no other meanings or interpretations are developed in connection with this fact, but in general terms it is part of the same pattern of alternating distance and closeness, the offering and withdrawal of intimacy already noted in their relationship: it is connected by P. with the child Ronnie's feelings about his new brother, which will be discussed later. To the extent that the situation is universal (and Laplanche does speculate on how it might change as and if more babies are bottle-fed) it must, if Laplanche is right, have functioned for Ronnie in the same way as for all other breast-fed babies: no other details are given to enable us to construct any more of this scenario in this particular case. However, what does develop through the interviews, conversations with Colin and the analysis is a sense of Janey's love for her sons as somehow inappropriate, even 'perverse'. Interviewing Lizzie, Fraser asks of his brother: 'Did you feel he lacked his mother's love?' She replies: 'Maybe. She loved him, gave him everything under the sun, but whether he actually had a mother's love, I don't know' (162). Recalling the time towards the end of the war, when he was about 13, back from boarding school and his father absent, he remembers a time when he started to wrestle with her: 'when my arms met the firmness of her body a sense of amazement made me recoil. Or was it not rather guilt? Who was I to her? Sometimes, sitting close by the fire, she would talk to me as though I were a man. And at other, more important times, she told me nothing ...' (176). P. tells Fraser that it was 'collusive' of her to make him promise never to resent her for allowing him to leave boarding school, and to give him a telescope instead of glasses as a 'penis ... that would compensate for yours which was smaller than your father's'. 'Her demands on you were mischievous, sometimes perverse' (169). Fraser resists P.'s interpretation of the telescope: it never becomes a 'translation' which rings true for him, but it does seem to function as a particularly *concrete* enigmatic signifier whose meanings for Janey we can only assume to have been unconscious. Her behaviour seems to correspond very closely to Laplanche's description of the adult who is inevitably unconsciously seductive towards the child:

> In the primal situation we have, then, a child whose ability to adapt is real but limited, weak and waiting to be perverted, and a deviant adult (deviant with regard to sexual norms ... deviant or split with regard to himself) ... given that the child

[26] Fletcher, 'The Letter in the Unconscious', 110.

> lives on in the adult, an adult faced with a child is particularly likely to be deviant and inclined to perform bungled or symbolic actions because he is involved in a relationship with his other self, the other he once was. The child in front of him brings out the child within him ... . [27]

In her reconstructions of her childhood through the filter of her mother's life story Steedman also shows the way in which the adult brings to her experience of parenting the unresolved conflicts of her own childhood: we know less about Janey's early life but it has already been shown how the servants perceived her as too young to have children of her own, and how 'it was a long time ... before she developed her own personality' (Ilse, 64). She seems to have functioned rather like an adolescent in response to her authoritarian older husband, whilst also wanting him to 'take the lead which he couldn't because he lacked the money' (62), finding a new freedom in his absence during the war, occasionally colluding with her sons in disobeying him, seeming to offer some kind of alliance with them but ultimately betraying them, as well as him, with Leroy. Colin also describes how upset and frustrated she was by Ronnie's own remoteness and apparent indifference, his 'inscrutable lack of reaction to anything' which she saw as reduplicating his father's behaviour, and to which she responded similarly. It is necessary to recognise the fact that Laplanche is talking on the whole about situations that arise in early infancy, not those of later childhood: partly because of Fraser's lack of contact with his mother as an infant and his corresponding lack of early memories of her, but also because Laplanche sees the enigmatic signifiers of early childhood as constitutive of the unconscious itself, this layer remains mostly hidden.

For Laplanche 'enigmatic signifiers' would also include sexual remarks made, and unconsciously or potentially sexual scenes enacted, in the presence of the child when he or she is not capable of fully understanding them: what cannot be represented at the time becomes part of the unconscious. When Ilse reminds Fraser of the time he told his father that he got into Ilse's bed in the morning to play before getting up 'and asked whether he ever got into mummy's bed to play with her' (72) we are witnessing the young child's attempts to construct or translate what he has inevitably perceived of the sexual relationship between his parents. In spite of his new sense of freedom and happiness during the war, Colin recalls how, for him, 'each night brought trauma and chaos. A few hours after being put to bed he'd wake from some terrible nightmare

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[27] Fletcher, 'The Letter in the Unconscious', 111 (quoting Laplanche, *New Foundations*).

screaming and vomiting'. The doctor only suggested a change of diet: Colin is now convinced that 'the problem lay in an uneasy psyche ... a reaction perhaps to Ilse's leaving and the collapse of his world at the start of the war' (137). He also developed a serious stutter at this time. Ilse was replaced by a younger nanny, Annie, who Cookie remembers as leaving Colin alone at night: Lizzie recalls Colin's screaming as 'like somebody - I wouldn't say tortured but closed in and who can't get out'. Janey dismissed Annie when she found out about her neglect: the adult Colin still doesn't know why she absented herself at night, and Fraser now tells him that it was because '[s]he was fucking with Bert.I can remember him telling me about it. How she screamed when he broke her in in the spinney. I didn't know what he meant, he had to explain about the hymen' (138). Colin laughs, and Fraser remembers that 'with Annie's departure, his nightmares and vomiting had soon ended', commenting only that '[p]erhaps they were more connected with her than he had thought' (138). The unconsciously and partially apprehended sexual relationship between two parent-surrogates (Bert was a father-figure for both boys) functions as an 'enigmatic signifier' for the young child, as does Bert's description until it is explained to and understood by the older Ronnie. As the analysis nears its end (at least within the text) Fraser is able to recognise and admit to his sexual desire for his mother: during their discussion of the telescope and its meanings Fraser lies 'hoping the session will end and I won't have to admit to the guilty sensation of pleasure flowing like warm water through me. A rational remark comes to my defence: 'Well, it proves what I've always thought. The Oedipal complex isn't a one-way affair"(169), referring here to the enigmatic or seductive message conveyed to him by Janey with the gift of the telescope. The language here also suggests a longing for the always-already lost imaginary 'oceanic' unity with the body of the mother. A few sessions later his excitement and guilt at touching his mother's body through her silk evening dress is recalled in the contexts of her 'defection' to Leroy and Ronnie's own sexual experiences as a young adolescent with Ron Jones and Lizzie. The older child - and the adult reconstructing these experiences - is able to integrate them into his 'normal' sexual development whilst perhaps unconsciously drawing on infantile sexual feelings -'flowing like warm water through me'.

For Laplanche, developing an example Freud gives in 'Constructions in Analysis', '[g]iving birth to a child is a type of enigmatic signifier: what does she mean to me when giving birth to a small brother?' The child's response to this - that he has been abandoned - is defined by Freud as a construction: Laplanche says that it is 'in fact the

reconstruction of an old construction, which again the child has to deconstruct again and again'. [28] In Fraser's case there seems to have been a repression of the memory of this construction: P. has to help him to reconstruct it before it can be deconstructed. His aggression towards P., initiated by seeing a younger patient leaving his house, develops into a memory - and a re-experiencing - of the desire to kill Colin, and then also his mother: 'My rage seemed so destructive that I can't remember ever daring to express it'. A 'sensation of shimmering water' provokes the memory of the fear that '[m]y mother would dissolve if I expressed hatred of her ...The little I had of her dissolved with my brother's birth. There was nothing left' (100). [29] He remembers Ilse bringing him scones filled with honey after a vomiting attack soon after the birth of his brother: in her interview Ilse says that this was the only time he was ever really ill as a child, but no link is later made with Colin's own vomiting attacks at a similar age. Ilse's comments are used here to reconstruct his sense of abandonment : 'You suffered, I know, when you couldn't sleep in my bedroom any longer because I had to have Colin with me' (101): this develops into a memory and a reliving of the physical experience of total exclusion: 'as though it were happening again, I retreat to the safety behind the shutters. In the inner darkness faint flickering shadows begin to move, there's a yearning for something - something hidden. From the other side of the door come murmurs, low voices. I numb myself and turn away. "I can do without them ..."' (101). The image prefigures that of the dream of the 'crash' and the memory of being unable to leave his room to go to the bathroom when Janey and Leroy were together in another room across the corridor. P. links this feeling of exclusion with his loss of his mother's breast: initially angrily rejected by Fraser on the grounds that she only breast-fed him for a fortnight, the feeling of 'never having enough' of her 'even as a baby' is nevertheless accepted, and the anger directed at his father who possibly 'complained about the inconvenience of being woken up' (101).

The 'enigmatic signifiers' of Janey's seductive messages and behaviour, the birth of a brother, and the sexual activity of parents or parent-surrogates are thus translated into consciousness and retranslated during the analysis to provide a 'more complete, more

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[28] 'The Kent Seminar' in *Jean Laplanche*, 21-40; 38.

[29] Melanie Klein describes the child's feeling that his aggression, the result of the frustration of his desires, will destroy the mother in 'Love, Guilt and Reparation': 'The baby feels that what he desires in his phantasies has really taken place; that is to say he feels that he *has really destroyed* the object of his destructive impulses, and is going on destroying it'. In Melanie Klein, *Love, Guilt and Reparation and other works 1921-1942* (London: Virago, 1989), 303-343; 308.

comprehensive, less repressive' translation of the subject's early experience, enabling him to become more of the subject of his history, the historian of his past. Fraser has chosen to leave this story in the fragmented form of its own process of discovery, rather than the polished, closed-off form which a *next* retranslation or rewriting might have become. Asked in the *HWJ* interview what kind of book he would have written had the 'I' he was looking for been found, Fraser replies: 'A book which would have been a finished object, a literary work, instead of this desperate rummaging among the fractured objects of the past. A seamless totality: a work of art, in other words, dead before its birth'. [30]

Memories brought forward: Steedman's interpretative devices

Steedman's autobiography is also one which attempts to preserve the status of her memories as 'traces, as open signs ... to make the work of interpretation manifest, provisional and open-ended'. [31] As I suggested above, we are not witness here to the *process* of psychoanalysis, although Steedman says she is using the form of the case-study, which does suggest a certain objectification of herself as subject: nor do we experience the moments of recovery of memory as we do with Fraser. The two central memories which Steedman offers for interpretation have the status of memories already recalled, already and always known, although she by no means exhausts the possibilities of their 'retranslation'. These are her dream of the woman in the New Look dress and her memory of her visit to the bluebell wood with her father. These memories and their subsequent retranslations exemplify the structure of *Nachträglichkeit* in that an early memory (from the age of 3 or 4) with some possible sexual signification is retranslated in the light of later knowledge, although as in the case of Fraser there is no one significant later memory which triggers off the latent content and meaning of the first one, rather an accumulation of later experiences, discoveries and 'interpretative devices'. The dream is recounted at the beginning of the 'autobiographical' second section, 'Exiles':

> When I was three, before my sister was born I had a dream.
> It remains quite clear across the years, the topography
> absolutely plain, so precise in details of dress that I can use
> them to place the dream in historical time. We were in a street,

[30] *HWJ* 'Review Discussion', 188.

[31] Sheringham, *French Autobiography*, 314.

> the street so wide and the houses so distant across the road that it might not have been a street at all; and the houses lay low with gaps between them, so that the sky filled a large part of the picture. Here, at the front, on this side of a wide road, a woman hurried along, having crossed from the houses behind. The perspective of the dream must have shifted several times, for I saw her once as if from above, moving through a kind of square, or crossing-place, and then again from the fixed point of the dream where I stood watching her, left forefront.
>
> She wore the New Look, a coat of beige gabardine which fell in two swaying, graceful pleats from her waist at the back (the swaying must have come from very high heels, but I didn't notice her shoes), a hat tipped forward from hair swept up at the back. She hurried, something jerky about her movements, a nervous, agitated walk, glancing round at me as she moved across the foreground. Several times she turned and came some way back towards me, admonishing, shaking her finger.
>
> Encouraging me to follow in this way perhaps, but moving too fast for me to believe that this was what she wanted, she entered a revolving door of dark, polished wood, mahogany and glass, and started to go round and round, looking out at me as she turned. I wish I knew what she was doing, and what she wanted me to do. (27-28)

The way this dream is narrated does give it the quality of one only just dreamed and recalled: we have no way of knowing how 'accurate' the account is, and neither does Steedman at the distance of thirty-odd years. She says that '[m]y understanding of the dream built up in layers over a long period of time ... The dream is not a fixed event of the summer of 1950; it has passed through many stages of use and exploration, and such reinterpretation gives an understanding that the child at the time can't possess' (28-9), but it is not suggested that the *content* of the dream has been in any way changed or distorted over time and subsequent re-rememberings. Not only is it more fully understood in retrospect, it is also used as an 'interpretative device', 'brought forward again and again to shape responses to quite different events'. As suggested earlier, Steedman always places the retranslations of her memories and experiences firmly in the social: as an adult, she says, the 'strange lowered vista' of the streets now

'seems an obvious representation of London in the late forties and fifties: all the houses had gaps in between because of the bombs, and the sky came closer to the ground than seemed right' (28-9): it was only later that she was able to label the style of the woman's dress 'New Look', when she understood that such large quantities of material were 'as expensive as children'.

The dream is later used as an 'interpretative device' for women's longing for the material goods, including clothes, which are simultaneously offered to them by advertising and denied them by their circumstances, which include their children. The dream could also be described as an enigmatic signifier, as Steedman herself suggests when she describes the '*evidence*' of the dream as 'the feeling of childhood - all childhoods, probably - the puzzlement of the child watching from the pavement, wondering what's going on, what they, the adults, are up to, what they want from you, and what they expect you to do' (29). The central 'enigma' is only 'solved' much later: 'it's only recently that I've come to see who the woman in the New Look coat actually was'. This suggestion of who she 'actually was' does seem to indicate a desire to close off meaning, and could in any case only be established by 'retrospective attribution' (one of Strachey's translations of *Nachträglichkeit* rejected by Laplanche but which here seems appropriate): the three year-old did not know - except perhaps unconsciously - of the existence of her father's wife who he left behind in the North and with whom she later identifies the woman in the dream. Later in this same section she recalls the occasion when this final identification was made, whilst also suggesting that she 'knew' as a three year old who the woman 'was':

> Just before my mother's death, playing about with the photographs on the front bedroom mantelpiece, my niece discovered an old photograph under one of me at three. A woman holds a tiny baby. It's the early 1930s, a picture of the half-sister left behind. But I think I knew about her and her mother long before I looked them both in the face, or heard about their existence, knew that the half understood adult conversations around me, the two trips to Burnley in 1951, the quarrels about 'her', the litany of 'she', 'she', 'she' from behind closed doors, made up the figure in the New Look coat, hurrying away, wearing the clothes that my mother wanted to wear, angry with me yet nervously inviting

me to follow, caught finally in the revolving door. (39-40)

This passage again suggests the enigmatic signifiers only partly understood by the young child, perhaps ascribing to the three year-old an overly adult understanding of the possible feelings of the abandoned wife. The juxtaposition of the two photographs is striking but undeveloped: it is almost as if the existence of the wife and child is hidden beneath that of the child of the second relationship, or as if the coincidence of the two photographs 'proves' that the child knew about the first family. It is this discovery that is presumably being referred to when Steedman says earlier on that it was 'only recently' that she came to see who the woman 'actually was', although it seems that she also wants to ascribe at least a partial awareness of this to herself at the age of three. The discovery of the photographs does seem to function as the second 'time' of *Nachträglichkeit*, the moment when the latent meaning of the earlier memory becomes clear. In between lay a childhood characterised by a sense of unexplained difference and isolation, by the enigmatic signifiers of half-understood messages: 'the sense of my childhood that I carried through the years was that people knew something about me, something that was wrong with me, that I didn't know myself' (40). It was a family characterised by the existence of secrets which could only be transmitted unconsciously and enigmatically to the child, and which also achieved 'the status of a myth ... such secrets can also produce myths of origin that serve both to reveal and conceal what is actually hidden from view' (66). [32] It wasn't until 1977 that Steedman found out that she was illegitimate, but the memory of a scene from childhood which she subsequently interprets in the light of this knowledge has stayed with her with a clarity similar to that of the dream.

In the sub-section of 'Exiles' entitled 'A Thin Man' Steedman describes the cellar underneath the flat in Hammersmith where the family lived until she was four, which her father used as a workroom and where he was making her a dolls' house. Her mother took her down to the cellar to show her the work in progress, which in retrospect she realised was odd because her mother always used to criticise her father for not understanding conventions such as keeping surprises a secret. In the cellar, her 'mother leant back against a workbench, her hands on its edge behind her. It tipped her body forward, just a little. She leant back; she laughed, she smiled. Ellis stood under

[32] These 'secrets' and their unconscious transmission are also illuminated by Abraham and Torok's notion of the 'crypt' in *The Shell and the Kernel* Vol. 1, trans. Nicholas T. Rand (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

the spot of light, a plane in his hand, a smile: a charmer charmed.' Again the scene has a photographic clarity, as if etched in the child's memory by means of its unconsciously perceived significance. 'Years later it becomes quite clear that this was the place where my mother set in motion my father's second seduction. She'd tried with having me, and it hadn't worked' (that is, Ellis hadn't married her). 'Now, a second and final attempt' (53). This is the scene which Steedman says she hadn't yet remembered when she was writing *The Tidy House*: the text does not give us the time and circumstances of its recall, but it is clear from what she says here that it was remembered before it was understood: 'The scene of seduction remained a mystery for a very long time, an area of puzzlement that failed to illuminate, like the light absorbing the darkness over the workbench' (53), although the girls' story in *The Tidy House* was, she says, unconsciously interpreted in the light of this scene. What she now realises that she unconsciously perceived at the time, and which the little girls who wrote 'The Tidy House' also realised, was the initiative of women in instigating and maintaining families: the bargain which her mother was attempting to make is also interpreted by means of an anthropological text, Gayle Rubin's essay 'The Traffic in Women'.

As a child Steedman interpreted the mysteries of her parents' relationship in the light of the fairy tales she read voraciously during her seventh year, and this conjunction of the imaginary and the partially-apprehended reality provides the material for a fantasy, again remembered and reconstructed in clear detail. What we do not discover, however, is whether, or when, the child realised that it *was* a fantasy. It was 'The Snow Queen' which played the greatest part in the construction of the child's imaginary: 'Kay was my name at home, and I knew that Kay, the boy in 'The Snow Queen', was me, who had a lump of ice in her heart' (46).

> I lay on my bed, and read, and imagined what they were doing downstairs. The wireless was playing and I saw this picture: they both sat naked under the whitewood kitchen table, their legs crossed so that you couldn't really see what lay between. Each had a knife, sharp-edged with a broad yet pointed blade, and what they did with the knife, what the grown-ups did, was cut each other, making thin surface wounds like lines drawn with a sharp red pencil, from which the blood poured.

She goes on to quote the passage from 'The Snow Queen' in which the Little Robber Girl draws a knife across a reindeer's neck and then takes the knife, and Gerda, into bed with her, and then continues:

> Downstairs, I thought, the thin blood falls in sheets from my mother's breasts; she was the most cut, but I knew it was she who did the cutting. I couldn't always see the knife in my father's hand. (54)

One element which seems to have gone into the construction of this fantasised sexual scene which Steedman does not mention is the child's unconscious perception of the link between sexuality and violence or pain; the other is clearly her perception of her mother as the active, powerful partner who is somehow also the agent of her own suffering, not a victim. In spite of her failure to 'seduce' Ellis into marriage, Steedman makes it clear that she was otherwise the locus of power within the family, the father being absent or marginalised, allowed a limited space within the house and the life of the family. The image of the knife in the hand of her mother, not her father, becomes an interpretative device' which instigates and enables a rethinking of the supposed 'law of the father' within theories of patriarchy based on orthodox psychoanalysis: her mother's ambivalence and harshness towards her daughters persists as the image of the knife even for the adult Steedman: 'I accept the idea of male power intellectually, of course', but 'in the dreams it is a woman who holds the knife, and only a woman can kill' (19). (We are told this early on in the text at a point when it is still unexplained in terms of the fairy- tale and the fantasy.) By the age of nine, Steedman says that she had 'stopped seeing' except through the screen of the fairy-tales, through which she could 'dimly make out ... the thin red lines of blood drawn across her breasts: displaying to my imagination the mutilation involved in feeding and keeping us' (82). Later still she retranslates even more fully what she learned from the fairy- tales and what she imagined in the fantasy:

> The fairy-tales always tell the stories that we do not yet know. Often, a few years later, I would long for my mother to get rid of my father, expel him, kill him, make him no more, so that we could lead a proper life. And what I know with hindsight about that summer of the fairy-tales,

> is that a new drama was in process of enactment. The removal of my father by the birth of my sister (an old, conventional story, every oldest daughter's tale) was being formalised by my mother's warfare against him, a warfare that always stopped short of banishment; and I was to end up ten, indeed twenty years later, believing that my identification was entirely with her, that whilst hating her, I was her; and that there was no escape. (55)

Whilst often still retaining the imagery of the fairy-tale, in *Landscape* Steedman is using other interpretative devices - social history, anthropology, feminist theory - to retranslate the loss of her father, who was already, like Fraser's mother when his brother was born, partly absent. This literary and historical contextualising is in striking contrast to Fraser's 'working through' of his loss within analysis, but within Steedman's text we have the (provisional) *results* of her reworking of the material of her own childhood - the realisation of her over-identification with her mother at the expense of her father, although she still seems to feel and fear her mother's power. The book seems to have been written shortly after her death (as Fraser's was shortly after the death of his father) and to have functioned partly as reparation - Steedman had not seen her for nine years until two weeks before her death - and partly as exorcism - on that last visit, she says, she looked like a witch. The use of literary and historical contexts does partly function as a way of distancing the subject from her own experience: the last section consists of discussion of the stories of other lives, although there is also a return to her mother. Even in passages where the pain of childhood deprivations is still felt, those deprivations are 'read' in terms of the literary or cultural myths which they 'disprove'. At the end of 'The Thin Man' she evokes the power of the father and the daughter's desire embodied in fairy-tales and 'the modern psychoanalytic myths' in order to mark their absence in her own case: 'But daddy, you never knew me like this; you didn't really care, or weren't allowed to care, it comes to the same thing in the end. You shouldn't have left us there, you should have taken me with you. You left me alone; you never laid a hand on me: the iron didn't enter the soul. You never gave me anything: the lineaments of an unused freedom' (61).

Her central memory of her father, an encounter with a gamekeeper in a bluebell wood, is described with the clarity of the dream of the woman in the New Look dress and the 'seduction' scene: again, we are not given the circumstances of its first recall, so it is as

if it has always been available to consciousness. Although there are a couple of gaps and one significant distortion of which Steedman is aware, the memory is presented as if it has remained immune from change or 'retranscription'. It can be placed very precisely: Steedman was four, her sister had just been born, and the family were just about to move from Hammersmith to Streatham: in retrospect, she is also able to place it at the beginning of her father's 'expulsion from the domestic scene' - a significant link with the content of the memory itself. She describes the shade and sunlight, ferns and bluebells which made up the setting, and then:

> My father started to pick the bluebells from in between the ferns, making a bunch. Did he give me some to hold? I can't remember, except how else to know about their white watery roots, the pale cleanness pulled from the earth? ...
>
> The arrival of the forest-keeper was a dramatic eruption on this scene ... He was angry with my father, shouted at him: it wasn't allowed. Hadn't he read the notice, there'd be no bluebells left if people pulled them up by the roots. He snatched the bunch from my father's hand, scattered the flowers over the ground and among the ferns, their white roots glimmering, unprotected; and I thought: yes; he doesn't know how to pick bluebells.
>
> My father stood, quite vulnerable in memory now. He was a thin man. I wonder if I remember the waisted and pleated flannel trousers of the early 1950s because in that confrontation he was the loser, feminized, outdone? They made him appear thinner, and because of the way the ground sloped, the forest-keeper, very solid and powerful, was made to appear taller than him. In remembering this scene I always forget, always have to deliberately call to mind the fact that my father retaliated, shouted back; and that we then retreated, made our way back down the path, the tweed man the victor, watching our leaving. (50)

Steedman suggests that memories such as these *are* vulnerable to change over time by the fact that she 'always forgets' that her father retaliated, possibly because the version of her father she has now constructed is one of powerlessness. The phrase 'vulnerable

in memory' suggests both that she remembers him as vulnerable on this occasion and that her memory of him is vulnerable to change: has he become *more* vulnerable in memory than he may actually have been, the older Steedman augmenting her image of him as powerless here with her knowledge of his later powerlessness as her mother began to exclude him from the domestic scene, and, later still, with her political awareness of working-class marginalisation? The scene has developed for Steedman into a marker of her own political awareness: 'Any account that presents its subjects as cold, or shivering or in any way unprotected recalls the precise structure of its feeling' (50), linking it here with the little watercress girl and later with John Pearman, the radical soldier and policeman whose memoirs she later edited, whose children were also forced to watch his humiliation. Raymond Williams' phrase, 'structure of feeling', is used to indicate a continuity between the child's feelings for her humiliated father and the adult's political allegiance, although her feelings then included the somewhat less sympathetic 'yes; he doesn't know how to pick bluebells': there was something in the young child which was reassured by this confirmation of her mother's view of her father as incompetent. The 'shivering' 'unprotected' subjects suggest both the vulnerabilty of the exposed bluebell roots and that of her father, for which they become an image. This is a detail to which Steedman frequently returns and about which she often seems to be suggesting more than she wants to make explicit: she alludes to 'something that at the age of four I knew and did not know about my father (know now, and do not know), something about the roots and their whiteness, and the way in which they had been pulled away, to wither exposed on the bank' (51). What is being suggested here can only be sexual: a link is being made between sexual and political impotence, both of which were only partly - or unconsciously - perceived by the child. The adult still senses something which she does not 'know' about her father and which the reader is not in a position to reconstruct, although a link could be made with the 'seduction' scene where the mother took the initiative.

When Steedman discusses the memory again later, it is to assert that 'the official psychoanalytic myths ignore the social powerlessness that the scene in the bluebell wood reveals, speak to other matters: to the illegal picking of the flowers, the vulnerability of their white roots' (74). Although she goes on to insist that 'its point is perhaps the place where it enables me to watch John Pearman's children watch the play of class relations on the road to Winkfield in 1867', and throughout the text that it was the 'interpretative device' by which she reinterpreted the theory of patriarchy, there is still some residue of possible meaning which is being suggested and then evaded. If the

'official psychoanalytic myths' are irrelevant, why mention them in such a way that suggests what is being denied, the sexual meaning of the scene, if only in fantasy? In the passage quoted earlier Steedman expresses a regret for what her father did not provide - the power which the daughter finds seductive, the possibility of the daughter's desire for the father, and the separation from the mother which he might have enabled her to effect. The traces remain of a fantasy that might have arisen at the time, or which might have been developed since: here the suggestion of incestuous desire - the 'illegality' of the scene, the signifiers of the whiteness and vulnerability of the flowers which here almost slide over to the signified of the little girl - is made only to be rejected in favour of the securely social and political retranslation of the scene. What we observe here is the process outlined in more theoretical terms earlier in the text: 'if we do allow an unconscious life to working-class children, then we can perhaps see the first loss, the earliest exclusion (known most familiarly to us as the oedipal crisis) brought forward later, and articulated through an adult experience of class and class relations' (14). If 'oedipal' suggests the desire of the child for the parent of the opposite sex which s/he has to realise cannot be fulfilled, in the bluebell wood scene it is as if this realisation came at the moment when she witnessed his social humiliation, and the destruction of any power she may have been attracted by. Her later, entirely politicised retranslation of the scene reads it in terms of class oppression and exclusion: what her retranslation of the episode half-admits and then shies away from is an awareness that one need not exclude the other, that the social-political meaning of the scene does not completely eclipse the psychic.

Conclusion

Steedman connects her mother with the witch of the fairy-tales: her father would often tell his daughter that she was 'a good mother', and she reinforced this herself by constantly reminding her children how lucky they were to have enough to eat and warm beds to sleep in. Steedman grew up with an awareness of her mother's ambivalence towards her children: they were pawns in a failed bargain, the reasons why she was unable to have the material things she longed for, as well as objects of affection. There is no longing for the imaginary satisfactions of the pre-oedipal unity of mother and child in Steedman; instead she charts the difficulties of separation from a mother who both resented her daughter, and used her as a screen on which to project her own desires and dissatisfactions. Her mother's warfare against her father resulted in Steedman ending up 'ten indeed twenty years later, believing that my identification was

entirely with her, that whilst hating her, I was her; and there was no escape' (55). The complex desires projected onto her daughter by Steedman's mother and experienced by the child as 'enigmatic signifiers' are read partly through the work of Alice Miller, who Steedman quotes:

> every mother carries with her a bit of her 'unmastered past', which she unconsciously hands on to her child. Each mother can only react empathetically to the extent that she has become free of her own childhood. (105)

This is a slightly different way of formulating the relationship from Laplanche's idea that 'an adult faced with a child is particularly likely ... to perform bungled or symbolic actions because he is involved in a relationship with his other self, the other he once was', [33] but in both scenarios the child will pick up unconscious messages and translate them into understandings and responses of her own. In Steedman's case, she says that she became the 'good child' of Miller's analysis, 'intelligent, alert, attentive, extremely sensitive ... transparent, clear, reliable and easy to manipulate', in response to the understanding that 'someone else has paid the price for you, and you have to pay it back' (105). As she grew older and increasingly resentful of these manipulations, Steedman says that she became what her mother described as 'cold and unfeeling': on being accused of this, she would shout back that it was she, her mother, who had made her so. She uses Miller again to interpret her own situation, the way in which, in such circumstances, 'the child's intellectual capacities develop undisturbed, masking often, though, a damaged world of feeling, a false and despairing self' (106). This analysis has striking parallels with Ronald Fraser's 'goodness' as a child - an 'easily worked-out, well-behaved child', of whom Ilse says 'here wasn't anything I expected of you that you didn't do' (74) - and who his mother experiences as being withdrawn and cold. He tells P. about his decision to become a writer at the age of seven or eight in response to his parents' inability or refusal to hear him: 'I would write about an 'I' who wasn't the 'I' who everybody else knew, would create a world that my parents would have to recognise as being more valid than theirs, a world of which, moreover, I was the author' (110). In fact, as we know, Fraser became the historian of other people's lives, avoiding the first person until the writing of *In Search of a Past*, and even then still struggling with it: 'It's no accident, I suppose, that, in writing, I choose to stand

[33] Fletcher, 'The Letter in the Unconscious', 110-1 (quoting Laplanche, *New Foundations*).

outside myself, as though I'm talking to an intimate other - which is how I feel to myself' (109). It is striking that these two social - and socialist - historians should return to rework the material of their own painful childhoods in ways that still, to some extent and in different ways, evade the 'I'.

Having clearly evoked the exclusions and deprivations of her own childhood, Steedman moves away from them to other lives: in the context of her readings of Freud's case-history of Dora and Mayhew's interview with the little watercress seller she describes 'child analysis' as 'a late manifestation of the romantic quest to establish childhood as an area of experience lying within us all, not as a terrain abandoned, but as a landscape of feeling that might be continually reworked and reinterpreted ... childhood *is* a kind of history, the continually reworked and re-used personal history that lies at the heart of each present' (128). Steedman quotes Steven Marcus on the assumption within psychoanalysis that 'a coherent story is in some manner connected with mental health ... On this reading, human life is, ideally, a connected and coherent story, with all the details in explanatory order and with everything ... accounted for, in its proper causal and other sequence' (131). This is what Freud tried to construct out of the fragments and dreams communicated to him by Dora, accusing her of the hysteric's 'failure of narrative', which, it has since been demonstrated, was as much a failure of his own 'interpretation'. Steedman points out that Freud did not always expect this kind of narrative consistency from his patients: 'in a later case-study, that of the Wolf Man, there is a clear implication that narrative truth, order and sequence does not much signify in the eliciting of a life history, for it must remain the same story in the end, that is, the individual's account of how she got to be the way she is' (132).

In the case of the watercress girl, it is not narrative inconsistency she is accused of: Mayhew allows her to tell her own story, which displays a high degree of coherence and order. It is the child herself who discomfits Mayhew: with 'the blank absence of childhood from her face' (134), he 'did not know how to talk with her' (126); her story, whilst coherent, 'does not fit: all its content and its imagery display its marginality to the central story, of the bourgeois household and the romances of the family' (139). 'The things she spoke to Mayhew about (pieces of fur, the bunches of cress, the scrubbed floor) still startle after 130 years, not because they are strange things in themselves, but because in our conventional reading, they are not held together in figurative relationship to each other' (138). Steedman uses Dora and the watercress girl as two further examples of stories of the marginalised - a young girl, a

working-class child - that do not fit, which are not easily assimilated or 'interpreted' by their male, middle class analyst/interviewers. The way in which she - and Fraser - tell the stories of their own lives, or rather, the stories of how they came to be able to tell those stories, demonstrate a resistance to the demand for coherence and order, 'with everything accounted for, in its proper causal or other sequence'. They remain fragmentary, provisional, open-ended: Fraser's analysis is not terminated, his analyst's face still 'impassive'. Steedman allows the little watercress girl's life to 'slip[...] away into the darkness, as she turned into the entrance of her Clerkenwell court' (139): at the end of the book, after describing her final visit to her mother, she asserts the desire to preserve 'the irreducible nature of all our lost childhoods', to resist their incorporation or assimilation into 'a wider world of literary and cultural reference' (144). Since this is exactly what she has been doing (whilst always preserving a sense of the particularity of the lives and stories she discusses) the text enacts a double movement at the end: like the story of Beloved, it must be remembered and told, its importance recognised, before it can, and must, be 'consigned to the dark':

> I must make the final gesture of defiance, and refuse to let this be absorbed by the central story; must ask for a structure of political thought that will take all of this, all these secret and impossible stories, recognize what has been made out on the margins; and then, recognizing it, refuse to celebrate it; a politics that will, watching this past say 'So what?'; and consign it to the dark. (144)

Chapter Three

A Life Entire: Narrative Reconstruction in Sylvia Fraser's *My Father's House* and Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*

Introduction

In this chapter I examine two texts, one a novel 'whose form is that of an autobiography' [1], the other an autobiography which uses 'many of the techniques of the novelist' [2], which are predicated on the assumption that memory of childhood trauma can be repressed and (almost) completely recovered, enabling the reconstruction of the past 'as it really was'. The concept of memory they employ thus differs radically from the idea of memory as a continual process of 'retranslation' in the autobiographies of Ronald Fraser, Carolyn Steedman and Georges Perec, which acknowledge the provisionality and incompleteness of memories of childhood. *My Father's House,* Sylvia Fraser's *Memoir of Incest and Healing*, and Margaret Atwood's novel *Cat's Eye* both represent the recovery of memory of trauma: Fraser's of prolonged sexual abuse by her father, and the severe psychological bullying suffered by Atwood's protagonist Elaine Risley as a young child. Both are predicated upon Freud's belief that the 'burial' of the past entails its 'preservation', that the unconscious is 'that part of the self which had become separated off from it in infancy'; [3] my readings of these texts will show that the 'truth' about the preserved and rediscovered past only emerges as an effect of narrative itself. Reading the two texts side by side is not intended as a denial of the difference between fiction and autobiography, but rather as a means of highlighting the fact that the creation or impression of truth is an effect of language and narrative.

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[1] Margaret Atwood, *Cat's Eye* (1988; London: Virago, 1990). Atwood includes this description on the page of the text which also gives copyright and publication details, including also the disclaimer that the book is *not* an autobiography. All page references are to this edition and will be given within the text.

[2] Sylvia Fraser, *My Father's House: A Memoir of Incest and Healing* (1987; London: Virago, 1989). The quotation is from the 'Author's Note' which prefaces the text. All page references are to this edition and will be given within the text.

3 Sigmund Freud, 'Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis ('The Rat Man') (1909), PF Vol. 9, 33-128; 57 - 58.

The main focus of this chapter will be Sylvia Fraser's 'memoir', which exposes quite clearly the contradiction between the idea of 'reconstruction' as the accurate archaeological recreation of the past and as the 'mark of the fictionality' [4] of any such recreation. She makes explicit use of the archaeological metaphor, comparing her resurrected memories of sexual abuse to 'smashed hieroglyphic tablets', which, when she 'finally began excavation', had to be 'fitted into patterns and dated' (218). At a stage prior to the writing of the text, she re-read her life in the light of the 'evidence' produced by this excavation: her reconstruction of this rereading within the text employs, as she readily admits in her 'Note', many of the 'techniques of the novelist' in order to 'provide focus and structure'. But within the text the final literary reconstruction has come to stand in for the complex psychic reconstruction which must have preceded it (although Fraser does give us *some* account of this), and the structure she has produced is so highly and tightly *con*structed, and the recovery and representation of memory so apparently complete, that doubts arise about the truth status of the events she reconstructs, and hence about the appropriateness of such techniques for her material. The text obviously *is* a reconstruction of her past in the light of certain beliefs she has come to hold about it, but I shall argue that it is a reconstruction which the text largely effaces. My analysis of her autobiography is not an attempt to disprove the facts of her sexual abuse, but an examination of the way in which narrative is used to establish that truth. Although *My Father's House* could be seen as a landmark text for those (including survivors) who fought for the recognition of child sexual abuse as an important and neglected reality, the 'novelisation' of Fraser's experience now also reads like a paradigm of the kind of memory recovery of which many - and not only accused parents - have become wary. [5] Roberta Culbertson's recent account of her memories of sexual abuse provides a useful alternative model, one which draws attention to the huge difference between the child's

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[4] Lis Møller, *The Freudian Reading:Analytical and Fictional Constructions* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), xi.

[5] The British False Memory Society has a well-documented and researched file of cases of 'recovered' memory of sexual abuse which they believe to be false, claiming that no 'confirmed' case exists. This side of the debate is thoroughly outlined by Frederick Crews in his two-part review article, 'The Revenge of the Repressed', in *The New York Review of Books*, 17 November and 1 December 1994. Much of the debate centres around the opposition between the two models of memory outlined in my first chapter: positions have become polarised, and I do not claim the ability to make judgements on actual cases. Whilst it seems that early experiences of trauma can be 'blanked out' or apparently forgotten, it is also clear that their later recall will involve the play of fantasy, displacement, and condensation as well as the inevitable 'rewriting' of memory in the context of the present. This is the process described by Roberta Culbertson.

experience and the adult's understanding and description of that experience. [6]

Culbertson also draws attention to the way in which extreme victimisation and the experience of powerlessness dislocate memory and the sense of self: Fraser describes the creation or emergence of another 'self' during her experience of abuse, and Atwood's Elaine finds ways of dissociating herself from the bullying to which she is subjected. The splitting of the subject, and the 'preservation' of the past from the consciousness of the present, are represented in the narrative structure of the texts: both employ narrative techniques which attempt to hold past and present apart, so that the past can be represented as if uncontaminated by the consciousness of the remembering subject. Fraser uses italics for the reconstruction of her forgotten childhood, and Atwood's Elaine tells two stories which never quite meet, one reconstructing her past, including the forgotten traumas of childhood, the other narrating the events of a brief period in the 'present' when she revisits Toronto for a retrospective exhibition of her paintings. But Elaine's 'reconstruction' cannot avoid the incorporation of later knowledge and insight; her account of her childhood frequently incorporates the knowledge of what she 'didn't know then', whilst also 'preserving' the pain and immediacy of the experience of the tormented child. In Fraser's text, full recovery and narrativisation of memory is equated with the re-integration of the self and with healing; Elaine reaches a moment of understanding and reconciliation with her childhood tormentor, but her story also acknowledges gaps and losses which cannot be restored.

Atwood's Elaine recovers her memory of the forgotten and traumatic past by means of a highly novelistic device, the rediscovery of her cat's eye marble which enables her to 'see [her] life entire' (398); Fraser also experiences a sudden moment of revelation which is prepared for by means of an intricately plotted chain of events and coincidences. Over-determined or highly coincidental *fictional* plots may be unsatisfactory or unconvincing, but they obviously do not create the same kind of doubts about the truth of the events being narrated as can arise in texts which claim autobiographical status. In certain genres, in fact, plot depends precisely upon what Mark Freeman has called 'the reciprocal determination' of 'endings and beginnings': [7] Peter Brooks describes the detective story as 'using the plot ... to find,

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[6] Roberta Culbertson, 'Embodied Memory, Transcendence, and Telling: Recounting Trauma, Establishing the Self', *New Literary History: A Journal of Theory and Interpretation* 26, 1 (1995), 168-195.

or construct, a story of the crime which will offer just those features necessary to the thematic coherence we call a solution, while claiming, of course, that the solution has been made necessary by the crime'. [8] Fraser compares herself to a detective, and my analysis of her text will demonstrate exactly this 'double logic' of plot, which makes memory itself the agent and effect of a closed system of determination, in which 'final scene returns to first scene' [9] both as a measure of difference in understanding, but also as proof and solution. The text also demonstrates the powerful appeal of the model of memory as total recovery of the past; even when the past is traumatic this model is nostalgic in its comforting assumption that nothing is lost and that wholeness and reintegration are possible.

In first-person fictional narrative, we also accept the convention that the narrator has a much more complete and detailed knowledge of her past life than is usually the case in reality. The rediscovery of the past and its recreation in full detail is a popular narrative trope; in both texts under discussion the experiences of the past which have been 'forgotten' and those which were presumably always available to memory are reconstructed with equal fullness and 'fidelity'. Paradoxically, the 'thickening' of detail which provides the texture of reality in a novel seems unconvincing in a text which purports to be autobiographical, and is problematised even further when much of the narrator's past was supposedly forgotten for forty years. Fraser's use of the 'techniques of the novelist' evades the question of the unreliability, fluidity and 'retranscription' of memory. In *Cat's Eye*, the double narrative frequently avoids or conceals the position of the narrating subject; we are often unsure from which point in time the subject is speaking, as Elaine does not tell her story from the point in time at which it was supposedly remembered, the finding of the cat's eye marble. This aporia reveals the difficulty any first-person narrator has in stabilising the position from which she speaks: past and present cannot be held apart, in spite of the narrative strategies

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[7] Mark Freeman, *Rewriting the Self: History, Memory, Narrative* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 176.

[8] Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 29.

[9] Gayle Greene, 'Feminist Fiction and the Uses of Memory', *Signs* 16, 2 (1991), 291-321; 307. Greene is analysing what she defines as a specific form of feminist fiction - by Lessing, Drabble, Atwood and Morrison - in which the protagonists begin with a longing for the 'true story', which they 'relinquish for a view of the past as ever-changing and open to revision'. The narrative structure of 'circular return' and the 'alternation of past and present episodes' enables 'repetition with revision' and a movement towards a 'present transformed by remembering'.

used by Atwood and Fraser in an attempt to do so. This instability is signalled by Fraser's awkward question, posed just before she recovers her memory of abuse: 'How would I feel to discover that the prize, after four decades of tracing clues and solving riddles, was knowledge that my father had sexually abused me?' (211). Here the subject-narrator wonders how she is going to feel when she 'finds out' something that she knows already, and rewrites her life in terms of a detective story when for much of it she did not know that there was a 'crime' to be solved.

Fraser's plot forms a closed circle; the effect of Atwood's narrative technique is closer to the series of postcards or transparencies to which she compares her memory and her notion of time, although these do form a chronological sequence, and 'final scene' does return to 'first scene' in Elaine's last encounter with Cordelia, her childhood tormentor. Her realization that 'there is never only one, of anyone' (6) suggests the instability of identity and thus of memory itself; the novel, in spite of the device of the cat's eye marble, represents the disjointedness of Elaine's experience of her life and the way in which her memory of childhood is inevitably affected by her subsequent knowledge and understanding. Both texts demonstrate Caruth's 'belatedness' in knowing, but both assume the possibility of a sudden revelation and recovery of the past. *Nachträglichkeit* here functions suddenly and dramatically, but the second and third stages suggested in my analysis of the autobiographical texts of Ronald Fraser and Carolyn Steedman - the memory of the event and the writing of (the memory of) the event - are elided, and the 'primal scenes' of childhood trauma are remembered without acknowledgement of the 'complicated process of remodelling' which 'consolidates' childhood memories. [10] This function is, however, demonstrated in *Cat's Eye* by Elaine's paintings, which, at first unconsciously and later with a greater degree of consciousness, rework and re-represent elements of her past, and which are then subjected to re-interpretation in the light of later knowledge. Her 'retrospective' exhibition provides the opportunity for 'retranslation', a reflection upon the ways in which she now realizes she has reworked the past, and the new meanings which have emerged in the light of recovered memory.

Fraser's 'Author's Note' and the question of point of view

Fraser's 'Author's Note' highlights several potential problems with the technique she has chosen to use in order to tell her story. 'The story I have told in this book is

[10] Freud, 'Rat Man', 87.

autobiographical', her 'Note' begins: 'As a result of amnesia, much of it was unknown to me until three years ago'. The use of the term 'amnesia' suggests a clinical authority for her experience of forgetting: it sounds even more 'medical', susceptible of objective diagnosis, than the usual post-Freudian term 'repression', and makes clear that Fraser is not talking about Bollas' 'unthought known', or Freud's later idea that 'forgetting impressions, scenes or experiences nearly always reduces itself to shutting them off ... failing to draw the right conclusions and isolating memories'. [11] Although survivors of accidents or violent assaults often attest to a 'blacking out' of some details of the traumatic event, 'amnesia' is the kind of forgetting which few survivors or therapists claim or describe, talking rather in terms of isolated and often meaningless visual images which cannot be articulated, or affectless narratives which hold memory at a distance.

The statement about amnesia is followed by a comment on technique: 'For clarity, I have used italics to indicate thoughts, feelings and experiences pieced together from recently recovered memories, and to indicate dreams'. The split text is, to some extent, a narrative reconstruction of the split which she claims was the result of the abuse, a split between the 'child who knew' and the conscious self who had no knowledge of the abuse. In fact, this division does not make for as much 'clarity' as she claims: in the first few pages there is indeed a clear and marked separation between the story of the child who 'did not know' and the experiences of the child who 'did', but later it is often unclear whether what is being reconstructed in the italicised sections is a recovered memory, a dream or a fantasy, or from which period of her life these date: italics are also used to express adult understandings or interpretations of the experience of abuse as well as the unmediated experience of the child. Mark Freeman, in his analysis of this text, says that taking Fraser's advice and keeping 'this device in mind' will help us to 'acknowledge throughout that the story being told is a reconstruction'. [12] In fact, although this is in one sense obviously true, as I read the text I feel that we are often being invited to assume just the opposite: that is, that the past, bracketed off in italics as it is, has been recovered 'pure' from the timeless dimension in which it waited until recovered by the subject. When we read in the first section of the text '*I lie naked on my daddy's bed, clinging to the covers. His sweat drips on me. I don't like his wet-ums. His wet-ums splashes me...*' (10), we are very well aware that this is a *literary*

[11] Freud, 'Remembering, Repeating and Working Through' (1914), *SE* Vol. XII, 145-156; 148.

[12] Freeman, *Rewriting the Self*, 151.

reconstruction, but at the same time we seem to be experiencing directly what was experienced by the child, in the present tense and in her language and mode of perception - very much as the adult Fraser re-experiences these moments through hypnosis, which seems to give her direct access to a repressed experience unmediated by time and changing understanding. By contrast, an italicised comment on the feelings of the child who has just been 'saved' by her father from having to kiss her dead grandmother's cheek is clearly an adult reconstruction: *'In those few seconds, my other self reconfirms - if she ever doubted it - the wisdom of serving power in a precarious world'* (23). Other reconstructions and interpretations, such as the first paragraph of the section entitled 'The Other' (15) are not italicised; this gives an account of the 'splitting' of Fraser's personality and the creation of her 'other self', something which she obviously only realised once the memory of her abuse had been recovered. If the 'piecing together' is, as claimed in the 'Note', only represented in the italicised sections, the implication follows that the roman sections must have the status of the 'always known', the past unproblematically remembered, and this is clearly not the case with the account of the creation of the 'other self' who remembers what the conscious self has forgotten. The fact that both italics and roman are used for the interpretation of past experience is a textual acknowledgement of what the text otherwise denies, that such interpretation and 'retranslation' is a continuous and ongoing process.

Cat's Eye also employs a double narrative structure, not marked typographically, but alternating sections in which Elaine tells the story of her childhood with sections describing her visit to Toronto some forty years later for her 'retrospective'. The childhood sections are narrated with the full knowledge of what she later remembered, and because there is no typographical distinction as in the case of Fraser's narrative, it is not always clear what has always been remembered and what was forgotten, and when that forgetting occurred. Although the visit to Toronto, when she revisits the sites of her childhood experience, provides the occasion for an *intensification* of memory, it is not the time or place when she first 'remembers'. This occurred some years earlier, with the finding of the cat's eye marble, although the *effect* is that she is remembering during her visit to Toronto. The narrative technique enables the *reader* to see Elaine's life 'entire', with the forgotten elements of the past re-inserted into the narrative of that part of it which had always been available to consciousness. The forgotten past is not narrated from the point in time at which memory was supposedly recovered, but from

several intermediate points which are impossible to 'place' exactly in time. Although the past as narrated to us has been supposedly 'forgotten' by the self who narrates it, nevertheless it is already marked by a degree of retrospective interpretation which creates the effect of the narrator knowing and not knowing about the past at the same time. Although this could be seen as a demonstration of a psychoanalytic truth about traumatic and 'forgotten' experience, here, as in *My Father's House*, it is also a specific effect of narrative.[13]

The childhood sections of *Cat's Eye* recreate the experience of the child with immediacy and clarity, but also imbue it with a nostalgia which can only be the effect of retrospection, and of subsequent awareness of the 'future'. Elaine's father is an entomologist, and until she is about six the family lead a nomadic life, camping or living in motels: this represents a kind of Golden Age, before she meets Cordelia and is initiated into the painful rituals of little girl-hood. The evocation of tastes, smells and visual details is intense: re-placing herself in the back of her parents' car, she describes her father's ears as 'large and soft-looking, with long lobes; they're like the ears of gnomes, or those of the flesh-coloured, dog-like minor characters in Mickey Mouse comic books' (21). But the adult voice and perspective is introduced suddenly at moments which disrupt this evocation of the child's world: she says of her father, who is examining a new harvest of caterpillars, 'he's joyful, he's younger than I am now' (22) - the 'now' of the time of the narration. Elaine's only companion as a very young child is her older brother Stephen, who grows up to be a physicist, fascinated by the nature of time: she evokes the excitement and mystery of a night when he tried to teach her to see in the dark, but breaks into it with the statement: 'Such are my pictures of the dead' (26). This functions rather like the 'memory of the future' of Stephen Hawking's question: 'Why do we remember the past, and not the future?' which Atwood uses as an epigraph to the novel. [14] In recreating this moment the narrator is brought up short against the awareness of what she 'didn't know then', the death of her brother some years before the 'present' of the text: she cannot preserve or represent the innocence of the original memory. On first reading the novel the reader might assume that she is referring to the death of the child that her brother was then; on subsequent readings we also 'remember' that Stephen *is* dead, and the scene is doubly imbued with nostalgia

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[13] Freeman has an effective way of describing this: 'I cannot speak of that of which I *am* unconscious, but only of that of which I *was*. Hence the narrational dimension of the notion of the unconscious itself' (*Rewriting the Self*, 152).

[14] Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to Black Holes* (New York: Bantam Books, 1988).

and a sense of loss. Elaine's description of her first meeting with Cordelia preserves its innocence - she is standing in the apple orchard with two other little girls who were already Elaine's friends - but also 'reads' the scene in the light of later knowledge when she adds the comment that it was 'empty of premonition'. The fact that she felt no premonition then is worthy of comment now because of what followed, the bullying to which Cordelia subjected her: her memory of the scene includes a sense of what she would have felt then had she known what she knows now. The poignancy of these moments arises from the meeting and mutual transformation of past and present: the instability of the position of the speaking subject demonstrates that our readings of the past are in a continuous process of retranslation, a process denied or hidden by the comparative rigidity of Fraser's typographical separation of past and present.

When Fraser claims in her 'Note' that 'I have not exaggerated or distorted or misrepresented the truth as I now understand it', she is clearly referring to the 'truth' of her abuse which on the one hand it seems presumptuous to question, whilst on the other the reader is constantly aware of the highly 'reconstructed' or novelistic nature of that truth. Her last phrase is important, and embodies a recognition that 'as I understand it' may not be the same as 'as it actually was', although this is one of the few recognitions within the text of that possibility. Finally, Fraser includes the statement that her sexual abuse 'has been corroborated by outside sources'. This seems to recognise the possibility that her story might not be believed, suggesting both the narrative (im)plausibility mentioned above, and the more general problem of what many see as a reluctance to accept the realities of child sexual abuse, exacerbated by the recent controversy over 'recovered' or 'false memory syndrome'. Her father is dead by the time she remembers, so there is no question of confrontation with the abuser; towards the end of the book she describes a meeting with her mother during which she tells her of the abuse and is believed. Her sister also provides 'corroboration' - 'I always felt something strange was going on' (222) - but it is not clear whether there was other corroboration 'from outside sources'. If so, this comment constitutes a gesture to something outside the text which we are not being told, as with the process which Fraser underwent '[t]hree years ago', when 'I decided to retreat to a place where I could heal and integrate, and perhaps write a book' (245). Although the text seems painfully honest about the experiences of the abused child and the adult who suffered as a consequence, and about *some* of the processes of remembering and reconstructing, this last stage of 'integration' and 'piecing together' is omitted, leaving us with the text

which is the *result* of that integration. In an interview with Scarlett McGwire Fraser said: 'Writing was a natural way of discovering more about what had happened': [15] it is not clear here whether she is referring to earlier novels, including *Pandora*, which is mentioned and used in *My Father's House*, or to the *Memoir* itself. If the latter, then this is a stage which the text effaces, there being no reflection on the way in which the writing of the text transformed or developed the memories with which it deals.

The italicised sections in the first chapter, 'Secrets', give us the 'truth' which the adult Fraser only realized some three or four years before the writing of the book, her sexual abuse by her father. Towards the end we are told that this began in tenderness: 'In my earliest memory' (although we are not told how or when *this* was recovered) 'I am an infant lying on my father's bed, being sexually fondled but blissfully unaware of any deception. Then I was treated with tenderness. That was my Garden of Eden. As in Genesis, pain came with knowledge and expulsion' (241). The italicised sections trace the development of the abuse from this early bliss through enforced masturbation and attempted penetration, accompanied by threats of destroying her beloved cat, and of not being loved herself. There are also hints - choking fits, and more explicit details of having her head forced down towards her father's genitals (103) - at what we later realize is oral abuse: although the narrator is telling her story from the beginning with the full knowledge which she has acquired by the end, these hints function as a kind of titillation, the promise of further shocking details to come. Full narrative gratification is thus postponed until near the end of the text, when Fraser finally remembers 'through the body', re-enacting the most extreme violation involved in the abuse: 'my head bends back so far I fear my neck will snap, my jaws open wider than possible and I start to gag and sob, unable to close my mouth - lockjaw in reverse. These spasms do not feel random. They are the convulsions of a child being raped through the mouth' (220). The narrative is thus structured by means of a partial concealment of the full facts of the abuse which is supposedly fully available to the consciousness of the narrating subject: as in the case of *Cat's Eye*, there is a sense in which the text wants to have it both ways, to reveal and not to reveal, the narrator knowing and yet not knowing at the same time. In the cases of Ronald Fraser and Perec, it is the *subject* who both desires and fears to be found: in these texts, we are more conscious of this simultaneous revelation and evasion as an effect of a narrative which wants to keep us reading.

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[15] Scarlett McGwire, 'Who Was Sylvia ? ' *Observer*, 19.2.1989.

Four narrative elements: a parallel with Freud's 'Wolf Man' case history.

Using the formalist distinction between *fabula* ('the order of events referred to by the narrative') and *sjuzet* ('the order of events presented in the narrative discourse') [16] Peter Brooks analyses Freud's case history of the Wolf Man in a way that is also useful for an understanding of the narrative technique of *My Father's House*. Brooks distinguishes four narrative elements in the case history of the Wolf Man:

> (1) the structure of the infantile neurosis (the history of the neurosis);
> (2) the order of event in the past providing the cause of the neurosis (the etiology of the neurosis);
> (3) the order of emergence of past event during the analysis (the history of the treatment);
> (4) the order of report in the case history.[17]

(4) is the *sjuzet*, and (1), (2) and (3) are, at different points of the text, the *fabula*. In Fraser's case, the four elements of the text need to be defined slightly differently. I use the term 'neurosis' for convenience and to establish a parallel structure, not as a clinical definition.

> (1) the story of her childhood and adolescence, ('the order of event in the past providing the cause of the neurosis');
> (2) the emergence of symptoms which hint at the truth behind the apparent normality of (1), ('the history of the neurosis');
> (3) 'the order of emergence of past event', the way in which Fraser remembers or reconstructs her past by interpreting the symptoms in (2) and by means of various therapies;
> (4) 'the order of report', the text which we read (the *sjuzet*).

These four elements can also be distinguished in *Cat's Eye*, except that Elaine does not 'read' her life in terms of symptoms to be interpreted as proof of her early experience of victimisation. Freud's narrative includes the memories and experiences of the Wolf Man as well as his own interpretations of them: Fraser takes the roles of analysand *and* analyst, interpreting dreams, symptoms and fragments of memory in order to provide

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[16] Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, 12.

[17] Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, 272.

the 'etiology' of her own 'neurosis', also writing as the child who experienced the events which the adult subject has forgotten. In both texts level (3) is already inserted into level (1): in *My Father's House* the italicised sections provide the reader of (4), the *sjuzet*, with the 'evidence' of the 'cause of the neurosis' as the story of her childhood is being told. Here the supposed defence against an intolerable reality - the splitting of the subject into a self who knows and a self who does not know - provides the means by which the 'past event' is allowed to 'emerge' within the narrative while the subject is simultaneously ignorant of it. It is useful to distinguish these four narrative elements because they are so often elided within Fraser's text, partly because of the threefold role taken by the narrator: this elision obscures the point made by Mark Freeman, that 'the series of events and experiences that culminate in Fraser's realization and that lead subsequently to her reconstructing her previous life is itself a product of this same reconstruction. As such, the end of the story is ... contained in the beginning'. [18] That is, Fraser is 'reading' her own life, interpreting her own symptoms, in order to find the 'primal scene' which leads to the given outcome which, in the end, seems *over*-determined because of the high degree of narrative coincidence. Given that she is reading her *own* life (and every reading of a life *is* the construction of a *sjuzet*), it could be said that she is deriving her *fabula* - the 'real' story, the 'truth' - from her *sjuzet*, - the plot, or construction - as the reader of any narrative must do. In 'Constructions in Analysis' Freud writes: 'The path that starts from the analyst's construction ought to end in the patient's recollection; but it does not always lead so far.' Instead of recollection of the repressed, the analysis may produce in the analysand 'an assured conviction of the truth of the construction which achieves the same therapeutic result as a recaptured memory'. [19] Citing this passage, Brooks suggests that this conviction is close to that of the detective who feels that he has successfully solved a case: 'it is the conclusion that a *sjuzet* has been so well formed, so tightly enchained, that the *fabula* derived from it must be right'. [20] This is not the effect of *Cat's Eye*, partly because Elaine is an entirely fictional construct, and partly because Atwood's technique is to juxtapose fragments of the past and present without exhausting the possible links between them: important elements, such as Cordelia's relationship with her father, are left unexplained, their possible causative effects only hinted at.

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[18] Freeman, *Rewriting the Self*, 151.

[19] Sigmund Freud, 'Constructions in Analysis' (1937), *SE* Vol. XXIII. 255-269; 265-6.

[20] Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, 322.

'My other self': the splitting of the subject

At the beginning of the second chapter of *My Father's House* the voice of the narrator, who 'now' has full knowledge of the abuse, tells us: 'When the conflict caused by my sexual relationship with my father became too acute to bear, I created a secret accomplice for my daddy by splitting my personality in two. Thus, somewhere around the age of seven, I acquired another self with memories and experiences separate from mine, whose existence was unknown to me' (15). Mark Freeman claims that 'this 'other' and her activities are strictly (and avowedly) constructions': [21] it is not clear what he means by this, since although Fraser could not, by definition, have 'known' about this 'other self' at the time, she is presented as the only possible explanation of the amnesia. The use of italics to indicate the memories and experiences associated with her does, however, make her at least in part a *textual* construction. But otherwise I feel that we are being asked to accept this 'other self' as a psychic reality, 'constructed' by the psyche as a defence mechanism in response to the radical assault on the child's sense of self. Throughout the text she is referred to as a twin, 'my other self', the child who needs to be comforted when the adult Fraser 'remembers': she lives a hidden but parallel life which occasionally 'leaks' messages and emotions into the conscious subject through dreams and somatic symptoms.

The creation of this other self could be interpreted as a response to trauma which the psyche cannot register, in the terms suggested by Eric L. Santner and Dori Laub [22] in their interpretations of Freud's concept of the *Reizschutz* or 'protective shield': her father's sexual assaults are traumas not registered as such by the conscious self as a pre-pubescent child. Roberta Culbertson suggests that '[w]ounding produces in the body particular neurological responses' which limit the experience

> sometimes merely to the reflexes; siphoning senses of fear and panic off into other parts of the brain so as not to destroy the potential for action as required. Thus events and feelings are simply not registered, but this does not mean they are forgotten; they are located in other parts

[21] Freeman, *Rewriting the Self*, 153.

[22] Eric L. Santner, *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory and Film in Postwar Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

> of the mind and the parts of the body affected as well, though separated from the continuing integrated story of the self. [23]

In her analysis of the experiences of survivors of the kind of trauma which violates the self, she describes the 'simultaneous existence of a more or less functional self and the truncated, surviving self': [24] the latter is that aspect of the self which 'remembers' the trauma which the 'functional' self has forgotten. She makes it clear that she is not talking about the controversial question of 'multiple personality', but an 'existential division' such as that described by Fraser and also by Charlotte Delbo, who experiences her present-day functioning self as fundamentally different from the self who experienced Auschwitz - although this experience has not been 'forgotten'. [25] Abraham and Torok have formulated a very similar psychic process, an 'internal psychic splitting', as a result of which 'two distinct "people" live side by side, one behaving as if s/he were part of the world and the other as if s/he had no contact with it whatsoever'. [26] If the trauma occurs when the subject is a very young child, the process is further complicated by the fact that she does not have the language or the understanding to represent to herself what is happening.

> To narrate a child's memory is ... to construct a culturally acceptable narrative unavailable to the child, to create in some sense ... a fiction, a story the child never knew, from a perspective that was not part of the original scene or experience ... [T]he demands of the adult in whom such memories appear to reside require that they be bundled into narratives constructed from chaotic and branching sets of facts, essentially as fiction masqerading as objective truth, rather than recounted as truth finally set down. [27]

There is a sense in which Fraser acknowledges this 'masquerade' by the very act of turning her experience into the form of a novel; when she 'relives' the experience of

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[23] Culbertson, 'Embodied Memory', 175.

[24] Culbertson, 'Embobied Memory', 178.

[25] Culbertson uses Lawrence L. Langer's discussion of Delbo's account in *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

[26] Nicholas T. Rand, 'Introduction: Renewals of Psychoanalysis' in Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel*, Vol.1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 100.

[27] Culbertson, 'Embodied Memory', 181, 183.

abuse under hypnosis, she also seems to agree with Culbertson when she says: 'Mostly my feelings can't be classified because I have no framework of experience in which to place them or to judge them' (226). But her use of the language of the four or five year-old who was first abused, on the one hand an attempt to represent the confusion of the child, on the other suggests that the adult can have direct and unmediated access to this experience - that it is, precisely, 'truth finally set down'. Culbertson does not make this claim: in her discussion she includes several quotations from her own autobiographical writing which represent 'the movement of one sort of truth to another ... [f]rom reconstructed memory to true memory, to fragments without meaning, or with meaning layered on only in the telling'. She does make a claim for 'true memory', but suggests that it is only 'true' in so far as it remains wordless and fragmented, the 'feelings, smells, sounds, movements, images' first experienced by the young child. She is 'aware that [her] childhood memories may have been refigured over time, reshaped, embellished by subsequent memories gathering on them like dust from then to now' - Fraser's reconstruction allows for no such refiguration or reshaping. Culbertson also acknowledges that a child's early memory of painful or confusing experiences will inevitably be intermingled with fantasy - in her case 'black cloaks and talons and knives and witches and my own white knights ... Fairy tales, as it were, my own, became my truth, my experience, and the places in which I won'. [28] Her scrupulous analysis of her own memories of sexual abuse is instructive for those on both sides of the 'recovered' or 'false memory' debate in its insistence on the elusiveness of the notion of 'truth' when dealing with very early experience and memory: Sylvia Fraser's account, although clearly part of her own process of 'healing', lays claim to 'objective truth' albeit in the guise of fiction.

Fraser's second 'self' also brings into focus the difficulties inherent in the complex term and idea of 'repression'. Although in the 'Rat Man' case history Freud talks in terms of the repression of a part of the self, in the 1915 paper 'Repression' he talks rather of the repression of 'an instinctual representative', by which he means an 'idea' or representation (*Vorstellung*) which is invested with 'psychical energy coming from an instinct'. [29] 'Repression' here clearly means not the forgetting of a painful experience, but an internal operation of the psyche. In the second of the 'Three Essays on Sexuality', however, repression is clearly linked to '[h]ysterical amnesia, which occurs at the bidding of repression', and 'is only explicable by the fact that the subject

[28] Culbertson, 'Embodied Memory', 181-3, 189.

[29] Sigmund Freud, 'Repression' (1915), PF Vol. 11, 139-158; 152.

is already in possession of a store of memory-traces which have been withdrawn from conscious disposal, and which are now, by an associative link, attracting to themselves the material which the forces of repression are engaged in repelling from consciousness'. [30] In 'The Aetiology of Hysteria' the term 'defence' is used interchangeably with 'repression', and Freud writes: ' *The defence achieves its purpose of thrusting the incompatible idea out of consciousness if there are infantile sexual scenes present in the (hitherto normal) subject in the form of unconscious memories, and if the idea that is to be repressed can be brought into logical or associative connection with an infantile experience of that kind* ' (his italics). [31] In both these accounts, repression is 'actually an after-pressure' (*Nachverdrängung*) in that it depends upon the prior existence of 'memory-traces' or 'unconscious memories' associated with the instincts of the ego or with premature sexual experience. Freud seems to be suggesting that repression 'proper', in the sense of ' *turning something away, and keeping it at a distance, from the conscious*' does not occur without 'primal repression', 'which consists in the psychical (ideational) representative of the instinct being denied entrance to the conscious'. [32] But now repression, rather like the 'primal scene', seems to retreat forever backwards, in the sense that it cannot happen unless it has already happened. As Lis Møller puts it: 'Repression is thus always already anticipated by repression, by a mythical moment of original repression that constitutes the condition of possibility of repression proper, but which can only be hypothetically deduced from the phenomenon of after-pressure'. [33] In 'Repression', Freud explains that

> [t]he process of repression is not to be regarded as an event which takes place *once*, the results of which are permanent, as when some living thing has been killed and and from that time onward is dead; repression demands a persistent expenditure of force ... the repressed exercises a continuous pressure in the direction of the conscious, so that this pressure must be balanced by an unceasing counter-pressure.[34]

Although Freud is here talking about the repression of 'instinctual impulses' and not of

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[30] Sigmund Freud, 'Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality' (1905), PF Vol. 7, 33-155; 91.

[31] Sigmund Freud, 'The Aetiology of Hysteria' (1896), *SE* Vol. 3, 211.

[32] Freud, 'Repression', 147.

[33] Møller, *The Freudian Reading*, 64.

[34] Freud, 'Repression', 151.

painful memories, this process seems close to the continuous work of repression necessitated by prolonged and repeated abuse. It also requires the psychic mechanism of Elaine's account of forgetting, close to Orwell's 'doublethink': 'I've forgotten things, I've forgotten that I've forgotten them' (200). If repression does require an 'original' moment of 'turning away' an impulse, then in *My Father's House* this might be represented by Fraser's 'original' moment of *jouissance*, the 'Garden of Eden' where she was 'sexually fondled but blissfully unaware of any deception' (241). Internal conflicts within the ego, or messages unconsciously picked up from the world outside, might have resulted in the repression of the instinct which sought or responded to this pleasure.

Roberta Culbertson and Judith Lewis Herman both link the kind of forgetting characteristic of childhood experience of severe trauma with what Culbertson calls 'transcendence' and Herman 'trance states' or 'dissociation': Herman explicitly links dissociation with the splitting of the self and even with the formation of multiple personality, using Fraser's account - 'I unscrew my head from my body as if it were the lid of a pickle jar' - as an example' (221).[35] Fraser does not link this final dissociation with the altered state she experiences during her father's earlier assaults: '*my mind goes away like when the big boys ... push you too high on a swing and you scream to get down*' (10). She relives the experience under hypnosis, describing how 'I hold my breath a lot and that makes me dizzy, or light-headed, as if I were swaying in a hammock outside time and space' (226). Elaine describes her ability to dissociate from the experience of being tormented by Cordelia in similar terms: 'fainting is like stepping sideways, out of your own body, out of time or into another time. When you wake up its later. Time has gone on without you ... I can see what's happening, I can hear what's being said to me, but I don't have to pay any attention. My eyes are open but I'm not there' (173). This dissociation may be another way of formulating Dori Laub's idea that 'massive trauma precludes its registration': Culbertson suggests that '[t]hose who find themselves now and again having "gone blank", particularly after a triggering event of some sort, might indeed be having a memory, revisiting a time in which they "went blank" in the midst of terror, entered another level of experience retained elsewhere in the mind and triggered by other stimuli'. [36] Such states might

[35] Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (London: Pandora, 1992), 103. Both Culbertson and Herman use Fraser's account in their discussions of sexual abuse and its after-effects without recognising the way in which its 'truth' is produced as an effect of narrative.

[36] Culbertson, 'Embodied Memory', 175.

contribute to the experience of the self as fragmented and discontinous, represented concretely in *Cat's Eye* by the 'black hole' in which Elaine is buried by Cordelia: 'I have no image of myself in the hole; only a black square filled with nothing, a square like a door. Perhaps the square is empty; perhaps it's only a marker, a time marker which separates the time before it from the time after' (107). The thirteen year-old Elaine expresses an unconscious awareness of this effect when she teases Cordelia with the idea that she has a vampire twin: 'I'm one of a twins. Identical ones, you can't tell us apart by looking ... I'm really dead. I've been dead for years' (233). Culbertson also describes a more positive version of the 'trance state', what she calls 'transcendence', often described by children as 'being in a golden light, in forests and castles, floating above themselves, being among the stars'. [37] Elaine seems to experience a version of this when she nearly freezes to death in the ravine and is 'saved' by her vision of a black-cloaked lady on the bridge. The relationship between reality and fantasy in this memory will be discussed later: for the moment it can be linked with Culbertson's reconstruction of a memory in which, during or after the experience of severe sexual abuse, she feels 'another presence - arms around me from behind, big skirts surrounding me and a sense of skimming just above the ground, or a grey sea ... it is clear to me then that there must be some other force beyond my own body which keeps me alive, ... or else I would be dead'. [38] Such experiences are clearly connected with the mysticism to which Fraser is later attracted and upon which Atwood draws in its connection with the 'new physics': the idea that 'time is not a line but a dimension' (3) provides a 'cosmic' dimension to the operations of memory to which I will return.

Freud's later cases, and the theory outlined in 'The Aetiology of Hysteria', presuppose more or less isolated incidents of infantile abuse which cease long before puberty and before the child becomes aware of their full meaning. Abraham and Torok's formulation of the 'crypt' as the site of 'preservative repression', which 'seals off access to part of one's own life in order to shelter from view the traumatic monument of an obliterated event' [39] also seems predicated upon the occurence of a unique and isolated event, not repeated traumatic experience. In Fraser's case the abuse was more or less continuous for approximately 10 years, with a brief respite at around the time of puberty. When it resumed, both her conscious self, and, we are told, her 'other', were

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[37] Culbertson, 'Embodied Memory', 176.

[38] Culbertson, 'Embodied Memory', 187.

[39] Rand in Abraham and Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel*, 18.

more fully aware of its meaning and the betrayal it involved: '*She is old enough, now, to know about blood and babies*'. Here the language of the 'other self' has also changed in order to express the developed understanding of the adolescent: '*For the first time, penetration is attempted, though it is by no means completed ... She feels used, not as one person exploited by another, but as a condom is used then discarded in the gutter*' (43). According to Mark Freeman's reading, at this point '[t]he past of her other, therefore, was itself being rewritten; infused with the knowledge she (it?) had come to acquire as she had grown older ... [I]t wouldn't be quite so easy ... for this divided self to adhere to her imposture'.[40] Freeman here perhaps takes the 'other self' too literally: from which point is the 'past of her other ... being rewritten'? Unless this is taken to be the point of the 'present', when the adult Fraser has recovered full memory of what happened to her as a child, then we have to assume at least some awareness of the existence of the 'other self' on the part of the 12 year-old, some emerging into consciousness of the reality of what was happening, and a subsequent 'retranslation' of memory. It is this 'retranslation' that is absent from the text: instead we are asked to believe in the continued existence of the 'other self', in spite of what Fraser acknowledges as the increasingly fragile boundaries between them. 'Just as the emotions of my other self often leaked up into my life, now my moral values began seeping down into hers' (39): this boundary also becomes increasingly hard for the reader to believe in. The repression of the memory of a few isolated incidents of infantile abuse is much easier to accept than the idea of the conscious and repeated repression of the knowledge and memory of a more or less continous experience. The idea of a second self which 'takes over' and even participates in the sexual relationship could be seen as a construction which overcomes this difficulty whilst also creating others in its place.

Repetition toward recognition

Modelling his concept of narrative on a reading of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Peter Brooks claims: 'Repetition toward recognition constitutes the truth of the narrative text': the 'middle' is 'the place of repetitions, oscillating between blindness and recognition, origin and ending'. [41] Fraser's text does embody this 'oscillation', but because the narrator has already 'recognized' the truth and recovered her memory of the 'origin', and revealed that origin to the reader, the series of events which constitute

[40] Freeman, *Rewriting the Self*, 153.

[41] Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, 108.

the 'middle' of her plot are reconstructed as repetitions of an originating event for which they also provide the evidence. Fraser still uses italics in an attempt to represent what was still unconscious at the time when the events occurred, and the juxtaposition of italic and roman text represents the 'oscillation' between 'blindness' and 'recognition'. Repetition is also a textual device which reinforces the pattern of narrative determination: significant sections of the text are literally repeated at the points where the events or dreams they describe inform the understanding of the remembering subject.

The first element of the narrative - 'the order of event in the past providing the cause of the neurosis' - could be said to end when the adolescent Fraser is finally able to say 'no' to her father, to resist and deny him.

> *As daddy pushes her head down to his crotch, she at last gets out the words; "I hate you!" She smashes her left fist into his belly. "Touch me again, and I'll kill you!" She punches and punches like her mother kneading bread dough. He doesn't resist. He doesn't fight back.*
> *So that is all it took, would have taken.* (103)

The ultimate simplicity of this refusal, this breaking of the hold of the apparently powerful over the apparently powerless, is strikingly similar to the way in which Elaine finally refuses the domination of Cordelia:

> ... I turn and walk away from her. It's like stepping off a cliff, believing the air will hold you up. And it does. I see that I don't have to do what she says, and worse and better, I've never had to do what she says. I can do what I like ... They need me for this, and I no longer need them. (193)

Both Sylvia and Elaine realise the dependence of the other on them, and the power they finally have to refuse. In Fraser's case it is significant that the power and action of refusal is ascribed to the 'other self', not to the conscious subject, which we might expect if we see this refusal in terms of a spell being broken. But the continued existence of the second self is necessary for the maintenance of the structure of

repression: in future she will be brought into play in order to suggest the underlying and hidden cause of the subject's 'symptoms' - her defensive retreat into the logical and intellectual, her fear of having children, her compulsive insecurity with her boyfriend Danny before their marriage, and her increasing depression after it, and what she interprets as a repetition - an attempt to 'reunite with daddy' - in her affair with Paul Lawson, the father of one of her high-school friends.

We are even told that her 'other self' takes over on her wedding day, so that she '*will have no memory of the wedding ceremony*' or ' *of the wedding night ... It will never be written on my consciousness any more than a hand inscribing water produces a record*' (141). The wedding night is thus distinguished from early childhood experience of trauma, in that the text is clearly claiming that memory-traces of the latter *are* 'written on' the *un*conscious, and potentially available to consciousness. Here a voice from the future tells us that this event will ' *never*' be remembered. Neither does the '*sexual initiation*' which occurred on her wedding night function as the trigger for her repressed memories: instead we are told that this '*is the territory of my other self*' (141) so that the event seems to function as the occasion for a further and more thorough repression. It is unclear from the text whether sex continued to be the 'territory' of her 'other self': if so, all of her sexual life must have remained on the level of the unconscious, which seems unlikely. When she first visits Paul, knowing that a sexual relationship is likely to develop, the words of her 'other self' from the first chapter of the book are repeated and juxtaposed with the account of the later encounter in order to reinforce the interpretation of this affair as an unconscious repetition:

> *Hitching at the strap of my sunsuit, I scrape my foot back and forth over the metal band marking the threshold of my daddy's room ...*
>
> I ring once more, wait ten seconds. Again I'm turning towards the steps when a male voice barks through the door: "I'm coming. Hold your horses". Paul opens it, wearing a white terry bathrobe, his grey hair wet and tufted as if from the shower.
>
> *My daddy sits on the bed in his undershirt... .* (171)

These two examples of the use of italics from this section of the text show that they are being used to signify *both* the 'return' of an unmediated and as yet unrecognised 'repressed' *and* the voice of the subject reconstructing her experience in the light of present knowledge: my point is that the two sit rather uneasily together.

The highly constructed nature of the section just quoted makes it clear that it is, precisely, a reconstruction: it is the aspect of Fraser's story - or her interpretation of her story - with which Mark Freeman is least comfortable. He is unconvinced by the plausibility of her explanation for the reasons for this destructive affair:

> What I am uncomfortable with ... is the specific account Fraser has elected to offer, the reason simply being that I, as a reader, haven't really been told why it is more plausible than numerous others. Why should this other self want to 'reunite with daddy'? ... it could be argued ... that her admittedly curious affair with her friend's father had little to do with reuniting with her father, and that she was merely transferring some of the fruits of her subsequent discoveries on to anything and everything that led up to them. [42]

It could be argued further that she then uses these reinterpreted events as 'proof' of the initial trauma which has supposedly caused them: here I would argue not that her interpretation lacks narrative plausibility, as does Freeman, rather that it is almost *too* plausible, as if she is constructing a psychoanalytic textbook case out of the material of her own life. Repetition with-a -difference is part of the classic psychoanalytic enchaining of cause and effect: early trauma; repression; hysterical symptom or repetition; recovery of the memory of the trauma; cure. If this is plausible, then Fraser's story is also, except that what Freeman calls the 'reciprocal determination' at play here makes it seem *too* plausible to be plausible in effect.

Representation as repetition

The affair with Paul is not the first 'symptom' to emerge after her marriage and to be in need of later interpretation: her depressions are interpreted as '*experiencing the unexpressed sorrow of my other self ... It is precisely because my life is tranquil that she is staking her emotional claim*' (146). Here the 'other' voice is also used to provide information which 'explains' the recurring image of a hangman's noose which begins to haunt her dreams: '*Though I don't yet know it, my maternal grandfather hanged himself, age forty-four, and a maternal aunt soon would* ' (146). That which she 'didn't know then' is transmitted almost telepathically from the future in order to

[42] Freeman, *Rewriting the Self*, 162-3.

provide the imagery of her dreams and fantasies *and* to provide the means by which she interprets them. A ragamuffin child, obviously an image of her 'other self', keeps appearing in her dreams and fantasies, demanding attention and recognition: towards the end of the text she visualises a 'five-year-old child with matted hair and blue fangs' with 'the bloody mark of a broken leash' around her neck' (227), and is forced to recognize the co-identity of this child with the adolescent who was also abused and with her adult self. As the ragamuffin child first appears and demands attention, so Fraser feels drawn to her childhood haunts: the pictures she finds in trunks at her old home, of fairytale heroines defaced and marked by signs of violence, do not trigger conscious memories, but surface in the violent, stream-of consciousness narratives her 'other self' begins to write. Repetition here takes the form of an unconscious representation in writing produced almost 'automatically', effecting a re-entry into the world of childhood, although not yet with full memory of her relationship with her father:

> *My other self has learned to type. She presses my keys, throwing up masses of defiant memories - stream-of-consciousness stuff without punctuation ...*
>
> It's as if I have fallen down the Alice-in-Wonderland hole into that detailed child's universe below an adult's kneeecaps where getting poop on my shoes and burs in my hair are serious worries ...
>
> *My other self leads me to the edge of her secret world, offering up murky clues without taking me over ... .* (149-150)

The material of the unrecognised unconscious - 'a gush of primordial pain from a part of me I never knew existed' - is eventually reworked into a text called *Pandora*, which itself seems to sit rather uneasily between fiction and autobiography; Fraser says that at some point she made a transition - one which the reader does not witness - between the 'first person hysterical' and the third. Fraser wonders: 'Why did I give my fictional father a hooked arm? ... Why did I suggest incest in my father's family?...Why did I portray my father as threatening the life of my cat ...?' (151-2). The process of reworking which this text underwent seems to have functioned both as a revelation and a concealment of the truth, and stands as another 'repetition' - and another *sjuzet* - which the reader of *My Father's House* is not actually given as 'evidence': it is a text that Fraser herself comes to 'read' in the light of later knowledge, providing 'clues' for later interpretation.

This 'automatic writing', and her increasingly explicit dreams, perform a similar function to the pictures Elaine begins to paint when she is pregnant long before she has recovered her memory of her childhood experience. Her first paintings are of 'things that were actually there, in front of [her]' (337); she is attracted to early medieval paintings, 'with their daytime clarity, their calm arrested gestures', to 'objects that breathe out light; a luminous flatness'. She experiments with 'egg tempera and flat surfaces, disliking the 'shadowy, viscous' quality of oil paintings which 'call attention to the brushstrokes of the painter' (326). She is looking for a mode of representation which is 'innocent', transparent and clear, with no shadows or hidden corners - a visual equivalent of the version of the past she has created for herself. But when she is pregnant she finds herself painting 'things which aren't there' (337), things which the reader, but not the Elaine who paints them, recognises as memories of objects associated with her forgotten childhood. The silver toaster and glass coffee percolator were closely and minutely observed by the young child at breakfast time as a way of delaying or avoiding the moment when she would have to leave for school and face Cordelia; she even paints a jar of deadly nightshade, with the 'eyes of cats' in the 'tangle of the glossy leaves', an unconscious memory which transposes images associated with the ravine with her burial in the 'black hole'. The Elaine who paints these pictures realises that 'these things must be memories, but they do not have the quality of memories ... They arrive detached from any context; they are simply there, in isolation, as an object glimpsed on the street is there ... I have no image of myself in relation to them. They are suffused with anxiety, but it's not my own anxiety. The anxiety is in the things themselves' (337). As she remembers these objects in the process of painting them, she re-experiences the anxiety associated with them as external to herself, projected onto the objects in a way which also makes it convincing that she should now 'remember' them so vividly. The objects have almost become screen memories, standing in for the painful experiences with which they are linked but which have not yet been remembered. She also paints Grace's mother, Mrs. Smeath, who 'floats up without warning, like a dead fish, materialising on a sofa I am drawing'; she is 'smiling her half-closed smile, smug and accusing. Whatever has happened to me is my own fault, the fault of what is wrong with me. Mrs. Smeath knows what it is. She isn't telling' (338). As a child Elaine was fascinated and repulsed by Mrs. Smeath and the idea of her 'bad heart': when she is first described, from the point of view of the child, the narrator goes on to reflect: 'This is how I will see her forever: lying

unmoving, like something in a museum'. When she adds: 'She is ten years younger than I am now. Why do I hate her so much? Why do I care, in any way, what went on in her head?' (58) the perspective of the narrator has clearly shifted to the 'future', but the subject who speaks at this point has clearly not yet 'remembered', otherwise she would be able to associate her hatred of Mrs. Smeath with the fact that she knew about, and colluded in, the bullying to which Elaine was being subjected. It is the reader who makes the connection between Elaine's paintings of Mrs. Smeath and the role she played in her childhood: when Elaine reviews these paintings at her retrospective her hatred is transformed into understanding. 'I used to think these were self-righteous eyes, piggy and smug ... And they are. But they are also defeated eyes, uncertain and melancholy, heavy with unloved duty ... the eyes of a small-town threadbare decency. Mrs. Smeath was a transplant to the city ... A displaced person, as I was.' She is also able to see herself through Mrs. Smeath's eyes, 'a frazzle-haired ragamuffin from heaven knows where ... And yet she took me in' (405). Reviewing her paintings as versions or representations of the past enables Elaine to retranslate the meanings of the reality of that past.

Elaine's paintings are visual equivalents of the way in which we rework and re-represent elements of the past, and her re-interpretations acknowledge the complex processes of condensation, displacement, and fantasy which produce what we call 'memory'. Fraser's stories and dreams are interpreted more crudely as 'symbols' or evidence, and her earlier novel, *Pandora*, initiates a chain of events which leads to the revelation of the truth about her past, the most contrived and novelistic element of the text. Fraser is interviewed about *Pandora* on a TV show by Joker Nash, a member of her old high school gang. He reads aloud a section in which Pandora is sexually assaulted by the bread delivery man who entices her up onto his cart with cherry tarts, and dismisses it on the grounds that ' [s]ome little girls can be seductive at an early age. I think your book is typical of the kind of hysterical imaginings we're seeing too much of these days ...' (158). Both the 'breadman' who assaults Pandora in the extract which Joker reads aloud and Joker himself are described as having 'pointy teeth' (156, 158); the intertextual echo raises the question of how far each text has 'rewritten' the other. Joker plays a key role in the revelation of the truth about Fraser's past: he becomes the comic-strip figure who haunts her dreams - '*Joker Nash, dressed as a magician in whiteface, top hat and tails, perches on the railings of my father's house*' (221) - and is the indirect catalyst for the final recovery of Fraser's memory of abuse, when her friend Babs, who has recently married him, tells her that he has molested her

daughter. Joker now almost *becomes* the fictional breadman with whom he shares 'pointy teeth'. It is this kind of narrative coincidence which makes the reader aware of the construction of a sequence of events almost *too* tightly plotted to be convincing as truth. The second 'encounter' with Joker Nash is a means by which Fraser is able to reinterpret the meaning of the first, that is, the strength of her reaction when he denied the reality of events such as those described in *Pandora*. In retrospect, she is able to 'recognize' that her '*other self* was '*trembling*' (158) and responding to his words: her conscious self is described as suffering from a 'hysteria' which renders her speechless. In the second scene, italics are used for repetitons of Joker's earlier statements of denial, juxtaposed with the revelations Babs is making, suggesting an unconscious memory and reinterpretation of the earlier scene. The two scenes thus stand towards each other in the relationship of *Nachträglichkeit,* with the first scene, that of Fraser's own abuse, standing behind these two. The memory is then recovered 'through the body' in the manner already described, and the 'full' knowledge of the details of the abuse is finally given.

Dreaming as repetition

Repetition towards recognition also takes the form of a series of obviously symbolic dreams which Fraser says she 'learned how to interpret ... as messages from my unconscious' (211), a rather crude formulation of the possible significance of dreaming. In the 'Wolf Man' case history Freud claimed that 'dreaming is another kind of remembering': 'It is this recurrence in dreams that I regard as the explanation of the fact that the patients themselves gradually acquire a profound conviction of the reality of these primal scenes'.[43] Fraser does recover memory independently of her dreams, although they do pave the way for recollection: but these dreams are so tightly constructed, or reconstructed, and so obviously symbolic, that it often seems as if they have been either dreamed in response to recovered memory or even constructed in order to provide evidence for it.

The ending of Fraser's relationship with Paul Lawson and the death of her father are reconstructed in a sequence which seems highly contrived and which incorporates several dreams which encode or predict events in this obvious way. She and Paul are planning an illicit holiday, after which she is due to teach on a creative writing course;

[43] Sigmund Freud, 'From the History of an Infantile Neurosis' ('The Wolf Man') (1918), PF Vol. 9, 227-345; 285.

before they leave, there is a Halloween party which they attend separately. The night before the party, Fraser discusses her father's condition with her mother over the telephone; during the conversation, she stares at a photograph of Paul and begins to see a previously unnoticed resemblance to her father. She goes to sleep uneasily, thinking of her Aunt Estelle, her father's sister; just before her affair with Paul began she visited her father in his nursing home, he called her 'Estelle', and she experienced a sudden sense of recognition that they 'share the bloodstone' (169). She now has a dream in which Estelle figures prominently, and which she remembers ten days later when she goes home for her father's funeral:

> *I am a princess lying on a bier in the forest. Aunt Estelle cuts a swatch of my hair and presents it to my father. Now I am standing beside the bier, holding the blond hair, looking at the princess. Through the glass floor of the forest I see a ticktacktoe game, marked with Xs and Os. Pointing to the princess, Aunt Estelle announces: 'She is not dead yet, but she is dying'* (205)

This dream is taken by Culbertson as an example of the 'transcendence' experienced by abused children, but there is no evidence that Fraser experienced her own abuse in terms of such imagery. The dream only develops its full meaning after her father's death, and much later, when, as a result of another dream, she 'knows' that her father and Aunt Estelle must once have been lovers: at this point, it is clearly connected with the ending of her relationship with Paul, her own contemplated death by suicide, and the death of her beloved cat which functions as a substitute. Fraser attends the Halloween fancy-dress party as a cat, and is shocked to see Paul's wife there; when he tells her that he has to spend the week with his wife instead of on vacation with her, she ends the relationship in a way which explicitly echoes the way in which she finally managed to resist her father: ' *"Touch me again and I'll kill you!" He doesn't resist. He doesn't fight back. So that is all it took, would have taken*' (195). This is clearly the conscious reconstruction (level 4 of the narrative) of a then unconscious repetition (level 2) which also functions as a step towards level 3, 'the order of emergence of past event'. Haunted by the image of the noose with which her grandfather hanged himself, she sees suicide as the end for which she is destined. Distracted by the disappearance of her cat, she dreams: '*I am curled in a tight ball, still wearing my cat costume*'... ' *Everything is very dark, very still, as if I were in a cellar ... Now I am a cat with a red leash would like an umbilical cord around my neck ... I'm looking down a long*

dark tunnel, and I'm choking' (198). The next day she finds her cat, choked to death on its collar. The echoing of event - loss of a beloved cat, the ending of an abusive relationship - and imagery - the leash around the neck - again reinforces a too-insistent pattern of repetition, as if the story of the discovery of the truth of the past is being deliberately constructed as an echo of the story of the past itself.

When Fraser receives the news that her father is dying she decides not to catch the first plane home, thus missing the chance of seeing him whilst he is still alive. Instead, the shrieking of a train whistle at the precise hour of his death establishes a 'telepathic' connection with him, of a kind she will later come to accept as part of a vision of the world as 'infinite' and 'full of wonder' (253). Ferenczi suggested a possible explanation for telepathy precisely in terms of the kind of abuse Fraser suffered as a child: '[p]eople who claim to be clairvoyant ... have been forced into a kind of hypersensitivity from childhood. That is, they have been the victims of such cruelty on the part of their parents that in order to survive they had to develop a remarkable sensitivity to determine what their parents were really feeling, so that they could avoid their murderous rage'. [44] Fraser says at the end of the book that she had to learn to give up the sense of her own 'specialness', and 'to see instead the specialness of the world around me' (253), but in her claim that she has rejected a 'narrow, pragmatic world of cause and effect' for 'an infinite world of wonder' she avoids the recognition that her narrative has been constructed precisely upon the search for a specific 'cause' for a cluster of 'effects'.

Fraser remembers her dream about Aunt Estelle when her mother shows her a lock of her father's baby-hair just after his death, and the account of the dream is repeated at this point (205). It is one of many such dreams in which the events and images of her life are reworked and represented in a way which symbolise the hidden truth in a manner almost too direct to be plausible. Here the Xs and Os echo the game she used to play with her father as a child, described on the first page of the text; the princess is the fairytale heroine with whom she identified as a 'special' child; she has recently established a connection with Aunt Estelle; the bier is a premonition of death - her father's, her cat's, the death of her relationship with Paul, and of her later serious illness; Aunt Estelle's words are a reference to the 'other self' who is on the way to being recognized and hence to her 'death', and to the conscious self who will die unless

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[44] Paraphrased from Ferenczi's diary by Jeffrey Masson in *The Assault on Truth: Freud and Child Sexual Abuse* (London: Fontana, 1992), 184.

the hidden self is recognized. The blond hair is also hers, a prominent feature of the photographs of her which her mother found under her father's bed, provocative pictures of Fraser in swimsuits and cheerleading costumes which provoke a feeling of what she calls the 'uncanny' which she cannot yet interpret.

After her father's death Fraser becomes seriously ill following a hysterectomy and has a series of dreams whose obvious symbolic content make them difficult to credit if we are reading the text as autobiography. The imagery of caves, demon-monsters, white larvae, a blond child giving birth to Satan's baby, devil-masks, snakes, rocky passageways, impenetrable castles, a '*joker in a deck of cards*', of blindness and death (212-217), is too obvious to need interpretation, and gives the unfortunate impression of having been invented for the purpose. They even suggest the process by which analysands - she has already embarked upon a mixture of therapies including 'Freudian and Jungian analysis', 'rolfing' and 'bioenergetics' (211) - are prone to 'produce' the kind of dream susceptible to the method of interpretation favoured by their analysts. Ultimately we do not know whether these dreams were actually dreamed at the time and possibly written down immediately, dreamed in response to ideas suggested in analysis, or more or less constructed either at the time of the recovery of memory or in the process of writing the text - or any combination of these. Culbertson suggests that the young child who is being sexually abused might construct around the events fantasies incorporating images of evil from fairytales, but in Fraser's case these fantasies only emerge in the dreams she dreams as an adult as part of the process of 'remembering'. Culbertson's suggestion provides a possible explanation for some cases of supposed 'satanic' abuse (although in her account the paedophiles who abused her *did* use 'parlor occultism', 'ritual and dress-up' as a cover for their activities); [45] Fraser's use of such images seems sensational given the concern of some therapists that the quest for evidence of 'satanic' abuse might be a diversion from more 'ordinary' and genuine cases. The section in which these dreams appear is called 'Satan's Child': she finally gives this image a real referent by connecting it with her hysterectomy, 'getting rid of the gnarled tissue in my womb' (217). When she does recover her memory, however, and relives the experience in her body, it 'invoke[s] thoughts of the incubus who, in medieval folklore, raped sleeping women who then gave birth to demons', linking this also with the child Regan in the film *The Exorcist*, and we wonder whether this connection was made *because* of the dreams, or inserted *into* the dreams via the process of 'retrospective attribution' - or indeed suggested intertextually by the film

[45] Culbertson, 'Embodied Memory', 184.

itself.

In spite of the precision and 'relevance' of these dreams, and the growing feeling that 'I seem to be on the verge of remembering something sexual to do with my father', Fraser states: 'I was never going to believe anything I dreamed to have literal truth, no matter how persuasive. *My insight and intuition could only prepare me to remember. They were my detectives who could uncover clues, but who couldn't deliver a confession. That had to come from my other self* (217). Here she further subdivides herself and objectifies elements of her psyche into separate agents, rather like the medieval dramatic technique of psychomachia: 'insight' and 'intuition' are seen as distinct from the repressed unconscious which holds the memory of the trauma, and function as 'detectives' looking for a 'confession'. The 'other self' finally emerges physically and emotionally, when her body re-enacts the experience of the abuse, but this kind of memory is further distinguished from 'verbal or visual' (225) memory which she seeks via hypnosis as stronger or more valid evidence. It is as if the text enacts a search for what would count as truly authentic memory, as full 'proof' of what she increasingly suspects must have happened in the past, and it is interesting that she uses technological or mechanical models for the memories which seem to count as the most valid evidence, and the analogy of detective work or archaeological reconstruction for the process of recovery. At the beginning of the section in which the recovery of memory occurs, she says that '[l]ike a small child playing hide- and-seek, she often tried to conceal herself by closing her eyes so that visual memories were sometimes not recorded' (218): this could be read as another way of describing the kind of dissociation discussed earlier, but also suggests the idea that memory functions like a video camera, filming what is 'there' for future review. After 'remembering through the body' her experience of being 'raped through the mouth, which the reader also experiences as a shocking revelation, she says: 'One startling piece of information has been fed into my head like a microchip into a computer: I KNOW my father raped me'. The image used here puts this new information in terms of scientific fact: except, of course, any 'fact' can be fed into a computer in order to effect what Fraser calls a 'drastic shift' in 'history' (221). An italicised fantasy, dream or construction which uses the image of '*Joker Nash, dressed as a magician*' retextualises the memory, and the voice of the conscious narrator comments: 'The Joker on my father's porch has at last delivered. And the true villain of the piece? Not the breadman, as I wrote in Pandora, but the breadwinner with the devil's hooked hand' (221). Dreams or fantasies

are once more brought into play in order to reinforce the 'evidence', reinforcing even further the closely constructed network of proofs and connections.

The final stage in the process of Fraser's remembering is via hypnosis: it is significant that this therapy is only resorted to at the end of a long process of the recovery of memory by other means, given the controversy over the use of hypnotherapy in cases of 'false' or 'recovered' memory - and the fact that it was abandoned by Freud after his early association with Breuer. Here, hypnosis gives Fraser access to the 'visual' memories she has been looking for: under hypnosis she is able to 'see' herself as a young child hanging around outside her father's bedroom door, and then to 'watch' the sequence of abusive actions. Hypnosis itself does not produce the experience of 'remembering through the body', but is experienced as more convincing 'proof'. When she 'blocks', her therapist encourages her to use images or fantasies: she imagines herself in a 'fairytale forest' with her mother 'dressed like the witch in Snow White' (226), and then sees herself in a mirror in the moonlight. Here she is using the fairytale as a mode of narrative visualisation by which she is able to insert herself into a story of persecution: it thus becomes an 'interpretative device' by means of which she is able to remember that her father also abused her as an adolescent. The child in the mirror is 'too old' - 11 or 12 - and Fraser later continues the guided fantasy to produce the image of the five-year-old child with matted hair and blue fangs already referred to, and who she finally accepts is also her adolescent and adult self. This realisation of the continuance of the abuse into adolescence is almost harder for Fraser to accept than her rape as a young child - just as the continued repression of the knowledge of the experience into adolescence becomes harder for the *reader* to accept.

Life does have a shape...

The last stage of Fraser's story is that of reconciliation, understanding and forgiveness. She sees her journey as one of moving from darkness into light, both in terms of knowledge and psychic health: as Mark Freeman points out: 'The narrative Fraser elects to tell ... is a function of the very beliefs she holds about what human beings ultimately are ... The very way one understands the past ... is the product of a narrative choice which, in turn, may issue from the most fundamental beliefs, values, and ideals one holds'. [46] Within the text, Fraser partly 'explains' her ability to forgive and even love her father in terms of the notion of 'readiness to remember': 'I did not remember the

[46] Freeman, *Writing the Self*, 173.

past until the homemade bomb was defused, until the evil was contained, until I was stable enough and happy enough that sorrow or anger or regret or pain was overwhelmed by joy at my release' (252). For Fraser, 'truth', the solving of a mystery, seems to have had therapeutic value in itself: 'Finally, truth is the only thing worth saying' (233). 'Life does have a shape and maybe even a purpose' (253), she claims: her narrative, as I have shown, is itself highly 'shaped' in terms of the 'reciprocal determination' of ends and beginnings. As she reads and rewrites her own life, and we read that rewriting, 'we read only those incidents and signs that can be construed as promise and annunciation, enchained towards a construction of significance - those markers that, as in the detective story, appear to be clues to the underlying intentionality of event', as Brooks describes the way in which the narrator of Sartre's *La Nausee* reads his own life. [47] All loose ends are tied up, as Fraser tells her sister what she has discovered, and is believed; understands why her mother was unable to confront what she suspected; has one last affectionate meeting with Danny, and is also able to mourn for his loss at his funeral. Her understanding of her parents' failures is framed in terms of their own deprivations: her mother's displacement from England to America, the deaths of her sisters from diseases of poverty, her father's suicide, her sexual ignorance and the need for respectability. Her own father's life was one of loneliness and frustration: 'My father's rage was an impotent rage. He shouted and waved his fists like a child in a high chair. I know that now. He demanded and was obeyed, but was never heard' (239). She even wonders whether he was 'as profoundly split as I. Was there a Daddy Who Knew and a Daddy Who Did Not Know?' (240) .[48] This kind of 'explanation' is part of Fraser's acceptance of a particular model of causality of child abuse: 'Children who were in some way abused, abuse others; victims become villains. Thus, not to forgive only perpetuates the crime, creates more villains' (252). This explanation encodes events in a narrative chain of cause and effect which offers its own satisfactions: it is one denied by Judith Lewis Herman, who argues instead that 'the great majority of survivors neither abuse nor neglect their children. Many survivors are terribly afraid that their children will suffer a fate similar to their own, and they go

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[47] Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, 94.

[48] There is some evidence for this kind of splitting on the part of perpetrators in Robert Jay Lifton's *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (London: Macmillan, 1986). In *The Drowned and the Saved* Primo Levi also describes how the perpetrators of atrocities in Nazi Germany used a '*cordon sanitaire*' in order to 'impede the entry' of 'burdensome memories', because '[i]t is easier to deny entry to a memory than to free oneself from it after it has been recorded'. They subsequently 'built a convenient past for themselves and ended by believing it' (London: Abacus, 1988), 17-18.

to great lengths to prevent this from happening'. [49] But to become a 'survivor' in the sense of the word used by therapists, some degree of self-understanding is necessary: Fraser knows that it was her parents' determination to give her an education and a 'better chance' than they had had that enabled her to gain the insight, understanding and resources to survive. Like Carolyn Steedman, she is the middle-class daughter of working-class parents who is able to bring the insights of intellectual work and psychoanalysis to bear on the problems and traumas of her parents' lives, and to use writing as a mode of exploration, explanation and, for Fraser, catharsis. In the texts of Atwood and Fraser, Ronald Fraser and Steedman there is an enactment of a process of what could be called *Nachträglichkeit* through the generations: 'children are always episodes in someone else's narrative', writes Steedman [50], and Fraser agrees: 'All of us are born into the second act of a tragedy-in-progress, and then spend the rest of our lives trying to figure out what went wrong in the first act' (241).

Sylvia Fraser's rewriting of her life is characterised by a need to fashion an 'intelligible, consistent, and unbroken case history' [51] in which all gaps are filled and all clues 'solved'. Stephen Marcus and Peter Brooks demonstrate the fragmentary, provisional and even contradictory nature of Freud's case histories: provisionality is especially marked in the case of the Wolf Man, where Freud's later footnotes open up the question of the reality of the 'primal scene', and represent Freud's own 'rewritings' of his material. Fraser's narrative is marked by a search for, and discovery of a primal scene - or series of scenes - that is never thrown into doubt. Child sexual abuse is an important reality, not to be evaded by definitions of the primal scene such as Ned Lukacher's as 'a constellation of forgotten intertextual events offered in lieu of a demonstrable, unquestionable origin', [52] despite the usefulness of this concept as a tool for the analysis of narratives in which such an origin is postulated and sought. Fraser's search is marked by nostalgia for an originary memory and presence, not of abuse experienced as such but of the original tenderness and bliss of the child still in the Garden of Eden of innocent infantile sexuality - not the 'memory' of imaginary oneness

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[49] Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 114.

[50] Steedman, *Landscape For a Good Woman*, 122.

[51] Stephen Marcus, *Freud and the Culture of Psychoanalysis: Studies in the Transition from Victorian Humanism to Modernity* (Boston: George Allen and Unwin, 1984), 61. Marcus is here discussing Freud's aim in his analysis of Dora.

[52] Ned Lukacher, *Primal Scenes: Literature, Philosophy, Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 24.

with the body of the mother, but a version of the feminine oedipal longing for union with the father, also hinted at yet evaded by Carolyn Steedman.

Time is not a line ...

Fraser's reconstruction of her life depends upon a 'law of human nature, as compelling as Newton's, that whatever is hidden in the psyche will struggle to reveal itself' (153). This assumption about the nature of the psyche is given a 'cosmic' dimension by the idea Elaine takes over from her physicist brother Stephen, that '[t]ime is not a line but a dimension' still existing 'somewhere' and potentially available for the kind of revisit created by these two narratives. Elaine says at the beginning of the book that 'I began then to think of time as having a shape, something you could see, like a series of liquid transparencies, one laid on top of another ... Sometimes this comes to the surface, sometimes that, sometimes nothing. Nothing goes away' (3). What does become available to consciousness is imagined as random and involuntary; Elaine comes to think of the past as 'discontinuous, like stones skipped across water, like postcards' (302). Although we are asked to imagine that Elaine is suddenly able to 'see [her] life entire', the narration preserves some of this discontinuity, telling a story which is roughly chronological but in short disjointed sections which also reflect the sense of disconnection Elaine feels from earlier versions of her 'self', the idea that 'there is never only one, of anyone'. Stephen tells her that 'if you put one identical twin in a high-speed rocket for a week, he'd come back to find his brother ten years older than he is himself' (219): when Stephen is killed Elaine remembers this story and thinks: 'Now I will get older ... And he will not' (392). She also imagines several future identities for the grown-up Cordelia she never actually meets: on the one hand Cordelia has escaped the future by her absence, whilst on the other she is stuck in time as nine-year-old bully just as a part of Elaine is stuck in the past as her nine-year-old victim. When she revisits, in the present time of the narrative, the playground of their primary school, she suddenly feels 'ill will' surrounding her: 'it's hard to breathe. I feel as if I am pushing against something, a pressure on me, like opening a door against a snowstorm. Get me out of this, Cordelia. I'm locked in. I don't want to be nine years old forever' (400). A little later she feels that Cordelia is vanishing and escaping while 'I'm headed for a future in which I sprawl propped in a wheelchair, shedding hair and drooling ... and I stand in the snow under the bridge, and stand and stand' (413). Here the 'I' is imagined as split between the ageing self and the child who is stranded in the past, the self of the present absent. The idea of time as a dimension in which one can

'double back' and revisit the spaces of the past provides a 'scientific' rationale for a particular model of memory which imagines the past as still existing 'somewhere', preserved in part of the psyche or in the places where events occurred, susceptible of recurrence as in the concept of 'rememory' developed in Morrison's *Beloved*.

It is the episode which marks the end of the bullying and the beginning of Elaine's 'forgetting', the time when she nearly froze to death in the ravine and was 'saved' by a 'dark lady', that enacts the most complex revisiting of the past and its reinterpretation in the light of later understanding. When Elaine tells the story of what happened in the ravine it is with full memory of what the child of nine *believed* to have happened, although, as with the rest of her memory of childhood, it is not clear when it was remembered, and it is immediately problematised by the subject's uncertainty about what she really 'saw'. Elaine's hat is thrown down into the ravine by Cordelia who then orders her to retrieve it; she climbs down the steep and frozen bank and walks out onto the ice. Her boots fill with water and she struggles to get out, sitting and then lying down on the bank, convinced she will be unable to climb back up again with her frozen feet. Her head fills with 'black sawdust' and she imagines that the rustling of the sleet through the branches is the voices of the dead people gathering around her. Cordelia has long since abandoned her there, but when she looks up she sees a figure standing there on the bridge, which now looks quite different: 'it seems higher above me, more solid, as if the railings have disappeared or been filled in. And it's glowing, there are pools of light along it, greenish-yellow, not like any light I've seen before' (189). What she 'sees' is a lady in a black cloak who walks or floats down towards her, holding her arms out so that she can see a patch of red, 'her heart, on the outside of her body, glowing like neon, like a coal'. She hears her voice telling her: '*You can go home now ... It will be all right. Go home* ' (189). As she makes her way back up the hill she 'knows' that '[i]t's the Virgin Mary, there can be no doubt' (190). The memory of this episode and its representation are complicated not only by the process of forgetting which began after this episode but also by the fact that a few days afterwards she became unsure of the identity of the 'dark lady', though she still 'believes' it was the Virgin Mary, and by her final realisation, when she goes back to the ravine during the Toronto visit, that 'there was no lady in a dark cloak bending over me' (418). What was 'remembered' when Elaine saw 'her life entire' was thus a fantasy, but it is only when she revisits the ravine that she realizes it *was* a fantasy, whilst at the same time the dark lady comes 'back to me now in absolute clarity, acute in every detail' (418). What we do not witness is the way in which this event was

remembered *at the time of its first recall*, when it must already have raised the question for the remembering subject of the relationship between memory and fantasy.

When Elaine describes her visit to the ravine in the 'present' we become aware that as a nine-year-old lying there she was 'remembering' or 'seeing' the future when she saw the concrete, lighted bridge which she now walks across: the Elaine of the present asserts '[n]evertheless it's the same bridge' (418). An event already remembered is now re-remembered with the immediacy of place: 'That's where I stood, with the snow falling on me, unable to summon the will to move. That's where I heard the voice', although at the same time she realizes '[t]here was no voice', that there was no dark lady, although she can now 'see' her in clear detail: 'There was only darkness and silence. Nobody and nothing'. The effect is of a memory being recreated and destroyed at the same time. At this point Elaine becomes aware that if she turns around she will see someone waiting for her ahead on the path: at first she thinks it will be her nine-year-old self in her blue knitted hat, but then turns to see the nine-year-old Cordelia, looking at her:

> There is the same shame, the sick feeling in my body,
> the same knowledge of my own wrongness, awkwardness,
> weakness; the same wish to be loved; the same loneliness;
> the same fear. But these are not my own emotions any more.
> They are Cordelia's; as they always were. (419)

This awareness of Cordelia's *own* sense of failure, inferiority and fear of rejection, projected on to and created in Elaine and internalised by her, is a complex inter-personal psychological process which the text subtly suggests to the reader at the time of its occurence, when Elaine is too young and vulnerable to realize it. The climax of the narrative is a cathartic moment of repetition-with-a-difference, a final 'meeting' between the adult Elaine and the child Cordelia which could not have occured in reality; the text sets up a framework of reference for this in terms of Stephen's ideas about time so that understanding and acceptance comes about not as an effect of memory alone, nor as the result of a long process of construction and re-construction in therapy, but by means of a supposed recreation of an earlier moment as time 'doubles back' upon itself. Here again the 'end writes the beginning' in the suggestion that the earlier event - the ravine episode - was 'created' or determined by the end - this final meeting on the bridge. Elaine now feels that 'I am the older one, now, I'm the stronger', and Cordelia is the

child in danger: 'If she stays here any longer she will freeze to death; she will be left behind, in the wrong time ... I reach out my arms to her, bend down, hands open to show I have no weapon. *It's all right*, I say to her. *You can go home now*' (419). One interpretation of this, suggested by the black dress she is wearing, the gesture and the echoed words, is that the child Elaine was 'saved' by a vision of her adult self, an idea that belongs to the realm of the mystical and irrational if taken literally: Elaine grows up to become the woman who saves her own life as a child. But this moment also metaphorically suggests the way in which the adult who has fully remembered and come to terms with the past frees the part of the self which is still 'stuck' there. This also necessitates a 'letting go' of the Cordelia who tormented her, a gesture which symbolically redeems the lonely and frightened child who Cordelia also was, but which also accepts that she is gone. Elaine's recognition of their mutual identification, the process of projection and internalisation which made them 'others' to each other, gives psychological conviction to the mystical or telepathic connections established here, so that they are 'of the psyche' as well as 'psychic'.

Five 'new' paintings are included in Elaine's retrospective; these are more conscious reworkings of elements of the past than the paintings made and discussed earlier, but they also are reviewed in the light of the fuller understanding she has gained by revisiting Toronto and the sites of her childhood traumas. *Unified Field Theory* suggests the 'unified field' of moments in which past and present are held together; the moment when she 'meets' the past on the bridge, and the moment when she re-reads the painting which is a reworking of that moment. The 'Virgin of Lost Things' stands on the bridge over the ravine, holding an oversized cat's eye marble; beneath the bridge is the night sky, full of stars: 'galaxy upon galaxy: the universe, in its incandescence and darkness'. We are reminded of Stephen's lecture which Elaine attended and understood little of: 'When we gaze at the night sky ... we are looking at fragments of the past' (331-2). Looking more closely, one also sees 'beetles and small roots', because this is also 'the underside of the ground', suggesting the beetles collected by Elaine's father, the earth under which she was buried and the 'underside' of unconscious memory. Underneath flows the creek, 'down from the cemetery. The land of the dead people' (408). This painting functions both as a representation of a memory which was in part a fantasy, the ground in which past and present meet, and an image of the future, the meeting on the bridge in which Elaine 'becomes' the dark lady of her memory.

As Elaine looks once more at these paintings, she acknowledges that they have escaped her control: 'I can no longer ... tell them what to mean. Whatever energy they have came out of me. I'm what's left over' (409). It is as if the past itself, and her efforts to rework it, have used her up. She realises 'I may have thought I was preserving something from time, salvaging something', but is now tempted to destroy the lot', thus raising very explicitly the complex questions of our relationship to the past and the function of memory itself. She here rethinks her mental model of time: it is 'not a place, which is only a blur, the moving edge we live in', a phrase which precisely evokes our tenuous sense of inhabiting the present moment. She goes on to evoke time as something 'fluid, which turns back upon itself, like a wave' (409), suggesting the way in which she 'meets' past versions of both herself and Cordelia, and the structure of the novel itself.

Her understanding of the past includes a recognition of loss: flying home to the west coast Elaine sits next to two old ladies who are enjoying their friendship and the freedom of old age: 'They're rambunctious, they're full of beans; they're tough as thirteen, they're innocent and dirty, they don't give a hoot ... now for a short while they can play again like children, but this time without the pain' (420). Now Elaine realises that she misses 'something that will never happen' - close female friendship as she grows old, the friendship she might have had with Cordelia, recalled by the two old ladies. In spite of this recognition of loss, the ending of the novel is not as negative as is suggested by Gayle Greene. [53] She misreads the ending of the novel, or ignores its final paragraph in stating that the novel ends with repetition of the word 'nothing' : in fact, it ends with a description of the night sky full of stars, 'echoes of light, shining out of the midst of nothing. It's old light, and there's not much of it. But it's enough to see by' (421). It has enabled Elaine to 'see' what was really going on in her relationship with Cordelia and to recognize their mutual need. It is an echo of her realisation that '[a]n eye for an eye only needs to more blindness' as she looks again at her paintings of Mrs. Smeath, which also suggests the kind of forgiveness reached by Sylvia Fraser and the breaking of a cycle of victimisation. Atwood's novel ends on a note of cautious and qualified optimism, in contrast to Fraser's 'I have burst into an infinite world full of wonder' (253) - although *My Father's House* does actually end on the sadder note of the death of Fraser's mother. In spite of the trope by which the narrator-subject is imagined as seeing 'her life entire', both narrative and sense of self

[53] Gayle Greene, 'Feminist Fiction and the Uses of Memory', 321.

are left more fractured and discontinuous, less 'complete' and resolved, than Fraser's autobiography which (almost) ends with a dream in which she says goodbye to her father in his coffin, is 'joined' with her lost 'inner child', and turns into a seabird on its way to the ocean with a quill in her mouth 'to be dipped into the sun' (242). Although the resolution of Atwood's novel is more provisional, both texts provide the reader with the vicarious satisfaction of the experience of trauma and the comfort of recovery, as well as the narrative satisfaction described by Peter Brooks and by Stephen Marcus: 'What we end with, then, is a fictional construction which is at the same time satisfactory to us in the form of the truth, and as the form of the truth'.[54]

[54] Marcus, *Freud and the Culture of Psychoanalysis*, 62.

Chapter Four

Writing Absent Memory: Georges Perec's *W Or The Memory of Childhood*

Introduction

In Elie Wiesel's novel *The Fifth Son*, Reuven, the son of a Holocaust survivor who has not spoken to him about his experience, says: 'I suffer from an Event I have not even experienced. A feeling of void: from a past that has made History tremble I have retained only words'. [1] Like Reuven, Georges Perec grew up in what Nadine Fresco has described as 'the compact void of the unspeakable', part of the generation who had to 'recover the past by inventing it'. [2] In his reconstruction of the fragments of his childhood, which he always acknowledges is, precisely, a reconstruction, Perec foregrounds the textuality of memory, the investment of fantasy and the inevitability of 'afterwardsness'. As a five-year-old Jewish child living in Paris under the Vichy regime, this past - that part of the past now labelled 'the Holocaust' - *was*, in a sense, 'his', but 'his' at a time of incomplete knowledge and understanding, when memory is also fluid, vulnerable and easily invested with fantasy. At the beginning of *W Or The Memory of Childhood* [3] he claims: 'I have no childhood memories ... I was excused: a different history, History with a capital H, had answered the question in my stead: the war, the camps' (6). His representation of memory as characterised by loss, absence and constant retranscription is the opposite of Marie Cardinal's belief that '[e]very event ... is catalogued, labelled, and locked away in oblivion' until the right 'signal' is found to open the appropriate door. [4] In *W* the instability and belatedness of memory is doubly inscribed, in terms of the nature of early childhood memories as such and the specific trauma experienced by the subject: in

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[1] Elie Wiesel, *The Fifth Son* , trans. Marion Wiesel (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), 192.

[2] Quoted by Ellen S. Fine, 'The Absent Memory' in Berel Lang, ed., *Writing and the Holocaust* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1988), 42. Fine also quotes Henry Raczymow: 'What is dead is dead ... and cannot be resurrected. It can only be invented' (50).

[3] Georges Perec, *W Or The Memory of Childhood* , trans. David Bellos (London: CollinsHarvill, 1989). First published in France with the title *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* by Editions Denoël in 1975. Henceforth I refer to the book as *W*, and the fantasy which it includes as W. Page references to this edition will be cited in the text.

[4] Marie Cardinal, *The Words To Say It* , trans. Pat Goodheart (London: Picador, 1984), 125-6.

1942, at the age of six, Perec was sent away from Paris into the Free Zone, and in 1943 his mother died in Auschwitz - although, of course, he 'didn't know that then'. Perec's representation of his own memories and his mother's story in *W* is oblique and indirect - a technique described by Warren Motte as 'writing under erasure'. [5] 'I know that what I say is blank, is neutral, is a sign, once and for all, of a once-and-for-all annihilation ... all I shall ever find in my very reiteration is the final refraction of a voice that is absent from writing, the scandal of their [his parents'] silence and of mine' (42). I analyse his text in the light of demands that two different kinds of silence - that of the dead, and of those who did not directly experience the Holocaust - be respected. I read *W* as an attempt at an answer to Lyotard's demand for a form of writing that 'never forgets that there is the forgotten and never stops writing its failure to remember and to fashion itself according to memory'. [6]

Trauma, Holocaust, Representation

I situate my reading of *W* in the light of recent debates about the question of the representability of the Holocaust, and of the theorisation of trauma outlined in my first chapter. David Carroll has described the event as an 'extreme limit case of memory' [7] and Shoshana Felman claims that it has produced a 'crisis of witnessing'. [8] Perec's position as a Jewish child who lost his parents to 'the war, the camps' (his father died fighting for France, just before the Armistice with Germany), but who obviously did not experience the camps directly, raises in particularly acute form the question of the limits of memory, witness, and representation. In spite of his direct involvement with the events which became known as the Holocaust, his 'witnessing' is problematised by the fact of his extreme youth and the belatedness of his knowledge of the full meaning of his final

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5 Warren Motte, 'Georges Perec and the Broken Book' in Lawrence J. Kritzman, *Auschwitz and After: Race, Culture and "the Jewish Question" in France* (London: Routledge, 1995), 235-249; 237.

6 David Carroll, 'Foreword: The Memory of the Devastation and the Responsibilities of Thought: "And let's not talk about that"', in Jean-François Lyotard, *Heidegger and "the jews"*, trans. Andreas Michel and Mark S. Roberts (Minnesota: University of Minneapolis Press, 1990), vii-xxix; xxiii.

7 David Carroll, 'Foreword', viii.

8 Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (London: Routledge, 1992), 201.

parting with his mother. In fact he refuses to represent what he did not experience or cannot remember, using instead a fantasy he developed at the age of thirteen, and rediscovered a few years before the writing of *W*.

Therapeutic work with survivors demonstrates that the experience of massive trauma disrupts what we think of as the 'normal' processes of memory. Dori Laub (who was himself imprisoned as a child) analyses how these processes, and the ability to use memory in order to bear witness, were specifically dislocated during the experience of the death camps: 'The perpetrators, in their attempt to rationalize the unprecedented scope of the destructiveness, brutally imposed upon their victims a delusional ideology whose grandiose coercive pressure totally excluded and eliminated the possibility of an unviolated, unencumbered, and thus sane, point of reference in the witness'. [9] Even Primo Levi, possibly the 'sanest' and most 'rational' of witnesses, testifies in his later work, *The Drowned and the Saved*, to the difficulty of bearing witness to events which disrupt accepted frames of reference. 'In this case, all or almost all the factors that can obliterate or deform the mnemonic record are at work'; the violence that is 'inflicted on man' is also 'inflicted on language', the medium in which witness might later be borne. [10] There have been several attempts to theorise the possible effects of the Holocaust on what might be called 'collective memory': Jacqueline Rose has described it as 'that piece of collective memory which it is hardest for the culture to recall', functioning 'like the return of the repressed: a fragment of the cultural unconscious that will not go away' [11], and according to Terrence des Pres, '[s]ome hideous impression of Auschwitz is in every mind, far removed from conscious thought but *there*: and not only as a repressed perception of historical events but as an image which stirs up the demonic content of our own worst fears and wishes.' [12] 'The culture' and 'every' do here assume the universality of an experience which is specifically part of European (and, to some extent, North American) history; other atrocities might constitute similar ruptures and repressions for other cultures, but Rose, Eric Santner and others would argue that fascism and the destruction wrought in its

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[9] Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 81.

[10] Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (London: Abacus, 1988), 12, 76.

[11] Jacqueline Rose, *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath* (London: Virago, 1991), 7-8.

[12] Terrence des Pres, *The Survivior: an Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 170.

name in Germany effected a dislocation of reality, language and representation of a particular kind. Following the Mitscherlichs, Santner argues that post-war Germany had been unable to 'work through the more primitive narcissistic injury represented by the traumatic shattering of the specular, imaginary relations that had provided the sociopsychological foundations of German fascism ... Nazism had promised a so-called utopian world in which alterity in its multiple forms and dimensions could be experienced as a dangerous Semitic supplement that one was free to push to the margins and finally to destroy'. [13] Santner's use of a psychoanalytic frame of reference makes it clear that he is not talking about Nazi Germany as a unique aberation, but a potential inherent in any form of social organisation which prevents or impedes the recognition of others as separate but equal identities. [14] Perec's text demonstrates the persistence of fantasies of omnipotence and the elimination of difference in its employment and rewriting of his childhood fantasy of the 'utopia' of the island of W, a fantasy which also demonstrates the emergence of 'some hideous impression of Auschwitz' as if from the unconscious. Speaking of Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah*, Felman and Laub argue that it 'shows how the Holocaust still functions as a cultural secret, a secret ... which we are still keeping from ourselves, through various forms of communal or of personal denial, of cultural reticence or of cultural canonization'. [15] The commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of the camps, the opening of the Holocaust Museum in Washington, and Spielberg's film *Schindler's List* have once more foregrounded the horrors of the Holocaust whilst also, possibly, creating a 'canon' of Holocaust images or histories. 'The trap isn't too little reverence, it's too much', claims Howard Jacobson, speaking of Martin Amis' *Time's Arrow*, criticized by many for its use of the tricksy narrative device of making time run backwards, so that the Jews in Auschwitz are reconstituted out of ashes. [16] Amis' description of the reconstruction of Jewish communities instead of their destruction defamiliarises a story which has perhaps become too well-known, jolting the reader into a renewed

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[13] Eric L. Santner, *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory and Film in Postwar Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 32.

[14] Santner goes on to say: 'For the complex entity called the human self constitutes itself precisely by relinquishing its narcissistic position and ... assuming its place in an expanded field of relations and relationality in which "I" and "you", "here" and "there", "now" and "then" ... have boundaries ...' (32).

[15] Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, Preface, xix.

[16] Howard Jacobson, 'Jacobson's List', *Independent*, 2.2.1994, 19. Martin Amis, *Time's Arrow* (1991; Harmondsworth: Penguin 1992)

awareness of precisely what was lost. Like Amis, Perec refuses to 'canonise' by employing a fantasy which also defamiliarises, and by refusing to impose the trope of a reconstructed identity onto the fragments of memory. Lawrence Langer, in his analysis of oral testimonies of survivors, has demonstrated that it is difficult for listeners not to construct comforting narratives of liberation or redemption out of fragmented and dislocated accounts which bear witness to the co-existence of two selves, the self who experienced the death camps and the self who survived. Stories of suffering, courage and liberation take place in a sequence of temporality contradicted by the a-temporal persistence of the Auschwitz 'self': for Charlotte Delbo, 'the "self" who was in the camp isn't me, isn't the person who is here, opposite you'. [17] For many survivors, it has proved impossible to assimilate the traumatic past into a present which would enable the subject to construct a coherent narrative of the self: 'Testimony seems to be composed of bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance, acts that cannot be constructed as knowledge nor assimilated into full cognition, events in excess of our frames of reference.' [18] Perec refuses to 'construct a coherent narrative of the self' out of fragments of memory and fantasy: instead he meticulously charts the re-translations of his memories, and constructs an 'adventure-story' which replaces his own missing 'history', with a 'hero' and a lost child who both stand in for a self who cannot be directly represented. Dori Laub describes how some survivors 'live not with memories of the past, but with an event that could not and did not proceed through to its completion, has no ending, attained no closure, and therefore, as far as its survivors are concerned, continues into the present and is current in every respect'. [19] David Bellos, in his recent biography of Perec, evokes the 'muffled, displaced, almost absent' quality of his mourning for his mother: for those who had no formal proof of their relatives' deaths after the war, 'their grieving could have no formal beginning: what has no beginning has no end'. [20]

If the subject's sense of identity is largely dependent upon memory, '[t]he systematic destruction of self-identity of inmates in concentration camps was also

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[17] Quoted by Lawrence L. Langer, *Holocaust Testimony: The Ruins of Memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 5.

[18] Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 5.

[19] Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 69.

[20] David Bellos, *Georges Perec: A Life in Words*(London: HarperCollins, 1993), 92, 83.

the attempt to destroy their narrative of themselves'. [21] The inmates were 'systematically deprived of foresight' [22] - like Leon Greenman, who 'didn't know that then', the child Perec, who did not know that he was saying goodbye to his mother for the last time, and his mother herself, who Perec claims died 'without understanding' (33). The Jews 'were caught by the other's narration in a place within that narration which annulled existence a priori'. [23] Laub describes the world of the camps as one in which 'there was no longer an other to which one could say "Thou" in the hope of being heard, of being recognized as a subject, of being answered ... when one cannot turn to a "you" one cannot say "thou" even to oneself. The Holocaust created in this way a world in which one *could not bear witness to oneself*. [24] For many, the determination to bear witness in the future was a strong motive for survival in the present; according to Terrence des Pres, 'the will to bear witness arises early ... during the *initial* stages of adjustment to extremity'. [25] But this determination must also have been undermined by the incommensurability of the experience and the fear of not being believed, and the isolation which Laub describes. Primo Levi, who on the whole retained a faith in the power of language to communicate, dreamt whilst in Auschwitz that on his return home his family turned away from him, unable to hear what he was attempting to tell them of his experiences. Many of his fellow-prisoners shared 'the ever-repeated scene of the unlistened-to story'; [26] writing in 1958, Levi says that '[t]oday, at this very moment as I sit writing at my table, I myself am not convinced that these things really happened'. [27] He calls the history of the Third Reich a 'war against memory' whose victims were told:

> However this war may end, we have won the war against you;

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[21] Amos Funkenstein, 'History, Counterhistory and Narrative', in Saul Friedlander, ed. *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution"* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 66-81; 77.

[22] Geoffrey H. Hartmann, 'The Book of the Destruction', in Friedlander, *Probing the Limits of Representation*, 318-334; 324.

[23] Sande Cohen, 'Between Image and Phrase: Progressive History and the "Final Solution" and Dispossession' in Friedlander, *Probing the Limits of Representation*, 171-184; 180-1.

[22] Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 82.

[25] des Pres, *The Survivor*, 39.

[26] Primo Levi, *If This is A Man / The Truce*, trans. Stuart Woolf (1958; London: Abacus, 1987), 66.

[27] Levi, *If This Is A Man*, 109.

> none of you will be left to bear witness, but even if some one were to survive, the world would not believe him...there will be no certainties, because we will destroy the evidence together with you. [28]

Holocaust deniers attempt to prove that there is no 'evidence' of the gas chambers: on a more deeply worrying level, the postmodern tendency which claims that there are no 'facts' in history, that history is a story we construct out of the needs of the present, also plays into the hands of those who seek to deny this specific historical reality. As Barbara Foley has pointed out: 'One of the philosophical foundations of National Socialism was the belief that truth is relative, determined not by the application of reason but by the exercise of force'. She goes on to suggest that the 'epistomological relativism' of novelists such as William Styron, Gerald Green and Leslie Epstein, who deliberately blur the boundaries of fact and fiction in their representations of the Holocaust, 'is philosophically akin to the subjectivist attitude toward truth characteristic of the very fascist nightmare they describe'. [29] Amis' *Time's Arrow* might also be said to demonstrate this relativism at a particular extreme - taking literally the speculations of physicists that 'time is not a line but a dimension' [30] in which one might move in any direction. His text also demonstrates the impossibility of fully reversing the order of language, syntax and narrative at the same time as preserving meaning; Stephen Hawking, whose *Brief History of Time* has done the most to popularise the 'New Physics', actually argues that because the 'thermodynamic' and 'psychological' 'arrows of time' run in the same direction, it is in fact impossible to 'remember the future' or revisit the past. [31] Perec's text demonstrates the impossibility of recovering 'lost time', and, in spite of his acknowledgement of the impossibility of finding a language which would 'truly' or 'fully' describe his lost parents, he also, at least in the pieces he wrote for the left-wing journal *Partisans* in 1962-3, disassociates himself from the

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[28] Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 1. Levi is quoting the words of an SS militiaman as remembered by Simon Wiesenthal.

[29] Barbara Foley, 'Fact, Fiction, Fascism: Testimony and Mimesis in Holocaust Narratives', *Comparative Literature* 34 (1982), 330-360; 358.

[30] Margaret Atwood, *Cat's Eye* (1988; London: Virago, 1990), 3.

[31] Stephen W. Hawking, *A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to Black Holes* (New York: Bantam Books, 1988), 143-153.

theory of language as an entirely enclosed and self-referential system: 'The disease that eats words away is not inside words ... The "crisis of language" is a refusal of the real'. [32] His meticulous description of objects in texts such as *Life: A User's Manual* insists upon the referential function of language; in *W* his task is that of describing an absence, and although the childhood memories to which he does lay claim are described - and corrected - in precise detail, the fullest description in language within the text is of a fantasy, the island of W.

The dislocation or disruption of individual identity and memory, of temporality, of ethical categories and of meaning which the Holocaust effected does seem to demand recognition in the art which seeks to represent it - to require 'some sort of narrative margin which leaves the unsayable unsaid' [33] - acknowledged by Perec in the form of *W*. In *The Postmodern Condition* Lyotard suggests that the postmodern differs from the modern by projecting 'the unrepresentable in representation itself ... [it] searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable'. [34] Lyotard is not here referring specifically to the effects of the Holocaust on representation; Shoshana Felman claims that the Holocaust has opened up a *'radical historical crisis in witnessing'*: 'the cryptic forms of modern narrative and modern art always - whether consciously or not - partake of that historical impossibility of writing a historical narration of the Holocaust'. [35] Here the Holocaust is being appropriated to 'prove' a point about representation as such: some kind of 'historical narrative', however inadequate, is surely necessary in order to teach those who might otherwise grow up not knowing of the event, or unable to distinguish it from fictional representations of violence or atrocity. But, as Lyotard argues, narratives which 'neutralize violence' by recuperating it into chronologies of before and after, cause and effect do their own kind of violence to the event.

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[32] Quoted by Bellos, *Georges Perec*, 276. Bellos does not give an exact source for this quotation, but at the end of the chapter provides a list of articles by Perec in *Partisans* 3, 4, 7 and 8 from which 'unattributed quotations' are taken.

[33] Saul Friedlander, 'Introduction' to *Probing the Limits of Representation*, 17.

[34] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 79.

[35] Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 201.

Absence, loss, and disrupted time may be easier to represent visually: James Young has described how recent 'counter-monuments' to the Holocaust in Germany testify, precisely, to an absence.The Gerzes' *Harburg Monument Against Fascism* was gradually sunk into the ground, after being covered with signatures and other graffiti; at the site of a former concentration camp in Neukölln in Berlin, now a sports field, Norbert Radermacher has constructed an installation which, when a pedestrian passes by and 'trips' a trigger, projects a slide of a written text describing the former history of the site, which then fades away; in Kassel, a pyramid-shaped fountain in the Rathaus-Platz was destroyed by the Nazis in 1939 because it was built and funded by Jews: Horst Hohiesel 'restored' it by creating its mirror-image and sinking it into the water, 'in order to 'rescue the history of this place as a wound and as an open question'. [36] Such 'counter-monuments 'never forget that there is the forgotten': they acknowledge that memory itself is subject to the processes of time, accepting that the past can never be recreated 'as it really was', because our knowledge of the past always has to incorporate what could not have been known 'then'.

Commenting upon his inability to 'improve upon' the descriptions of his parents written 15 years earlier, based on photographs and fragments of knowledge and memory, Perec says: 'It is not - as for years I claimed it was - the effect of an unending oscillation between an as-yet undiscovered language of sincerity and the subterfuges of a writing concerned exclusively with shoring up its own defences: it is bound up with the matter of writing and the written matter, with the task of writing as well as with the task of remembering ... (the unsayable is not buried inside writing, it is what prompted it in the first place)' (42). The 'unsayable' prompts the attempt to articulate, to represent, but writing or words will not 'unbury', or reveal the truth, the 'unsayable'. After Auschwitz, the 'earthquake' which destroyed the instruments which measure earthquakes, Lyotard writes: 'Signs are not referents to which are attached significations validatable under the cognitive regimen; they indicate that something that should be able to be put into phrases cannot be phrased in the acceptable idioms'. [37] Writing and memory are

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[36] James E. Young, 'The Counter-Monument: Memory Against Itself in Germany Today', *Critical Inquiry* 18 (1992), 267-296; quoting Hoheisel, 288.

thus inextricably interwoven: memory can only be reconstructed through the writing which inevitably 'retranscribes' it, and is the mark both of absence - '[t]heir memory is dead in writing' - and of a paradoxical presence - 'I write because they left in me their indelible mark, whose trace is writing' (42). Writing performs for Perec the double function described by Lyotard: it 'always is of some restorative value for the evil done to the soul because of its unpreparedness, which leaves it an infant', but reminds us once again 'that there is no salvation, no health, and that time, even the time of work, does not heal anything'. [38]

This paradoxical absent presence could also be refigured in terms of the Jewishness which, as a child, Perec was required to conceal or deny. Jewishness is part of his missing inheritance:

> Quelque part, je suis étranger par rapport à quelque chose de moi-même; quelque part, je suis "différent", mais non pas différent des autres, différent des "miens" : je ne parle pas la langue que mes parents parlèrent, je ne partage aucun des souvenirs qu'ils purent avoir, quelque chose qui était à eux, qui faisait qu'ils étaient eux, leur histoire, leur culture, leur espoir, ne m'a pas été transmis. (Somehow, I am a stranger to myself; somehow, I am "different", but not different from others, different from "my own": I don't speak the language that my parents spoke, I don't share any of the memories that they may have had, something that was theirs, that made them what they were, their history, their culture, their hope, was not transmitted to me.) [39]

This broken transmission is represented in Perec's retranslation of one of his earliest memories, to be discussed later; but his articulation of a sense of not belonging, of an 'otherness' from the self could also be read as reinforcing the claim made by Lyotard (here summarised by David Carroll) that 'Western thought ... attempts to make "jews" of all of us, that is, what Lyotard refers to as a "non-

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[37] Quoted by Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 201-2.

[38] Lyotard, *Heidegger and "the jews"*, 33-4.

[39] Quoted from Georges Perec and Robert Bober, *Récits d'Ellis Island: Histoires d'errance et d'espoir* (Paris: Sorbier, 1981) by Warren F. Motte, Jr., *The Poetics of Experiment: A Study of the Work of Georges Perec* (Lexington, Kentucky: French Forum, 1984), 112; my translation.

people of survivors, Jews and non-Jews called here "the jews", whose being-together does not depend on the authenticity of any primary roots but on that singular debt of an interminable anamnesis." ' As "jews" we are 'a heterogenous nonpeople obligated to the memory of what cannot be represented, remembered, presented as such, with unpayable debts to a Law that does not tell us what to do but only that we are not autonomous, self-constituting or "self-asserting", but rather "hostage" to it, obligated before being free, other before being same.' [40]
Lyotard's is one of many attempts to theorise what it is 'in excess' about the Jews as a people which has seemed to necessitate their destruction: such theorisations are problematic in that they appear to universalise, trivialise or even deny the *specific* loss of autonomy and subjection to arbitrary and impenetrable laws in the concentration camp. When Perec describes the Olympian island of W which is gradually transformed into a concentration camp, he does so in terms which recall the words of Kafka's doorkeeper in *The Trial*: 'The Law is implacable, but the Law is unpredictable. The Law must be known by all, but the Law cannot be known. Between those who live under its sway and those who pronounce it stands an insurmountable barrier' (117). His book ends with a quotation from David Rousset's *Univers concentrationnaire*: the title of this work recalls the judgement of Tadeusz Borowski, that 'the whole world is really like the concentration camp'. [41] Perec's representation of W raises similar questions of specificity and universality. [42]

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[40] Carroll, 'Foreword' in Lyotard, *Heidegger and "the jews"*, xii. Lyotard has recently clarified his use of the term "the jews": 'the expression "the jews" refers to all those who, whereever they are, seek to remember and to bear witness to something constitutively *forgotten*, not only in each individual mind, but in the very thought of the West. And it refers to all those who assume this anamnesis and this witnessing as an obligation, a responsibility, or a debt, not only towards thought, but towards justice'. *Political Writings*, trans. Bill Readings and Kevin Paul Geiman (London: UCL Press, 1993), 141.

[41] Tadeusz Borowski, 'The January Offensive' in *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen and other stories*, trans. Barbara Vedder (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), 164-173; 168.

[42] There is insufficient space here to discuss fully the question of the uniqueness of the Holocaust. Eberhard Jäckel puts the case most clearly: 'the Nazi murder of the Jews was unique because never before has a state decided and announced, on the authority of its responsible leader, that it intended to kill in its entirety, as far as possible, a particular group of human beings, including its old people,women, children and infants, and then put this decision into action with every possible instrument of power available to the state'. Quoted by Richard Evans, *In Hitler's Shadow: West German Historians and the Attempt to Escape from the Nazi Past* (London: I.B.Tauris, 1989). See also Charles S. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust and*

The structure of the text and the fantasy of W

W consists of two texts, which, as Perec says in his Preface, 'simply alternate'. The 'simply' is disingenuous, as is his claim that 'you might almost believe they had nothing in common'; in fact, as he goes on to say, 'they are ... inextricably bound up with each other ... as though it was only their coming together, the distant light they cast on each other, that could make apparent what is never quite said in one, never quite said in the other, but said only in their fragile overlapping'. The first is an 'adventure story ' which is further split into two: 'it begins to tell one tale, and then, all of a sudden, launches into another' - the 'other' being the transformed tale of the island of W. In this break - represented in the text by the mark (***) on an otherwise empty page - Perec says 'can be found the point of departure for the whole of this book: the *points of suspension* on which the broken threads of childhood and the web of writing are caught'. The other text is 'an autobiography: a fragmentary tale of a wartime childhood, a tale lacking in exploits and memories, made up of scattered oddments, gaps, lapses, doubts, guesses, and meagre anecdotes'. The fragments themselves may be meagre, but it is Perec's reading and retranslation of his early memories which demonstrates how personal history is constructed, and how it is always inevitably bound up with a larger 'History'. The 'fragile overlappings' are such that my discussion of the two texts will inevitably also overlap.

The 'adventure story' is narrated by a deserter from the army who was given a false identity and the new name of 'Gaspard Winckler': in the first short section of the text he describes himself in the 'present' as 'impelled by a commanding necessity' to reveal the events to which he was a witness, believing that he was the 'sole depository, the only living memory, the only witness' of a world of which there 'could be no survivor' (3-4). Already the language suggests the need of some Holocaust survivors to bear witness, although the context of Winckler's story is apparently quite different. In the next brief section Perec speaks of his own lack of childhood memories and the story he made up and drew in pictures at the age of thirteen, which he remembered 'seven years ago', and which set 'the snares of

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German National Identity (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1988), for a full discussion of the question of uniqueness.

writing'. Like Ronald Fraser, he 'was like a child playing hide-and-seek, who doesn't know what he fears or wants more: to stay hidden, or to be found'. He 'reinvented and wrote' the story of W, and published it in a journal. 'Today', he says, 'I propose to bring to term - by which I mean just as much "to mark the end of" as "to give a name to" - this gradual unravelling' (6-7). Like Fraser again, Perec is suggesting that writing might be a means of leaving the past behind, but, as *In Search of a Past*, *W* represents a history in the process of construction, always susceptible of retranslation, not a finished product. Perec confesses: 'W is no more like my Olympic fantasy than that Olympic fantasy was like my childhood. But in the crisscross web they weave as in my reading of them I know there is to be found the inscription and description of the path I have taken, the passage of my history and the history of my passage' (7). We are not witness to the process by which the childhood fantasy became the story of W within the text, just as Perec does not tell us how or when he found out how his mother died. But although these omissions could be seen as evasions, they also acknowledge the fact that memory is constructed by means of a process of 'reading' the texts of memory, of retranslating them, and of constructing them as narratives.

Gaspard Winckler is asked by a member of the 'Shipwreck Victims' Relief Society' to undertake a voyage to the islands off the southern tip of South America in order to find the body of the child whose name he was given. This eight year-old child, the first Gaspard Winckler, was deaf and dumb, for a reason which was never discovered but which 'could only be ascribed to some infantile trauma whose precise configuration unfortunately remained obscure' (23): he was taken on a long sea-voyage by his mother in the hope of a cure, but their ship was wrecked, all on board died, and the body of the child was never found. At the point when the second Gaspard Winckler is contemplating this mission, the story breaks off and launches into another, the description of the island of W, located in the region where the child Gaspard was lost, which is entirely dedicated to the 'Olympian ideal' of highly organised competitive sport. This society is at first represented in utopian terms: in 'cool and happy countryside', W is a 'nation of athletes where Sport and life unite in a single magnificent effort' (65-7). It is a version of the '(always already) lost organic society that has haunted the western imagination'. [43] When we are told that 'life, here, is lived for the greater glory of the Body', we may already think of the Nazi ideal and Leni Riefenstahl's film of the Berlin

[43] Santner, *Stranded Objects*, 7.

Olympics; the reality of W as a brutish struggle for survival under arbitrary laws gradually emerges in details such as a race which culminates in the mass rape of women by the victors, the complex system of handicapping which means that those who lose have no chance of winning again, and the ritual humiliations to which the losers are subjected - they are given nothing to eat after their failures, the last man in a race sometimes even being stoned to death. Boys are kept in the women's quarters until the age of 14 (roughly the age at which Perec first invented W); they are then initiated into the athletic rituals, and at the end of their first day see 'the cohort of the beaten returning, the exhausted, ashen-faced Athletes tottering ... they see them collapse onto the ground, where they lie with their mouths open, wheezing; they see them, a little later, tearing each other to pieces for a scrap of salami, a drop of water, a puff at a cigarette' (139). So the island of W is gradually transformed into the concentration camp itself, with 'Athletes of skin and bone, ashen-faced, their backs permanently bent, their skulls bald and shiny, their eyes full of panic, and their sores suppurating ... ' If, later, 'someone gets in one day to the Fortress', he will find 'the subterranean remnants of a world he will think he had forgotten: piles of gold teeth, rings and spectacles, thousands and thousands of clothes in heaps, dusty card indexes, and stocks of poor-quality soap' (160-161). As the truth about the camps emerges as if from the unconscious of this text, it thus demonstrates what Shoshana Felman describes as the psychoanalytic recognition that

> one does not have to *possess* or *own* the truth, in order to effectively *bear witness* to it; that speech as such is unwittingly testimonial; and that the speaking subject constantly bears witness to a truth that nonetheless continues to escape him, a truth that is, essentially, *not available* to its own speaker. [44]

It also demonstrates that that which 'he will think he had forgotten' will return, will not remain hidden, reconstructing for the reader the process of coming to knowledge of a shocking reality which we somehow realize we have always already known. The development of the fantasy also reproduces the way in which knowledge of the truth of the extermination was concealed or avoided not only within Nazi Germany but also in Allied Europe. It demonstrates the paradoxical exaltation and degradation of humanity which characterised the regime, and raises

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[44] Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 15.

the question of whether such brutality always underlies the veneer of 'civilization', in particular behind ideologies of utopia, or whether Nazi Germany was a unique aberration. By the time that Perec rewrote his childhood fantasy of W, of course, the history of the camps was known and available to him: what he is attempting to represent in this rewriting is the unconscious or semi-conscious knowledge of the adolescent self. Towards the end of the 'autobiographical' part of the text, Perec describes how, some time after their return to Paris at the end of the war, his aunt took him to an exhibition about the camps. This is described quite dispassionately, almost as if the full meaning or horror of what he saw was not fully registered: 'I remember the photographs of the walls of the gas chambers showing scratchmarks made by the victims' fingernails, and a set of chessmen made from bits of bread' (158). The emotion we might expect is displaced onto the 'W' section which just precedes it, by which time the language of the camps - 'Raus! Schnell!' (155) - has completely broken through. We are not told whether the young Perec knew by this time how his mother died, nor whether he invented the fantasy of W before or after seeing the exhibition: Perec deliberately avoids constructing narratives which supply sequences of cause and effect, leaving the reader to speculate whether his adolescent fantasy might have been an unconscious or displaced representation of the horrors to which he was not quite a witness. What his drawings did attest to was a sense of profound dislocation, a dislocation which also characterized his memories of that time - 'mechanical vehicles with disconnected nozzles, discontinuous cordage, disengaged wheels rotating in the void ... the legs of the athletes were separated from their trunks, their arms were out of their torsos, their hands gave them no grasp' (68).

The reader also becomes aware of the way in which the memory of the concentration camp exhibition has supplied a detail of the 'adventure-story': the 'deep scratches on the oak door' of the ship's cabin made by the 'bleeding fingernails' (58) of the child Gaspard's mother in her attempt to escape from the wrecked ship reinforces the oblique connection between Perec the child who lost his mother, and Gaspard who was lost at sea and never found. In *Je suis né* Perec tells the story of how he ran away from home at the age or 11 or 12, while he was living in Paris with the aunt and uncle who subsequently adopted him: he spent a lonely and pointless day, and when he was found, according to David Bellos, he 'sank into a defensive, almost autistic silence: he spoke to nobody, did not answer those who spoke to him'. At around the same time his psychotherapist Françoise

Dolto said: 'But he's lost himself, absolutely!' [45] This is one of the 'fragile overlappings' between the two stories which Perec refers to in his preface, and which 'make apparent what is never quite said in one, never quite said in the other'. What is 'never quite said' is, of course, the double displacement of Perec onto his adventure story narrator, the second Gaspard Winckler, and onto the traumatised eight year-old child whose body is never found. Otto Apfelstahl, who tells the story of the first Gaspard to the second, offers two possible interpretations of the loss of the child: from the evidence of the ship's log and its position when it was wrecked it was on its way back, either to find the child who had *escaped*, or because he had been *abandoned* by his mother who had then changed her mind. Another 'fragile overlapping': a six year-old child sent away by his mother as a means of *escape* would also have experienced this separation as *abandonment* , and possibly, as Bellos suggests, as a reason for guilt - the child was unable to protect his mother. [46]

Perec had at one time intended to include a third section in *W*, to be called 'Critique ou Intertexte: (histoire du fantasme, du projet d'écriture, metadiscours)': [47] using the threefold structure of autobiographical writing which I developed in Chapter Two - the event, the memory of the event, the writing of (the memory of) the event - this would presumably have expanded what already exists in the text as a *fourth* layer , the writer's analysis of the writing of his memory. Derrida points out that *Nachträg* also means 'supplement', or, literally, 'appendix, postscript': 'The text we call present may be deciphered only at the bottom of the page, in a footnote or postscript. Before the recurrence, the present is only a call for a footnote'. [48] But

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[45] Bellos, *Georges Perec*, 99-100.

[46] Bellos, *Georges Perec*, 555.

[47] Philippe Lejeune, 'Points de Repere Chronologiques et Bibliographiques' in *Parcours Perec: Colloque de Londres, Mars 1988: Textes reúnies par Mirielle Ribière* (Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 1990), 70. Lejeune analyses Perec's autobiographical writings in 'Les Projets Autobiographiques de Georges Perec' in the same volume, showing that much of Perec's work can be read as an extended and intertextual exploration of the nature of memory. In *Les Lieux*, for example, Perec planned, each year for twelve years, to describe twelve places in Paris which had some personal significance for him, once *in situ* and once from memory: these descriptions would be placed in sealed envelopes and reopened at the end of the twelve years in order to form a book. The project was abandoned, but it demonstrates Perec's conscious concern with the retranscription of memory: one of his 'places' was the Rue Vilin where he lived as a young child in Paris and which is described on page 47-49 of *W*, where he also mentions the *Lieux* project.

although Perec does 'decipher' the text of his memories in footnotes, there is, as David Bellos points out, a residue of 'uncorrected' details and false clues which function as defences or as clues to the reader that memory is always provisional, that 'the surest engagement with memory lies in its perpetual irresolution'. [49] The text is evidence of a residual refusal to be 'found': Perec uses 'dream and memory' (and fantasy) ' to reveal himself up to a determined point, then avails himself of their possibilities to conceal that which is consequent to the revelation'. [50] What is 'found' instead is the island of W, which is 'really' the concentration camp, which can also 'never quite' be 'said'. The lost child - Perec himself when there was 'no mooring', an 'absence of landmarks', 'no sequence in time' (68), later claiming to have 'no childhood memories' - is thus finally identified with the 'History' which, he said, excused him from having a 'history' of his own.

Memory as text

Throughout the text, Perec evokes the *materiality* of writing in its relationship with memory in terms that recall Derrida's reading of Freud's 'Notes on the Mystic Writing Pad': 'The unconscious text is already a weave of pure traces, differences in which meaning and forces are united - a text nowhere present, consisting of archives which are *always already* transcriptions. Originary prints'. [51] Perec says: 'The idea of writing the story of my past arose almost at the same time as the idea of writing' (26) suggesting the identification between memory and writing made by David Farrell Krell - 'and so it seems that writing is of memory and memory of writing before there is writing in the usual sense - since time immemorial, as it were'. [52] So, in spite of the fact that Perec knows that 'what I say is blank, is neutral, is a sign, once and for all, of a once-and-for-all annihilation', writing is still necessary: 'I write because we lived together ... I write because they' (his parents) 'left in me their indelible mark, whose trace is writing. Their memory is dead in

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[48] Jacques Derrida, 'Freud and the Scene of Writing' in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 196-231; 212.

[49] Young, *Counter-Monument*, 269.

[50] Motte, *The Poetics of Experiment*, 98. David Bellos describes Perec's technique as the use of 'consistent falsification to communicate otherwise unutterable emotions' (*Georges Perec*, 597).

[51] Derrida, 'Freud and the Scene of Writing', 211.

[52] David Farrell Krell, *Of Memory, Reminiscence and Writing: On The Verge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 49.

writing; writing is the memory of their death and the assertion of my life' (42). To write is

> essayer méticuleusement de retenir quelque chose, de faire survivre quelque chose: arracher quelques bribes au vide qui se creuse, laisser, quelque part, un sillon, une trace, une marque ou quelques signes.
> (to try meticulously to retain something, to make something survive, to tear some scraps out of the emptiness that opens up, to leave, somewhere, a furrow, a trace, a mark or some signs.) [53]

This need to leave behind a physical mark or 'trace' of one's existence or experience is close to James E. Young's account of the demand of some survivors 'that words not just signify experiences but that they become - like the writers themselves - *traces* of their experiences'. [54] Despite his recognition that writing cannot create or re-create presence -'their memory is dead in writing' - Perec also affirms that 'the unsayable is not buried inside writing, it is what prompted it in the first place' (42), thus asserting the existence of a reality outside of discourse; the camps did exist, his mother was killed there. But *W* insists upon memory as *text*; of his two stories Perec writes: 'in the crisscross web they weave as in my reading of them I know there is to be found the *inscription* and the description of the path I have taken, the passage of my history and the story of my passage' (7).

'All of this autobiographical work', writes Perec, 'was organised around a single memory which, for me, was profoundly obscured, deeply buried, and, in a sense, denied'. [55] His only surviving memory of his mother, of his parting from her at the age of six, demonstrates both the textuality of memory - 'the *points of suspension* on which the broken threads of childhood and the web of writing are caught' - and the continual process of retranscription to which it is subject. The memory is briefly recounted in section 8: '...the day she took me to the Gare de Lyon, which is where I left for Villard-de-Lans in a Red Cross convoy: though I

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[53] Quoted from Georges Perec, *Espèces d'espaces*(Paris: Galilée, 1974) by Motte, *The Poetics of Experiment*, 106; my translation.

[54] James E. Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 23.

[55] Quoted from Georges Perec, *Je me souviens* (Paris: Hachette, 1978) by Bellos, *Georges Perec*, 549.

have no broken bones, I wear my arm in a sling. My mother buys me a comic entitled *Charlie and the Parachute:* on the illustrated cover, the parachute's rigging lines are nothing other than Charlie's trousers' braces' (26). A slightly more fully developed version of this memory is given later, in Section 10, in a sub-section entitled THE DEPARTURE: here Perec says that his aunt told him some time after the formation of the memory he did not have his arm in a sling, that there would have been no need for him to pretend to be wounded (part of the child's fantasy) as he was leaving legally as a 'war orphan'. In fact, as he tells us in a footnote, he was wearing a truss, a 'suspensory bandage' for a hernia that was later operated upon in Grenoble (55). Perec does not reflect upon this 'retranscription' or subsequent alteration of the memory of a possibly embarrassing truss to that of a slightly more heroic sling - possibly the child fantasised *at the time of the formation of the memory* that he was wearing a sling, so that this is the 'reality' which is subsequently 'remembered'. Nor does he 'correct' what David Bellos has identified as another 'mistake' in this early memory: Bellos claims that it would have been impossible to buy a Charlie Chaplin comic in Paris in 1941, as Chaplin had been banned following his impersonation of Hitler in *The Great Dictator.* [56] Perec goes on to comment: 'A triple theme runs through this memory: parachute, sling, truss: it suggests suspension, support, almost artificial limbs. To be, I need a prop. Sixteen years later, in 1958, when, by chance, military service briefly made a parachutist of me, I suddenly saw, in the very instant of jumping, one way of deciphering the text of this memory: I was plunged into nothingness; all the threads were broken; I fell, on my own, without any support. The parachute opened. The canopy unfurled, a fragile and firm suspense before the controlled descent' (55).

The fact that his early memory still incorporates the 'mistake' of Chaplin's image is an acknowledgement of the fact that early memories are often reconstructed at least in part out of later events and images, demonstrating Freud's claim about the nature of childhood memories in the essay on Leonardo da Vinci: they 'are not fixed at the moment of being experienced and afterwards repeated, but are only elicited at a later age when childhood is already past; in the process they are altered and falsified, and are put in the service of later trends, so that generally speaking they cannot be sharply distinguished from phantasies'. [57] The parachute which supported Perec's

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[56] Bellos, *Georges Perec*, 58.

[57] Sigmund Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood*, PF Vol. 14, 143-231; 173.

fall in 1957 has been superimposed upon a (different) comic his mother may actually have bought him: the memory thus functions as a retrospective reconstruction of his first fall, his separation from his mother. The meaning of this memory is re-interpreted yet again in the light of another, similar 'false' memory. In section 15 Perec describes being knocked over by a sledge while he was skating at Villard-de-Lans, where he lived during his 'exile': his scapula was broken and his arm had to be tightly strapped behind his back 'in a whole contraption of bandages' which made any movement impossible. In his memory, this accident evoked tremendous sympathy from others. On going back to Villard in 1970 and talking with an old school friend, he discovers that the accident - described identically in all its details - happened not to him but to another classmate, Philippe. Perec was thus 'not a heroic victim but just a witness' (80). These false memories of physical, vaguely heroic, sympathy-evoking and relatively easily mended 'breaks' have come to stand in for the *real* trauma, 'which was mentioned only in an undertone', although 'today it seems to me that the metaphor will not serve as a way of describing what had been broken - and what it was surely pointless hoping to contain within the guise of an imaginary limb' (80-81). These memories thus represent a (not entirely successful) displacement of the diffused and only-partly understood trauma of the loss of his mother onto more specific and comprehensible injuries.

Another of Perec's early memories is 'not the memory of a scene, but a memory of the word, only a memory of the letter that has turned into a word' (77). This is the word/letter 'x' - 'a saw-horse' (used by an old man in Villard) 'made of a pair of upended parallel crosses, each in the shape of an x...connected by a perpendicular crossbar, the whole device being called, quite simply, an x' (76). Derrida explains that Freud, 'in order to suggest the strangeness of the logico-temporal relations in dreams, constantly adduces writing, and the spatial synopses of pictograms, rebuses, hieroglyphics and non-phonetic writing in general'. [58] The Hebrew alphabet is closely derived from the Phoenician, which was hieroglyphic, the letters developing from symbols which originally represented the objects themselves, then coming to denote the initial sound of the word for that object. 'X' is a letter which is still also the name of an object, and the representation of the shape of the object: such signs assert the materiality of language. Perec goes on to trace the changing

[58] Derrida,' Freud and the Scene of Writing', 217.

referents and uses of the sign 'x', from sign of deletion, of words turned into blanks, to the 'geometrical fantasy, whose basic figure is the double V' (the sound of 'W' in French) 'and whose complex convolutions trace out the major symbols of the story of my childhood' (77) - the W of his fantasy, the swastika and the star of David. This memory thus fits the pattern of those elicited at a later date and 'put into the service of later trends': one can even imagine that the 'x' of the saw-horse was remembered instead of the swastika the child may have seen on the uniforms of the German soldiers who visited his school (the head teachers were members of the Resistance). The hieroglyph also suggests Perec's description of his handwriting up to the age of 17 or 18: 'that unjoined-up writing, made of separate letters unable to forge themselves into a word' (68) which he compares to the disconnectedness of his memories from his time in Villard, and which he also links to the disconnected figures he drew at the time of the invention of the island of W. Through the material sign of written language the child Perec represents not only the disconnectedness of his own life but also, perhaps, at some unconscious level, the sense of disconnection experienced by the inmates of the camps, and the degeneration and distortion of human bodies nevertheless compelled to 'work'.

Screen Memories

Perec refers to the 'high wall of prefabricated memories' that had to be broken down during his psychoanalysis: Levi describes the way that memories 'evoked too often' become 'crystallised, perfect, adorned', taking the place of 'raw memory and grow[ing] at its expense'. Perec's account of his two earliest memories, and the way in which he footnotes and 'corrects' them, show this process exactly, although here there is an insistence upon the impossibility of uncovering 'raw memory'. These memories, he says, 'are not entirely implausible, even though, obviously, the many variations and imaginary details I have added in the telling of them - in speech or in writing - have altered them greatly, if not completely distorted them' (13). In the first of these he sees himself as a three year-old sitting on the floor surrounded by Yiddish newspapers and a warm, loving, complete family group, admiring the new-born child - '(but didn't I say a moment ago that I was three?)' - who has just deciphered his first Hebrew character, a letter which he calls the 'gammeth or gammel', which he reproduces in the text. A footnote comments: 'Excess detail such as this is all that is needed to ruin the memory or in any case to burden it with a letter it did not possess. There is in fact a letter called 'Gimmel'

which I like to think could be the initial of my first name; it looks absolutely nothing like the sign I have drawn which could just about masquerade as a "mem" or "M"' (13). Bellos explains that the Hebrew 'letter' which Perec reproduces in the text is a 'manifestly non-existent, Hebrew-seeming squiggle that is in reality nothing other than a regularised mirror-image of Perec's own handwritten first initial, G. Perec's first memory is thus nothing of the sort; it is rather a (re)construction of his origin in writing'. [59] Perec goes on to explain that his aunt has recently told him that one of his favourite games as a three year-old when he visited her was deciphering the letters in French, not Yiddish newspapers.

Perec does not read the text of this memory any further, but it is possible to do so in terms of Freud's analysis of screen memories - memories of apparently trivial events which have come to mask, or stand in for, more significant or painful ones. [60] Freud explains that screen memories can work retroactively: later events cause particular aspects of earlier memory-traces to 're-surface' to consciousness, and to acquire meaning that they did not have at the time. In the footnote Perec claims that

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[59] Bellos, *Georges Perec*, 552. Bellos also explains that in his translation of *W* he 'corrected' what he thought was a mistake, changing 'men' to 'mem'. Perec *did* write 'men', but '[t]here is no Hebrew letter called men ... But M is W turned upside down ...It is a diabolical game to play with the *mem*ory of a Jewish childhood' (553).

[60] Sigmund Freud, 'Screen Memories' (1899), *SE* Vol. III, 301-322. In its simplest form, a 'screen memory' records an apparently trivial image or event which masks a more painful one. But Freud's most detailed example (an unacknowledged memory of his own) incorporates another feature which brings it close to the function of *Nachträglichkeit*. The imaginary subject of this analyis remembers playing in a meadow at the age of two or three, picking dandelions with a boy and girl cousin; the boys snatch the little girl's flowers away from her, and she is comforted by a peasant woman who gives her a piece of bread. The little boys throw their flowers away and demand a piece of bread also; the colour of the flowers and the taste of the bread have a hallucinatory quality. When questioned, the subject realises that he first remembered this scene at the age of seventeen, when he revisited his childhood home in the country and fell in love with a young girl, who wore a yellow dress; he remembers thinking how comfortable his life would have been had his father's business not collapsed, forcing them to move to a large town. Three years later, he became aware that his father and uncle had plans for him to change the subject of his studies for something more lucrative, settle down and marry his cousin, the same little girl who featured in the memory. Freud tells him: 'You projected the two phantasies' (of marrying the girl in the yellow dress, and his cousin) 'on to one another and made a childhood memory of them' (315). The delicious tasting bread symbolises the comfortable life he could have had with either of the young women, and the snatching of the flowers the sexual desire he felt for them. The meaning, and possible even the content, of this memory has thus been constructed *nachträglich*,in much the same way as Perec's memory of his farewell to his mother.

the letter he has drawn is closer to the first letter of the word 'mother/mère/mama' - the mother who Perec lost at the age of six. The referent of the sign thus slides between Perec (G, the gammel) and his mother, suggesting both a displacement *and* wish-fulfillment - the child is surrounded by 'the entirety, the totality of the family' - the family that was destroyed by 1941. The identification of the sign which means 'mem' with the letter 'gimmel' suggests the dyad of mother and child which is broken by the entry of the child into the symbolic order, the reading and writing which Perec will later state is 'the assertion of my life'. In *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, Freud describes a memory of a 25 year-old man which is similarly focused on a letter: he remembers being taught the alphabet by his aunt, and having difficulties over the difference between 'n' and 'm'. Freud suggests that this memory acquired its meaning at a later date, when the boy became anxious about another difference, that between men and women, represented retrospectively by the 'third stroke' of the letter 'm'. [61] The buried text of this memory also takes us back to Lyotard's 'first blow', the 'shock without an affect' which is sexual difference itself. This difference is here elided with the 'difference' of Jewishness: the footnote tells us that 'really' the child Perec began to decipher letters in French, not Hebrew: here the memory (or its subsequent retranscription) reveals a truth that had to be concealed, the family's Jewish identity, the reason, of course, for the loss of his mother. In footnote 8 to section 8, Perec accounts for the origin, meaning, differing spellings and versions of his surname: 'This explanation signals but by no means exhausts the complex fantasies, connected to the concealment of my Jewish background through my patronym, which I elaborated around the name I bear' (36). Perec's 'inaccurate' early memory thus reveals a greater historical 'accuracy' - the fact of the family's Jewishness - than a 'true' memory of the event - if indeed such an event did take place.

In 'Screen Memories' Freud describes how often, in early childhood 'memories', 'the subject sees himself in the recollection as a child, with the knowledge that this child is himself; he sees this child, however, as an observer from outside the scene would see him...it is evident that such a picture cannot be an exact repetition of the impression that was originally received'. [62] Freud takes this feature of childhood memories as evidence that the original memory-trace has been 'worked over' in the

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[61] Sigmund Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901) PF Vol. 5, 89.

[62] Freud, *Psychopathology*, 88.

way in which Perec acknowledges: he says that the subject and lighting of the scene are 'reminiscent of a painting, maybe a Rembrandt or maybe an invented one, which may have been called "Jesus amid the Doctors"'. The 'correction' which he supplies in the footnote reinforces the idea that the adult has placed himself as a child in the scene: 'All the paintings entitled "Jesus amid the Doctors" depict him as an adult' (14). Freud says: 'In my own case the earliest childhood memories are the only ones of a visual character; they are regular scenes worked out in plastic form, comparable only to representations on the stage'. [63] For Freud and for Perec, the static, visual, 'crystallised' quality of these memories suggests that they are the product of subsequent reworkings and retranscriptions: for Donald Spence, 'pure' memory is visual, subsequently distorted by language.

One further memory that Perec retranslates suggests both that the body acts as a mediator or container of memory, but also that this mediation may be indirect, functioning as a screen for another, more deeply buried trace. Perec says that he has three memories of his time at school before he left Paris: the third is of being awarded a medal for good work, but then losing it when he accidentally pushed a little girl over on the stairs in a crush. The medal was torn off his chest, and he writes:

> I can still physically *feel* that shove in the back, that flagrant proof of injustice; and the sensation in my whole body of a loss of balance imposed by others, coming from above and falling on to me, remains so deeply imprinted that I wonder if this memory does not in fact conceal its precise opposite: not the memory of a medal torn off, but of a star pinned on. (54) [64]

The 'loss of balance imposed by others' recalls his parachute descent and the 'points of suspension' connected with his parting from his mother, not to speak of

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[63] Freud, *Psychopathology*, 88.

[64] David Bellos suggests that this is another of Perec's 'little flags of deception': yellow stars, he says, were stitched, not 'pinned' on, and in any case the regulation obliging Jews to wear the star did not come into effect in France until after Perec had left for the Free Zone. For Bellos, this is part of the book's design, 'to keep the child most hidden at precisely those points where he seems nearest to being found' (*Georges Perec*, 56-7). Whether it is a conscious or unconscious 'mistake', it also demonstrates the way in which memories, even 'of the body', can incorporate later knowledge or vicarious experience.

the dislocation caused by the war itself. The medal/star recalls the medals awarded to the victorious athletes on W, and the arbitrary ways in which they are subsequently lost. This memory 'of the body' could thus be seen as having come to stand in for other, more painful and significant injustices and losses.

Conclusion

Perec foregrounds the materiality of language, the written sign as a mark of absence. The child Gaspard is deaf and dumb, and apart from the story of the first Gaspard which is narrated to the second by Otto Apfelstahl, there is very little direct speech in the text. Primo Levi describes how, in the camps, 'use of the word to communicate thought, this necessary and sufficient mechanism for man to be man, had fallen into disuse'. [65] He describes the language of the camps as 'orts-und-zeitgebunden' (tied to time and place): prisoners who could not pick up very quickly the debased German of the camps - the 'Raus! Schnell!' of the Olympian island of W - had very little chance of survival. But he also describes the paralysed child Hurbinek, born in Auschwitz, struggling to speak as he is dying: 'his eyes ... flashed terribly alive, full of demand, assertion, of the will to break loose, to shatter the tomb of his dumbness ... he fought like a man, to the last breath, to gain his entry into the world of men'. [66] Speech, language and writing become essential means of restoring a sense of humanity as well as of bearing witness, in spite of Levi's recognition that 'our language lacks words to express this offence'. [67] For Perec, also, writing is 'the assertion of my life' and making the Holocaust an 'extreme limit case' of the 'impossibility' of writing would thus deny the claim to life and humanity here being made. To speak at all is to express the desire to be recognized and heard, whether as a traumatised child or as the inhabitant of a world in which there is no 'other' to address. *W* constitutes 'un appel: le lecteur est sommé de prendre la place de l'Autre' ('an appeal: the reader is summoned to take the place of the Other') [68], as well as also being *put in the place of* the subject coming to knowledge.

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[65] Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 70-71.

[66] Levi, *If This is a Man / The Truce* , 197-8.

[67] Levi, *If This is a Man / The Truce* , 32.

[68] Andy Leak, 'W/Dans un réseau de lignes entrecroisées: souvenir, souvenir-écran et construction dans *W ou le souvenir d'enfance*'in *Parcours Perec*, 75-90; 81.

David Bellos suggests that the enforced but 'vitally necessary act of forgetting' his Jewishness caused Perec to grow up into a man 'always puzzled by memory and sometimes obsessed with the fear of forgetting'. [69] But in spite of Perec's almost obsessive documentation elsewhere in his work of memories - of dreams, places, meals eaten, objects in a room - almost in the process of their formation, *W* demonstrates that 'remembering is not contrary to forgetting. "True memory" is found at the *intersection* of remembrance and oblivion, at the instant where the memory returns which was both forgotten and preserved by our forgetting'. [70] *W* represents a refusal to 'inscribe in memory', which, as Lyotard says, 'might seem a good defence against forgetting', but which 'can be just the opposite'. [71] It is a 'writing of the ruins' [72] - literally so in the case of the ruins of W - and a text which 'remembers that it has forgotten the Forgotten' - the 'forgotten' of childhood memories as such, and of the event which destroyed that childhood. A biographer might be concerned to establish which of Perec's memories are 'genuinely' false and which have been consciously reconstructed, but *W* is a text, not a slice of memory, which demonstrates the impossibility of a complete and accurate reconstruction of the past in a way which renders the question of the degree of consciousness of memory's retranscriptions irrelevant. Afterwardsness is built into the structure of the text not only because of Perec's constant retranslations of memory, but because the central event around which it is structured, his parting from his mother, is one characterised by unpreparedness and belatedness. One of his early memories represents a moment of imaginary wholeness with 'the entirety, the totality of the family' (13), but it is a memory which is immediately acknowledged as at least in part constructed out of the fantasy which it represents. The text represents in material form - the 'points of suspension' - the gap between an initial, unassimilated and unrepresented shock - the loss of his mother - and its later manifestation, the fantasy of W and its subsequent retranscriptions. It is also a text which represents the 'silence' demanded of those who did not directly experience the Holocaust, but for whom it has become the material of fantasy, and, literally and of necessity, of words.

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[69] Bellos, *Georges Perec*, 68.

[70] Merleau-Ponty, quoted by Krell, *Of Memory*, 101.

[71] Lyotard, *Heiddeger and "the jews"*,26.

[72] Lyotard, *Heiddeger and "the jews"*, 43.

Chapter Five

Rememory and History: Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

Introduction: Rememory and Reconstruction

'Rememory' is a concept central to the structure and meaning of Toni Morrison's *Beloved.*[1] It is a term which has been variously interpreted by readers of the novel: what most critics have missed is the fact that it designates both positive and negative processes and states of mind.[2] My analyses of the partly contradictory meanings of 'rememory', and of the associated term 'reconstruction', provide a framework for my reading of the novel. I shall argue that on the one hand the 're' in Morrison's 'rememory' confirms the view of memory as a process of 'retranscription' and 'retranslation': on the other, that the reliving of the pre-oedipal mother-infant dyad in the relationship of Sethe and Beloved enacts the trope of memory as nostalgia for the 'pure' past, seen in this instance as both necessary but ultimately destructive. 'Rememory' also indicates a point of intersection between individual memory of personal experience and cultural or collective memory: in *Beloved* a murdered child returns to exact due recognition of the pain and loss of the personal past, and is also made to bear the symbolic weight of the repressed or forgotten histories of her people.

Beloved, albeit based on a historical event, the killing of her child by the escaped slave Margaret Garner, is a novel. Its author thus stands in a different relationship to her material than the authors of the autobiographical texts so far discussed, both in terms of time and narrative voice. The novel comes 'afterwards' in a double

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[1] Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (1987; London: Picador, 1988). All page references to this edition will be cited in the text.

[2] See especially Rebecca Ferguson, 'History, Memory and Language in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*' in Susan Sellers, ed., *Feminist Criticism: Theory and Practice* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 109-127; Mae G. Henderson, 'Toni Morrison's *Beloved* : Re-Membering the Body as Historical Text' in Hortense J. Spillers, *Comparative American Identities: Race, Sex and Nationality in the Modern Text* (London: Routledge, 1991), 62-86; Helene Moglen, 'Redeeming History: Toni Morrison's *Beloved*', *Cultural Critique* 24 (1993), 17-40; Asnaf Rushdy, '"Rememory": Primal Scenes and Constructions in Toni Morrison's Novels', *Contemporary Literature* 31 (1990), 300-323; and Jean Wyatt, 'Giving Body to the Word: The Maternal Symbolic in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*', PMLA 108, 3 (1993), 474-488.

sense: the present time of the narrative is the year 1873, during the period of Reconstruction just after the Civil War and the abolition of slavery. But the central events, those which are constantly half-remembered and half-told during the first section of the novel, take place some sixteen years earlier, when Sethe, the central character, escaped from slavery on a farm called Sweet Home in Kentucky, gave birth to her younger daughter Denver on the banks of the Ohio River, and murdered her older daughter to prevent her being taken back into slavery. Rememory - remembering again - thus refers to the events which Sethe tries *not* to remember, and to the period of American history which Morrison believes it is vital to remember. The term 'reconstruction' can be used to refer to specific psychoanalytic processes and to the work of the historian or archaeologist: Morrison has also spoken of her writing as the attempt to 'reconstruct a world'.[3] The 're' of reconstruction, like the 're' of rememory, signals something that takes place 'again', 'afterwards', 'for a second time': it suggests both repetition and the reinterpretation to which time inevitably subjects our knowledge of the past. The tension between differing psychoanalytic meanings of reconstruction - the complete and accurate recreation of the past, and the continuous process of reconstructing previous constructions - is refigured here in the conflicting meanings and purposes of the term in a particular politico-historical case. Reconstruction aimed to restore the Union and reunite a society shattered by civil war: it was also the time when ex-slaves struggled to reconstruct lives, families and identities in the wake of 'certain kinds of dissolution' which Morrison sees as having been experienced by blacks as 'the first truly modern people'; she speaks of 'the loss of and the need to reconstruct certain kinds of stability.'[4] When Paul D. attempts to reconstruct that stability for Sethe after the disappearance of Beloved, he remembers Sixo describing how he felt about his Thirty Mile Woman: 'The pieces I am, she gather them and give them back to me in all the right order' (272-3). For Sethe, this process of re-ordering or reconstructing takes place through rememory - remembering again in a context of trust after a period of attempting to forget.

The language of the text also evokes the disintegration and reconstruction of shattered and fragmented *bodies*, bodies reduced to 'seared, divided, ripped-apart'[5] *flesh* on the slave ships and under torture, divided and measured by

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[3] Toni Morrison, 'The Site of Memory' in *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir* ed. William Zinsser (Boston: Houghton: Mifflin, 1987), 112.

[4] 'Living Memory': Toni Morrison talks to Paul Gilroy, *City Limits*, 31 March - 7 April 1988, 11.

Schoolteacher, and also the pre-oedipal 'fragmented body imperfectly effaced by our illusions of coherence'. [6] Sethe and Beloved relive or reconstruct the imaginary unity of the mother-infant dyad of which they were deprived, both in terms of their own violent separation and the depleted possibilities of mothering under slavery, represented in the text by Sethe's absent relation with her own mother. Carole Boyce Davies suggests that 'reconstructions of mothering have been continuous' in black culture in response to the over-determination of the black woman slave as 'Mammy' and to the fact that, under slavery, the offspring of the female does not "belong" to the mother': [7] according to Jean Wyatt, Morrison 'reconstructs the acts of maternal heroism' in the narratives of Harriet Jacobs and Lucy Delaney 'as the reproductive feats of the maternal body'. [8] Morrison explores 'the power and the danger of the maternal inscription for black women': [9] the reconstruction which the novel enacts is both a powerful re-affirmation and a regression or repetition which is ultimately shown to be destructive.

Defining slavery as a form of pathology, Morrison has suggested that in order to construct and maintain it as a system, white people 'have had to reconstruct everything in order to make that system appear true', a process which continued after abolition in order to maintain supremacy. [10] Reconstruction here means a radical revision of reality in order to justify slavery or racist ideology. But used in the sense of reconstructing a fuller and more accurate view of the historical past, a more positive process of reconstruction has demonstrated that slavery played a central role in the development of American culture and history: its previous dismissal as a 'tragic' or 'peculiar' aberration was part of the construction of America as an 'innocent future' in which 'the past is absent or ... romanticised'.[11]

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[5] Hortense J. Spillers,'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book', *diacritics* 17, 2 (1987), 65-81; 67.

[6] Elizabeth Abel, 'Race, Class and Psychoanalysis? Opening Questions' in Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller, eds., *Conflicts in Feminism* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 184-204; 188.

[7] Carole Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (London: Routledge, 1994), 136. Davies describes *Beloved* as 'one of the most deliberate problematizings of motherhood that I have encountered' (135).

[8] Wyatt, 'Giving Body to the Word', 475.

[9] Sally Keenan, 'From Myth to Memory: the Revisionary Writing of Angela Carter, Maxine Hong Kingston and Toni Morrison' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Essex, 1992), 278.

[10] Morrison, 'Living Memory' , 11.

Beloved is clearly part of a recent rediscovery and re-representation of the trauma and impact of slavery on American culture. Sally Keenan has suggested that Morrison's 'exploration of that liminal condition, between the then of slavery and the future of freedom, acts as an analogue to the relationship of contemporary African Americans to their past; the need, that is, to recover and recall their history, and the need to escape the cycle of oppression and violence it tells, and in which many remain entrapped'. [12] It embodies a recognition of the uncomfortable fact that the legacy of slavery might be the tendency to inflict violence on the self, and of the need to acknowledge the traumas of the past in order to leave them behind.

Beloved is an imaginative reconstruction of the experience of slavery in that Morrison is representing something she did not directly experience: it is also an attempt to represent, or reconstruct, what has been only partially represented - the enslaved Africans' experience of the Middle Passage. Morrison describes how, '[o]ver and over, the writers [of slave narratives] pull the narrative up short with a phrase such as "but let us draw a veil over these proceedings to terrible to relate" ... most importantly ... there was no mention of their interior life'. [13] More specifically, Morrison has referred to 'a silence of four hundred years ... the void of historical discourse on slave parent/child relationships and pain'.[14] Gina Wisker has suggested that *Beloved* 'articulates and embodies a history and experience which has been ostensibly, literally and "safely" recuperated but is actually still "raw"'. In Paul D.'s painful, hesitant account of Halle's traumatised witnessing of Sethe's rape the text recognises that some experiences cannot be fully articulated, that they might remain "raw". [15] Morrison suggests the inadequacy of 'historical discourse' in the claim she makes for art: 'There is so much more to

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[11] Morrison, 'Living Memory', 11.

[12] Keenan, 'From Myth to Memory', 240.

[13] Morrison, 'The Site of Memory', 109-110. This turning aside from events 'too terrible to relate' is echoed by a survivor of the concentration camps in Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah*: 'And let's not talk about that'. *Shoah* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 7.

[14] Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 22.

[15] Elaine Jordan says that 'the story of Halle Garner ... is always promised within *Beloved,* but it is the story which can never be told, the story of those women and men who did not escape or survive, who suffered the worst beyond what can be recalled'. '"Not My People": Toni Morrison and Identity' in Gina Wisker, ed., *Black Women's Writing* (London: Macmillan, 1993), 111-126; 118.

remember and describe, for purposes of exorcism and salvatory rites of passage ... things must be made ... some fixing ceremony ... some memorial, something, some altar, somewhere ...where these things can be released, thought, and felt ...but the consequences of slavery only artists can deal with'. [16] The tentativeness of this formulation suggests that Morrison is searching for a way to articulate the relationship between art and historical suffering; Leo Bersani has criticized the assumption that art can 'redeem' suffering, which might be suggested by Morrison's idea that the novel can provide 'salvatory rites of passage'. [17] But in *Beloved* she uses the form of the novel to respect and represent the gaps, silences and dislocations which are the marks of such suffering; the novel attests to the impossibility of fully representing or recuperating such experiences as Halle's traumatised witnessing or the Middle Passage itself. 'There is so much more to remember' not only as a counter to the mainstream myth of American 'innocence', but also because of the 'deliberate, calculated, survivalist intention to forget' [18] which, according to Morrison, characterized African-American responses to slavery. *Beloved* testifies to the impossibility of forgetting without adequate remembering, whilst recognizing that remembering - or finding form and expression for one's memories - may never be complete. As Asnaf Rushdy puts it: ' *Beloved* is the story that stops haunting when told, and stops being when disremembered, but must be remembered to be told, and must be told to be disremembered'. [19]

Narrative voice: interpersonal anamnesis

Although Morrison saw her task as one of restoring an interior life to people who were either presumed not to have one, or whose subjectivity had never been fully represented, *Beloved* is not written in the first person. Its often indeterminate narrative voice represents the communal or collective process of remembering, described by Satya P. Mohanty as a 'braiding of consciousnesses'; [20] Morrison herself has spoken of her desire to 'have the reader *feel* the narrator without *identifying* that narrator'. [21] But it also raises the question of how far Sethe's

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[16] *The South Bank Show*, ITV, 11.10.1987.

[17] Leo Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 1-9.

[18] *The South Bank Show*.

[19] Asnaf Rushdy, 'Rememory', 317.

[20] Satya P. Mohanty, 'The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity: On *Beloved* and the Postcolonial Condition', *Cultural Critique* 24 (1993), 41-80; 58.

subjectivity and memories are being directly represented, to what extent she is represented as reconstructing her own history, or having it reconstructed for her by the narrator. There are many passages in which it is unclear whether Sethe is 'speaking' or being 'spoken for' by the narrator: the power of the text is such that most readers ignore the fact that Sethe is a narrative construction, not a real person who speaks through the text. This indeterminate narrative voice gives rise to radically different readings of the text. Mae G. Henderson reads the novel as a representation of Sethe's successfully completed 'task' of becoming the narrator or historian of her own life. Without making her strategy explicit, Henderson 'reads' the sections of the text which deal with Sethe's experience as narrated entirely by her, ignoring any distinction between character and narrator. [22]

Jean Wyatt also sees Sethe's dilemma in terms of an inability to represent her loss and trauma in language; she reads Sethe as spoken *for* by the narrator, the full story of the loss of Beloved still untold by Sethe herself: 'The hope at the end of the novel is that Sethe, having recognised herself as subject, *will* narrate the mother-daughter story and invent a language that can encompass the desparation of the slave mother who killed her daughter. Or will she?' [23] (my italics). Whilst it recognizes the open-endedness of the text, this question assumes an independent existence for Sethe outside the pages of the novel. These readings, interesting and suggestive though they are, tend to treat Sethe as a client in therapy rather than seeing her as a narrative construction through whom a powerful story is told. Many such readings of the novel focus on the moment when, soon after the arrival of Paul D., Sethe begins to feel that '[h]er story was bearable because it was his as well - to tell, to refine and tell again. The things neither knew about the other - the things neither had word-shapes for - well, it would come in time: where they led him off to sucking iron; the perfect death of her crawling-already? baby' (99).

In fact, these episodes from the painful past are narrated for the reader by a voice which articulates the inner language of memory of the characters, not by the

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[21] Quoted by Gayle Greene from a personal communication in 'Feminist Fiction and the Uses of Memory', *Signs*16, 2 (1991), 290-321; 318.

[22] Henderson, 'Toni Morrison's *Beloved:* 'Remembering the Body'. For example: 'Sethe's task is to transform the residual images ... of her past into a historical discourse shaped by narrativity' (66).

[23] Wyatt, 'Giving Body to the Word', 484.

characters directly to each other: Asnaf Rushdy's description of this technique is 'interpersonal anamnesis', [24] suggesting that 'rememory' takes place outside, or independently of, any one individual consciousness. The reader is also forced to witness the killing of the baby through the alienated eyes of Schoolteacher and the slavecatcher before approaching it more closely through Baby Suggs and Stamp Paid: even here, the reader is told what the character cannot bring himself to say. 'So Stamp Paid did not tell him [Paul D.] how she flew, snatching up her children like a hawk on the wing ...' (157). When Sethe is 'spinning' around Paul D. in the kitchen, circling around him and the core of the story she is trying to tell, '[h]e knew exactly what she meant: to get to a place where you could love anything you chose - not to need permission for desire -well now, *that* was freedom'. But Sethe knows 'that the circle she was making round the room, him, the subject, would remain one. That she could never close in, pin it down for any body who had to ask' (162-3). According to Jean Wyatt, 'the omniscient narrator subsequently fills in' this 'gap ... at the heart of her story': [25]

> Because the truth was simple ... Simple: she was squatting in the garden and when she saw them coming and recognized schoolteacher's hat, she heard wings. Little hummingbirds stuck their needle beaks right through her headcloth into her hair and beat their wings. And if she thought anything, it was No ... She just flew. Collected every bit of life she had made, all the parts of her that were precious and fine and beautiful, and carried, pushed, dragged them through the veil, out, away, over there where no one could hurt them. (163)

Henderson gives few specific textual references to substantiate her claim that Sethe becomes the 'historian' of her own life, but she would presumably include this passage as it is the first time that the event is narrated from Sethe's point of view. I would suggest, however, that the narrative voice is here articulating Sethe's internal representation of the event, the only 'word-shapes' (99) she can find to embody the 'outrageous claim' she made on the life of her child, a claim she hopes to be able to justify to Beloved before she leaves. The fact that the same image - the 'little hummingbirds' which stick their 'needle beaks' into her head - is used to represent Sethe's state of mind when she attempts to kill Mr. Bodwin, mistaking him for the

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[24] Rushdy, 'Rememory', 321.

[25] Wyatt, 'Giving Body to the Word', 476.

slave-catcher, suggests that it is Sethe's own internal consciousness which is being 'voiced' here by the narrator. All she is able to *say* to Paul D. here is: 'I stopped him ... I took and put my babies where they'd be safe' (164). When she recognises Beloved as the incarnation of the spirit of her baby daughter, she feels at first that she will not have to remember now that what is lost has been restored: repetition here functions, as Freud suggested, as a remedy for the failure of memory. Within the text, and for the reader, the re-enactment of the unspeakable drama of the past in the form of the symbiosis of mother and infant stands in for the full therapeutic narration of the traumatic event. The novel is the place where 'unspeakable thoughts' (199) - the internal monologues of the three women, articulating the ambivalences and intimacies of their relationships and memories, including the 'memory' of the Middle Passage - can be 'spoken' in a language that seems to come from a time *before* the constitution of the individual subject who might narrate a coherent or consistent story.

Like the Holocaust survivors interviewed by Dori Laub, Sethe has not forgotten the traumas of her past, but has not fully 'witnessed' or 'taken cognizance' of them. If Beloved represents 'the return of the repressed', the 'repressed' is here not the completely forgotten, but the sign of an unassimilated, isolated event. Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok's concept of 'preservative repression' is useful here: it 'seals off access to part of one's own life in order to shelter from view the traumatic monument of an obliterated event'. [26] Such events are preserved in what they call an 'intrapsychic tomb', and 'the tomb's content is unique in that it cannot appear in the light of day as speech. And yet, it is precisely a matter of words. Without question, in the depths of the crypt unspeakable words buried alive are held fast, like owls in ceaseless vigil'. [27] As Jean Wyatt makes clear, Sethe's inability to substitute the sign of language for the presence of her daughter indicates her own refusal to acknowledge her loss: Beloved is the 'phantom' which, according to Abraham and Torok 'represents the interpersonal and trans-generational consequences of silence'. The novel does find ways of breaking this silence, of speaking these 'unspeakable words': initially, however, the narrative reproduces this kind of 'not knowing', the half-sensed knowledge of an untransmitted secret, by placing the *reader* in this position. On the third page of the text we are told that

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[26] Nicholas T. Rand, 'Introduction: Renewals of Psychoanalsis' in Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel* Vol.1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 1-22; 18.
[27] Abraham and Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel* Vol. 1, 159-60.

Sethe's baby is haunting 124 because it is furious 'at having its throat cut' (5): the shocking incongruity of this statement remains unassimilated by the reader, who is not in a position to understand what exactly she is being told, or the possible reason or context for such a death. Morrison has described how, at the opening of the novel, '[t]he reader is snatched, yanked, thrown into an environment completely foreign ... Snatched just as the slaves were from one place to another, from any place to another, without preparation and without defense'. [28] This assimilation of reader to traumatised slave does seem a little glib, but Morrison is pointing to the way in which she is attempting to position the reader in the place of the subject who has not yet fully 'given birth to' the event. The reader gradually realises that Sethe murdered her own baby daughter: this is made clear when we are told the reason for Denver's years of deafness and isolation - Nelson Lord's question 'Didn't you mother get locked away for murder?' (104) The reader is required to 'work *with* the author in the construction of the book', to participate in the reconstruction of the story: [29] as suggested above, this reconstruction is a textual event rather than one which occurs entirely within the minds of the characters. This collaborative process - a 're-membering' or putting together the fragments of the story - puts the reader in a better position to understand Sethe's 'perfect dilemma' when the killing of the child is finally narrated. Even here the position of the reader is further destabilised when the event is narrated first through the eyes of the slave catcher, for whom the act was confirmation of 'the cannibal life they preferred' (151).

To the extent that Paul D. stands in the position of witness to Sethe's story, the event remains incompletely assimilated by the reader through *his* inability to accept it at this stage. Beloved's role as mediator of the 'unspeakable' experience of the Middle Passage further contextualises and historicises the event, and the re-enactment of the mother-infant dyad reworks it in terms of the psychic consequences of such a rupture. Using Cathy Caruth's formulation of the structure of trauma, the re-representing or re-remembering which the narrative of *Beloved* offers finally resituates the event 'in our immediate understanding', permitting 'history to arise where *immediate understanding* may not'. [30] In Lyotard's terms, the narrative presents the 'symptom' -the spiteful house, the baby ghost, the

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[28] Toni Morrison, 'Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature', *Michigan Quarterly Review* 28, 1 (1988), 1-34; 32.

[29] Greene, 'Feminist Fiction', 318.

[30] Cathy Caruth, 'Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History', *Yale French Studies* 79 (1991), 181-192; 182.

isolation of Sethe and Denver - before the event, the 'first blow' - the listing of Sethe's 'animal and human characteristics' (193), the theft of the milk from her breast, the murder of the child: in its avoidance of diachronic time, the narrative refuses to 'neutralize violence', to 'reappropriate the improper, achronological affect'. [31] The constant deferral of the narration of the trauma - manifest in the baby ghost and in the person of Beloved - represents the 'immemorial' as 'always "present" but never' - or at least only very gradually and tentatively - 'here-now'. [32]

Rememory: the persistence of the repeated?

The coinage of the term 'rememory' suggests that some part of the remembering process is left unacknowledged by the term 'memory'. When first encountered by the reader it suggests a vernacular form which blends 'remember' and 'memory': at one point Sethe refers to 'my rememory' as if it is synonymous with 'memory' and she uses 'to memory' as a verb interchangeably with 'to remember' (202). But the term gathers meaning as the novel progresses, and develops into a sign of the complex and sometimes contradictory processes which it articulates. It stresses the afterwardsness of memory, the *an* in Lyotard's *an*amnesis, the fact that memory is always a *re*presentation. It suggests 're-remembering', or 'remembering again', a remembering *after* a forgetting. It acknowledges the rediscovery of the role of memory in culture as well as the recollection of specific events: Orlando Patterson has suggested that part of the 'social death' of the slave was the loss of social or cultural memory. 'Slaves differed from other human beings in that they were not allowed freely to integrate the experience of [their] ancestors into their lives, to inform their understanding of social reality with the inherited meanings of their natural forbears, or to anchor the living present in any conscious community of memory'. [33] Morrison has made clear that she sees the novel as in itself a

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[31] Jean-François Lyotard, *Heidegger and "the jews"*, trans. Andreas Michel and Mark S. Roberts (1988; Minneapolis: University of Minnestota Press, 1990), 16.

[32] Lyotard, *Heidegger and "the jews"*,20.

[33] Orlando Patterson, extract from *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), in Lawrence B. Goodheart, Richard D. Brown, and Stephen G. Rabe, *Slavery in American Society* (Lexington: D.C.Heath and Co., 1993).

Henry Louis Gates Jr. stresses the dependence of the slave upon his or her individual memory in the absence of written records and of the continuity of inherited memory: 'In antebellum America,

representation of the rediscovery of memory: such rediscovery may unveil not only the positive heritage of lost African languages and traditions, and the healing power of a preacher like Baby Suggs, but also the 'shameful secrets' ... and 'nameless and undisclosed suffering' of the ancestors. Spillers suggests that even if the facts of the history of slavery have become familiar, 'the familiarity of this narrative does nothing to appease the hunger of recorded memory, nor does the persistence of the repeated rob these well-known, oft-told events of their power, even now, to startle. In a very real sense, every writing as revision makes the "discovery" all over again'. [34] The disorientation of the reader and the startling embodiment of history as ghost enacts this rediscovery within the text (as, in a very different way, Perec 'rediscovers' the Holocaust for the reader by allowing it to emerge out of a childhood fantasy).

Barbara Christian has described the effect of the novel on 'emotionally disturbed' black patients with whom she has worked: 'Unlike so many others who found the novel difficult to follow, these patients felt it to be a healing experience, one that mirrored their sense of their own personal and communal history and returned them to a point, sometimes only short-lived, where they were willing to remember what they had decided they did not want to remember. For many of them, that remembrance had to do with their parents, grandparents, the glimpses of ancestors that they had pushed away'. [35] When Sethe begins to remember what Nan told her of her ancestry, it is like 'picking meaning out of a code she no longer understood': Nan's insistence that Sethe should listen and understand what she is being told

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it was the deprivation of time in the life of the slave that first signaled his or her status as a piece of property. Slavery's time was delineated by memory and memory alone ... the dependence upon memory made the slave, first and foremost, a slave to himself or herself, a prisoner of his or her own power of recall. Within such a time machine, as it were, not only had the slave no fixed reference points, but also his or her own past could exist only as memory without support, as the text without foonotes, as the clock without two hands. The slave had no past beyond memory; the slave had lived at no time past the point of recollection'. *Figures in Black: Words, Signs, and the 'Racial Self'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 100-101. This account might seem to contradict Sethe's belief in 'rememory' as the persistence of images of the past which can be seen by those who did not experience them, but Gates is also suggesting the absence of the idea of time as a sequence of events which passes on: both Denver and Sethe have to learn, or relearn, this concept of time. The recovery of ancestral memory which the text represents also historicises and gives specific meaning to Freud's idea that individuals are bound to 'the memory-traces of the experiences of former generations'. (*Moses and Monotheism*, PF Vol. 13, 239-386; 345.)

[34] Spillers, 'Mama's Baby', 68-9.

[35] Barbara Christian, 'Fixing Methodologies: *Beloved*', *Cultural Critique* 24 (1993), 7-15; 8-9.

about her mother's history - 'Telling you. I am telling you, small girl Sethe ... She threw them all away but you' (62) - is part of her resistance to the idea of the slave as what Patterson called a 'genealogical isolate'. [36] Denver's insistence on hearing again and again, and then reconstructing with her newly rediscovered sister Beloved, the story of her own birth also functions as a confirmation of ancestry and of memory as a communal act. Remembering again, in new and more enabling contexts, is the positive process which the novel enacts, yet Sethe's problem is also the question of how to give due weight to the past without allowing it to consume the present - to overcome, to adapt Spillers' phrase, the 'persistence of the repeated'.

'Rememory' also suggests the process and structure of the novel itself, the necessary avoidance of, yet continual return to, the traumatic moments of the past. The death of Chicken Little in *Sula*, and Milkman's memory of being breastfed when he was already walking in *Song of Solomon* are also significant moments - 'primal scenes' by Asnaf Rushdy's definition - which are returned to in new contexts with different understanding. [37] This is what Jane Miller presumably has in mind when she defines 'rememory' as 'something like a willed remembering which includes its own strenuous reluctance to return to the past' [38], although it seems to me that memory in *Beloved* is more often *un*willed, involuntary, as in the early episode when Sethe is returning to 124 across the chamomile fields: 'The plash of water, the sight of her shoes and stockings awry on the path where she had flung them; or Here Boy lapping in the puddle near her feet, and suddenly there was Sweet Home rolling, rolling out before her eyes' (6). Mae G. Henderson suggests that 'rememory' 'is something which possesses (or haunts) one, rather than something which one possesses': Beloved herself is, in part, an embodiment of this kind of 'rememory'. [39] Sethe defines 'rememory' as the sense of being haunted or possessed by the past early on in the novel as a warning to Denver:

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[36] Patterson, *Social Death* in *Slavery in American Society*, 8.

[37] Toni Morrison, *Sula* (1975; London: Picador, 1980); *Song of Solomon* (1977; London: Picador, 1989); Rushdy, 'Re-memory': 'I wish to redefine the primal scene as the critical event (or events) whose significance to the narrated life becomes manifest only at a secondary critical event, when by a preconscious association the primal scene is recalled' (303) - a definition close to the function of *Nachträglichkeit.*

[38] Jane Miller, 'Understanding Slavery', *London Review of Books*, 12 November 1987, 7-8.

[39] Henderson, 'Toni Morrison's *Beloved:* Re-Membering the Body', 67.

> Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place - the picture of it - stays, and not just in my rememory, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head.I mean, even if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw, is still out there. Right in the place where it happened ... Someday you be walking down the road and you hear something or see something going on. And you think its you thinking it up. A thought picture.But no. It's when you bump into a rememory that belongs to someone else. (35-36)

Rememory here expands to become shared, but still involuntary memory: it is defined by Asnaf Rushdy as 'signifying a magical anamnesis available to one not involved in the originary act'. [40] As such it is close to what Virginia Woolf imagined when she wondered whether 'things we have felt with great intensity have an existence independent of our minds', and whether 'some device will be invented by which we can tap them'. [41] Gina Wisker suggests that this kind of rememory indicates that 'history is a tangible, visible existent that a community can experience, bump into'. [42] Toni Morrison describes her own process of 'literary archaeology' in similar terms:

> on the basis of some information and a little bit of guesswork you journey to a site to see what remains were left behind and to reconstruct the world that these remains imply. What makes it fiction is the nature of the imaginative act: my reliance on the image - on the remains - in addition to recollection, to yield up a kind of truth. By "image"... I simply mean "picture" and the feelings that accompany that picture ... The approach that's most productive

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[40] Rushdy, 'Rememory', 304.

[41] Virginia Woolf, 'A Sketch of the Past' in *Moments of Being* (St. Albans: Triad/Panther, 1978), 71-159; 77-8.

[42] Gina Wisker, '"Disremembered and Unaccounted For": Reading Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Alice Walker's *TheTemple of My Familiar*' in Gina Wisker, ed., *Black Women's Writing* (London : Macmillan, 1993), 78-95; 85.

> and most trustworthy for me is the recollection that moves from the image to the text. Not from the text to the image ... The image comes first and tells me what the "memory" is about ... So the nature of my research begins with something as ineffable and as flexible as a dimly recalled figure, the corner of a room, a voice. [43]

Morrison is not here specifically referring to her 'reconstruction' of the world of slavery: in *The South Bank Show* she explained that she did not in any case set out to write a novel about slavery, but was drawn into it, almost reluctantly, through her discovery of the story of Margaret Garner. [44] In *The South Bank Show* Morrison talks about listening to the stories of her grandfather, who had been a slave: it is memory of this kind that she is possibly referring to when she talks about 'images' and 'pictures' - as well as contemporary drawings of the slaveships and slaves in irons. But she here also evokes the kind of shared 'rememory' described by Sethe: given that she is not talking about strictly autobiographical reconstruction, and that in the case of slavery she is dealing with a world no longer within living memory, her stress on visual images and pictures suggests that collective memory is somehow available to the individual, that memory can be held by places and objects as well as within human consciousness. 'Journeying to the site' suggests a replacement of temporality by spatiality; that, as Sethe puts it, some things 'pass on' whilst others 'just stay'. As with Abraham and Torok's idea of 'preservative repression', memory is here 'entombed in a fast and secure place, awaiting resurrection'. Morrison's metaphor also evokes Freud's analogy between the psychoanalyst and the archaeologist: where Freud claims that he acknowledges

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[43] Morrison, 'The Site of Memory', 112.

[44] Paradoxically, Morrison would first have encountered this story in written form: the account of Margaret Garner in *The Cincinnati Commercial* is included in Gerda Lerner's anthology *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History* (New York: Random House, 1973). Also included here is the account of the murder from Levi Coffin's *Reminiscences*,published in 1876. What most critics who have gone back to this source have missed is the account of what subsequently happened to Margaret Garner: she was shipped to Louisville, but the ship had an accident, and she was thrown into the river with one of her surviving children. She was rescued, and 'displayed frantic joy when told that her child was drowned', and insisted that she too would never reach her destination, implying her intention to drown herself. Another report said that 'she threw her child into the river and jumped after it. It is only certain that she was in the river with her child, and that it was drowned, while she was saved by the prompt energy of the cook' (Lerner 62-3). These details give greater historic specificity to Beloved's account of trying to 'join' with the woman who threw herself off the slave ship.

where his 'constructions begin', Morrison acknowledges the nature of the 'imaginative act'. However, in her discussion of the role of memory in her writing, there is a slippage between the idea of the imaginative reconstruction of a world based on images supplied by the memories of others and by other 'sites' of memory, and images from the writer's *own* past - 'the dimly recalled figure, the corner of a room'. She almost seems to be suggesting that personal memory is part of a larger collective, or even 'ancestral' memory: she also speaks of how 'rememories of ancestors infiltrate the present' as a 'benevolent, teaching, protective presence'. The possibility of knowing and sharing forgotten and painful history is clearly vital, but the existence of pictures 'floating around there outside my head' which other people can 'bump into' invokes random and painful collisions with bits of the past rather than the possibility of shared knowledge and understanding. And for Sethe, at this stage, the idea of pictures of the events of the past still existing in the places where they occurred involves a belief in the inevitability of repetition:

> Where I was before I came here, that place is real. It's never going away. Even if the whole farm - every tree and grass blade of it dies. The picture is still there and what's more, if you go there - you who never was there - if you go there and stand in the place where it was, it will happen again; it will be there for you, waiting for you. (36)

When Denver asks whether that means that 'nothing ever dies', Sethe confirms that '[n]othing ever does'. '[H]ow can I say things that are pictures?' asks Beloved, when she becomes the medium of the 'unspeakable thoughts' or memories of those who experienced the Middle Passage, for whom 'all of it is now it is always now' (210). Freud's early work with hysterical patients suggested that it was painful memories in the form of pictures or snapshots which gave rise to the symptoms, pictures which faded when put into words. Jean Wyatt sees this aspect of rememory in a similar way: 'Through Sethe's reluctance to substitute words for things, not just Beloved but all the painful events of the past that Sethe has not transformed into narrative are left there, where those events first occurred'. [45] Rememory is here formulated as the imprinting of painful events on the mind and on the world: whilst these imprints might function as material evidence of the

[45] Wyatt, 'Giving Body to the Word', 477.

atrocities of the past - as some Holocaust survivors have expressed the desire for their writing to function as material trace of their experience - they also include the threat of repetition.

This version of 'rememory' recognises the fact that there are some events that tear the fabric of social space or shatter our sense of time as normally experienced. Sethe's account gives imaginative form to the compulsive and involuntary reliving of the past in flashbacks or nightmares by the survivors of accidents and other traumas. [46] That it is a model of memory eventually to be rejected is made clear by Denver's movement out of the 'crypt' of 124, and by the final 'passing of Beloved. When Denver is hesitating on the threshold of the house, afraid to step out into the world 'where there were places in which things so bad had happened that when you went near them it would happen again', the voice of Baby Suggs asking her 'You don't remember nothing about how come I walk the way I do and about your mother's feet, not to speak of her back? I never told you all that?' (243-4) suggests that it is possible to use the memory of a painful past not as an avoidance of the future for fear of the past recurring, but as a way of refusing repetition. Jean Wyatt has also suggested that here the past is put into its proper place by the voice of Baby Suggs, that it becomes 'oral history'; situating her in a family with its own historical memory enables her to see herself as moving forward into the future. [47]

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[46] A sufferer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, a soldier who had narrowly missed being killed whilst serving in Belfast, eventually began to recover when he revisited the city and realized that time *had* passed on, that, as he said, 'its a different world here now'. (*Inside Story: Survivors:* BBC 1, 8 June 1995.)

[47] James Snead's model of African history as cyclical, as 'highlighting the observance of repetition', adds another dimension to the novel's representation of time and the relationship with the past. Snead sees a cyclical model of history as acknowledged within black culture and as the repressed 'other' in European thought, superseded by the model of linear progess and development: not only does this valorisation of repetition run the risk of essentialising an African 'primitivism', but it also avoids the question of the danger of the compulsion to repeat. James A. Snead, 'Repetition as a Figure of Black Culture' in Henry Louis Gates, Jr., ed., *Black Literature and Literary Theory* (New York: Methuen, 1984), 59-79. As Freud points out in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, repetition manifests the death instinct as well as serving the pleasure principle, and both impulses are clearly evident in the relationship of Sethe and Beloved. Barbara Christian cites John Mbiti's account in *African Religions and Philosophies* (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1970) of the non-linearity of African time: 'Rather, the future, in the Western sense, is absent, because the present is always an unfolding of the past. Thus every "future" is already contained in what Westerners call the "past' (Christian, 'Fixing Methodologies', 13). This view of time clearly depends upon stable social systems which can support it and guarantee this

In the concept of rememory Morrison has found a powerful trope for the organisation of her narrative, one which has been noticed, developed and valorised by many critics: but it is also a model of memory which condemns its sufferer - an individual or a culture - to repetition of that suffering.

Psychoanalysis and slavery

Morrison's account of the impulse which led her to the writing of the novel - 'I had to deal with this nurturing instinct that expressed itself in murder' - suggests that she is dealing with conflicts and relationships that have found their fullest expression and mode of analysis in the realm of psychoanalysis. Critics such as Hortense Spillers and Barbara Christian have quite rightly questioned the application of psychoanalytic theory to 'social and historical situations that do not replicate moments of its own historic origins and involvements'. [48] In spite of this, Spillers has suggested that Linda Brent/Harriet Jacobs' account of her relationship with her owners 'uncover[s] slavery in the United States as one of the richest displays of the psychoanalytic dimensions of culture before the science of European psychoanalysis takes hold'. [49] As Jacqueline Rose suggests in the case of fascism, the institution of slavery, characterized by relationships of power and oppression and the construction of a racial 'other' which is also the object of fear, projection and desire, is one of historical moments which need 'psychoanalytic concepts of desire and identification in order for it to be [more] fully understood'. [50] It is also the site of the conditions which lead to the possible conjunction of mothering and murder, of love and death.

However, Spillers has also warned against 'search[ing] vainly for a point of absolute and undisputable origin' of slavery itself, 'for a moment of plenitude that would restore us to the real, rich "thing" itself'. Even a past as painful as that of slavery, she suggests, evokes the desire to find a moment of pure identity or origin.

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kind of 'unfolding': the radical separation from Africa and life under slavery shattered this possibility, and Sethe seems to have been left with a deeply pessimistic version of this view of time - that the traumas of the past are bound to recur.

[48] Hortense J. Spillers, 'The Permanent Obliquity of the In(pha)llibly Straight: In the Time of the Daughters and the Fathers' in Cheryl Wall, ed., *Changing Our Own Words* (London: Routledge, 1990), 128-9.

[49] Spillers, 'Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe', 77.

[50] Rose, *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath* (London: Virago, 1991), 7.

To homogenise or reduce it to an 'essence' is only to collude with the stereotypes which slavery produced: 'the collective and individual reinvention of the discourse of "slavery" is, therefore, nothing other than an attempt to restore to a spatio-temporal object its eminent historicity, to evoke *person/persona* in the place of a "shady" ideal'. [51] Morrison has also said that '[u]sually slavery is an abstract concept. The purpose of making the ghost real is making history possible, making memory real', [52] although of course she also exposes the dangers of the desire for 'a moment of pure identity and origin' in the reconstructed pre-oedipal relation of Sethe and Beloved. In her critique of 'The Moynihan Report' Spillers also warns against the essentialising and universalising tendency in which 'ethnicity' 'freezes in meaning, takes on constancy, assumes the look and the affects of the Eternal' and 'embodies nothing more than a mode of memorial time'.[53] If psychoanalysis runs the risk of de-historicising and universalising the human subject, the appeal to slavery as 'the "thing" itself' in a critique of the applicability of psychoanalysis runs the corresponding risk of essentialising 'race' and universalising a complex and shifting set of social and familial relations. Whilst slavery clearly distorted and often prevented family relationships which in themselves originated in the very different social arrangements of West Africa, it did so in complex and differing ways. [54]

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[51] Hortense J. Spillers, 'Changing the Letter: the Yokes, the Jokes of Discourse, or, Mrs Stowe, Mr Reed' in Deborah E. McDowell and Arnold Rampersad, eds., *Slavery and the Literary Imagination* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 25-61; 28.

[52] Quoted by Wyatt, 'Giving Body to the Word', 475.

[53] Spillers, 'Mama's Baby', 66. Stuart Hall, in his insistence that our relationship with the past, like our relationship with the mother, is 'always already after the break', has warned against the idealisation and homogenisation of 'Africa' as the lost organic community or imaginary space of plenitude. 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora' in Jonathan Rutherford, ed., *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 222-237; 224, 230-1.

[54] Nathan Irvin Huggins' impressionistic and generalised account in *Black Odyssey: The African-American Ordeal in Slavery* (1977; New York: Random House, 1990) stresses the extended network of family relationships in the traditional West African village: although he does not make it explicit, 'multiple mothering' by aunts, grandmothers, older siblings and the father's other wives was clearly possible and likely. Hortense Spillers (in 'Mama's Baby') suggests that a form of this developed in the 'New World', an extended network of family and other relationships that established themselves in spite of the patterns of dispersal and fragmentation under slavery. One vital difference was the absence of the power of the father whose 'greatness', in the African village, was in the produce of his land and his loins, whose greatest wealth was in his children' (Huggins, 8). Jacqueline Jones and bell hooks stress motherhood as a site of resistance under slavery, but Jones also sees the possible dangers of maternal sacrifice: 'The gender kinship between mother and daughter provides the mother with a fundamental motive for resistance, that is, to prevent the daughter from being subjected to her own fate, the commodification of the female body

Spillers, who dismisses object relations and the 'reproduction of mothering' 'as an account of female gender transmission entirely irrelevant to the brutally disrupted kinship bonds of persons in captivity' nevertheless uses the theory when she suggests that '[i]f the child's humanity is mirrored initially in the eyes of its mother, or the maternal function, then we might be able to guess that the social subject grasps the whole dynamic of resemblance and kinship by way of the same source'. Winnicott's concept of the mutual mirroring of mother and child as an essential part of the constitution of identity is here framed as deprivation or absence: she quotes Frederick Douglass on his relationship with his siblings - 'The early separation of us from our mother had well nigh blotted the fact of our relationship from our memories' - to suggest that 'the feeling of kinship is *not* inevitable. That it describes a relationship that appears "natural", but must be "cultivated" under actual material conditions'. [55]

Morrison recognises this within the novel by representing a range of possible family arrangements. Baby Suggs knows that she would no longer be able to recognise her 'sold away' children. Sethe herself has little or no relationship with her own mother, 'who must of nursed me two or three weeks' and who then left her to be fed by another woman 'whose job it was' (60) while she went back to work in the fields. In this Sethe represents an exception: historians of slavery such as Deborah Gray White suggest that most slave children had more than this minimal contact with their mothers, and more opportunity to 'cultivate' 'the feeling of kinship'. [56] Sethe had 'the amazing luck of six whole years of marriage to that "somebody" son who fathered every one of her children' (23), whose 'care suggested a family relationship rather than a man's laying claim' (25): her husband is Halle, the only one of Baby Suggs' children who was not 'sold away' and who 'rented himself out all over the county to buy her away from there'. Whilst the other Sweet Home men wait for Sethe to choose her partner, they resort to 'fucking cows' (11); none of them have sexual partners or children except for Sixo, who

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... However, that very act of resistance seems inevitably to involve a sacrifice that may not only sever the bonds betwen the mother and daughter, but may bind them to the past they were trying to escape'. Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work and the Family from Slavery to the Present Day* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 250. See also bell hooks, *Aint I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (Boston: South End Press, 1982).

[55] Spillers, 'Mama's Baby', 75-6.

[56] Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I A Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1985).

walks thirty miles in one day to see his woman, and dies crying 'Seven-O!' (226) because she is pregnant. Whatever the *actual* role of the father, however, under slavery 'dual fatherhood is set in motion, comprised of the African father's' actually or potentially '*banished* name and body and the captor father's mocking presence'. [57] This is one of the immutable premises upon which American slavery was based, whatever the local variation: all slaves were owned as material possessions; their marriages and parenthood were not legally recognised, so that their children or spouses could be 'sold away'; and the first generation of slaves also experienced an abrupt and radical separation from their homeland, the trauma of the Middle Passage. Although the term 'psychoanalysis' covers a wide range of positions and theories, it might also be said to be founded on an immutable premise: the fact that all children have a biological mother with whom some relationship is formed, however brief and however inflected by different childrearing practices. Spillers analyses the contradictory meaning of motherhood under slavery, by which '"motherhood" as female blood-rite/right is denied', whilst women still give birth to children in the *flesh.* [58] The fact that both psychoanalysis and the history of slavery recognize the centrality of a radical separation leads several critics to describe one in terms of the other: Barbara Christian speaks of the 'monumental psychic rupture' of the Middle Passage, 'that wrenched tens of millions of Africans from their Mother, their biological mothers as well as their Motherland'. [59] The fact that separation from the mother in birth, and as part of the process of maturation, is inevitable and necessary, whilst the radical rupture of the enslavement of African people in America was not of this order of neccessity, is the root of one of the difficulties in using one to represent the other which Morrison's novel does not entirely escape. Hortense Spillers uses the discourse of the pre-oedipal (or pre-natal) mother-child relation to evoke the disorientation of the sea-crossing: 'Those African persons in "Middle Passage" were literally suspended in the "oceanic", if we think of the latter in its Freudian orientation as an analogy for undifferentiated identity'. [60]

Morrison clearly employs this conjunction of discourses in her use of Beloved as pre-oedipal child longing to re-merge with its mother and as mediator of the

[57] Spillers, 'Mama's Baby' , 80.

[58] Spillers, 'Mama's Baby', 75.

[59] Christian, 'Fixing Methodologies', 7.

[60] Spillers, 'Mama's Baby', 72.

fragmentation and confusion of identities on the slaveships. The 'oceanic' in Spillers' account is clearly terrifying and equated with a kind of death: in much recent feminist psychoanalytic discourse it is used positively to invoke the lost imaginary unity of mother and child, the semiotic space before the separation of language, the Father and the Law. When Paul D. remembers his sexual encounter with Beloved, he is 'thankful ... for having been escorted to some ocean-deep place he once belonged to' - the memory of his own early relationship with his mother, who is never mentioned, and the place of 'the dead female ancestors to whom he once "belonged"'. But his desire for her is described as a kind of drowning which 'forced him to struggle up, up into that girl like she was the clear air at the top of the sea' (264): although Mohanty and others have described this encounter as 'profoundly renewing' and 'an emotional acknowledgement of his historical indebtedness' [61] it is also deeply ambivalent. The 'ocean-deep place' is, paradoxically, also a place to struggle out of, as it eventually must be for Sethe and Beloved.

Paul D. is one of the black men in Morrison's novels whose ability to 'keep moving', to 'do the other thing' she admits to finding attractive: 'the fact that they would split in a minute just delights me ... it's part of that whole business of breaking ground'. [62] In *Song of Solomon* this idea is embodied by the image of the flight of the peacock unencumbered by 'shit', [63] the flight of Solomon back to Africa, abandoning his wife and children, and the final 'flight' of Milkman, a surrendering to the air which must also mean his death. For Paul D., 'walking off when he got ready was the only way he could convince himself that he would no longer have to sleep, pee, eat or swing a sledge hammer in chains' (40). The reader is put in a position to understand this desire by the reconstruction of his appalling experience of the Georgia chain-gang, where he was also sexually abused and humiliated by the parody of 'nursing' enforced by the guards. This humiliation is re-figured in Halle's compulsive smearing of 'the butter as well as its clabber all over his face because the milk they took is on his mind' (70). But Paul D.'s autonomy and humanity survive the chain gang, his years of wandering, and the

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[61] Mohanty, 'The Epistemic Status', 66.

[62] Robert B. Stepto, ' "Intimate Things in Place" ': a conversation with Toni Morrison' in Dexter Fisher, ed., *The Third Woman: Minority Women Writers of the United States* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980), 167-182; 174, 180.

[63] Morrison, *Song of Solomon*, 179.

fact that he has shut all memory, and its attendant emotion, away in a 'tobacco tin': when he arrives at 124 he has become 'the kind of man who could walk into a house and make the women cry. Because with him, in his presence, they could. There was something blessed in his manner' (17), as though 'all you had to do was get his attention and right away he produced the feeling you were feeling' (7-8). In spite of his need to 'walk off when he felt ready' Morrison constructs him almost in the role of a therapist, who can create the 'holding environment' and the transference to enable trust and rememory in its positive sense. With him, Sethe feels that she might be able to trust enough to 'feel the hurt her back ought to' (18); he tells her 'Go as far inside as you need to, I'll hold your ankles. Make sure you get back out' (46).

Paul D. is thus used to undermine the split between culturally 'masculine' and 'feminine' roles, formulated by Jessica Benjamin as that between the 'mother of attachment' and the 'father of separation'. [64] Morrison has claimed that black women 'seem able to combine the nest and the adventure ... They are both safe harbour and ship; they are both inn and trail', [65] but in fact none of the women in her novels, with the possible exception of Pilate in *Song of Solomon*, embody this ideal - and even Pilate's household is seen as ultimately inadequate to nurture her granddaughter Hagar. On her way to freedom, and during the few weeks she had with her children before the arrival of the slavecatchers, Sethe saw herself as exclusive and all-providing protector of her children - she had 'milk enough for all' (100). But when Paul D. arrives Sethe has not left 124 since her time in prison except for brief daily journeys to work as a cook, and Denver has been unable to leave the yard since she heard Nelson Lord ask whether she was in prison with her mother. In Sethe Morrison represents a woman who, partly through necessity and

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[64] Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination* (1988; London: Virago, 1990). See especially chapters 3 and 4. Benjamin argues persuasively against psychoanalytic theories which are founded on the opposition between 'a primitive/narcissistic mother and a civilized/oedipal father' (141), and 'the belief that we actually long to return to oceanic oneness with mother, that we would all sink back into "limitless narcissism" were it not for the paternal imposition of difference. The equation *oneness=mother=narcissism* is implicit in the oedipal model' (148). Benjamin is here referring to the work of Margaret Mahler and Jeanette Chasseguet-Smirgel. In 'Women's Time' Julia Kristeva recognises the need to 'challenge ... the myth of the ... archaic, full, total englobing mother' whilst also recognising that she is 'an unbelievable force for subversion in the modern world'. In *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 187-213; 205.

[65] Claudia Tate, *Black Women Writers at Work* (New York: Continuum,1983), 122.

partly through isolation from other members of the black community born of mutual distrust, has ended up as 'the ultimate single person' who represents not progression but 'a form of narcissism', locked into a relationship with her children which, as Morrison has described it, is like 'a love relationship in which one surrenders oneself to the lover'. [66] Sethe has not fully surrendered to Denver in this way, although Denver still 'push[es] out the front of her dress ... provided she can get in it' (11). Denver doesn't feel the lack of children to play with as long as she has the company of the baby ghost, and as long as her mother 'did not look away as she was doing now' (12), now that she is looking at Paul D. instead. Sethe still claims: 'I'll protect her while I'm live and I'll protect her when I ain't', this 'protection' leading to her warning that the past is still waiting to happen again outside the boundary of 124.

The ocean-deep place: reliving the pre-oedipal

It is in the relationship of Sethe and Beloved that the 'narcissism' of the love relationship is fully played out, and Paul D. plays an important role in the materialisation of the dead child. He gets rid of the baby ghost, challenging it: 'You want to fight, come on!' (18) - but it is also through his presence, in which 'emotions sped to the surface' (39), that Beloved materialises as a 19 year-old girl. Peter Brooks has described the process of transference as 'actualiz[ing] the past in its symbolic form so that it can be repeated, replayed, worked through to another outcome. The result is, in the ideal case, to bring us back to actuality, that is, to a revised version of our stories'; 'the transference succeeds in making the past and its scenarios of desire relive through *signs* with such vivid reality that the reconstructions it proposes achieve the *effect* of the real'. [67] As Freud claimed in 'The Dynamics of the Transference', 'it is impossible to destroy anyone *in absentia* or *in effigie*' . [68] Whatever the reasons for the reappearance of Beloved at this point - Paul D.'s 'conjuring', her jealousy of his relationship with her mother, Sethe's (and Denver's) desire, the psychic recognition of the need and readiness to deal with 'unfinished business', it is clear that only the physical manifestation of Beloved as the 19 year-old she would have been, and the 'crawling-already?' baby

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[66] 'Literary Excavation': Toni Morrison talks to Pratibha Parmar, *Marxism Today*, April 1988, 33.

[67] Peter Brooks, 'The Idea of a Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism' in Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, ed., *Discourse in Psychoanalysis and Literature* (London: Methuen, 1987), 1-19; 12-13.

[68] Sigmund Freud, 'The Dynamics of the Transference', *SE* Vol. XII, 108.

she was at the point of her death, enables the necessary confrontation with, and working through of the past. What Freud believed to occur in the transference - the re-incarnation of the patient's mother, father or 'significant other' in the person of the analyst - occurs here in the form of a ghost or re-embodied spirit. Although Paul D. breaks into and re-arranges the feminine household of 124 under the mark of the oedipal, [69] Morrison avoids what Jessica Benjamin has described as 'the idea of the father as the protector, or even savior, from a mother who would pull us back to what Freud called the "limitless narcissism" of infancy'. [70] In Paul D.'s absence, it is Denver who steps off the threshold of 124 to seek help from the community of women who decide that, whatever Sethe's crime and pride, 'the past [was] something to leave behind. And if it didn't stay behind, well, you might have to stomp it out', that 'the children can't just up and kill the mama' (256).

Even before Sethe has recognised the girl who 'walked out of the water' (50) as her lost baby daughter, Beloved behaves like the one year-old she was when she died: incontinent, constantly thirsty and greedy for sweet things, and totally dependent on her mother's gaze for a sense of recognition: 'Sethe was licked, tasted, eaten by Beloved's eyes. Like a familiar, she hovered ... It was as though every afternoon she doubted anew the older woman's return' (57): later she asserts 'she is the one. She is the one I need'. Taken literally, their sudden and violent separation has meant that the child has been unable to come to terms with its mother's comings and goings, either in reality or through symbolic play as in Freud's grandson's *fort-da* game. Abraham and Torok suggest that '[t]he passage from food to language in the mouth presupposes the successful replacement of the object's presence with the self's cognizance of its absence'. 'Learning to fill the emptiness of the mouth with words is the initial model for introjection', or the successful internalisation of the object, but 'without the constant assistance of a mother endowed with language, introjection could not take place ... the mother's constancy is the guarantor of the meaning of words'. [71] Without speculating on Sethe's (or other slave mothers') ability to provide this constancy and linguistic stimulation, her escape from Sweet

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[69] Marianne Hirsch describes the novel very effectively in these terms in *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), Chapter 1.

[70] Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love*, 135.

[71] Abraham and Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel*, 126-9. 'The abrupt loss of a narcissistically indispensable object of love has occured, yet the loss is of a type that prohibits its being communicated' (129).

Home necessitated a significant separation from her nursing child, and, as Jean Wyatt points out, her refusal to allow it to be fed by anyone else in her absence indicates a reluctance to substitute any other object for the maternal breast.

Beloved 'died' before she became a speaking subject, and like a slightly older child, she is also hungry for stories: Sethe 'learned the profound satisfaction Beloved got from storytelling', and also the 'unexpected pleasure' of telling stories about the past which she had previously consigned to 'short replies or rambling incomplete reveries' (58). When Beloved seduces Paul D. and insists that he 'touch me on the inside part' and 'call me my name' (116-7) she is looking for confirmation of absent or insecure identity; after Paul D. has moved back into the house and into Sethe's bed, her tooth falls out and she fears the total disintegration of her body. Here she symbolically rehearses the manner of her own death, her experience of sexual abuse during her previous 'incarnation' - 'I am going to be in pieces he hurts where I sleep' (212) - and the fragmentation experienced by the bodies of tortured slaves: she also represents the child who has not yet reached the imaginary wholeness of the mirror stage or who realizes just how precarious that unity is. [72] 'Pieces of her would drop maybe one at a time, maybe all at once. Or ... she would fly apart. It is difficult keeping her head on her neck, her legs attached to her hips when she is by herself ... She has two dreams: exploding and being swallowed' (133). Here she articulates the fear of the 'engulfing' mother (the mother of the psychoanalytic theories criticised by Jessica Benjamin) 'who didn't know where the world stopped and she began' (166), whose 'goodness' - or 'too-thick love' (167) becomes a seductive threat to autonomy.

Beloved and Sethe collude in the reconstruction of a relationship in which the boundaries between self and other become increasingly blurred. Beloved's monologue expresses the desire to 're-join' with the mother from whom she was separated; as Rebecca Ferguson observes, her 'very existence is merged in the face and responding smile of her mother, corresponding closely to what Winnicott has described as "the mother's role of giving back to the baby the baby's own self". [73] Because this desire functions in part as a compensation for what was lost (and

[72] Jacques Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I' in *Écrits: A Selection* trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1977), 1-7.

[73] Ferguson, 'History, Memory and Language' in Sellers, *Feminist Criticism*, 118. See D.W.Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971). Jessica Benjamin

also, of course, on at least two other levels, the spirit of the baby trying to find another body to inhabit, and Beloved acting as mediator of the experience of those who suffered the Middle Passage), its representation is profoundly ambivalent. Their joint monologue ends: 'You are mine' (217) thrice repeated: this assertion of belonging recalls Sethe's explanation to Paul D. earlier in the novel that she 'couldn't love em proper in Kentucky because they wasn't mine to love' (162). Here it is suggested that it was the fact of previously denied *ownership* that led to 'too-thick love', the love that led to murder in order to prevent repossession. Denver's monologue expressess her fear, rehearsed in her dreams, that her mother will cut off her head too. She wants to warn Beloved not to love Sethe too much: 'Maybe its still in her the thing that makes it all right to kill her children' (206). When the three women are alone once again in 124, Denver observes how her mother and sister become almost indistinguishable, and how gradually it is her mother who needs protection. 'Beloved made demands. Anything she wanted she got, and when Sethe ran out of things to give her, Beloved invented desire' (240). She is like the child at the stage defined by Margaret Mahler as 'rapprochement', when, as Jessica Benjamin explains, 'to the child, it ... appears that his freedom consists in absolute control over his mother ... He is ready, in his innocence, to go for complete control, to insist on his omnipotence ... He will tyrannically assert [his] demands if he can, in order to assert - and have mother affirm - his will'. Benjamin goes on to suggest that the child 'is ready to be the master in Hegel's account, to be party to a relationship in which the mutuality breaks down into two opposing elements, the one who is recognized and the one whose identity is negated'. [74]

Hegel's account of the relationship of master and slave, the self's paradoxical demand for recognition from the other which it also needs to dominate and control, has been recently developed within post-colonial theory as a model of the relationship between colonial power and racial 'other'. Benjamin sees the roots of this relationship, and the inability to tolerate difference, in a model of child rearing as 'dual unity' by which the mother is seen only as the 'other' of the child's demand: 'The other is represented as the answer, and the self as the need; the other is the breast, and the self is the hunger'. This formulation is very close to

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modifies Winnicott's idea of mirroring: 'The mother cannot (and should not) be a mirror; she must not merely reflect back what the child asserts; she must embody something of the not-me; she must be an independent other who responds in her different way' (24).

[74] Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love*, 34.

Morrison's expression of Beloved's sense of relationship with her mother/other: 'she is the laugh I am the laugher ... she is my face smiling at me' (212-3). Benjamin questions the psychoanalytic model that sees the child's development in terms of 'a gradual separation and individuation from an initial symbiotic unity with the mother', because it 'contains the implicit assumption that we grow *out of* relationships rather than becoming more active and sovereign *within* them, that we start in a state of dual oneness and wind up in a state of singular oneness'. [75] There is an implicit critique of this in Morrison's account also, in spite of her evocation of the bliss of the imaginary unity of mother and child: before the arrival of Paul D. Sethe was living in a state of fierce and isolated autonomy; the step Denver takes into the world outside 124 in order to seek for help is a step into a new world of connection and social relations; and it is the local community of black women who come to rescue Sethe from the succubus Beloved has become. It is as if Morrison is herself using and exploring different psychoanalytic models, or stages, of the relationship between mother and child, ultimately discarding that which would blur all boundaries and dissolve separate identities, the 'ocean-deep place' before individuation. In her analysis of the situation of Frederick Douglass, Spillers suggests that the *absence* of the mother's gaze prevents the child's internalisation of a feeling of kinship; here the *exclusivity* of the mutual gaze of mother and child as reconstructed by Sethe and Beloved precludes any awareness of difference and the ability to establish other social relationships.

If the self is seen as emerging from what Eric L. Santner has called the 'primitive auratic symbiosis' with the mother, Santner suggests that this separation must be 'empathetically witnessed' and adequately 'mourned'. Otherwise

> the thereby dangerously depleted and unstable self will permanently hunger not for the gaze that bears witness to one's grief over the necessary local spoilings of the auratic gaze but for the archaic aura of prelapsarian eyes, eyes that offered themselves before the need to mourn and become a self became necessary ... A hunger of this kind is the beginning of secondary or pathological narcissism. [76]

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[75] Benjamin. *The Bonds of Love*, 18.

[76] Eric L. Santner, *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory and Film in Postwar Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 126.

It is narcissism of this kind, based upon a refusal or inability to mourn our primary losses by means of the entry into the symbolic order which can be used to represent them, which, Santner suggests, leads to the 'collective narcissism' of fascism, 'the return to the purity of a self-identity unmediated by any passage through alterity'. Fascist Germany, Santner suggests, was 'a world where the mournful labor that opens up the space between "I" and "Thou", "here" and "there", "now" and "then", could be banished as degenerate ... A "respecularization" of identity, that is, the simulation of a pure, specular reciprocity between self and other, was achieved by finding those one could blame for having disturbed this utopian exchange of gazes'. [77] Fascism attempts to create a world without difference by constructing an 'other' who is absolutely different and must therefore be excluded or destroyed; slavery was based on, or justified by, a theory of absolute racial difference and inferiority. In the novel Morrison is not concerned with the pathology of the masters and their justifications: [78] she has said, however, that 'the trauma of racism is, for the racist and the victim, the severe fragmentation of the self, and has always seemed to me a cause (not a symptom) of psychosis'. [79] Fragmentation might suggest the opposite of the imaginary unity of mother and child which the novel reconstructs: but as Santner and Benjamin make clear, it is the over-investment in this idea of unity, or the refusal to leave it behind, which causes an inability to tolerate separation or difference which in its turn leads to the psychosis. For Helene Moglen, 'the "ocean-deep" place of [Sethe's] relation to Beloved [is] the place of abjection which is both the cause, and, for the "others", the result of the cultural psychosis of racism'. [80]

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[77] Santner, *Stranded Objects*, 5.

[78] She does articulate it at one point through the voice of Stamp Paid: 'Whitepeople believed that whatever the manners, under every dark skin was a jungle', but '[t]he screaming baboon lived under their own white skin; the red gums were their own' (198-9).

[79] Morrison, 'Unspeakable Things Unspoken', 16.

[80] Moglen, 'Redeeming History', 34. Moglen links the relationship of Sethe and Beloved to Kristeva's notion of abjection: 'A place of horror that is also transformative, the abject unveils the void upon which the signifying process relies ... Sethe and Paul D. struggle by evading memory to evade the abjection to which they have been reduced: but like the patients of whom Kristeva writes, they can move out of the abyss only by travelling through it. Beloved serves as the intermediary in their voyages: a split-off fragment of themselves that, as both plenitude and absence, represents the promise and the horror of the archaic world in which subjectification begins' (32-3). See Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982): 'The abject confronts us, on the one hand, with those fragile states where man strays onto the territories of *animal*. It also confronts us

Santner suggests that the desire for the gaze of the other need not be seen as automatically regressive or narcissistic: 'What the self needs in order to mourn and assume its selfhood ... is not the perfect, auratic gaze at all ... but, to paraphrase Winnicott, the *good-enough gaze'*, which requires the 'solidarity of the empathetic witness. Under the good-enough gaze of the empathetic witness the self may take leave of its more archaic hankerings for the full hallucinatory gaze that sees nothing because there are, in a sense, not yet any separate objects to be seen'. [81] It is the 'good-enough gaze' which Beloved provides for Denver: 'to be looked at in turn was beyond appetite'. When Beloved looks at her 'with attention ... [i]t was lovely. Not to be stared at, not seen, but being pulled into view by the interested, uncritical eyes of the other' (118). As Benjamin puts it in the context of infant development: 'To experience recognition in the fullest, most joyful way, entails the paradox that "you" who are "mine" are also different, new, outside of me'. [82] It is a paradox that Beloved and Sethe cannot sustain, and their obsessive reconstruction of their lost or imaginary unity replaces the healing power of memory and recognition that Beloved initially provides. Her curative effect on Sethe, who discovers through her the pleasure of telling stories about the past, has already been noted: Denver has always been able to 'step into the told story' (28) of her birth as an escape from the loneliness of the present, but it is only by recreating it for Beloved that she is able to ' feel ... how it must have felt to her mother ... The monologue became, in fact, a duet ... Denver spoke, Beloved listened, and the two did the best they could to create what really happened, how it really was, something only Sethe knew because she alone had the mind for it' (78). The story becomes a positive example of 'rememory' as is it is partly reconstructed by the two girls and then taken up by the omniscient narrator and narrated fully for the reader. Beloved's role here and elsewhere is that of listener: although her voice 'speaks' the 'unspeakable thoughts' of lost and traumatic memory, it is a voice which seems to come from the realm of the semiotic or of an unconscious pool of collective memory. The text represents it for the reader, but by the end of the novel people 'realized they couldn't remember or repeat a single thing she said, and began to believe that, other than what they themselves were thinking, she hadn't said anything at all' (274). Dying as an

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'with our earliest attempts to release the hold of the *maternal* entity even before ex-isting outside of her, thanks to the autonomyof language' (12-3). She also speaks of 'the desirable and terrifying, nourishing and murderous, fascinating and abject inside of the mother's body' (54).

[81] Santner, *Stranded Objects*, 126.

[82] Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love*, 15.

infant, it is as if she has never become a 'speaking subject' whose 'fundamental vocation' according to Eric Santner is 'as a survivor of the painful losses - the structural catastrophes - that accompany one's entrance into the symbolic order'.[83]

In spite of the untransmitted secret which caused Denver's two-year silence, she *has* discovered the power of language: her 'original hunger' is for words, not for her mother's body. She delights in 'the capital *w*, the little *i*, the beauty of the letters in her name' (102), the sentences 'rolling out like pie dough' (121). As Jean Wyatt makes clear, the conflation of learning language with eating, and Denver's re-entry into the social by means of food and language - the pies and dishes left for her family, and the written messages which identify their owners - 'rewrites the entry into the symbolic in terms that retain the oral and maternal, challenging the orthodox psychoanalytic opposition between a maternal order of nurturing and a paternal order of abstract signification' [84] - although it was her father who 'loved ... the alphabet' and was the only slave on Sweet Home who could 'count on paper' (208). Denver's continual retelling to herself of the story of her birth might also be seen as the imaginative substitution of language and narrative for the imaginary unity with the mother, her birth marking the first moment of that process of separation.

Conclusion: not a story to pass on

'It was not a story to pass on' (274-5). The phrase that echoes through the last section of the novel, like the term 'rememory', suggests several contradictory meanings and possible relationships with the past. 'This is not a story to pass on' because the novel has demonstrated that the past is not doomed to repetition: the cycle of violence which began when the first slaves were taken from Africa, and which culminates in the murder of a child by its mother, can be broken. It is broken when Sethe turns her ability to kill in order to protect outside: as Mae G. Henderson puts it, she 'directs her response to the threatening Other rather than to "her best thing"' in her attack on Mr. Bodwin, who she believes to be the slavecatcher returning for her children. Henderson sees this event as 'a scene of re-enactment in which Sethe rethinks and revises her previous (re)action', comparing her to the historian in Collingwood's account, who thinks of the past as 'being re-

[83] Santner, *Stranded Objects*, 9.

[84] Wyatt, 'Giving Body to the Word', 483.

enacted'. [85] But it seems to me that this ascribes a much higher degree of conscious awareness to Sethe than the text and situation suggest: although she *has* reworked elements of the past in conjunction with Paul D. and through the return of Beloved, at this stage she is so depleted through giving and attending to Beloved that she is hardly capable of being, and is certainly not represented as, a freely acting agent. The recurrence of the image of the 'little hummingbirds stick[ing] needle beaks right through her headcloth' and of the exact words of her resistance to the recapture of her children - 'And if she thinks anything, it is no no no. Nonono' (262) - inscribe the event as an unconscious and compulsive repetition: that is exactly how she experiences it, being unable to see that time has moved on and that Mr. Bodwin is *not* the slavecatcher. It is Denver, and the women who have come to prevent Beloved from destroying her mother, who also prevent a second murder, and it is not until Paul D. returns that Sethe begins to accept that she is her 'best thing' (273), not her children. It is this compulsive and ultimately destructive over-identification, the nurturing instinct that also leads to murder, that must not be 'passed on'.

But the story of Beloved has been 'passed on', as both warning and commemoration. It is not a story to *pass* on, not a story that one can, or, should, choose to ignore: it is ignorance, or inadequate recognition of the claims of the past which, Morrison suggests, lead to the danger of repetition. Although Beloved herself 'erupts into her separate parts' and into the natural forces of the 'wind in the eaves, or spring ice thawing too quickly', hers is not a story to 'pass on', or die, in that it lives as long as the text which represents it is read. For a while, after her disappearance, 'her footprints come and go...[d]own by the stream in back of 124.' 'Should a child, an adult place his feet in them, they will fit. Take them out and they disappear again as though nobody ever walked there' (275). Like the novel itself, Beloved's footprints represent a history which is available for temporary reinhabitation or reconstruction, not a past which still exists 'elsewhere', waiting to recur: like the 'ocean-deep place' of her reunion with Sethe or her union with Paul. D., they do not represent a permanent resting place.

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[85] Henderson, 'Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: Re-Membering the Body', 80. R.G.Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1946).

Conclusion

Preserving the Remainder

What I have attempted to show in this thesis, through close readings of a group of texts, is that memory is inextricably interwoven with the processes of both writing and reading. Memories - initially perhaps unbidden, visual, sensory, immediate - become texts as soon as we begin to describe them to ourselves or to others, to put them into sequence or turn them into stories. And once this happens, the original memory, however 'pure' it may have seemed in the moment of its recovery, becomes part of a process of reconstruction and retranslation.

Although the process of putting memory into writing adds a second level of retranslation, writing may also be the means of *recovery* of memories otherwise lost: David Farrell Krell says that as he began to write down his earliest childhood memories as part of a process of relaxation before going to sleep, he found that 'simply *in writing* about these early memory images a vast store of remarkably detailed memories - in fact, an entire world of the most intense perceptions and feelings - began to unfold.' But, like Krell, many writers have also found that using memories as material for writing or as the means of reconstructing a life also involves a loss - as Krell also says, 'exposing and killing something that was my life'.[1] 'Once they have been textualized', writes Michael Sheringham in a discussion of the autobiographical writings of Michel Leiris, 'memories lose their potential: there is no way back to an original memory when writing has done its work'.[2] It is the emotional charge which illuminates 'original' memory which may be lost in writing, as Annie Dillard warns:

> Don't hope in a memoir to preserve your memories. If you prize your memories as they are, by all means avoid - eschew - writing a memoir. Because it is a certain way to lose them ... The work battens on your memories. And it replaces them ... After you've written, you can no longer remember anything but the writing ... After I've written about any experience, my memories - those elusive, fragmentary patches of colour and feeling are gone; they've been replaced by the work.[3]

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[1] Krell, *Of Memory*, xii.

[2] Sheringham, *French Autobiography*, 301.

Several of the texts I have discussed embody the recognition that 'pure' memory cannot be recovered in writing, that there is also something in memory that escapes the margins of the text, remains inexpressible. As Walter Benjamin points out: 'Autobiography has to do with time, with sequence and what makes up the continuous flow of life'. In his autobiographical sketch 'A Berlin Chronicle' he is 'talking of a space, of moments and discontinuities'. Jorge Semprun writes, in a text which reconstructs his memory of one day in Buchenwald, and the future of that memory: 'My life is not a temporal flow, a fluid but structured duration ... It is a random succession of arrested moments, of snapshots, a discontinuous succession of fleeting instants ...'. [4] But when Benjamin goes on to claim that 'even if months and years appear here, it is in the form they have at the moment of recollection', taking 'strange form' which 'may be called fleeting or eternal', there seems also to be an attempt to *elide* the gap between memory and writing, to claim that memory can be represented exactly as it occured at the moment of first recollection. [5] In the autobiographical texts I have discussed there is, of necessity, a gap between the moment of first recall and the writing of the memory as it takes form in the text. This is a gap which cannot be filled or crossed by the reader, but which is acknowledged and punctuated by the footnotes and retranslations of Ronald Fraser, Georges Perec and Carolyn Steedman.

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I grew up in a big Victorian house in South London which was owned by my grandmother, and where my mother and her brother and sisters also lived as children. It had a garden which was magical to us, with an extra L-shaped piece at the end which we called 'the paddock'. It had a frog-pond, apple-trees, a tumble-down shed where we made 'perfume' out of rose petals and where my father kept his tools and the fireworks for Guy Fawkes night. It was where we lit bonfires, dug for buried treasure, picked blackberries and collected grasshoppers and ladybirds in matchboxes. It was the place where my love of gardens, of lupins, marigolds, lilac, bluebells and all the other

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[3] Quoted by Zinsser, *Inventing the Truth*

[4] Jorge Semprun, *What a Beautiful Sunday!* (1980), trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Abacus, 1984), 234.

[5] Benjamin, 'A Berlin Chronicle' in *OneWay Street*, 316.

flowers that belong in English country gardens began. And as I write this I can 'remember' the smell of the lilac, the hot scent of marigolds and the sweetness of rose petal perfume. I have never attempted a full reconstrution of these memories in writing, partly out of a feeling that I am not a 'creative' writer, but partly, I now realise, out of an unconscious fear that to write them would be to lose them. Because I lived in that house until I was 16, and continued to visit it, and the garden, quite regularly over the next 10 years until my grandmother died, my memories have a continuity which would make it impossible to say when any of them were first recalled.One of the most vivid is of a moment which itself problematised memory. I remember walking on a warm summer's day along one of the narrow paths between flower beds and apple trees towards the swing which hung from an apple bough; somewhere near, on or beside the swing, was an especially vivid red or pink flower, which must have been a rose but which, in the mental picture I now hold of that moment, looks like a lotus or camellia, flowers which did not grow in that garden. As I walked towards the swing I had an extremely strong sense of *déja vu*, of having experienced that moment, seen that flower and swing in just that way before, a feeling that I somehow re-experience when I bring this memory to mind. It is because I thought then that this experience must have been a memory that its memory is still so clear to me now.

I also know that my memory of this garden has been at least in part constructed out of something I found and read when I was in my teens, a novel that one of my aunts began to write when she had left London and was living with her new husband in Spain. It described that house and garden - which, like Morrison's 124, we always called (and call, now that it no longer belongs to the family) by its number, 254 - with a precision and nostalgia that has become part of my own memory of that place. Over the years it has also gathered the resonance of countless other representations of hidden, lost or secret gardens, the gardens at least in part created out of the nostalgia for our lost and 'perfect' childhoods. My aunt's style, I have always thought, must have been influenced by Woolf - endless sentences, rhythm imbued with emotion, vivid images - and, like Woolf, she loved London, the London she still misses and imagines as Bloomsbury, as a place of hidden beauties, chance encounters, elegant squares. And I still sometimes imagine London through her eyes, with a vague, possibly imaginary memory of striding with her through the streets, the wind blowing our long coats through our legs, looking for a cafe she was sure would be just around the next corner.

One of her daughters, my cousin Sally Gutierrez, is now an artist living in Berlin, a city where layers of the past persist in tangible form; many artists living there are exploring ways of representing and interrogating that past. She was born in Madrid, but lived in London (the London of *my* childhood) for several months as a very young child, and for several years in Portugal. Perhaps as a result of living in such different places, and of having parents with such different cultural memories, she too is puzzled and fascinated by memory; we both feel that we 'know' the landscape of our childhoods at least in part through the stories of her mother. This summer she came to England for the first time in several years, to take part in a project called 'Europe in a Box', involving six artists from six European cities; as the artist from Madrid, her task is to construct an installation based upon her impression of London. She decided to use her own memories, and the memories of other members of the family, as the basis for this: revisiting the places which she only barely remembers from her childhood; taking photographs and looking at old ones, of our mothers as children; interviewing our aunts and uncles, all now in their seventies. This proved more disturbing than she had expected, raising difficult questions about the 'reality' of memory and the possibility of reconstructing it in art. Later she wrote to me, having read my introduction to this thesis: 'Since I got back to Berlin I have a feeling which I try to ignore that I shouldn't have gone back to some of the places I went to, like Nanny's house at Barry Road [254]. Not because of superstitious or even nostalgic reasons but because it seems that I have lost strong memories in exchange for something that I do not really understand. Like when you see a child who has changed a lot, grown into somebody else, and you ask yourself, when I used to know him he was real, I could touch him and he was solid, a being in itself, now its the same person, the same object, but has changed completely, so where is the one I knew? Was it not real or is it still somewhere else? Is there one Barry Road or as many as the memories?'

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I may try to describe the garden of my childhood in words, but my memory of it is insistently pictorial, the *déja vu* scene of flower and swing having the quality of a photograph. It is perhaps this visual quality that represents the 'remainder', that which cannot be fully reconstructed in writing. The relationship between the reconstruction of memory in writing and in the visual arts is one which I have not been able to explore in this thesis, but it has clear connections with the contrasting models of memory as a visual image and as text or narrative. Steedman, Atwood, Perec and Sylvia Fraser all

explore, albeit briefly, the relationship between memory and the photograph: these explorations show that even the photograph, apparently an image of the past 'as it really was', cannot supply full or accurate memory. Carolyn Steedman describes a photograph of herself as 'evidence' that 'the world went wrong that afternoon', soon after her father's humiliation in the bluebell wood. When she describes this photograph it is clear that she has used it in order to reconstruct a memory which includes elements not actually represented in the photograph: 'My father said "Smile, Kay" and I smiled ... I am irritated and depressed because she [her new baby sister] has come to stay ... Somewhere on the grass, beyond the photograph, is an apple that I've been given to cheer me up, but that I refuse to eat'. This photograph has become the marker of her 'first dislocation' and 'first deception', but it has clearly been subject to a long and complex process of interpretation, incorporating elements which she 'didn't know then', when the photograph was taken. [6] Sylvia Fraser uses photographs as retrospective 'evidence' of a more straightforward kind: the photographs she finds under her father's bed after his death, of herself 'in skimpy bathing suit, in a strapless gown ... in cheerleading outfit, my mouth a too-red slash', produce an overwhelming 'feeling of the uncanny', and in the light of recovered memory she reads a photograph of herself at the age of four, 'her clothes exhibiting what might be called seductive details' as further evidence of 'the child who knew'. [7] Atwood's Elaine, given a Brownie camera at the age of 8, finds the photographs she took then when she is a teenager and the traumas of her childhood have been 'forgotten': she can feel no sense of connection with the child who took photos of rocks and gave them the names of cows, and who is herself the subject of one of the photographs, standing in the doorway of one of the family's temporary summer homes, looking like 'old photos of immigrants'. [8] The photograph here is also a mark of dislocation, connected with the 'series of postcards' which is how Elaine has come to imagine the past.

In the 'autobiographical' text of *W Or the Memory of Childhood* Perec reproduces (in bold type) two passages written 'fifteen years ago', attempts to describe and reconstruct the fates of the parents he can barely remember. The passage which describes his father begins with a description of a photograph of his father in a greatcoat, military boots and puttees, 'on leave in Paris ... in the Bois de Vincennes'. The details of this account make it sound as if the writer had the photograph before him as he wrote: but fifteen

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[6] Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman*, 51.

[7] Fraser, *My Father's House*, 202, 225.

[8] Atwood, *Cat's Eye*, 27, 203.

years later Perec corrects his description, even down to the length of the greatcoat. His missing memory of his father was filled up with fantasies connected with this photograph - Perec 'thought up various glorious deaths' for him, and for some years had a 'passionate craze' for collecting and playing with tin soldiers. There is no basis, he now says, for the idea that the photograph was taken in the Bois de Vincennes: one of the five photographs he possesses of his *mother* was taken there. [9] He later describes the photographs he has of her in meticulous detail - her clothes, the setting, her posture are all recorded as if to capture precisely a non-existent memory. In one, his mother is holding him in her arms: 'I have fair hair with a very pretty forelock (of all my missing memories, that is perhaps the one I most dearly wish I had: my mother doing my hair, and making that cunning curl).' [10] Although newly-discovered photographs may provide the occasion for the recall of 'new' memories, the memory will never be of the precise moment or image represented by the photograph. In *Family Secrets* Annette Kuhn uses the technique of 'memory work' developed by Frigga Haug and Jo Spence in order to explore her own memories, often based on photographs: 'memories evoked by a photo', she writes, 'do not simply spring out of the image itself, but are generated in a network, an intertext, of discourses that shift between past and present, spectator and image, and between all these and cultural contexts, historical moments. In this network, the image itself figures largely as a trace, a clue: necessary, but not sufficient, to the activity of meaning making; always pointing somewhere else'. [11] For Roland Barthes, the discovery of a photograph of his mother as a young girl brings to life a moment which he could not have witnessed, achieving 'the impossible science of the unique being'. [12] Kuhn suggests that here 'remembering appears to make no insistence on the presence of the rememberer at the original scene of the recollected event', [13] the photograph providing the occasion for a version of Morrison's 're-memory'.

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The incorporation of new knowledge into the representation of the past takes on

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[9] Perec, *W Or the Memory of Childhood*, 27-9, 33.

[10] ibid., 49.

[11] Annette Kuhn, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (London: Verso, 1995), 12. Frigga Haug, *Female Sexualisation* (London: Verso, 1987); Jo Spence and Rosy Martin, *Double Exposure: The Minefield of Memory* (London: Photographers Gallery, 1987).

[12] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (1980), trans. Richard Howard (London: Fontana, 1984), 71.

[13] Kuhn, *Family Secrets*, 107.

specific political meaning in the work of a writer who I have not had the space to consider here, the Spanish writer Jorge Semprun who was a communist, a member of the French Resisitance and imprisoned in Buchenwald. What he 'didn't know then' was the fact that after the war many surviving political prisoners would find themselves in Gulags in the Soviet Union, on the presumption that collaboration must have been the price of their survival - or indeed that the Soviet camps were already in operation whilst he was a prisoner in Buchenwald. His two autobiographical novels, *The Long Voyage* and *What a Beautiful Sunday!* are structured on the principle of the constant re-remembering of moments of the past in new contexts, out of situations in which the writer imagines how he will remember the 'present' moment - travelling in the cattle truck to Buchenwald, one Sunday in the life of the camp - in a possible future. *What a Beautiful Sunday!* is also an account of how the text came to be written: 'All the possible accounts' of his experience of the camp, he writes, 'will never be anything but scattered fragments of an endless, literally interminable account' [14] because his repeated re-rememberings will never cease to affect and transform the memory he is trying to reconstruct. 'There is no such thing as an innocent memory. Not for me any more'. [15] Semprun describes a moment (now already a memory) when, at the Gare de Lyon in 1964, he saw 'a whirlwind of light snow caught in the beam of searchlights, that expanse of dancing, drifting snow', and is transfixed, hearing the words '*dancing, frozen light*' without knowing where they are coming from. At first he describes this moment as being 'revisited by some blinding ... incommunicable memory of Buchenwald', but immediately 'corrects' himself, realising instead that 'I was remembering a place where I had never been ... I was not remembering Buchenwald. I was remembering some unknown camp whose name I did not know: the special camp in which - forever, it seems to me, to the end of time perhaps - Ivan Denisovich Shukov is a prisoner'. For a long time Semprun had felt that he was 'the dream of someone who appeared to have been dead for a long time', but at that moment he felt that he

> was about to cease being the memory of a dead man, the desperate, lucid dream of a young man who did long ago, who may very well have been me ... I was going to abandon my unreal being and begin to inhabit, or rather, to be inhabited by, another life, occupied by another memory: that of Ivan Denisovich to begin with, then, as the years passed, with the help

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[14] Semprun, *What a Beautiful Sunday!*, 67.

[15] ibid., 83.

> of other reading, that of all the zeks from the Gulag camps whose memories and names have been preserved for us in inumerable accounts; perhaps, at the very frontiers of death, or madness, I shall finally be invested by the monstrous work of some anonymous, silent memory, the flat, devastated memory, now devoid of the slightest spark of hope, of the slightest possibility of pity, the muddy, gloomy memory of some unknown zek, forgotten by all, erased from every memory of the world.[16]

He now remembers Buchenwald through the 'screen' of a literary representation of something imagined as a kind of repetition, a similar imprisonment for which he also, as a former member of the Communist Party, feels a kind of responsibility. As with Barthes' photograph of his mother, reading has here provided the occasion for a version of Morrison's 're-memory', by which a memory becomes available to one who did not literally experience it. Semprun 'remembers the Marne through the memory of others', [17] the memory of his comrade Barizon which caused him to call out one Sunday in Buchenwald '*Quel beau dimanche, mes gars!*'. He dedicates his book to his son Thomas, 'that he may - later, afterward - remember this memory'. This is to suggest that there might be a form of memory not limited to the individual subject: not a mystified 'presence' or haunting, but the vivid recreation of experience in art, including the telling of stories, for those who did not, literally, experience it. Like Perec, Steedman and Ronald Fraser, Semprun demonstrates the formation of cultural memory by means of the continuous and mutual modification of individual memory and culture or history.

The knowledge of the Gulags means that Semprun can no longer live 'in the blessed innocence of the memory of Buchenwald, the innocent memory of having belonged to the camp of the just'. 'Stalin had destroyed any possibility that our memories could be innocent', [18] and the knowledge of the Gulags meant that he would have to rewrite his first book of 'innocent' memory, *The Long Voyage*, his account of the journey to Buchenwald, published in 1963. 'I ... knew that the only way of reliving that experience was to rewrite it, with full knowledge this time. In the blinding light of the searchlights of the Kolyma camps, illuminating my memory of Buchenwald'. [19]

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[16] ibid., 94-6.

[17] ibid., 15.

[18] ibid., 119.

His second book about Buchenwald is thus a rewriting - a rewriting after a rereading, of the text and of his life - of his first; Semprun also talks about the difficulty, even impossibility, of 'finishing' this second book, an unfinished manuscript 'forever taken up again, rewritten, forgotten, rediscovered, proliferating through the years ... the word "end", even if one day you managed to write it, would be but a pitiful acknowledgement of the temporary interruption of a piece of writing - of memory - on which the work, overt or subterranean, explicit or hidden, would immediately resume'. [20] Like Ronald Fraser and Georges Perec, Semprun recognises that the work of memory and of the writing that strives to represent it is never finished, never perfect or complete. 'The mysterious work of remembrance', says Benjamin, 'is really the capacity for endless interpolations into what has been'. [21]

The work of the *reader* also involves this 'interpolation', or rereading in the light of later knowledge, as Peter Brooks makes clear in his account of the role of memory in the process of reading. *Re*reading is a process which not only confirms, changes or develops preliminary interpretations, but also changes the nature of the reading process itself, incorporating 'what wasn't known then'. Toni Morrison quotes A.S. Byatt in *Possession*, describing how 'the knowledge that *we shall know* the writing differently or better or satisfactorily runs ahead of any capacity to say what we know, or how. In these readings, a sense that the text has appeared to be wholly new, never before seen, is followed, almost immediately, by the sense that it was *always there*, that we, the readers, knew it was always there, and have *always known* it was as it was, though we have now for the first time recognised, become fully cognisant of, our knowledge'. [22] This account brings the experience of reading certain kinds of texts close to the experience of memory of trauma, of those who suffer, as Christopher Bollas describes it, 'not from an unknown thought, but from an unthought known'. In the texts which I have discussed the reader becomes a witness to, even a participant in, the process of reconstructing and retranslating memory - witness also, at times, to the impossibility of reconstruction.

There is something in the nature of traumatic events that seems to require renewed attempts at representing the unrepresentable, in spite of the 'remainder' that resists the

[19] ibid., 276.

[20] ibid, 185.

[21] Benjamin, 'A Berlin Chronicle', 321.

[22] Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*, xiii-xiv.

processes of remembering and representation. Both individual and historical memory involve a complex process of negotiating the relationship between remembering and forgetting. Individual memories of personal histories, especially but perhaps not only painful or traumatic ones, are constantly reworked and retranslated in the present; so traumatic historical events seem to require re-representation and re-reading, to resist the memorialisation which is also a kind of forgetting, the forgetting which assumes that remembering is finished.

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