

Université de Montréal

**A (Dis)Play of Traces: Trauma, Witnessing, and the Poetics of
Implication**

par

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Abstract

This thesis will provide a comparative analysis of the poetics of traumatic hindsight and the literary devices that three texts - Anne Michaels's *Fugitive Pieces*, Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms*, and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*- utilize to signify the necessity of a retrospective gaze towards the atrocious past. The thesis investigates the ways in which each text negotiates the fragmentation that characterizes the traumatic aftermath, particularly as a result of the incomplete nature of traumatic history inscribed as absence of knowledge. It also explores the positioning of such a past within an intersubjective context, which goes beyond the simple individual plight to comprehend the need to be an ethically responsible agent of remembrance in the present. A central aspect of this study is thus the focus on how memory and witnessing are deeply entwined with the linguistic, which, by imploding into the poetic, offers the possibility of reconciling the imaginative intervention with the (obliquely) referential.

Keywords: trauma; return; witnessing; poetics; transmission; language; memory; ethics

Résumé

Cette thèse se propose de fournir une analyse comparative de la poétique de la rétrospective traumatique et les dispositifs littéraires que trois textes - *Fugitive Pieces* d'Anne Michaels, *Solar Storms* de Linda Hogan, et *Beloved* de Toni Morrison - utilisent pour signifier la nécessité du recul, d'un regard rétrospectif, sur le passé atroce. La thèse étudie les façons dont chaque texte négocie la fragmentation qui caractérise la suite traumatique, notamment en raison du caractère incomplet de l'histoire traumatique inscrite comme l'absence de savoir. La thèse explore également le positionnement d'un tel passé, dans un contexte intersubjectif, qui va au-delà du simple sort individuel pour essayer de comprendre la nécessité d'être un agent moralement responsable de la sauvegarde de la mémoire dans le présent. Cette étude met ainsi l'accent sur la façon dont la mémoire et le témoignage sont intimement liés aux outils langagiers, qui, par implosion poétique, offrent la possibilité de concilier l'intervention imaginative avec le référentiel (oblique).

Mots-clés: trauma; retour; témoignage; poétique; la transmission, le langage, la mémoire, l'éthique

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DEDICATION

I wish to dedicate this dissertation to my wonderful family:

To my mother, Manana, and my father, Habib, for everything that they have given and taught me;

And,

To my wife, Imen, and my kids, Adam and Amin, for being my very breath...

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Introduction: A Poetics of re/collection

“Is the witness the one who *sees*, the one who *undergoes*, or the one who *propagates*, the accident to which he bears witness?” – Barbara Johnson¹.

“Writing, friendship for the ill-come unknown, for the “reality” that cannot be made evident and that escapes every possible utterance” – Maurice Blanchot².

Texts written under the sign of trauma are often perceived as attempts to narrativize an event that is not fully assimilated during its occurrence – i.e., an event so violent that it shatters the linear unfolding of the subject’s comprehension of temporal ordering. Trauma is not registered as it happens but is rather re-lived belatedly; experienced for the first time as it *returns*. The dilemma that ensues, for the literary text attempting to bear witness to traumatic events, is similar to the paradox inherent in the mind’s fragmentary understanding of an event that insistently remains outside its reach. Textually confining a trauma which, by its very nature, escapes the grip of consciousness necessarily implies going beyond conventional modes of representation, just as trauma³ conveys a crisis of time and defies traditional modes of knowledge. Once this referential paradox is transposed into the field of historiography, trauma theory becomes an intensification of the deconstructive and anti-essentialist view that the *récit* cannot coincide with the totality of history – that history as symptomatic of trauma is, to use Cathy Caruth’s qualification, “an impossible history,” marked by its duplicitous impacts, demanding witness and occluding full recognition (*Explorations* 5).

If, as Cathy Caruth points out, the narratives of trauma pose a challenge to a homogenous reading as the oblique allusion towards the ineffable, or by pointing to an excess/insufficiency of language, then it becomes essential to pay attention to how the trauma narrative enlightens not only the project of bearing witness to past atrocity but also participates in shaping the subject-in-becoming. The *récit* informs the redefined individual who reintegrates the events of the past within a somewhat orderly narrative but also as one whose emergence as a more integral subject is *itself* shaped by the *narrative* in question. While the literary attempts to recuperate what is missing from a history of trauma not only highlight issues of expression and unspeakability, it also entails, due to its many removes from the event, the “difficulty of listening and responding to traumatic stories in a way that does not lose their impact, that *does not reduce them to clichés* or turn them all into versions of the same story” (Caruth *Explorations* vii, emphasis added). Arising, as Caruth enunciates, from the very theory of trauma that centralizes the structural pattern of repetition within the traumatic experience; this remark begs the question of situating the narratives of trauma within a dialectic whereby they supplement, challenge, or feed back into, trauma theory’s theoretical models.

Accepting Caruth’s implicit invitation for an openness to the variations within the traumatic narrative “pattern,” this project embarks upon a search for what might be termed a poetics of the (literary) bearing of witness in three novels – Ann Michaels’ *Fugitive Pieces*, Linda Hogan’s *Solar Storms*, and Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*. Thus, it focuses mainly on examining representational modes of bearing witness to trauma: it fuses the analysis of the trauma of/in literature with an investigation of the literariness of trauma – a question that Cathy Caruth, as she shifts the focus to the structure of the

traumatic experience in her *Unclaimed Experience* – raises but leaves rather undefined. In other words, this thesis asks what it means to read three texts that situate themselves within a chain of witnessing to traumatic events that were missed – if we are to align our understanding of trauma with that of Freud, Caruth, or Giorgio Agamben – even by their survivors. More specifically, I examine how the texts under study attempt to elaborate *a poetics of the traumatic retrospective* – the fictional, and paradoxical, writing in hindsight about trauma that coincides not with the experience but rather attempts to bear witness to bearing witness. I expose the different ways in which the novels ground their efforts in the linguistic medium, rely on similar tropes (having recourse to the figure of ‘un/covering,’ for instance) to point to a ‘non-appropriable’ event, and how they impose ethical demands upon the readers that advocates an ever-returning examination of the past as a corrective to amnesia.

As Caruth postulates in *Unclaimed Experience*, the temporal breakdown entailed by the harrowing event – the “breach in the mind’s experience of time, self, and the world” – places trauma narratives within a paradoxical configuration that further refutes the notion of a straightforwardly referential language (4). Trauma is hence “not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual’s past, but rather in the way that its unassimilated nature – the way in which it was precisely *not known* in the first instance – returns to haunt the survivor later on” (4). Therefore, the gaps at the heart of the structure of traumatic events require oblique modes of signification to depict their unbridled nature, forcing poetic paradigms to reach for a referentiality that stubbornly remains beyond their grasp. Hence, Caruth suggests, the non/experience of trauma offers a unique opportunity, because:

it is here, in the equally 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 that 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 rethinking of reference is aimed not at eliminating history but at resituating it in our understanding, that is, at precisely permitting *history* to arise where *immediate understanding* may not (UE 11).

The question arises then about the nature and characteristics of the language that attempts to assimilate the untoward experience. How does language intervene in the transmission of the belated, one-moment-too-late awakening of the psyche to its encounter with a deadly situation? If, as van der Kolk and van der Hart suggest, “traumatic memories are the unassimilated scraps of overwhelming experiences,” to what kind of narrative language or figuration do they give rise in the texts’ integrative efforts⁴ of an experience at which they did not assist (176)?

In their attempt to *signify* about, and around, trauma, the texts under study here attempt to highlight the possibility of choice on the part of the subject, and object, of trauma. While preoccupied with the unconscious repetition of an injury not understood as such – i.e., the traumatized subject’s enactment of symptomatic repetition that is the signature of trauma – the texts attempt to assert the possibility of a *conscious return* by the subject that would align their life events within an otherwise truncated history. This entails a writing challenge; how to ‘consciously’ represent an unconscious manifestation in the subject. To do so, the texts revert to a language that is highly metaphorical, a language that calls attention to its own limits even as it attempts to become a reflection of the excess of experience via its own tropological referentiality. Particularly prominent

examples of recurring tropes include those of exhumation and uncovering. But it is not a language that attempts to render aesthetic the violence done to both humans and itself; rather, it is a language that recedes in the face of its own excess at times to dislocate what Shoshana Felman calls the “masquerade of cruelty as art” (33).

In other words, the reader encounters a language that is self-consciously porous and suggestive, a language that engages in what Robert Eaglestone calls “playing what’s not on the page” (122). It is also a language that frenetically refuses to reiterate the containment reminiscent of the perpetrator’s violence – for example, the historically material gas chambers, the Indian reservations, the allotted space aboard slave ships as well as the concomitant the linguistic confinement of the victims into debasing definitions that facilitate mass annihilation by cliché. A language that is open(ing) or a link to the hidden and silenced past, rather than an illusory vessel of experiential meaning is – the novels seem to suggest – essential to the act of bearing witness. Symbolic language thus arises, which is driven to excess by the power of negation emanating from the traumatic experience. This is not a coherent language that seeks closure, but a permeable language of de/composition that demands participatory supplementation from the readers – what Caruth identifies as a “new mode of reading and of listening” (UE 9).

In addition to this avowed equivocation, the texts exemplify how the deployment of tropes and the intensification of the non/material markings of past history would allow a reversal of silence; they envision and enact a belated articulation in the gaps of historical records in the pursuit of a cohesive account. This move is of particular relevance because, as Peter Brooks notes, the texts thus reflect the strain placed upon language and its resources in the project of upholding the principle of “*mens sana in*

fibula sana: [that] mental health is a coherent life story, neurosis is a faulty narrative” (49). Hence, the texts remain preoccupied with the need to account for unattainable and unrecoverable *origins* and – in the face of the impossibility of reaching, or naming, such origins – become obsessed with meeting the double requirement of bearing witness to a trauma that is missed, or unattested to, and of acknowledging the limits of language by paradoxically stretching⁵ it to its most tropical *ends*. In other words, writing “has now...to write *against itself*,” meeting the challenges of traumatic memory while renouncing the possibility of total containment thereof and acknowledging its shortcomings (qtd. in Felman 34).

Attending to the linguistic shortcoming in the face of extreme devastation necessarily means raising the issue of the ineffability of traumatic events. This idea emanates primarily from the reactions of survivors, who often claim that language is far from able to convey all their traumatic perceptions and emotions, thus embracing a rhetoric that, for instance, *Fugitive Pieces* acknowledges as Jakob Beer wonders about “that space, that damaged chromosome in words” (111). It also recalls Caruth’s equating of trauma to the missing elements of our re/construction of it – given that trauma “is always *the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us* in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also *to what remains unknown* in our very actions and *our language*” (UE 4, emphasis added). In this respect, the concept of traumatic ineffability derives from the idea that bearing witness does not narrate trauma *per se*, since it is always ontologically a narrative-to-be, but partially

voices the unbound universe that is induced by the traumatic fissures both in the psyche and in language. Indeed, Caruth's position echoes that of Dori Laub, who asserts that the

victim's narrative – the very process of bearing witness to massive trauma – does indeed begin with someone who *testifies to an absence, to an event that has not yet come into existence*, in spite of the overwhelming and compelling nature of the reality or its occurrence...the trauma – as a known event and not simply as an overwhelming shock – has not been truly witnessed yet, not been taken cognizance of (*Testimony* 57).

In concordance with this view, therefore, the role of testimony itself emerges not as the chronicle of the event's reality but rather as a "mode of access" to its truth. It is not a constative or a declarative (a statement, or series of statements, relating the horrors an event) but a verbal performative, an utterance that acts, and that materializes the subject by so acting. Indeed, Shoshana Felman insists that – in order to make the "namelessness" of the traumatic experience receivable rather than an empty or remote depiction, and so to pass it on – language must subvert its own aesthetic intentions of "artistic mastery" and present itself as a "project of address" that achieves transmission because it effects a "breakage of words" (16-39). There is thus a paradoxical demand placed upon language which is also key to understanding how a language that is aware of its own tropological weight is our sole – albeit, oblique – pathway towards a history of trauma because

it would seem that it is impossible to speak about violent fact without acknowledging the violence done to that very articulation. To write about such violence is to explore, in minute and intimate detail, the effect of that violence on the words that would describe it. The act of grasping violent fact in words must include, then, by formal definition, the action of grasping, in the most precise way possible, the exact boundaries of that description (Fridman 109).

The concept of traumatic ineffability, according to Naomi Mandel, represents a rejection of the potential for "a radical misrepresentation" as one encounters a language that is ill-

equipped to depict traumatic horrors. Mandel asserts that there is, in the qualification of disaster as unspeakable, an implied awareness not only of the fact that it “poses a specific challenge to the potential of human conceptualization and hence to language” but also a categorization of such an “action as “inhuman” and hence as inaccessible to human understanding” (209). In addition, Dori Laub points to the intricacy inherent in the act of recreating the event *de novo* through the victim’s narration by equating it to a process of uncovering a “black hole,” the “place of the greatest density of silence” (64). While the concept of assigning language to a space of indistinguishable muteness is paradoxical, this “rhetoric of the unspeakable,” to use Mandel’s label, also reflects the aporetic nature of a project that stages a linguistic attempt to pierce into a silence that challenges the very idea of articulation (204).

The unspeakable dimension of traumatic events cannot be fully expunged, nor can it be fully voiced or integrated into a narrative account. In effect, this element that escapes the reach of language is sometimes so centrally presented within theoretical approaches that it tends to become its defining trait. For instance, Versluys defines as traumatic any “limit event, an event so traumatic that it shatters the symbolic resources of the individual and escapes the normal processes of meaning-making and cognition” (980). The unspeakable thus is a term qualifying the impotence of terms at one’s disposal to process the ungovernable memory⁶ traces lodged in the shattered psyche; so that the more the traumatic inscription into the undecipherable muteness is approximated via language, the more language itself is reinstating its several removes from its ‘truth’. Taking the example of the Holocaust and its metonymic condensation into the proper name of “Auschwitz,” Mandel points out that “The more we speak about Auschwitz, it

seems, the more prevalent and compelling our *gestures toward the limits* of our speech, our knowledge, and our world” (204, emphasis added).

Speaking the unspeakable is thus a process that generates its own erasure, a move that produces the effacement of its approximation of the unsaid. It also refracts the distance that separates traumatic memory from the symbolic resources of the individual and highlights even more centrally the fact that language is indeed in need of meditating on its own problematic status in trauma writing⁷. Nonetheless, the denial of language’s accessibility to memory (and vice versa) seems to repeat the aggression⁸ or the hegemonic intent of the perpetrators: they sought to suppress all details of their deeds from the historical record, and to pervert language itself to denote ‘alien’ realities in its own corpus. From the perpetrators’ point of view, genocide and/or cultural destruction was subsumed in a ‘meaning-making’ process that understood annihilation as a logical, or even natural, outcome. Hence, the very notion of unspeakability of trauma is often met with skepticism. Rather than reinforcing silence by negating the play of language as a potential, albeit contorted, entrance into traumatic reality and, as Giorgio Agamben laments, “confer on extermination the prestige of the mystical,” it is imperative for trauma literature to situate its articulation⁹ at the moment of untangling of traumatic memories, at the re-living of the initial fright that is attended to by the psyche (32).

Agreeing with Agamben’s rejection of the negativity carried by the terms *unspeakable* or *unsayable*, Marianne Hirsch suggests that a “way must be found to represent the unrepresentable without blunting the response”, asserting that it is imperative to establish “a kind of *textual compromise* between the senselessness of the initial traumatic encounter and the sense-making apparatus of a fully integrated historical

narrative” (qtd. in Versluys 988, emphasis added). This same perception of the unspeakable – not as a presence that needs to be figured out into speech, but rather as a discursive effect of atrocity upon language that is reflected in the limits of its forceful injunction to remember – is also observed in the view of what a successful rendering of trauma should be. Thus, according to Versluys, trauma “is not transmissible through words or images, except if the representation has *a built-in reference to its own inadequacy*, self-reflexively meditates on its own problematic status, and/or incorporates traumatic experience not so much thematically...as stylistically” (988).

This scantiness of the linguistic in its operation of traumatic representation is indeed what Agamben asserts as he studies the question of how to testify in lieu of the ‘common’ victim of the Holocaust, the one who reached the end of human endurance: the Musselman. The Musselmen, or Muslims, are the individuals who touched the bottom of the Nazi extermination process, becoming human shadows whose hollowed linguistic repertoire did not supply any reactive articulation of perspective¹⁰. According to Agamben, the question of the kind of language that could deliver the possibility of articulation is a preoccupying one¹¹ – one that arises even if one could speak *in the stead* of those who were unable to bear witness because they experienced the totality of the system of annihilation, and even if one could bypass the inherent limitation of proxy-witnessing for those who “have nothing to say... [who have no] instructions or memories to be transmitted” (34). Thus, only a language that is intentionally self-effacing could offer the possibility of impossibility – that is, realize a pseudo-registering of the withheld and absent testimony of the total casualty. For Agamben, the ambiguous position of the testimonial operation, which inhabits precisely “the disjunction between two

impossibilities of bearing witness,” affects the demands placed upon language so as to require its simultaneous affirmation and disavowal¹². Hence, the “language of testimony is a language that no longer signifies and that, in not signifying, advances into what is without language, to the point of taking on a *different insignificance* – that of the complete witness, that of he who by definition cannot bear witness (39, emphasis added).

While inviting trauma discourse to embark upon the contemplation of its status as a literary one, the idea of tropological indebtedness is brought to the forefront of what the literary text must consider: attempting to communicate trauma, which implies the re/living of atrocious events, is always already an insistence upon that which is missing. Consequently, even in a text that succeeds in bridging the gap between the thinkable and the un/thinkable, there is bound to be an experiential loss because trauma, as Anne Whitehead observes, “carries the force of a *literality* which renders it resistant to narrative structures and linear temporalities” (5, emphasis added). The shattering of language becomes precisely the means to gesture towards the traumatic past. Not only is the dissolution of the linguistic medium an effect or a manifestation of the inscription of trauma within textual templates of transmission; it is also a causal requirement to open the ambiguities of *non-literality* in order to signify – thus exemplifying the way the literary itself comes apart, for “trauma is a rupture not only in the normal order of things, but, more importantly, in the meaning-giving apparatus that is responsible for this order” (Versluys 986). It is in these very fissures of the literary voice that the text resists (back) the trauma that resists its structural framework.

It is not surprising, therefore, that even as it takes leave from a reality that is unattainable in retrospect, the language in the three novels analyzed in this project

remains focused on its *troping*, acknowledging the fact that it swerved from putative accuracy to *turn* – a word that, in Classical Greek, holds also the meaning of ‘trope’ – to the many figures that inhabit its texture. Each text thus brings the imagery and lyricism that it deploys to the fore, calling attention to its own verbal de/composition. As Agamben insists, however, acknowledging its own shortcomings does not necessarily refer diction back to its counterpart, silence. Rather, as Agamben seems to point out through his dissecting of what Primo Levi calls the “gray zone” – the confusing interaction that blurs or momentarily suspends the distinction between the victim and the perpetrator – this intermediary and equivocal perception of language, while distancing one from trauma and transforming it, can be mobilized or adjusted as a foundation to revitalize memory¹³.

In fact, suspending the haunting and atrocious qualities that emanate from the ambiguous “game” described by Levi in *The Drowned and the Saved* becomes Agamben’s introductory premise: it is the argument via which he underscores the fact that placing certain horrors upon an altar of incomprehensibility, via linguistic encoding, only enhances collective amnesia through the flight to a transcendent “explanation”. This play/ful act, be it the soccer game in the camp or the non-engaging euphemism of language, is an illusory repetition of hopeful expectation – a chimera that demands, paradoxically, that those traumatic memories be kept silent, as they refer one back to a higher moral order, a God-like explanation, always already pending. Agamben’s move from the play of the “game” to the question raised by linguistic play against itself explores the way in which a linguistic encryption that chooses not to confront its insufficiency may ultimately foster incomprehension – even as language tries to

‘immortalize’ horrific events by imploding a register of catastrophe. A language that hides our lack of understanding of trauma in understatement that exonerates us from any blame repeats the violence and erects new totalizing, self-evident, or all-encapsulating categories.

Primo Levi’s meditation upon the “gray zone” is itself a repudiation of simple or clear-cut distinctions. Indeed, he points at a screaming contradiction, which only seemingly places the perpetrators at an equal footing with the Sonderkommandos, themselves Jews to soon meet their fate of systematic destruction, and which becomes a spectacle for the bystanders Special Squad soldiers, who “take sides, bet, applaud, urge the players on as if rather than at the gates of hell, the game were taking place on the village green” (55). This ambiguity is echoed by Agamben and placed within language, which “in order to give witness, must give way to a non-language” (37). Thus, his view exposes an identical uncertainty vis-à-vis the utterances of those who unwittingly and arbitrarily escaped death, as they narrate what they did not live through but have observed from a close distance. In Agamben’s equation of the current historical moment to a “gray zone,” the present is identified as a period that is framed with(in) the potential return of trauma even as it (mistakenly) seems to offer a respite from destruction. In addition to making precise our position as a fictitious halt in human history as trauma, Agamben shows that the line of separation between victim, perpetrator, and bystander is muddled in the same way that, in Levi’s lamenting depiction¹⁴, the soccer game masquerades as an innocent or idyllic interaction between peers (i.e. equals).

Agamben’s emphasis is precisely placed on the need to explore the fact that this game should magnify the horror around it, rather than normalize its context as an

occupational hiatus, since what is configured as a professional (i.e., objectively detached) endeavor is nothing but the systematic and atrocious annihilation of camp inmates (Levi 55). Thus, it is the capacity to artificially detach oneself from the surrounding and ever-invading atrocity that is history that Agamben perceives as the threat emanating from the ambiguity of the camps' interaction. Indeed, rejecting complacency to establish a contaminating position that can also affect the survivor, who is always already lacking the full perspective on events, is taken up by Agamben as he proceeds to analyze its impact upon language. In particular, as noted by Thomas Mitchell, Agamben argues that the condensation of traumatic meanings, with terms like the Holocaust or the Shoah, is but "an apotheosis" that adulterates "the Final Solution from its grisly reality into a divine sacrifice" (295).

While Agamben does not specifically locate language in the "gray zone" of a halt between massacre and play, it is important to notice that this shift – from the polyvalence and incomprehensibility of a camp situation that seemingly implicates some victims' culpability to the language that addresses it – is strongly suggested. For Agamben, as it is for Levi, establishing a contaminating articulation that radiates from the soccer game situation, and from the camps by extension, that impinges upon the present condition is a must. This is precisely what positions Agamben against the notion of unspeakability, which he regards as an impetus to proliferation of attenuating and reductive clichés which substitute for 'knowledge'. This unsuspecting transformation – what Agamben calls the "semantic migration" towards other meanings – occurs because of the concentration of ideas of incomprehensibility and unsayability within metonymic umbrella terms. In fact, as he dissects the etymological origin of the word "euphemism," Agamben takes the idea

of alluding to that which cannot be put into words without imploding language back towards the theological concept of silent reverence¹⁵ – an idea that carries the dangers of distancing one from the traumatic event, especially in terms of our responsibility towards testimony, which for him is primordial. Thus, he distances his analysis from taking the same path as he declares that

[t]o say that Auschwitz is “unsayable” or “incomprehensible” is equivalent to euphemein, to adoring in silence, as one does with a god. Regardless of one’s intentions, this contributes to its glory. We, however, “are not ashamed of staring into the unsayable” – even at the risk of discovering that what evil knows of itself, we can also easily find in ourselves (32-33).

Agamben also denies the “conciliatory vice of...theodicy,” or the deifying and elevating abandonment that characterizes the recourse to such magnanimous bestowing of morality-driven meaning upon the Holocaust because it offers a closure that allows mankind to hide behind the “powerlessness of [a] God” (20). Not only does such a concept effectively render one passive towards the occurrence of such atrocious events, but it also perceives them as unavoidable even as it hopes to escape their recurrence – for a theodicy is more an indictment of the divine than it is of mankind. Moreover, the reduction of such trauma to a question of the indifference of the divine (which makes it unpreventable) re/inscribes it within the logic of sacrifice, a logic that not only legitimizes the Holocaust, but also renders it even more indefinite because “insofar as it implies the substitution of a literal expression with an attenuated or altered expression for something that one does not actually want to hear mentioned, the formation of a euphemism always involves ambiguities. In this case, however, the ambiguity is intolerable” (34).

Thus, the attempt to comprehend the incomprehensible – that is, to contain it and to understand it by absolutely removing it from the taxonomy of the profane – works paradoxically to “free the sinner[s] of guilt” (24). Moreover, to ‘absolve’ humanity from the responsibility for such events as the Holocaust, via an attenuating substitution of terms, is an illusory enterprise. For Agamben, it is a move that situates us in an era that is reminiscent of the camp’s soccer game: a distorted historical moment characterized by the false belief in safety and a fallacious relief that is surrounded by the manifest potential for the tragic recurrence of unknown, or unacknowledged, traumatizing violence¹⁶. Accordingly, Agamben’s position affirms the perplexing inextricability of our epoch from past traumas. It also functions as a theoretical precursor to viewing the engagement of the poet as the ethically sound perpetuation of ungraspable – not the linguistic management thereof. Just as the “gray zone” collapses regular taxonomies (perpetrator, victim, bystander, collaborator) and reinforces the circuits of implication, a language that refrains from becoming an outburst of indistinct significations – by opposition – no longer signifies anything beyond the empty clichés of the ‘already-known’.

The rejection of concentrating meanings within the euphemistic, and therefore silencing, labels that accompany the view of the Holocaust as an unspeakable event, leads Agamben again to ponder upon poetics – not as the aesthetic opportunity that emanates from the failure of the testimonial project but, rather, as an emulation of the traumatic effect that is placed in/on the linguistic medium. At the same time, he notes that “[n]either the poem nor the song can intervene to save impossible testimony; on the contrary, it is testimony...that founds the possibility of the poem” (36). Hence, one is not

contemplating a poesis that supplements what would otherwise be a silent realization of the impossibility of bearing witness, but a move towards poetics as the very offshoot or effect of that prospect of diluted or attenuated witnessing. Since the traumatic experience is always already partial, and as its recollection implies variation and modification, it makes the poetic stance an ethical position that acknowledges its incapacity to speak the whole truth, its eschewal of totalizing and banal euphemism, and its necessity to grasp something beyond a muting that would merely conceal and underwrite the injurious intentions of the perpetrators. In other words, this is an interstitial troping that self-consciously positions itself as a combination of an articulate silence and a silent expression of trauma, a language that brings itself to its own limits in order to memorialize what is increasingly irrecoverable.

1. Dis/play of Traumatic Traces

Just as this project analyzes texts that grapple with trauma, it also attempts to investigate the ways in which they configure the intricate relationship between narrative witnessing and traumatic memory. At issue is how each text reflects the fragmentation of the subject that results from historically specific and distinct violent events, and how the text attempts to establish the intersubjective connections necessary for the transmission of these events so as to bear witness. What should arise from this analysis is a better understanding of how, while acknowledging the traumatic experience as an epistemological limit, these texts do not shy away from a rethinking of reference – its possibility, its nature, and its limitations. The texts are ultimately instructive about how the structure, or rather network, of meaning that they propose is reconfigured as the sum

total of the incessant interaction between the fragmented subjectivities of the victims and the dis/play of traumatic traces¹⁷ that trigger the process of exhumation of the past in order to speak from its gaping wounds¹⁸.

This analysis tries to uncover a common thread that connects the three texts at hand. In fact, the objective is to conceptualize a poetics of traumatic hindsight: I explore the manner in which these texts, which derive from different traumatic histories and moments, attempt to remember those horrendous events that plague history. In addition, this research attempts to examine the ways in which each text positions itself as a valid, appropriate form of remembering that which cannot be entirely articulated. The project has to simultaneously note the different workings of traumatic traces in the texture of these novels, to attend to a poetics that is as unsettled as the traumas with which they grapple, while taking account of those discursive specificities that allow each text to remain referential – lyrically, obliquely, materially or otherwise. Indeed, Michaels' text seems obsessed with exhuming the buried body of archives that tell the tale of Holocaust¹⁹ victims. Hogan's novel, on the other hand, enacts or embodies the notion of a trauma signified through the flesh via literal, disfiguring wounds and their persistent scars. In a similarly intricate fashion, Morrison conjures a ghostly figure while engaging in a corporeal encoding of slavery's traumas. Ultimately, this thesis will try to reveal how the three narrative threads follow the protagonists' journeys into agency, that of a 'bearer' of the traumatic trace while the texts, *qua* traces in play themselves, are situated in the ambiguous space of il/legibility that appeals to an ethically committed readership.

Trauma has been identified – by Cathy Caruth – as *precisely* the one area of study that refutes the alignment of poststructural thought with “political quietism;” she

challenges the allegations that it is principally textually-focussed²⁰ and that, consequently, it remains necessarily lethargic and ethically non-committal, indifferent to anything that is not purely epistemological (Balkin 4). In the attempt to recuperate deconstruction to accommodate the claims of a traumatic history, Cathy Caruth is in fact able to destabilize such an accusation by insisting on a shift in the perception of trauma: it should not be conceptualized as a pathology defined by the misconstrued experience of an event, nor by the violence of the event per se. Rather, at issue for Caruth is the temporality of the subject: she analyzes the belatedness of the traumatic impact, its *après coup*, to transpose Sigmund Freud's temporal slippage of the traumatic impact within the *structure* of trauma. Thus, the "latency" by which the event *returns* to repossess the traumatized is, for Caruth, specifically and paradoxically the pathway toward history: an indirect access fraught with the uncertainty of memory, such recourse places a question mark around the validity of historical accounts because it establishes a "crisis of truth" that is born out of the tension between the event's immediate presence and belated after/effects (*Explorations* 6).

It is useful to examine the concept of "trauma" itself and analyse its (Freudian) associations before one can understand the formidable implications of Caruth's reinterpretation of its impact within the collective sphere. One has to reconsider Freud's psychoanalytical qualification of the "the dark and dismal subject of traumatic neurosis" in order to situate Caruth's broadening of it into what she considers our era's "historical enigma": the fact that one is witnessing "a history that is in its immediacy a crisis to whose truth there is no simple access" (*Explorations* 6). In his seminal text, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud conceptualizes trauma as the result of the failure of the mental

apparatus's "protective barrier" in the face of excessively violent stimuli (29). This "breach" in the psyche's shield explains, according to Freud, the incessant *return* to the situation in which the traumatic event occurred – e.g. in nightmares. This re-emergence reflects the event's fixation upon the patient's psyche, and that its unbidden nature places it outside the control of the psyche: the "traumatic experience is constantly forcing itself upon the patient" (7). This is an iteration of the event's violent irruption, in its first occurrence, as a surplus of impact that engenders a fissure in the mind's experience of time²¹.

Thus, the traumatic event is, since its first non/inscription, one that does not yield to the normative structuring schemata of the psyche. The event's excessively violent registration keeps it, paradoxically, unregistered for a certain time²². Moreover, the re-immersion in the unpleasurable experience reflects the endeavour to bind and dispose of it. More crucially, it reveals the need "to master the [traumatic] stimulus *retrospectively*, by developing the anxiety whose omission was the cause of the traumatic neurosis" (26, emphasis added). Trauma is also a ramification of an event characterized by a first non/experience – because, as far as consciousness or psychic control is implied, it is a first encounter that is a missed encounter. In order to compensate for its initial unpreparedness, the psyche effects a staging or re-enactment, after-the-fact of the very event that overwhelmed it. This recreation is, interestingly, a common link between the psychological re/incorporation of traumatic stimuli into the present of the survivor and the narrative that Freud uses to describe that process, which is also the occasion for him to introduce the notion of a "repetition compulsion" within his theoretical framework²³.

According to Cathy Caruth, the historical import of the experience of trauma resides precisely in the fact that its repetition, its repossession of the subject, its incessant return is actually due to the momentous lamination of its literality within a chronological structure of delay. The event is preserved in its rawness. It is temporally displaced and perceived for the first time only as it invades the psyche iteratively. Caruth claims that “the historical power of the trauma is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only in and through its inherent latency that it is first experienced at all” (*UE* 17). Thus, while Freud reads the recurrence of the traumatic dreams as an indicator of attempts to exert control over a past event’s reception, Caruth asks what it means to suggest that certain violent incidents allow for a literal but delayed perception, and wonders about the extent to which this time gap makes the events themselves unavailable for knowing, remaining inaccessible even as they repeatedly ‘take place.’ In addition to the indirectness of the traumatic experience, the issue of the delayed literality of the traumatic moment generates compelling concerns about the translation of life-threatening experiences into narrative. How can an event which is not comprehended as it happens, due to the un-readiness of consciousness to respond to the unmediated rawness of the event, be submitted to the structural requirements of the textual, the referential²⁴, the narrative?

In fact, literary expression alone seems to accommodate the traumatic requirement for an indirect frame of reference – a space that would allow one to conjugate the inherent amnesia of the experience with the paradoxical literality of its return, giving rise to an articulation that foregoes any pretence of privileged access to the truth of the traumatic past. Indeed, Freud’s own paradigmatic example for the

verbalization of trauma is drawn from a poetic text, which reveals how literature is not dependent on simple or direct knowledge in order to signify the vicissitudes of traumatic experience. Freud thus initiates his examination of traumatic neurosis, and especially its operating outside the conscious control of the subject, by quoting a passage from Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*, where the hero "unwittingly" repeats the wounding of his beloved, and in so doing unleashes a voice from the wound of which he was not aware, a voice that – as Caruth notes²⁵ – "bears witness to the past he unwittingly repeats...[representing] the enigma of the otherness of a human voice that cries out from the wound" (*UE* 3).

The repetition compulsion, apparent in the second wounding of Tancred's beloved, is a central precept in the temporal unfolding of the traumatic experience. Freud has indeed noted how inescapable are the repetitive behaviours that invade the present of individuals suffering from traumatic neuroses. In fact, this intrusive reiteration of the experience in its literality – e.g. in flashbacks – is so powerful that Freud calls attention to its inescapability by likening it to a "fate" (*Beyond* 16). In the same way that this repetition reflects the attempt to grasp the event itself, to integrate it within one's life story and to understand it belatedly, narratives of trauma are obsessively preoccupied by the need to look backwards, to retrieve and to examine a past that was in its pristine literality unavailable for psychic assimilation – for knowing – as it took place. The idea of attempting, *post factum*, to regain control over the violent scene of trauma, and to amend the psychological reaction to it on the basis of a delayed 'comprehension' of it, is as central to Freudian psychoanalytical theory as it is basic to the genre of trauma writing. Indeed, the three novels under analysis in this thesis are instantiations of the need to

account for ‘lost’ or ‘missed’ origins that is simultaneously problematized by the difficulty of naming the origins, or the primal scenes, of disjuncture.

It is the aim of this project to establish, through the study of the above-mentioned novels, what might be termed a *poetics of traumatic hindsight*. I shall examine how the temporal confusion inherent in the traumatic experience is negotiated by the resolutely lyrical texts as they retrospectively and self-referentially examine the possibility of deferred comprehension (and, implicitly, of bearing witness, of something that might be understood as referentiality). The questions asked in this project concern the themes and tropes utilised in the narratives in order to reflect (on) a past that is not available in simple terms for knowing. I shall chart their attempt at a recuperation of a lost origin, a foundational moment of trauma, which can be gestured toward only obliquely. The project also investigates the positioning of such a past within an intersubjective context that is inclusive of communal plight in order to constitute the writer and her protagonist as ethically responsible agents of remembrance.

In each text, one character suffers the fragmentation due to the traumatic aftermath, partly because of the incomplete nature of traumatic history inscribed as non/knowledge and its marked absences and vacuousness but also due to the gap evident in the character’s arrival at maturity to mature without the communal or family circle of transmission or historical rememory. For instance, Jakob Beer, in *Fugitive Pieces*, struggles with the fact of being there when his family is decimated by the Nazis but, at the same time, of not having *seen* it happen (as he was hiding). As Jakob’s story criss-crosses with that of Ben, the son of Holocaust survivors who withhold the narratives of their suffering and loss, the silences inherent in traumatic witnessing are magnified.

Asserting both the urge to tell and the currents of denial that complicate it, these texts configure *intersubjectivity* as the (ethically) appropriate and perhaps only means available for connecting the traumatic fragments inherited as truncated history. To establish this connection, the subject must embark on a *return* to the community to share its traumatic history and to learn that their past is informative of his/her now. In *Solar Storms*, for example, Angela, the protagonist, finds that, dislocated and cut off from her family, she cannot make sense of her literal defacement, the scars she has lived with all her life, or her anguish. It is only when she reunites with her kin that she starts to re/integrate the horrific past into her own life story, seeing her life intersect with her ancestors'. Similarly, in *Beloved*, it is not until the African American community re/members Sethe within its ranks that the ghosts of the horrendous past that haunt her mind seem to be exorcised.

Even if the fragmented state is not resolved by the end of the narratives – which remain suspended and equivocal – the communal bonds and the mutually-feeding hi/stories help the protagonists to achieve a sense of a more accomplished subjectivity. Their perception is altered, literally and symbolically, as they perceive new details. Ben notices details of which he was unaware in a family picture: “now, from thousands of feet in the air, I see something else. My mother stands behind my father and his head leans against her... Like a miraculous circuit, each draws strength from the other. I see that I must give what I most need” (*FP* 294). Likewise, Angela finds herself a new skin, “like a snake,” “fresh,” and “seeing clearly” (*SS* 344). In a similar fashion, Sethe is able to single out the threat of the white man’s presence, a presence whose missing led to infanticide in an episode of her past – “Sethe feels her eyes burn... she sees him...his black hat wide-

brimmed enough to hide his face but not his purpose. He is coming into her yard and he is coming for her best thing” (*Beloved* 197). At the same time, the texts chronicle the emergence of a new selfhood, a novel agency that is aware of its own position as a link within a chain of witnesses and/or victims of traumas.

The three texts resonate in their gesture, albeit in different fashions and with different catalysts, towards an ethical responsibility vis-à-vis historical events: as traumatic as the past may be, it needs to be remembered and integrated, rather than ignored or rejected, for its values and teachings not to be missed²⁶. In addition to their obsession with an increasingly irretrievable past, the texts also share an insistent concern with the liminal space between personal and collective traumas. In fact, they all demonstrate that articulating the victim’s perception of how trauma fits within their life stories is a crucial mechanism in the tenuous process of identity re/construction. By depicting the process by which, characters like Jakob, Ben, Angel, Hannah, and Sethe reclaim the agency denied by violent traumatic moments, the texts at hand re/inscribe their unique traumatic insight within the larger context of a violent history. Because of the tensions between silencing factors and the need to tell the horrors, the texts intervene to provide (representational) linkages to a past that is already fading away, thereby re/composing the idiosyncratic universe of the individual victim while establishing it as a node within a larger network of sufferers/survivors.

Otherwise put, the three texts – while centering on how certain characters negotiate the traumatic aftermath and how trauma disrupts the immediate sense of identity – move back and forth between the individual struggles to recover a normal storyline and the attempts to make sense of their plight by resituating it within a bigger

picture of systematic group oppression. Thus, in *Fugitive Pieces* for instance, Jakob Beer's story of surviving the killing of his family by the Nazis becomes that of his reworking of his non/presence there (he only partially heard his family being shot while hiding) into a symbolic map²⁷ of remembrance of all the victims he missed. He thus invents a method of imaginatively making traumatic "stories a precise recipe" of metonymically connecting the one to the many (FP 193). In *Solar Storms*, the same patterns are at work, even though it is not solely an *imaginative* insertion of the protagonist within contexts of victimhood that one observes this time around. In effect, the protagonist, Angela, is able to physically re-enter the location of the Native American disaster, in space if not literal time, to witness firsthand the traumatic markings that befell her culture and led to her expulsion from her milieu – which also works as a reminder that this particular traumatic situation continues unabated²⁸. Finally, this trend – of linking individual and communal fates in the aftermath of monumental trauma – is perhaps clearest in *Beloved*, as Sethe is dependent on the intervention of other survivors, the "singing women," in order to re/situate her personal story of loss within the larger hi/story of abuse and degradation that started with her ancestors being snatched from Africa to become slaves on a foreign continent (308).

As the texts resist equating the memory of absence with an absence of memory, they unequivocally advocate a re-visiting of trauma in order to release those voices that speak past suffering. This explains why the novels as such, and characters within them, remain captivated by the interplay between violence and language. For instance, Jakob notes, in *Fugitive Pieces*, that he "already knew the power of language to destroy, to omit, to obliterate. But poetry, the power of language to restore: this was what both Athos

and Kostas were trying to teach me” (FP 79). Similarly, the protagonist of *Solar Storms* analyzes the linguistic imprisonment of her mother, who was not only turned into an object referent of traumatic transmission, replete with foreign signification, but also codified as dysfunctional within her Native world: penetrated by the alien logos of commodification, Angela’s mother’s dead body fits well with the printed lies and propaganda of the colonizer that cover it (SS 254). Likewise, *Beloved* points to the struggle against a doubly enslaving system of reference that denies the African Americans any right to define themselves. Thus, when Sethe tries to re/enter this medium to register the significance of her murdered daughter, she is immediately re/interpreted as an object of concurrent disdain and lust – paying for the words on her daughter’s tombstone through the sexual violation by the engraver, with the “ten minutes she spent pressed up against dawn-coloured stone studded with star chips, her knees wide open as the grave, [which] were longer than life” (5).

The delicate task of casting into language that which resists it – i.e., the concatenation of traumatic details that disable their own registration – amounts to a re/construal or re/composition that allows the texts to reinterpret past traumas. According to Dori Laub, the process of unearthing the traumatic experience from under the layers of muteness and uncertainty that cover it demands attention to what is not even mentioned, an attention to silence and to the fact that language is brought to its limits. Hence, in the testimonial process, there “are never enough words or the right words, there is never enough time or the right time, and never enough listening or the right listening to articulate *the story that cannot be fully be captured in thought, memory, and speech*” (*Testimony* 78, emphasis added). As an ever-fleeting element, the traumatic event

strenuously hollows language – not only in that it resists being contained in verbal depictions but also in that, to begin with, its atrocity creates antithetical currents of non/expression, culminating in what Judith Herman refers to as an inner “conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud” (1).

In the face of such resistances, the texts under analysis here attempt various strategies in order to formulate a perceptive account of trauma that communicates it, while also conveying what Shoshana Felman calls its “radically unique, non-interchangeable, and solitary burden” of bearing witness to the unspeakable (*Testimony* 3). What is most remarkable in the texts at hand is that they all depict tragedy by having recourse to a poetic linguistic medium²⁹. In fact, as Susan Gubar notes, in *Poetry after Auschwitz*, poesis is the most adequate channel toward a comprehension of traumatic workings and the vicissitudes of memory precisely because it repeats the same aggression vis-à-vis language and narrative structure. Because poetry “abrogates narrative coherence” and “marks discontinuity,” Gubar insists, it “denote[s] the psychological and the political, ethical and aesthetic consequences of the calamity without laying claim to experiencing or to comprehending it in its totality” (7). Accordingly, the disconnection between the traumatic instant and the moment of writing is echoed in the poetic. The lyrical denotes thus the trauma of language that draws a parallel to the experiential gaps it represents: “to signal the impossibility of a sensible story,” and to reflect the challenges of narrative logic in the face of the unthinkable, poetic language can supply “spurts of vision, moments of truth, baffling but nevertheless powerful pictures of scenes unassimilated into an explanatory plot and thus seizes the past” (7).

In *Fugitive Pieces*, for example, Susan Gubar notes that “the discontinuities and stutters of repetition, the cutting of connectives found in ordinary prose, the blank spaces between stanza-like chapters, the recurrence of mysterious maxims, the clustering of rhythmic image patterns, the elaboration on and analysis of extended metaphors” all reflect the traumatic gaps and the incomprehensibility inherent in survival (256-257). Hence the *indirectness* of the death threat, the awakening to the missed encounter with destruction, is paralleled in the *oblique*, lyrical prose that becomes an ambiguous condensation of both the violence of trauma, its constant slippage within and outside the ‘standard’ linguistic range, and its vivid intrusion into the present of the survivor. In *Solar Storms*, the metaphorical language becomes an index of the protagonist’s openness to the natural world, which is an immersion in the very wound that speaks the traumas of her kin. A language inspired, for its tropes, by the land becomes Angela’s source of renewal, allowing her to reinterpret her own scars as signs of healing rather than traces of wounding. This awakening to the natural surrounding as the muse-like inspirer of the secrets of ancestral strategies and tricks of survival is not accidental. It rather shows that the protagonist’s act of going back makes it possible, paradoxically, for her to take leave from the past’s grip on her life (narrative). Morrison’s *Beloved* merges a sense of indirectness through a language that is poetically abrupt and ambiguous, a language that unleashes the many potential significations from the gaps of historical non/knowledge and enmeshes the voices of the lost. There is a breaking of language itself into fragmented lines that could also depict its alienation from the suffering that weighs upon individuals who are not its native speakers. Still, the novels’ language presents an

openness to meaning-creation on the part of the reader that pits it against the closure-driven, status quo maintaining language of the perpetrators³⁰.

Moreover, in each novel, the poetic nature of the text suggests its own self-referential reflection of excess, of fractured time and disjoined words – a language symptomatic of traumatic aftermath, as Gubar notes, whereby the “lyrical utterance often announces itself as an involuntary *return* to intense feelings about an incomprehensible moment. But recollected in relative safety, if not tranquility, such a moment rendered in writing allows authors and readers to grapple with the consequences of traumatic pain without being silenced by it (8, emphasis added). Furthermore, this flight toward language as a commemorative tool, as the aesthetic reminder that can only gesture at “what happened” without encompassing it, fits well within the Caruthian view that the origins of trauma are held within a preoccupying and unattainable scene but that their impact is seen best in the structural pattern of infinite return of its “unassimilated nature” that haunts the victim (*UE* 4).

In this light, the metaphorical language dis/played by the texts is required by their status not as the medium that allows one to establish a full knowledge about trauma but as the code that figuratively hints at its own insufficiency, highlighting its limits as well as its role as a site of potentially undecipherable signification. The texts refuse to abandon their witnessing project because of the lacunae that inhabit language as it meets trauma, especially because – as Dori Laub mentions – the “‘not-telling’ of the story serves as a perpetuation of its tyranny” (79). Rather than prolonging a silence that would perpetuate the perpetrators’ intentional suppression of victims and witnesses alike, the texts explore language for its ability to foster a different kind of remembrance – one that is not based

on a *complete* knowledge of past events, which is a claim that even survivors refuse to make. In this respect, the texts seem to concur with Elie Wiesel's view that language "had been corrupted to the point that it had to be *invented anew*" (8, emphasis added).

2. Re/turning Memories

If the texts seemingly agree that only the attempt to refract suffering in a language that is insistently elegiac, or dignifiedly mournful, how do they conceive of the nature of testimony itself? This also raises questions about the appropriate reading of these texts, crafted in the aftermath of a suffering that, as Dori Laub notes, paralyzes the "parameters of 'normal' reality, such as causality, sequence, place and time" (69). According to Laub, testimonial texts are not unlike episodes of traumatic repetition, as they conjugate the silences inherent in the missed event with the imperative of communicating its atrocity, because "testimony is inherently a process of facing loss – of going through the pain of the act of witnessing, and of the ending of the act of witnessing – which entails yet another repetition of the experience of separation and loss" (Laub 91). In addition, these texts are inhabited by dual and opposed currents – paralleling the caesura in trauma-as-experience, and mimicking and signaling its non-linguistic component.

Working obliquely to assert and to deny the inherent problems of reporting traumatic events is an intricate task, since "the horror of the historical experience is maintained in the testimony only as an elusive memory that feels *as if it no longer resembles any reality*. Realizing its dimensions becomes *a process that demands retreat...*to halt and reflect on those memories as they are spoken, so as to assert the veracity of the past and to build anew its linkage to, and assimilation into, present day-

life” (*Testimony* 76, emphases added). Accordingly, the testimonial text is not straightforwardly a historical chronicle of events and psychosocial reactions to them, nor is it a text that linearly progresses towards the establishment of a knowledge status that equals the “perception” of how/what it must have been like for victims. In fact, as Shoshana Felman notes,

testimony cannot be subsumed by its familiar notion, how the texts that testify do not simply report facts but in different ways encounter – and make us encounter – strangeness, how the concept of testimony, speaking from a stance of superimposition of literature, psychoanalysis and history is in fact quite *unfamiliar and estranging*, and how, the more we look closely at texts, the more they show us that, unwittingly, *we do not even know what testimony is* and that, in any case, it is not simply what we thought we knew it was (19).

Since this (defamiliarizing) language of testimony is the element to which one has access, Giorgio Agamben has noted the connection between language and individuation, both of which are brought to a severe test that threatens their collapse in the situation of the ‘Muslim,’ the denizen “who submits unconditionally”, the inmate who lost human dignity, becoming “a rigid mask,” a “staggering corpse” of abandonment³¹. “Subjectivity and consciousness,” as Agamben insists, “rest on what is most precarious and fragile in the world: the event of speech” (129). Because the Muslims have no access to a language by which they can bear witness, the whole notion of proxy-witnessing becomes a resurrection of the inhuman (or “barbarous,” which Agamben uses for a-lingual) within the human in a process by which one *lends a voice*, a language, to the dead. Accordingly, this supplementation of articulation means that

to speak, to bear witness, is thus to enter into a vertiginous movement in which something sinks to the bottom, wholly desubjectified and silenced, and something subjectified speaks without truly having anything to say of its own... Testimony takes place where the *speechless one makes the*

speaking one speak and where *the one who speaks bears the impossibility of speaking in his own speech*, such that the silent and the speaking...enter into a zone of indistinction in which it is impossible to establish the position of the subject, to identify the ‘imagined substance’ of the ‘I’ and, along with it, the true witness (120, emphasis added).

It is in line with this project that all the three novels under study can be situated, for they emanate from the need to articulate the unsaid – thus imprinting the psychoanalytical question of knowing and not knowing onto the poetic utterance. While the unspoken/unspeakable is a mark of traumatic events from which no full account can be derived, historical traumas may be said to become somewhat ‘fictional’ over time (if anything else, because of the testimonial gap engendered by the disappearance of those who lived through them). The death of the survivors of traumas places the writer and the reader at a further remove from the reality of the events³², which complicates a lacunar testimony that is already diminished by the privilege of escaping death so that, as Levi mentions, “[n]o one has told the destiny of the common prisoner” (qtd. in Agamben 33). Nobody lived to tell. In fact, the three texts engage in an approximation, which is paradoxically also a distancing maneuver³³, of traumatic implications; consequently, they raise questions about the impact of trauma upon the lives of the survivors and how to reintegrate the perspective of the events within a large scheme of intersubjective relations, a re-(con)figuration of loss, and ethical awareness.

One striking similarity in the poetic approach amongst the three texts is their insistent focalization on the trope of *exhumation*, be it the literal unearthing of victims (this is how Jakob Beer is introduced as a Holocaust survivor in *Fugitive Pieces*); the uncovering of the expressive, archival efforts of the victimized (e.g. how the poetic

articulation of memory of Jakob becomes Ben's prized find in the second section of the text); the displaying of traces of traumatic markings on the bodies of victims (Linda Hogan's equation of corporeal wounds of Native Americans, in *Solar Storms*, to the scarred land/scape); or the inserting of revelations about undocumented, or intentionally suppressed, traumas of the past (for instance, Morrison's filling in the gap of emotional depiction in the experience of victims of the Middle Passage and slavery, in *Beloved*). The texts thus stage an attempt, within which they themselves are inscribed as textual reminders, to re/construct a remembrance of the traumatic moment in order to draw attention to its fleeting, incomplete truth as its absolute, and absolutely troubling, truth.

Another correspondence between the three texts at hand, which is also connected to the first project of traumatic disclosure, is the way in which their investment in a *return*, usually of the main character through a literal journey or pilgrimage, becomes a symbol not only of the possibilities of healing that the traumatic aftermath may hold but also a warning of the dangers of the later generations functioning as bystanders that allow the historical truths of the Holocaust, of the Native American genocide, or of the Middle Passage/Slavery to sediment and be hidden from collective memory. The texts themselves, in effect, are research-based fictional returns towards the incomplete historical truth. In their quality of linguistic media that attempt to replenish some of the gaps of historical accounts with the multi-generational repercussions (Ben, in *Fugitive Pieces*; Angela and her nameless sister in *Solar Storms*, to mention a few instances), the texts stage a return within a return: that of the protagonist to the archival site. These mnemonically charged spaces provide the characters with the added contextualization of the events that they do not understand. In addition, they supply a teaching from the past

that is either encapsulated in a memoir (as in *Fugitive Pieces*), in an inherited way of situating oneself in the world (as in *Solar Storms*) or in the ancient values of communal solidarity that were violently severed (as in *Beloved*). The texts represent an opening of future possibilities even as they remain decidedly concerned with relating the details of the traumatic past.

The notion of fleeting memory traces of trauma³⁴ is evident in the title of the first book, *Fugitive Pieces*, a text that upholds its status of a non-fiction so as to guarantee a complete suspension of disbelief until, at the very end, one stumbles upon notes in which the author acknowledges the “work of historians” and the “many book” and from which she drew information for her novel (295). Also noteworthy is the fact that, in the preface, there is an allusion to the existence of many accounts, written by victims, which did not get the chance to be retrieved or transmitted (because the victims did not live to recover them and the perpetrators did their possible to obliterate them). It is in this light that the position of the book as the retrieving story that tells a story of retrieval (another synonym for memory of memorialization) becomes clearer.

In the text, two accounts are juxtaposed, which repeatedly deploy the exhumation trope as a necessity for the continuation of life – be it literal survival (as when Jakob Beer is ‘extracted’ from a pit in which he hid after the extermination of his family by the Nazis) or the scientific revealing of the fabrications masquerading as past (as in the work of Athos, the archeologist who saves Jakob, which is to reveal the lies used by the Nazis to morph older remains into proof of Aryan racial superiority and to eradicate the Other’s trace, literally). The first section of the novel exposes how Jakob tries to find solace in poetics, how his fascination with language awakens him to its possibilities and to its

erasures. In the second section, one is taken closer to the present as Ben, the son of Holocaust survivors, struggles with the heavy silence and emotional outbursts of his parents. This connects Ben to the poetic expression of Jakob, as he realizes his need to contextualize his father's disjointed teachings³⁵. But even as he notices the inadequacy of his father's story to his position as a second-generation member, Ben reiterates the validity of the geological trope that frames the domain of memory:

Images brand you, burn the surrounding skin, leave their black mark. Like *volcanic ash*, they can make *the most potent soil*. Out of the seared place emerge *sharp green shoots*. The images my father planted in me were an exchange of vows. He passed the book or magazine to me silently. He pointed a finger. Looking, like listening, was a discipline. What was I to make of the horror of those photos, safe in my room with the cowboy curtains and my rock collection? ...What I was to make of them, in my safe room, was clear. You are not too young. There were hundreds of thousands younger than you (*FP* 218-219).

This insistence upon the physical world, itself a trope signifying the stubborn persistence of the literal/real, is closely entangled with the indirect and apprehensive project of extracting history from the soil in which it is buried by perpetrators, or inadequately revealed by survivors who are not themselves fully exhumed from their near-death experience, which falls rather within the domain of the figurative. While it is itself not different from archeology, uncovering and reinterpreting the traces of the past, the task of bearing witness seems here to conjugate both the real and the poetic, to offer a poetics in which the figurative and the literal are in uneasy but corresponding interlinearity. For example, Anne Michaels herself has explained, as will be explored in Chapter 1, that it was her intention to reverse the objectification of the Jews by the Nazis by resurrecting them from the every elements to which they were reduced – literally, via incineration and

mass graves, and metaphorically, in the process of degradation to non-humans that made their extermination “meaningful” within the Nazi agenda.

It is remarkable, however, that her text is an actual poetic re/collection (as in recalling or gathering the traces of the past). It is indeed an archeological resurrection of the past and its victims that is also imbued with a metaphorical language that binds and recreates family ties. Starting from the depths of “The Drowned City,” the chapter whose title evokes the layered accumulation of elements and the hidden, undiscovered, unrecovered wealth of information to be found, Michaels addresses the issue of the disappearance of survivors head-on: “time is a blind guide [because it covers and erases the past]...if you’re lucky, you’ll emerge again [in remembrance]” (*FP* 5). It is in light of this framing suggestion that one is to understand how Ben’s uncovering of Jakob’s memoir represents a rebirth of the poet. That the salvation of Jakob, “bog boy,” is operated through Athos, the Greek archeologist, is also a mark of how Michaels herself views her role as an author who digs these traces up from a forgetful, gap-ridden history. While clearly placing her book along Athos’s own “historical topography,” writings that counter the Nazi falsification of the past, Michaels also depicts the struggle within language that is the effect of both trauma and the need to testify, joining Agamben’s view that testimony is only possible because of the struggle or impotence of language.

This obsession with language, seen most clearly in Jakob’s contemplation of a shadow language to his native Hebrew – one that is not dissimilar to Agamben’s hypothetical language of testimony – that would approximate most his terrifying experience but without deviating from its language of occurrence, is also what drives Ben to connect with his words, words that he could not get from his biological father. In

effect, in the second part of the novel, one notices the great extent to which Ben unknowingly functions according to Jakob's own faith in books: "When I was young I searched among them for *the one book that would teach me everything*, just as I would look for *one language*, just as some would look for one woman's face. There is a Hebrew saying: Hold a book in your hand and you're a pilgrim at the gates of a new city" (*FP* 156). Jakob had learnt from his mentor that language could be used to falsify events – *Bearing False Witness*, Athos's book, was finished by Jakob himself. Ben is attracted by the potential to amend that Jakob places in his lyrical text – much like Michaels herself – and how it is necessarily a potential to remember and love, to "make love necessary" (*FP* 121).

The fact that Ben looks for the poetic expression of Jakob, that he seeks Jakob's recorded perplexity about how some kinds of experience remain beyond language, unsaid, even as he inscribes it in language via his memoir, shows that – just like the author herself – Ben prefers the oblique gesturing towards trauma through a circumventing poesis to the abrupt and incoherent interjections of his silent father. Negating the possibility of a return to a coherent order of things cripples Ben's father, but it is precisely what sets Ben on a quest to ascribe meaning to what he knows only partially, having paid an awe-filled attention to his parents' behavior and "oddities"³⁶. In addition, his quest is demanded by the gaps in the narratives to which he has access: "Instead of hearing about ogres, trolls, witches, I heard disjointed references to kapos, haftlings, "Ess Ess", dark woods; a pyre of dark words" (*FP* 217).

This fascination with the missing story is what drives Ben closer to Jakob's articulation of pain, to the poet/translator who believed that "[t]here is no absence, if

there remains even the memory of absence. Memory dies unless it's given a use" (*FP* 193). This perception is precisely what speaks to Ben; he needs to integrate the mnemonic traces that his father reenacts with the fragments of stories he gathers. He must (re)collect the "fugitive pieces" of the past, and by so doing, he would honor the memory of those who have gone without telling their tale. In effect, a striking similarity with Ben's credo seems to inform Michaels' own project, which is condensed best in this statement: "my fascination wasn't archaeology or even forensics: it was biography. The faces that stared at me across the centuries, with creases in their cheeks like my mother's when she fell asleep on the couch, were the faces of people without names. They stared and waited, mute. It was my responsibility to imagine who they might be" (*FP* 221). Hence, the text itself strives to become the loving map of remembrance that emanates from the ethically committed, a verbal map that allows one to re/trace the way back towards the past, even as it – just like Jakob's book – flies from the poetic medium to the "Groundwork³⁷" that needs to be done to exhume the hidden accounts of the dead.

The endless return staged in *Fugitive Pieces* – the reader witnessing Ben re/turn to Jakob's poetry after Jakob re/turns to a land that remembers him (Greece) and writes about the re/turning ghosts of his murdered family – reinforces a conceptualization of a language that bleeds metaphors, a language that imploded in testimony so that its tropological density becomes an echo (again, a repetition) of the extreme nature of the catastrophe towards which it gestures. It also raises the questions of whether redefining an ethos of language may be needed to rescue the possibility of transmitting that which is doubly missed: "Murder steals from a man his future. It steals from him his own death. But it must not steal from him his life" (*FP* 120). According to Michaels, a language that

loves to remember or that remembers to love – that is, a language that unearths and sings the past, as if in a Kaddish for the dead, while acknowledging the limits of its restoring capacity – might be our only access to salvage the victim’s past.

This thematic axis, of the return that is generative of an intersubjective awareness and potential re/integration³⁸, extends through Linda Hogan’s *Solar Storms*, explored in Chapter 2. Indeed, in this text the reader follows another path of return that leads back to the revelation of the extent of destruction that befalls the lives of Native Americans: it is an escape of the protagonist from an oppressive America that stifles her to one that liberates her. The crucial nature of examining the origin of one’s own past-as-trauma is signified by the protagonist’s discovery that “beginnings were important to my people” (SS 37). In fact, Angela herself re-enacts this necessity: so that returning becomes a process functioning across time and space towards the potential source of her trauma, the primal scene of her personal tale of wounding. Indeed, Angela decides to leave suburban America to reconnect with her family and tribe. Intending to abandon what she calls the “savagery of civilization” behind, Angela returns to her kin hoping to reveal the secret of her disfiguration (SS 65).

This move ends up revealing both the origin of Angela’s corporeal scars and the other wounds inflicted upon the Native existence, upon the natural element that they venerate. In addition, it is the journey towards the (traumatized) self – i.e., the active remembrance of the horrific abuse that also led to her disfiguration – that starts the protagonist’s gradual maturation process – a development fed by stories about destroyed lives, by the teachings of a resisting landscape, and by the resilience of her maternal elders: “From my many grandmothers, I learned how I came from a circle of courageous

women and strong men who had walls pulled down straight in front of them until the circle closed...but some lived, some survived this narrowing circle of life” (SS 107). In addition, I would like to argue, the text itself functions as a literary equivalent of the Native American “sweat lodge” ceremony, the ritualistic gathering that reconnects the Natives to each other, to their past and their land, because this is precisely what Angela re/lives: “[t]o be common people, humble people, how freeing that is. How much it offers us, placing us back in the *participatory relationship* with the world. It offers us the animal underpinnings of our own minds and bodies...to bring us back to our humanity and compassion, to restore ourselves to *our place* (*First People* 19, emphasis added).

Hence, a renewed perception of the natural as the altered but resilient foundation to life³⁹ allows Angela to reposition herself in order to renegotiate the power dialectics that otherwise doom her (kin) to the margins – without voice, without a visibility, without a presence (except for the extremes of demonization or romantic fetishism). In fact, it is precisely the immersion within a community of rememberers who acknowledge the destruction of their land, but who are able to remember its value, that contributes to the growth of Angela. This initiates her formation as an ethically-committed individual who honours her heritage and re/adjusts the definitions that ruled her life: “True sin...consisted of crimes against nature and life” (SS 160). In other words, it is the inclusion of Angela within her family that allows her to exclude the paralyzing signification of her bodily scars, to reject their meaning as reminders of her (people’s) inferiority and subjugation. When among her many mothers, she is shown how to regain the interpretive command over her traumatic past and its corporeal reminders: Bush, the caring mother-figure

whose name is inspired from nature, teaches Angela that “some people see scars and it is wounding they remember. To me they are proof of the fact that there is healing” (SS 125).

Taking ownership of the significance of one’s experiences also indicates the rejection of cultural arrogance, apparent in the Euro-American non/discursive oppression: thus traumatic infliction is shown to derive from the ego-driven and short-sighted logic of imperialism that is narcissistically focussed on its own reflection. By contrast, in the house of Bush, “there was no bathroom, no electricity, and no mirrors because, as Bush said, *mirrors had cost us our lives*. I would come to call her house the House of No. It was *defined by what wasn’t there*” (SS 69, emphases added⁴⁰). It is also this same reverence towards spiritual values that demarcates the old Angela from the renewed one – especially that the dramatization of the effects of the alien materialistic gaze shows how the unbridgeable gap can separate close family members: erecting a wall between Angela and her own mother, Hannah⁴¹. Standing for the irreconcilable relation between acquisitive values and the Native stewardship of the land, this divide is not a fatalistic condition that is necessarily transmitted. Even if Angela is present during the last moments of her mother’s life, Angela is fully aware of the discursive distortions disseminated to justify the violation of land and people, which ultimately *took* Hannah’s life: she sees that her mother “walked out the rifles of our killers” and, even as she wraps Hannah’s dead body in the newspapers’ propaganda, finds that it is “a suitable skin” (SS 245).

In another deconstructive reading of the values and discursive practices of subjugation, Hogan shows that the potential for healing/redemption resides in the understanding of one’s individuation and of one’s place within the community. Angela

feels crippled at first by her fear of the alien forces that “lived inside her [mother], whether history, as Bush has said, or spirits the priest believed possessed her, would fill the room. I was afraid that when she left her body, whatever possessed her would open its claws and seize another body” (SS 250). However, soon afterwards, the continuity of the struggle for a say in how the land is treated appears to be brought about from Hannah’s second baby daughter, symbolically named Aurora, who is immediately viewed as another beginning or as a sign for the wise ancestry’s return, so Angela now “believed in newness, in the freedom of a beginning *outside the past*, outside history” (SS 257, emphasis added). She is able to extricate her focus from trying to hide (her) scars and reorient herself towards an active engagement to prevent the repetition of trauma/wounding.

By affirming the boundless new beginnings that nature offers the Natives, Hogan allows for the repetition of their stories, but not without an imagined or suggested modification of their course: she depicts a return whose underpinning is not merely an exposition, or even a critical indictment, of the violation of the land and the Native cultures. It is rather a signalling of the potential for the re/inscription of new ties to the land and its history that results from the revival of the ancestors’ cosmology. It is not a literary lament or a display of wounds that aestheticizes victimization, but an imaginative return or re/membering that allows the continuation of the struggle for the reestablishment of a severed connection to the land, as the carrier of the wisdom of survival. As Hogan seems to suggest, the temporal paradox of returning towards a better future is possible, once the ego-driven logics of the occupiers is discerned and shattered –

a message reminiscent of Angela's own coming to grips with her own fragmentation in the beginning of her journey towards maturity⁴².

Interestingly, recourse to the literary imagination as the source from which to draw or recollect stories from the traumatic past that would not otherwise be *related* is apparent in Morrison's *Beloved*, a narrative which attempts to highlight the myopia that characterizes the cultural reception of slave narratives. In fact, the text reacts belatedly, in the Caruthian usage, to the many internal and external pressures, couched in terms of inappropriateness or irrelevance, applied to the earlier testimonies. Morrison's novel works to supplement a metonymical procession of expressive repression, a long line of slave records that endured a limitation of the articulatory effort. Slave narratives were truncated, devoid of subjective mentions of the traumas experienced in order not to offend the audience. This deliberate hiding of the total account – by imposing a restriction that, supposedly, has the reading experience in mind – is doubly resisted by Morrison's text. Indeed, it inverts the ellipsis and incompleteness shown in the accounts of ex-slaves by providing a glimpse of the slaves' inner lives and operating as an addendum that transforms the unspoken into a suggestive tool for the unspeakable – while simultaneously situating itself inside and outside this curtailed line of writing. Moreover, the novel itself elliptically recalls the “sixty million and more” victims of the Middle Passage, whose tale is largely absent due to the lack of documented Slavery traumas⁴³.

As an amendment to the historical accounts of traumas that exist, *Beloved* (both the text and the ghostly figure) exposes the gaps of the official historical narrative. Moreover, it represents an emanation from the grave – in fact, a haunting that always recalls a revenant's exhumation. It stages a resurgence of the victim who represents the

victims who have not had the power to speak their traumas and those whose voices were forcibly silenced. In addition, it reverses the elliptical treatment of the issues of racism and subjugation, which inheres in the expeditious treatment of slavery and the middle passage as phases in American history that only highlight the lessons learnt from them. This historiographical omission of what the experiences have meant to the real lives affected, which the text perceives as a furthering of the violation and as an attack on the subaltern's expression, is thus precisely what calls upon the poetic to supply its view on the inner, the unseen, the unarticulated.

The figure of Beloved releases a voice that was meant to remain contained, entombed, and unheard. However, she is able to intrude within the narrative of personal development of her mother, Sethe. This figure also disturbs the “coherent” or “smooth” flow of the national myth of progress that avoids dwelling upon the past in its concern with a better future. Interestingly, Beloved returns. Like a repressed memory, Beloved, the murdered daughter and the figure for the missing/silent figures (of Africans who died on their way to becoming slaves or as a result thereof) returns because she is *en-graved* – meant to be caged into oblivion but paradoxically more tenaciously inscribed in memory. The return of the (memory of the) victim who refuses to be tamed into muteness, to be powerfully placed within the realm of non-speech, also symbolically stands for a revisiting of the vividly indelible traumatic memory, invading the present in its pristine literalness⁴⁴.

The notion of fragmentation, of identities shattered by trauma, is also tackled as a central concern that necessitates the intersubjective collaboration of the community in order to mend the gaps of personal history and situate it within an incomplete but

interdependent collective history. The uncertainty apparent in Sethe's question – "will the parts hold?" – is thus an appeal for mutual sustainment within the communal fragments and among the victims (*Beloved* 313). It also casts doubt upon the prospect of continuation without solidarity, a concern that is not only of an ethical nature but also one that seems to specify the narrative (and literal) enmeshing of all the fragments of traumatic stories. The text thus functions as the alternative historiographical account of the subaltern, the resisting trace that would not allow its effacement because it is shared by many, written and re-written by or through or upon every victim. Hence, Morrison's text and its undecidable figure of idiosyncratic, yet metonymical, victim complement each other, the text allowing the ghost to inhabit it and the ghost permitting the very writing of a history from the grave.

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This thesis is a comparative survey and analysis of the poetics of hindsight and of the literary devices that the three texts utilize to turn a retrospective gaze towards the traumatic past. It also investigates the authors' positioning of past experiences within an intersubjective context, which includes more than the individual plight, in order to serve as an ethically responsible agent of remembrance in the present. In each text, one character endures traumatic fragmentation, partly as a result of the incomplete nature of traumatic history inscribed as non/knowledge and its marked absences and vacuousness, but also – perhaps mainly – as a consequence of the gap evident in the character's (non)evolving without the communal or family circle of transmission. Also, all the texts include a short description of physical suffering, since as Judith Herman asserts, "a

narrative that does not include the traumatic imagery and bodily sensations is barren and incomplete” (177).

Without advocating a reductionist homogenization of traumatic experiences or of the contexts under study, I attempt to analyze the texts as spaces of contesting the literal-mindedness and selectiveness of historiography, to reveal their understanding of what traumatic ‘telling’ is about, and – ultimately – to grasp their advocacy of social justice. The fragmented, displayed, and lamented state is not resolved by the end of the texts (which remain suspended and equivocal). However, the communal bonds and the mutually-sustaining histories help the protagonists achieve a sense of a more accomplished present condition and a fuller subjectivity. What emerges is a sense of selfhood/agency that is aware of its own position as a link in the chain of witnessing and its ethical responsibility towards the past: to be a rememberer who integrates – rather than ignores or rejects – its values and lessons. As the novels attempt to articulate the voices from different historical wounds, they also become contestations of the oppressive narratives that generate amnesia. Ultimately, the texts at hand supply proof that “remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and the healing of individual victims” (Herman 1).

CHAPTER 1

Fugitive Pieces: “The tableau of the haunting trinity”

“I am...a child of two survivors who lived through the horror...They loved and sheltered me and gave me everything, including some of their scars” – Alti Rodal.

“[A]bstraction can only be reached by way of physicality, by way of concrete reality” – Anne Michaels.

Throughout her text, Anne Michaels links the memories of the traumatic past to physical entities, and across generations, in order to accentuate their presence. By foregrounding the material⁴⁵ as the locus of teachings about the past, she establishes a connection to Holocaust trauma that revolves around the notion of preserved memory. In effect, she asserts: “It’s no metaphor to feel the influence of the dead in the world...It is no metaphor to witness the astonishing fidelity of minerals magnetized, even after hundreds of millions of years, pointing to the magnetic pole...Human memory is encoded in air currents and river sediment. Eskers of ash wait to be scooped up, lives reconstituted” (*FP* 53). By insistently claiming the literality of Holocaust remainders, Michaels expresses her refusal of the Nazis’ industrialized genocide and its underlying tenets, which reduce humans to objects to facilitate their annihilation⁴⁶.

Michaels’ text reinstates the humanity of the victims while asserting that every atom of life is a monumental reference to it. Her novel establishes a web of tangible traces of all events past that are to be recollected by ethically responsible individuals, a gesture that highlights the way she interweaves together the spiritual requirement to bear

witness with the obstinately material remainders from which the remembering project is to spring. As early as in the prologue, which explicitly reminds the reader of the erasure of material records of the Holocaust, Michaels emphasizes the physicality of the traces that testify to Holocaust traumas: one learns that many narratives “were buried in back gardens, tucked into walls and under floors” (*FP* 1). The implied parallel with her text sets the stage for Michaels’ own willful recovery of that past, in a text about how to retrieve a trauma that is only transiently available from its enfolding silence.

In fact, rootedness in the material is so central for Michaels that her novel itself progresses out of the muddy ground where Jakob Beer, whose story occupies the first section, hid from the Nazi killers of his family. Although the reader does not notice this fact until later in the text, Michaels has already - within the novel’s first couple of pages - unearthed the very person that the prologue announced as dead. The young Jakob Beer is unearthed from a peat bog by Athos, a Greek geologist excavating in Biskupin – a move that reiterates the novel’s preoccupation with the grounding of memories in the material realm and reveals its entwining of ethical responsibility and physical ‘residues’. The story continues as Jakob is raised by Athos and is affected by his poetic leanings. As a survivor, Jakob carries an indomitable grief, despite his attempts to find solace in language. His imaginative attempts to fill in the sensory gaps of his traumatic experience – punctuated in particular by a total lack of knowledge as to what happened to his sister Bella – paradoxically lead him towards the concrete world: “Caves are repositories of spirits; truth speaks from the ground...In the holy ground of the mass graves, the earth blistered and spoke” (*FP* 143). In fact, Jakob’s story itself is depicted as a sort of buried

treasure, uncovered by Ben, the son of Holocaust survivors who refuse to articulate any of their traumas.

The fact that the second section narrates how the first comes to be known at all is a sign that Michaels' text – which understands itself as archival – is thematically, structurally, and stylistically attentive to a lyrical knowing and a witnessing function. The significance of richly figurative language is reflected in Jakob's poetic expression of traumatic experience and how it ultimately connects him to Ben, who finds an alternative – in Jakob's memoir – to the void signified by his parents' inarticulate subsistence. Michaels has generated, through research complemented with the work of imagination, two accounts that are connective to the past and to each other, without claiming to be a totally verifiable fact of history, a move that highlights the import of the testimonial. Indeed, Michaels' modus operandi, supplementing historical facts with creative details, stems from an ethical ground. One can easily see Michaels' position in Ben's statement: "I see now that my fascination wasn't archaeology or even forensics: it was biography. The faces that stared at me across the centuries (...) were the faces of people without names. They stared and waited, mute. It was my *responsibility to imagine* who they might be" (*FP* 221, emphasis added).

Placed within the realm of Holocaust representation, Ben's (or Michaels') statement becomes problematic in connection to the idea of the limit of the authorial license and whether it allows for supplementing the gaps inherent in traumatic narratives so as to, as Giorgio Agamben puts it, "listen to what is unsaid," and represent creatively some of that significance (14). Indeed, the Holocaust is widely considered to be the ultimate crisis of humanity and the epitome of destructive drives given free rein towards

the Other. Thus, its very depiction is framed in an array of controversial views about, among other things, the kind of textual representation tolerated when dealing with Holocaust traumas. Is it permissible, or even possible, to aestheticize what may be viewed as an essentially ineffable trauma? If this trauma demands articulation, why does its fictional representation meet moral indignation and objections⁴⁷?

This chapter endeavors to analyze the ways this text establishes the intersubjective connections necessary for the empathic involvement in the traumas of others; how it depicts a fragmentation that necessitates a network of ‘rememberers’ to approximate an image of the past. It thus tries to attain a characterization of what may be labeled *an epistemology of the traumatic hindsight*. It asks: how does the textual oscillation between the material and poetic configure the literary witnessing act? It analyzes the congruity that the novel establishes between the exhumation of past records and the awakening to the other’s trauma as an ethical stance founded upon the archival. It examines the text’s reaction to its forces of repetition and erasure, how it understands its ontological status through its self-reflexive de/stabilization of its prime signification⁴⁸.

This chapter ultimately explores Michaels’ sense of what an aesthetic of trauma witnessing should be founded upon. Michaels attempts to bypass the lacunae of traumatic history by imaginatively establishing chains of witnessing, thus stressing the ethical aspect of storytelling. Her reliance upon lyricism⁴⁹ as a mode of signification breaks away from a solemn, expository, literary protocol. It anchors the text within a logic of remembrance that reverberates within the community of readers. Michaels’s strategy, her emphasis on the material to claim and celebrate the spiritual, is not her only oblique way of upholding an ethical representation of transgenerational trauma; there is a plurality that

permeates it on several levels of signification. Essential to the analysis is the idea of dis/play, which captures the Derridean cross-referencing textual movement⁵⁰, either between storytellers and hi/stories or between overtones of sadness and the insistence on ‘lyrical beauty’. Far from overemphasizing the significance of factual authenticity in the representational project, Michaels’ text claims a space of creative choice. This imaginative freedom, reflected in the text’s metaphors and tone, is viewed as central to the continuity of an ethically-committed commemoration of the traumatic past because it self-referentially acknowledges the dependence of witnessing on representation. In others words, it attempts to guarantee responsible remembrance, across generations, by foregrounding its own mediated, lacuna-ridden status.

1. A Poetics of the Tragic: Representing the Holocaust

Faced with the great trauma that is the Holocaust, literature – as a representational means that can transfigure reality – is dismissed as inadequately equipped. The literary medium arrives at an impasse: this event poses the threat of remaining outside the literary reach, negating its very potential. On the one hand, literary efforts are confronted with emptiness and cannot intensify or elevate the traumatic f/actuality of the Holocaust – for that may lead to a gradual effacement of its traces as a fact of history. On the other hand, creative/imaginative attempts to portray the Holocaust are not necessarily in a better position to do so than those other accounts which claim a sense of literal or realistic depiction. As Froma Zeitlin states,

[i]maginative efforts in the area of Holocaust studies are always surrounded by a whiff of suspicion, if not potential scandal. There is a continual risk involved in confronting that abyss in history through literary

or other artistic means...[There is a fear that] this devastating event in any way be exploited or appropriated, domesticated or trivialized, falsified or aestheticized – in a word, desanctified (173).

As shown in this formulation, the religiously-freighted adjective ‘desanctified’ denotes an attitude towards the Holocaust as the epitome of an event that is both beyond cognition and understanding – i.e., as sublime⁵¹. In this view, the Holocaust’s exceeding horror and overwhelming magnitude not only lead to a sentiment of awe but also to a sense of relief and enjoyment. As it conflates its universal significance with its singular nature, the idea of the Holocaust as sublime ascribes an air of transcendence to this event: thus, when its horrifying excess retreats, the incapacity to understand leaves room to a euphoria derived from a position of safety⁵². This idea generates the paradox of rendering the sublime experience purposive while incomprehensible: it attributes redemptive value to the traumatic catastrophe, which in turn gives it *raison d’être* and significance⁵³.

The idea of unspeakability – which generates epistemological questions about the nature of witnessing as a speech act – also emanates from the *structural* quality of any traumatic event, regardless of whether one chooses to regard it as sublime. In effect, one can define a traumatic event as an extremely violent experience that shatters one’s sense of integrity. Trauma, whose originary meaning in Greek is ‘wound,’ is defined by the *Oxford Advanced English Dictionary* as “an emotional shock producing a lasting harmful effect”. It “lies beyond the bounds of ‘normal’ conception”, which poses questions about the ways in which one can communicate that which defies language (Tal 15). The effects of trauma are so devastating that it results, states Caruth, in a “breach in the mind’s experience of time, self, and the world” (*UE* 4). Accordingly, the violence of the event

creates a situation where it is not assimilated as it occurs but as it returns, *belatedly*. Hence, the nature of the traumatic event renders the connection between experience and the language that attempts to articulate it rather unstable.

When it comes to Holocaust traumas, the idea of excess that surrounds extremely horrific killing acts is usually reflected *in language* via the idea of ineffability. The view that language is not equipped to relate these traumas is exemplified by Theodor Adorno's famed assertion that "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" (*Prisms* 34). This gnomic expression is not only an amplification of the idea that traumatic events shatter language itself but also a reflection on the dysfunctional nature of language after trauma. This is an acknowledgement of the *ethical*⁵⁴ element that Holocaust traumas bring forth, which demands a morally conscientious attitude. Literary critical discourse, Sara Horowitz notes, equates Adorno's statement to a proscription stipulating "that one should not write lyric poetry, any poetry, any fiction, any 'literature', or anything at all in the wake of the Holocaust, unless or even if one is a survivor of the Nazi genocide" (*Breaking Crystal* 277). Horowitz rejects what she labels the 'rough parameters' that are reductive to the esthetic endeavors built around this event. In a similar stance, Zoe Waxman points to the inherent inconsistency in conflating representation and comprehension as two processes that the Event negates: "two judgments have been made: the severity of the Holocaust's crimes, and that this severity cannot be uttered or comprehended. Language may not be adequate to convey the horrors of the Holocaust, but *this does not mean that nothing can be said*" (175, emphasis added).

The esthetic silence which Adorno's dictum seems to produce is also rejected by Michael Bernstein as an ethically precarious interpretation that attempts to elevate the

paralysis ensuing from the tragedy to a moral act reflecting sensibility. Reading such a prescriptive statement along the same lines as those of the very *perpetrators* of the Holocaust, Bernstein not only rejects the idea of ‘a principled silence’ but also opposes the idea of a single spokesperson for the victims. Refuting any suggestion that some individual authority be the voice of the whole set of victims⁵⁵, he asserts:

[n]o one can speak for those murdered, and no one can determine what would count as a further betrayal of their suffering. The freedom to choose...is precisely what Nazism had made impossible for Jews, and although the affirmation of that freedom can do nothing for the victims...it is the only coherent rejection of the Nazi principle of nondifferentiation among Jews (337-338).

Concerning textual representations of the Holocaust, Bernstein denies the legitimacy of “any overarching formulae” in determining whether or not these have transgressed the boundaries of ‘appropriate’ remembrance (343). Furthermore, he stresses the idea that – in the aftermath of the Holocaust – it would be misguided to homogenize Holocaust narratives because they engage with a multiplicity of issues that cannot be reduced to a single core. For Bernstein, attempts to depict the Holocaust should rather be read on an individual basis: “[t]here is only a series of specific works...each of whose seamliness needs to be considered *on its own terms*” (343, emphasis added).

While he takes issue with the idea of a perfectly articulated testimonial text, Bernstein does not deny the necessity of establishing connections with past events. Indeed, he states that silence relegates the events to the realm of distant absence and “it risks consigning the events to a kind of oblivion interrupted only occasionally by the recitation of voices from an increasingly distant past” (338-339). Nonetheless, he considers the ‘ideal’ of perfect textual Holocaust testimony to be another silencing limit

upon esthetics, a reductive boundary that repeats a Nazi principle (essentializing the Jews as a negative term to facilitate the annihilation of their totality). It is, ironically, his overall distrust of textuality as a means to affect the readers that leads Bernstein to reject Adorno's idea, since he believes that no textuality can be perfectly representative. He affirms that the ability of the few who survived to make their voices heard somehow betrays the fate of the majority – for “even the most scrupulous first-person ‘factual’ testimony does a certain injustice to the other victims [as] survival itself was largely accidental” (338-339).

In moving beyond the controversy about what constitutes ‘serious’ or ‘authentic’ modes of representation, Bernstein's stance also points to another, and no less central, dilemma of Holocaust representation. If Holocaust testimony only reflects – and is made possible by – arbitrary survival, then how is the literary act of bearing witness to simultaneously mediate truthfulness and to comment upon its own status as a scarce outcome of the limit event? How can textual witnessing achieve an awareness of its own improbability as it strives for faithful depiction of trauma?

It is precisely in addressing the tenuous relationship between language and traumatic experience that Giorgio Agamben addresses in his book, *Remnants of Auschwitz*. In this text, Agamben focuses on Primo Levi's limit figure of the *Muselmann*, the individual who exists on the very line of demarcation separating the human from the non-human in the camps. For Agamben, the *Muselmänner* – in their total destitution of all human traits and their effacement before atrocity – truly signify the difficulty of bearing witness to the Holocaust. Following Levi, Agamben asserts that the survivors speak in the stead of the ones who cannot speak, so that “the ‘true’ witnesses, the

‘complete witnesses,’ are those who did not bear witness and could not bear witness” (34). Following his early exposition of the historical lacuna that is Holocaust as a “reality that necessarily exceeds its factual elements,” Agamben affirms that the availability of only incomplete witnesses, speaking by proxy for the dead, makes it necessary to interrogate this testimonial lacuna (12). In fact, his text asks the following questions: if the survivors only bear witness to the impossibility of witnessing, how does that affect the language of testimony? What are the protocols of bearing witness to the Holocaust?

Primo Levi’s description of Hurbinek, a child in the camps whose only utterances were the doubtfully heard and unintelligible *mass-klo* or *matsiklo*, provides Agamben with a first characterization of the language that accounts for the secret, the unsaid. Paradoxically, this is the very counter-part of language – a non-language that underlies the existence or possibility of language: “language, in order to bear witness, must give way to a non-language in order to show the impossibility of bearing witness” (39). This does not mean, however, that glossolalia per se constitutes the model testimony for Agamben. In fact, he insists that, since the process of giving voice to the voiceless should reflect the epistemological gap engendered by their total silence, it is “not enough to bring language to its own nonsense, to the pure undecidability of letters...It is necessary that this senseless sound be, in turn, the voice of something or someone that, for entirely other reasons, cannot bear witness (39). To give the Holocaust the ethical significance it deserves, it is the absence in language – the inarticulate message within it – that are thus foregrounded as the appropriate reflectors of the extreme violence exerted on the human. The dead become apostrophes addressing the human in a language that

does not signify and, *consequently*, this leads back to them as complete witnesses, deprived of linguistic means to testify the total truth⁵⁶.

The representation of trauma is an arduous enterprise because a traumatic experience is – as suggested by Freud – a paradoxical event whose occurrence is not accompanied by a total assimilation thereof (Caruth, *UE* 5). Trauma is a structurally doubled and fractured experience that defies the logic of direct access and linear depiction. At once a survival crisis and an epistemological one, trauma is a pathological response that is perceptible only in its delayed haunting of the traumatized individual. Because it is experienced only as it reappears, trauma also makes it impossible to construct history in a straightforwardly referential fashion (*UE* 11). In addition, the catastrophic experience also generates traumatic memories, which “are not available to the patient in the way his commonplace ones are, but act “as a kind of a foreign body” in the psyche” (Kaplan 26). Because experiences of extreme horrific nature may not be readily available for the very victims to remember and ‘narrativize’, texts written under the sign of (Holocaust) trauma have been under close critical scrutiny and have had varied receptions – each response focussing rather on one aspect of the literary act of bearing witness.

When it comes to representing the Holocaust, not every critic denounces the literary narrative *tout court*. Critical discomfort surrounding esthetic projects that are built around the Holocaust tends to target issues of narrative mediation, resolution, and the linguistic medium. The first reproach stems principally from what Horowitz labels the “proprietary sense of what belongs to the domain of the historian” (*Breaking Crystal* 277). The proponents of this view are not interested in reading Holocaust representation

for its insights or as a mediation of the atrocious event. Rather, it is the cold hard facts, as well as the way in which they appear in the artistic production, that are under scrutiny here. For instance, Lawrence Langer, in his *Preempting the Holocaust*, calls for the need to refocus attention squarely towards the depiction of Holocaust horrors, rather than romanticize or overemphasize its ‘usefulness’ as a moral.

According to Langer, attempting to draw conclusions and lessons from the Holocaust (or its aftermath and legacy) simplistically moves beyond the actual historical facts towards ethical didacticism. He also expresses concern with the deviation that ensues when the factual aspect of the Holocaust is bypassed in favor of a desired moral teaching. Langer thus asserts that the “habit of using mass murder as a text for furthering personal agendas about humanity’s capacity for goodness or its ability to resist oppression threatens to displace the *original narrative of atrocity* with a variety of alternative models” (xvii, emphasis added). Langer’s position seems to favor what could presumably be labeled a realistic representation of the Event, a depiction thereof which remains unencumbered by redeeming fantasies, imposed resolutions, or other homogenizing interpretations.

In effect, Langer argues against this reading of the Holocaust as a reductive stance that – led by the desire to draw lessons from the events encompassed by the term – only manages to circumvent its specific horrors. In other words, he considers this universalizing tendency as reflective of a propensity to shroud the Holocaust in consoling expressions and exculpatory notions, the need for atonement expressed via assertion of the ‘gain’ of a lesson of conduct and human values. “When I speak of preempting the Holocaust,” he explains, “I mean using – and perhaps abusing – its grim details to fortify

a prior commitment to an ideal of moral reality, community responsibility, or religious belief that leaves us with space to retain faith in their pristine value in a post-Holocaust world” (1).

Langer thus uncovers an inclination to rationalize the horror in order to salvage systems of beliefs into the Holocaust’s aftermath – which is significant inasmuch as it counters the self-reproach that reads the Holocaust as the epitome of Western civilization’s failure (after all, it *did* let atrocity happen). Moreover, he explains the appeal of the impulse to do so by affirming that the Event stands for “an unholy world with millions of victims and few heroes” (66). In his view, this facet is precisely what deserves to be brought to the forefront as the Holocaust’s inner ‘logic’ of violence and the unfathomable particularity at its core. When it comes to the Holocaust, Langer would rather avoid celebratory esthetical acts and keep the ‘mountain of corpses’ upon which it is built visible at all times. For him, Holocaust literature must be informed by a sense of faithfulness to the traumatic experience and must aim at alarming readers out of complacency. He indeed writes: “Holocaust literature is a major goad urging us to reimagine atrocity and to rewrite the text of suffering in contemporary terms” (60).

It is noteworthy that Langer’s standpoint does not lead him to discredit all literary representations of the Holocaust (albeit on the condition that they avoid the displacement inherent in resolutions or redemptive happy endings). Other critics, however, reject the very idea of literary mediation as a downright misguided fabrication. In effect, Berel Lang takes issue with the fact that literary representations of the Event “present to the imagination characters in situations over which they have at least some degree of control...when in fact the Nazi genocide was horrifying precisely because such an

individuality or personhood was prohibited” (Bernard-Donals 190). In this view, literary language ascribes mastery and order where there was none. Interestingly, the idea of ‘desubjectification’ operating within the ‘logic’ of the Holocaust is itself highly linguistic⁵⁷ and is intended to facilitate the categorization and subsequent elimination of the Jews as a supposedly homogenous, abject, non-human group.

Underscoring the fact that the Holocaust effectively represents the enunciation and resulting act of denying “individual consciousness” in order to suppress it, Lang asserts that “imaginative literature presupposes individuality and subjectivity in the representation of its characters and their actions, and that *to represent certain literary subjects in those terms is a falsification*” (*Holocaust Reader* 352-353, emphasis added). This objection to imaginative writing is “conceptual rather than moral,” according to Lang, who perceives the Holocaust as an ineffable event beyond the grasp of human description or imagination. The attack on the creative literary gesture, which errs in adding elements of agency that the traumatic experience annihilated, appears clearly in Lang’s assertion that “historical writings about the genocide have been more adequate and more compelling – in sum, more valuable – than the imaginative writings about the subject” (140).

Among the reasons that justify the hierarchy which places documentary texts over literary ones, Lang cites the idea that, unlike historical writing, imaginative writing “establishes a literary field or space between the writer and his writing and between that writing and what is written about” (142). This belief that historical writing has a more direct access to experience is coupled with a distrust of the figurative language that creative esthetics utilizes. Accordingly, figurative language “conduces to a *distortion* that

is both conceptual and moral” since it provides alternative vantage points that vary with the figures of speech chosen by authors (352-353, emphasis added). Lang seems to believe that, in addition to rendering oblique what should be straightforwardly depicted, the figurative turn “impinges on the content of the subject, adding itself and the decisions it presupposes” as focal points (*Act and Idea* 143). By drawing attention to the very literariness of the depiction, this ‘literary particularity’ – to use Lang’s appellation – overemphasizes the esthetic nature of the representation over its object.

Lang’s position, moreover, epitomizes the critical view that considers drawing attention to the vehicle of representation instead of (or in addition to) the events themselves to be a highly suspicious move. This is a stance similar to Bernard-Donals, who asserts that “[f]igurative discourse ‘estranges’ the subject of representation – and with this separation, a process of generalizations begins in which what is being represented...can be substituted for more general kinds of action” (75-76). This interpretation of literature reflects an insistence upon the Holocaust events as the sole elements worthy of analysis, focus, and attempts at comprehension. In effect, Lang believes that, as the Holocaust defies any understanding, “all representations of those events...will fail...It is the opacity of the subject itself that is asserted, its inaccessibility either to reason or to the imagination” (*Holocaust Reader* 349). He also seems to find moral difficulties with any text calling focus upon its own texture and ‘beauty’: the text should be all event and readers must ultimately come to the conclusion that these are both inconceivable and unspeakable.

The position regarding literary representation of the Holocaust as especially suspect highlights both the linguistic medium as such and the impact registered upon the

reader. Due to the fact that rhetorical devices are foregrounded in literature, Horowitz notes, “[l]anguage is acknowledged and explored not as a transparent medium through which one comes to see reality but as implicated in the reality we see, as shaping our limited and fragile knowledge” (*Breaking Crystal* 288). The idea of literary self-reflexivity is considered to impinge upon, and basically taint, the access to the pure brutal facts of the Holocaust. In a context where bearing witness is such a conceptually and ethically vital project, the amalgamation of traumatic reality with esthetical artifice ostensibly undercuts the ‘truth value’ of literary representations of the Event.

Horowitz affirms that imaginative texts about the Holocaust are informed by a paradox, since “the ‘willing suspension of disbelief’ integral to the reading of fiction... runs counter to the exacted demands placed on testimony and might end in a suspension of belief altogether” (288). However, as Bernstein remarks, this contradiction is not the only threat to the objective of a testimony-driven textuality. In fact, regardless of whether a narrative is documentary or fictional, it is a supplement – hence always already at a remove from the traumatic events per se. What is unsettling for Bernstein is the idea of pleasure derived from textuality and its concomitant elements of “stylization, figurative language, aesthetic ordering, and...distinct point of view” (339). Indeed, he warns that the text of trauma may thus

provide...a certain formal ‘seemliness’. If the text succeeds in moving its reader at all, then these writerly choices must have yielded a kind of readerly ‘pleasure’, strange though the term may be in this context. Irrespective of genre, a reader necessarily remains someone who responds with emotions and ideas to words encountered in a printed text, no matter how imaginatively unsettling (339).

2. The Vicissitudes of Intergenerational Witnessing

In the context where a narrative – like Michaels’ – cannot utterly avoid imagining the trauma to which it bears witness, the question arises about how a narrative may maneuver its way towards a form of ethical witnessing. As it faces the generational gap of absence from the events, how does *Fugitive Pieces* conjugate the trauma that is inherited with that which is experienced? To answer this question, one needs to examine the text as a hybrid medium, inhabited by several temporal (dis)connections. While it is not a text written by a survivor, nor a sample of what came to be known as second generation Holocaust literature, *Fugitive Pieces* certainly displays several characteristics of both narrative modes. Its first part is the memoir of Jakob Beer, a Holocaust survivor, and its second part is by Ben, the son of Holocaust survivors, who recovers the memoir of Beer. In addition to its intertwined double storylines, *Fugitive Pieces* could be seen as a hybrid because it is suspended between fact and fiction and is aware – or even suggestive – of such a dual nature. To perform the act of remembrance, it is based on extensive archival research but it includes imaginative elements as well.

Fugitive Pieces appears to designate the active investment in research and documentation as the ethically appropriate way of bearing witness to transgenerational trauma. The text, however, is aware of the epistemological lacuna that the generational disconnection produces (within the triad “event/survivors/offspring of survivors”). It is this gap that invites the imaginative esthetic gesture. In this manner, textually bearing witness to Holocaust suffering becomes neither directly nor simply determined by its connection to the fact-fiction binary. In fact the text seems to establish a hierarchy within the realm of missing historical details that is logical once situated within the totality of

textual signification: while the historical details are important because they are the proof of the occurrence of the event, Jakob – who, paradoxically, is the one to leave a material trace as the record of his experience – places the affective component of the experiences of other victims above the contextual details thereof. His position is that human affect is of prime value in the remembrance gesture. In his puzzlement about the missing facts, Jakob wonders:

Does it matter if they were from Kielce or Brno or Grodno or Brody or Lvov or Turin or Berlin? ...Or if one went first or last; or whether they were separated getting on the train or off the train...Whether they were ripped from their dining-room tables or hospital beds or from the forest? Whether wedding rings were pried off their fingers or fillings from their mouths? None of that obsessed me; but – were they silent or did they speak? Were their eyes open or closed? I couldn't turn my anguish from the precise moment of death. I was focused on that historical split second: the tableau of the haunting trinity – perpetrator, victim, witness (*FP* 137-138).

Commenting on the precarious position from which second generation⁵⁸ writers produce textual witnessing, James Young states that they do not “attempt to represent events they never knew immediately; instead, they portray their own, necessarily hypermediated experiences of memory...a generation no longer willing, or able, to recall the Holocaust separately from the ways it has been passed down to them” (*Witnessing the Disaster* 26). In *Fugitive Pieces*, Michaels displays this complex position by juxtaposing two epistemological crises. The first is Jakob Beer's, who cannot fully know because, paradoxically, he lived through the trauma. The second is Ben's, whose need for a family history cannot be fulfilled – in the beginning of his part of the novel, at least – because of the parental silence into which he is born. The task of Ben in the novel is not dissimilar to that of Michaels herself, who writes from a historical fissure about an experience that is

not lived through and, yet, not totally foreign. Jakob's tale of survival is balanced against the literal process of its recovery as well as the circumstances under which it is (re)told. This recovery-in-uncovering signifies Michaels' answer to the ethical dilemma of (un)knowing and bearing witness to past sufferings. She seems to point out that the absence of knowledge *about* the Holocaust can actually be the drive for the production of knowledge *from* the Holocaust, which is what Ben – and ultimately Michaels herself – does. In fact, were it not for the second part where Ben looks for Jakob's record of and about his survival, the first part of the novel would not have been.

In the words of Ellen Fine, Michaels exemplifies the way in which later generations of writers about the Holocaust are “confronted with a difficult task: to imagine an event they have not lived through...*to create a story out of History*” (qtd. in Berger 2, emphasis added). Again, the parallel with Ben's effort to retrieve past narratives is brought to the fore, since Michaels's own artistic remembrance is based on research and documentation, which her text self-referentially acknowledges. Indeed, *Fugitive Pieces* is bracketed between two important notes. The first draws attention to the fact that

[d]uring the Second World War, countless manuscripts – diaries, memoirs, eyewitness accounts – were lost or destroyed. Some of these narratives were deliberately hidden – buried in back gardens, tucked into walls and under floors – by those who did not live to retrieve them. Other stories are concealed in memory, neither written nor spoken. Still others are recovered, by circumstance alone.

In addition to framing Jakob Beer's narrative with a prefatory remark that brings him to life, this note establishes the role of Michael as the one revealing the life story of an actual Holocaust survivor. This belief is held until the very last pages of the novel

when Michaels acknowledges, following Ben's narrative, the following fact: "many books assisted me in my research of the war – original testimony as well as the work of historians" (acknowledgements). By this double gesture of assertion and suspension, Michaels stresses not only the frailty of memory (as lost fragments) itself but also the central character of the vessel (whether human or textual) that reveals or construes it whole again.

Anchoring one's esthetic representation of the Holocaust in archival research is indeed one feature of what Susan Gubar calls *proxy-witnessing*, a term that she uses to designate "reliance on earlier testimony" (23). In Michaels's text, this is especially seen in Ben's recovery of Jakob's testimony and the publication of his Holocaust memoir. It is also clear in the above-mentioned parallel with Michaels's own stance in imaginatively 'recovering' both stories (and making them available to the readers). In Michaels's case, the ambiguous position from which she writes *Fugitive Pieces* complicates its interpretation. In fact, she is not the daughter of a Holocaust survivor. Hence, her text could be an instantiation of proxy-witnessing, as the term attenuates the immediacy of the events – and the removes at which she stands from them and from survivors – to emphasize the fact of traumatic *legacy*. It is important to remark that Gubar's own term attributes a rather subtle role for the 'proxy-witness'. In effect, in coining this term, Gubar is aware that – in the *Oxford English Dictionary* – the term 'proxy' implies *substitution*. Nevertheless, she insists that in her view of esthetic representation "the proxy functions as a licensed authority for an absent party. The proxy *does not replace*, but instead acts, or speaks in the place of, another" (23, emphasis added).

Gubar's proxy-witnessing is yet another departure⁵⁹ from Marianne Hirsch's influential concept of "postmemory", which she identifies as "the experience of those who grew up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are displaced by the stories of the previous generation" (8). These postmemories are essentially the traces of the survivors' experiences as (re)appropriated – and made sense of – by their descendants. While this act poses questions concerning the dangers of speaking for – which may also mean *instead of* – the survivors, Hirsch insists that her term is intended to ascribe a "temporal and qualitative difference from survivor memory" upon second generation memory, and she emphasizes the fact that postmemory is characterized by "its displacement, its belatedness" (8).

While belatedness is – as Cathy Caruth argues – common and, even, characteristic of *any* trauma, Hirsch notes that the difference between survivor's memory and postmemory lies in the fact that this latter's "connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through projection, investment, and creation" (8). In this case, the displacement in question is not the direct result of the violence of the traumatic event, but rather emerges as the effect of the precedence given to the traumatic narratives of survivors over their children's worldviews and experiences. This primacy holds sway both in terms of temporality and value: the second generation is born after the Holocaust; it lives in the shadow of an agony not its own. In this way, Hirsch links the process of memory with the reaction to history-as-represented (by the survivors' speech, silence, or other facets of their lives) rather than to history *tout court* (the factual aspects of trauma as experience). Hence, second generation memory is not simply conceived as an "identity position" but rather as an ethical "space of remembrance", which offers

access to the traumatic experiences of the Other to essentially any individual who is morally driven to *adopt* them. For Hirsch, this “is a question of conceiving oneself as multiply interconnected with others – proximate or distant – cultures and subcultures...an *ethical* relation to the oppressed or persecuted other” (89).

Fugitive Pieces goes beyond highlighting the multiple ways in which one is ethically implicated in the traumas of others. In an important ethical maneuver, the text exposes the gap that separates the forms of past reminiscence as one that reflects different underlying degrees of commitment towards the events of the past that are brought back to the fore:

History is amoral: events happened. But memory is moral; what we consciously remember is what our conscience remembers. History is the Totenbuch, The Book of the Dead, kept by the administrators of the camps. Memory is the Memorbucher, the names of those to be mourned, read aloud in the synagogue (*FP* 138).

By pitting memory against history, Michaels situates her narrative (itself mixing history with imagined memories) in a space of ‘intermediate-ness’. History is the record, and until that record is intentionally revisited in order to honor – via acts of remembrance – those names that fill its pages, they will be subjected to the same kind of brutality that attempted to erase them in the first place. Michaels seems to foreground the impersonal aspect of history as opposed to the conscience-related, ‘humane’ component of memory⁶⁰. What she emphasizes, moreover, is the intersubjective nature of both mnemonics and witnessing, the fact that it takes ‘others’ to respectfully read the victims’ names aloud, that it takes others to remember or pay tribute.

The intersubjective nature of witnessing – which is the idea that a whole network of human connections is needed to bear witness to the trauma of others – is foregrounded by several trauma theorists. Anne Whitehead notes, for instance, that “testimony requires a highly collaborative relationship between speaker and listener. The listener bears a dual responsibility: to receive the testimony but also to avoid appropriating the story as his or her own” (7). In fact, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub – in their book *Testimony* – adopt a rather celebratory stance vis-à-vis the testimonial act, which they regard as a stable means to counter the gaps of memory or history in a “post-traumatic century,” especially as they emphasize the fact that the Holocaust’s “traumatic consequences are still actively *evolving*” (xiv).

In fact these knowledge gaps affect even the first-hand witnesses of the Holocaust (i.e., the survivors) because one may see them – as do Primo Levi and Giorgio Agamben⁶¹ – as incomplete witnesses whose perspective of the events is only partial. Indeed if one considers that only the dead have gone through the total atrocity, then the survivors cannot formulate a complete picture thereof – because they have not been seen it all, not to mention the vicissitudes of traumatic memory itself, which may lead to an incomplete picture of what *was* actually witnessed. This epistemological crisis, or the paradox of knowing and yet not knowing which inheres in trauma, is also expressed in *Fugitive Pieces* by Jakob Beer, who comments “I did not witness the most important events of my life. My deepest story must be told by a blind man, a prisoner of sound. From behind a wall, from underground” (FP 17). Although he *was there* as the invasion of his parents’ home by Nazi soldiers occurred, he *did not see* it unfold.

This positioning of Jakob as the victim/witness who has only limited access to the scene of the murder of his family has two consequences upon his perception and role within the narrative: it not only fits Laub and Felman's recognition of the process of unconscious testimony but also further complicates the reading of Jakob's character, as a first-generation survivor. Concerning the first element, Felman and Laub propose that psychoanalysis itself is a form of testimony to the unspeakable. As such, it acknowledges "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" (15). This stance seems to bypass the idea of absolute truth inherent in testimony – the supposed assurance of narrating the happenings with utter exactitude – in order to highlight its status as a *performative* that grants one access to the traumatic vantage point of the speaker, even via their mistakes or forgetfulness. The epistemological and performative aspects of testimony are thus joined as elements of the same articulatory process: "knowledge *does not exist*, it can only *happen* through the testimony" (51).

In ascertaining a view of historical truth as that which goes beyond the verifiable and established facts to the *way* in which the traumatic experience is recounted, Felman and Laub stress the idea that any revelations about the conditions under which the speaker testifies are *at least* as important as those about the events to which they bear witness. Furthermore, this perspective places responsibility upon the receiver – in the process of traumatic testimony – because it considers that the traumatic truth possesses the speaker rather than the other way around. As the listener⁶² uncovers what would

otherwise be hidden by historical facts (i.e., the performative or the living-through aspect of witnessing), he or she becomes a “participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event” (57). Laub even considers psychic survival to be contingent on the presence of an addressable other⁶³. Indeed, he states that the “absence of an empathic listener, or more radically, the absence of an addressable other, an other who can hear the anguish of one’s memories and thus affirm and recognize their realness, annihilates the story” (68).

The status of ‘listener’, in *Fugitive Pieces*, is not straightforwardly presented as a discrete role in the testimonial dyad. Indeed, the text does not construct Jakob Beer’s character in a simple one-dimensional fashion. Jakob is both the testifier and listener; he actually is the witness *via* being the listener⁶⁴. The text fuses the roles of the listener, whom one expects at the receiving end of the tale, with that of the child victim/survivor of trauma. Hence, the young Jakob – small enough to fit “behind the wallpaper in the cupboard”, his usual “hiding place” (*FP* 6) – escapes his own death but remains nevertheless exposed to the demise of his family *because* he listens. In her article “Listening as a Holocaust Child”, Adrienne Kertzer considers that Jakob’s inability to visually ‘witness’ the Beers’ tragedy opens a reading of *Fugitive Pieces* as the text about “the children who came after, the children who listen. For it is not just Ben (...) but Jakob (...) whom Michaels constructs as the child who listens” (196). Hence, the text is an elaborate story telling more than just how the second-generation child (Ben) finds, and relates to, the story of the first-generation poet (Jakob).

As if to counter a sense of disconnection imposed by history, the text effectively creates a chain of listeners: Jakob and Ben⁶⁵ represent two links of this chain; they attend to the trauma of others and establish a connection to it that saves it from the oblivion of

meaninglessness by the effect of contextualization. In keeping with its reliance on indeterminacy, *Fugitive Pieces* keeps Jakob in the position whereby he does not see the execution of his family. The text emphasizes the limits of Jakob's 'view' since it "creates a protagonist who on a literal level is a holocaust survivor, yet repeatedly emphasizes his belatedness, the inadequacy of the visual, and the necessity of the aural" (Kertzer 205). In effect, Jakob is not an eyewitness, if by eyewitness one means an individual that saw the violent event occur. However, he remains a witness who saw the immediate aftermath or result of the killing of his family. From its onset, moreover, Jakob's trauma is characterized by delayed realization. It is this belated witnessing of the Beer family's bodies (except for the sister's) that assigns Jakob an ambiguous status, blurring the gap between first- and second-generation witnessing⁶⁶ via the emphasis upon the incomplete nature of traumatic knowledge.

Jakob's failure to observe the tragedy of his family – which engenders the haunting memory of his sister Bella, the only family member whose fate escapes both his aural and visual senses – influences his connection to the sound/silence pair as well. In effect, the sensory gap that creates a mystery about Bella also becomes what Jakob calls his 'truth'. In an early part of his memoir, he states:

At night, a few lights marked port and starboard of these gargantuan industrial forms, and I filled them with loneliness. I listened to these dark shapes as if they were black spaces in music, a musician learning the silences of a piece. I felt this was my truth. That my life could not be stored in any language but only in *silence*; the moment I looked into the room and *took in only what was visible, not vanished*. The moment I failed to see Bella has disappeared. But I did not know how to seek by way of silence. So I lived a breath a part, a touch-typist who holds his hands above the keys slightly in the wrong place, the words coming out meaningless, garbled. Bella and I inches apart, the wall between us. I thought of writing poems this way, in code, each letter askew, *so that loss*

would wreck the language, become the language. If one could isolate that space, that damaged chromosome in words, in an image, then perhaps one could restore order by naming (*FP* 111, emphases added).

Jakob's attitude at the traumatic moment reflects what Caruth identifies as the traumatic consequence by which one rather 'take[s] leave' of the violent event, denoting a process that is characterized more by forgetting and detachment than by remembrance and conscious investment. In fact, traumatic latency makes the extreme event register as the absence of experience because of the breach in the mind's sense of time and self. *Fugitive Pieces* also attests that, through the very missing of the event, Jakob's story bears the impact of trauma. This trauma is multilayered in a complex fashion: the aural witnessing delays the visual one, which in turn is lacking because of the vanishing element (Bella). Jakob's repeated haunting by the event is also in line with Caruth's definition of being traumatized as being "possessed by an image or event" (*Explorations* 5). The silence in which Jakob is trapped, while hiding behind a wall, does not only emphasize the value of the image (the sight of the murdered family members) but also turns into a metaphor for Jakob's "great ignorance" that communicates loss (*FP* 110).

While Jakob is haunted by the shadow of the "thousands [who] were stuffed into baking stoves, sewers, garbage bins", the ignorance which he tries to bypass via the act of imagination centers mainly on Bella's mysterious disappearance and its meaning or implications (*FP* 45-46). In effect, Jakob engages in a process whereby he creatively tries to fill in the gap of his knowledge about his sister's unknown fate. He has recourse to imagination even as he extends his connection towards the other victims as well⁶⁷. Thus he starts by "choosing philosophy over the brutalism of fact" (*FP* 168). Even as he tries

to imagine his sister's last moments in the gas chamber, Jakob cannot but believe that he is desecrating her memory. His desire of staying with her is very intense – especially that she represents the missing part of the traumatic image he inherited from the day his family was murdered. Yet, he still feels guilty “I want to remain close to Bella. To do so, I *blaspheme* by imagining” (FP 167, emphasis added).

Even as he realizes the probable inappropriateness of his attempt, Jakob still takes ‘refuge’ in mental imagery in order to remain close to the lost. Via Jakob, Michaels seems to suggest that to approximate the victim(s) – in the sense of getting closer to them – one may have to operate another approximation, one that signifies the incomplete nature of the historical facts and the necessary recourse to imagination. The project of remaining close to those lost does not salvage the resulting ‘view’ of the past from a sense of inadequacy: the indiscriminate collage or projection of figments of the imagination onto already fading mnemonic traces may distort the facts or – at least – further blur the distinction between fact and fiction. In effect, in some of Jakob's oneiric reminiscing moments, one cannot precisely delineate when memories stop and imagination begins. The following passage, for instance, shows that such ‘visions’ could equally be triggered by the Holocaust pictures that Jakob scrutinizes feverishly, or by a sentence that Bella used to tell him:

At night the wooden bunk wears through her skin. Icy feet push into the back of Bella's head. *Now I will begin the intermezzo. I must not begin too slowly.* There is no room. Bella's arms cover herself. *At night when everyone is awake, I will not listen to the crying. I will play the whole piece on my arms.* Her skin is coming apart at the elbows and behind her ears (FP 167).

Jakob's necessary blasphemy also reads as a merger of imagination and research on the part of Michaels herself. It thus shows that the act of imaginative witnessing is a project upon which Michaels seems to embark. This is a process of testimony as a composite of fact and fiction that – in some parts of the text – obscures the divide between Jakob and the author. The imaginative component is not surprisingly presented as a necessary medium in the effort to *make sense* of the atrocity to which Bella, but also other victims, are prey. In effect, the whole process is indicative of the limitations of the linguistic medium and the incapacity of images to provide a satisfying account of the murdering violence. The emphasis upon imagination as an unavoidable complement in testimony is clear in Michael's depiction of Jakob's emotions: "I read. I rip the black alphabets to shreds, but there's no answer there. At night, at Athos's old desk, I stare at the picture of strangers" (*FP* 167). The question that arises, then, is: how can Michaels point to the insufficient nature of language as a mnemonic or witnessing device and, simultaneously, use it to inscribe trauma in a textual project of affective remembrance? The answer at which *Fugitive Pieces* seems to hint is that *poetic* language – because it can evoke traumatic images and because it can incorporate truth and imagination in its folds – is a well-equipped medium for the representation of the horrific past⁶⁸.

3. Witnessing via the Lyrical

Fugitive Pieces is a multi-layered and self-reflexive narrative that does not forget to comment on the evolution of the linguistic ability of the trauma survivor: "The numb tongue attaches itself, orphan, to any sound it can: it sticks, tongue to cold metal. Then, finally, many years later, tears painfully free" (*FP* 95). The text operates as a chronicle of

the link between trauma and its own medium, thus keeping an awareness of its own supplementary nature – that its act of signification reflects a traumatic belatedness, not a survivor's determined and timely choice of expression. Moreover, this “is a narrative echoing with the ambient noise and issues that surround its telling (...) it tells both the story of events and its own unfolding as narrative” (Young, *Witnessing the Disaster* 28). Not only does it depict the traumatic past as experienced by Jakob Beer, but also the connection between Jakob's story and the reaction of Ben to the silent attitude of his parents towards the Holocaust. The text positions the motivation of Ben (his reaction to the silence and secrecy in which he is born and raised) as the very origin of *both* component tales. Furthermore, the textual double-telling comments upon the tension between language and silence, especially that the latter may be considered synonymous with forgetfulness, repressive absence, or even a collaborative effort with the perpetrators⁶⁹. Thus, the linguistic meaning-making attempts that *Fugitive Pieces* incorporates offer a leeway to reclaim the lives of the victims by articulating the traumatic effects, via and upon language, of the Holocaust across many generations.

If the combination of lyrical language and traumatic experience such as the Holocaust may at first appear rather anomalous, it is because – logically – one tends to expect solemn, flat, denotative language to depict tragedies. A language that parallels the seriousness of the situation is expected in the depiction of horrific events. This idea has ethical and moral bearings upon the reception of such texts as *Fugitive Pieces*. In order to avoid being perceived as a light celebration of atrocity, the text has to maintain a certain distance from a language that calls attention to itself. It has to establish literary self-guiding principles and representative limits that permit representation while eschewing

what Horowitz calls “the pornographic, the voyeuristic, the sensational, or the sentimental” (*Breaking Crystal* 278). As the title itself suggests, *Fugitive Pieces* is replete with musicality (and music related themes) that runs counter to expectations in the depiction of shocking historical facts. So how can this highly poetic text – in its apparent concern with ‘beautiful’ language – articulate annihilation? How can the literary act of bearing witness to past traumas “[f]ind a way to make beauty necessary, find a way to make necessity beautiful” (*FP* 44)?

In order to answer the preceding question, one needs to contextualize the issue of language in Holocaust depiction. A remarkably paradoxical tendency resides in writing about the traumatic moment while asserting that neither words nor images are equipped to do so. This is connected to the perception of the Holocaust as an unspeakable, which – beyond the aforementioned and dangerous auras of holiness and mysticism that it sheds upon the ‘sublime’ event⁷⁰ – also comments upon the failure of language to contain that which, by its very nature, escapes comprehension⁷¹. However, the limitations of language (vis-à-vis this trauma) appear independently of whether or not one considers the Holocaust to obliterate linguistic possibilities *per se*⁷². In *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust*, Young asserts that since linguistic constructs – be they historiographical or literary – are permeated by culturally-determined influences, they cannot be deemed representational. This postmodernist approach, and its attendant rejection of language as representational, implies the deconstructive view of language as performance (which, in Felman’s view, creates witnesses by inducing trauma that is experienced or caught by being read⁷³).

In asserting the effect of language as the normalization of the traumatic experience, the notion is established that there can be no mimetic function for the text depicting the Holocaust, language being already at several removes from the facts. Indeed, Young objects to the historical reality of the extreme event being forced into a mold of narrative structure that organizes and guides but ultimately also resolves it. According to Eaglestone, this stems from the idea that – in order to function as a speech act, rather than a representative *récit* – the text must communicate the violence of the experience. Otherwise, the traumatic events “re-enter the continuum, are totalized by it, and thus seem to lose their ‘violent’ quality...once written events assume the mantle of coherence that narrative necessarily imposes on them, the trauma of their unassimilability is relieved” (29).

In the postmodernist view, the narrative can only aim at achieving *poesis*, rather than *mimesis*. Otherwise put, it should not endeavor to represent but must act as a performative that only signifies its own inability to signify. In effect, as Efraim Sicher states, the narrative has to recognize “the unsayability of the unspeakable, not as some sacred act of reverence but in the knowledge that *the word is compromised* and that representation is impossible” (305, emphasis added). This idea falls squarely within the dilemma surrounding the issue of language and Holocaust depiction. On the one hand, mere facts cannot be left to speak for themselves because archiving the traumatic events can often be equated to relegating them to the realm of silence⁷⁴. In fact, a reading of Jakob’s remark – history is the “Totenbuch” – could be that only those names *uttered* in remembrance escape the logic of the book of the dead (names), lost reference of lost individuals, unspoken. On the other hand, there cannot be a representation of the

traumatic events so as to depict the victims', witnesses', or perpetrators' experience without the aforementioned resort to figuration⁷⁵, and the concomitant dangers of resolution and rationalization (as facts that can be forced into logical understanding – in terms of cause and effect, for instance).

Caught within the dialectic of silence and articulation which is at the core of the theme of bearing witness, Michaels' narrative – much like Jakob himself – seems hesitant at times between emphasizing one or the other as the appropriate answer to the traumatic magnitude of the Holocaust. In effect, Jakob is plunged into silence during his 'escape' into the forest. He hides "with my ears under the surface, I can't hear. This is more frightening to me than darkness, and when I can't stand the silence any longer, I slip out of my wet skin, into sound" (*FP* 11). Having survived, thanks to the ability to witness aurally, Jakob post-traumatically regards silence as extreme isolation still, as a death, from which he is born again when he meets Athos. Nonetheless, even as Jakob tries later to manipulate language so as to carry (his) experience, the text asserts the idea that "[s]ome stones are so heavy only silence helps you carry them" (*FP* 77). However, the formal quality of the narrative – its insistence on musicality and beautiful imagery⁷⁶ – seems to reflect Jakob's final position: he comes to embrace the idea that "war can turn even an ordinary man into a *poet*" (*FP* 68, emphasis added).

According to Marita Grimwood, "poetry...functions as therapy for Jakob against the traumatic loss of metaphor and the Nazi corruption of metaphor in euphemism" (120). In effect, Jakob is totally obsessed with language(s) and the power that even seemingly minute linguistic details have upon human lives. Jakob's faith in language, Ben mentions, is so total that he can detect the fact that a single letter can demarcate life from death:

“like the “J” stamped on a passport” (*FP* 206-207). Because a letter can become a death sentence for the Jewish individual, it becomes synonymous “with the power of language to destroy, to omit, to obliterate” (*FP* 79). Nevertheless, this realization does not obscure the fact that the very same letters present a subversive potential once used as a means for resistance – Michaels seems to insist. In fact, there are mentions of linguistic acts becoming the full-scale effort of resistance – “there was Palamas and the graffitos, whose heroism was language” (*FP* 79). Jakob is amazed by the way in which language becomes a weapon against Nazism in the hands of members of the Greek resistance: “During the occupation, graffiti required swiftness and courage. Graffitos who were caught were executed by the Germans on sight. A single letter was *exhilarating*, it was spit in the eye of the oppressors” (*FP* 78, emphasis added).

Inasmuch as it attributes a healing capacity to language, *Fugitive Pieces* seems to oppose Theodor Adorno’s aforementioned pronouncement that poetry is another offence to the victims. For Michaels, the very traumatic experience that Adorno considers beyond words can be dealt with if one has recourse to “poetry, the power of language to restore” (*FP* 79). In asserting the viability of poetry after catastrophe, *Fugitive Pieces* goes against the Adornian position by which poetry is debased as an art(form) in the depiction of trauma. In his 1962 essay “Commitment,” Adorno enunciates his principle that when a text, in the quest for supreme esthetic effect, is narcissistically contemplating into its own formalism, its only fate is that of cultural commodification.

Concerning the Holocaust – and especially from the viewpoint of the later generations – an absence of factuality, either due to the absence of texts or to the prevalence of imaginative accounts, may have precarious effects. Both an utter silence

and the inaccessibility of the truthful *récit* deny expression, although in different ways. This either falls within negationist agendas (demanding silence for ‘non-experience’), or disconnects later generations from their traumatic legacies, the facts of which are lost under all the superimposed esthetic layers. Along these lines, Adorno warns against the remote prospect that “the so-called artistic rendering of the naked physical pain of those who were beaten down with rifle butts contains...the possibility that pleasure can be squeezed from it” (*Commitment* 9). This statement underlies his suspicion that artistic configurations may distort the traumatic experiences portrayed, which could trivialize the limit event and engender readers’ complacency.

Adorno also dismisses texts that celebrate the humanity burgeoning in extreme situations as unjust to the victims of violence, as well as those whose depictions of horror normalize and attenuate it. For him, the “aesthetic stylistic principle, and even the chorus’ solemn prayer, make the unthinkable appear to have had some meaning; it becomes transfigured, something of its horror removed” (*Commitment* 9). Accordingly, Texts are not to shed any possibility of meaning upon the traumatic limit in quest for a moral teaching about human values or redemptive outcomes. Adorno also rejects the tendency to “to work up atrocities into “limiting situations” which ... [are then accepted] to the extent that they reveal authenticity in men” (9). The texts that attempt to impose formal limits upon an otherwise indomitable experience, which intrinsically resists narrative and linguistic frames, paradoxically promote political paralysis within the very culture that generated the Holocaust⁷⁷.

In *Fugitive Pieces*, language is the very sign of deliverance: it is intertwined with all the developments of the major characters and parallels their situations of loss,

fragmented views, and detached maturity. For instance, shortly after one is told that, in the aftermath of catastrophe, an individual can be born again into another life⁷⁸, Jakob Beer narrates his emergence from the earth's womb to Athos: "I *screamed* into the *silence* the only phrase I knew *in more than one language*, I screamed it in Polish and German and Yiddish, thumping my fist at my own chest: dirty Jew, dirty Jew, dirty Jew" (*FP* 12-13, emphasis added). The prominence of language as the medium signifying survival does not fade away throughout the text. Placed against Adorno's prescriptive views of the overly sensational or the absurdly redeeming, Michaels's text would seem at first glance to fall in the trap of making affliction a beautiful process – one that is pleasing to readers, numbing them to any brutality of the facts. However, this is not simply a rewrite of atrocity under the mark of beauty but a narrative device that operates to maximize readerly affect (as they are caught off guard) vis-à-vis the event. As Grimwood notes, the text's "self-aware 'literariness' ... makes it clear to the reader that [it is] *not attempting to rewrite history*" (29, emphasis added).

According to Grimwood, the whole witnessing project is contingent upon the transformative possibilities that are accessed via language. In effect, she considers that the esthetic quality of Michaels's text gives it the advantage of affecting the readers into empathy⁷⁹. Without the anchoring of beautiful referents within the text, the narrative would have to be a list of historical facts. It would thus offer no particular insight into them. It is also my view that a text that simply presents another historical enumeration of facts and figures does not necessarily solicit empathic reactions because it presents the victims as one-dimensional individuals (i.e., Jews). For inasmuch as history presents itself as an unbiased, uncommitted narrative, it may act as a factor attenuating any sense

of loss⁸⁰. History does not highlight the depth or humanity of the victims, nor does it foreground their beauty. The highly metaphoric language of *Fugitive Pieces* does intensify catastrophe. It has a more contagious traumatic effect because it heightens the tension between the individual beauty of the lost and their systematic reduction to non-beings.

Interestingly, Michaels has defended, in an interview, her choice for lyrical textuality by stating that *Fugitive Pieces*:

could have been written in very brutal language. It could have been ugly to read. But I realized in a way that that would be less true. It would separate one from the horror even more in a way by pretending to be closer. Rather than do that, I wanted to make the images work in a certain way so that the brutality or potency of an image would hit the reader before one had a chance to defend oneself against them, in such a way that you respond to them emotionally and then very quickly start to think about what the image means (qtd. in Grimwood 114).

Michaels's insistence that her narrative vacillates between turning trauma into a total song and emphasizing the calamitous loss that inheres in trauma shows that it attempts to avoid the readers' detachment from tragedy as well as the agreeable – but counterproductive – overemphasis of the formal textual quality. It is my position in this chapter, in line with Michaels' own stance but without putting too much emphasis upon authorial intention, that, inasmuch as Michaels' formal strategy appeals to readers' sensitivity, it leaves the door open for *subjective* evaluation of the efficiency of the lyrical in Holocaust representation. Furthermore, Michaels's notion of the suddenly-noticed wound creates a textual situation paralleling the concept of trauma witnessing inasmuch as it is an instant of seeing without knowing, a moment of sudden awareness.

In Jakob's case, witnessing – much like his journey to make sense of his life after the traumatic loss of his family – is profoundly dependent upon the linguistic signifier and Jakob's connection to the languages which he comes to learn or forget. Alphabets figure prominently within the text, each offering Jakob a different angle vis-à-vis 'reading' his family tragedy. For instance, the fact that his memoir is written in English is made possible by the fact that his traumas are not inscribed into it. English, the language later acquired, is not primarily connected to his childhood traumas because these are incorporated without barriers to the Hebrew, Yiddish, and Polish languages. While these latter are shattered by the violence of his calamity, Jakob asserts that the distance between the English language and his trauma offer him protection from invasive memory episodes: "later, when I began to write down the events of my childhood in a language foreign to their happening, it was a revelation. English could protect me; an alphabet without memory" (*FP* 101).

The loss of Jakob's Yiddish is feared by his mentor and savior, Athos⁸¹, as the annihilation of memory. Jakob remarks: "Athos didn't want me to forget. He made me review my Hebrew alphabet" (*FP* 21-22). The fact that Athos regards this language as young Jakob's connection to his past is derived from his own discoveries⁸² of how direct access to past events can be denied by suspicious manipulations (as in the Nazis' previously-mentioned tampering with historical evidence for the purposes of appropriation of other civilizations' cultural production). However, the fears of Athos are futile; Jakob himself demonstrates a desire to adopt the newly acquired language coupled with an urgent need to forget: "Slowly my tongue learned its sad new powers. I longed to cleanse my mouth of memory. I longed for my mouth to feel my own when speaking his

beautiful and awkward Greek, its thick consonants, its many syllables difficult and graceful as water rushing around rock” (*FP* 21-22).

The fact that Michaels juxtaposes remembering and the idea of language⁸³ as a resource also appears in Jakob’s choice of writing his memoir in English: the acquisition of this amnesiac tongue is balanced by its ability to provide perspective and narrative format to Jakob’s traumas. English, having avoided the implosions engendered by early trauma, opens new insights into the past: “On Idhra I finally began to feel my English strong enough to carry experience. I became obsessed by the palpable edge of sound. The moment when language at last surrenders to what it’s describing” (*FP* 162). Moreover, the disconnection from the other languages may, paradoxically, also signal Jakob’s acceptance of his identity as a Jew: for while his Yiddish fades into oblivion like “a melody gradually eaten away by silence” (*FP* 28), the English that he feels can mediate his view of ‘what happened’ becomes, as Alan Rosen points, a neutral language, almost the language of the detached observer⁸⁴.

Noting that Jakob’s first words (as he is found by Athos) join together his primary languages within a self-loathing symbolic, Rosen asserts that the Polish, German, and Yiddish in which Jakob screams to identify himself to Athos reveal the extent to which his identity is twofold at that stage: “He [Athos] said he spoke to me. But I was wild with deafness. My peat-clogged ears. So hungry. I screamed into the silence the only phrase I knew in more than one language, I screamed it in Polish, and German, and Yiddish, thumping my fists on my own chest: dirty Jew, dirty Jew, dirty Jew” (*FP* 13). Hinting at the literal meaning of the expression, being soiled, Michaels’ characterization also gestures towards the metaphorical, anti-Semitic self-repulsiveness that inhabits Jakob.

This is also seen in the way the English language of the memoir levels all three languages as expressing the one idea of ‘dirty Jew’. Beyond what Rosen considers to be a masquerade of English as three languages, this reflects the fact that Jakob’s memories are already suffused with the unbiased tongue and that the symbolism of language is not solely important *per se* but can become a reference to a traumatic stage, as the survivor revisits his past.

Along with the obliteration or erosion of linguistic faculties in which the traumatic event and its aftermath plunge Jakob (sometimes with his willful⁸⁵ acceptance), the text refers to another form of linguistic violence: what Derrida – in the added postscript to his text, *Force of Law* – labels the “project of destruction of the name,” a project of erasing the archive (as the possibility of memory) that testifies to the names of those put to death and a silencing discursive practice sustaining the final solution (60). In his analysis of Nazism, Derrida points that this system’s threat to the name emanates from its dual workings: it simultaneously “kept the archive of its destruction, produced simulacra of justificatory arguments, with a terrifying legal, bureaucratic, statist objectivity and paradoxically produced a system in which its logic, the logic of objectivity made possible the invalidation and therefore the effacement of testimony and of responsibilities” (60).

In line with Benjamin, Derrida inscribes the violence of the final solution within an interpretation of language that assigns destructiveness to its representational component. From this perspective, it is the aporia between language as “appellation, nomination, the giving or the appeal or presence in the name” and the communicative dimension of language that creates “evil” (64). The mediating element of language, which goes beyond designation, also causes it to swerve from its originary destination.

The final solution and its violence are thus a conflation of the non-road between two features of language, culminating in what Derrida names “lethal power” squarely aimed at the eradication of the “possibility of singularity” (64).

The uniqueness of the name, which Derrida perceives as the other of the representational mythical violence that feeds into the Nazi project, is also witness to the order of justice, from which – Derrida asserts – should start any serious questioning of the final solution. This order’s prime requirement is the *demand for names* as “the possibility of giving, inscribing, calling and recalling the name” (60). The attempts to erase the “name as memory” are conducive to a logic operating via objectivist, semiotic, and representational means in order to normalize the final solution. By aiming at the annihilation of the Jewish name, the Holocaust has corrupted historiography both by permitting revisionist views and by asserting it as a natural, commonly expected derivative of other historical war acts (60).

It comes as no surprise, therefore, that the effort to assert the Jewish name – a project upon which Michaels herself is embarking – becomes a retort to the Nazi onomastic violence⁸⁶ and a re-appropriation of the proper name. This is a parallel to the fact that – in order to keep the names of loved ones uttered and alive – Holocaust survivors would often attribute them to their own children. This pronouncement, both an appellation and a statement against oblivion, is apparent – in *Fugitive Pieces* – in Jakob’s intention to name⁸⁷ the child that he did not know was conceived: “Child I long for: if we conceive you, if you are born...I say this to you: Light the lamps but do not look for us. Think of us sometimes, your mother and me...You, my son, Bela living in an old city...Or you, Bella, my daughter” (*FP* 194). According to Dina Wardi, this move

effectively positions the second generation individuals thus named as ‘memorial candles’ for those whose names would otherwise be silenced by death (Jakob’s sister, in this case). These “replacement children” – to use Alan Berger’s term – become living memorials to the dead relatives and symbolize, in their parents’ eyes especially, the continuation of the name and its resistance to forced erosion (13).

The same life-asserting strategy is reflected in Ben’s name, which he discovers is “not from Benjamin, but merely ‘ben’ – the Hebrew word for son” (*FP* 253). From this perspective, Ben does have a proper name, but it is not his name proper. It supplements the proper names of his lost siblings in both senses of complementing but also replacing or attempting to move on (on the parents’ side). As he understands his own position (after finding the picture of his siblings), Ben wonders “whether the two names on the back of my father’s photograph, if they had ever been spoken, would have filled the silence of my parents’ apartment” (*FP* 280). In fact, one could read Ben’s own name as a metonymical inscription of survival. For Ben himself, however, his parents have simply refrained from naming him, a reaction to appellation violence: they may have “hoped that if they did not name me, the angel of death might pass by” (*FP* 253). Ben is a name which, precisely in its oneness, is multiply referential. Since it functions as a commemorative sign for the category of progeny, Ben’s name links him to others⁸⁸: the children who did not survive, including his siblings, as well as his (and possibly other) parents and their traumatically motivated name choice. Via the naming practice, Wardi argues, parents like Ben’s “decree for their children a double sense of identity and emotional life; the children must live simultaneously as themselves and as the relatives they were named after” (94).

What arises from names like Bela/Bella and Ben, according to Wardi, is an “ethical appeal” to the bearers of the name – i.e., the offspring – by which the parents seek to reestablish orderly time and “resurrect the dead” to ensure the continuation of the Jewish lineage (30-97). While it carries a hope of redemption⁸⁹ that new life may replace old death, this naming gesture also “is a kind of *attribution ceremony*, establishing the individual’s place in a long chain of images of the past...By repeating the names of relatives who died, the family organizes historic time and creates continuity between the past and the future” (97, emphasis added). Thus, this is a speech act that reflects the commitment of survivors to the memory of the victims⁹⁰, a wish to recall them daily, to *recall* them and thus call them as they *call* their children (to call and to name are synonymous, in this respect). Furthermore, this gesture points to the fact that traumatic mechanisms of transmissions always exceed the individual’s capacity to integrate it and to make sense of it independently of intersubjective connections – that trauma always contaminates and involves others.

The idea of trauma transcending the individual is one that is mentioned by Caruth, in her analysis of Freud’s *Moses and Monotheism*. In this text, Freud analyses the traumatic history of the Jews, considering this trauma, marked by the death of Moses, as one in which a “latency” is observable in a period of apparent disappearance of monotheism. This period ends with the symptomatic return of the monotheistic idea (also a figure for the *return* of Moses himself) and signals Jewish history as one – according to Caruth – that is characterized not only by the epistemological gap of the traumatic event as it happens, but – perhaps more importantly – as the non-recognition of the fact of survival as well. This enigma of survival, as deferred awareness of having missed the

traumatic encounter and having *remained intact*, transcends the individual: “history is not only the passing on of a crisis but also the passing on of a survival that can only be possessed within *a history larger than any single individual or any single generation*” (UE 71, emphasis added).

The bestowal of the names of deceased family members onto the children of survivors thus symbolizes the fact that the trauma extends beyond their own personae to necessarily require bonding with others. Indeed, the naming act is an appeal that crosses generational boundaries to establish a connection between individuals who share, albeit differently, a certain traumatic heritage. In this respect, the naming of the offspring calls them to internalize what Nadine Fresco names a “phantom pain”: the traumatic loss of a past that they have never owned⁹¹ in the first place, “like people who have had a hand amputated that they never had. It is a phantom pain, in which amnesia takes the place of memory”. Accordingly, second generation individuals have to embark upon their inherited assignment: to sustain the very collective memory which is haunting them as amnesia. Furthermore, this contamination turns the child of survivors into the locus of their parents’ emotional overload – making a new life operate as a link in the chain of commemoration. It thus testifies to the parents’ own belated recognition of their unfathomable escape from destruction – showing, as Cathy Caruth notes, that both crises (of death and of life) define history as the story of the intertwined traumas of self and other (UE 7-9).

The idea, expressed by James Herzog, that “unbound, unintegrated, and unshared trauma is most likely to overflow” fits both Jakob’s and Ben’s narratives (110). In effect, Jakob’s memoir is a longing letter to his unborn child, in which he testifies what it meant

for him to survive. Although memoir writing tells one's story as remembered, the text discovered by Ben also stands for a different legacy, or mechanism of trauma transmission, when compared to Ben's parents' repressed and unvoiced past. It is pointed out in the literature – notably by Bernard-Donals – that several survivors tend to hide behind a withdrawing attitude, which reflects their wish to spare their progeny both the horrific details of their past and the continuation of their torment and disbelief at being alive⁹². A “silent exile” ensues from their inclination “to keep the humiliation of the atrocity to themselves for fear that it would contaminate the lives that they were trying to build (or rebuild) after the destruction” (20).

It is significant, however, that the silence of Ben's parents could be understood as broken in the affirmation or appeal that is his name – Ben, son. Hence, the call ‘son’ represents the parents' semiotic retort to the otherwise overwhelmingly silencing trauma which they survived. As a result of his parents' memorializing gesture, Ben bears a name which is a condensation of meanings – invested with his parents' past connections to their dead children as well as to their future hopes – and yet it also functions as a synechdocal abridgement which stands for *all* his parents' offspring. In this respect, one can understand the very fact that Ben himself, as inhabited by the aftereffects of his own name and (his parents' naming motives) is in some ways lost as well. In order to become whole, in terms of understanding both the past and the origins of his parents' ordeal, Ben has thus to come to terms with the death that is inherent in his very name. Moreover, his identity and self-perception become balanced by supplementing the narrative of his family history with the understanding obtained from Jakob's own commentary upon his experience of survival.

4. Fragments of Memory

Supplementation – as the ‘appropriation’ of Jakob’s experience by Ben, who integrates it into his own life story – is presented as a commemorative way that can alleviate the Holocaust’s traumatic incompleteness and bridge its mnemonic fissures. In its resistance to facile categorizations, the text does not univocally lament the fragmented consciousness that ensues from the violent instance of trauma – although it proceeds in ways that leave room for incoherent, struggling, views of that state. In fact, *Fugitive Pieces* espouses this fragmented perspective, the epitome of which may be the two layers of narrative in which the first (Jakob’s) is the material outcome of the second (Ben’s) and thus understood as Jakob’s open letter to his unborn child. By turning the traumatic sense of dissociation to a leitmotif, Michaels inscribes it within the structure of the text as well as its thematic axes and worldviews. For instance, Jakob’s narrative is nonlinear and is filled with intrusive memories and cross-referencing stories – two of which introduce other unidentified children survivors⁹³ – that widen the textual gaps. In addition, back-and-forth plot movements and discontinuities complicate any straightforward understanding of the events narrated.

This way of reflecting the erratic nature of the traumatic perception may constitute an attempt to mimic the structure of the survivors’ lives and their epistemological struggle to understand and relate their traumatic past and its unstable aftermath. In fact, the title itself, *Fugitive Pieces*, already points to a sense of disintegration that is subsequently unveiled as both happening to, and internalized by, the characters. The title also complements the text’s overarching structure as a collection of interspersed pieces of individual life stories. Along these lines, one could consider memory itself to be an ever

fleeting, fugitive archive which – unless uncovered, or recovered – may vanish under the effect of a faceless, voiceless history. This material view of memory is also supported by Jakob’s assertion that “each time a memory or story slinks away, it takes more of me with it” (*FP* 144). Likewise, the characters themselves could be seen as pieces transported by the current of events, only to discover their places within a network where their bonds emanate from empathy and scientific rigor (Athos), from the attempt to fill knowledge gaps (Jakob), or from the resistance to silence (Ben).

Michaels’ own pseudo-journalistic epigraph – that “Poet Jakob Beer, who was also a translator of posthumous writing from the war, was struck and killed by a car in Athens in the spring of 1993, at age sixty” – not only frames the novel’s two sections temporally but also intensifies the lack of closure that follows in them. In fact, Michaels’ epigraph, in line with the dyadic nature of the text itself, only mentions Jakob’s death after an introduction to the fact that many World War II narrative were lost, destroyed, or “deliberately hidden – buried in back gardens, tucked into walls and under floors”. The narrative is made to begin *following* this symbolic characterization of memory itself as a space where stories can also be “concealed”. Michaels juxtaposes the two forms of archives – the dry facts and the biographical details – in order to show that, while it is much more comfortable to deal with victims generically as “victims”, it is more ethically appropriate to view them as whole lives, rich with the details of their humanity.

The dual attitude towards fragmentation – reflected in the structural binary division of the narrative and its epigraph’s equivocal stance towards the way to uncover parts of the past – also deconstructs the dehumanization of the Jews, revealing it to be an indefensible corruption of both language and logic. The Nazi project denies its victims

the status of human beings in order to facilitate their ‘destruction.’ They are thus problems, questions, objects, etc., to be dealt with in a horrifically detached so-called objectivity. This logic is self-defeating according to Jakob, for whom it is

the most ironic loophole in Nazi reasoning. If the Nazis required that humiliation precede extermination, then they admitted exactly what they worked so hard to avoid admitting: the humanity of the victim. To humiliate is to accept that your victim feels and thinks, that he not only feels pain, but knows that he’s being degraded. And because the torturer knew in an instant that of recognition that his victim was not “figuren” but a man (*FP* 166).

The text’s insistence upon the fragmentary as a symptom of traumatic loss is accompanied by its depiction as a condition that can metamorphose into salvation. This is apparent in the mentioned episode of Jakob’s survival, wherein he is saved by hiding under Athos’s coat: “We were Russian dolls. I inside Athos, Bella inside me” (*FP* 14). The symbolism of empathy places Athos in the role of Jakob’s mother, carrying Jakob inside him. It also establishes a parallel between caring and hiding, especially via Jakob’s rhetoric which describes the fact as a second birth that echoes his emergence from the earth’s womb. The concepts of the disconnected, partial, fragmented worldview that is the aftermath of trauma are condensed in the image of the doll, the ‘piece’, the detail, which could also signify the possibility of containment or internalization as empathy. The idea of the fragment as representing an informative story-telling potential also falls along this line of symbolism. Hence, Ben’s travel to Greece – motivated in part by his own sense of dissociation from his family history and his need to gain access to what his parents would not disclose – salvages another part of Jakob’s life: his memoir, the

document revealing not only his memory but also his struggle to put his post-traumatic sense of the world into language.

By uncovering the memoir, Ben materializes Jakob's own historiographical moment, his perspective on what happened, and his complex connection to language as a means to represent experience since, for Jakob, "English was a sonar, a microscope, through which I listened and observed, waiting to capture elusive meanings buried in facts" (*FP* 112). Finding the archive is also an act that counters the complacent anonymity of history, which would otherwise cover Jakob's existence and flatten his traumatic experience as a statistical entry⁹⁴. As Ben locates Jakob's missing textual trace, he claims Jakob's experience as an integral part of his own past and becomes the guardian thereof. It is this gesture, which Zeitlin calls becoming "the spiritual or adoptive heir" to the other's experiences that materialize as a metaphor for remembering as the act of re-collecting the "fugitive" pieces of the survivor's past to gain insight into its complex perspective (198).

Anne Michaels' text as a whole asserts the importance of looking for, and uncovering, the fragments of the past as pertaining to the ethical act of remembrance. *Fugitive Pieces* is indeed replete with allusions to the fact that layers of past events always conceal specific details of real lives that were obliterated – as opposed to a historical one-dimensional declarative list of names. For instance, Jakob reflects upon the act of hiding valuables as a mystical practice that is laden with traditional or religious significance: "Letters to absent children, photos, are buried. While the men and women who place these valuables in the ground have never done so before, they go through the motions with centuries of practice guiding their hands, a ritual as familiar as the Sabbath"

(*FP* 39). In fact, Jakob himself owes his survival in part to being ‘dug up’ by Athos, the archeologist who scrutinizes layers of soil for their valuable teachings about the past.

The geological metaphor is indeed one of the most stable and recurring symbolic structures that Michaels uses to characterize the past and the memories of the past. This is an idea that permeates her poetry as well. For instance, in “The lake of two rivers”, she writes: “If cut open, memory would resemble/a cross-section of the earth’s core, /a table of geographical time” (*The Weight of Oranges*, 8-9). In this view, layers of events have to be pushed aside in the search for a hidden, buried ‘truth’ or sign: an object, textual or otherwise, that brings one a step closer to the forgotten or absent other. As an individual who saves precious remnants of the past, ones that can ‘relate’ the tragedy to which they were contemporaneous, Athos also uncovers Jakob from the peat as an ‘afterbirth of earth’ and, in so doing, saves him from the threat of inconsequentiality or forgetfulness. Indeed, Athos symbolically participates in Jakob’s re-birth, since he witnesses his emergence from underneath the mud in which he was hiding. He also becomes his ‘discoverer’: Jakob’s existence can now be of significance – as opposed to its trivialization by Nazism – since it is uncovered, brought into light, and firmly placed within the referential order. Together with Jakob’s linguistic evolution, it is this uncovering that signals the beginning of Jakob’s very own “second history” (*FP* 20).

The meaning of uncovering the archival traces (personified by Athos and, later in the text, Ben) is intensified as resistance: this is relevant especially once we place it at odds with the Nazi project, which – according to Felman – remains principally a “project of *containment*” (240). In effect, she points to the annihilation of Holocaust victims within gas vans, which she equates to receptacles of destruction that epitomize the

perpetrators' execution of the "enforced confinement of a burial alive" (*Testimony* 241). Furthermore, she observes that this 'method' reflects the fact that the Other – according to the Nazi logic – must be "at once *enclosed* and literally (in all the senses of the term) *framed*" (241). This observation of the obliteration-via-containment process is not disconnected from Felman's understanding of the Event itself *qua* project of erasure of the witness, a secretive inward-facing system that attempts not to leave any trace of its own workings: the darkness inside the van steals even from its captive victims the possibility of being aware of their own death⁹⁵. This confinement, Felman insists, has for objective the desire "to transform the material frame...into a means for the literal obliteration of the Other and a medium for the rationalization of the murder" (241).

From this perspective, the concept of 'burial alive' that Michaels repeatedly uses in the text reads as an allusion to the demands that survival exerted upon the Jews during the extreme event: the fact that they had to 'vanish,' to assimilate themselves to an absence in relation to the Nazis' gaze, which contained their death. One is reminded of the hiding/appearing dyad all through the text as a historically maintained 'ritual' which is endured by the Jews on a regular basis. Moreover, this morphs into such a huge burden for Jakob that he cannot refrain from feeling guilty for 'enjoying' the simple possibility of (re)appearing:

While I hid in the luxury of a room, thousands were stuffed into baking stoves, sewers, garbage bins. In the crawlspaces of double ceilings, in stables, pigsties, chicken coops. A boy my age hid in a crate; after ten months he was blind and mute, his limbs atrophied. A woman stood in a closet for a year and a half, never sitting down, blood bursting her veins. While I was living with Athos on Zakynthos, learning Greek and English, learning geology, geography and poetry, Jews were filling the corners and cracks of Europe, every available space. They buried themselves in strange

graves, any space that would fit their bodies, absorbing more room than was allotted them in the world (*FP* 45-46).

Jakob's re-emergence from underneath the earth, which follows the incident of his burial alive, is placed within the symbolic field of re-generation – thus operating as a counterpoint of presence to the coercion-to-absence. The episode of Jakob's surfacing like a "bog boy" to meet Athos is already located within a temporal frame of repetition that emphasizes the centrality of the theme of archeology: Jakob thus compares his appearance to that of the "Tollund Man, Grauballe Man", and he muses about the possibility that the wooden horses that decorated synagogues now "desecrated and buried" may "rise in a herd, as if nothing had occurred, to graze in a Polish field" (*FP* 50). In fact, the archeological theme is taken to its extreme form⁹⁶ of ideal preservation when Jakob mentions that the bog bodies made time stop and, in their death, have defeated their killers by remaining "perfectly intact" (*FP* 49).

The depiction of the bog men's death also serves as a symbolic reference, a parallel to the Nazi idea of covering or burying the (human) traces of their deeds in order to suppress any future knowledge thereof. This conceptualization of traces as the material site of memory – also reflected in Jakob's self-description as a 'bog boy', a victim who remains to tell about the killing after the perpetrators themselves have become the past – is enhanced by the fact that archaeology, as a field, examines the past primarily via fragmentary material remains. Indeed, Athos, the savior of Jakob who is "an expert in buried and abandoned places" (*FP* 49) also compares him to "a building that's burned out inside, with the outer walls still standing" (*FP* 30). Jakob himself becomes a material signifier of trauma, one inviting excavation or perhaps exhumation, just like the "Polish

synagogues whose sanctuaries were below ground, like caves... [and where] the congregation simply prayed deeper underground” (*FP* 50).

In this sense, the reader is made to understand that the project of burial (alive) – the silencing endeavor of the Nazis – is one of killing the voice, of negating history from surfacing and being un- or re-covered. Inasmuch as this view of Michaels’ equates the interment procedure with an anomalous and fragmentary historical narrative that is imposed by the perpetrators of atrocities, it also suggests the heroic and ethical nature of the archeologist’s work (epitomized by Athos and, later, Ben). The excavation-related process that both these characters undertake (in connection to Jakob) is shown to amount to an act of committed remembering – lest the past’s articulation, the historical account, be left in its earthly grave, without a receiver to decode it, bear witness to it, and pass it on. The search for ancient tales is also what Michaels herself engages in; it is an act of active – albeit temporally dislocated – establishment of connections to the traumas of past generations.

That the text is structured around interment and uncovering – for the major part of section one, but in Ben’s geological interest as well – also speaks to a view of mnemonics that is Freudian, Nicola King asserts. According to King, Michaels’s narrative reflects a model of memory that is “illustrated by Freud by means of an analogy with *archaeological excavation*, [which] assumes that the past still exists ‘somewhere’, waiting to be rediscovered by the remembering subject” (4, emphasis added). In fact, there is a remarkable similitude between Jakob’s ‘romanticizing’ of the survival of the bog people’s bodies (an allusion that calls for later generations to keep searching, like Michaels herself, for past traces) and a Freudian remark – in the Rat Man case history –

about the fact that the very burial of objects is their preservation (qtd. in King 12-13). Michaels, like Freud, sees a parallel between diving into the human psyche and the digging up of archival traces – which also suggestive of the reasons why Michaels’s text hints at Biskupin, Jakob’s hiding space as the “Polish Pompeii” (*FP* 104). Freud states that the most accurate metaphor for the mechanism at once providing access to, and conservation of, psychical material is that of a “burial of the sort to which Pompeii fell a victim and from which it could emerge once more through the work of spades”(qtd. in King 130).

The layering of traces, which enables conservation by the very mechanism that inters, is a parallel to the superimposing of geological strata⁹⁷ and also an act of de/signifying the excessively nostalgic Nazi idea of a superlative communal past to be regained through violence. The text thus depicts the active remembering/search as a similar process to the Freudian “excavation of a stratified ruined site” (qtd. in King 12-13). Moreover, the metaphorical layers of memory also parallel the different levels of witnessing that are highlighted through the text’s tapestry of voices. Hence, multiperspectivism is made central to the message as well as the format of the text. It is presented as the mode in which an intersubjective network of *listeners* and *raconteurs* is necessary to secure the access to otherwise hidden – or stored – historical narratives. In the case of *Fugitive Pieces*, the strata of witnesses⁹⁸ are at once the medium of telling the story and the reason for its very existence. Were it not for their receiving/listening/uncovering efforts, silence would have engulfed the traumatic experiences reported by Michaels (as a literary witness).

Michaels' emphasis upon the uncovering of memory layers is also reinforced and epitomized by Ben's attempts to find a meaningful interpretation of the events that he did not witness, and which his parents refuse to narrate. Ben voices his struggle by stating: "My parents, experts in secrets, kept the most important one from me to their last breath" (*FP* 252) – a remark that also alludes to the fact that the parents viewed their new life as a continuation of an inexhaustible attempt not to attract attention, not to appear. In fact, early in his section, Ben comments on this situation by stating: "I was born into absence. History had left a space already fetid with undergrowth...I lived there with my parents. A *hiding place*, rotted out by grief" (*FP* 233, emphasis added). In depicting Ben's parents' continued sense of insecurity, Michaels emphasizes their survival as a multilayered state⁹⁹ which is not immune to the traumatic impingements and mnemonic intrusions of past experiences. Moreover, she generalizes this fact to the Jewish Diaspora itself, which she depicts as a relocation of the atmosphere of necessity-induced concealment both through time (by superimposing the past into the present) and space (via the move from Europe to America).

The idea of collapsing the past and the present is a reflection of Michaels's "messianic materialism" according to Annick Hillger (29). The fact that Michaels expresses – through Jakob – the idea that "every moment is two moments" reveals her conception of the legacy of the dead as a presence to be incorporated into the lives of those who came to existence after the horror (*FP* 140). Michaels is thus operating within a system of ethical obligation that calls for a "reconfiguration of time", a repositioning via which it is the responsibility of the present generation to account for, and to relate to, the struggle of the past ones (Hillger 29). It is not surprising, therefore, that the text

highlights the continuity and scope of the past effects into the present time, and that the dead – who “are everywhere but the ground” – are shown to inhabit, or rather cling to¹⁰⁰, the present (*FP* 8). This is essentially an effort to give voice to the ones who have been prevented from articulating their presence in(to) history, and also an attempt to redeem the voices of the past by providing active listeners/witnesses to their perspectives and experiences.

The foundation of this idea, the ethical need to live with the dead, can be traced back to Derridean thinking. In effect, in his *Specters of Marx*¹⁰¹, Derrida outlines his view of what he labels “being-with specters” as a “*politics* of memory, of inheritance, and of generations” (xviii). One can, in fact, squarely situate the text of *Fugitive Pieces* within the logic of a haunting past that coexists with the present. Indeed, the narrative itself is (about) the recuperative effort that imperatively goes into the remembering examination of past events: for instance, this is observed in Jakob’s investigations and collections¹⁰², in Ben’s retrieval of Jakob’s memoir as his legacy, and in Michaels’s own research efforts (to create her imaginative record). Furthermore, as Jakob maintains, the past effectively guides the steps of the generations that follow – a “shadow past is shaped by everything that never happened. Invisible, it melts the present like rain through karst...*It steers us like magnetism*, a spirit torque. This is how one becomes undone by a smell, a word, a place, the photo of a mountain of shoes” (*FP* 17, emphasis added).

According to Annick Hillger, Michaels’ condensation of time is a mirror image of the Benjaminian concept of an open history, a history in which the traditional linear model – where a past slowly becomes a rigid and monolithic fact via the work of dominating forces, i.e., the victors – is rejected in favor of a past that is constantly

intruding in the present and even signaling the future (29-35). It is this intrusion that leaves an opening for heterogeneous voices to emerge, including those who were marginalized or silenced by the writers of history. It is this idea that is expressed in Benjamin's time-contracting notion of *Jetztzeit*, a now-time of a standstill that cannot resist the retrospective – in a similar fashion to his angel of history¹⁰³ – and that redeems the present via the recovered past voices since, as Benjamin mentions in his *Theses*, “even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins” (qtd. in Hillger 29).

This Benjaminian fear that the past of the vanquished be occluded or denied articulation¹⁰⁴ leads him to call for a reading of history that goes countercurrent – both because the dead do not participate in writing history and because “there is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism” (*Illuminations* 258). The incorporation of a dual reading of history that searches for the unspoken, dispersed, and fragmented traces of the muted past is opposed to the one-sided character of historiography as a discipline that is often the expression of the ‘omissive’, marginalizing standpoints of the victors. Historiography presents a parochial standpoint precisely because, as Benjamin indicates, “[w]hoever has emerged victorious participates to this day in the triumphal procession in which the present rulers step over those who are lying prostrate” (258).

This corrective uncovering effort, which resists the tyranny of a universal tradition, has several parallels in Michaels' narrative. Indeed, it is exemplified by Athos, who keeps “stirring up historia” in order to unmask fraudulent abuse thereof in his book – tellingly named *Bearing False Witness* (FP 131). The book, which is set to defy the Nazis' abusive misrepresentations of the past “plagued Athos. It was his conscience; his

record of how the Nazis abused archaeology to fabricate the past” (FP 105). The subversive reading of history is also evident in Jakob’s thought, as he comments on the connection between ethical remembering and the revelation of hidden past traces. There is a need to bring the hidden aspect of history into visibility for them to be acknowledged as factual: “I seem to *remember* things only as I *see* them” (FP 153, emphasis added). Ben – and, to some extent, Michaels herself – attempts to document the elements of the past that are not readily available to the individual/cultural awareness by recuperating them from silence. This endeavor is best summed up by Michaels, as she states that “[h]istory is amoral: events occurred. But memory is moral; *what we consciously remember is what our conscience remembers*” (FP 138, emphasis added).

Michaels’ emphasis upon the twofold nature of history translates into the moral imperative of finding and unearthing the records that have been trodden under. This is an ethical duty to excavate lost narratives in order to bring them to the attention of the generations that may otherwise have no awareness of their existence (and thus feel no ethical commitment to mnemonically honor the departed). Integrating the ‘then’ into the ‘now’ reveals Michaels’s adherence to the Benjaminian idea of time restructuring as the very locus of ethics. According to Hillger, this is clearest in Michaels’s evocation of the Jewish ritualistic acts of communion with past generations: “It’s Hebrew tradition that forefathers are referred to as “we,” not “they” (...) *This encourages empathy and a responsibility to the past but, more important, it collapses time.* The Jew is forever leaving Egypt. A good way to teach ethics” (FP 159, emphases added).

For Annick Hillger, the pronominal reference to the dead as “we” shows that Michaels adheres to the view that there should not be any temporal distancing between

the dead and the living. Moreover, the latter have a moral obligation – that is also their legacy – to recall the stories of the past generations and to reclaim them as their own. In this view, what Michaels highlights is a vision of history as a shared and repeated temporality that demands an ethical “telling and retelling [of] the story of those who can no longer speak for themselves, for the past and present are parts of an ongoing communal story and cannot be told once and for all” (30). Hence, the recuperative endeavor becomes ethical *per se* because it signifies a willful attempt to remember. In addition, what that effort may uncover as a residue or surplus of historical facts offers valuable insight into an alternative cultural memory.

The act of giving voice to those sidelined by a history which is dictated by the conquerors also indicates an effort “to wrest tradition away from the conformism that is working to overpower it” (*Illuminations* 255). Otherwise put, if the records of the defeated recede in front of a homogenous grand narrative (that is history from the winners’ viewpoint), then this very *récit* would become a praising ode to the idea of sameness. This is a prospect that threatens to create, and justify, more violence towards any alterity and to erase or discard competing historical narratives to consecrate and consolidate a homogeneous archive – which is metamorphosed into “a monument celebrating the negation of difference” (Hillger 30). Benjamin’s messianic opposition to this solidification of identity into a norm operates by rescuing the marginal from within the selective totality that attempts to thrust it aside as trivial debris. Michaels’s text functions along these messianic lines¹⁰⁵, but with an emphasis upon the spatial component that is seen even in her early poetry: “memory is cumulative selection/ It’s an undersea cable connecting one *continent/* to another” (*Miner’s Pond* 9, emphasis added).

If memory functions as a spatially-construed link between the old continent (the site of trauma) and the new world (the place where the past is legacy), two questions arise: how does Michaels structure her characters' movements around the idea of *grounded* reminiscence? How do the textual patterns of departure/return define the intersubjective network of cultural memory as one that exposes past traumas? In order to answer these questions, one needs to consider the fact that Michaels operates within a Benjaminian view which stipulates that the past remains open to recuperative and (re)interpretive efforts of the generations inheriting it. The fluid nature of the past demands the recuperation of the neglected histories and simultaneously prevents the dominating version from essentially obscuring other realities. Moreover, the uncovering of silenced (buried) past records also offers a redemptive potential – this is the very optimistic possibility that Michaels foregrounds, “a backward hope...Redemption through cataclysm; what had once been transformed might be transformed again” (*FP* 101).

The idea of redemptive transformation resides in the very process by which Michaels makes the concept of place an important connection to memory and recuperative salvation. This is especially remarkable because, in light of the horrific event that is the Holocaust, place is commonly a notion loaded with traumatic resonances¹⁰⁶ (camps, gas chambers, graves, exodus, and dispersion – to mention but a few). In effect, as places are flooded with trauma and obliteration, the very notion of anchorage to experience disappears, “cutting off survivors from place-based moorings forever” (Kandiyoti 300). Michaels' text, I would like to argue, approaches the spatial threat of vacuousness against the grain to claim locations as sites of memory – repositories of *meaning*, not death, that are replete with teachings about the communal past. The notion

of place as the vessel of mnemonic knowledge, I would add, perfectly fits Michaels's own ethical use of the tropes of departure/return as a parallel to the epistemological journey that her characters (Jakob and Ben in particular) embark upon.

The themes of departure/return are not uncommon within the context of trauma theory; they inhabit the structure of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, according to Cathy Caruth. In fact, Caruth analyses the progression of Freud's argument for a repetition compulsion as a moment that paves the way to his move from analyzing the individual past as trauma towards an assessment of the collective and intergenerational history of the Jews in *Moses and Monotheism*. In effect, Caruth's reading of Freud highlights his analysis of traumatic repetition – i.e., “the *return* of the event against the will of the one it inhabits” – as the defining moment in a history that is essentially catastrophic or one that is necessarily marked by recurring past violence (UE 60, emphasis added).

One can add that the repetition itself works within the logic of a “missed experience” of the traumatic event and – according to Caruth – it thus symbolizes a countermeasure to the impossible act of taking leave of the catastrophic event in its first non/occurrence. “Not having truly known the threat of death in the past, the survivor is forced, continually, to confront it over and over again” (UE 62). In this manner, the very survival of the traumatized individual is paradoxically characterized by the impossibility of either departure (from the memory of the event) or return (to the onset thereof). Hence, the repetition compulsion *qua* the continuous attempt to reposition oneself with regard to trauma, as the unsuspected awaking to life that is triggered by the brush with death, becomes congruous with Freud's foundational concepts in his delineation of the death

instinct¹⁰⁷ or “the drive to return to inanimate state” that is a drive within the human psyche (*Beyond* 46).

Interestingly, Caruth alludes to the fact that Freud’s very analysis of the famous fort-da game¹⁰⁸ – which he later uses to substantiate his claim about the repetition compulsion as a marker of structured history – is itself paradoxically inhabited by an uncertainty about whether primacy (as origin or temporal precedence) should be given to either departure (the *fort*, “gone”, component or phase) or return (*da*, “here”). Indeed, Freud mentions the fact that – in this game of “disappearance and return” – only the first act was repeated as an independent part from the second, despite the fact that it is the latter that constitutes the game’s pleasurable conclusion (*Beyond* 13-14). In her reading of this Freudian hesitation, Caruth¹⁰⁹ fuses both gestures into one component: departure. Accordingly, the game does not reiterate the resolution of trauma as an assertion of the possibility of return (to a normal state of affairs, among other things), but works as a repetition thereof (as a realization of the incomprehensibility of both traumatic survival and aftermath).

Cathy Caruth’s theoretical model focuses on the idea of departure as one that allows the recognition of a history which is simultaneously inhabited by trauma and imposes an overflow or excess (unbound stimuli, in Freudian parlance) upon the individual consciousness. The pattern of departure/return can be considered a reflection of a larger historical pattern, through which one is always implicated in the traumas of others. This universalizing effect is notably produced by the repetitive historical violence upon the psyche, combined with the death drive’s imposed recognition of the impossibility of the re-enactment of the prime instant of ‘animateness’ (the receding

moment of escaping death). In my reading of *Fugitive Pieces*, I would like, however, to focus on the pattern of return in order to show the way in which the character's movements – in connection to the *site* of traumatic events – is configured as an essential component in what Michaels perceives as the moral response to trauma, one that opens the possibility of an ethical commemoration of the past.

According to Dalia Kandiyoti, there is an abundance of texts depicting both the physical and identity *dislocations* caused by the Holocaust. These representations detail the “mappings, topographies, wanderings, unbidden travels, exiles, and incarcerations” of the victims as well as their impact upon the construed sense of selfhood (305). Nonetheless, the majority of these portrayals fall short of inscribing these trajectories into a spatial model – instead, these movements are explored as features of history or of time¹¹⁰, not geography or place. The need to analyze the significance of the spatial component of the texts that emanate from the Holocaust thus bears a specific urgency: to anchor experience in the physical place is simultaneously to provide a way to materialize the traces of the past and to literally ground the retrospective task of the following generations – in other words, to emphasize place is to denote ethical remembrance as exhumation.

That the idea of (dis)location is central to Michaels's text is perceptible in the fact that it becomes a hybrid writing joining both notions of history and geography/geology. This is a concept which Michaels concentrates in her notion of “vertical time”, an allusion to the layering of the earth in geological time which has been buried but which can offer a narrative once examined. The notion of physical place also serves, throughout the text, as anchorage to all the experiences that the characters go through. In fact,

Michaels asserts that this an intentional gesture because – in order to avoid abstractions that distance the reader from connecting to the story – she believes that the depiction must reside in a physical, concrete reality that only a “natural site” can signify (Gorjup 2). Furthermore, the evolution of the notion of ‘locatedness’ follows the very progression of the characters (Jakob and Ben, primarily) as they grapple with the nature of the traumatic event and its significance.

In Jakob’s case, his traumatic awakening – which is described in the text as nothing short of a resurrection – appears in the form of emergence from a hiding place on more than a single occasion. In a masterful gesture, Michaels repeatedly places the child survivor in the position of being brought back from a death-like world or, precisely, from a tomb. In effect, Jakob is in cupboard as his family is annihilated and yet, as he comes out of it, he realizes that his only viable survival tactic is to hide again in the swamp, *buried*. Once found by Athos¹¹¹, his emergence is likened to that of a rigid golem and he has to be hidden again under Athos’s coat – like a Russian doll – in order to be taken to safety (*FP* 12). The centrality of place, as intertwined with themes of death and survival, hiding and emergence, also establishes the link with the historical/chronological component of the experience: consequently – and in accordance with Michaels’s view that the material space also meets time – Jakob admits that “even as my blood-past was drained from me, I understood that if I were strong enough to accept it, I was being offered a *second history*” (*FP* 20, emphasis added).

The possibility of a new existence – the second history of which Jakob Beer is in awe – provokes him into thinking about connectedness: “To survive was to escape fate. But if you escape your fate, whose life do you then step into?” (*FP* 48). This

complication ensues from the *return* from the dead, which is also the return or reemergence from the hiding *space*. In codifying survival in terms of material locations, Anne Michaels not only concretizes the material component as a mnemonically relevant mark of the past but she also repossesses that very materiality in order to resuscitate the dead (the victims of the Holocaust) and to deconstruct the logic of the Nazis who wanted to erase the Jews as matter. In effect, as Jakob mentions,

Nazi policy was beyond racism, it was anti-matter, for Jews were not considered human. An old trick of language, used often in the course of history. Non-Aryans were never to be referred to as human, but as “figuren,” “stücke” – “dolls,” “wood,” “merchandise,” “rags”. Humans were not being gassed, only “figuren,” so ethics weren’t being violated. No one could be faulted for burning debris, for burning rags and clutter in the dirty basement of society. In fact, they’re a fire hazard! What choice but to burn them before they harm you (*FP* 165).

The idea of reading the Nazi anti-matter ideology against the grain, by asserting the humanity of the victims, is an objective shared by Athos, Jakob, Ben, and Michaels. In other words, the contact with the conscientious individual who tries to remember the authentic past creates a repetitive effect: the meticulous care about the veracity of details is passed on as ethical reaction demanded by the victims’ shattered worlds. Jakob thus asserts: “Athos was an expert in buried and abandoned places. His cosmology became mine...our tasks became the same” (*FP* 49). In this way, the effect of the contact with Athos – whose chief interest was about “how geography could be used against the dangerous fabrications of politics” – is to get Jakob imbued by the will to expose the past as it was (*FP* 82). Hence, while he finishes his mentor’s book, Jakob reiterates his own investment as an agitator of history – someone who will “keep on stirring up historia” and act as a guard against the falsifications or misrepresentations that may leak into it.

Both men act as individuals whose mission is to uncover the truth, to expose whatever is kept in the dark: “Koumbaros, we are lightening rods for our time” (*FP* 103-105).

Vertical time, the grounded concept of Michaels’s “historical topography” which keeps it available to those who reject its forcible misrepresentations, is also the title of two chapters in *Fugitive Pieces* – one is in Jakob’s section (or memoirs) and the other is in Ben’s section or the tale of how Ben’s (life) narrative led him to uncover Jakob’s (*FP* 119). In fact, all the chapter titles from the second part are *repetitions* of the ones in the first part: ‘The Drowned City’, ‘Vertical Time’, ‘Phosphorous’, and ‘The Way Station’. That the chapter titles are repeated in both sections is significant, primarily because it denotes the repetitive tendencies of history and the similarities between the conditions of the ‘main’ characters, both of whom have to struggle towards an understanding of the Holocaust as simultaneously an individual trauma and a cultural one. At the same time, it reflects the fact that the novel’s narrative structure cannot be detached from the traumatic symptom to which it bears witness. It may also show an identity in the thematic orientation, which serves as an assertion that the second generation faces precisely what their ancestors did, with minor time and space differences. Thus, according to Anne Whitehead, Ben and Jakob’s

histories are inextricably interlinked through a series of corresponding events and submerged images. Ben finds Jakob’s journals, unearthing a story that was hidden or buried during the latter’s lifetime, while Jakob becomes a surrogate father for Ben, enabling him to address his unresolved relation to his dead parents and siblings. Ben completes the *circuit of returns* in the novel, so that Jakob returns to Greece, his wartime hiding place, in order to bury Athos and to complete his mentor’s writing, while Ben travels to Greece to unearth the journals which comprise Jakob’s own hidden or concealed testimony (54, emphasis added).

Ben's voyage to uncover Jakob's memoir, similarly to Michaels' own effort, places him in the position of a messianic materialist, who fetches silenced lessons and inundated viewpoints from the past (Jakob's but also Athos's) in order to expose and to transmit them. There is an obvious parallel between Jakob's return to Greece (in order to make visible, via writing, his koumbaros's experiences and views) and Ben's own return to his own family home, following his survivor parents' death (to try to unravel and reveal the narratives of their life stories that they deliberately withheld from him¹¹²). Both movements are induced by the belief in the importance of narratives as anchors to present understanding of past events. In effect, Michaels emphasizes the silence that inhabits the home of Ben's parents' in order to pave the way for his travel to Greece, a move by which he adopts Jakob as a surrogate father¹¹³, whose past is relevant to his sense of identity and 'situatedness' in a post-Holocaust world. Indeed, very early in his section, Ben tells the readers:

There was no energy of a narrative in my family, not even the fervor of an elegy. Instead our words drifted away, as if our home were open to the elements and we were forever whispering into a strong wind. My parents and I waded through damp silence, of not hearing and not speaking. It soaked into the furniture, into my father's dank armchair, a mildew in the walls. We communicated by slight gestures, surgeons in an operating theatre. When my parents died, I realized I'd expected sound suddenly to enter the apartment, to rush into the place so long prohibited. But no sound came into the apartment (*FP* 204).

It is in this manner that one can configure the movement of Ben as one imposed by the search for the details suppressed from his family narrative. The linkage between place and (self-)understanding is again highlighted by Michaels, who concludes her novel with the suspended or yet-to-be return of Ben – whose worldview is now informed by the

experience of looking for, and exhuming, Jakob's memoir. The fact that Ben claims the details of Jakob's past as his own gives him a sense of belonging and a point of reference: "[a]t least my unhappiness is my own" (*FP* 292). Moreover, this sense of ownership is reciprocal and places him in a situation where he is both in possession of a past but also possessed by it. It is important to note that, in order for Ben to return changed from his contact with Jakob, he has to adopt Athos's very attitude towards the past. In effect, he must become an examiner of past layers, a person who uncovers and signals its teachings. In fact, this adherence to what could be seen as an essential part of the messianic endeavor is signaled literally in the text: "I [Ben] promised him [Salman] I would *excavate* gently. I would spend weeks inside your [Beer's] house, an *archaeologist* examining one square inch at a time" (*FP* 261, emphases added).

Ben's discovery of Jakob's memoir is hence the beginning of a process that brings this archival text back into the realm of significance. Indeed, without Ben's efforts – which supply (more than) a receiver to Jakob's words – that very text (as a record of a particular worldview) would have remained silent. By providing a link between Jakob's words and the world, Ben participates in the testimonial project – an intersubjective association which, as maintains Dori Laub, "cannot take place in solitude" (*Testimony* 71). The idea of physically connecting to where the traumatic events – or the words that emanated in reaction to them – took *place* reflects Michaels's belief in the centrality of the material (body and/or place) as the medium of remembrance: "who can separate fear from the body? My parents' past is mine molecularly" (*FP* 280). It is this encoding of memory in the physical that guides Ben towards the island of Idhra. In order to mentally approximate what the past was like, he has to physically approximate the site where

Jakob – his “transferential figure” according to Marita Grimwood – has incorporated his own trauma into a textual trace (172).

Michaels’s insistence upon the material as the vehicle of past memories is expressed throughout her text as a literal, but also symbolic, perspective of (intersubjective) connectedness and guidance¹¹⁴ across time. In this view, “[i]t’s no metaphor to feel the influence of the dead in the world, just as it’s no metaphor to hear the radiocarbon chronometer...fifty thousand years old...It is not metaphor to witness the astonishing fidelity of minerals magnetized, even after hundreds of millions of years, pointing to the magnetic pole” (FP 53). This geology-inspired observation is in line with Michaels’s attempt to denote the “very strong sense of the physical world as a potential source of restoration of the human spirit” (Gorjup 2). This is a transformative reading of materiality: it operates a shift from the Nazi’s objectifying logic (the projection that caused the victims’ destruction) to a (retrospective) gaze that impels a resurrection or an articulation of the victims’ hi/stories in the aftermath of annihilation.

Seen as part of the phenomenal world, as a natural life occurrence, the materially contained memory becomes scattered across the land in a way that imitates the exodus of the victims themselves. In *Fugitive Pieces*, the belief in the materiality of memory is further elevated by Jakob, who recognizes that “each life saved: genetic features to rise again in another generation” (FP 48). The concrete nature of memory is thus clearly perceived as one that permits a corporeal integration thereof, an integration that goes beyond the capacity of language itself because “No words mean as much as life./Only the body pronounces perfectly/the name of another” (*The Weight of Oranges* 46).

The primacy of the lived trace vis-à-vis the written word remains visible later on in the text, as Ben goes through Jakob's house in search of his diaries. Ben does acknowledge the fact that Jakob's life is extremely well recorded in his words: "[t]he relation between a man's behavior and his words is usually that of gristle and fat on the bone of meaning. But, in your case, there seemed to be no gap between the poems and the man. How could it be otherwise, a man who claimed to believe so completely in language?" (*FP* 207). Despite the acknowledgement of Jakob's linguistic mastery, Ben's physical presence within the house is what he perceives as the real connection with Jakob's persona¹¹⁵: "A house, more than diary, is the intimate glimpse. A house is a life interrupted" (*FP* 265-266). Despite its materiality, language leaves out many of the details that can only appear within the real, concrete frame of a life – configured here as home.

5. A Place that Remembers

The materiality of memory entails its availability for the morally motivated examiner. Michaels further ascribes an air of pantheism to the whole mnemonic network: thus, places display their own will to memorize facts. In a gesture that reveals the centrality of the reciprocity figure in her narrative project and vision, she asserts: "We long for place; but place itself longs. Human memory is encoded in air currents and river sediment. Eskers of ash wait to be scooped up, lives reconstituted" (*FP* 53). In fact, the text is replete with references that suggest the centrality of space-correlated experiences and the complex interactions between events and the site where they occur – what Kandiyoti aptly names "Michaels's spatialization of consciousness" (309). To mention only a few

of these, one can cite Athos's musing: "What is a man...who has no landscape? Nothing but mirrors and tides" (*FP* 86). Otherwise put, without grounding in the material – or without materializing in the ground (the soil, the place, the site) – the past is fated to be only loosely remembered. Without grounding, the traumatic experience of the child survivor is only bound to be exacerbated by its diffusion across new spaces of survival. In another textual moment of condensation between time and place, Jakob is consequently advised: "try to be buried in ground that will remember you" (*FP* 76).

Michaels's own understanding of loss as connected to (dis)location is the motive for her pantheistic stance; for if the sense of belonging to negative (non)places is internalized by the child survivor, then a possible solution to this 'uprootedness' can be operated if the "protagonist relocates by immersing himself in the consciousness of his places of exile" (Kandiyoti 310). The Holocaust, as an experience, relegates the victims to a status of negative essence: it "annihilated metaphor, turning humans into objects...The step from language/formula to fact: denotation to denotation" (*FP* 143). In response to this spacelessness, Michaels suggests a possibility of redemption that emanates precisely, and paradoxically, from those traces that are scattered across Europe. The very materiality that served as a justification for annihilation becomes then a ground for 'relationality' between generations of survivors and victims. Furthermore, the event which originally lacked landscape becomes one that suffuses nature itself, waiting for its potential for regeneration to be put to use by the ethically motivated protagonist. As Ben authoritatively notes, "everywhere nature remembers" (*FP* 211).

Michaels's ascription of mnemonic abilities to the natural sites where the past traumas took place reverses the lack of setting that characterizes the Holocaust. This

sense of spatial vacuousness is notably examined by Laub and Allard, who remark that material locations¹¹⁶ themselves are infected by the traumas of the Holocaust. In fact they suggest that destruction is “a verdict still in operation...the empty fields and the desecrated synagogues and Jewish homes are the traces of a crime...They are empty, they reveal nothing of what has occurred in their midst” (801). The strategy employed by Michaels in *Fugitive Pieces* opposes nature as a whole – as a place of revelation and potential re-composition and reconstruction – to the lack of articulation that is often the effect of the extreme event. The text thus establishes itself as a linguistic space that intensifies the tension against the silence conveyed by spaces of death, hiding, or exile, by the anonymity of mass graves and by an amoral history that intrinsically rhymes with the victor’s viewpoint, not that of the concealed individuals/records. The notion of place has otherwise been ruined and abused by the perpetrators, “mass shootings and burials took place in forests across Europe, and forests were planted by the Nazis in order to conceal the sites of mass graves and concentration camps” (Whitehead 62). Michaels invalidates the perpetrator’s deliberate misconstruction and misreading of historical facts by insisting on the disclosure of specifics that is offered by natural places.

The instructions derived from physical/spatial provide Ben with linkages that compensate for his parents’ “disjointed references to kapos, haftlings, “Ess Ess”, dark woods; a pyre of dark words” (*FP* 217). Material records supply otherwise marginal narratives that expose atrocity even as they are manipulated to become its cover. Accordingly, Ben underscores the fact that trees recall the past and provide an archival text for the events they witnessed: “[i]n their rings we read ancient weather...A forest shares a history, which each tree remembers even after it has felled out” (*FP* 211). In

addition to providing the possibility of filling in the fissures of imposed historical metanarratives, or countering them altogether, Michaels's sanctification of natural sites as silent witnesses has the effect of reinforcing her view of the merging of tenses – the aforementioned messianic now-time: “[t]he present, like a landscape, is only a small part of a mysterious narrative. A narrative of catastrophe and slow *accumulation*” (*FP* 48, emphasis added). Thus, the past fuses with the present and is accessible for examination via the very locus of historical occurrence: “containing within itself the fugitive pieces of memory, the landscape provides for Michaels an important and potentially redemptive counterforce to the catastrophe of the Holocaust” (Whitehead 10). This raises another issue: regardless of its medium, is redemption a viable project at all for a Holocaust text such as Michaels'?

To answer this question returns this chapter to its starting point of emphasizing the ethical dimension surrounding narratives that attempt to represent, and perhaps to contain, the trauma of the Holocaust. Traumatic (re)presentation – inasmuch as it vacillates between its retrieving or repeating motions and its repairing or transcending possibilities – remains an intricate project. It is fraught with moral dilemmas: in what ways does a redeeming fiction – such as *Fugitive Pieces* – constitute a moral gesture of remembering? How can remembering avoid being normatively flattened by the idyllic textual format? The answers suggested in this concluding section will not be simply unequivocal: for inasmuch as the remembrance that the novel offers is avowed as created, it is aware of its own fictional status. Nonetheless, this avowal – refuting the suspension of disbelief built in earlier textual phases – is only available at the very end of the novel (indeed, supplementarily to its own text). This I read as an investment, on the part of

Michaels, to make her text operate not as a narrative account but as a wounding *récit* – one which functions as a performative that surprises the reader into empathic respons(e)ibility.

An essential rule of Holocaust writing, according to Bernard-Donals and Glejzer, is “to produce in the reader an effect that forces him or her not simply to recognize the event but to confront it” (*Witnessing the Disaster* 12). This confrontation¹¹⁷ is brought about, in *Fugitive Pieces*, via the instantaneous realization of trauma in the moment when the beauty of the poetic language recedes in the face of the atrocity that it depicts. This novel opens a textual space for a morally sound remembering retrospective between two moments of suspension: the one when it induces the reader to believe in the veracity of the stories told and the final moment where it acknowledges its fictional component. In addition to textual ambiguity, the lyricism of Michaels’s text in the face of the horror it represents is a strategy that aims at bringing the reader closer to the perspective from which the narratives emanate – i.e., the survivors’ gaze. It thus attempts to elicit the responsibility of the other by acting against the detachment and distance that would normally characterize their response to a text depicting atrocity.

Fugitive Pieces endeavors to become what Felman and Laub label a performative text, one that does not simply represent but transmits trauma to its readers, impresses it upon them as something that goes beyond the textual signifiers to be configured as a speech *act*. It thus tries to equate the effect of “a literality” that cannot be subdued by, or contained within, linguistic signifiers. Indeed, facing the horrendously literal that history itself “cannot assimilate or integrate as knowledge,” the text does not attempt to control or contain it but rather to transmit it without interference (*Testimony* 276). Within the

performative concept of contaminating trauma, the text operates not as a source of knowledge, but as a medium of transmission of the incomprehensible. This process, however, remains surrounded by the danger – induced by the narrative’s setting of proxemics – of the reader’s enticement to take ownership of the experiences depicted. In fact, an ethics of trauma that conveys a sense of the events’ horror and arbitrariness has to be counterchecked to avoid an inappropriate identification with the victims. Otherwise, the speech act misses its objective and raises “the stakes of mystification. Now, what is unrecoverable, unspeakable, unknowable – the authentic ‘kernel’ – belongs not just to survivors but also to everyday scholars, readers, and filmgoers” (Sundquist 70).

Fugitive Pieces places its message carefully in balance between establishing too much distance (that would protectively prevent the reader from emotionally connecting with the narrative and its characters) and too much identification (which would not save the difference and particularities of the event as a historical occurrence – i.e. as a past event that targeted a particular set of victims). For instance, Michaels plunges the reader into the child perspective in the first part of the novel. This move shrinks the distance between reader and tale. In fact, according to Hirsch,

The image of the child victim...facilitates an identification in which the viewer can too easily become a surrogate victim. Most important, the easy identification with children, their virtually universal availability for projection, risks the blurring of important areas of difference and alterity (16-17).

This implicative strategy is applied, however, only to withdraw from the child’s angle and to reformulate the narrative as a recollection, indicating that it is written from the vantage point of the *adult* Jakob Beer. Hence, *Fugitive Pieces* establishes a variable

system of proxemics – using the attraction of poetic language, the innocent vantage point of the child survivor, and the undoing of its own “suspension of disbelief” by the end of the novel – in order to amplify its own traumatic affect.

The text’s deconstruction of its own simulated historical accuracy is a feature praised by such critics as Theodor Adorno, who insists on the need to “valorize those moments...at which art “dismantles” its own illusion” (qtd. in Trezise 44). In addition to reflecting the text’s self-consciousness, this move also forbids a reading that would foreground the final return to ‘normalcy’ or equilibrium – an evolution from trauma to a better state of affairs. In effect, Ben is left literally suspended as he flies home after growing more mature from his expedition into Jakob’s archive. The deployment of its stylistic devices and the final bracketing of the text with the resources used to construe it imaginatively all work in the sense of negating any redemptive value that would act as “a sensuous realization of the ideal, as an imposition of meaning on the otherwise meaningless, of form on the formless, or of familiarity on the radically unprecedented” (Trezise 44). In leaving the redemptive component¹¹⁸ of the text as a suggested effect upon the reader, Michaels stops short from endorsing what would otherwise seem an expected corollary of her messianic position: that a redemption is possible, which “carries with it a notion of exchange, of a quid pro quo, whereby that which is lost may not be recovered but for which we may gain something of equal value in return” (*Between Witness and Testimony* 3).

More dangers than the affirmation of a possible healing redemption loom around the text, however. One such threat is that, while refusing to ascribe significance to meaningless destruction, the text be narcissistically drawn to foreground its own poetic

language and tropes. For Horowitz, the extreme form of this self-contemplation praise “appears to *make a fetish of language*. In avowing its own artifice, rhetoric, and contingent symbol-making, fictional narrative...threatens to shift and ultimately destroy the grounds by which one measures one set of truth claims” (*Breaking Crystal* 288, my emphasis). If the historical facts are not deemed worthwhile *per se*, or are relegated to a background position and viewed as auxiliary, then the text’s effort of commemoration fades before the engraving of the mark of its tropological beauty upon readers. The narrative’s tendency to overly value itself as the vehicle via which transpires the way the survivors remember their own traumas¹¹⁹ is also a potential fallacy. Thus, creative textuality problematizes its efficacy as a serious medium to reflect (about) the extreme event. It also faces the possibilities of becoming either “a weaker, softer kind of testimony when compared to the rigors of history, or...a misleading, dangerous confusion of verisimilitude with reality” (Horowitz, *Voicing the Void* 1).

Since the extremes are fraught with these dangers, the text of *Fugitive Pieces* is carefully woven so as to avoid any unequivocal signification or any facile conciliatory or redemptive stance. Michaels’s narrative suspends itself before the reader can make sure that, for instance, Ben’s return is one that is synonymous with a new beginning for him or one that represents an affirmation of the power of life over destruction and trauma. Any sense of a comfortable closure is denied throughout the text by the fact that many stories of other survivors/victims are grafted onto the ‘main’ narratives. These are as suddenly left hovering over the central plot as they are hinted at. Michaels also uses a lyrical language to denote horror, taking a linguistic medium to its extreme in order to counterbalance an extreme fact of trauma – acting according to Athos’s motto “Find a

way to make beauty necessary, find a way to make necessity beautiful” (*FP* 44). In so doing, the frames of what Ulrich Baer labels “an aesthetic of shock” that cultivates a fascination with atrocity are exploded (113). Furthermore, the text defamiliarizes¹²⁰ the approach towards a traumatic effect by obliquely gesturing towards the horror it depicts – i.e. by proceeding through a poetic language that suddenly recedes to expose traumatic images. The apparent sentimentalization of the facts of trauma is only a means to effectively turn the narrative into a performative that catches the reader unawares in order to transmit a wound to them.

Fugitive Pieces stops abruptly short of offering a humanistic teleology or becoming a bildungsroman of individual growth by keeping Ben literally suspended as he realizes the hidden facets of his parents’ experience. By avoiding the explicit ascription of meaning onto annihilation and trauma, the text rather reconfigures the nature of the connection between the first and second generation of survivors. In this respect, the linkage is such that the lessons taken from the consultation of the archival traces of the former may illuminate the latter in their quest for an understanding – not only an understanding of the trauma in question but also in figuring out a way to incorporate it into their own lives. This is clearly indicated by Ben’s return from the Greek island where Jakob left his material traces – an intersection of time and space – as an individual who is able to see what he was missing (in his parent’s picture but also in the bigger picture of his traumatic inheritance). Hence, the text manages to direct attention towards the problems that surround the issue of remembrance across generational gaps without committing itself to a particular view as such.

By relating the story of a fictional survivor, Michaels manages to find a leeway between the needs for historical exactitude and the imaginative component which testifies to the particular. The amalgamation of historical documentation with imaginative details effectively blurs the boundaries of genre. According to Young, this also allows Michaels to “tell the story and not tell it at the same time” and to assert the mediated nature of mnemonic knowledge, i.e. that one does not have access to the past that is disconnected from the way it is related (*Witnessing the Disaster* 35). Hence, the bracketing of the text – with make-belief elements that seem to claim veracity and others that emphasize their basis in archival reconstruction – ultimately suspends it as a (non)fiction Holocaust *récit*. To this undecidability Michaels adds the element of intersubjective remembrance and the ethical manner of memorialization: the text is simultaneously a report of first generation witnessing (Jakob) that is put into its frame of reference via the discovery by a member of the second generation (Ben¹²¹). This aspect of the narrative complements the trauma it transfers to the reader with an epistemological and ethical unsettlement: it leaves the event and its significance within a network of interrogations, denying it any coherent framing into purposefulness¹²².

Fugitive Pieces is a text whose thematic richness amalgamates both the traumatic memories of the first generation with the unexplained sense of loss and lack of situatedness of the second. Inasmuch as the text presents the project of commemoration as one that is inherently dependent on human connections, it asserts the value of an intersubjective network of remembering. If this network is not naturally established (as in Ben’s case), then it must be triggered by one’s ethical need to be implicated in the traumas of the past generations. This system of intersubjective links can start from the

historical note, gain detail through empathic and imaginative effort, and become a contagious responsibility towards trauma. The text stresses the value of the historical record (the archive to which Michaels herself resorts) but also depicts the difficulty to honor the victims' lives if one fails to see them as multidimensional lives rather than statistical data. It is to this end that *Fugitive Pieces* ultimately employs its narrative topoi, its poetic language, its recurrent themes, as well as its shifting perspectives. These elements, and the multilayered nature of the text, make it echo the itinerant letter that pleads for an addressee – one who might attempt to cross into the Other's experience and engage in the intricate process of relating (to it) through reading. Indeed, this obliqueness would also suit the novel's cryptic one letter dedication, "to J".

CHAPTER 2

Solar Storms: “Beginnings...are everything”

“[W]riting...is an act of defiance, born out of the need to survive” - Elizabeth Cook-Lynn.

“I knew there was a history to our life that needed to be saved, a history not in books or films...I knew that they were important stories and that they had to be documented” - Linda Hogan.

Linda Hogan’s novel endeavours to mend the fragmented sense of identity deriving from traumas that have plagued Native¹²³ Americans for centuries¹²⁴. In order to recover the unwritten and discarded Aboriginal history, she finds it necessary to re-visit a traumatically charged past and to recuperate the remnants of broken tribal lives in her narrative. In fact, Hogan has repeatedly underscored the need “to use words to make wholeness out of what’s been broken” (Colatosti 2). Hence, mending the wrecked condition of Natives via textual means is not only possible but necessary for Hogan, who asserts that “words have a great potential for healing, in all respects. And we have a need to...speak first the problem, the truth, against destruction, then to find a way to use language to put things back together, to live respectfully, to praise and celebrate earth” (qtd. in Jensen 122).

In Hogan’s text, *Solar Storms*, the alter/native signifying requirement¹²⁵ becomes one of the main drives of the protagonist, Angela, to reconnect with her maternal kin following their separation and her assignment to foster care. Early in the text, as she re-

immerses herself within her Native family¹²⁶, Angela reveals that she is not yet in possession of a language that can meet her physical and psychological wounds: “I was full of words inside myself; there were even questions in me I hadn’t yet thought to form, things not yet come to words” (*Solar Storms* 25). Angela’s journey back home not only leads her towards a group of motherly figures (her step-grandmother, Bush; her great-grandmother, Agnes; and her great-great-grandmother, Dora Rouge) but also – through their bonding and subsequent collective voyage – to face her traumatic past, which is also connected to the suffering of her people “in that northern place called Adam’s Rib” (*SS* 27). The biblical undertones of the name – apparent in the idea that human creation is supposed to have sprung from the rib of the first man, Adam – implicitly reinforce the idea of a return towards an origin or towards a beginning. Hence, to confront her “deep and unresolved grief,” the protagonist of *Solar Storms* consciously chooses not to remain a marginal figure of an/other (Euroamerican) world but to embrace her history, despite the fact that it is one laden with pain and incompleteness (Wesley-Esquimaux and Smolewski iii).

Early in the text, Hogan stresses the difference between Angela, who decides to open herself to her/story, to (re)open her wounds in order to understand who she is, and an oppressor, secluded in a self-centered universe: “Christian-minded, sky-worshipping people who did not want to look out windows” (*SS* 27). What follows is not just the narrative of how Angela’s investment in her Native community changes her perspective on life, but the chronicles of how she journeys into language and selfhood. Angela revisits her past through matrilineal connections. She experiences the wilderness, via the body, so as to emerge a new individual. What starts as the return of an ‘orphan’ to her

family, or to what remains of her community, becomes a narrative of transformation: the tale of how Angela succeeds in figuring out her place within her people and becomes aware of the threats surrounding the bases of their existence.

This chapter attempts to analyze the ways in which Hogan depicts the traumas of Native Americans, metonymically through Angela, as a *legacy*¹²⁷ that has to be confronted even as the Native individual deals with pressures of the present. I ask the following questions: why does the text deem it essential to effect a retrospective examination of one's trauma in order to resist its resulting fragmentation? Also, how does the fact that *Solar Storms* fictionalizes the historical impetus of Native American struggle become a strategy of resistance in the face of a history that omits it? In order to answer these questions, I will address the place of trauma within Native American literatures. Then, I will analyze the corporeal inscription of trauma that Hogan effects in *Solar Storms* as indelible historical trace. Following that will be an examination of the trope of return – effectuated by the main character – as intergenerational re/connection¹²⁸: as matrilineal guidance helps Angela through her identity crisis, it allows her to thrive on more than one level. I will conclude by analyzing the variety of literary resistance strategies that Hogan utilizes, and how these allow her to configure a healing possibility for the Native.

In *Solar Storms*, Linda Hogan tells, through the voice and perspective of the main character, the story of five generations of Native American women, living on the borderlands between Canada and the United States. Taken away by the government as a young child, Angela, whose face and body display several scars, is just set to go back home. One learns that the reason why Angela, aged seventeen as the narrative starts, had

to spend all that time tossed from one foster home to another is her inability to integrate well in “White” America, a place in which she felt dislocated and uneasy. In addition to her feelings of alienation, Angela has a need to understand her past. The reader learns, later on, that it is her own mother – presented as a conflicted person who has absorbed the values of the oppressors – who was the one to disfigure her. However, we do not get all the elements that would help one understand the events in a chronological manner. The story does not progress in a straightforward fashion. It rather presents the reader with a cacophony of voices: several of Angela’s foremothers share stories about other characters with her, and some of the stories are ambiguously suspended between being a memory or a form of communicating with the dead (a power that Angela acquires around the end of her story). Thus, the story unfolds in time in a way that allows for sequences of events to be skipped, to be linked with the stories of other characters to emphasize the communal destiny, and integrated as elements that are mystically linked to the story in a way that compels the reader to broaden their definition of what can represent a source of knowledge.

Gradually, and by becoming emotionally open to new teachings, Angela discovers her people and how she belongs to her newfound family. She begins to let go of an anger that she kept repressed and attempts to move on with her life. This development is paralleled by a literal move, a journey by canoe, which Angela undertakes with four motherly figures from her family: they travel north to find the home of Dora Rouge’s tribe, the matriarch’s birthplace and where she wants to peacefully die. During this trip, the ties between all the women, and between Angela and the surrounding nature, grow stronger. So much so, in fact, that Angela begins to see Native American history written

all over the landscape around her, which becomes a source of inspiration informing her about who she is.

As Angela encounters the scenes of her ancestral lifestyle, experiencing them in a highly sensory and imaginative fashion, she becomes attached to her heritage. As she becomes more and more mature, she also understands the loss of land through the incursion of the Euroamerican Other. This is why she decides to join the resistance against the building of a dam by a hydroelectric company – a project that threatens not only the tribal ways of life but the land and animals as well¹²⁹. After the details of legal and physical struggles against the bureaucracy of the Western worldview, this parable of the Native American quest to retrieve a lost way of life ends on an optimistic, yet ambiguous, note: Angel, who found herself abject in the beginning has now embraced her identity and kinfolk, thinking: “something beautiful lives inside us” (SS 351).

This assertion of beauty is part of countering the debasing practices of oppression, a reaction that speaks to the representational and historical responsibilities affecting the Native American literary project¹³⁰. According to Nancy Peterson, “the history of America has often been exclusionary – a monologic narrative of male Anglo-American progress that constructs others as people without history. Writing history...has thus become one way for marginalized peoples to counter their invisibility” (*History* 983). Moreover, since the dominant representations of Natives were concoctions that perpetuated negative perceptions of their culture, they served to validate their oppression and relegated them to the status of an Other¹³¹. This view is expressed by Gretchen Bataille, who asserts that these clichés about Native Americans were, at any given time,

closer to the self-reflection of the Euroamerican gaze than an accurate depiction of its subject:

Native Americans have been mythologized by anthropologists and ethnographers, by tourists and the tourist industry, and through art and literature...Indian images reflected the creators of those images more than the people themselves, and the images have changed through time, with the portrayals of vanishing Indians, primitives, half-breeds, squaws, warriors, and militants taking their turn in the foreground during various historical period (4).

How can the Native American attain a sense of identity when his or her history is presented by an Other's *authority*? Since authority implies both power relations and dominating perspective, this question becomes also about the possibility of achieving a coherent Native American identity in the present – an identity predicated, in large part, upon recovering a missing or absent narrative that would bring into 'presence' the traumatically charged past that is elided in mainstream history yet entirely constitutive of the Native self. Hogan's writing seeks the expression of a worldview that is deemed inferior vis-à-vis "the grand narrative of legitimation," to use Louis Owens' words, which aims at their cultural extinction (*Native American Representations* 12).

Writing from the perspective of a silenced people articulates a history of trauma, "displacement and orchestrated ethnocide" that is unspoken, fictionally redressing past offenses (12). Hogan works from a denigrated narrative of her people's history, from a distorted image of the Native – stereotypically seen as a menacing, sub-human figure – to craft a narrative of personal and communal quest for identity. To do so, she creates "a totally fictional community, and yet the story is really about the truth...Those [historical facts] are part of the story; they're not made up, they're not a story. It's a form of truth,

not a story. It's in some ways a retelling of history...It's the story that's been *repressed* (*Interview B* 193, emphasis added).

There is a sense in which Hogan seems to imply that repression is more than an internal working of the collective Euroamerican psyche. It is also, more emphatically, an effect of the dominant power which resorts to alterations of factual events in order to construct a narrative that legitimizes its abuse of subjugated communities. This orientation is observable in Hogan's poetry: "We have stories/as old as the great seas/*breaking through the chest/flying out the mouth/noisy tongues that were once silenced*/all oceans we contain coming to light" (*Harper's Anthology* 197, emphases added). The explosion of expressive energy that Hogan depicts is only matched by the obstinacy in the dominant power's disenfranchisement of the Native worldviews. Indeed, from the Euroamerican perspective, "the stories of people and animals are considered magical or mythic. If nothing else, they are considered metaphoric, and 'not real'" (*First People* 11). Hogan's novel, by opposition, works as a retort to a discrediting imperial perception by foregrounding the importance of establishing self-conscious, balanced individuals, who maintain healthy connection with their surroundings.

Thus, *Solar Storms* depicts the way Angela thrives as an individual (she becomes an active agent of progress within her community) as based upon her acceptance of her ancestors' ingenuity. The apparent paradox of presenting a story which is not a 'story' can be understood as the assertion of the fact that revisionist history, as a story, is not immediately fictional. It also works to destabilize conventional ('Western') frames of narrative interpretation by blurring the elements in the text that might be considered 'unrealistic'. Indeed, Hogan's text reinstates traditional knowledge as a viable and

foundational structure that can lead the Native individual to blossom, reinforcing the idea that

the old stories of the human relationships with animals can't be discounted. They are not primitive; they are primal. They reflect insights that came from considerable and elaborate systems of knowledge, intellectual traditions and ways of living that were tried, tested, and found true over many thousands of years on all continents (*First People* 11).

1. The Corporeal Site of Witnessing

In *Solar Storms*, Linda Hogan strategically places the mark of the traumatic past on the body of her main character. In effect, Angela's awareness of her corporeal marks is brought to the forefront even as she begins her contact with her female relatives:

I looked at my face in the mirror. Half of it, from below the eye to the jawline, looked something like the cratered moon. I hated that half. The other side was perfect and I could have been beautiful in the light of earth and sun. I'd tried desperately all my life to keep the scars in shadows. Even then, before the mirror, I tried not to see them (*SS* 33).

Angela's attempt to repress her traumatic marks is indicative of a state of denial, a wish to turn the physical evidence confirmation of a violent past to an absence, a sign not to be encountered. The memory that this inscription in the skin signifies, however, is not meant to become such an absence. Hogan thus sets Angela's literally disfigured person as the referent for an inherited past trauma, a literal wound that she carries (but whose circumstances and causes are unknown to her in the beginning of the narrative). Angela's scarred face becomes a materialization of a trauma that operates intergenerationally since one is told that her scars were inflicted by her own mother.

Ironically, and despite her vain attempts to forget, the effect of trauma on Angela's life is magnified: her scars signify come to signify a disturbingly *excessive*

presence¹³². In fact, Hogan intensifies the devastation that permeates Angela's existence under the sign of trauma as one that is not very dissimilar to literal plain death. The narrative indeed starts with a mourning ritual that her aboriginal community (led by her loving step-grandmother, Bush) performs in her own memory – as she is taken away by government officials to a foster home. This ceremonial act points to the fact that Angela is *lost* to her tribe and relatives. It asserts that, because she is disconnected from her people and their ways, Angela is “departed” in the most immediate meaning of the term. When Angela returns to her relatives, years later, she informs the reader (as she takes over the narrative voice from her great-grandmother) of her intention to search for the unknown events that are embodied on her figure and which she has always tried to hide behind:

a curtain of dark hair falling straight down over the right side of my dark face. Like a waterfall, I imagined, and I hoped it covered the scars I believed would heal, maybe even vanish, if only I could remember where they'd come from. Scars had shaped my life. I was marked and I knew the marks had something to do with my mother...While I never knew how I got the scars, I knew they were the reason I'd been taken from my mother so many years before (*SS* 25).

As shown in this passage, Angela's body is the material signifier of a memory that has to be uncovered, contextualized, and grasped in order for her to be able to move on in life. In effect, Angela reveals that her “scars had no memory, were from unknown origin. There were others, as well, on my body” (*SS* 34). This is not the only relevance of Angela's wounds to the analysis of the text, however. Indeed, setting Angela's body as the corporeal manifestation of the traumas endured by Native Americans operates as a reinforcement of the idea of intergenerational transmission: her mother, Hannah, as well, is described as having outward corporeal reflections of the Native predicament. The

narrative effect is thus intensified by having generational bodies stand for the unspeakable deeds of colonial perpetrators¹³³. In fact, Bush describes the first time she saw Hannah in terms that echo with Angela's self-description - an iteration emphasizing the recurrent pattern of violent traumatic inscriptions endured by generations of Native Americans women:

She was a body under siege (...) when I saw her in her small nakedness, I stopped and stared. Beneath all the layers of clothes, *her skin was a garment of scars*. There were burns and incisions. *Like someone had written on her*. The signatures of torturers, I call them now. I was overcome. I cried. She looked at me like I was a fool, my tears a sign of weakness. And farther in, I knew there were violations and invasions of other kinds. What, I could only guess (SS 99, emphases added).

Angela's mother, therefore, is herself victim of violence, of "people a shade away from evil, an atom away, a speck of dust" (SS 94). She, in turn, brutally transposes that aggression onto her own daughter – creating another "body under siege" (SS 99). Hannah "knew the wound and how it was passed on, the infinite nature of wounding" (SS 94). Her character, according to Melani Bleck, reinforces the depiction of "the destructive belief that...bodies [of Native women] represent an "other" lack to inscribe and an "other" territory to own" (35). Accordingly, Hannah represents the violation that is the result of the Euroamerican gaze, which projects absence into the Aboriginals¹³⁴ and subsequently attempts to impress its ethnocentric worldview upon them – in total disregard of the texts of their own civilization. What Owens calls "brutally enforced peripherality" turns Hannah into a plaything, manipulated by almost everyone, till she becomes a slave to the forces destroying her, perpetuating their effects on her progeny (*Other Destinies* 4). But because she is "possessed" – both *haunted* by voices from an alien world and *owned*,

prey to them – she suffers “soul loss” and is a “damaging” “ice heart” that hurts (*SS* 98, 115).

Hogan’s deployment of the corporeal signifier exemplifies what Peter Brooks labels a “semioticization of the body which is matched by a somatization of story: a claim that the body must be a source and locus of meanings (...) a prime vehicle of narrative significations” (xii). In fact, the foregrounding of disfigured bodies testifies to a *traumatic connection* that imprisons generations of Natives: the trauma of being seen as a blank surface upon which ‘civilization’ can be violently written. Moreover, the embodiment of colonial history attests to the need to face a presence that cannot be denied, but has to be coped with and transformed. Hence, the repetition and the transmission of trauma are highlighted when Hannah’s body is described as one of the loci “where time and history and genocide gather and move like a cloud above the spilled oceans of blood. That little girl’s body was the place where all this met” (101). The intergenerational connection becomes even clearer when we realize that the “signatures of torturers” are passed on from the mother, the “skin that others wore,” to Angela, who thinks she is “emptiness covered with skin” (*SS* 74, 77, 99).

As a vehicle conveying the perspective of the victimized, and as an archive that bears witness, the body is an effective articulator because it immediately interpellates the very gaze that participated, “romantically and from a distance made hazy with fear and guilt,” in the destruction of many facets of the Native culture (Owens, *Other Destinies* 3). In *Solar Storms*, Hogan invests the corporeal signifier with a multitude of meanings to depict the plurality of negative effects of the colonial enterprise upon the lives of the Aboriginals¹³⁵. Lamenting the loss of the Native American way of life as a consequence

of the encroachment of the Western civilization upon a different but equally valid value system, Hogan links Hannah's body to "all the violations that American Indians suffered at the hands of their colonizers. The rape of Hannah's soul by "[t]he signatures of torturers" (99) also symbolically represents the theft of Native American land by signatures on treaties" (Bleck 37). What is written as the imprints of the perpetrators on the feminine body symbolically alludes to the legal word that was used as a means to manipulate the Natives, to the words of broken promises and treaties that served to further dispossess them, and to the theological God – the Word – under the auspices of which native people were the object of cultural genocide.

In fact, the bodies of Native women in particular have been the sites over which several colonial administrators (priests, residential school systems, health personnel trying to regulate female sexuality, etc.) tried to establish domain as a part of their 'civilizing mission'. The body functions as an extension, or a reflection, of power relations and ideologies of hierarchy. This is used by Hogan to strengthen the inherited and unresolved character of the trauma and violence inflicted upon the Natives. This also emphasizes the transmission of *unsettled* pain, since, according to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation,

When trauma is ignored and there is no support for dealing with it, the trauma will be passed from one generation to the next...Children who learn that physical and sexual abuse is "normal", and who have never dealt with the feelings that come from this, may inflict physical abuse and sexual abuse on their own children. The unhealthy ways of behaving that people use to protect themselves can be passed on to children, without them even knowing they are doing so (qtd. in Wesley Esquimaux & Smolewski 2).

The temporal delay of resolution, and the generational impact, is apparent in Hogan's connection of Hannah's own unstable mental state to her mother Loretta – which testifies

to a brutal colonial inscription that perturbed her sense of identity. This impact extends beyond the nucleus of immediate family: Loretta's specific traumatic experiences, her painful encounters made her a detached and malevolent agent feared even by her community:

The curse on that poor girl's [Loretta] life came from watching the desperate people of her tribe die...How she'd lived, I didn't know. But after that, when she was still a girl she'd been taken and used by men who fed her and beat her and used her. That was how one day *she became the one who hurt others. It was passed down.* I could almost hear their voices when she talked, babbling behind hers, *men's voices speaking English.* Something scary lived behind her voice...There was no love left in her. There was no belief. Not a bit of conscience. There wasn't anything left in her (SS 39, emphases added).

In addition to trauma as the total of psychological and corporeal violations, or a somatic encryption thereof, the odour of poisonous cyanide is a common sign that Loretta and Hannah share. Interestingly, Hogan complicates her characterization with a plethora of elements pointing towards the women's common loss, despite the generational gaps separating them: for instance, in Loretta's description, one learns that "the smell never came off that poor girl. It was deeper than skin. It was blood-deep. It was history-deep" (SS 40). The emphasis on Loretta's incorporation of traumatic history and her loss of compassion points to Hannah's dysfunctional inheritance. Hence, a cycle of violation is established along the matrilineal connection: Hannah's transformation into a foreign and infected self within her own community is described by Angela as parasitic: "my mother was stairs with no destination. She was a burning house, *feeding on the air of others.* She had no more foundation, no struts, no beams. Always, a person would think she was one step away from collapsing" (SS 96-97, emphasis added). In turn, Hannah will act as a true 'savage' by eating a part of her own child's face; for "there are rages and wounds so

large, love is swallowed by them and is itself changed, the lover taken in and destroyed” (SS 105). Thus, these characters accentuate the reality of a disturbing “psychological baggage being passed from parents to children” (Wesley Esquimaux & Smolewski 3).

Moreover, the amassing of these violated bodies, signs of the decay that affects the Natives when their connections to nature are severed and their worldviews are marginalized, works as the guiding thread to the narrative itself. In effect, as Brooks remarks, “marking the body signifies its passage into writing, its becoming a literary body, and generally also a narrative body, in that *the inscription of the sign depends on and produces a story*” (3, emphasis added). These bodies metamorphose from recipients of the violence inflicted by the colonizers to become sources that destructively repeat the very marks of their traumatic abuse. The corporeal signs of disfiguration, which are the most visible results of oppressive forces, also become the physical or material incarnation of the psychological distress engendered by past sufferings. In the view of Angela’s grandmother, this is a permanent testament to the predicament of her tribe: starved due to the overexploitation of natural resources by institutionalized greed, her people were those “who became so hungry they ate the poisoned carcasses of deer that the settlers left out for the wolves. The starving people ate that bait” (SS 38).

Hogan delineates the fact that the trauma of Loretta also affects her daughter, Hannah, in ways that are inscribed – more or less obliquely – in the flesh: “Loretta was sold into sickness and prostitution, and those things followed Hannah into dark, dark places” (SS 119). The text thus portrays the transmission of traumatic trace as a symbolic *and* literal infection – insanity and the smell of cyanide – whose effect is seen in the emergence of a misguided conception of one’s identity. At the same time, Hogan attaches

the unspoken traumatic past – via an equally disquieting embodiment of its traces – to a present where the material scars bespeak a devastation extending beyond the individual (body) *per se*. Both Loretta and Hannah’s corrupted bodies are thus signs of a collective trauma, one that is damaging to one’s own flesh as much as it is detrimental to the communal network. They prove that “the residue of unresolved, historic, traumatic experiences...is not only being passed from generation to generation, it is *continuously being acted out and recreated* in contemporary Aboriginal culture” (Wesley Esquimaux and Smolewski 3, emphasis added). In sum, they metonymically stand for the disastrous effects of the encounter with the Euroamerican modes of life on the indigenous population.

The bodies, as material signifiers, enter the realm of the narrative through the gesture that implies that the wounds that they display¹³⁶ are reflective of hidden truths, thus recovering an otherwise unarticulated history. However, the narratives that they immediately present remain disconnected from Angela’s until her return to Adam’s Rib to make sense of the past that she carries marked in the flesh. It is a past that, despite its immediacy, is only superficially present to her – first as a result of her attempt to hide her corporeal marks (a repetition of the violence against herself as self-loathing) and, second, because she tries to superimpose other narratives upon hers in order to have a story. Nonetheless, when she decides to explore the source of her (ancestors’) wounds, the storytelling offered by her female relatives transforms the corporeal narratives of devastation into contextualized references that inform Angela’s past re-examination and subsequent growth towards a self she fully assumes.

Envisioning the traumas of her grandmothers as constitutive of Angela's, however, is not instrumental to the evolution of the narrative only. Indeed, the signifying process that Hogan undertakes is manifold. First of all, the display of maimed female bodies across three generations is a statement that testifies to continuous acts not only of subject violation but also of cultural erasure. The bodies are metaphors for the empty vessel that the Native and the Native culture are perceived as. The Euroamerican forceful writing, or the projection of its worldview, results in maimed beings, which hints at the failure of the supposed colonizing agenda of the betterment of the Natives' lives. The failure of Euroamerican settlers to appropriately connect with the landscape is in fact emphasized as retrograde. Indeed, Bush (whose very name is laden with environmental connotations) states:

The immigrants had believed wilderness was full of demons, and that only their church and their god could drive the demons away. They feared the voices of animals singing at night. They had forgotten wild. It was gone already from their world, a world according to Dora-Rouge that, having lost wilderness, no longer had the power to create itself anew. Bush called them the reverse people. Backward. Even now they destroyed all that could save them, the plants, the water. And Dora-rouge said, "They were the ones who invented hell (SS 86).

On another level, the act of displaying visceral images as the corporeal manifestations of trauma avoids replicating the metonymical and reductive gaze that is often part of the mechanisms of subjugation inherent in the colonial enterprise. As Dee Horne mentions, the construction of the individual as representative of the collective Other is a major discursive strategy, used to assert a hierarchy that justifies subjugation. The deployment of a homogenizing gaze serves to "make the colonized cognizant of what they lack" and thus make possible the exclusionary practices to follow (72). Hogan rather presents the

reader with different somatic manifestations of the traumas faced by different generations of Native women, which reflects both an understanding of the changing nature of the traumatic trace as well as an emphasis on the *fluidity* inherent in identity politics across time. The scarred body thus becomes a multilayered symbol for what Ellen Arnold labels the boundaries “between euro-American and native cultures; between history and the present; between spirit and the material world” (qtd. in Groover 13-14).

In addition, laminating trauma onto a bodily referent is also a powerful reminder of the slippage operating in the colonizers’ mind – affected by what Hogan labels “the ignorance of the Europeans” (SS 123) – between the native as an imagined vacuous entity and the actual individual whose psychic trauma, wounds, and scars are real, visible, palpable. In effect, the text is replete with allusions to the fact that a central factor in the Natives’ plight is their relegation to a permanent status of absence, which is also signified in the systemic and systematic disregard of their existence upon lands and around water ways when these are to be exploited. The tendency to fetishize the entities that escape destructive acts is also critically noted in the text: “The last. They always loved the last of everything, these men, even the last people. I guess they felt safe then, when it was all gone” (SS 45-46). Mutual understanding becomes difficult as the Native is seen as an ontologically vacant signifier, within a logic that celebrates sameness and via a language which, Hogan says,

didn’t hold a thought for the life of water, or a regard for the land that sustained people from the beginning of time. They didn’t remember the sacred treaties between humans and animals. Our words were powerless beside their figures, their measurements, and ledgers...it was easy and clear-cut. They saw [the land] only on the flat, two-dimensional world of paper (SS 279).

Hogan transgresses this oppressing language¹³⁷ by attempting to recover “a language” that communicates “not by words as we think of them, but *by feel, by body, by pure life*” and thus is able to bypass the nature/culture dichotomy inherent in Western logos¹³⁸ (*First People* 18, emphases added). In these terms, the body is transformed into a symbol of rejecting the notions of domination inscribed on it rather than the material assertion, or refection, of the oppressing worldview. According to Stacy Alaimo, Hogan “rewrite[s] the body...[to] conjure nature-body connections in which neither nature nor the body is fallen, denigrated or exiled...[Her words] invoke the body not as a mute, passive space that signifies the inferior part of our natures but as a place of vibrant connection, historical memory, and knowledge ” (126).

Thus, the body is not a static and voiceless object, reflecting the Western gaze and its subtexts of superiority, but a space of liminality and resistance. Not only can the corporeal mutate and critique its very construction as a site of silent and passive otherness, but it can also reclaim its own significance as a valid site of knowledge/learning. The body morphs from standing for the violations that saturate Native history, to representing the ability to reinterpret these very signs on the way to recovery. While highlighting the oppressor’s alienation of the natural as way of knowing, it is re-established as a vessel of reintegrating a natural order that is replete with teachings, and as a medium to access a type of knowledge that links the individual with the ancestors. Hence, the body challenges the Cartesian, i.e., Western, reductive frameworks¹³⁹ that debase it. Indeed, according to Alaimo, the reappropriation of the body, which “has been variously raced, animalized, feminized, and naturalized in order to be seen as inferior and antagonistic to the progress of culture...[defines it as] a locus of

knowledge transmission and reception, a source of information just as valuable as the intellect” (qtd. in Gaard & Murphy 9).

A further outcome of the representation of historical trauma via the corporeal is that it becomes - in a contrapuntal reading of the colonial project - the starting point of Angela’s connective re-evaluation of the past. In fact, her investigation of a trauma whose origins are unspoken and unknown ultimately becomes a mending of social bonds that were previously severed via institutionalized, legalized, and bureaucratic oppression. In fact, Hogan denotes the traumatic devastation that is the communal reality of the Indigenous people as one that – despite its many facets and the different effects it may create individually – is derived from one source: the incursion of the Euroamerican settlers and developers and the forcing of their systems upon the Natives. Thus, Angela is reminded by Agnes: “I don’t know where the beginning was, *your story, ours*...It might have started when the crying children were taken away from their mothers or when the logging camps started and cities were built from our woods, or when they cut the rest of the trees to raise cattle” (SS 40, emphasis added).

Thus viewed, Angela’s move towards her traumatic origins – as reconnection with her kin and the subsequent voyage they all undertake to the north – becomes an act of resistance that effects a reversal of attitude. This reversal is perceptible in the movement from a situation marked by what Jennifer Brice calls “spiritual anorexia,” clearly displayed by Angela in the beginning of the text as an effect of the materialistic gaze of the colonizers, towards a position in which the body is reclaimed, re-owned and with it the whole Native value system (129). Taking command of what their body, life, and culture should signify, and asserting the bonds that have been severed by the colonizing

project is an act of confrontation that voices a refusal of both the encroachment of the colonizers upon the Natives' material and spiritual resources and the simultaneous projection of values and significance into them as Other to the 'civilized' world – which establishes Aboriginals as its “antithesis and as the object of a reforming zeal” (Aschcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 3). It is also an act of asserting the communal stance¹⁴⁰ of the Natives towards this situation of cultural loss that they have to endure: Angela finds ways to recover when she re-experiences community. In fact, Hogan's trauma narrative establishes its literariness by foregrounding the need for, and possibility of, recovery – in both senses of the word; i.e., both as healing and as recuperation. This is why the language used in *Solar Storms*, while dealing with disconcerting events, remains resolutely metaphorical.

2. Sustaining Metaphors

The pervasiveness of metaphors in Hogan's text serves both above-mentioned objectives simultaneously. Metaphors offer a referential anchor to Angela's emotional development and a textual space to reintegrate the 'lost' natural foundation that is dear to the Native. In fact, the striking poetics of metaphor in Hogan's narrative go beyond simply providing natural references to the depiction of the evolution of the protagonist and her unison with the wilderness surrounding her. While the language of the text incorporates the natural elements as figurative components, these are made to have a real presence, and a palpable effect, in the story of Angela's maturity. The text abounds with parallels between animals and humans, and it insists on the validity of the lessons imparted by wolverines, fish, and snakes, on the dialogue between plants and people, et cetera. Adding this new sensitivity

to the English language, through nature-drawn imagery, has a double implication for Hogan's objective. First, it highlights the fact that an English language that is devoid of connections with the natural surroundings is not well-equipped to transmit the native's harmonious relation with the natural world. Indeed, as Hogan herself notes in *Dwellings*,

there are laws beyond our human laws, and ways above ours. We have no words for this in [the English] language...*Ours is a language of commerce and trade*, of laws that can be bent in order that treaties might be broken, land wounded beyond healing. *It is a language that is limited, emotionally and spiritually, as if it can't accommodate such magical strength and power*. The ears of this language do not often hear the songs of the white egrets, the rain falling into stone bowls. So we make our own songs to contain these things, make ceremonies and poems, searching for *a new way to speak*...to say that wilderness and water...are invaluable not just to us, but in themselves, in the workings of the natural world (45-46, emphases added).

Thus, the language that Hogan uses has to express the difference that characterizes the native views of the earth. It has to laminate the respect of the natives towards the earth, as a loved and venerated mother, onto the language of possession and commodification that rationalizes its destruction. Secondly, because it is inspired by the natural world, this metaphorical language is not Hogan's unique way of re/opening of the English language to the natural elements which expand and enrich it; it also is strategy to underscore the natural, not merely nature-like, aspect of Angela's movement and journey. Thus, writing nature into the linguistic medium works doubly to root the poetics of the author within the living world, Other/wise seen as a resource to be exploited. In addition, it re-replaces the protagonist herself within a natural motion that brings her back to where her plight has begun.

Hogan's gesture of reintroducing the natural surroundings into the very language of their abuse reverses the way language operates: it alters the status of the linguistic

element from a prime oppressor of the land, articulating its loss and fragmentation via broken treaties and possessive maps, to an element where the natural can become a presence, a palpable life/force to be acknowledged, to be listened to, to be learned from. Reopening the English language to tell the stories and transmit the wisdoms that natural elements impart is a political move, a re-mapping that allows Hogan to ‘invade’ yet another space from which the native imagination and expression are excluded. According to Louis Owens, mapping goes beyond cartography. It indicates the ways structures of dominations affect the narratives that legitimate control, and it reflects a commanding gaze that is oblivious to the views of the oppressed:

Mapping is...an intensely political enterprise, an essential step appropriation and possession. Maps write the conquerors’ stories over the stories of the conquered...the future of all life depends upon whose stories we listen to: the stories that tell us we are bound in timelessness and extricable relationship with the earth which gives us life and sustains us, or the stories that tell us the earth is a resource to be exploited until it is used up (*Mixedblood Messages* 211).

Hogan’s gesture of remapping language, by imposing other structures of meaning upon it and investing it with imagery that foreground the primacy of the living world as a guide for Angela, highlights the capacity of the natural to heal the wounds of the past, within its own cyclical ‘progression’, and thus lends even more credence to native cosmology. Moreover, as Catherine Rainwater states, it exemplifies how Hogan “employ[s] the self-conscious language games of the colonizers in pursuit of [her] own ends” (*Dreams* xiii-xiv). Hogan undoes the silencing of the voices of the land by making the all the living world interact with and speak, literally, with humans. She also makes the living creatures also present stylistically, providing referential foundations to her characters. The natural

elements act as measures or reflectors of the characters' emotional and spiritual development, fully participating in the story, becoming characters themselves.

By resorting to a symbolism that is directly and unflinchingly taken from the natural field, Hogan penetrates the English medium with the element that seems beyond its capacity to acknowledge/integrate. English is modified so as to contain that which it was intently made to disregard: nature is integrated within the story and the medium of the story as a source of more than just physical goods. Nature becomes a source of knowledge, an inspirer of growth and equilibrium. Nature is a full-fledged muse that holds the cherished Native cultural values and transmits them to those whose "souls and minds stayed in the older world, floating in natal waters, and they still heard the heartbeat of Mother Earth and received her ancient sustenance" (*SS* 218). Hogan's textual symbolism shapes the novel so that it is not just about the natural elements and their preciousness. It makes the natural elements enter the narrative of recovery from a trauma that is caused by the devastation of the natural: the damage inherited as historical trauma and transmitted via lost individuals will find its way towards healing by immersion in nature, the caring mother that the oppressor's worldview mistakes for an enemy to be dominated.

Among the plurality of Hogan's figurative language, the imagery of water is especially interesting as it functions as a leitmotif thematically, the story being about how the building of a dam is devastating to the nature and (therefore) to Native lives. Hogan clearly thinks that the interference with the flow of life – the epitome of which is the building of a dam to obstruct the free motion of a natural element, water – and the commodification and cordoning of the Natives and their cultural productions are not

disconnected¹⁴¹. One instance of Hogan's water metaphor is apparent as she insists that the return of Angela to her kin is not merely similar to a natural process but is indeed part of the natural world. In fact, Angela herself notes: "I was traveling toward myself like rain falling into a lake" (SS 26). The protagonist thus comes to her people (in fact, to her own, to herself) in the same way that water returns from a cloud to a lake. In an endless cycle of regeneration, water that has lost touch with the land regains contact with that body of water that has never stopped connecting with it, thereby qualifying as "something back in place" (SS 29).

In addition to being a symbol for the continuity of life, water also functions as a guiding agent to the natives, a being that they revered and listened to, "because if water wasn't a spirit, if water wasn't a god that ruled their lives, nothing was" (SS 62). Water flow is pivotal to the continuity of the native way of life, and its cyclical evolution mirrors the very perspective of existence in which Native cosmology is ingrained. Water and its flow are also reminiscent of the native view of circular time, a metaphor in light of which the dam, as it blocks the natural flow of water, effects an interference with – in fact, an obstruction of – the temporal itself. This obstruction amount to, and is understood as, a prophecy of an apocalyptic end of native time, a peak of annihilation that would not be surmountable if the native cosmology did not fervently stress the possibility of renewal.

Moreover, the body of water that Angela and her people revere acts like a motherly body to her: when she plunges in the river, her body is embraced by water as if within a womb¹⁴² from which she is about to access to another existence, to be reborn: "I had stepped out of my rational mind...as if it were just another article of clothing. In the

cold water, my feet hurt. I hoped the water would cleanse all the pasts, remove griefs. *Inside it, naked and alone, I held my breath past my own limit. I saw my body as from a distance*” (SS 229). The metaphorical aspect of the text thus works not only to ground the story firmly within the natural world, making it the source of the entire story, but it also insists on making it so visible and present that it becomes the constitutive of the subject. It resolutely points to another perspective on existence, one that is detached from a logical reason destructive to both human lives and natural beings.

3. Ceremony as Ante-primal Scene

As Hogan infuses the corporeal with traumatic markings, the scars of the flesh bear witness to the desecration of the land, the bodies of water, and their creatures (which are, literally and spiritually, the Natives’ source of subsistence) just as they represent other types of violations endured by them on a psychological level. This conflation of the traumatic with the physical also reflects other interesting orientations for Hogan: not only are traces of times past registered upon the body and thus guaranteed visibility that speaks beyond language, but the temporal itself is experienced primarily through the sensory, which resituates the body as the central medium within a valid non-Cartesian epistemological structure – one that does not consider the terrestrial merely as a resource to be exploited, but rather as a valuable and treasured entity: “God was everything beneath my feet, everything surrounded by water; it was in the air, and there was no such thing as empty space” (SS 170).

Interestingly, Angel reconnects with the historical trauma of her people by listening to her matrilineal kin’s stories and oral wisdoms. Also, she learns about her past,

and in ways that are depicted as more literally and straightforwardly touching, by somatically re-investing the ties with the natural environment where her ancestors lived and in such a fashion that seems to freeze time to free the self. During the trip northwards, Angela indeed notes that the “time we’d been teasing apart, unravelled. And now it began to unravel us as *we entered a kind of timelessness*. Wednesday was the last day we called by name, and truly, *we no longer needed time*” (SS 170, emphases added). The body’s entanglement in the natural, which is in a dialogue with this suspension of time, shows, as Stacy Alaimo remarks, how Hogan invests the body with a double significance: it works as a reflection of past suffering, an animated record of trauma, but can also become a means of historical reappropriation, an opening towards understanding one’s position as deriving from past power relations and violations (134-135).

The concept of a time that can be brought to a halt in the present, and a remote past that can be recuperated through the bodily senses is in itself a strategic challenge, on the part of Hogan, to a Biblically-inspired Western notion of time as a chronological entity that proceeds by anticipating the future, and the fulfillment of prophecy as the apocalyptic end of historical time, and does not look backwards¹⁴³. This manipulation of time permits the revival of the self through the immersion within the environment. Angel indeed asserts: “truly, *we no longer needed time*. We were lost from it, and lost in this way, *I came alive*. It was as if I’d slept for years, and was now awake...Cell by cell, all of us were taken in by water and by land (SS 170, emphases added). Hogan’s strategic recuperation of the limitations of the Western conceptualization of the world and time as the loci where Natives thrive is even clearer in the fact that Angela’s whole story is

placed under the sign of a mourning ceremony that her loving step-grandmother Bush performed in her memory (and which is narrated by her great-grandmother, Agnes).

The narrative of Angela's life is mainly driven, at least in terms of the personal motivation she has in the beginning of the text, by her search for an explanation or an initial moment when her traumas have originated. In fact, she states that she "had an entangled memory, with good parts of it missing. I was returning to the watery places in order to unravel my mind and set straight what I had lost, which seemed like everything to me" (SS 72). Combined with the repetitive assertion of the importance of beginnings, which permeates Hogan's text, Angela's attempt to uncover what amounts to the primal scene of her – and, Hogan seems to hint, of Native Americans' – traumas becomes the central structural and thematic center of the narrative. In fact, the whole quest for identity that Angela undertakes comes to make sense only once it placed within a cyclical – i.e., Native – notion of time. This is a cyclicity through which healing is not only made possible *after* the traumatic past but is also grasped as a *first* step toward a new understanding of the challenges that face that newly-constructed self. This is why healing, in Hogan, "is no seamless erasure of wounds, no restoration of harmonious balance, but a dynamic process grounded in the interdependency of destruction and creation" (Arnold 294). Because it is essentially cyclic, regeneration both follows and precedes destruction, since the conception of time as periodic allows its reversal for exploration, a "backpedaling" that opens it to both scrutinizing retrospection and active alteration. Hence, what unfolds in Angela's narrative is a past revision (in both senses of the word re/vision, as second sight and modification).

Otherwise put, the ceremonial gesture of love and connection that brackets Angela's narrative of isolation and loss works both as a moment that *precedes* healing on her part and that also *follows* it: Angela does not have to recover a moment of plenitude that precedes her wounds, because that moment, thanks to a cyclical time, can arrive after the wounds have been inflicted. Dora-Rouge indeed speaks about the current era as "this skin of time," which leaves the possibility open of both reading traumatic encryptions marked upon history itself and moving beyond them by shedding that skin (SS 247). Significantly, circular temporality permits the transformative effort (of traumatic traces) to have precedence over the recuperation of a pre-traumatic instant, made impossible under a chronology that moves endlessly forward. Moreover, Hogan involves the ceremony in Angela's return and regards Angela's understanding of its value as a consequence of her growth and assimilation of her native values. In so doing, Hogan gives primacy to the ceremonial act over the traumatic primal scene of beginnings, variously implied as the moment of colonization¹⁴⁴. In addition to foregrounding the notion of time as circular, which permits continual phases of beginnings and ends in the Native cosmology, this allows the protagonist to reach backwards to her ancestor's experiences and to integrate them within her own as she moves forward towards her future (self).

Hogan's designful substitutive move, through which a traditionally-inspired ritual is superimposed over the traumatic primal scene (as origin/trace), also has a parallel in the protagonist's own evolution of self-perception: Angela moves from a feeling of shame caused by her perceived abject appearance to a felt sense of beauty. In other words, this gesture can be read as an assertion of the validity of cyclical time over the

linear chronological one – a situation that would allow the recuperation and reintegration of the traumatic moment into a narrative of growth rather than merely lamenting it as an unattainable, bygone event that cannot be recovered. The question that arises, then, is: what strategies does Hogan use to displace the traumatic primal scene by the ritual of communal connection – i.e., via the ceremony of mourning and remembrance that Bush sets for Angela after she is taken away by government officials? Examining the Freudian conception of primal scene is in order here.

In Freud's vernacular, the primal scene of trauma is chiefly a re-creation or a biographical reconstructive effort that permits the analysis of neurosis by allowing an interpretive reading of the symptoms that considers them to be determined by a founding traumatic event (to be formulated accordingly and *in retrospect*). It is in the Wolf-man case history that Freud enunciates his theory of the primal scene: a densely vague erotic scene in which the young child observes his parents during sexual intercourse in a specific posture (*coitus a tergo*). Because it is veiled by other screen memories, this memory has to be speculatively and inductively assembled, through "associative bridges" linking its contents to the neurotic consequences experienced by the patient. Moreover, it is generated by the analyst as a comprehensive explanatory account and assigned signification because "it is indispensable to a comprehensive solution of all the conundrums that are set us [since] all the consequences radiate out from it, just as all the threads of analysis have led up to it" (*The Case of the Wolf-man* 199).

The Freudian "theory of neurosis as an effect of retrodetermined trauma" establishes the primal scene as a speculative foundational moment, which does not necessarily have to literally be a lived experience but could be fabricated in the patient's

unconscious through the displacement of other experiential phenomena. Importantly, the primal scene remains explanatory to its belated traumatic effects (Forte 264). In other words, since the traumatic effects are real, and since the establishment of this concocted occurrence is beneficial to therapy, its verisimilitude is only secondary. Moreover, the primal scene, rather than an absolutely verifiable or actual beginning, functions as a narrative requirement that permits a certain closure because it starts from the residual traces backwards to their ‘source,’ so that “not only the large problems but the smallest peculiarities of in the history of the case [are] cleared up by this *single assumption*” (Freud 196, emphasis added). Downplaying the importance of factuality within the primal scene observations of the child, according to Raz Yosef, points not to Freud’s “denial of its truth value, but rather reflects a shift in emphasis from the content of the traumatic memory to *the act of remembering itself*” (94).

It is precisely this sense of primal scene – i.e., the will to uncover the roots of that which is traumatic – which is instrumentally useful for my reading of the quest for identity and explanations that Hogan’s protagonist, Angela, undertakes. In fact, the readers of *Solar Storms* are explicitly informed, from the first textual moment of encounter with Hogan’s main character, about her exploratory quest for her own past. It is in these terms that Angela describes her own movement to reconnect with the women who raised her in Adam’s Rib: “It was 1972 and I was traveling toward myself, coming home to a place where I’d lived as an infant, returning to people I’d never met” (SS 29). Angela’s disappointment with one America that marginalizes her and her discovery of the failure of foster homes to replace her kin become her drives to admit that she cannot

continue living with the past she has created for herself, a past for which she has already forged a pseudo-narrative to appease her situation of peripherality:

all I carried with me into this beginning was the tough look I *cultivated* over the years, a big brown purse that contained the remaining one-dollar bills Agnes had mailed me, the makeup I used, along with my hair, to hide my face, and a picture of an unknown baby, a picture I'd found in a one-dollar photo machine at Woolworth's. I used the picture to show other people how lovely I'd been as a child, how happy. I used it to feel less lost, because *there were no snapshots of me, nothing to say I'd been born, had kin, been loved* (SS 26, emphases added).

After realizing that she must face her/story the way it happened, Angela attempts to exchange a self-fashioned fake background, an individually produced primal scene¹⁴⁵ of how she ended up maimed and living with individuals who knew nothing about her, with a more accurate or factual one that is communally produced. Metaphorically speaking, she must face her own 'defacement':

I'd told myself before arriving...that whatever happened, whatever truth I uncovered, I would not run this time, not from *these people*. I would try to salvage what I could find inside me. As young as I was, I felt I had already worn out all the possibilities in my life. Now this woman [Agnes], these people, were all I had left. They were blood kin. I had searched with religious fervour to find Agnes Iron, thinking she would help me, would be my salvation, that she would know me and remember all that had fallen away from my own mind, all that had been kept secret by the county workers, that had been *contained in their lost records: my story, my life* (SS 27, emphasis added).

Opposed to the Euroamerican system where actual lives are relegated to oblivion is the ceremonial ritual of remembrance – the feast through which Bush admits her loss of Angela because of the legal system's inability or unwillingness to choose the best for her – which Hogan uses as an introduction to the tale of Angela. Temporally speaking, the feast and Agnes's tale are events that happen *before* Angela's return (and her subsequent growth and accomplishment as a full-fledged Native young woman). Remarkably, they

also occur *after* that very growth, since it is only after fully reintegrating with her community and re-experiencing her ancestral ways that Angela actually acquires a solid emotional and *ethereal*¹⁴⁶ connection with her deceased kin. Otherwise put, the ceremony of loss or departure is juxtaposed to Angela's return structurally but it is narrated from the point of view of the mature Angela, a maturity reached around the end of her own tale. That Hogan chose Bush, Angela's caring step-grandmother, to be the one responsible for that ceremony is indicative of the powerful linkage that she assumes between emotional and blood connections: caring works like, or supplements, family ties. Moreover, love reconnects in the same fashion that ceremonies bring the lost ones back¹⁴⁷.

Throughout the text, Bush is described as the one who is most radically opposed, by actions as well as by character, to Angela's mother, Hannah (who also serves as a model of the distorted individual who represents the effects of the colonizers' oppressive thinking). In fact, Angela soon recognizes that

Bush had fought hard for me against the strongest of our enemies, a system, a government run by clerks and bureaucrats. I didn't know that Bush had held a mourning feast on my behalf. I didn't know that I had once been in grave danger from the woman of my emergence, Hannah Wing, who had lived with Bush in this place. Hannah, who had disfigured me (*SS* 72).

Through this character, Hogan maintains the view of Native trauma as rooted in a singular event¹⁴⁸ only to challenge it later; so that the search for an original trauma is complicated by other intertwined traumas and incidents as well. Hogan's response is to establish a clear-cut origin for healing and connection in Bush's improvised – i.e., constructed – ceremony: “there wasn't one of us [visitors] who didn't suspect that she'd

invented this ceremony, at least in part, but mourning was our common ground and that's why they came...out of the loyalty for the act of grief" (SS 15, emphasis added). The ceremonial thus testifies to a certain love that is filled with the potential of changing the memorialisation of suffering (as separation between Bush and Angela) and also the possibility of mystically altering the future: not only does it work to bring Angela back but also becomes the overarching event under which her story becomes one of re/membering and healing¹⁴⁹.

In several other instances, Hogan has emphasized the role of the ceremony within the Natives' process of grieving and endurance as an ancestral and valid way of coping with trauma. In her essay, "First People," she asserts that a "ceremony enacts the recalled participation with nature. It reorients us, locates us in our human place, according to the natural laws of the world" (14). The ceremony offers guidance to the lost¹⁵⁰ but also represents in itself a re/turning point in the life of the community and the re/called individual, who is departed or lost (both qualifications ambiguously laden with double significations). Thus, Hogan asserts that a new beginning follows the ceremony, the intention of which is to

put a person back together by restructuring the human mind. This reorganization is accomplished by a kind of inner map, a geography of the human spirit and the rest of the world. We make whole our broken-off pieces of self and world. Within ourselves, we bring together the fragments of our lives in a *sacred act of renewal*, and we reestablish our connections with others. *The ceremony is a point of return*. It takes us toward the place of balance, our place in the community of all things. It ... sets us back upright. But it is not a finished thing. *The real ceremony begins where the formal one ends, when we take up a new way*, our minds and hearts filled with the vision of earth that holds us within it, in compassionate relationship to and with our world (*Dwellings* 196-197, emphases added).

The ceremonial gesture of Bush, who we learn “is a quiet woman, little given to words,” acts like a nonverbal call of return to the lost child within “a silence so deep it seemed that all things prepared for what would follow, then and for years to come, the year you [Angela] returned to us” (SS 13). In addition, it presages the path towards salvation – be it viewed as the reconnection with the natural elements, or her kin, or as the reliving of the ways of her ancestors through communion with the environment – to be taken by Angela. This reading is especially encouraged by the fact that “Hogan in effect bends the line of narration back on itself,” making the beginning of the text an uncertain moment within the life of protagonist as it “marks the end of formal structure that mandates a straight line of narration (Kunce 53). Thus, the temporal aspect of the narrative serves to blur the lines between past teachings or reminiscences and the actual progression of Angela’s experience itself *while* she receives those teachings¹⁵¹.

This amalgamation is even more accentuated by the idea that the real life ceremony follows the ritualistic one, which – once applied to the narrative at hand – makes the whole story of Angela a ceremony of remembering not just her past but the past of her ancestors as well. This ambiguity also serves Hogan’s strategic equation of the Native cosmology with present-day possibility of redemption and advancement despite trauma, and there are interesting parallels between Bush’s ceremonial act and Angela’s own re/discovery of herself and her legacy: the rediscovery of the voice of the land, the communion with – and respect of – all living creatures¹⁵², and the embodiment of all ancestral values within the self. In fact, all the commonalities between the two experiences – Bush’s mourning and remembrance, in the prologue, and Angela’s growth into an identity that she wholeheartedly accepts, precisely at the end of the text – are

reflections of the principles guiding the life of the Natives for millennia, which are summed up by Hogan:

We speak. We sing. We swallow water and breathe smoke. By the end of the ceremony, *it is as if skin contains land and birds*. The places within us have become filled. As inside the enclosure of the lodge, *the animals and ancestors move into the human body, into skin and blood. The land merges with us*. The stones come to dwell inside the person... We who easily grow apart from the world are returned to the great store of life all around us and there is the *deepest sense of being at home here in this intimate kinship*. There is no real aloneness. There is solitude and the nurturing silence that is relationship with ourselves, but even then we are part of something larger (*All my relations* 204, emphases added).

It is this understanding, seeing the self as belonging both to the Native group and as being in intimate ties with the natural elements, which is attained by Angela around the end of the novel. What is interesting is that the connection between this constructed, or rediscovered, self and the ceremonial part emphasizes the circular nature of the temporal and thus elevates the Native epistemological insights. The ceremony is established as an event that radiated an affection reconnecting the group to the lost child, Angela, and triggering her growth into a full-fledged Native. This *initiating* ritual, both first and instructive, permits Angela to develop her physical and spiritual potential to become a central figure within her community. In this recovery of history, the emphasis is squarely placed on the cyclical nature of experience, as the essence of the ritualistic ceremony, which, according to Hogan,

means to develop a compassionate heart. It is to learn... the loss of ego. It is to know that *there is not a Biblical-like end of the world*. We live in a *circular, sacred cosmos*. Human participation is part of the *constant process* of the *unfolding* of this world. Traditions and ceremony are part of this unfolding. *It is still an unfinished world in constant genesis* (*Inner Journey* XV, emphasis added).

To sum up, Hogan's text invites a reading by which the primal scene of trauma – the imaginatively reconstructed or complemented origin of the traumatic past of Angela – fades in the face of another type of Native knowledge that has precedence over it both textually, as the quest for the primal scene itself is framed by the ceremonial performance, and in terms of meaningfulness to the protagonist, who seems to develop out of it. Not only does this move reverse the dichotomy of Euroamerican knowledge as superior to traditional Native knowledge¹⁵³ but it also makes hope, as practical ways of coping with the traumatic offenses of the dominant power, an element that simultaneously surrounds trauma – hence making trust in the ancestral Native worldviews a necessary step towards survival.

The reversal of the temporal order establishes the beautiful act of communal empathy that is Bush's ceremony as the first moment in Angela's narrative of healing, the power of which is expressed by Agnes: "I don't know how to measure love. Not by cup or bowl, not in distance either, but that's what rose from the iron pot as steam, that was the food taken into our bodies. It was the holy sacrament of you [Angela] we ate that day, so don't think you were never loved" (SS 16). This substitutive play on chronology also intensifies the abject existence of Hannah and Loretta under the sign of individually-faced trauma versus the sense of beauty felt by Angela as she *reconnects* with her people – which is the culmination of a life that began under similar conditions of destitution and trauma but was salvaged by the caring ceremonial act of Bush. Angela indeed notes, by the end of her story: "like a snake I emerged, rubbing myself out of my old skin, my old eyes. I was fresh, I was seeing clearly... [that] we might better have knelt at the altar of our own love" (SS 344).

4. Return and Matrilineage

In *Solar Storms*, Angela does not succumb to her prescribed role of marginalized Other; rather, she decides, although somewhat irresolutely, to join her family¹⁵⁴. Her return signals the start of her tale of initiation into adulthood, a process of reclaiming a perceived befitting place within the world. Moreover, this return process is complicated by Hogan since Angela's move is followed by, or synchronous with, another leave-taking with her foremothers (towards Dora Rouge's northern birthplace). This complexity is compounded by the narrative double structure, a textual arrangement built on the pattern of departure and return: Angela re-visits Adam's Rib only to leave it once more, albeit by choice this time, a motion which rhymes with the place's depiction as a common ground for a mixed group of Natives, all rejects from other parts of the land.

Angela's first return is thus not a sheer romanticizing gesture of the tribal territory as the locus of some original innocence, a strategy which would – through closure – paradoxically re-place the Native American protagonist firmly within her mythologized prison. Indeed, Angela does not reintegrate a well demarcated or homogenous universe. Rather, the notion of originary place is complicated by Hogan: Angela gets reacquainted with a fragmented and almost crumbling community. Thus depicted, and even when relocated or dislocated, the native group stands against the internalization of what Owens calls “the Euramerican notion of a fixed, known ‘territory’ *imagined to contain Indians*” (35). In Hogan, the very notion of “territory” is rendered unstable in favour of a “richly hybridized frontier space” (36, emphasis added). In addition, returns are only a part of different physical and spiritual journeys, recuperating several of the main characters'

(plural) lost historical and cultural connections and setting the stage for her to operate from within her tribal community against that which marginalized them in the first place.

The notion of displacement is a ubiquitous theme in the Native American imagination, especially as it connects to the loss of ties with the land. There is a wide array of vital issues that invoke, and connect to, this leitmotif: “when the stories of your people center around the name of one stone, one place,” Hogan asserts, “the whole land around you becomes a part of everything that you know: your religion, your mythology, your family history” (*Interview B* 196). In *Solar Storms*, Angela’s plight starts when governmental officials decide to keep her with an insane non-nurturing mother who violently transcribes the marks of her internalized malevolence on her daughter’s body. Then, the same governmental officials decide that the solution to Angela’s traumatic suffering as an infant is further and total detachment from her roots, and they place within host homes in an America that is built on her own people’s destitution.

Angela’s return not only allows her to begin to “form a kind of knowing at Adam’s Rib” that compensates the silence and misunderstanding that she faced in foster homes (*SS* 54). As such, her return intensifies the situation of unease and the “out-of-place” feeling against which the young natives have to struggle. Hogan also hints at the commonality of Angela’s early condition of dysfunctional survival and aimless anger, by showing that a sister of hers, Henriette, struggles with traumas that are also registered, through self-inflicted scars, on her skin. Henriette, who is depicted by Angela as a lost individual, shows signs of dis/integration. The textual description of Henriette intensifies the inadequate subsistence of the natives within a dominant and alienating America. Moreover, it presents the native body as undignified: it is either a debased currency, or a

ravaged and abused object (targeted in the expression of anger). Angela's first attempt to reconnect with kin reflects the Natives' awkward existence:

I had my secrets, too. For a long time I kept to myself a missing part of my own story. In the early part of my search for kin, I'd found a sister in South Dakota, my blood sister, Henriette, younger than me. I never told anyone how *I'd stolen the money to find someone to track her down*, had walked into a neighbouring house one night and taken the money off a nightstand while the people slept. It wasn't really like stealing, I thought. It was dire necessity. Fifty dollars was what I paid the man to find her, and *I had slept with him, too*. No one could ever prove who'd stolen the money, though everyone suspected me. I'd had such hope when first I found my sister. It was like finding my true name. That's how it felt. *I hitched rides across the plains to get there* (SS 117, emphases added).

But Angela's happiness and recovery of her sibling and her "true name," we are told, quickly recedes in the face of what confirms her fears. She is again confronted with what she cannot fathom yet: the integration of the traumatic into her life narrative. If one bears in mind the fact that Angela wants to reconnect with her family in order to make sense of her facial scars, one can see how her reaction is not unexpected. And she admits that:

I didn't speak about her [Henriette] because *her existence both horrified me and filled me with despair*. She was lovely and quiet, but she was a girl who cut herself, cut her own skin, every chance she had. Her eyes were innocent and trusting, but *her skin was full of scars*. She cut herself with scissors and razor blades, *as if she could not feel pain*. *Perhaps it was more than just wounds*. *Perhaps it was a language*. She spoke through blades, translated her life through knives. I took a bracelet to her, but when I saw its sharp edges I...gave her instead some of the cash I'd stolen. She never spoke. We just looked at each other. We sat and smoked one cigarette after another. Only she put hers out by pinching the end with her fingers. *She could not be hurt*. *That's what she wanted to show*. *Not by anything outside her, that is, not anymore* (SS 117-118, emphases added).

The absence of communication between Angela and her sister is another way in which Hogan highlights the necessity of building a community, one that celebrates the strategies of the ancestors and values the traditions that have sustained them (by not abandoning it –

not even for radical ways of marking traumas on the body). Moreover, it shows that the complete translation of experience into corporeal expressions is an inadequate medium that does not necessarily guarantee understanding from, or effect on, the Other. Therefore, bodily signification, while it is an extreme revolted gesture, remains a code that is difficult to decipher if it remains confined to a shocking visual effect. At the same time, it is a mode of bearing witness. It is a scarring that bears witness to a scarring.

Hogan's manoeuvre also problematizes a somewhat naive view of the reconnecting moment as one that easily and straightforwardly restores the necessary and desired plenitude sought by the marginalized individual. In this way, this first encounter with her kin – while not completely useless because Angela empathizes with her sister – serves as a narrative moment that intensifies the following, and more effective, return that she undertakes. The second time around, not only does Angela reconnect with female kin (who stayed together despite all the hardships) but she also finds individuals who verbally instruct her about her past and culture. In fact, Angela's metamorphosis is apparent in her changing perception of her family: from strangers, whom she feared, to individuals whom she connects with in a smooth manner that seems as natural to her as her place in the wilderness seems her due. In fact, Angela describes this bonding in terms of fluidity, synonymous with liberated movement, of uncontrolled water:

I was like Agnes had said: Water going back to itself. I was water falling into a lake and these women were that lake, Agnes, with her bear coat, traveling backward in time, walking along the shore, remembering stories and fragments of songs she had heard when she was younger and hearing also the old songs no one else remembered. And Dora-Rouge, on her way to the other world, already seeing what we could not see, answering those we could not hear...walking through clouds and waters of an afterlife (SS 55).

Even more importantly, Angela encounters the person who will influence her mostly, who is going to be her mentor, and who is naturally gifted for re-integrating broken things – her step-grandmother Bush. With such a name, Bush is set as the woman whose feelings of empathy with nature are not only justified but also expected. Her very occupation reflected her deep reverence for everything alive: “For a living, *she assembled things*. She put together bones for LaRue, who sold them... and she put them together with devotion, as if the animals would come back down a road of life that had been broken through the felled forests” (SS 68, emphasis added).

Having fought with all her might to keep Angela from being placed into foster homes¹⁵⁵, in vain, Bush gives Angela the greatest insight into her place within the wild, how to perceive the natural world and to feel it. Indeed, Bush’s dearest dream was to be able to reassemble individuals who were shattered, just like Angela, as reflected in her mention: “Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we could piece together a new human...? Yes, we should make some new ones...We’d do it right this time. They’d be love-filled, the way we were meant to be all along” (SS 86). Thus, Bush functions as Angela’s spiritual guide, providing her love and reverence toward the world to replace the emptiness with which she returned. Liberating Angela from her inner rooms of resentment, melancholy, and hate, Bush offers her a language to nurture herself by and shepherds her growth into autonomy and self-assertion. She helps Angela discover the voice that allows her to address her identity crisis. Almost as soon as Angela is under the influence of Bush’s wisdom, she starts to wonder: “Perhaps that is what I went there to do, to put together all the pieces of history, of my life, and my mother’s, to make something whole” (SS 86).

Hogan's attribution of this healing capacity to motherly figures culminates in making Bush the better (fore)mother – in the Native traditional sense – to Angela, even as they are not linked directly by blood. Bush is shown to be spiritually, almost mystically, linked to Angela even in her absence. Indeed, after Angela is taken away as an infant, Bush experiences

the familiar presence of a young child standing beside her bed in the first light of morning. It was a girl, about five years of age, wearing hand-sewn deerskin boots and a soft dress. The child looked like me. She had visited Bush all the years I'd been gone, but that morning the girl raised her hand in wave of good-bye. That was how Bush knew I had come home after all her years of patient waiting. Twelve years had passed (SS 60).

Further amplifying the bond between Angela and Bush is the fact that the depiction of Angela's biological mother, Hannah, is set in a diametrically opposed manner – painting her as violent and ruthless: “Hannah's breasts were dry. Like her mind and heart, it had nothing to offer [Angela]. It had already abandoned [her]” (SS 110). Thus, Hannah is far from exemplifying the traditional roles of Native women – which, as enumerated by Dunn and Comfort, include “daughter, wife, mother, storyteller, auntie, sister, co-creatrix, language bearer, nurturer, provider, spiritual center” (xv). In fact, Hannah's aggression toward her daughter sharply contrasts with the love and care of Angela's foremothers. She stands out among the motherly figures in the text as a disturbed individual who rejects her new-born, claiming it is not hers and that it died at birth, and as an “angry, screaming woman” who is cut off from her people's history (SS 108-112).

While Hannah (and even Angela's grandmother, Loretta) are depicted in ways that link the effect of the Western values to folly and disaster¹⁵⁶, it is telling that Bush's effect upon Angela is providing mystical guidance and wisdom to live by, culminating in

the latter's ability to reintegrate herself as an adult with vision and purpose within her community – a transformation that started very quickly after the two women meet: “even my illusions began to drop away. I had created a past for myself and now, I knew, it was about to be dismantled, taken apart and rewoven the way spiderwebs on the floating island changed every night” (SS 74). Hence, Angela grows whole and is aware that she is being reconstructed from old fragments – she states: “I was remaking myself” (SS 106). She becomes a fuller individual because she communes with the land that surrounds her and its creation. Her chronicles of maturity are thus records of how she learns to experience the land in a Native reverential fashion, a reappropriation that does not focus mainly on issues of possession and exploitation but that foregrounds compassion and sharing.

5. A Bildungsroman

To reverse the effects of the Colonial scripture – the emblem of a process that is both an invalid limitation of Native signification and an aggressive rejection of their cultural values outside the Western cosmology – the Native “must survive physically by adaption and culturally by erasing, or writing over the white man's texts with his own story out of the guarded recesses of his mind,” argues Paul Beekman Taylor (149). Accordingly, the evolution of Angela's character in *Solar Storms* acts as reappropriation of the material signifier (often alluded to as bodily as well) and of the text it figuratively emits. The text undertakes a contrapuntal reading of traumatic history by revisiting its colonial inscriptions to counter its dire workings. Hence, Angela's efforts reflect both her will to write over the inherited corporeal marks of “the torturers,” be they the original settlers

who violated the bodies venerated by the Natives (exploiting the land and the water, and controlling human bodies) or the unbalanced Natives who interiorized their worldviews and became numbed to the traumas of their own or even agents of their propagation (e.g. Hannah, who wrote, or impressed with her teeth, the language of greed that takes hold of the exploitive view of the land onto her daughter's face).

Linda Hogan's writing of this history of the Native peoples' suffering inscribes itself as an exposé of how Angela's writes off the signifiers of colonial domination and how she reads her wounds differently – dismissing their finality as reminders of oppression and, in line with the Native cosmology, expecting a positive change to emanate from the site of affliction. In other words, what Hogan presents is an exploration of Native history that attempts to display and to right the wrongs perpetrated by the colonial enterprise – an examination that is itself formatted as the growth chronicles of Angela: as her character starts with the inherited material writings of trauma and evolves towards a position where their significance is dismissed, ontologically and epistemologically, as inappropriate for the Native to thrive by. Writing the hi/story of the Native people is also an attempt to redress the injustice done to them by allowing them to write the views they would like to convey and negate the oppressive significations imposed on their experiences. It is a form of permitting the subaltern to speak, to use Gayatri Spivak's renowned concept and of establishing an alternative historical narrative. Hence, the coming into agency, also signified as control over the narrative thread, is reflected both in Hogan's text *per se* and its depiction of Angela's development and how she takes ownership of her life events, and fulfills her position as the narrator of her/story. Angela indeed takes over the narrative thread from the prologue, although her

story is heavily inscribed within those of other female figures: “sometimes now I hear the voice of my great-grandmother, Agnes. It floats toward me like a soft breeze through an open window” (SS 11).

The story of Angela is made available only via and following the events depicted in the text and which allow her to achieve voice, to be able to articulate her concerns. The positive change that is delineated in Angela’s story is expressed through the common format of the *bildungsroman*, or the ‘novel of formation,’ in order to assert the possibility of development in the face of violent cultural oppression. Indeed, Angela’s transmutation is deeply anchored within intersubjective and communal bonds that she discovers as she reintegrates her kinfolk:

I began to see...that there were three women and myself, all of us on some kind of journey out of the narrowed circle of our history the way rays of light grow from the sun. Only a month earlier I knew none of these women, or even that they existed, and now our lives were bound together (in truth as they had been already) by blood and history, love and hate (SS 93).

Angela’s change is a psychological one that allows her to understand her traumatic history and to come to terms with its repercussions on the one hand and to become a conscientious subject who is invested in her people’s survival issues and their defense, on the other. On the material level, Angela ultimately becomes an accomplished mature woman by the end of her quest for origins, a change reflected on her body¹⁵⁷ as well.

In the beginning of the text, Angela hesitatingly stands at the boundaries of two different worlds. On the one hand, she had only recently broken away from a cycle of displacement (as psychological detachment from her hosting families and as endless repetition of motion). On the other she was undecided as to whether or not she wanted to

reconnect with her actual family or with the remnants of her relatives in Adam's Rib because her ties with them were almost non-existent: "Between us there has once been a bond, something like the ancient pact of land had made with water, or the agreement humans once made with animals. But like those other bonds, this bond, too, lay broken" (SS 22). Standing between two dissimilar Americas, Angela has "little courage" and is shocked by the limited and marginal place that is allotted to her family members, "the stark place that held [her] people" (SS 23).

Importantly, this moment of return conjures up two different realizations on Angela's part: first of all, she admits her status as alien to this place, which remains "a foreign world" in spite of the fact that she is meeting her grandmothers (SS 24). In fact, Angel is acutely conscious of her own doubts and does not know what to expect from such an encounter. As she first meets her great-grandmother Agnes, she notes: "I watched her walk toward me, but my own legs refused to move. They were afraid. So was my heart having entered this strange and foreign territory with the hope of finding something not yet known to me, not yet dreamed or loved (...) I wanted to turn back" (SS 23). As Angela readies herself to reconnect with her people, a second reality consistently appears to her, and to the readers: the realization that, in order for her developmental process to continue, she has to be severed from the dominant culture. It is this insight that balances her fear and anger, derived from her lack of knowledge about her scars and her past, and helps her choose to stay:

My return was uneventful, dull and common...it was my first step into a silence, into what I feared. I could have turned back. I wanted to. But I felt that I was at the end of something. Not just my fear and anger, not even forgetfulness, but at the end of a way of living in the world. I was at the end of my life in one America, and a secret part of me knew *this end was*

also a beginning, as if something has shifted right then and there, turned over in me. It was a felt thing, that *I was traveling toward myself* like rain falling into a lake (SS 25-26, emphases added).

In addition to signaling a new beginning, this movement toward selfhood signals a pivotal moment in Angela's development: at seventeen years of age, she already realizes that the Euroamerican system has exhausted all the opportunities that it could offer her. In fact she states: "As young as I was, I felt I had already worn out all the possibilities in my life" (SS 27). Until that moment in Angela's life, two emotions, fear and anger, are her only certainties in life. Up until that moment when she returns to connect with her relatives, Angela is constantly obfuscated by the attitude of her host families towards her, by a feeling of not belonging, she is simultaneously angry because she cannot come to form a whole idea about what happened to her (face and body) and afraid to engage with anyone or anything in any deep or meaningful way.

As an extension of her sense of loss and confusion, Angela tries to blind herself and others to the corporeal traces of trauma she constantly bears. She thus attempts to hide her facial scars behind her hair in the same way she tries to hide her fears and weakness behind airs of physical toughness. Her reaction emphasizes the effect her scars have and reflects an ineffective strategy to come to terms with their significance. The invariable nature of her fear is due to her constant awareness of her disfiguration, more than to being constantly on the move. This fact renders her insulated from other individuals around her: "I was the girl who ran away, the girl who never cried, the girl who was strong enough to tattoo her own arm and hand. An ink-blue cross on the knuckle, the initials of Lonnie Faro on my upper left arm. A cross on my thigh. And no one had ever wanted me for good" (SS 26). By further mutilating herself, and through

additional inscriptions upon her body, Angela attempts to write over her initial textual mark of trauma another sign, one that stands for her mental strength and her ability to cope with isolation¹⁵⁸.

Interestingly, it is the need for a story, the tale of her body as a site of written (family) history that animates Angela's reconnection with her blood kin, after her failure to transpose her scars onto different and inauthentic narratives. The demand for an accurate semioticization of her bodily injuries imposes itself upon Angela, so as to guide her back towards her family in Adam's Rib. It pushes her to come to terms with her past and to seek the factual story, and true meaning, of her defacement. It forces her to recognize the restricted nature of the means that she is offered by the dominant culture, the America that limits her emotional development and turns her into a social reject, as well as other intellectual struggles with the absence of a signification to her corporeal signs. Angela indeed recognizes the fact that she has used the appearance of hardiness to cover her scars and frailty, and that she imaginatively created a past for herself from the bits and pieces that she could collect as a marginalized, literally and metaphorically dispossessed subject, who had inherited solely the trauma of defacement from her mother:

The scars, I knew, were from my mother. They were all I had of her. For me, she was like air. I breathed her. I had to breathe whether I wanted or not, and like air, she was invisible, although sometimes I thought I recalled her heartbeat from when I was inside her body. At those times, a distant memory tugged at me in a yearning way, and I felt something deeper than sorrow (SS 34).

Angela's facial disfiguration is a mark whose deciphering brings Angela back towards her family; she is obliged to meet these women who are her s/kin, despite her fear of the

return and her “need to shed skin,” leaving both family and past behind her (SS 43). Her struggle with a wound that speaks no story becomes unbearable; it becomes her driving force towards a reconnection that seeks to assimilate that which was not integrally known in the first place. This is perfectly in line with the view of such trauma theorists as Cathy Caruth, who insists that trauma overflows beyond the violent infliction of the wound, so that the way “its very unassimilated nature...haunt[s] the survivor” is itself traumatic (UE 4).

As Angela becomes possessed by this traumatic event, her need for narrative that would allow her to come to grips with its fragmented details increases. She starts a search for a truth which – as Caruth points out (UE 5) – destabilizes the idea of a simple knowledge deriving from the experience of trauma/violence: “the truth remained that I was wounded and cut and no one could, or would, tell me how it happened... And deep down I dreaded knowing what had happened to me and *the dread was equal to my urgent desire to learn the truth*” (SS 54-55, emphasis added).

Angela’s quest for a story to be spoken from her wound, and the way that story demands address, also exemplify what Caruth calls “the complex ways that knowing and not knowing are entangled in the language of trauma” (UE 4). In fact, Hogan’s text itself places Angela’s story of recovery (as recuperation) of lost time within a larger story of recovery (as healing via the connection with her ancestors and special ties with the land). The episode of her disfiguration is not straightforwardly presented as a readily-accessible narrative awaiting Angela’s return. Rather, the fragmented nature of the knowledge derived from the traumatic moment is emphasized. The tension between the need to know and the incompleteness of such a knowledge are heightened by the fact that Angela’s

crisis is presented via several modes of telling – none more ‘factual’ than the other. Hence, these gaps and breakages, between the totality of the tales that inform Angela’s story, reflect the lacunae at the core of the traumatic moment – denoting how “the language of trauma does not...stand outside trauma but may emerge equally from within its very experience” (Caruth, *UE* 116).

In addition to emanating from the heart of the traumatic experience, language in *Solar Storms* also links the individual and communal aspects thereof. Thus, the fact that Angela is facially disfigured reflects both her own individual trauma, and a trauma present within the entire history of the mistreatment of native people. Angela’s story started even before her birth: the “beginning of all this is that too many animals are gone” (*SS* 245). The corporeal aggressions that follow are seen as part of Hannah struggle with a part of her that she loathed, coming from a body that is itself a reminder of her own abuse: “We knew what happened to you, your face, how, like a dog, she bit your face with her teeth. It was worse for you, maybe because you looked like her. She hated you for that, from coming from her body, being part of her” (*SS* 246).

Thus, the entanglement of the personal with the public doubles the traumatic scene of disfiguration with an ordinary and unidentifiable moment of historical trauma that remains beyond the reach of the protagonist. In fact, Angela’s disconcerting childhood events are differently explained by the characters in the novel, each tracing Angela’s plight back to a certain cause. Hence, when addressing Hannah as a perpetrator of traumatic violence towards Angela, “[e]veryone had a name for what was wrong [with her]. Dora-Rouge said it was memory and...I thought, yes, it was what could not be forgotten, the shadows of men who’d hurt Loretta, the shadows of the killers of children”

(*SS* 100). This is also corroborated by Bush, her wise step-grandmother, who said it was “history” that was trapped in Hannah (250).

As the text depicts, in a scattered fashion, the manifold ways in which Hannah abused her daughter, the reader discovers that: “She had used weapons against me. I learned later – hot wire, her teeth. Once she’d even burned me with fire...I could see that there was no love inside her, nothing that could ever have loved me” (*SS* 231). The narrative mixes the details about all the ways in which Hannah hurt her daughter with reminiscences by Angela’s foremothers, and tales by other women she meets on the way towards her mother’s house. In addition, the equivocality of the moment of traumatic infliction works doubly to assert the absence of the victims from that violent episode due to its excessive horror, so that Angela feels unreal: “sometimes I thought I had never really existed, that I was nothing more than emptiness covered with skin” (*SS* 74). Simultaneously, it highlights the intertwining of native traumatic experiences as well as the connection of these experiences with nature’s violation. Hannah, who is repeatedly said to have a world of evil inside her, who “walked out of the rifles of our killers...was born of knives, the skinned-alive beaver...and the chewed-off legs of wolves,” Angela realizes, “had died long ago” (*SS* 345, 246). At the same time, she is presented as a person with harmful potential that can be directed against anyone, not just her daughter, so that all “were afraid of her,” that “there were people all along who thought Hannah should have been sent away. Maybe even killed. People believed she was a danger to others” (*SS* 98, 246). Still, she is presented as a soul lost between two knowledges – the native and the Other’s – that she could not conjugate together harmoniously, a victim of trauma herself:

Her eyes had no trust, not in anything or anyone. They were dark and flat. No light. It was the expression the tortured wear. Even now I study their faces. Their faces are like Hannah's face. The darkness beneath their eyes. As if it would explain things people do to one another...From the very beginning she didn't sleep. She paced at night. Like she was trapped, or something was trapped in her...she herself never emerged. The others, with their many voices and ways, were larger than she was. She was no longer there (*SS* 98).

By highlighting the way Angela, starts her quest from a status of absence or nothingness reminiscent of her mother's, Hogan seems to simultaneously point out the similarity and difference of their situation. Both are brutally victimized, and in that respect they also metonymically offer insight into the mistreatment of other Natives. But while Hannah was disconnected from her kinfolk, like "a door...[a]lways closed," Angela bonds with her foremothers who instil in her the idea of not only accepting her childhood events but also get over them, so that she sees that "scars were proof of healing". When asked about her scars, she replies: "What scars?" (*SS* 125). Instead of reflecting glimpses of past sufferings, Angela's reintegrates her wounds within a narrative of (natural) regeneration that is inspired by her rootedness in the land. The way her wounds address her changes from an unknowing silence to a hope of healing, in contrast with her mothers' reiterated stories of abuse.

It comes as no surprise, then, that Angela thrives into womanhood and comes to understand both her position and role just as Hannah, "the skin of [her] skin, the face that had given shape to [hers]" dies, thus substituting her mother in taking care of her infant half-sister Aurora (*SS* 249-251). When she replaces her mother, the "damaged woman," and reverses the loss of compassion that swallowed her, Angela becomes "Maniki," "a true human being" and her belief "in newness, in the freedom of beginning outside the

past, outside history” contrasts with her previous inability to progress in life, when at seventeen she felt her possibilities and existence came to a halt (SS 247,257).

In fact, Angela even names her half-sister and becomes her surrogate mother. She literally takes the place of Hannah, but unlike her, she attempts to break the chain of traumatic transmission. Angela sees Aurora as a chance of renewal, another Native self who is the same but who can be different because she is offered a better life, away from the trauma of uprootedness: “She would be what I was not. She would know her world and not be severed from it. Whoever she was, it was a kind of beginning, I reasoned, because all parts of her were new and fat and laughing” (SS 258). Thus, the reconnection of Angela with her Native kin allows her to understand the circular aspect of existence and to experience the regenerative dimensions of natural laws, with her half-sister being the “new skin” that she is offered (SS 255). In effect, the new beginning that she attains about the end of her journey is brought about by the end of Hannah existence, like a natural, cyclical healing:

It was death, finally, that allowed me to know my mother, her body, the house of lament and sacrifice that it was. I was no longer a girl. I was a woman, full and alive. After that, I made up my mind to love in whatever ways I could. I would find it in myself to love the woman who had given life to me, the woman a priest had called a miracle in reverse, the one who had opened her legs to men and participated in the same life-creating act as God. Yes, she tried to kill me, swallow me, consume me back into her own body, the way fire burns itself away, uses itself as fuel. But even if she hated me, there had been a moment of something akin to love, back at the creation. Her desperation and loneliness was my beginning. Hannah had been my poison, my life, my sweetness and pain, my beauty and homeliness. And when she died, *I knew that I had survived in the best ways for I was filled with grief and compassion* (SS 251, emphasis added).

Having attained maturity, Angela understands her mother’s passing as a logically expected event to be included in a long list of wrongs sustained by her kinfolk: “How

appropriate it was to place her on words of war, obituaries, stories of carnage and misery, and true stories that had been changed to lies. It seemed like the right bed for her. Some of the words stuck to her body, dark ink, but we did not wash them off; it was a suitable skin” (SS 253). Angela also understands that while “what possessed her [mother] was now gone,” a history of ill-treatment does not simply vanish because another victim/perpetrator of trauma is silenced (SS 250). Her growth is exemplified by the nurturing attentions she gives her half-sister, Aurora, and how she tries to prevent her from getting contaminated by the inherited trauma: “I wanted nothing to enter the innocent, open-eyed gaze of this child. None of the soul stealers were going to sing this one away or fill her body with emptiness and pain” (SS 250).

6. Hogan’s Literary Strategies of Resistance

One of the interesting acts of resistance operated by Hogan’s text is the pitting of Angela’s two extensive life moments against each other: her experiences in the America where she is marginalized are critically juxtaposed to her new existence with her kinfolk. In fact, Hogan establishes the narrative frame of Angela’s true maturation into agency on the very failing structure of her aborted development in white-dominated America. In other words, this could be read as Hogan’s signifying the impossibility of growth of her uprooted and displaced main character, which testifies to her critical stance towards the hegemonic and ethnocentric America that hosts Angela as an environment that remains inadequate for the Native heroine to thrive in. Hence, only the aforementioned confused attempts at situating herself, on Angela’s part, are briefly mentioned (between her very

first departure and her return home in the beginning of the text). It is as if Hogan wanted to parallel their insignificant nature, in Angela's life story, with the textual space she gave them in her tale of betterment.

Another remarkable fact is that the insufficient growth that Angela acknowledges is the result of her years of foster homes has several features of the common bildungsroman: Angela's departure as a baby, engaging in a journey (to reconnect with her mother), and her attempts to formulate a more integral sense of her 'self', her recovery of past memories via research and willed investment, and the achievement of a more thorough sense of self by the end of the narrative. It is of critical importance to note that every aspect mentioned here is shaped, perhaps even tainted, by a history of colonial abuse that is endured by the Natives and which Angela is shown to inherit along with her scars and hazy past. For instance, Angela's departure is one that is depicted more like legal kidnapping: she is seized and taken away from her whole family by "a case-worker with an office full of abused and neglected children she'd picked up late at night, a locked file cabinet, lost papers, a hierarchy of administrators and secretaries" (SS 96). Moreover, as she tries to find traces of her family (especially her mother, Hannah), Angela can only rely on court records, a shocking reminder of the laws used to isolate her in the first place.

One of the remarkable facets of Angela's personality, as she matures, is that she simultaneously conjugates her reverence towards her people's world with the observation of impropriety of Western ways¹⁵⁹, which she decries as indiscernibly destructive because materially-oriented:

The Europeans called this world dangerous...they had trapped themselves inside their own destruction of it, the oldest kind of snare, older than twine and twigs. Their legacy, I began to understand, had been the removal of spirit from everything, from animals, trees, fishhooks, and hammers, all things the Indians had as allies. They'd forgotten how to live. Before, everything lived together well, lynx and women, trappers and beavers. Now most of us had inarticulate souls, silent spirits, and despairing hearts (SS 180-181).

In fact, Angela laments the disappearance of her people's "fine savagery" rather nostalgically, and sees great merit in being able to understand "the languages of earth, water, and trees" (SS 334). Furthermore, the text legitimizes Native knowledge since it shows that, by receiving it, Angela not only thrives as an individual but also becomes an active agent defending her community. This is in line with Hogan's reclamation of the old ways of being and knowing, Angela's inheritance, not only as rightful but also helpful and necessary tools in her present condition: "I'd searched all my life for this older world that was lost to me, this world only my body remembered. In that moment I understood I was part of the same equation as birds and rain" (SS 79). Thus, the textual recuperation of the ancestor's path, its linkage to growth, contests the inflexible discrediting endeavour of the Western standpoint.

Interestingly, the story of Angela's metamorphosis is rich in the imagery of mythological beings and chimerical incidents and it is asserted – precisely in this capacity – as a factual story via its very components that are most implausible in a Western cosmology. The oppressive master narrative and its underlying matrix of Cartesian epistemology are thus debilitated, and the events that transform Angela are placed beyond the explanatory capacity of logical frameworks. For instance, a different reading is demanded when Angela asserts: "I could see in the dark. My fingers grew longer, more

sensitive. My eyes saw new and other things. My ears heard everything that moved beyond the walls. I could see with my skin, touch with my eyes” (SS 120). Thus, ethereally-accessed knowledge – understanding the language of animals, waters, and winds, perceiving people’s special connection or harmony with(in) a certain natural element rather than another, to cite only a few examples – is positioned as a field over which only the Native culture has command. As such, not only does the embedding of this knowledge in the text act as a counter-disenfranchisement of Western epistemology but it effectively displaces the notion of a margin to which it “lesser” worldviews¹⁶⁰ are relegated.

The text ultimately demands from its readers what Rainwater calls “radical hesitancy,” an attitude that demonstrates skepticism with regard to the all-encompassing nature of reason-based or logical knowledge (*Who May Speak* 265). This is also an appeal to refute or to suspend a narrow, culturally limited type of epistemological access and to contemplate other ways of communing with the world. These ways are culturally viable in the worldviews of the Native other, and necessitate the bypassing of “self-imposed cultural blindness” as a superfluous limit that obstructs the Eurocentric vision. This marginalizing arrogance impoverishes the Western view, the text contends repeatedly, and denies it the possibility of overcoming its lack and eliminating the concept of annihilating that which is necessary to end its estrangement from the natural (267).

Solar Storms avoids commending a rigid perspective of otherness to which one has to adhere; it does not exchange an exclusive view for another. What transpires in many moments is rather a will to formulate a more inclusive view, structured around

openness to the Other, not around a hierarchy of values. Thus, *Solar Storms* does not seek to find out a better univocal cultural identity and to undermine the dominant view *per se*, but to establish fluid identities on both sides of the cultural divide – identities that imply responsibility and self-aware choice, rather than canonical truths whose alternatives must be eradicated and silenced. Moreover, Hogan does not straightforwardly or unequivocally build her characters and “[b]y refusing to grant the reader a simple dichotomy of innocent good versus evil and corrupt, Hogan encourages the recognition of the complexity of the systems of domination on the one hand, and the diversity of forms of resistance and levels of awareness on the part of the oppressed on the other” (Murphy 184).

In *Solar Storms*, Hogan also undertakes an imaginative imploding of the boundary between what is knowable through the mind, and what is knowable via other equally well-founded (sensory and corporeal) means. According to Arnold, the text also “layers an incenteric, “homing-in” narrative with and “eccentric” or centrifugal wilderness quest more typical of Euro-American literature to produce a complex revisioning of both” (285). The reinterpretation of the boundaries between self and setting parallels an unsettling of the frontier between Euroamerican and Native cultural spaces – an ideological gesture which, for Arnold Krupat, amounts to performing what he labels “anti-imperial translation,” a rewriting of the imperial narratives that supplements¹⁶¹ them with indigenous perspectives (32-38).

The progression of the protagonist operates as a performative that foregrounds spiritual values over what the text claims are unjustifiably-venerated commodity values, a fact that intensifies the textual “resistance to assimilation through [the] recovery of [ancestral] roots” (Murphy 183). Hogan’s subversion of the monolithic narrative of

exploitation is further observed in the fact that the itineraries of Angela's ancestors¹⁶² operate as pathways of guidance¹⁶³. They lead her to a full sense of identity by allowing her access to an array of elements that were not previously available to her: "we were undoing the routes of explorers, taking apart the advance of commerce, narrowing down and distilling the truth out of history" (SS 176). Hence, learning her people's ties with wilderness makes Angela question the truth-value of a history that is not primarily drawn from a loving bond with nature. She is captivated by her ancestors' "defiant land" that "had its own will" (SS 123). It is a land that exposes the "tricks and lies of history," how the European maps did not document the reality of the bloodshed and destruction of lives it witnessed. Thus, the land, with its ability to change and its "stubborn will to remain outside their [the Europeans'] sense of order" becomes a model of resistance to Angela¹⁶⁴, an incentive to reject any connection to the land that is not predicated on principles of sharing and love.

The narrative also alludes to the unjust legacy of the reservation as confinement and to oppose the women's journey to a history of objectification and restrictive tyranny. Re-living of the ways of ancestors becomes a form of resistance to the traumatic effects of Euroamerican commodification of Native land and culture. The opposition to a territorially and imaginatively marginalizing agenda is expressed as motion (via the breakaway of Angela and her foremothers) and as textuality (via the record of such eventful voyage). Moreover, in the work of Hogan, as in that of Louis Owens, thriving and free individuation is an exercise in motion: it is a sign of self-determination that accompanies the Native rather than resides in a romantically established originary site. Recuperating a notion of "frontier" that rests upon excluding precepts of colonial

discourse, Owens turns it into an arena of resistance where the Native can retain “the freedom to reimagine themselves within a fluid, always shifting frontier space” (*Mixedblood Messages* 27). This is what Hogan achieves through her text: allowing her protagonist to re-compose her being as “[e]very piece of [her]self was together anew, [in] a shifted pattern” (SS 325). Hogan’s heroine radiates out of the essentialized space to which she is confined to attain what Owens celebrates as “new self-imaginings, continual fluidity, and rebirth” (28).

While Owens moves between the discursive and the geographical, Hogan condenses identity problematics with spatial politics and temporal dimensions: Angela’s northbound travel becomes a travel in time, not just a journey through place. Again, the notion of time as a linear chronology, reminiscent of Christian theology and stressing the inevitability of progress, becomes disrupted as the women enter into the wild. Moreover, the temporal becomes intertwined with the spatial, as Angela awakes in

time that was measured from before axes, before traps, flint, and carpenter’s nails. It was this gap in time we entered, and it was a place between worlds. I was under the spell of wilderness, close to what no one has ever been able to call by name. Everything merged and united. There were no sharp distinctions left between darkness and light. Water and air became the same thing, as did water and land in the marshy broth of creation...It was all one thing (SS 177).

The more Angela harmonizes with life around her, the more she understands the stories of creation and destruction that they tell. Gradually, this connection begins “to pester [time] apart or into some kind of change” (SS 168). By feeling the land and its creatures, like and as her ancestors did, Angela experiences a temporal caesura that reopens history and reveals its untold stories, the marginalized accounts of the voiceless (SS 173). This remarkable ability to reach the historical through the material is underscored by Hogan,

who declares: “Even if we have been removed from our homelands...we return to our original homelands and feel them. They remember us. The spiritual consciousness of the world and of creation recalls our beauty to us” (*Inner Journey* xiii).

As the pursuit of traditional visions is aligned with the fluid, but connected, position to be taken by the Native (i.e., Angela) vis-à-vis the natural, it is shown to permit development even under trauma. Thus, the reclamation of heritage becomes an *active* mode of being as it leads to a defensive attitude vis-à-vis cultural intrusion – protesting and fighting the systems of violent take-over. Second, it becomes a perceptive mode of being that sees the beauty of old ways and prioritizes the need to preserve them. The protagonist’s move from the (wishful) denial of abjection to its reintegration within her life story also shows that the dominant culture offers only a referential vacuum that cannot be sufficient for a full positioning of Native subjectivities. Bypassing the fixation upon traumatic remnants, corporeal and psychological scars, to see oneself as a beautiful person also hints at a current necessity that links the aforementioned perceptive and active modes of being. The gesture of actively quitting the Euroamerican space reveals itself, in this light, as a perceptive certainty that it represents a void that has to be moved beyond, literally and otherwise, in a search for a signifying network within one’s kin – a fact that makes Angela’s journey an entry into the linguistic as well.

As Angela “was finding a language, a story, to shape [her]self by,” her body literally changes as well. And she describes how she “grew strong, my hands rough, my arms filled out. It happened gradually...it’s in the body, in the stomach, in the heart. They ache and then they open. I felt it then” (SS 89). Via a process of slow accretion, Angela transforms so as to reclaim the right to interpret her (people’s) past, which becomes

conducive to the will to rescue the land. Her metamorphosis culminates in the recognition that everything around her is alive and is worthy of reverence¹⁶⁵. This change also supports the view, expressed by critics such as Dunn and Comfort, that the land offers Angela valuable teachings on how to “ascend to true power and full womanhood” (xv). Realizing the significance of the land, Angela becomes more and more involved with the task of protecting it from being commodified and abused. She notices the encroachment of the “Western” civilization upon the land as a factor in the destruction of her ancestors’ livelihood.

Through her main character, Hogan questions the validity of the notion of Western progress¹⁶⁶ and civilization¹⁶⁷, perceived – as Angela states – rather as “a kind of darkness of words and ideas, wants and desires” (SS 268). This image¹⁶⁸ not only literally alludes to the light-creating hydro-electric project but also intensifies the systematic seeping into Western values and systems of a kind of ignorance of what is best for life, all life, including theirs – which is, the text hints, respecting the natural. Hogan indeed asserts that

This darkness came in the guise of laws made up by lawless men and people who were, as they explained, and believed, only doing their jobs. Part of the fast-moving darkness was the desire of those who *wanted to conquer the land*, the water, the rivers that kept running away from them. It was their *desire to guide the waters*, narrow them down into the thin black electrical wires that traversed the world. They wanted *to control water*, the rise and fall of it, the direction of its ancient life. They wanted its power...False Gods said “Let there be light,” and there was *alchemy in reverse* (SS 268, emphases added).

The recognition of this unsound connection (between the land and the people who usurp and abuse it) is perceived as a sign of maturity on the part of Angela. It leads her not only to join the resistance movement¹⁶⁹ but also to see the lack of humanity in anyone out of

tune with the land, for “a person is only strong when they feel the land. Until then a person is not a human being” (SS 235). The rejection of the alien conceptualization of nature as a resource to be controlled, reflected in Angela’s activism, is intensified by Hogan as her main character squarely places the blame for her past sufferings upon an intrusive of perspective that commodifies everything¹⁷⁰. Indeed, Angela sees that the root of her people’s plight resides in the greedy monster managing their world: “My beginning was...one of broken lives, gone animals, trees felled and kindled. Our beginnings were intricately bound up in the history of the land...in the nooks of America, the crannies of marble buildings, my story unfolded” (SS 96).

Through her journey, Angela comes to understand that her mother’s violation of her body is a consequence of the disturbing containment and annihilation of her people’s universe by an array of outsiders – hunters, fishermen, priests, map makers, history writers, bureaucrats, social workers, etc. – looking for “small and pitiful power” (SS 324). Angela’s journey is not just a northbound motion but one that “moves in many directions at once – inward and outward across the surface that separates individual from world and cosmos, backward and forward in time – [thus] destabilizing conventional Western divisions between nature and culture, spirit and matter, past and future, time and space” (Arnold 286). In addition to affirming the *presence* of the Natives’ past, neither forgotten nor erased, this embedding of the primal within the current rejects the notion of containment, geographical or imaginative, that is superimposed upon the Native individual as ostracism. The depth of her bond with the natural, with the scenery that witnessed her people’s care for all creation, underscores the import of their modes of

being in the world. Thus, Angela embraces her affiliation with her eloquently-named tribe, “the Beautiful People”.

Beyond condemning an unjust legacy of objectification and manipulation, *Solar Storms* remains hopeful in the future and expresses the possibility of transgressing imposed restrictions and boundaries. In fact, when Angela manages to reintegrate her heritage – with all its historical traumas – within her own story, her life comes full circle at the same time her community gets a legal victory: “one fracture was healed, one crack mended, one piece back in place. Yes, the pieces were infinite and worn as broken pots, and our human pain was deep, but we’d thrown an anchor into the future and followed the rope to the end of it” (SS 344). Ultimately, Angela embraces both her (people’s) historical realities and earth-bound spirituality – her wholeness is epitomized in her perception of her individuation as inherently communal and crisscrossing with all creation around her. Her maturity notably coincides with an act of *recovery*: she is healed from chronic feelings of shame and also re-appropriates her connection to her ancestral land.

CHAPTER 3

***Beloved*: “unspeakable thoughts, unspoken”**

“For people who have been culturally parochial for a long time, the novel is the transition. The novel has to provide the richness of the past as well as suggestions of what the use of it is” – Toni Morrison.

“[W]hen I was writing *Beloved*, part of the architecture was the act of forgetting” – Toni Morrison.

It might seem odd, at first glance, that a text like *Beloved*, which arises from a discernible moral imperative to recover the experience of slavery and its far-reaching impact upon African Americans, would focus on the missing details of such a traumatic history rather than exposing the sordid traces of such an institution/era. However, Toni Morrison’s attempt to retrieve the painful history of subjugation and slavery foregrounds the silences and omissions that resonate within the historical representations of this African American experience. This allows her not only to be able to fictionalize the history of slavery but also to model a new sensibility toward the emotions and turmoil of black ‘selves’ – a historical consciousness.

While the novel revolves about the repercussions of a history of ill-treatment and how they shape the ‘present’ conditions of newly-freed individuals and their communities, it also destabilizes the facile construal of such narratives as exhaustive or totalizing. Instead, it is vitally concerned with the traumatic aporia inherent within such accounts. Hence, it acts as an intercession of African American perspective within a

hegemonic historiographical tradition. Indeed, Morrison underscores the importance of Beloved not only as an investigation of the roots of slavery qua institution but also of “the process by which we construct and deconstruct reality in order to be able to function within it,” noting that she is “trying to explore how a people...absorb and reject information of a very personal level about something that is *indigestible* and *unabsorbable*, completely. Something that has no precedent in the world, in terms of length of time and the nature and specificity of its devastation” (qtd. in Washington 235, emphasis added). Thus, her text attempts to meet one distinguishing feature of the traumatic experience itself, as a recurrent literality that necessitates integration for testimonial purposes even as it defies our comprehension and ability to reshape it into narrative (Caruth, *Explorations* 153).

As it tries to re-write the past, the text itself mimics this unfathomable and aporetic quality that is thematically at its core: via the disembodied narrative voice, several stories about the devastating events generated by the Peculiar Institution collude – each depicting the inner reactions of the character to slavery’s effects and after-effects. While the diverse emotional adjustments of the characters are related by the narrator, this overarching voice retreats suddenly at times – in parallel with the fragmented and interwoven time sequences – giving the readers a heightened sense of the immediacy of the events, and plunging them in the psychological universe of the characters. In the telling of the victims’ entangled yet repressed accounts, the text reveals the blanks and fragments that permeate the attempt to retrieve them in their totality. The narrator’s swift withdrawal also creates a fractured narrative style in which the ‘fading’ of the narrating voice recalls that of our knowledge about slavery – thereby highlighting one’s limited

insight into the traumatic experience, a moment that is specifically characterized by absence and excess at once, an experience that does not totally coincide with its telling.

The narrative method also permits to compensate for the lack of attention – in the official, historical coverage of Margaret Garner’s story, which is the real incident that Morrison imaginatively invests to create her text – to the inner motives and struggles of slaves. Moreover, as the narrative progresses in a multidirectional fashion – undercutting accounts by other ones and altering the timeline so as to heighten the awareness of the intrusion of traumatic memories upon the now of the newly-freed individual – it reiterates the thematic representation of a plethora of subaltern voices vying for a space in which the traumas they tell can be *heard*.

The text displays an oral quality: not only does it interweave songs and stories together, but it also demands a *reading* that mimics a call-and-response situation – i.e. an *interaction* in which the communicated message is variously affected by repetition, omission, questioning, validating, etc. Thus, *Beloved* exemplifies what Henry Louis Gates labels a “speakerly text,” one “whose rhetorical strategy is designed to represent an oral literary tradition” (181). Indeed, the text asserts the fact that individual and communal traumatic histories are intertwined. Moreover, it places the readers at the heart of the meaning-making process via an inclusive gesture that draws them into the unfolding story, while avoiding the normalization of the harrowing tale(s) and preventing the reader from distancing themselves from the events narrated.

Because the shifting narrative does not operate according to a linear trajectory, either time- or space-wise, it does not lend itself easily to synopsis. The text in fact starts by informing the reader about the ghost that haunts the house of Sethe, a runaway slave

who chose to slit the throat of her infant daughter, Beloved, rather than lose her to the slave owner who found her again after her escape. The ghost's violent, destructive deeds are tolerated by Sethe, who otherwise tries to keep her memories of the past at bay. Sethe's attempts are not successful, not only because her reminiscences invade her now against her will, but also because she is localized at her current address by Paul D, a man whom she knew from Sweet Home, the agricultural estate from which she escaped.

Paul D, who like Sethe is also haunted by his painful past, manages to chase the baby ghost from the home but only to see it come back incarnate, in the shape of a girl, Beloved. It is this girl's presence that ultimately wreaks havoc on Sethe, Paul D, and Denver (Sethe's younger daughter). The novel keeps switching points of view and moving between past and present but culminates in a scene of hope, when several women, all Sethe's neighbours, join their efforts to chase the mysterious girl from the house, saving Sethe from being totally consumed by her relation with Beloved. The text, which is replete with a cacophony of other characters and the critical display of the gruesome details of their abuse, ends on an ambiguous note of recovery even as it self-referentially points out that it is "not a story to pass on" (*Beloved* 274).

What is particularly interesting about *Beloved* is that it offers an opportunity to analyze the textual process of imaginative remembering, which resurrects the suppressed signifiers of trauma from oblivion. In fact, it allows a composite ghost of traumatic history to inhabit the very spaces from which it is 'banished' – for instance, Sethe's memory as behaving, in the beginning of her story, in the same way that the literary canon – particularly, genre boundaries of slave narratives as reflections of trends of suppression in American history – does. It returns to a collective traumatic burden that

demands witnessing. It also foregrounds the Caruthian “enigma of survival,” which is inherent in the aftermath of traumatic experiences, while insisting on the impossibility of numbing oneself to the voices of the remnants displayed (*UE* 58). By blurring boundaries, the temporal as well as the subjective, the text imposes a retrospective gaze towards the past by impinging it, as an ever-returning moment, onto the present of both narration and reading.

1. The Other Slave Narrative

As a text, *Beloved* reflects the im/possibility of offering access to the erased or silenced past, in that it attempts to offer a voice to the “sixty million and more” victims of the institution of slavery, referred to in the epigraph, and whose stories are yet to be heard. By foregrounding its interest in the missing historical subject (vanished victims, untold stories, incomplete accounts), the text distinguishes itself from the ‘normative’ slave narratives, which are “testimonials to the transplantation, brutalization, and enslavement of black people by those who endured, survived, and...[which] are predicated on an individual narrator’s capacity to represent, stand for, and stand *in* for those who have been silenced, but whose stories are interwoven with the narrative of others” (Brodzki 69). By focalizing on the denied past, and the secrecy or silencing currents at work within the traditional slave narrative, Morrison’s text reflects a disavowal of these texts as totalizing records that essentially subsume the African Americans’ entire experience of slavery while ideologically situating themselves *outside* the tendentious generic template to which traditional slave narratives conformed. The text’s recuperative urgency¹⁷¹, therefore, is not only an articulation of an alternative historical reality but also a

commentary upon the establishment's patronizing, uniform codifications of early attempts at such a subaltern writing of history.

Morrison's text thus questions the manipulations that surround the narrative accounts to which the experience of slavery has been confined, sealed, and – ultimately – concealed. Indeed, the text is preoccupied by the fact that, as Morrison herself remarks, slave narratives

had to be authenticated by white patrons, that they couldn't say everything they wanted to say because they couldn't alienate their audience; they had to be quiet about certain things. They were going to be as good as they could be under the circumstances and as revelatory, but they never say how terrible it was. They would just say, "Well you know, it was really awful, but let' abolish slavery so life can go on." Their narratives had to be very understated...I wanted it [slavery] to be truly felt. I wanted to translate the historical into the personal...to who the reader how slavery felt like rather than how it looked (qtd. in Schappel 75-76).

Accordingly, the content and style of such texts become not simply a testimonial to the hardships of Black slaves but also one to the directive efforts imposed upon their storytelling, a tactic that furthers the status quo in racial relations. According to Kathleen Brogan, it is these and other "larger omissions, in the interests of focusing scrupulously on verifiable facts" that preoccupy Morrison's project. By opposition to this manipulative will, Morrison's text, radically "seeks knowledge of American slavery that escapes documentary evidence" (62). Going beyond the unspeakable, it attempts to imaginatively resurrect those details that were not articulated, as the "authors elided the most repulsive details of their experience at least partly in deference to popular taste and literary convention" (63). Morrison thus returns to the narratives of her ancestors to effect a revision thereof, and to imaginatively unleash their stifled messages¹⁷².

Morrison's project of reading between the lines is meant to reflect the fact that these accounts ought not to hide the humanity behind them, nor should they be ignored or simply read as cases against an institution. Rather, the full humanity of the victims is to be acknowledged, not dismissed – if one is not to repeat the violations of racism itself. Equally central to this re-vision, for Morrison, is showing that the autobiographical slave narratives were usually *misread* or “read for the eloquence of their message as well as their experience of redemption, but...frequently scorned as ‘biased,’ ‘inflammatory,’ and ‘improbable’” (*Site* 106). Received as historical testimonials, these narratives had ironically to be wrought so as to avoid offending the readers. Morrison notes that the manumitted slaves' attempt to vocalize their concerns, and to convince the reader of the immorality of slavery, had to be circumlocutory, attenuated so as to refrain from containing what would be deemed an excessive emotional load that the reader would reject – which certainly meant that disclosing details of sexual abuse was out of the question. Thus, the effort to fill in the gap in the representation of slaves' point of views, to spontaneously reveal their stories, was somewhat short-circuited by the need to appear objective, non-partisan, and to appeal to the reader's “nobility of heart and his high-mindedness...his finer nature” (*Site* 107).

Drawing a line that limits the expression of the former slaves' experience effectively participates in perpetuating the reader's “patronizing sympathy” (107). Providing truncated accounts to fill in the aporia of a truncated historical narrative of slavery is the signature of the dominant discourse's indictment more than it is a reflection of its openness to rethinking; it pays more attention to the reader's sensitivity than to the victim's articulatory urgency¹⁷³. Furthermore, this gesture is detrimental to the reception

of the trauma narrative itself, which – as noted by Judith Herman – is already rather unfavorable to the victim, because

when the traumatic events are of human design, those who bear witness are caught in the conflict between victim and perpetrator. It is morally impossible to remain neutral in this conflict. The bystander is forced to take sides. It is very tempting to take the side of the perpetrator. All the perpetrator asks is that the bystander do nothing. He appeals to the universal desire to see, hear, and speak no evil. The victim, on the contrary, asks the bystander to share the burden of the pain. The victim demands action, engagement, and remembering (7-8).

Morrison's refusal to produce another curtailed account of the horrors of slavery, deplete of excess or of the victims' feelings, can be understood as a refusal to further a certain blindness¹⁷⁴ to the facts of slavery and the reticence to accept the agency of the ex-slave as someone who can *speak*, who can relate his or her story¹⁷⁵. Hence, her text by no means intends to safeguard the reader from any involvement with the narrative, declining to offer the detached possibility of facile or superficial sympathy with this historical, and therefore seen as remote, trauma. *Beloved* thus deconstructs the imposition of stylistic form and objective upon the 'traditional' slave narratives, by its audience as well as its editors, which completely relegates the emotional component of the already marginal narrative to the margin thereof, on the ground that it might re/present some indecorousness. This account does not feel obliged to "shap[e] the experience to make it palatable to those who were in a position to alleviate it," an imposition under the burden of which early African American authors became "silent about many things, and they *'forgot'* many other things" (*Site* 110, emphasis added).

It is against the silence persisting within the utterances of the African Americans who wrote about the ordeal that is slavery that Morrison places her representational project. In effect, her text reflects the desire for subjectivity and identity that is at work

within the psyche of her characters, as they struggle to assimilate their contained hi/stories. The text seems to stress the need to articulate, rather than to repress, such an element of the self if one is to move on; otherwise, the horrid past may forcefully erupt into the present and make the individual fall apart. Moreover, Morrison defends the inclusion of the details otherwise eschewed in “standard” slave narratives, the accounts effectively molded into master narratives¹⁷⁶ that paradoxically restricted the ex-slaves’ own discourse on slavery – such as reflections of the characters’ “interior life” and the disclosure of the traumas that they undergo:

For me – a writer in the last quarter of the twentieth century, not much more than a hundred years after Emancipation, a writer who is black and a woman – the exercise is very different. My job becomes how to rip that veil drawn over “proceedings too terrible to relate”. The exercise is also critical for any person who is black, or who belongs to any marginalized category, for, historically, we were seldom invited to participate in the discourse even when we were its topic. Moving that veil aside requires, therefore, certain things. First of all, I must trust my own recollections. I must also depend on the recollections of others. Thus memory weighs heavily in what I write, in how I begin and in what I find to be significant... [The] “memories within” are the subsoil of my work. But memories and recollections won’t give me total access to the unwritten interior life of these people. Only the act of the imagination can help me (*Site* 110-111).

In an act of reclaiming one’s agency, it is central to re-possess one’s own memories and visual imagery, however ugly they may be, in order to incorporate them within a coherent account. Otherwise, the limits that weigh on the narrative and silence all what may be suspected as indecorum or *impropriety* effectively imprison the discourse of the newly emancipated, thus perpetuating the factuality of the ex-slave writer being still a *property* of the system of abuse that they thought they escaped. In effect, Morrison laments the fact that the narratives were to submit to such a reductive paradigm:

The narratives are instructive, moral and obviously representative. Some of them are patterned after the sentimental novel that was in vogue at the time. But whatever the level of eloquence or the form, popular taste discouraged the writers from dwelling too long or too carefully on the more sordid details of their experience (*Site* 109).

Slavery, the text shows in a multifaceted fashion, has the effect of dismembering, literally as well as figuratively, the whole being of the individual¹⁷⁷. It is this very hell, unmitigated, that Morrison presents or rather confronts the reader with, from the onset of the tale of Sethe's struggle with a past that refuses to be silenced. From the first passage in the novel, one is plunged into the "spiteful" universe that Sethe's house has become due to her baby's ghost rage at being denied (*Beloved* 3). This is a deliberate move on Morrison's part, as she reverses the tendency to comfort the reader into sympathy or empathy. On the contrary, her text is intended to be lacking and bewildering and to offer the reader no solace or unequivocal refuge to fall back on, but rather to plunge the reader into the hardly sustainable emotional unrest that fills the characters he or she reads about.

As Morrison herself lengthily explains,

[w]hatever the risk of confronting the reader with what must be immediately incomprehensible in that simple, declarative, authoritative sentence, the risk of unsettling him or her, I determined to take it. Because the *in-medias-res* opening that I am so committed to is here excessively demanding. It is abrupt, and should appear so. No native informant here. The reader is snatched, yanked, thrown into an environment completely foreign, and I want it as the first stroke of the shared experience that might be possible between the reader and the novel's population. Snatched just as the slaves were from one place to another, from any place to another, without preparation and without defense...And the house into which this snatching - this kidnapping - propels one, changes from spiteful to loud to quiet, like the sounds in the body of the [Transatlantic Passage] ship itself may have changed (*Unspeakable* 160-161).

Destabilization is not only the reader's predicament in *Beloved*. In fact, Morrison's text depicts the protagonist, Sethe, as a divided subject herself, oscillating between the need to reveal and a silence that ultimately prevents her from a fuller experience of freedom. In effect, "she worked hard to remember as close to nothing as was safe," not realizing that her attempts to avoid remembering participate in her inadequate present and lack of (self-)knowledge (*Beloved* 6). What one discovers, along with Sethe, toward the end of the text, is that her unsuccessful struggle with the memories she tries to repress is precisely the impediment that keeps her locked in a truncated present.

Even after eight years into freedom, Sethe's traumatic memories of past bondage and its attendant abuses keep on surging unexpectedly, pulling her focus away from her present condition. Sethe is disappointed and shamed that her "devious brain" cannot ignore the memories of her days as a slave:

Then something. The splash of water, the sight of her [Sethe's] 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, rolling out before her eyes, and although there was not a leaf on that farm that did not make her want to scream, it rolled itself out before her in shameless beauty. It never looked as terrible as it was and it made her wonder if hell was a pretty place too. Fire and brimstone all right, but hidden in lacy groves. Boys hanging from the most beautiful sycamores in the world. It shamed her--remembering the wonderful soughing trees rather than the boys. Try as she might to make it otherwise, the sycamores beat out the children every time and she could not forgive her memory for that (*Beloved* 6).

There is a need to reintegrate the negative traumatic moments that threaten to break down the subject's identity within a re-examined hi/story. Being free, the text seems to hint, is not a straightforward maneuver that smoothly follows one's emancipation: "Freeing

yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another” (95). While the recollection of trauma can be transformed into a source of psychological sustenance – because it does contain the elucidation of one’s past that ultimately reconnects one with their relatives, their kin, and their families – it remains replete with horrific and loathsome events that cannot be easily addressed.

Nonetheless, the traumatic events harbored by memory have to be confronted; otherwise one remains enslaved, in thrall to their disruptive effect upon the present. The twofold materialization of the ghost in *Beloved* attests precisely to the impossibility of simply ignoring the traumas of the past. The ghost is a possessive yet not fully knowable figure that strains the idea of a simple transition or continuation towards a stable, or healthy, future. When past trauma is denied its due presence, the haunting ghost, which yearns to acquire recognizable selfhood, unleashes an ambiguous message of “so much rage,” amalgamated with “a kind of weeping [that] clung to the air,” that subverts the possibility of closure (5, 10). The ghost participates in a (narrative) version of events that emphasizes the fragmentation and incompleteness of the authorized accounts of traumatic history: the ghost erupts into these narratives to anti/essentially claim that “Nobody *knows* what happened,” not entirely (224, emphasis added). For Morrison, confronting the simultaneous excesses of the details emanating from a traumatic past, as well as their lack of narrative cohesion or direction, can only be accommodated via an admission of the porous nature of the historical record of slavery – an admission that allows, or rather invites, the address of a haunting ghost¹⁷⁸.

2. Beloved as a Hauntological Narrative

The ghost, in *Beloved*, is a form of resistance towards a discursive restraint, imposed by the dominant Eurocentric denial of the victims' humanity by shifting the focus onto the 'abstract' institution, i.e., slavery. It also emanates from a performative act that brings back the dead so as to keep them ambiguously suspended over, as well as within, the narrative. Animate yet immutable, absent yet present, departed yet subject to return, the ghost establishes a textual 'beyond' that effectively undoes the chronological distinctness of past and present, collapsing the former into the latter in an unpredictable fashion and formulating address in what Morrison calls a "traumatized language" (Darling 247). This fact precisely makes the novel a case of a Derridean *hauntological* narrative, one that intensifies the act of ghostly return as primal – simultaneously anterior to, and disruptive of, 'stable' ontology. In *Spectres of Marx*, Jacques Derrida offers a critique of presence, which occludes the possibility of social justice. He suggests that one needs to implode the notion of *being* to allow for a *being-with* ghosts and interacting with them¹⁷⁹.

For Derrida, hauntology is a ghost-inhabited ontology that accentuates the impossibility of linear progression through time, or of the clear-cut separation of life and death, presence and absence. It is a logic that supersedes its near-homonym and that points to the insufficiencies at the heart of the belief in the stable or self-sustaining nature of the present, or in the ideology of pure presence that nostalgically longs for itself, detached from any past or memory, but also from any responsibility to the Other. Hence, hauntology is a reaffirmation of deconstruction's project of *différance*, which opposes the spectral trace's infinite intrusion, a perpetual return which is "not docile to time," to an ontology of essentialist sameness and synchrony. Otherwise put, the specter reveals the

dislocation of identity of the living present to itself, and in thus doing re-instates the logic of the (absent) Other at the heart of the violence of assimilation as homogeneity¹⁸⁰.

Derrida writes that “[t]o haunt does not mean to be present, and it is necessary to introduce haunting into the very construction of a concept. Of every concept, beginning with the concepts of being and time. That is what we would be calling here a hauntology” (*Specters* 202). He argues that the ghost is indeed the initiatory force of history, upsetting its teleological linearity, its “timeliness,” because it is always already a reiteration of presence. Derrida notes that “a spectre is always a *re-venant*. One cannot control its comings and goings because it *begins by coming back*” (11, 144). It is this return of the ghost that initiates *Beloved* as a narrative, for as soon as one is plunged into the universe of ‘124 Bluestone,’ the ghost is already *there* and both Sethe and Denver are coping with its presence and deeds: “Sethe and the girl Denver did what they could, and what the house permitted, for *her*. Together they waged a perfunctory battle against the outrageous behavior of that place; against turned-over slop jars, smacks on the behind, and gusts of sour air. For *they understood the source of the outrage as well as they knew the source of light*” (*Beloved* 4, emphasis added). The ghost is already beyond death, already returned.

Beloved is also the spectral representation of the repressed, the history standing beyond, outside, or on the margins of white history. The spectre, as defined by Derrida, is essentially an ambiguous, ubiquitous figure that highlights the “non-contemporaneity with itself of the living present” (xviii). The specter becomes the incarnation of time as an unhinged or timeless chronological stasis that generates superimposed, interwoven moments of present present and present past. Thus, when she mentions ‘rememory,’ the psyche’s unrelenting retrospective reworking of traumatic memories and unresolved

material, which, via its iterative prefix, denotes a compulsive preoccupation with a primal scene that cannot be reached integrally, Sethe states the difficulty of envisioning time at all:

I was talking about time. It's so hard for me to believe in it. 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 (*Beloved* 35-36).

Clearly, the notion of spectrality, in *Beloved*, operates in several ways to illustrate its Derridean characterization as an entity that dismantles the present's self-sufficiency. Moreover, the ghost inhabits the textual space as an affirmation, or reflection, of the way it insistently haunts a history of slavery that does not become past, at least not for its victims. As such, it bespeaks the excesses of past memories that Sethe cannot control in her "rebellious brain," which "was not interested in the future [but] loaded with the past and hungry for more" (*Beloved* 70). Moreover, the presence of the specter permits the condensation of several contradictory meanings: it acts as a signifier that signifies its own emptiness, "a sign without referent for those to whom her return is addressed" (Gordon 178). *Beloved*'s haunting presence stands for a void that permeates the imperial historical accounts of slavery, monolithic and suspiciously omissive. This inherent contradiction is emphasized by Derrida, as he notes that

the specter is a paradoxical incorporation, the becoming-body, a certain phenomenal and carnal form of the spirit. It becomes, rather, some "thing" that remains difficult to name: neither soul nor body, and both one and the other...*It is* something that one does not know, precisely, and one does not

know if precisely it *is*, if it exists, if it responds to a name and corresponds to an essence. One does not know: not out of ignorance, but because this non-object, this non-present present, this being-there of an absent or departed one no longer belongs to knowledge. At least no longer to that which one thinks one knows by the name of knowledge. One does not know if it is living or if it is dead. Here is – or rather there is, over there, an unnameable or almost unnameable thing...this thing that looks at us, that concerns us [ça nous regarde], comes to defy semantics as much as ontology, psychoanalysis as much as philosophy (*Spectres* 5).

The ghost is an overdetermined yet referentially vague signifier which, while inviting the readers to the sphere of traumatic memories, denies them any perfunctory reading position that would safely distance them from an understanding of the plight depicted. It operates as an index that simultaneously stands for Sethe's dead daughter and the faces of the faceless victims, the many who are otherwise "disremembered and unaccounted for" (*Beloved* 274). Its insistent disjuncture of temporality – which Derrida brilliantly qualifies as reflecting a "contretemps," or time that is "disadjusted," "unhinged," "unjust," and "out of joint" – also provides a narrative¹⁸¹ that opposes any dismissive historical approach to, or totalitarian closure of, slavery as an experience of an Other that is reductively considered a settled past (*Spectres* 96).

For Derrida, the ghost signals a different type of dwelling that is characterised by a mercurial, unpredictable movement across chronological layers and physical loci. Thus, the ghost is not locatable at "124," Morrison's vague mention of address, nor does it *reside* there; rather, it *inhabits* it, without being confined to it since, as Baby Suggs mentions¹⁸², there is "[n]ot a house in the country ain't packed to its rafters with some dead Negro's grief. We lucky this ghost is a baby" (3). The ghost is residual but not rigidly fixed or stagnant. It defies containment and demands to be seen. It is a remnant,

an infinite trace that transgresses boundaries of place and time alike. Like the history to which it points, it cannot be fixed – i.e., it can neither be localized nor repaired.

In addition, the ghost operates as a challenge to a grand narrative that attempts to suppress it, to un-see it, to silence it. It reveals the tensions between dominant history, or history as told and a nascent history, not unlike Sethe's baby, that wills itself to be told, to find life (beyond its own) still. The ghost is a defiant figure haunting an otherwise monolithic hi/story that narcissistically inhibits its alternative, and thus re/calls it, re-introduces it, within its own structural layout. Indeed, Derrida believes that the resounding agreement to keep the dead buried, in their place, is highly questionable and potentially dangerous. However, in his undoing of the ontological schemata, Derrida also points that this willed loud silence is precisely what triggers the need to bring about a different conjuring that articulates with the dead. In fact he states that

[s]ince such a conjuration today insists, in such a deafening consensus, that what is, it says, indeed dead, remain dead indeed, it arouses a suspicion. It awakens us where it would like to put us to sleep. Vigilance, therefore: the cadaver is perhaps not as dead, as simply dead as the conjuration tries to delude us into believing. The one who has disappeared appears still to be there, and his apparition is not nothing. It does not do nothing (*Spectres* 120).

While deconstructing the discursive selectiveness of a history of denial, Morrison's ghost functions as a call for a retrospective examination of historiography's gaps and repressions, a narrative that always hyphenates¹⁸³ the 'Americanness' of blacks, continually marginalizing them as Other-American (e.g. Afro-American, African-American, etc.). Indeed, Morrison has noted, in her text *Playing in the Dark*, that Americanization works through the *burial* of its "racial ingredients," which define the essence of being American by elimination, of the racial other so that "American means

white, and Africanist people struggle to make the term applicable to themselves with ethnicity and hyphen after hyphen after hyphen” (47). Thus, Morrison explains, the imposed silence of literary discourse in the field of race is in itself a reflection of its being *preoccupied* by racial politics. If, according to dominant ideology, ‘American’ (as human) equals ‘white,’ then the racial Other marks the outside of that norm but simultaneously serves to enforce it, according to the logic by which the phantasmatic other is always already ‘inside’ the normative subject. “America is nation of immigrants,” she states, “and one of the greatest needs of immigrants is to feel at home. How do you do that? One way is to hate Blacks. That makes you White. American” (Hostetler 202). Morrison’s approach reveals the failure of the dominant discursive utterance to prevent its Other – the “dark and abiding presence...both a visible and invisible mediating force” that informs, whether acknowledged or not, American literary texts – from surfacing (47). Her project of exhuming this Other and returning it to speech, of giving the revenant a textual space of expression, should be viewed within this political frame.

Morrison has also commented upon the fact that the “American dream is innocence and clean slates and the future,” an unstopping chronicle of immaculate progress that precludes any hindsight, especially when it would expose traumatic scenes (qtd. in Gordon 184). The literary expression of this willed cultural myopia, the wish to uphold a heaven-like vision¹⁸⁴ of America, is also a repression of the ‘abjectness’ and ‘guilt’ that saturate the traumatic past¹⁸⁵. In this respect, *Beloved*, as a ghost, permits the implosion of the self-centered, self-enclosed narrative of American history – uncovering it as a myth of immutable progress that pretends not to show any gaps or traumatic chinks and monopolizes the right to articulation. The “conjunction or conspiracy,” which is

secretively “meant to conjure away,” to banish any ghost of alterity in order to maintain domination paradoxically leads, as Derrida notes, to an accentuated awareness thereof (*Spectres* 120).

The ghost’s effect is, as Derrida remarks, to reveal, magnified, the excesses of the countering investment in stable concepts and illusory essences that aim at exorcizing the ghost – an investment in, or as, an ontological opposition¹⁸⁶ that tries to distance itself from the abject in its cultural margins (202). As a deconstructive tool, the ghost thus becomes Morrison’s outsider figure: one that refuses to belong to a pre-established, estranging, canonical order of knowledge while it violently re-enters it. Morrison thus *informs* the American historical and literary narratives with their (spectral) rejects, their unacknowledged fears and denials, because she considers that “the contemplation of this black presence...should not be permitted to *hover at the margins* of the literary imagination” (*Playing in the Dark* 5).

Just as much as the metaphysics of presence permeate ontology and call for Derrida’s expansion via a hauntology that enunciates a ‘*being-with spectres*,’ a larger discourse that leaves room for the departed, the effect of such a logic, at work in the realm of the literary, demands the intervention from Morrison, by proxy of those that the discourse, in its loud silence, is *about*, i.e., the victims of slavery. In other words, the concept of a literature of the marginal responds to and accommodates the duality of the spectre – an almost nameless, always repeating (a *revenant* being one who comes back *ad infinitum*), multivocal, floating, and unbound figure that delivers lessons about the past but also re-calls, or *re-turns*, the very victims of oppression (discursive and otherwise) who demand a committed transgression of hegemony to alterity. It is in this way that the

spectre, according to Derrida, creates the drive for “a *politics* of memory, of inheritance, and of generations” (xviii).

The ghost also opens a space for the marginalized to come into play; its non/presence fuses the textual recovery of the inner lives of the characters with the allusion at the gaps within American history as a historiography whose texts act as the burial grounds, the silent tombs, of the African Americans’ experience of slavery as trauma. So, the ghost is appended to the “real” world but also to the textual canon. This expansion aims at destabilizing the narcissistic belief in a normative ‘American’ novelistic template which requires that the Other’s perspective – i.e., the slave narrative – be distilled to conform to the transcendental ideal, effectively draining it from any subversive edge. Thus, the ghost offers a supplement which is also a remnant, an additional room to voice the attending absence of the old chronicles of bondage, an unearthing of the past that is present within the world of the traumatized characters – it is a haunting burden, a disavowal of homogenizing views, and a supplement that cannot be erased.

Beloved, as a spectre, becomes an incessant questioning of Western foundationalism, of ontology-as-conjuration (*Spectres* 202). It fictionalizes a history of slavery at the same time as it historicizes slavery’s fictions, destabilizing their closures and allowing the spectre to *possess* the narrative – to own it as well as to haunt it. In a literary tradition that does not admit the way in which race is “a metaphor...so necessary to the construction of Americanness,” Morrison opens a fissure through which the dead can be re-introduced (*Playing in the Dark* 47). Indeed, when Paul D asks Beloved about what brought her, and what she was looking for when she came “here,” she replies: “This

place. I was looking for *this place I could be in*" (*Beloved* 65, emphasis added). This seems to concur with the Derridean view of ethics as an allocation of (narrative or textual) space to a ghost and as an exchange with it, which, in *Beloved*, is reinterpreted as to entail living with the ghost, and listening to its address, a metonymical condensation of the hi/stories of millions of slavery victims:

If I am getting ready to speak of ghosts, which is to say about certain *others* who are not present, nor presently living, either to us, in us, or outside of us, it is in the name of *justice*. Of justice where it is not yet, not *yet there*, where it is no longer, let us understand where it is no longer *present*, and where it will never be, no more than a law, reducible to laws or rights. It is necessary to speak *of the ghost*, indeed *to the ghost*, and *with it*, from the moment that no ethics, no politics, whether revolutionary or not, seems possible and thinkable and just that does not recognize in principle the respect for others who are no longer or for those who are not yet *there* (*Spectres*, xviii).

Thus, Morrison's text concatenates the need to bear witness to the traumas of four centuries of slavery with a hauntological debunking of the lies and evasions that have passed for 'presence' at the heart of American history of slavery, by summoning the ghost as its (missing) center. The ghosts of *Beloved*, the text, and Beloved, the child, roam through locations and temporalities so as to connect the "living present" to its Other, its death, its haunting, and to the counterpart that paradoxically – but also exclusively – can instruct it about the value of life, in a *just* way. What it offers, according to Derrida, is the ultimate "irreversible and asymmetrical address," a "magisterial locution" that epitomizes the locus of "a heterodidactics between life and death" (*Spectres* xvi-xvii, emphasis added). Otherwise put, the ethical injunction that Derrida perceives as the address of the ghost, both emanating from death and Otherness, teaches one about the *just* value of life. In effect, as Morrison herself notes, the "fully

realized presence of the haunting is both a major incumbent of the narrative and sleight of hand. One of its purposes is to keep the reader preoccupied with the nature of the incredible spirit world while being supplied a controlled diet of the incredible political world” (*Unspeakable* 161).

To insist on the pre/occupation of the reader – that a certain knowledge is already there that needs only surface, unrepressed, and whose validity has to be acknowledged – is one of the paradoxical ways by which the ghost operates in Morrison’s text. As *Beloved* resurrects a story that nobody wants to remember, it functions as a transgressive text which depicts the vicissitudes of traumatic anamnesis. The ghost, as the incarnation of the trace of past atrocities, is also laden with the possibility of writing against the grain of English itself, liberating Morrison from the hold of conformism and silencing capacity that this medium exerts. Undermining the linguistic code permits Morrison to question the validity of its constructs and, by extension, to destabilize historiography as a fiction of history that offers no room, no solace, for the victims of slavery. Morrison has expressed the awareness of her position, as an African American woman writer, articulating concerns from within “a *language* which, in the United States, is *wholly coded* and highly racialized” (*Bench* 49, emphasis added).

How does the ghost operate in, and affect, language? How can a language that is subservient to the dominant culture’s purposes of covering up the traumatic past be made to reflect those very silences and to depict the unspeakability of the sufferings of African American slaves? How does the text parallel the shattering effects of trauma or manage, to use Laurie Vickroy’s formulation, to “incorporate the rhythms, processes, and

uncertainties of trauma within the consciousness and structures” thereof (xiv)? One way that the text attempts to speak from the gaps is by resurrecting the dead and by ascribing a multiplicity of voices to the ghost, a ghost whose speech articulates (the tale of) trauma. *Beloved*, thus, is a polyphonic symbol that intensifies undecidability while animating the narrative multi-perspectivism. What else but an incongruous traumatic address is the character who incarnates Sethe’s, but also “sixty million and more” people’s, traumas supposed to articulate? In the following subsection, I will expose the ways in which Morrison’s postmodern text allows her to inscribe the effects of trauma precisely within language itself.

In *Beloved*, Morrison introduces – by using several techniques and tropes of symbolization which heighten the reader’s perceptual puzzlement and immersion within the fluctuating, interlocked perspectives of the characters – a verbalization, operating via the de/composing dead, of that which remains unformulated as history. Effectively, this translates into an exercise in “cryptomimetic writing,” to use Jodey Castricano’s label – that is writing as a performative that resurrects and is “predicated upon encryption: the play of revelation and concealment lodged within parts of individual words” (6). In her analysis of Derrida’s own texts, Castricano identifies them as epitomizing what she calls the “poetics of the crypt,” in which the crypt is not simply a metaphor for the supplemental elements at play in the writing process but is indeed the writing practice itself. This is a writing that does not openly display its orientation but functions in secrecy, inscribes its in/scrutability in nonlinearity, and can be “ceaselessly reconstituted” through infinite re-vision (29). In other words, Derrida’s own texts exemplify a “textual

production that is predicated upon haunting, mourning, and the return of the so-called living dead” (32).

Return, in Morrison’s text – that is, the intrusion within the narrative of that which becomes, in many aspects, its driving mechanism (i.e., the ghost) – is also imbued with connotation of excavation, of a permeable border between death and life, silence and articulation. Morrison dubs her project “a kind of literary archaeology,” which is essentially a process of unearthing the dead in order to present/ify their stories (*Site* 112). In an act of resuscitating the (almost) nameless, dis/remembered victims, Morrison also issues textuality from the grave, making *Beloved* the one word that *matters* (Raynaud 51). She disturbs the separation between the world of the dead and the present in much the same fashion which rememory, the intrusive imagery of trauma, surges in Sethe’s insatiable mind:

She shook her head from side to side, resigned to her rebellious brain. Why was there nothing it refused? No misery, no regret, no hateful *picture* too rotten to accept? Like a greedy child it snatched up everything. Just once, could it say, No thank you? I just ate and can't hold another bite? I am full God damn it of two boys with mossy teeth, one sucking on my breast the other holding me down, their book-reading teacher watching and writing it up. I am still full of that, God damn it, I can't *go back* and add more. Add my husband to it, watching, above me in the loft--hiding close by--the one place he thought no one would look for him, looking down on what I couldn't look at all (*Beloved* 54, emphases added).

In fact, *Beloved* enters the world and the text as a body of a revenant after being literally submerged, smiling as she “walked out of water,” reborn (*Beloved* 50). *Beloved* later symbolically indicates that she, the ghost that makes the text be and that the text makes to be again, does not find it easy to turn the picture into an address¹⁸⁷. Her interrogative, which is grammatically unachieved, because of the invisible question mark, reverberates

through the text: “how can I say things that are pictures” (210). The ghost voices the textual *preoccupation* – a haunting that precedes the enunciation of its identity as haunting – with the detours¹⁸⁸ that it has to take to reflect the traumatic fragmentation of the victim(s). The very notion of the dead’s return is indicative of an open grave which dis/lodges the writing process so as to make possible an infinite narrative reiteration of the ghost’s address. As Castricano asserts, this return itself is a sign that points to a preceding dis/location, an untenable position of otherness that requires a *proper address* as a response to “a certain *undeliverability*” (103, emphasis added).

How does the ghost summon the reader towards traumatic memory in the very language that hinders its articulation? If the text is to operate outside the canonical mould, it must establish a network, or layers, of signification that enforce the uncertainties of silence and the aporetic displacements of both chronology and perspective that it undertakes. Indeed, this is one of the main elements characterizing language in *Beloved*, and especially the loosely concatenated, unfinished utterances of Beloved herself, ghostly words defying comprehension even as they call for it:

What he [Stamp Paid] heard, as he moved toward the porch, he didn’t understand. Out on Bluestone Road he thought he heard a conflagration of hasty voices—loud, urgent, all speaking at once so he could not make out what they were talking about or to whom. *The speech wasn’t nonsensical, exactly, nor was it tongues. But something was wrong with the order of the words and he couldn’t describe or cipher it to save his life.* All he could make out was the word mine. The rest *stayed outside of his mind’s reach* (*Beloved* 172, emphasis added).

It is a language replete with fissures that invites the reader not only to be aware of the crypt, but to participate in shaping its signification. The desire to be remembered, at the core of the dynamics of return, comes with a spectral injunction to attend to the text’s

linguistic disintegration. As Castricano notes, ghostwriting maneuvers through imploded language that hints at death and the disintegration of a corpse (32). Morrison builds upon this fact to make the traumatic voice from the wound emerge from within the grave, so that, as the constituents of language are scattered textually, the reader acknowledges not only the imperative to live with the revenant but also to be respons(e)ible vis-à-vis ‘past’ injustice.

Morrison has noted that readerly involvement, the witnessing and active re/construction of the traumatic event, is part of her writerly strategy to make the reader “bump into a rememory that belongs to someone else” (*Beloved* 36). In fact, the text of *Beloved* is a prime example of her “aural style,” an instance of a fractured language that offers a “place where the reader can come in, like a congregation, or like an audience at a musical concert, where they participate in it and I have to make it *open* enough so that they can” (Brown 117-118, emphasis added). The fact that a gaping grave is open for the reader to stare at is also magnified by the nature and form of the address that emanates from the tomb – which actualize it and forcefully superimpose it upon the present of reading. Morrison’s narrative does not only circle back on itself, but it also intensifies the open spaces that demand the reader’s interpretation and supplementation – thereby establishing the idea of an endless return of trauma, and an incessant repetition of the fact that, as the ghost notes,

there is no place where I stop her face is my own and I want
to be there in the place where her face is and to be looking at it too
a hot thing All of it is now it is always now
there will never be a time when I am not crouching and watching others
who are crouching too I am always crouching (*Beloved* 210).

Just as much as the Derridean trace stubbornly resists closure, the ghostly figure of *Beloved* resists precise identification; *Beloved* presents yet another dichotomy that is invalidated, because she stands for both an individual memory and the composite of many people's. This reflects Morrison's own belief in language as the access road towards negotiating questions of race, which lead to her use of this "unpoliced, seditious, confrontational, manipulative, inventive, disruptive, masked and unmasking language" (*Unspeakable* 136). The linguistic imprisonment that perpetrates Sethe's suffering and bodily abuse – as she tries to obtain, in exchange for sexual intercourse with the white engraver, the seven letters of the tombstone (B-e-l-o-v-e-d) that surround the text – is suspended by the very object of that love inscribing its own absence into language. *Beloved*'s pseudonym, inscribed only following her death, re/places her mother within the dominant realm of signification, in which the absence of voice is precisely what is offered to a (former) slave:

Ten minutes for seven letters. With another ten could she have gotten "Dearly" too? She had not thought to ask him and it bothered her still that it might have been possible – that for twenty minutes, a half hour, say, she could have had the whole thing, every word she heard the preacher say at the funeral (and all there was to say, surely) engraved on her baby's headstone: Dearly Beloved. But what she got, settled for, was the one word that mattered. She thought it would be enough, rutting among the headstones with the engraver, his young son looking on, the anger in his face so old; the appetite in it quite new. That should certainly be enough. Enough to answer one more preacher, one more abolitionist and a town full of disgust (*Beloved* 3).

Again, the language of the novel disrupts this discursive hierarchy that denigrates the ability of the former slaves to name themselves, to ascribe values independently of their masters' choices. This joins Derrida's affirmation that naming and haunting are not disconnected, that "[o]nly the name can inherit, and this is why the name...is always and

a priori...a name of death” (qtd. in Castricano 19). But Beloved’s name is not her name; it is not a proper name. It is a name that is not hers proper, for she represents all the Beloved ones who perished in the Middle Passage and as a result of enslavement. In this respect, her figure is not hers (only). She speaks for a multiplicity of victims. This fact also makes sense if one agrees with the Derridean view that “if one writes to call up names, then one writes also for the dead” (53). In order to summon the specters of the nameless, to re-call them, to graphically remember, Morrison writes in their stead. She thus is not only a *ghostwriter*, writing in lieu of the dead, but she also allows the textual space for the ghost itself to inscribe its mark¹⁸⁹, to accentuate the undecidability of references, effectively summoning a *ghostwriter*, whose locution appears similar to a perplexing diary entry:

some who eat nasty themselves I do not eat the men without skin
bring us their morning water to drink we have none at night I
cannot see the dead man on my face daylight comes through the
cracks and I can see his locked eyes I am not big small rats do
not wait for us to sleep someone is thrashing but there is no room to do
it in if we had more to drink we could make tears we cannot
make sweat or morning water so the men without skin bring us theirs
one time they bring us sweet rocks to suck we are all trying to leave our
bodies behind the man on my face has done it it is hard to make
yourself die forever you sleep short and then return in the
beginning we could vomit now we do not now we cannot his
teeth are pretty white points someone is trembling I can feel it
over here he is fighting hard to leave his body which is a small bird
trembling there is no room to tremble so he is not able to die
(*Beloved* 210-211).

This quotation demonstrates that the porous quality of the revenant’s testimony is puzzling, so that the reader has to adapt his or her vision to the shift in personal pronouns between the ‘I,’ which is set in motion early in the page as Sethe’s daughter but changes to become an unidentifiable narrator, morphing into the ‘we’ of the other slaves that are

aboard the ship, without ever losing the singularity of the “I”. Depictions of extreme thirst that prevents the expression of sorrow through tears, of severe hunger, of people soiling themselves, rats wandering among the bodies, interlace with, and somehow recede in the face of, the assertion that all slaves aboard wish for death/sleep to escape the reality of their torment: “we are all trying to leave our bodies behind/the man on my face has done it/it is hard to make yourself die forever/ you sleep short and then return,” which connects again with Sethe, who chose death over the distress of life under slavery for Beloved.

By enhancing the liminal quality of the address – by enlarging the witnessing place to include a plurality of voices, making it intersubjective rather than narrowly subjective – and by confusing the question of authorship, Morrison effectuates yet another writerly gesture that refutes what Derrida labels the foreclosure of traumatic experience as *unreadable*, i.e. as an experience that is traceless in that the dominant discourse intently erases the traces thereof¹⁹⁰. On the contrary, this vacillation between the particular victim and the muted many allows them, through the dissolution of the border between singular and communal memory, to be the haunting group that haunts the haunting ghostly figure, creating a polysemous sign. Moreover, the indeterminacy of the ghost in *Beloved* supplies an appropriate instantiation of the fact that “the subject that haunts is not identifiable, one cannot see, localize, fix any concrete form, one cannot decide between hallucination and perception, there are only *displacements*” (*Spectres* 169-170, emphasis added).

Displacement, or the constant attempt to evoke the integrity of the non-terminal list of victims, constitutes a Derridean “chain of substitutions” that not only complicates

the linearity of the text but also undoes the repression at the heart of its tale. In effect, Laurie Vickroy considers that this attribute makes *Beloved* a textual memorialization, in which “[m]emory...enacts an attempted recovery or supplement of forgotten or suppressed aspects of the lived past” (179). However, this is not to suggest that Morrison presents an alternative textual closure to revise and to replace another; rather, she implodes language into an oblique recital of survivor memories, one in which the tension between the traumatic need to tell and the wish to forget are palpable¹⁹¹, adding yet another dimension to the politics of disavowal that surrounds the tale of slavery both from within and without. Hence, the text intentionally aims at unearthing the secret: it is “about something that the characters don’t want to remember, I don’t want to remember, black people don’t want to remember, white people don’t want to remember. I mean it’s *national amnesia*” (qtd. in Haskins 100).

Thus, memory, even haunted memory of trauma, becomes the *Signifyin(g)* trope, to use Henry Louis Gates’ term, operating against the burial of the traumatic past within grand narratives bent on romanticizing, or ignoring, it¹⁹². The oblique access to the past that is mediated by the departed permits the repetition and reversal of the slave narratives which are canonically validated, thus operating a revision – both modification and *reviewing* – of their texts. In addition to asserting the need for the retrospective examination of history, the text exemplifies Derrida’s statement that “one must stop believing that the dead are just the departed and that *the departed do nothing*” (*Time* 30, emphasis added). In Morrison, the dead come back to write the repressed memory, demonstrating the factual aspect of “past errors taking possession of the present” (*Beloved* 256). The ghost speaks and instructs Sethe to speak the unspeakable, which

liberates her in such a way that she can narrativize her trauma. In other words, the ghost, unleashed, unleashes Sethe's memories so that she cannot take refuge in repression anymore. It is only once Sethe understands that concealing trauma is not forgetting it that she gives up "[c]ounting on the stillness of her soul" to stifle those images erupting from her past (*Beloved* 5).

3. Maimed Bodies, Claimed Bodies

As a neo-slave narrative undertaking a revision of history, and resisting its alignment with Western historiography, the text is deeply entrenched within the experience of slavery while emphasizing the linkage between the heritage of the slave-ancestors and the present of African Americans. It highlights the inextricable and paradoxical rootedness of the present in the appalling traumas of yesterday. Moreover, it locates the possibility of repairing trauma precisely within the excessive memories that these traumas inhabit, memories which invoke the very destruction of family ties, memories of corporal violations, and the shattering psychological wounds. Thus, Morrison creates a text that is not devoid of – to use her own qualification – “scatological” incidents and horrendous violations, it is an account that reveals the atrocities of slavery as an institution, a raw and an unpolished set of traumatic recollections (*Site* 109). But the novel also goes beyond merely exposing bodily pain; it fosters a connection among the display of corporeal traces, the incomplete historical account of slavery, and the body as a site of resistance.

In Morrison's temporal economy of narrative, the past traumatic events subtly merge into the present of the story so as to avoid offering a grotesquely voyeuristic, yet detached and counterproductive, glimpse into the graphic sufferings endured by the victims. In the pursuit of its avowed mission to “fill in the blanks that the slave narratives

left,” Morrison’s text avoids the tangible risk, as Katrin Amian puts it, of “perpetuating the kind of reading position inscribed in the sentimental language of ‘sympathy’ and ‘arousal’” characteristic of early slave narratives (121). Indeed, the spectacle of maimed and dismembered bodies can operate an adverse slippage, resulting in what Hortense Spillers refers to as ‘pornotroping,’ an eroticizing and reductive gaze¹⁹³ captivated by the synecdochical, captive, defenceless body which substitutes for the subject – a logic that reiterates the possessive and objectifying racist perspective¹⁹⁴.

Morrison’s text, however, strategically establishes a balanced focus between the exposure of bodies in pain and the constant allusion to the pain’s historicity. It moves from body to context to story and to other bodies, other contexts and other stories. In addition to the apparent self-reflexivity, by which the text points to its own construction as text, the almost overwhelming shifts in points of view effectively interrupt the potential gaze that is stimulated by the tableau of suffering bodies¹⁹⁵. Morrison mentions that this is a deliberate move in her novels, which stems from the need to effect a change in (readerly) perception. In fact, she deems it central to the novelist’s mission that their novels “effect change – improvement – take cataracts off people’s eyes in an accessible way. It may be soothing; it may be painful, but that’s his job – to enlighten and strengthen...I think novels are important because they are *socially responsible*” (Jones and Vinson 183, emphasis added).

In fact, mention of the various violations that Sethe and other characters have survived abounds in the text, which, as notes Joanna Wolfe, “is replete with other mut(e)ilated bodies, bearing the emblem of their sufferings as inscription of white domination upon their flesh as an extension of their dominion” (264). The physical and

psychological scars endured individually by the characters are sometimes inscribed within metonymical accounts that generalize the conditions of abuse to all slaves, but they are also borne individually and literally, as in the case of Sethe, who carries on her back the very emblem of her physical abuse at the hands of Schoolteacher, her former owner, and his nephews:

It's a tree, Lu [Seethe's chosen pseudonym]. A chokecherry tree. See, here's the trunk – it's red and split wide open, full of sap, and this here's the parting for the branches. You got a mighty lot of branches. Leaves, too, look like, and darn if these ain't blossoms. Tiny little cherry blossoms, just as white. Your back got a whole tree on it. In bloom. What God have in mind, I wonder. I had me some whippings, but I don't remember nothing like this (*Beloved* 62).

The somatically-triggered eruption of the past into the present, observed as Sethe is thrown back into memories that she tries to repress, also intensifies the corporeal as a signifier for an underrepresented, codified history of racial aggression on the body and psyche of African Americans. According to Valerie Smith, the “hieroglyphic nature of the scars” on Sethe’s back bespeaks a connection to the past sufferings that she has endured (177). The scars function as an inscrutable signifier, bearing witness to historical violence and making suffering present without narrativizing it¹⁹⁶. In addition, it symbolically stands for the systematic physical inscriptions, by the white Master, of a perspective that possesses the African American so entirely that even their bodies become encryptions that do not belong to them. As Spillers notes, “[t]he undecipherable markings on the captive body render a kind of hieroglyphics of the flesh,” which confer an undeniable visibility upon the mechanisms of subjugation and becomes an outer index that supplements an inner wound, both reflecting and exceeding it (67). The tree on the back of Sethe also functions as the corporeal signifier that both precedes and supersedes

(as in surpasses or supplements) language as we know it, while it dis/plays its connection to the historical reality of traumatic abuse.

Under slavery – whose logic, Morrison notes¹⁹⁷, is an exploitation of physical alterity interpreted as a sign of inferiority – African Americans were assigned only a token or nominal human identity. They were named in a fashion detaching them from their true condition and disconnecting them from their identity as well as from their bodily experience (e.g. Paul A, Paul D, Paul F, Halle, and, with names derived from the alphabetical order or from a digit, as in a list of commodity). In short, the slaves' (bodily) existence is emphasized and encoded as the property of animals. This is indeed how Paul D, who carries the mark of the iron collar, interprets his abuse as he cynically refers to his “neck jewelry--its three wands, like attentive baby rattlers, curving two feet into the air...collared like a beast” (273, emphasis added). Moreover, Morrison reveals how the debasing categorization of the African American as beast-like is intertwined with the white supremacist discourse¹⁹⁸ that inscribes its view upon the body of Sethe, as a “wrought-iron maze” (21). In one scene, we observe Sethe as she is horrified to discover the codifications reserved to her by Schoolteacher and his pupils as part of their pseudo-scientific exploration of her ‘features’:

I couldn't help listening to what I heard that day. He was talking to his pupils and I heard him say, “Which one are you doing?” And one of the boys said, “Sethe.” That's when *I stopped because I heard my name*, and then I took a few steps to where I could see what they was doing. Schoolteacher was standing over one of them with one hand behind his back. He licked a forefinger a couple of times and turned a few pages. Slow. I was about to turn around and keep on my way to where the muslin was, when I heard him say, “No, no. That's not the way. I told you to put *her human characteristics on the left; her animal ones on the right*. And don't forget to line them up.” I commenced to walk backward, didn't even look behind me to find out where I was headed. I just kept lifting my

feet and pushing back. When I bumped up against a tree my scalp was prickly (193, emphases added).

In addition to carrying the image or signature of the racial discourse, Sethe is no position to decipher it. It is rather Schoolteacher who controls the meaning making process. Schoolteacher portrayal places him centrally as the paradigmatic Master, who manipulates Sethe's body and the discourse about her body (which makes her a bestialized and hypersexualized breeder), who has the power and authority, as he is the one who holds the pen and takes notes, to inscribe and document Sethe's whole being and history, in his own words¹⁹⁹. Schoolteacher and his nephews are the "privileged white males in the plantation economy, [who] use writing to produce a self that is superior to the black bodies around them" (Wolfe 266).

In contradistinction, Morrison shows how Sethe's response is almost primarily a physical nonverbal one, as her "head itched like the devil. Like somebody was sticking fine needles in my scalp" (*Beloved* 146). In fact, it is the very white person who helped her, as she was escaping from her master's farm, who likens her scars to a "chokecherry tree" – a fact that accentuates the absence of Sethe's own reading or interpretation of past events. She takes the words of a white girl to be a truthful depiction of what her scars look like²⁰⁰. Sethe does not understand the ramifications of bearing the tree on her back, nor does she manage to integrate the story of her traumatic signs within a perspective of healing of which she would claim ownership. Rather, her story, as narrated in the beginning of the text, remains a subtext of the master narrative of domination²⁰¹ that does without her own import, further discrediting her insight and denying her any knowledge – even of that which literally touches her in the flesh. In a separate but similar incident

which takes place in Sweet Home, Sixo eats a shoat from the farm without asking the permission of anyone. When he wants to interpret this act as an improvement of productivity by explicitly claiming that good nutrition means better results for the master, Sixo is physically disciplined by Schoolteacher, who thus upholds the dichotomy between white culture and black savagery and “beat[s] him anyway to show him that *definitions belonged to the definers – not the defined*” (143, emphasis added).

Without the possibility of self-definition, Sethe carries the burden of historical oppression; she does not face it, examine it, or question its validity. Her “scars and tribulations” are not contextualized (17). Sethe’s body is the object of several types of abuse, and it is depicted – in both direct and oblique ways – as a medium for the expression of the racist logic of her former owner. Being the object of Schoolteacher²⁰² and his nephews’ quasi-phrenological experiments, she is submitted to the painful fact of not owning or controlling her own body – for example, when they “used cowhide” on her while pregnant, thereby extending the degradation to the baby within her. The essentialist positing of stable subject-object identities manifests itself in the racist refusal to see the enslaved as anything but property. The far-reaching confinement of Sethe’s status to that of an objectified possession invests her innermost bodily treasure, her unborn child who is destined to a life of slavery. This commodifying perception also denies her ownership of her corporeal “production”, as “her milk,” the bodily fluid meant for her baby, is also stolen from her. Hence, the body, through the nephews’ “milking” of Sethe, becomes the master trope for dehumanizing the slave as animal, even while it remains replete with a sexuality²⁰³ that suggests the dual gaze through which the corporeal is placed as an ambiguous signifier, simultaneously enforcing economies of desire and abjection²⁰⁴.

The complex racist authoritarian intervention between Sethe and her own body, confining her to being a “property that reproduced itself without cost,” reflects the dispossession at the heart of the experience of slavery (*Beloved* 228). The text also reveals the disconnection from their immediate skin of the individual who endures this reductive and violent re/definition: their body is primarily not theirs²⁰⁵. It is the site of colonial articulation, and where the discourse of their inferiority and silencing unfolds:

“Schoolteacher made one open up my back, and when it closed it made a tree. It grows there still.”

“They used cowhide on you?”

“And they took my milk.”

“They beat you and you was pregnant?”

“And they took my milk!” (*Beloved* 17).

Sethe’s is not the only body that Morrison invests with meanings in the novel, however. Many more references to physical ill-treatment and inscriptions upon the body as a vessel of traumatic encryption and/or sexual abuse can be found scattered in the text – a scattering that accentuates the fact of silence about these traces of traumatic experience, but which also magnifies the fact of their incomprehensibility. For instance, when Sethe’s reminiscences lead her back to her own mother, the narrative is provided by Nan, another slave woman who “had to nurse whitebabies and me too because Ma'am [Sethe’s mother] was in the rice. The little whitebabies got it first and I [Sethe] got what was left. Or none. There was no nursing milk to call my own. I know what it is to be without the milk that belongs to you; to have to fight and holler for it, and to have so little left” (*Beloved* 200). This passage wonderfully condenses the idea of dispossession in the corporeal signifier, for one finds Nan, who misses half of one her arms, being deprived of her ‘milk,’ Ma’am

is deprived of her daughter's presence, and Sethe is deprived of her mother and sometimes even of the nourishment of the surrogate mother that the system forces.

When Nan's own memories are traced back to the slave ships, as she tries to explain the origin of their plight to a young Sethe, they offer but further confirmation of the historical extent of physical abuse that slavery entails. In this case, rape is mentioned as a common activity that took place aboard the Middle Passage ship:

Nan holding her with her good arm, waving the stump of the other in the air. "Telling you. I am telling you, small girl Sethe," and she did that. She told Sethe that her mother and Nan were together from the sea. *Both were taken up many times by the crew. "She threw them all away but you. The one from the crew she threw away on the island. The others from more whites she also threw away. Without names, she threw them. You she gave the name of the black man"* (*Beloved* 63).

It is noteworthy that the assertion of truth from within the community (via Nan) is added to the horror of the events related to Sethe, rendering her a survivor of her mother's extension of White violence and their politics of corporeal dispossession – rejecting the bodies of babies that were created by invading her own body. The reaction of the young Sethe, contrasts to hers when she is older and Amy Denver describes her back wounds to her, for she consigns this fact to her subconscious, as "[s]omething privately shameful that had seeped *into a slit in her mind right behind the slap on her face and the circled cross*" (61, emphasis added). This remark reveals a discrepancy, or a tension, between the way Sethe wants to remember and her rememory's recurrent inclusion of disregarded details of her past experiences. More importantly, it shows that the physical mark on the body, the sign of the cross that is burned into the flesh of Sethe's mother, takes primacy in signifying how the slave's body serves as an extension of the dominion of its owners²⁰⁶. The mark, in fact, parallels a discursive appropriation of the Other's body, a

forceful imposition of ideology and a simultaneous invasion of the self of the slave's identity.

The mark on the body of Sethe's mother stands for an unspeakable history. The body thus acts as a visible sign, itself carrying a visual mark of incommunicable atrocities. The mark on the mother's body becomes also a vital detail for remembrance, because it is a singularity that distinguishes her from all the other equally distant female slaves called "Ma'am". In this respect, the scar works as a route towards the achievement of identity, as opposed to the intention behind its inscription by the dominant power as a suppression of that identity in bondage as ownership: "Back there she opened up her dress front and lifted her breast and pointed under it. Right on her rib was a circle and a cross burn right in the skin. She said, "This is your ma'am. This," and she pointed. "I am the only one got this mark now. The rest dead. If something happens to me and you can't tell me by my face, you can know me by this mark" (61). Thus, the marked body of the mother becomes the foundational image that initiates Sethe's (family) history-as-trauma, as it both registers and validates slavery's atrocities. As the body becomes the means of historicizing the experience of slavery, it also strengthens the characteristic intergenerational inheritance of (traumatic) history because it authenticates the death of Sethe's mother: "the woman called Nan who took her hand and yanked her away from the pile before she could make out the mark" (62).

While the corporeal becomes a prime signifier for a history littered with African American corpses, scars of the flesh, and other elements of physical abuse, are not unequivocally portrayed as something that all the characters manage to positively reinterpret to advance towards a fuller sense of one's history and self. Whereas, for some,

the violated body becomes an entry point into articulation; it enacts its own laws of silence, de-activating language in reaction to atrocity. Morrison thus highlights the embodiment of experience and both its transformation into narrative account and intersubjective transmission, which hints at the im/possibility of bearing witness across the racial divide: for instance, Mrs. Garner, in what Claudine Raynaud perceives as a translation of the “inner corruption of the system” is unable to stop Schoolteacher from mistreating Sethe (46). Her muteness is made embodied; she “had a lump in her neck the size of a sweet potato and [was] unable to speak to anyone” (*Beloved* 9). Even Sethe’s daughter, Denver, “went deaf rather than hear the answer” to the question about whether or not she was with her mother in jail. Around the end of the novel, when Sethe attacks Mr. Bodwin, the Abolitionist²⁰⁷, he is also silent (and absorbed by the naked figure of Beloved standing next to Sethe). In a gesture that could be read as a reflection of Sethe’s understanding that acting towards the oppressing Other fares better than self-suppression as infanticide, even as the infanticide literally prevents the reductive gaze of whiteness: “no one, nobody on this earth, would list her daughter's characteristics on the animal side of the paper. No. Oh no” (251).

Morrison’s chief trope for this imposed silence upon the slaves is, as she herself notes, *the bit*, another device of physical violation aimed at suppressing voice:

I think the signal instrument of silence for me in *Beloved* is the bit, which was a kind of familiar and frequently homemade instrument that you put into a person’s mouth, which you could adjust. And there are quite a variety of them. And whatever other feature they had, they were not to keep you from working because you worked with them, but they were to shut you up so that you could not say, you could not talk back, you could not articulate a contrary position or do any violence with your tongue or your word. And that was a complete erasure of all language that the victim or the oppressed had. So for me, it was operating this way. *I would try to*

say what they were prevented from saying (Silverblatt 175, emphasis added).

Hence, Morrison's literary intervention tries to supply speech for the ones whose traumatic wounding and physical abuse were made silent, or literally unable to go beyond this forceful suppression of expression. Nevertheless, the possibility of reinterpreting the wrongdoings of the past is shown to operate idiosyncratically. Hence, while some characters, such as Ella, fixate on their abuse and cannot help but be drawn into comparing their plight with others', Baby Suggs, marked herself by the deformity of a broken hip and children lost to the institution of slavery, advocates a compensatory intervention between traumatic pain and shattered body: loving the corporeal self as deeply as one can establishes a new philosophy for the whole newly freed community to live by, becoming what Jill Matus calls "the cornerstone of antidotal healing and self-possession" (108). The reappropriation of the body that Baby Suggs advocates is the reversal of a situation of total deprivation. In fact, she

decided that, *because* slave life had "busted her legs, back, head, eyes, hands, kidneys, womb and tongue," she had nothing left to make a living with but her heart--which she put to work at once. Accepting no title of honor before her name, but allowing a small caress after it, she became an *unchurched preacher* (*Beloved* 87, emphasis added).

Becoming an unconventional voice operating without the oppressive institutional structure, Baby Suggs interprets the corporeal as a sanctuary from which resistance to the racist discourse of dispossession can start²⁰⁸. Having seen slavery thwart everything which she held valuable²⁰⁹, Baby Suggs becomes the preacher of the flesh. She acts as a matriarchal voice in addressing her neighbours, from within a devastated body, to reinvent their connections to their physical selves.

Baby Suggs deconstructs dispossession as a rupture within the identity of newly-freed slaves, telling them to have faith in their own bodies because it is *theirs*. Morrison links that rhetoric in the text to the reality of physical abuse that plagued the whole existence of Baby Suggs, even after being bought to freedom²¹⁰ by her own son: “Anybody Baby Suggs knew, let alone loved, who hadn't run off or been hanged, got rented out, loaned out, bought up, brought back, stored up, mortgaged, won, stolen or seized” (*Beloved* 23). The fact that she has witnessed the treatment of people as commodity, contemptible bodies shuffled according to ‘market’ laws and denied value as humans capable of social interaction, is further amplified by the intrusion of the system into her innermost self, through rape, as well as by the fissures denying any potential family network:

Baby’s eight children had six fathers. What she called the nastiness of life was the shock she received upon learning that nobody stopped playing checkers just because the pieces included her children. Halle she was able to keep the longest. Twenty years. A lifetime. Given to her, no doubt, to make up for hearing that her two girls, neither of whom had their adult teeth, were sold and gone and she had not been able to wave goodbye. To make up for coupling with a straw boss for four months in exchange for keeping her third child, a boy, with her – only to have him traded for lumber in the spring of the next year and to find herself pregnant by the man who promised not to and did. That child she could not love and the rest she would not (23).

Out of this experience of intimate contact of the very forces that simultaneously despise and ab/use the black body, Baby Suggs reacts not by attacking the bodies of the oppressors but by enunciating a philosophy of self-empowerment that is rooted in the love of one’s corporeal self. Morrison thus avoids essentializing the body as an indicator of the traumas inflicted upon it. She, through Baby Suggs, performs an invalidation of the oppressor’s gaze, a renegotiation of what the wounded bodies (can) signify. Indeed, by

rejecting the utilitarian utilization of a body that is denied any traits but bestial ones, “Baby Suggs, holy” starts her preaching by equating the self to its physical shell in order to re/claim both as a property that must be cherished:

we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. They don't love your eyes; they'd just as soon pick'em out. No more do they love the skin on your back. Yonder they flay it. And O my people they do not love your hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop off and leave empty. Love your hands! Love them. Raise them up and kiss them. Touch others with them, pat them together, stroke them on your face 'cause they don't love that either. *You* got to love it, *you!* And no, they ain't in love with your mouth. Yonder, out there, they will see it broken and break it again. What you say out of it they will not heed. What you scream from it they do not hear. What you put into it to nourish your body they will snatch away and give you leavins instead. No, they don't love your mouth. *You* got to love it (*Beloved* 88).

As Baby Suggs continues her speech, she becomes the wise ancestor²¹¹ who instructs other African Americans into agency, with the first action being one that is emotional: loving themselves and seeing another type of value in themselves, one that is at odds with the pricing that the institution of slavery imposes upon their lives and those of their kin. Indeed, Baby Suggs is highly insistent upon the fact that her words are to be taken literally:

This is flesh I'm talking about here. Flesh that needs to be loved. Feet that need to rest and to dance; backs that need support; shoulders that need arms, strong arms I'm telling you. And O my people, out yonder, hear me, they do not love your neck unnoosed and straight. So love your neck; put a hand on it, grace it, stroke it and hold it up. And all your inside parts that they'd just as soon slop for hogs, you got to love them. The dark, dark liver – love it, love it, and the beat and beating heart, love that too. More than eyes or feet. More than lungs that have yet to draw free air. More than your life holding womb and your life-giving private parts, hear me now, *love your heart. For this is the prize* (88, emphasis added).

The emphasis on the reconnection with the body is also reflected in the fact that the bodies of the gathering company have prior access to expression, so that dance, laughter and tears take place *before* Baby Suggs' own message because, actually, her message is about the free expression of the body being of the utmost importance for self-respect. It behooves the newly freed to treasure their marked bodies: "It started that way: laughing children, dancing men, crying women and then it got mixed up. Women stopped crying and danced; men sat down and cried; children danced, women laughed, children cried until, exhausted and riven, all and each lay about the Clearing damp and gasping for breath. In the silence that followed, Baby Suggs, holy, offered up to them her great big heart" (88).

It is only after she has provided them with a physical outlet that both consolidates and nurtures their bodily connection to the past and to others that Baby Suggs pronounces her sermon of self-celebration. In thus doing, Baby Suggs re-members both the individual body and the communal body: she brings together all the freed slaves to interact and to partake in similar corporeal expressions of anamnesis that literally moves the traumatized bodies into catharsis. Morrison has repeatedly stressed her belief that "the act of imagination is bound up with memory...*what the nerves and the skin remember* as well as how it happened" (*Site* 119, emphasis added). This is precisely what Baby Suggs articulates, since she tells the company "that the only grace they could have was the grace they could imagine. That if they could not see it, they would not have it" (*Beloved* 88).

By emphasizing the need to formulate one's own self-esteem from the very bodily wreckage, the scars and deformities that foreground its traumatic maltreatment, Baby Suggs re-interprets not only the stigma of trauma but also implodes the Cartesian dualism

as interpreted by the racist agenda, which according to bell hooks considers that “black folk [are] more body than mind” (qtd. in Henderson 4). She signifies upon its reading as reflection of suffering by supplementing it with another signified: its potential for redemption. This is in line with bell hooks’ expansion of the racist medium of articulation, who argues that “there exists a counter-language [to oppression]. While it may resemble the colonizer’s tongue, it has undergone a transformation, it has been irrevocably changed” (*Yearning* 150). What Morrison undertakes, through Baby Suggs, is a conjunction of the expansion of both the formal linguistic medium of oppression as well as its message of debasement, so that her text speaks to hooks’ belief in alternative “ways of knowing reality which affirm continually not only the primacy of resistance but the necessity of a resistance that is sustained by remembrance of the past, which includes recollection of *broken tongues giving us ways to speak that decolonize our minds, our very beings*” (150, emphasis added).

In the Clearing, Baby Suggs enunciates an alternative spirituality that has the body at heart. Nonetheless, the absence of reciprocated love that she witnesses when Schoolteacher comes unannounced by any of her neighbours²¹² to re/claims Sethe and her children, annihilate her efforts at resistance, while leading to Sethe’s infanticide and the return of the incarnate ghost, Beloved²¹³. In effect, after Paul D succeeds in chasing the ghost from 124 Bluestone Road, Beloved materializes and returns to the house again, in the shape of a “fully dressed woman [who] walked out of the water” (*Beloved* 50). Beloved represents the unresolved traumas of Sethe and her murdered daughter, but also, as mentioned in an earlier section, other traumas linked to slavery and the Middle Passage, a fact that is demonstrated by her voice. One of the characteristics that make

Beloved an ambiguous figure is reflected in her physical depiction: “She had new skin, lineless and smooth, including the knuckles of her hands” (50). Also, “her feet were like her hands, soft and new,” like a baby’s – like Sethe’s baby, in fact, with whom she shares the name Beloved.

It thus appears that the ghost became flesh to re/claim Sethe’s attention, a fact that Sethe comes to understand much later when she realizes that “Paul D ran her [Beloved] off so she had no choice but to come back to me *in the flesh*” (200, emphasis added). There is newness radiating from the body of Beloved, whose “skin was flawless except for three vertical scratches on her forehead so fine and thin they seemed at first like hair, baby hair before it bloomed and roped into the masses of black yarn under her hat” (51). In addition, the imagery of re-birth seems to point to the fact that this *is* Sethe’s daughter, returned at the age she would have been, had she lived. In effect, as soon as Sethe perceives this figure,

[a]nd, for some reason she could not immediately account for, the moment she got close enough to see the face, Sethe's bladder filled to capacity. She said, "Oh, excuse me," and ran around to the back of 124. Not since she was a baby girl, being cared for by the eight year-old girl who pointed out her mother to her, had she had an emergency that unmanageable. She never made the outhouse. Right in front of its door she had to lift her skirts, and the water she voided was endless...like flooding the boat when Denver was born. So much water Amy said, "Hold on, Lu. You going to sink us you keep that up." But there was no stopping water breaking from a breaking womb and there was no stopping now (51).

Morrison’s imagery of re/birth, as a return to life, not only explicitly positions Beloved as the resuscitated murdered daughter but also links the two via the physical loss of water, the bodily anticipation of birth. Moreover, Sethe’s recalling of Denver’s birth is given more significance by Denver’s own intuitive feeling that Beloved is her sister, becoming,

in a remarkable reversal, the loving “older” sister who cares for her. In effect, once inside the house, Beloved finds that “this place is heavy” with traumatic memories and succumbs to sleep like a tired baby would: “Four days she slept, waking and sitting up only for water. Denver tended her, watched her sound sleep, listened to her labored breathing and, out of love and a breakneck possessiveness that charged her, hid like a personal blemish Beloved’s incontinence” (54). This sisterly bonding is expanded by a sense of proximity in the flesh, a repercussion of Sethe’s infanticide itself, as revealed in the following exchange between Sethe and Baby Suggs:

It’s time to nurse your youngest,” she said. Sethe reached up for the baby without letting the dead one go. Baby Suggs shook her head. “One at a time,” she said and traded the living for the dead, which she carried into the keeping room. When she came back, Sethe was aiming a bloody nipple into the baby’s mouth. Baby Suggs slammed her fist on the table and shouted, “Clean up! Clean yourself up!” They fought then...Each struggling for the nursing child. Baby Suggs lost when she slipped in a red puddle and fell. So Denver took *her mother’s milk right along with the blood of her sister* (152).

Because of this double connection, established through the mother, Denver is able to identify her sister even before Sethe does, but “once Sethe had seen the scar, the tip of which Denver had been looking at whenever Beloved undressed--the little curved shadow of a smile in the kootchy-kootchy-coo place under her chin--once Sethe saw it, fingered it and closed her eyes for a long time,” she too knew (239). Hence, Beloved’s identity is inscribed onto her body and the mechanisms of recognition are also primarily corporeal, displaying connective traumatic traces (the four wounds inflicted by Sethe) that refuse anonymity. These wounds signal a change in the nature of the intergenerational corporeal marking/transmission of trauma, for while Sethe’s ma’am marks her with a slap, she does Beloved with a saw. The body of the daughter returning from beyond the tomb to reclaim

the mother's attention could also be read as an emphasis on the need for Sethe to be accountable for her reaction.

At the same time, however, Beloved is, in Denver's words "more," and thus not simply the sister whom her mother killed come back to exact justice (276). She is the body containing all the disembodied and unheard voices from the traumatic past that demand justice, "a conflagration of hasty voices – loud, urgent, all speaking at once" (172). She embodies generations of beloveds lost during the journey toward America and those lost to slavery. She is a traumatic address incarnate, a word from the wound, from a tombstone, made flesh. She is the physical manifestation of the unspeakable utterances of the silenced, a material condensation of the "undecipherable language...the mumbling of the black and angry dead" (198). In fact, Beloved herself is aware of her fragmentary nature, and she is continually afraid of literally disintegrating:

Beloved looked at the tooth and thought, This is it. Next would be her arm, her hand, a toe. *Pieces of her would drop maybe one at a time, maybe all at once.* Or on one of those mornings before Denver woke and after Sethe left she would fly apart. It is difficult keeping her head on her neck, her legs attached to her hips when she is by herself. Among the things she could not remember was when she first knew that *she could wake up any day and find herself in pieces.* She had two dreams: exploding, and being swallowed. When her tooth came out--an odd *fragment*, last in the row--she thought it was starting (133, emphases added).

Despite her ubiquitous interpretations, however, her moving through boundaries of time and space, her oscillation between personal and communal tragedies, as reflected in her unpunctuated address, Beloved is a figure that reifies more than just the suppressed traumatic memories of slavery. She is a ghost that "enters, all fleshy and real, with wants, and a fierce hunger, and she speaks barely, of course and in pictures and a coded language. This ghost, Beloved, forces a reckoning: she makes those who have contact

with her, who love and need her, confront an event in their past that loiters in the present” (Gordon 139). At the same time, she is also a figure that comments upon the excesses that are at play within the psyche’s negotiation of traumatic memories: re/born as a ghost from her mother’s excessive love²¹⁴, she haunts her as a spirit to counter her excessive repression of memory, yet, once she is incarnate, she herself acquires an insatiable appetite for narrative as a vehicle of memory, which is also paralleled by her growth into a fuller woman “getting bigger,” with a “basket-fat stomach” in a “belly protruding like a winning watermelon” (242-243; 250).

Because she reverts to another facet of the same “thick love” that Paul D warned her about, total submission, Sethe is withering under the weight of Beloved’s demands and desires. Again this is reflected in her body: “eyes bright but dead, alert but vacant” (242-243). Again, Beloved refuses containment. Just as she crosses the boundary of death, just as she refuses to remain a ‘spirit,’ once she is moved out of 124, she does not accept a limit to Sethe’s love or servitude. When her desires are not met favourably, she becomes violent. Seeing that Beloved has such a hold upon her mother, Denver decides to re/connect with their neighbours to help her mend this situation. As Ashraf Rushdy explains, Beloved “is the embodiment of the past that must be *remembered to be forgotten*; she symbolizes what must be *reincarnated in order to be buried*” (*Daughters* 41, emphases added). The materialized ghost has become an excessive, detrimental presence that feeds on other bodies (through the starvation to which it leads Denver and Sethe); it has to be banished to allow for a healthy progression of life – an exorcism that, Morrison seems to hint, must be a communal matter.

4. Communal Re/membering

In Morrison's text, the institution of slavery is depicted as the cause of deep social injustice and traumatic memories. It is a burden that disrupts lives, both on the personal and the communal levels. In effect, *Beloved's* ghost emerges out of Sethe's failure to historicize her personal motive for infanticide. Sethe's only verbalization of the trauma connected to the scene of infanticide is the name that she has engraved on the epitaph, which reflects her inability to access a linguistic medium through which to tell *that* story. The former slaves' being outside the language that 'defines' them is reflected in the way Paul D knows about Sethe's deed, in a newspaper: "there was no way in hell a black face could appear in a newspaper if the story was about something anybody wanted to hear" (155). Thus, when *Beloved's* ghost returns to haunt Sethe, it emerges to deny her silence, but also the community's. At the same time, the ghost demands a unified communal stance in order to leave again. Accordingly, Morrison weaves the personal into the communal: for as soon as the ghost at 124 enters the collective narrative and Sethe's neighbours start believing that it "eats, sleeps and raises hell. Whipping Sethe every day," they intervene to help and Sethe is offered a novel possibility of reinterpreting personal history, of redirecting her resistance (255).

In *Beloved*, Morrison constantly shifts the focal point from which the events are related to establish an unfinished account that renegotiates the non/presence of non-verbalized traumas. The plethora of (unfinished) stories that are quilted in the text, while often complementing each other, decidedly point toward the imperative that both individual as well as communal histories be interpreted within a reclaimed African American model outside official history, which is interested only in recording its

aberration. As Rebecca Ferguson remarks, Morrison's text "represents slavery's disruption of the potential for a range of communal and intersubjective bonds" (137). While there are several stories that resolutely place the African Americans' intersubjective bonds at the core of identity politics – the forming of an autonomous subjectivity, which connects them to issues of how to re/claim ownership of the freed self – I will consider two textual moments that, I believe, shape the text in radical ways. The first is the re/appearance of Beloved, incarnate, following Sethe's reunion with Paul D. The second part will be an analysis of the difference made by the communal intervention, at the end of the text, in the exorcism of Beloved. While offering a framework in which to place infanticide as a transgressive but also a symbolic gesture, Morrison's representational enterprise depicts the journey into selfhood, the personal or collective sense of an agency-in-progress, as a possibility of decolonizing memory.

As soon as Paul D, "screaming back at the screaming house," translates his presence into the eviction of Beloved's ghost, Sethe enters a new configuration of intersubjective bonds that makes her believe she is able to bypass her rememory, her mind's continual reinterpreting of traumatic memories (*Beloved* 18). She believes that she can put a stop to her constant effort of "beating back the past" (73). The same belief that a life that engulfs its traumatic traces in silence can unperturbedly proceed is shown by Paul D himself, who thinks that "he could put Alfred, Georgia, Sixo, Schoolteacher, Halle, his brothers, Sethe, Mister, the taste of iron, the sight of butter, the smell of hickory, notebook paper, one by one, into the tobacco tin lodged in his chest...nothing in this world could pry it open" (113). In fact, there is a furtive air of normalcy that surrounds the trio – Paul D, Sethe and the reluctant Denver – as they try to behave as a

family by going to a carnival. For Sethe, who undertakes her first social outing in years, the contemplation of a different future reflects her psychological position as a character: her gaze at their shadows “gliding over the dust,” and which appear to be holding hands, reflects both her psyche’s continuous struggle with the temporal stasis that trauma generates and her need to enlarge her intersubjective connections in order to negotiate a path towards the future (47).

Simultaneously, the fact that she opened herself to a human connection beyond her immediate family (her two daughters), immerses Sethe in a situation where she has to recalibrate her actions, to analyze them by placing them within the communal matrix of relationship, from which she has been ostracized following the infanticide. This time around, she pays attention to the sensibilities of the group; she muses that “[t]he others, ahead and behind them, would think she was putting on airs, letting them know that she was different because she lived in a house with two stories; tougher, because she could do and survive things they believed she should neither do nor survive” (47). This is a circular thematic point within Morrison’s narrative, particularly once the reader knows that the infanticide in question could well be a result of communal tensions, as the neighbours refuse to alert Sethe to the coming of her former owner to lay claim on her and her offspring as property, an event so devastating that the text describes in apocalyptic terms: “the four horsemen came--schoolteacher, one nephew, one slave catcher and a sheriff” (148). The fact that they do not warn Sethe to run away again reflects the anger of the community at Baby Suggs’ extreme show of kindness: “It made them furious. They swallowed baking soda, the morning after, to calm the stomach

violence caused by the bounty, the reckless generosity on display at 124. Whispered to each other in the yards about fat rats, doom and uncalled-for pride” (137).

As April Lidinsky remarks, during the feast, which leads to the collapse of intersubjective communication in the African American neighbourhood, Baby Suggs “oversteps her own credo “good is knowing when to stop”” (208). In many ways, the communal resentment of Suggs’ powers is due to its perception as a denial of agency – as the excess of her offering cannot be matched by anyone, a “generosity that prevents the others from any possible reciprocation” (208). As they cannot return Suggs’ favours, the community’s angry reaction becomes their only retort, a silent indictment that is precisely the opposite of the love religion preached by Baby Suggs – this is an anger that grows so vehement that it hinders Suggs’ supernatural abilities, blinding her to the fate that targets her family:

Nothing seemed amiss--yet the smell of disapproval was sharp... She sighed at her work and, a moment later, straightened up to sniff the disapproval once again. Resting on the handle of the hoe, she concentrated. She was accustomed to the knowledge that nobody prayed for her--but this free floating repulsion was new. It wasn't whitefolks--that much she could tell--so it must be colored ones. And then she knew. Her friends and neighbours were angry at her because she had overstepped, given too much, offended them by excess. Baby closed her eyes. Perhaps they were right. Suddenly, behind the disapproving odor, way way back behind it, she smelled another thing. Dark and coming (*Beloved* 138).

Being shunned by the community, after what they perceived as the excesses of Baby Suggs’ feast, leads to Sethe’s extreme gesture of love as denial of life under slavery. When she recollects the event, Sethe thinks about how 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. Over there. Outside this place, where they would be safe” (163). This ambivalence – the fact that Sethe is shown to be motivated by motherly affection to effect such a violent suppression of a dear life – constitutes an accusation of the systemic subjugation under which untenable choices, only allowing freedom in death, are made inevitable. In other words, Sethe’s impossible choice is an indictment of slavery²¹⁵, as an institution that “subverts all relationships and kinships,” by revealing its shattering effects and the deep dissociation it engenders (Furman 70).

That the infanticide is a gesture of love is repeatedly expressed by Sethe through the text, but never to members of the community, some of whose members read the murder as a retort or a counter-stance that tries to subvert the white domineering system via a role inversion. Sethe “ain’t crazy. She love those children. She was trying to *outhurt the hurter*” (*Beloved* 234, my emphasis). Rather, it is in Sethe’s apologetic interaction with Beloved that we see it emerge in fuller details, as Beloved is the only person to whom Sethe feels she is answerable. In her explanations, Sethe reveals the mechanisms by which the fear of traumatic repetition induces a contagion that furthers the suppression of being. In the flight towards death as salvation, Sethe’s “self that was no self” eliminates her daughter’s in order to permit it to achieve that selfhood otherwise, to be free in an absolute sense:

Sethe could make her [Beloved] realize that worse than that [being killed by one’s mother]--far worse-- was what Baby Suggs died of, what Ella knew, what Stamp saw and what made Paul D tremble. That anybody white could take your whole self for anything that came to mind. Not just work, kill, or maim you, but dirty you. Dirty you so bad you couldn't like yourself anymore. Dirty you so bad you forgot who you were and couldn't think it up. And though she and others lived through and got over it, she could never let it happen to her own. The best thing she was, was her children. Whites might dirty *her* all right, but not her best thing, her

beautiful, magical best thing--the part of her that was clean. No undreamable dreams about whether the headless, feetless torso hanging in the tree with a sign on it was her husband or Paul A; whether the bubbling-hot girls in the colored-school fire set by patriots included her daughter; whether a gang of whites invaded her daughter's private parts, soiled her daughter's thighs and threw her daughter out of the wagon. *She* might have to work the slaughterhouse yard, but not her daughter (251).

As Sethe's aggressive love of her children translates into infanticide, it remains an astonishing fact that no one else can decipher as emotional connection – taking her “babies where they'd be safe,” while resisting Schoolteacher's claim of ownership²¹⁶ – rather than severance of connection, a misunderstanding that sets her further apart from the community²¹⁷, who fails to perceive her motives. As Ferguson notes, “there is also a sense in which the community may be seen to have failed her, and her struggle to assert her own (and her children's) right not to be defined as property – or as half-human, or as animals” (138). In this respect, the prime figure signifying this breakdown of communication between Sethe and the community is Ella, herself a victim of the institution of slavery, who “understood Sethe's rage in the shed twenty years ago, but not her reaction to it, which Ella thought was *prideful, misdirected*, and Sethe herself too complicated. When she got out of jail and made no gesture toward anybody, and lived as though she were alone, Ella junked her” (256, emphasis added). This is why, as Sethe, her daughter and Paul D are discovering the carnival, Ella only nods at Sethe, but does not talk to her. Unable to reconcile with the community, Sethe mistakenly interprets the shadows holding hands as “a good sign. A life. Could be” (38). In fact, she is reminded that she has to resolve the wrongdoing of the past by finding it literally awaiting her at the steps of 124, a materialized ghost that will not tolerate being ignored.

As opposed to this tranquil Sethe, one finds, toward the narrative's end, another figure of the mother who struggles against the haunting on her own, "worn down, speckled, dying, spinning, changing shapes and generally bedevilled" (255). Having been isolated and faced with the demons of the past without recourse to communal solidarity, Sethe is almost literally disintegrating. Her downfall, away from Paul D – who, in turn, is evicted by Beloved²¹⁸, who managed to interrupt an already-fragile connection between him and her mother – is imminent. However, Denver ventures into the neighbourhood in order to prevent another death from happening, and the news

spread among the other coloredwomen. Sethe's dead daughter, the one whose throat she cut, had come back to fix her....That this daughter beat her, tied her to the bed and pulled out all her hair. It took them days to get the story properly blown up and themselves agitated and then to calm down and assess the situation. They fell into three groups: those that believed the worst; those that believed none of it; and those, like Ella, who thought it through (255).

Denver's gesture, in addition to Stamp Paid's incitement and advice to Ella²¹⁹, for instance, has a double effect: first, it denies her mother's stoic confrontation with the historical traumas embodied by Beloved as a personal affair and, second, it returns a sense of agency to the neighbors who find themselves in a position where they can act and affect the impact on the life of Suggs' kin. When they come forward as a unique entity that envisions liberating Sethe from being a prisoner to traumatic memories that engulf more than just her daughter, "the thirty women suggest a different kind of religious thinking, one that affirms Baby Suggs' religion of the body" (Duvall 129).

Thus, the text comes full circle to show how the community ultimately upholds Baby Suggs' philosophy of communal ties, albeit posthumously. The community's outreach towards a diminished member (Sethe) and their stance to expel the literalized

and incarnate metaphor of past trauma which threatens to consume her to death, reiterates the memory of Baby Suggs, a gesture that started even before the exorcism. When returning their utensils in which the neighbours put their food gifts

a small conversation took place. All of them knew her grandmother and some had even danced with her in the Clearing. Others remembered the days when 124 was a way station, the place they assembled to catch news, taste oxtail soup, leave their children, cut out a skirt. One remembered the tonic mixed there that cured a relative. One showed her the border of a pillowslip, the stamens of its pale blue flowers French-knotted in Baby Suggs' kitchen by the light of an oil lamp while arguing the Settlement Fee. They remembered the party with twelve turkeys and tubs of strawberry smash (*Beloved* 249).

This remembrance of Denver's grandmother affirms her ancestral influence upon the neighbourhood, for she is the one who envisioned a communal body as the vehicle of a love shared among all trauma survivors and all the former slaves (men, women or children). In a delayed response to her call for self-love, as the establishing force of a new subjectivity that autonomously decides what is valuable and acts to protect it when necessary, the community, represented by a group of thirty women headed towards 124, joins together in a cathartic scene to answer her call, to re-member her and Sethe and to exorcise *Beloved*. Again, Ella, the leading figure in this attitudinal adjustment, finally renounces her old "don't love nothing" doctrine and subscribes to Baby Suggs' theory of (inter- and intra-subjective) love. Remembering, the communal stance that acts against both forgetting and dis/membering, is also observable, according to Duvall, in the echoing rhetoric of Baby Suggs that permeates the conversations discussing Sethe's dreadful situation (129-130). Some instances emerge, Duvall points out, which have almost identical formulations, and which link Baby Suggs' preaching motto – "This is

flesh I'm talking about here" – to the following exchange between Ella and another woman:

"Ella. What's all this I'm hearing about Sethe?"
 "Tell me it's in there with her. That's all I know."
 "The daughter? The killed one?"
 "That's what they tell me."
 "How they know that's her?"
 "It's sitting there...Whipping Sethe every day."
 "I'll be. A baby?"
 "No. Grown. The age it would have been had it lived."
 "You talking about flesh?"
 "I'm talking about flesh" (88, 255).

The climactic scene offers a reconsideration of the primal scene of the traumatic narrative, the moment of infanticide as the culmination of the trauma of slavery's direct and delayed impacts.

The women's gathering to chase the ghost away permits a re-staging of that scene which demands repression and resistance as much as it demands reiteration. According to Joanna Wolfe, there "is no missing that this scene *revises* the women's actions from nineteen years earlier, when they both failed to warn Sethe of the approaching slave catchers" (273, emphasis added). By allowing themselves to intervene in order to save one of theirs, to re/claim Sethe as a member of their community, the other women alter their estranging attitude and reestablish Sethe's belonging to the collective body, another body that must be, in a Baby Suggs-inspired way "loved, cautioned, fed, chastised and soothed" (87). While offering Sethe a moment of communion, the women claim a share in "Sethe's closed and private text (her 'best thing') and turn it into a communal text that rewrites the past" (273). This moment of rebirth into the community is depicted in the text with a sanctified aura that is reminiscent of the title of Baby Suggs, *holy*: when the

women revert back to a pre-linguistic code, and their voices – much like in the Clearing with the preacher of the flesh – are searching for “the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words... It broke over Sethe and she trembled *like the baptized in its wash*” (*Beloved* 261).

The reconnection with the matriarch’s spiritual enlightenment regroups the communal network around value of solidarity and permits the containment of Sethe’s reoriented anger, which is oriented towards the white man, Mr. Bodwin, this time around. In addition, Sethe’s reintegration is an opening of redemptive possibilities, since the multiplicity of communal attempts to understand and intervene within Sethe’s story causes the ghost to erupt “into her separate parts, to make it easy for the chewing laughter to swallow her all away” (Wolfe 267). When the community repossesses the ability to redefine itself, because it conforms to the ancestral teachings of Baby Suggs, who “opened her great heart to those who could use it,” it succeeds in rescuing Sethe and Denver (87). Perhaps more importantly, however, the women’s changing prayer allows the creation of communal bonds that resurrect it as a whole, thereby reviving “itself by again giving voice to the power of the life-affirming language” vocalized by an ancestral maternal figure (Lawrence 240-241).

Morrison’s text thus operates in line with bell hooks’ expression of the yearning that African American textuality attempts to articulate – exemplifying how the “longing to tell one’s story and the process of telling is symbolically a gesture of longing to recover the past in such a way that one experiences both a sense of *reunion* and a sense of *release* (*Talking Back* 158, emphasis added). That *Beloved* vanishes from 124 is a certainty, but she does so in a mysterious way. Some are not sure they saw her, some

claim to have seen “cutting through the woods, a naked woman with fish for hair” (*Beloved* 267). There is no tangible sign that Beloved’s departure is final, however, which rhymes well with the anti-essentialist orientation of the novel. One thing is noticeable: Beloved’s exorcism and subsequent departure work as a catalyst that strengthens the intersubjective ties. Hence the disorientation in finding that, as Paul D is reminding Sethe that she is her “best thing,” deciding to “put his story next to her,” and pointing that they both “need some kind of tomorrow,” the text completes its cycle by re/turning attention again to the word from the grave, the name that brackets the whole narrative account, the word that begins and ends it all, the word that demands another reading: “Beloved” (273).

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Beloved reveals the need to accept the traumatic historical component of one’s identity: it relates what happens when the traumatic trace forces its way upon the subject who tries to obliterate it. The text stages a ghostly return of the repressed: Sethe’s daughter proves a version of history that refuses utter annihilation. In fact, as Julie Armstrong notes, the novel asks questions about “[w]hether the past is something that characters recover or recover from in order to heal” (290). In this respect, spectrality, but also materiality, is suggestive of the inner battle that is the sequel of traumatic history. The ghost is the signature of the past, a recurrent mnemonic agency that inscribes the text within the (traumatic) circular time that imprisons the African American victims. Standing also for the African Americans whose lives and traumatic experiences are ‘lost’ (from the archive) to history, the ghost is a presence that asserts the ontological status of traumatic reminiscences. Rememories cannot be repeatedly denied ‘into’ a referential vacuum.

Beloved, as a ghost, operates as the supplement²²⁰, the sign for the belated return of the formerly hindered African American articulation of experience – a manifestation of the dynamics of return and repetition at the heart of trauma which are symptomatic of traumatic excess, its being outside the range. It symbolizes the repression of a traumatic history, through Sethe's illusion that "the future was a matter of keeping the past at bay", but also the repression reflected in the silencing of the expression emanating from the traumatic wounds of the victims (*Beloved* 42). Morrison summons a ghost, a hauntological mark of that which is dis/regarded, sometimes even by the victims themselves. It is this challenging figure that permits the text to ask questions about the constructed nature of the historical past, and to underline the need "to know what happened and why and figure it out...[because] constantly burying it, distorting it, and pretending, I think, is unhealthy" (Hackney 129).

As Morrison explains, her text remains oriented towards the past, returning to investigate its silences and pay tribute to those whom her text calls "the unnamed, unmentioned people left behind" (*Beloved* 92). The text shows the evolution of 124 Bluestone Road's atmosphere from "spiteful," to "loud," to "quiet," thereby mirroring Sethe's inner metamorphosis. The ethical reader is invited to mimic such a transformation by filling in the textual gaps and the aporias of official history, detecting those "absences [that] are so stressed, so ornate, so planned, [that] they call attention to themselves; arrest us with intentionality and purpose (*Unspeakable* 136).

CONCLUSION

A remarkable aspect to be noted, in the analysis of texts grappling with trauma, is that the delayed mediation of the text itself vibrantly echoes the absolute need for the victims to revisit what their psyche could not handle in its first occurrence – the missed encounter with the possibility of violent death. It is at this junction of the recursive (non/experience) and the discursive (narrative/archive) that my comparative reading of the poetics of traumatic hindsight in Anne Michaels's *Fugitive Pieces*, Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms*, and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is best situated: all the novels signify the necessity of a retrospective gaze towards the atrocious past, even as they diverge in terms of how they view the unfolding of the effects of trauma and in the dissimilar claims they make about their own archival/literary status.

The thesis investigates the ways in which each text negotiates the fragmentation that characterizes the traumatic aftermath, particularly as a result of the incomplete nature of traumatic history inscribed as absence of knowledge. Thus, it shows that the three texts dis/play themselves as manifestations of how the poetic mode attempts to reach toward a referentiality that remains stubbornly beyond its grasp: a quest for an imploded language that would transmit, rather than depict, the traumatic disruptions characterizing the lives of the protagonists. The endeavour to negotiate the crisis of signification is apparent in the complex ways that the gaps riddling the memory of trauma are variously foregrounded in these multilayered novels: first, in the plethora of voices intruding and superimposing on each other; second, in the literal returning move that drives the progression of the novels and that leads to pronounced assertions of intersubjective ties as

the enabling element in the process of reassigning meaning to one's story; and, third, in the lyrical quality that shapes the 'limit language' of the text.

The multiperspectivism characterizing the novels not only instills disjointedness but also, and perhaps more significantly, reiterates the text's own avowal of incompleteness in terms of the range and variety of catastrophes that it re/covers: becoming a story within a story (Jakob's part) hovering over another story (Ben's part) is the passage – in *Fugitive Pieces* – about the little boy left alone with provisions of food and told not to open the door to anyone, thinking “Mama and Papa will come back. The last tin means they're coming” (*FP* 149). This accentuates the metonymical status of the stories un/told in the novel – or, at least, their partial representativeness. It also gestures towards the unattended to, towards the unarticulated that strains history and shows that it only is ethical to unearth those accounts. The same goes for the brief encounter, in *Solar Storms*, with Angela's sister, Henriet, another voiceless victim whose story cannot even be related by Angela “because her existence both horrified me and filled me with despair” (*SS* 118). Henriet's tale is a concentrated layer of semiotically-charged features; it is written by blades and cigarettes on her skin, as “she never spoke” (118). In *Beloved*, the unspoken not only intrudes upon the present, but it comes back in a raw, picture-like form: the slave boat “voyagers” merge into the present via the articulation of Beloved: the pronouns changes (from “I” – Beloved, presumably, or an African slave aboard a ship – to “we”) as well as the hesitant and ambiguously erratic mentions of the men and women aboard the ship only reinforce the intersection of missing stories, making the reader look “for the holes...for the unnamed, unmentioned people left behind” (*Beloved* 92).

It is this attention to the fractures of traumatic hi/stories that drives the emplotment of the novels and, in this process, somewhat imposes the return of the protagonist in a move that highlights the simultaneous need to account for origins and the impossibility of naming – or arriving at – such origins, which is at the heart of both the genre of trauma writing and, as shown in the dissertation, Freudian psychoanalysis. Hence, Jakob's return to Greece, Angela's return to Adam's Rib, and *Beloved's* return from the dead all signify the symbolic re-enactment in text, and in the characters' lives, of the traumatic past – thus revealed because re/lived. Present as the dynamic force within the textual attempt to come to terms with this non/experience, return is also a mechanism that is inherent to how the traumatic memory traces intrusively impose themselves in pristine form upon the victims (e.g. in flashbacks and nightmares).

This parallel is reflected in the fragmented life stories that are thus un/covers, which signals how the *après coup* of trauma is marked – like the texts themselves – by temporal incoherence, a troubled quest for meaning, and a difficulty in perceiving or formulating one's role or position in the traumatic aftermath. Nonetheless, since return is variously shown to bind victims, directly or via their trauma-ridden expression, it functions to establish an intersubjective network that allows for a better sense of self to be gradually reached: in *Fugitive Pieces*, Ben is able to compensate for his father's muteness through Jakob's poetry. Similarly, Angela's return to her decaying community in *Solar Storms* allows her to situate her story – literally and otherwise – as part and parcel of her traumatic heritage, binding her with her mother's abuse, and the pillaged land. Likewise, the return of *Beloved*, in Morrison's text, roots Sethe firmly within the

community that stops ostracizing her. Return becomes a catalyst for (self-)revelation, uniting the whole community of former slaves as they face the traumatic haunting.

Just as the protagonists *return*, so does the language of the text as it becomes lyrical: it echoes the excess of the traumatic moment – be it the extreme violence that is missed by the psyche or the surplus of missed elements of the non/experience – by operating a *turn* away, a deviation, from the literal. The poetic thus becomes a mark of, and on, language in the novels, their lyricism a swerving move that is brought about by the weight of a trauma that cannot be mastered or contained within language. Accordingly, as Geoffrey Hartman points out, figuration becomes an essentially inescapable condition of the text “meeting” the catastrophic event. Hence,

the text’s tropological processes reveal the fractured condition of signification caused by the traumatic event, in which the referent of the traumatic event cannot be accessed and *all that remains is the signifier of the traumatic symptom*. In terms of marking, this means that the text often cannot explicitly refer to its own stigmatized content, but rather can only *perform this stigmatization figuratively in the way that it produces that content* (McGlothlin 12, emphases added).

Being unable attain direct referentiality – because they are situated at so many removes from the events missed (even by the victims) – the texts cannot but turn around the question of trauma and its witnessing, perpetually utilizing tropes as detours: thus functioning via a limit language that can only obliquely allude towards the catastrophe and its testimonial burden.

A central aspect of this study is thus the focus on how memory and witnessing are deeply entwined with the linguistic, which, by imploding into the poetic, offers the possibility of reconciling the imaginative intervention with the obliquely referential. It is at this point that several theories seem to converge that tackle the nature of the traumatic

articulation, which is – according to this project – where the import of poetics in the field of trauma theory could be situated. To be more specific, one has to start with Pierre Janet’s mention that “[m]emory...like all psychological phenomena is an action; essentially, it is the action of telling a story” (qtd. in Leys 111). If we conjugate this remark with Hartman’s doubt-laden observation that “[t]raumatic knowledge...would seem to be a contradiction in terms. It is as close to nescience as to knowledge. Any general description or modeling of trauma, therefore, risks being figurative itself,” we end up recognizing the need for articulation as a heterologic act, even as this articulation is itself at times retreating, hesitant, and equally preoccupied with figures of victims/witnesses as it is with figures of speech (*Traumatic Knowledge*, 537).

¹ *Exploration*, 30.

² *The Writing of the Disaster*, 38.

³ In Greek, the term “trauma” means a wound. It was originally used to denote physical injuries, according to the Oxford English Dictionary’s earlier versions, which defines trauma as a “wound, or external bodily injury in general”. Subsequently, the notion was extended to include psychic wounds as well; so that it denoted “the wounding of the mind brought about by sudden, unexpected, emotional shock” (Leys 4). The term post-traumatic stress disorder, according to Rachel MacNair, originated from “studies of combat veterans. In World War I, the term “shell shock” was used to describe the phenomenon, and it was essentially thought to be a physical problem. In World War II, it was called “battle fatigue” or “combat fatigue”, and it was finally admitted to be psychological in origin” (1). Listing the commonly cited symptoms of PTSD, MacNair mentions the following:

- A. The person has been exposed to a traumatic event in which both of the following were present:
 - 1. the person experienced, witnessed, or was confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others; and
 - 2. the person’s response involved intense fear, helplessness or horror.
- B. The traumatic event is persistently re-experienced in one (or more) of the following ways:
 - 1. recurrent and intrusive distressing recollections of the event (...)
 - 2. recurrent distressing dreams of the event (...)
 - 3. acting or feeling as if the traumatic event were recurring (includes a sense of reliving the experience, illusions, hallucinations, and dissociative flashback episodes, including those that occur on awakening or when intoxicated).
 - 4. intense psychological distress at exposure to internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event.
 - 5. psychological reactivity on exposure to internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event.
- C. Persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma and numbing of general responsiveness (not present before the trauma), as indicated by three (or more) of the following:
 - 1. efforts to avoid thoughts, feelings, or conversation associated with the trauma.
 - 2. efforts to avoid activities, places, or people that arouse recollections of the trauma
 - 3. inability to recall an important aspect of the trauma
 - 4. markedly diminished interest or participation in significant activities
 - 5. feeling of detachment or estrangement from others
 - 6. restricted range of affect (...)
 - 7. sense of foreshortened future” (p4-5).

⁴ If I mention integration here, it is because there is a transposition of the distinction, in criticism, from psyche to language to memory. As indicated by Geoffrey Hartman, the

theory holds that the knowledge of trauma, or the knowledge which comes from that source, is composed of two contradictory elements. One is the traumatic event, registered rather than experienced. It seems to have bypassed perception and consciousness, and falls directly into the psyche. The other is a kind of memory of the event, in the form of a perpetual troping of it by the bypassed or severely split (dissociated) psyche. On the level of poetics, literal and figurative may correspond to these two types of cognition (*Traumatic Knowledge*, 537).

⁵ As Primo Levi has pointed out, “that where violence is inflicted on man it is also inflicted on language” so that the linguistic medium often becomes a means towards the redefinition of the victims, the denial of their humanity – e.g. in the Nazi shifting of reference to a “last *solution*” rather than annihilation and to the objectification of the Jews as “vermin,” not human beings. So this emptying of the linguistic signifier propels the counteract of repossessing language to restore or recreate, which is also to repeat, the events in the conditions of their happening and with the ‘right’ significance (*The Drowned and the Saved* 97). This position is strikingly similar to that expressed by Naomi Mandel, in regards to the Holocaust, which is the traumatic kernel of *Fugitive Pieces*:

A process stunning in its simplicity – the reduction of living people to smoke and ashes – while overwhelming in its implications: the reduction of living people to smoke and ashes. The word “Auschwitz” emblemizes this simplicity – giving the process a specific location and a name – while enacting its complexity: specifying, locating, and naming. Like any word, or any name, “Auschwitz” both signifies and effaces, refers and defers (204).

⁶ This again raises the question of conjugating the unspeakable with a project of communication in which, as Felman notes, “memory is conjured... essentially in order to address another, to impress upon a listener, to appeal to a community. To testify is always, metaphorically, to take the witness stand...not merely to narrate but to commit oneself, and *to commit the narrative*, to others: to take responsibility” (204, emphasis added).

⁷ As Elie Wiesel notes, the challenge is in knowing beforehand that what it “hopes to transmit can never be transmitted” and that all it “can possibly hope to achieve is to communicate the impossibility of communication” (qtd. in Bussie 124). However, there is a sense in which the ‘real’ is always a step away from writing, which could also be seen as an effect of presence (in Derridean terms). So that, in this light, writing about the Holocaust is paradoxically re-inscribed as one that shares the same challenges as any writing.

⁸ Giorgio Agamben has noted the link between the concept of barbarism and the absence of language, since the “literal meaning of the term *barbaros*, a ‘barbarian’ is a being not gifted with *logos*” (114). In this perspective, silence is a repetition of the principled dehumanization of the victims, a denial of their ability to report anything about the traumas they have lived through, as well as an affirmation of the perpetrators’ intent to make the event so unthinkable as to be the ones defining it, by suspending the ability of the victim to speak about it and the ability of the bystander to accept their version as improbable.

⁹ Trezise’s characterization of how language remains ambiguously entwined with Holocaust trauma seems particularly relevant:

With regards to language, the Holocaust is an undecidable in that it refutes both opposite relations with textuality. It “does not lie entirely “outside” or “inside” of language, since, on the one hand, to ascribe to it an ineffable exteriority is already to represent it, to interpret what supposedly surpasses interpretation, while on the other, to contend that it is now strictly a matter of representation and interpretation is to ignore or deny the extent to which their linguistic medium has been disrupted and altered by the Holocaust *as event*. The Holocaust only “exceeds” speech because its effects are *internal* to speech itself (41).

¹⁰ The appellation, musselman/muslim is a racist epithet that denotes the camp inmates who gave up on existence.

¹¹ This is a move demanded by his search for a new, uncontaminated ethics, an “*Ethica more Auschwitz demonstrata*,” one which would take into account the inherent aporia or impossible task of bearing witness to that which defies witnessing (*Remnants* 13). This invading uncertainty within the witnessing project is also cited by Primo Levi, whose very description of the soccer game, taking place in a concentration camp – between members of the *Sonderkommando*, victims victimizing others by serving as extensions of the perpetrators’ will, and members of the SS, the main agents of annihilation of both their doomed helpers and the others – is borrowed by Agamben to epitomize our historical stance in the aftermath of trauma.

¹² In addition to this paradox, there seems to be an area of connection between the belief in the literally unspeakable as an effect generated by (the limits of) language, or as a linguistic artifact itself, and what Hayden White’s calls “fictions of factual representation,” whose meaning extends now to cover trauma-ridden historiography (121). In fact, the discrepancy between White’s allusions to the limits of historiography and the fictions (i.e., texts like the ones under study in this thesis) that supplement it – i.e., the fictions appending the fictions – should be noted. The first misses the inward perception of the events it registers with objective detachment, while the second emanates precisely from the “subjective” reception of events. The latter type of fiction – poetry, drama, and memoir – represents, arguably, the complement to the gaps and homogenizations of official records of history.

¹³ Along the same lines, Eaglestone indeed notes that within the polyvalence

signified by these *tropes and strategies*, something ‘stubbornly persists’, a link to a ‘forgotten wound’ or more accurately to a remembered event. It is these *textual signs that bear a trace*: the trace, as Derrida makes clear...which marks ‘the limits of the linguistic and the limits of the rhetorical’. The trace is the grounds for that which refuses [oblivion] (70, my emphasis).

¹⁴ Levi asserts, in fact, the uncommonality of survival in the Nazi extermination camps as reiterated in his questioning of the nature of witnessing as necessarily incomplete, and of its revealed experience as uncharacteristic. He states: “We survivors are not only an exiguous but also an anomalous minority: we are those who by their prevarications or abilities or good luck did not touch bottom. Those who did so...have not returned to tell about it or have returned muted, but they are the “Muslims,” the submerged, the complete witnesses, the ones whose deposition would have a general significance. They are the rule; we are the exception (*The Drowned and the Saved* 84-85).

¹⁵ This is also common to the victims as well: “The Jews also use a euphemism to indicate extermination. They use the term *Shoah*, which means “devastation, catastrophe” and in the Bible, often implies the idea of a divine punishment” (*Remnants* 31).

¹⁶ Mandel raises the excellent question of how one needs to examine the construction of such an event as the Holocaust in terms of the ineffable. She states that “it is worth considering the extent to which the presumed “unspeakable” quality of the Holocaust...is a *cultural construct*, replete with the interests and assumptions that govern any cultural construct, *less a quality of the event itself* than an expression of our own motivations and desires” (205, emphasis added).

¹⁷ I use this term ambiguously to refer both to the rem(a)inder of the trauma itself – the archival, corporeal, or immaterial signs of non/presence from which emanates a retrospective tracing of history of/as trauma – but also to its Derridean reading as the supplement of signification, as the erasure of the origin that allows its first inscription as a trace. In fact, amalgamating the trace as a literary sign with itself as a traumatic after-effect that is always already in the process of taking primacy or precedence seems to be the point where the Derridean conceptualization of texts meets the appending belatedness of the traumatic event – Derrida already linked, in *Writing and Differance*, the Freudian belatedness, or *nachträglichkeit*, to a supplement. I specifically point to the fact that deconstruction considers that the “trace is not only the disappearance of origin...the origin did not even disappear, that it was never constituted except reciprocally by a non-origin, the trace, which thus becomes the origin of the origin” (Derrida, *OG* 61). By enacting the movement, or play, of terms and significations, the texts analyzed here exemplify the Derridean overflow of the chain of substitutions, participating in the extension of referral/reference (as traumatic contamination) beyond the margin or scope of the text itself – “a “text” that is henceforth no longer a finished corpus of writing, some content enclosed in a book or its margins, but a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces” (Derrida, *Living On* 69). Hence, the traumatic and literary trace enacts a further transformation of language – a non-literalization, in Derridean parlance, or a deviation from a rigid, “primary” perception – that enables it to shift or redefine its connection to non-language, and to effect an assertion of a memory that “lives on” in the network of deferral and distinction.

¹⁸ Inasmuch as the texts attempt to explode signification, rather than to precisely assign or confine it, they somewhat avoid becoming themselves euphemisms that substitute for memories which, they try to evoke, are gradually missing. It is true that writing itself becomes embarking upon a prosopopeia: exhumation, revenants, and wounds. Yet, the stereotypical display of the devices of the gothic is, paradoxically, downplayed or complemented by its effects: an enmeshing of the known and unknown that, as Caruth notes, “simultaneously defies and demands our witness” (*UE* 5).

¹⁹ The term Holocaust is but one of several terms assigned to the events that plagued the European Jewry. Among the other labels, one can cite, first, the final solution to the Jewish question (*Die Endlösung der Judenfrage*). This is a euphemism that shows the way Jewish individuals were considered as problems, while simultaneously stressing the ‘finality’ of the Nazi ‘solution’. Second, the destruction of the Jews (*Die Judenvernichtung*) strives for a purely descriptive and pseudo-scientific character. It also objectifies and reinforces the non-human character of the victims – who are thus not killed or murdered but simply destroyed (*vernichtet*). Third, (the) *Shoah* is a term with religious connotations. It translates from Hebrew

as calamity or devastation, and is associated to divine retribution, thus bearing a sense of historical connection between God and the Jewish people. The fourth designation, *Churban*, is a transliteration from Yiddish which denotes the destruction of a sacred place (the Temple). It is thus inscribed in a chronological history of repetitive destruction (the third one coincides with World War II). The fifth appellation, Auschwitz, is a synecdoche – a camp standing for all the camps – which tends to inappropriately isolate the event in a single place. The term *Genocide* rather accentuates the victims as a race. This lack of differentiation (looking at the group as a homogenous entity) reiterates the gaze that generated the killings in the first place. Finally, the term *Holocaust* is derived from the Greek *holokaustus*, meaning ‘burnt whole’. The term points to the ritualistic and sacrificial nature of the killing, bringing the event into the religious sphere (Smith, *The Holocaust and Other Genocides* 93-97). Since no term is without its own ambiguities (either shedding an air of mysticism and/or reiterating the logic of perpetrators in some way), I will refer to the killing *en masse* of European Jewish individuals as the Holocaust, in line with standard academic practice.

²⁰ As will be shown in a later part of this thesis, Deconstruction is perfectly compatible with “the view that are not fully present to ourselves and that we represent all our experiences in highly mediated forms” (qtd. in Kaplan 152).

²¹ Freud offers the following qualification for trauma:

We describe as ‘traumatic’ any excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield [of the mind/organism]. It seems to me that the concept of trauma necessarily implies a connection of this kind with a breach in an otherwise efficacious barrier against stimuli...There is no longer any possibility of preventing the mental apparatus from being flooded with large amounts of stimulus (23-24).

²² Elsewhere, Freud labels this period during which the event is not available to consciousness an “incubation period” (*Moses and Monotheism* 84).

²³ Following his insistence on the contradiction between the economy of pleasure – in which dreams have a wish-fulfillment function – and the disagreeable presence of nightmares that plunge the trauma victim back in the terror they barely escaped, Freud moves to depicting a child’s game that also *reproduces* trauma to dominate it. As he observes the child’s play, Freud notes his reaction to the departure of his mother through a game in which he throws a wooden reel, uttering the sounds “o-o-o-o”. Then, the child would bring the toy back in sight, joyfully saying “da”. Freud interprets this game as one of “disappearance and return,” a coping mechanism that allows the child to re-enact his mother’s occasional unpleasurable departure from the household. He points out that the sound “o-o-o-o” is the child’s version of the German word “fort” (“gone”) and “da” (“there” [it is]). Remarkably, Freud notes that the first part of the game – i.e., the less pleasurable one that mimics the painful separation from the mother – is far more frequent than the second one. He reads this re-enactment as a manifestation of the child’s attempt to compensate for his lack of mastery over the painful event, an empowering game that moves the child from a passive position to an active one and enables the redirection of his hostility towards a substitute. Even more crucial is the fact that, for Freud, this game provides a developmentally early example that conflates the trauma victim’s tendency “to *repeat* the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of...*remembering* it as something belonging to the past” with the staging of a return, the *mise-en-scene* of an experience that mimics the repressed, original one (*Beyond* 11).

²⁴ It is important to ask if, following deconstruction, deferral (the temporal aspect of *différance*) is a parallel notion to the delay structurally at the heart of the traumatic experience. Both concepts are concerned with the (discursive) failure of the subject to reach presence. *Différance* is the past moment’s mark, or trace, within the element appearing “on the scene of presence,” which because of the “non-synonymous chain” of substitutions becomes every element, *ad infinitum*. It is both a temporal gap and a spacing distinction. Similarly, the Freudian *nachträglichkeit* – i.e., the ‘afterwardsness’ that inheres in the structure of trauma – is itself marked by a return of the literal. In an important nuance, noted by Eric Savoy, it is this persistence of the literal that allows for a disruption of presence that it not marked by utter or absolute distinction, upheld at any given moment of substitution, but by an iterative resurgence of the index of the traumatic event (i.e. the wound that speaks). Hence, trauma opens a window for a chain of substitutions that revolves

around interspersed referrals that are marked by a certain prominence of the literal term. This is not to establish the literal link as the centre of the chain of signification, for “the literal is not the same thing as reference,” an element can be literal but cryptically non-referential, “or at most self-referential, and therefore not at all a transparent sign that points toward history” (Savoy).

²⁵ It is noteworthy that Ruth Leys, in a critique of Caruth’s inconsistent use of Freudian theory of trauma, points that Caruth amalgamates the perpetrator’s trauma with the victim’s (the unleashing of the voice is the effect of a second “killing” of Clorinda by Tancred). Leys insists (1) that Freud cites the story as an example of the repetition compulsion in normal people; (2) that Tancred was not unaware of the first killing; (3) that, the repetition of the killing gesture is not literal ; and, perhaps more crucially, (4) that the mis/identification of Tancred as a victim of trauma himself of a trauma of an “other” – i.e., the beloved he kills - permits the facile *migration of victimhood* across individual because it integrates the victim within the self of the perpetrator as a part of it that “confesses the truth of what Tancred himself does not and cannot know” (296). The danger of Caruth’s conversions of perpetrators into victims – by insisting on a split or dissociated self, in which the other’s trauma is known through incorporation but also performed or executed - is evident, accordingly, in the fact that the executioners of trauma are offered a dispensation by which they can mirror the state of those they aggressed and claim to be victims of the wounds they inflict (296-297).

²⁶ For example, Ben is able to move on and reconnect with the untold hi/story of his parents through the compelling and poetic narratives of Jakob, which he unearths. In a similar fashion, by tracing her own story of physical markings and wounds back to the hi/story of her mothers, Angela is able to meaningfully re/situate her existence as a potential recreation and resistance to destruction. In *Beloved*, Sethe’s repressive attitude towards the traumatic past backfires and demonstrates that her own act of infanticide fits within a history loaded with abuse, and which goes as far back as the slave ships, to the physical and psychological abuses of life under slavery.

²⁷ I use this term because of its resonance with the text’s highlighting of the ethical gesture of chronicling or memorializing the past – even when memory is incomplete: “Athos might have said: If one has no land but has the memory of land, then one can make a map” (*FP* 193).

²⁸ This continuation of abuse is one of the themes of the novel, which also revolves around the fact that the limited, exploitative view of the land denies the Native perception of it as sacrosanct. A utilitarian view of the land works to annihilate its potential and reductively suppresses its many roles in the Native cosmology: “land was being drilled to see what else could be taken, looted, and mined” (*SS* 219). The perennial subjugation of the land and the ones who believe have stewardship thereof has also been noted by Linda Hogan elsewhere, as she points out the incapacity of the perpetrators to change their perceptions of what the Native other stands for:

there was then, *as now*, a search by Euro-Americans for what they thought American Indians represented. Not for the best of what we have to offer, our knowledge, our complex theologies, our remembered ecology, but for a romantic tie to the earth the Europeans have forgotten and severed, and could now have back, but for self-deceit. They could have what it is they want *but they would have to change* (*A Turned-Around World* 44, emphases added).

²⁹ Giorgio Agamben has warned of the danger of the text being preoccupied by its own metaphorical beauty, insisting that the poetic must be subservient to the testimonial:

To bear witness, it is therefore not enough to bring language into its own non-sense, to the pure undecidability of letters...It is necessary that this senseless sound be, in turn, the voice of something or someone that, for entirely other reasons, cannot bear witness (*Remnants* 39).

³⁰ A language that calls one through and towards its aporetic gestures is thus an invitation to a participatory reading that requires ethical involvement but also an accusation of the “objective” or “factual” motif that sustains a language of detachment and indifference to the African American plight. As Morrison herself notes in her Nobel Prize speech,

a dead language is not only one no longer spoken or written, it is unyielding language content to admire its own paralysis. Like statist language, censored and censoring.

Ruthless in its policing duties, it has no desire or purpose other than maintaining the free range of its own narcotic narcissism, its own exclusivity and dominance. However moribund, it is not without effect for it actively thwarts the intellect, stalls conscience, suppresses human potential. Unreceptive to interrogation, it cannot form or tolerate new ideas, shape other thoughts, tell another story, fill baffling silences. Official language smitheryed to sanction ignorance and preserve privilege is a suit of armour polished to shocking glitter, a husk from which the knight departed long ago. Yet there it is: dumb, predatory, sentimental...summoning false memories of stability, harmony among the public.

³¹ Agamben provides a review of the etymological origin of the word itself in *Remnants*. Pp. 41-47.

³² Again, this is not simply a straightforward assumption but rather an ambiguous stance that is observable in the fact that the traumatic event is equally soundly drawn from historical research as it is from individual memory. As Anne Whitehead notes, “Holocaust fiction is often based on extensive historical research and documentation; while Holocaust testimony is subject to the inaccuracies and distortions of memory” (30).

³³ This distancing is also recognizably intentional in order to avoid what Geoffrey Hartman labels “memory envy,” the current that seeps writers to lose sight of the separating divide between fictional re/creation of the past and pathological claims to ownership of said “memories” as historically valid, as “foundation narratives” or “myths of origin” (*The Geoffrey Hartman Reader* 425). This envy motto’s is summed up as “better to recover false memories than none” – the blurring elision of the boundary between original and surrogate thus works to establish “social recognition,” where the status of victim supplies the needed attention (441). However, while the novels are aware of the dangers of total identification with the victims, they clearly enact their belief in belonging to what, as Hartman remarks, is increasingly a literary tradition of the “outbreak of unreal memories,” masquerading as history.

³⁴ According to Susan Gubar, the fact that the Holocaust, for instance, “is dying” is due to several factors: it is moving further into the past with the passing away of survivors, the necessary will to rebound from such horror by retrieving a grip on life by their descendants, the confiscation of its memory via the silence that envelops it or the ill-advised reverence that virtually elevates it to a sacred level, and the co-opting fetishization of its horrors that offers “facile or banal reconstructions” that distorted it even further (*Poetry After Auschwitz* 5).

³⁵ In the text, the gist of the story of Ben’s father is provided in one paragraph, which echoes the brevity itself of the time allotted by him to recount it:

those hours, wordless and close, shaped my sense of him... The story of his life as I knew it from my mother – strange episodic images – and his stories of composers, merged together with the music. Cow breath and cow dung and fresh hay on Mahler’s muddy night road home, moonlight a spiderweb over the fields. Under the same moonlight, marching back to the camp, my father’s tongue a thong of wool; unbearably thirsty as he walked at gunpoint, past a bucket of rainwater, its small circular mirror of stars. Praying for rain so they could swallow what fell on their faces, rain that smelled like sweat. How he ate the center of a cabbage in a farmer’s field, leaving it hollow but looking whole so no one would trace his escape from the soldiers in the grove (*FP* 216).

³⁶ As Ben observes about his parents eating habits:

My mother kept food in her purse. My father ate frequently to avoid the first twists of hunger because, once they gripped him, he’d eat until he was sick. Then he ate dutifully, methodically, tears streaming down his face, animal and spirit in such raw evidence, knowing he was degrading both. If one needs proof of the soul, it’s easily found. The spirit is most evident at the point of extreme body humiliation. There was no pleasure, for my father, associated with food. It was years before I realized this wasn’t a mere psychological difficulty, but also a moral one, for who could answer my father’s question: Knowing what he knew, should he stuff himself or starve? (*FP* 214).

³⁷ This is the title of one of Jakob’s poetry collections. The second one bears a preoccupation with, surprisingly, not language but time – again signifying the intertwined preoccupation of survivors with the impossible retrieval of the originary moment of absence that characterizes their experience of trauma.

³⁸ This is not to suggest a homogenizing template followed by the books analyzed in this project, but there are resonances and similarities that strike one as not only structurally needed but also as critically informative of the message conveyed in each text.

³⁹ It is important to note that, while Angela's return towards a depleted natural landscape is described as a crucial step towards the achievement of individuation that is also cooperative and harmonious with the natural order, Hogan does not exaggerate the value of place as a pristine, segregated space where the Natives flourish in a state of absolute, heaven-like temporal suspension. In fact, this romanticizing of place – which is not dissimilar to the ideological depiction that served to either eradicate the Native population or to marginalize and forcibly place them in reservations – is deconstructed by the fact that Hogan described a rather decaying community that is almost falling apart. Again, via a striking parallel with the ceremony of the sweat lodge, where “the entire world is brought inside the enclosure...it is all called in,” Hogan effects a move beyond a fixed spatial coordinate as the necessary component of a reconnection to the traumatic past (*Dwellings* 195-196). The natural/spatial component is rather shown to be internalized by the conscientious Native American in addition not only via a “mourning” that functions as a “common ground” upon which dissidence can be built, but also because the literal ground itself fights back: “a raw and scarred place, a land that had learned to survive, even to thrive, on harshness” (SS 15; 224).

⁴⁰ This passage demonstrates, once again, the complex relation of the literal and the figurative in trauma writing: here, the conscious eschewal of the mirror is a *literalization* – a symbolic performative – of a trope of the colonizer's narcissistic self-absorption, and an act of resisting the limited scope of a perspective that is oblivious to the Other.

⁴¹ Angela describes this meeting in a language of devastation: “I could only look at her, and what I saw was more ruined than the land...I could see that there was no love inside her, nothing that could love me, nothing that could ever have loved” (SS 231).

⁴² One day I dropped the mirror and it broke into many pieces. For a while I kept these, looking at only parts of my face at a time. Then *I had no choice but to imagine myself, along with the parts and fragments of stories*, as if it all was a part of a great brokenness moving, trying to move, toward wholeness – a leg, an arm, a putting together (SS 85, emphasis added).

⁴³ As Karla Holloway notes,

for Morrison's novel, *what complicates the physical and psychic anguish* is the reality that slavery itself defies traditional historiography. The *victim's own chronicles* of these events were systematically submerged, ignored, mistrusted, or superceded by “historians” of the era. This novel positions the consequence of black invisibility in both the record of slavery and the record-keeping as a situation of primary spiritual significance. Thus, the “ghostly”/“historical” presence that intrudes itself into this novel serves to belie the reportage that passes for historical records of this era (516-517).

⁴⁴ In fact, the story starts with a depiction of stable context where the ghost's presence yields a certain unease but where the main drive is to sustain the illusion of a healthy present, cut off from the examination of the past traumatic horrors – much like a historiographical move away from a shameful examination of past mistakes. But the powerful persistence of traumatic memories to be released from the silence that envelopes them is what unleashes the revisiting of the ghost-in-the-flesh of Beloved, the daughter murdered to escape a death-in-life fate that her mother sees is the true meaning of slavery. At the same time, as the ghost arises from the literal river (also qua the symbolic representation of time) and inhabits the narrative of a future that is disconnected from a traumatic past that is too horrid to re-examine, it modifies the way Sethe perceives the path towards the “integration” of those memories so as not to remain passively possessed by them. As Morrison notes, “an individual or even a country needs that [access to the past]...a certain kind of amnesia is just intolerable...you have to know what happened and why and figure it out...constantly burying it, distorting it, and pretending, I think, is unhealthy” (*Conversations* 2008 129).

⁴⁵ Michaels' material grounding opposes the Nazi idea of erasing every element that might bear witness to their atrocity by asserting that the traces are *literally* everywhere – from galaxies to atoms. It also signifies another traumatic materiality, represented by the transgenerational transmission or operation of the traumatic past. The former is asserted through the poetic insight of Jakob Beer, who muses: “The shadow past ... melts the present like rain through karst;” “images rising in me like bruises;” “my blood-past was

drained from me” and he even has similarities of perspective with Ben when he asserts that “each life saved [leaves] genetic features to rise again in another generation” (*FP* 17, 19, 20, 48). Jakob (or Michaels) even amalgamates the dead with stars, “aching towards us...though we are blind to their signals until it’s too late,” feeling compassion towards them. Ben, who does not have access to a linguistic account about the plight of his survivor parents, ends up imbued with such a philosophy and asks “who can separate fear from the body? My parents’ past is mine molecularly” (*FP* 280). In my reading of the novel, Ben sums up Michaels’ erection of the body as a memory site; he says that putting one’s hands into the bodies of victims is not only a touching of their deaths but also of their “emotions, beliefs, confessions” (*FP* 279).

⁴⁶ Michaels asserts:

In *Fugitive Pieces*, I explore this idea in relation to a law that was passed in Germany during the Third Reich declaring it illegal to refer to a Jew as a human. A Jew was, instead, an object, a *Stücke*, lumpen matter. The laws of the Third Reich pertaining to Jews were, therefore, anti-matter. So – the main character in the novel reasons – if a human being is reduced to an object, to a mere *Stücke*, to matter, how, then, might he be resurrected?...From matter (Gorjup 2-3).

⁴⁷ The effect of the generational gap on the traumatic impact and the passing away of the bearers of living Holocaust memories necessarily confine their survival to narratives. Consequently, a situation where the survivors themselves cannot assimilate the totality of experience gets (re)presented via a text that tries, despite its own removals from the facts narrated, to incite its readers into commemoration. In a sense, revealing the victims’ stories implies a certain obscuring of their experiences both due to the experiential gaps that are always already inherent to the traumatic past and to the indirect, spatially and temporally detached agency that operates a textual (re)construction.

⁴⁸ The chapter takes into account the text’s linguistic awareness and foregrounding of the material signifier as well as its moments of revelation and disavowal. These are moments in which the text acknowledges its own limitations and casts doubts on its signifying process; for instance, when its material assertion of the body as a site of memory retreats in the face of the warning that this human body may become a site of non-memory because it can disappear. This is explicitly expressed in the text by Jakob: “I long for memory to be spirit, but...I fear that knowledge becomes instinct only to disappear with the body” (*FP* 170).

⁴⁹ Michaels’s move towards poetic language is far from being unanimously lauded. Critical discourse insists that the Holocaust has a particular limiting effect upon the artistic license granted to authors dealing with it. This trauma has a quasi-negating impact upon literary expression. Faced with the double bind of acknowledging both the ineffability of the Holocaust and the need not to let it go unrepresented, literature settles for obliqueness to approach it. This engenders a strenuous connection between this historical traumatic moment and the art attempting to represent it. Due to this tension, literary articulation does not exert full control over this delicate subject matter. Indeed, Inga Clendinnen asserts that the Holocaust is a theme “so potent in itself that when art seeks to command it, it is art which is rendered vacuous and drained of authority. The most effective imagined evocations of the Holocaust seem to proceed either by invocation, the glancing reference to an existing bank of ideas...or, perhaps more effectively, by indirection” (164-165). The perplexity of the representational challenge also emanates from the fact that imaginative texts reenact the very depersonalization characterizing the Holocaust itself, thus repeating the injustice it claims to counter. Moreover, creative freedom may lead to a trivialization of suffering that offers an opening for some individuals to appropriate the traumatic pasts of others as their own. Finally, the fact of representing what one has not lived through necessarily implies a certain inability to ascribe meaning to the memories of the event.

⁵⁰ Play is a Derridean concept – mentioned in his “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences” – that emphasizes the system of differences between signifiers. This endless slippage between signifiers shows that language cannot signify any essential truth. Language – as a structure – is inherently not a reliable, or for that matter natural, reflection of reality. As such, language is a system the signifying elements of which enter into play without mimetic connections to the external world, referring to each other indefinitely. As Derrida demonstrates, the (linguistic) center – which serves as reference to “a point of presence” or “fixed origin” – is at the same time within and without the very structure it regulates, being what permits *freplay* and the point in which that very *freplay* is made impossible. The center is thus the

“very thing within a structure which while governing the structure, escapes structurality” (*Writing and Difference* 279-280). Logocentrism, thus undermined by Derrida, gives way to a certain openness of textual reading, where “the presence of an element is always a *signifying and substitutive reference* inscribed in a system of differences and the movement of a chain” (292, emphasis added). The play of language, its endless movement between traces works by supplementation as representations complement and replace one another other infinitely. In the case of *Fugitive Pieces*, this is seen in language’s disruption of the duality archive/fiction, as it blurs the distinction between the poetic and the factual. Even more interesting is the fact that the text establishes itself as a new hybrid archive that traces the event of the past, attempts to comprehend its intergenerational impact, and emphasizes the value of the archival record. Finally, the differential motion of language itself is paralleled by a move from one source of knowledge (about the past) to another. The novel’s language is made to refer to itself as part of a *real* pursuit of the truth of the Holocaust as trauma: it becomes a lyrical language of action, claiming attention to itself only to orient the reader in the direction of ethical exhumation/search for past traces.

⁵¹ This is the position advocated by such literary figures as George Steiner, who affirms that the “world of Auschwitz lies outside speech as it lies outside reason” (123). Elie Wiesel also asserts that “Auschwitz negates all systems, destroys all doctrines” (7). While insisting that only survivors may speak about the Event, Wiesel further emphasizes the fact that to represent it is forthright a sacrilegious, impossible project. “The *universality* of the Holocaust,” he states, “must be realized in its *uniqueness*. Remove the Jews from the Holocaust, and the Event loses its mystery” (qtd. in Clendinnen 11, emphases added). Along similar lines, Zoe Waxman notes the conflictual nature of Holocaust narratives, which are simultaneously driven by “the attempt to bear witness to the Holocaust – while insisting on the uniqueness of the severity of its horror – at the same time ensuring that posterity never forgets, and therefore never lets it happen again by universalizing its importance” (182).

⁵² The Kantian view, expressed in his *Critique of Judgment*, stresses the fact that the sublime has a paradoxical effect as it “may appear, indeed, in point of form to contravene the ends of our power of judgement, to be ill-adapted to our faculty of presentation, and to be, as it were, an outrage on the imagination, and yet it is judged all the more sublime on that account”. Moreover, Kant asserts, the sublime has an oblique effect of the sublime on the mind: “the feeling of the sublime is a pleasure that only arises indirectly...the mind is not simply attracted by the object, but is also alternately repelled thereby, the delight in the sublime...merits the name of a negative pleasure”.

⁵³ This is an untenable view for several critics, including Dominic LaCapra, who asserts that the idea of redemption generated via asserting the Event as a sublime is both outdated and dangerous. In effect, LaCapra sees a problem in the “affirmation of excess”– which is the element of the Event-as-trauma that is “unrepresentable and difficult to conceptualize” – and particularly in the tendency of the post-structural reaction “to try to counteract excess through excess” (Goldberg 9). In fact, “in certain thinkers there is, at times, the tendency to overdose on the antidote. This is to say, to participate too fully in the excess and to affirm the excess, with almost an oblivion of the problem of how to relate excess to legitimate limits, which is the ethical problem. If you affirm excess only, I think that’s a transcendence or an undercutting of ethics towards...an aesthetic of the sublime” (10). Clearly, LaCapra problematizes the sublime as an excess that calls for silence instead of the articulation of the Holocaust as a historically specific event. However, this does not mean that he supports the facile attraction of “redemptive narratives”. In this respect, LaCapra’s position is reminiscent of Lawrence Langer’s, who warns about the threat of authorial commentary in representations of the Holocaust that banalize the event by ascribing an aura of closure onto it. This has interesting bearings upon *Fugitive Pieces* and its highly lyrical text for , as will be shown later in the chapter, the text does not obstruct its own simulacrum or direct it towards a happy ending, but it rather asserts its discontinuities and avoids what could be viewed as a mending of an atrocious reality.

⁵⁴ In line with R. Clifton Spargo, I intend the term ethics “to denote the primordial facticity of the other. This is to invert our ordinary expectation about ethics as a language of obligation (the realm of *ought*) into a claim about a relation that is always already and necessarily in place (...) ethics is not the study of the imperatives through which we privilege relationship or some aspects of relationship; rather, it is *the inevitable and persistent fact of finding oneself in relation to the other*” (7, my emphasis). Ethics has remarkable bearings on how to remember the dead adequately in *Fugitive Pieces*.

⁵⁵ Bernstein also denies any philosophical mottoes the right to delineate the criteria defining the ‘authentic’ Jew, as Emil Fackenheim does in a supplementary 614th commandment: “Give Hitler no posthumous victories”. If Fackenheim understood the Event as a “*historically* unique” event, Bauer, on the other hand, proclaims uniqueness is not an attribute of the Holocaust (45). Bauer intends to keep the Event as a normally human one in order to make it possible to learn from its occurrence. In order to do that he asserts that the Event “is horrifying not because of its inhumanity but because of its *humanity*: the horrible was made possible, the possible was made manifest” (qtd. in Bernard-Donals 47).

⁵⁶ My analysis will draw on Agamben’s theoretical position in what concerns the poetic language of *Fugitive Pieces*. The search for a poetics that allows one to bear witness responsibly must indeed be considered when analyzing a text like *Fugitive Pieces* – a text that reflects the strong subjective will to tell an despite the incompleteness of the tale and the experiential gaps that prevent the very speaking subject from a total mastery thereof. The novel’s lyrical discourse becomes a narrative prism – for Michaels and her characters – through which to establish a poetics of traumatic memory, a register of speech that confronts the readers with the very (lack of) potential that language displays when narrating the Holocaust catastrophe.

⁵⁷ This is seen, for example, in such practices of the perpetrators as the adding of the name Sarah to all female names and the letter ‘J’ marking in all identity papers, to mention a few. It is interesting to note that, while the title of the novel may be read as reinforcing the idea, this is the very road that Michaels chooses to counter this qualification. Indeed, as will be elaborated upon in more details in the third section, her use of language alludes to both the fragmented agency that results from Holocaust traumas as well as the inscription of the crisis in language. However, power is also attributed to language as a way to escape from the burden of traumatic memories.

⁵⁸ ‘Second Generation’ refers to the offspring of survivors as witnessing vehicle, but also extends to other (following) generations. The concept ultimately attempts to depict the fact that the acts of witnessing do not derive from a first-hand experience of trauma but rather an indirect one. As intricate as this position may be, the witnessing in which later generations (of authors) are engaged is commensurate with the duty of passing the story *l’dor va’dor*, from a generation to another (Berger 1). As the survivors of the Event pass away, the insight of their offspring gains in value since, as Melvin Bukiet writes, “what the Second Generation knows better than anyone else is the First Generation” (14).

⁵⁹ Also notable are the variations developed by other theorists including Dora Apel’s “secondary witnessing”, James Young’s “vicarious past,” and Irene Kacandes’s “co-witnessing,” to take just a few examples. These labels signal the fact that the adoption of the other’s painful traumas, memories, or histories as part of one’s life is dangerous inasmuch as it may lead to a misguided identification. This is what LaCapra calls “acting out”, which is based on the constitution of oneself as surrogate victim. These labels may also reveal, as Sundquist states, “a preoccupation with making the trauma one’s own that verges at times on *narcissism*” (68, emphasis added).

⁶⁰ An analysis of the binary history-memory will be an element of the coming section. I will, in particular, consider Michaels’s position as favoring memory’s willful aspect rather than accepting the historical record as the final repository of facts. In addition to the post-modern skepticism that history is not an innocent or objective grand narrative, this stance parallels the dynamic binary view of the archive suggested by Derrida, that the record helps forget as much as it helps remember. As this view engenders the ethical commitment to conscience-driven, empathic remembrance, it falls squarely within the text’s message.

⁶¹ Agamben even claims that this very fact that the dead cannot testify “discharges the survivors of authority” (*Remnants* 34).

⁶² Placing the receiver of testimony in the role of the analyst is at the center of Felman and Laub’s theory of witnessing. It permits them to equate literature to testimony, noting that both function “as a mode of *truth’s* realization beyond what is available as statement, beyond what is available, that is, as a truth transparent to itself and entirely known” (*Testimony* 15).

⁶³ Michael Levine notes a similar take on this very idea, which he attributes to Paul Celan. Levine states that to “bear witness to the degrading and dehumanizing atrocities of the Holocaust is not simply to address one’s stories to others. It is more fundamentally – and more tentatively – to speak in search of “an addressable you” (3). According to Levine, Celan’s formulation points to the dialogical structure of literary

witnessing and to the responsibility of the receiver. It also attests to the vulnerability of the ‘I’ who utters the message, and to the possibility that the message never reaches the other, thus being subject to ‘destinerrance’, the neologism by which Derrida oxymoronically implies both destination and wandering as the fate of the letter.

⁶⁴ This is interesting, especially when seen through Laub’s above-mentioned formulation of dialogical testimony, because one individual (Jakob) combines both the stances of testifier and listener. He is thus in the position of the individual who creates knowledge *de novo* by helping reconstruct past memories.

⁶⁵ In my reading of *Fugitive Pieces*, the chain of memory creates several witnesses at different removes from the event: it could be seen as including Athos, the archaeologist who saves Jakob and is witness to the pseudo-scientific Nazi appropriation of Biskupin, which “falsified digs to prove that Greek civilization started in...neolithic Germany!” (*FP* 104). Athos writes his text *Bearing False Witness* to counter these ideas. The second link is Jakob, the witness who did not see death happen, literally. Ben, the child of survivors who has no familiar narrative is also one. My interpretation is that Michaels herself is part of this chain since she presents us – via research and imagination – with the tale of both Jakob and Ben. Michaels seems to point towards the final link, which I understand to be the ethically-motivated reader. The reader has thus to bear witness in the same fashion as the characters – that is, by attending across generational divides to others’ traumatic memories and remembering them *as if* they were their own: “We must carry each other,” Athos tells the young Jakob, “If we do not have this, what are we...” (*FP* 14).

⁶⁶ In an interesting article, Susan R. Suleiman provocatively labels child survivors the “1.5 generation”. This label is to include those “too young to have had an adult understanding of what was happening to them, but old enough to have been there during the Nazi persecution of Jews” (277). This would be fitting to characterize Jakob; especially that it emphasizes his unstable status as an individual who *only* gets knowledge of the catastrophe of his family *aurally*, not visually. According to Suleiman, the 1.5 generation experience premature aging and stupor, as they have to act in adult-like fashion to survive: “I had my duties. Walk at night. In the morning dig my bed. Eat anything,” Jakob states (*FP* 9). The label offers insight into generational distance but it rather implies an immutable qualification. Since *Fugitive Pieces* is in part the story and process of the adult poet Jakob reflecting upon his childhood memories, the indeterminate status of the protagonist (as oscillating between remembering and imagining) seems more practical than trying to essentially characterize his experience. Otherwise, other factors come into play and “perhaps we should speak not of a 1.5 generation, but rather of a 1.3 or a 1.7 generation” (281).

⁶⁷ Jakob notes: “Since those minutes inside the wall, I’ve *imagined* that the dead lose every sense except *hearing*” (*FP* 6, emphases added). This could be read as an identification process whereby Jakob would consider himself dead as well, having been deprived of all senses except hearing while hiding in the cupboard. In other words, it is ‘natural’ from his angle at this point in the narrative (he has not attained the conclusion that to remain with the dead is precisely to leave them yet) to consider himself one of them, despite the fact that, unlike the dead, he can speak about the catastrophe.

⁶⁸ This agrees with Agamben’s view, expressed in *Remnants of Auschwitz*, as he asserts the connection between testimony and poetry. In his analysis of de/subjectification, which he considers a linguistic problematic, Agamben asserts that the act of poetic creation...implies something like a desubjectification” because the poet experience an alterity or otherness in the process (113). Agamben affirms the possibility of testimony precisely in the disjunction between the speaking being and the living being. It is important to also note that Agamben, rather counterintuitively, calls the archive “the dark margin encircling and limiting every concrete act of speech,” which regroups everything missing, absent, and unsaid. Because the poet’s gesture implies a dislocation of the self so as to speak beyond the records of “what has already been said” to try to articulate the (non)speech that has remained both unsaid and un/sayable, Agamben equates it with the testimonial: “Poets—witnesses—found language as...what actually survives the possibility, or impossibility, of speaking (...) What cannot be stated, what cannot be archived is the language in which the author succeeds in bearing witness to his incapacity to speak” (161).

⁶⁹ Inasmuch as it prevents dialog from taking place, silence could be seen as complacent to the negationists’ agenda, which only accept a single fact: that the Holocaust never took place and that, as a consequence, it should not be spoken about or be the topic of any form of signification.

⁷⁰ According to Listoe, the prime danger of such “reflexive responses” is that they risk stopping one from trying to think the Event (57). I have pointed earlier to the fact that such a situation would either be a parallel to silence (i.e., forgetfulness) or negationism, which would erase dialogs about the Holocaust by asserting that “It did not happen. Period”.

⁷¹ Consider, for instance, Jean Amery’s view that the attempts at linguistic mastery of traumatic experiences are “totally senseless”. Amery’s idea is that language, and imagery, deviate attention from experience to form, which keeps the reader from accessing trauma. Talking about past ordeals, Amery writes, “[w]as it ‘like a red hot iron in my shoulders’ and another ‘like a dull wooden stake that had been driven into the back of my head’? One comparison would only stand for the other, and in the end we would be hoaxed by turn in the hopeless merry-go-round of figurative speech. The pain was what it was. Beyond that there is nothing to say” (qtd. in Eaglestone 18).

⁷² This position is best expressed by Robert Eaglestone: “Language is not enough. This is not mystical, nor does it suggest that the Holocaust is unapproachable or sublime: it is only to suggest that there is an insurmountable difficulty in understanding the existential truth of the events using ‘free words’ ” (18).

⁷³ Felman suggests that testimony can be a “point of conflation between text and life” that is powerful enough to “penetrate us like an actual life” (2). In this way, the traumatic experience transmits itself to the readers.

⁷⁴ This idea is notably expressed in Derrida’s *Archive Fever* as he notes that the archive shelters the past from forgetfulness and also – or as a result – shelters it from being remembered because it presents itself as a mnemonic supplement. In effect, Derrida states that “the archive, if this or this figure can be stabilized so as to take on a signification, will never be either memory or anamnesis as spontaneous, alive and internal experience. On the contrary: the archive takes place at the place of originary and structural breakdown of said memory” (11). Derrida’s analysis will be explored in a next section in connection with the notion of the archive as place and repetition/return, two themes that are highlighted by the movement of Ben to Jakob’s house in search for his view and his past so as to supplement the silence of Ben’s parents.

⁷⁵ This idea is also observed in connection to historiography and the language of figuration employed by history. The *récit* of history is always inhabited by what Hayden White refers to as ‘emplotment’, which carries within it both the concepts of perspective and negates pure objectivism.

⁷⁶ This is in line with Michaels’s rejection of repellent language (that mimics the horror it represents) in favor of attractive, lyrical prose. Michaels acknowledges the viability of other representational orientations. Indeed, she does not delegitimize the ‘realistic’ depictions, inscribed within an esthetic of shock. This view is expressed in her text via Kostas – Athos’s immigrant friend – who talks to Jakob about suffering, saying: “you’ve seen so much it’s only right you should know how to *swear*” (FP 68, emphasis added).

⁷⁷ It should be noted that Adorno amended this position later, stating that “[p]erennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream; hence, it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems” (*Negative Dialectics* 362).

⁷⁸ “No one is just born once. If you’re lucky, you’ll emerge again in someone’s arms; or unlucky, wake when the long tail of terror brushes the inside of your skull” (FP 5).

⁷⁹ Not all critics share this position, however. Far from considering lyricism a laudable narrative strategy, Sue Vice has formulated criticisms of Michaels’s poetic orientation. First, she asserts that the text is distrustfully tensionless and univocal. Otherwise put, the text imposes an illusion of resolution where there can be none. Accordingly, it “infuses human loss and memory into description of landscape, weather and ancient history. The novel is written in ‘strange episodic images’...and...diverts its attention to the world of the spirit and the transcendent...this seems to be a way of trying to write aesthetic and meaningful comfort from an event which offers no redemption of any kind” (9). Thus, Vice seems to argue for a fiction that denies the readers the ease of establishing coherence or structure, so that it challenges and discomforts them, rather than presenting a pleasant text that accommodates the readers into avoiding shocks. Other criticisms could be leveled at the text’s circumventing the representation of violent acts as well. For instance, Laura Tanner argues that by hiding the violent component of victimization, a text may essentially place the readers in a similar position to that of perpetrators: both categories of individuals can selectively create versions (and interpretations) of the violence that eradicated the victims. In this respect, the text can “jolt the reader into becoming the author of crime” (19). Both reader and perpetrator can move

autonomously through the violent act and shape its components and effects into ‘desired’ results. Hence, while the perpetrator hides behind flawed logic, the reader never transgresses the esthetic of the narrative (safely navigating through the otherwise disturbing facts). Inasmuch as both these imaginations turn real pain into extensions of their own desires, Tanner seems to suggest that they are complicit in murder (7-22).

⁸⁰ Ironically, Adorno himself has warned against “the indifference of the life of every individual, which history is moving towards” as reminiscent of the perpetrators (*Negative Dialectics* 355). He asserted that mass destruction is “the absolute integration...where human beings are made the same, polished, as the military calls it, until they are literally cancelled out...Auschwitz confirms the philosopheme of pure identity as death” (*Negative Dialectics* 345). Interestingly enough, this is the same, aforementioned, text in which Adorno revises his stance against poesis.

⁸¹ The role of Athos in the linguistic development of Jakob is far from being one-dimensional or straightforward. For while he tries to keep Jakob connected to his Yiddish, it is Athos’s stories that dilute that very language – as Jakob himself comments. Moreover, Michaels reverses the linguistic and cultural gap between Athos’s Greek and Jakob’s Hebrew by setting them as “twisting twins” (*FP* 21). The fact that Jakob writes his memoir in English (as he is on the Greek island of Idhra) shows that – in line with Athos’s’ thinking – he does not seem to believe that either language can reach out to others, for it has internalized breakdown and trauma. Both languages “contain the ancient *loneliness of ruins*” (*FP* 21-22, emphasis added). The account must be written in English, therefore, because it wants to testify and be transmitted but, perhaps more importantly, English is a language that stands at a distance from both the other two traumatized languages – this is what Ben discovers: “a broadsheet of “What Have You Done to Time,” the Greek translation written in ink under the English, a shadow; the Hebrew translation written above, an emanation” (*FP* 267).

⁸² The perpetrators’ destruction of records, as synonymous with an erasure of history, and their obsession with hiding traces of their own atrocities (or the possibilities of culture from without the racially pure Aryan universe) haunts Athos throughout the text. It is even felt by Jakob, who comments that “Biskupin was overrun by soldiers. We learned this after the war. They burned records and relics. They demolished the ancient fortifications and houses that had withstood millennia. Then they shot five of Athos’s colleagues in the surrounding forest. The others were sent to Dachau” (*FP* 51).

⁸³ This is an idea that Michaels has previously expressed in her poetry. For instance, in her poem “What the light teaches”, she asserts: “Language remembers./Out of obscurity, a word takes its place/ in history. Even a word so simple/it’s untranslatable: number. Oven” (*The Weight of Oranges* 113).

⁸⁴ In his analysis of *Fugitive Pieces*, Rosen indirectly links the ability of English to lend itself to the elegiac to its being the “*preferred language in which to write about the Holocaust*” (*Sounds of Defiance* 175).

⁸⁵ Jakob’s indecision between remembering and forgetting is noteworthy. While language opens the possibility for him to revisit his past from the comfort of distance (literally and metaphorically), it also becomes – through Athos’s narratives, among other things – a means facilitating his detachment from his memories, although not completely erasing them. In effect, this tendency is made clear in this passage, as Jakob declares: “The English was food. I shoved it into my mouth, hungry for it. A gush of warmth spread through my body, but also panic, for with each mouthful the past was further silenced” (*FP* 92).

⁸⁶ Nazi policies imposed on all Jewish men to add Israel as a middle name, and on women to add Sarah. This seems to precede a move to a violence negating the humanness of the Jewish name, to a project of erasure of that name and, subsequently, to an extension of the destruction to the referents themselves, once they are configured as objects/bodies.

⁸⁷ Early in the text, the reader is shown that Jakob wonders about naming and its “power of reversal,” which would counter the erasure of names and objectification that led to the Nazi destruction: “I imagined that if each owner of each pair of shoes could be named, then they would be brought back to life” (*FP* 50). This is not disconnected from the religious idea of creating-by-calling, in which the name carries the essence of the individual person.

⁸⁸ This idea – of memories being sealed in the linguistic, thus offering bonds to previous generations – is one that Michaels has also expressed in her poetry. In *The Weight of Oranges*, she notes: “Language is how ghosts enter the world./ They twist into awkward positions/ To squeeze through the black spaces./ The dead

read backwards,/ as in a mirror. They gather in the white field and look up,/ waiting for someone to write their *names*” (113, emphasis added).

⁸⁹ This attitude is regarded as somehow naïve by critics such as Aaron Haas, who asserts that since they wish for rebirth and restoration to be obtained via their offspring, the “parents may have harbored unconscious *magical expectations* that their offspring would undo the destruction of the Holocaust and replace lost family members, provide meaning for their empty lives, and vindicate their suffering” (27-28, my emphasis).

⁹⁰ This is seen in Jakob’s address to his unborn child: “My son, my daughter: May you never be deaf to love. Bela, Bella: Once I was lost in a forest. I was so afraid...I saved myself without thinking. I grasped the two syllables closest to me, and *replaced my heartbeat with your name*” (FP 195, emphasis added).

⁹¹ This condition of “knowing the unknown,” the coinciding form of the imperative remembrance and the absence of direct experience of the Event is what characterizes the generations after: distance denies the memories of the Event any positive content; so that – ultimately – “[o]ne remembers only that one remembers nothing (...) One doesn’t remember, one wasn’t there, one saw nothing, one cannot, one does not want to feed one’s impossible quest with anything other than the phantom of a void that recalls that one is only dispersed, far from the death on which true life ran aground”. The Event’s absolute inaccessibility is not to shed doubts on the truthfulness of the second generation’s turmoil, for “who can say that the pain felt in a hand that one no longer has is not pain?”.

⁹² Aaron Haas links the survivors’ silence to a sense of guilt because the fact of survival “entailed a numbness to the death of others, a focus on one’s own existence, and a denial of the odds against life...Survivors’ disinclination to relate experiences to their children reflected a desire to avoid imposing an unnecessary burden or inflicting unwarranted pain” (72).

⁹³ Nothing in the text specifically states that these stories (on pages 148-149 and 157-159) are creative productions by Jakob. They may be interpreted to serve the idea that Michaels often emphasizes in the text, which asserts the difficulty of assigning similar descriptions (victim, survivor) to a human life, because every life is so unique that it problematizes the idea of bearing witness to it and honoring its memory.

⁹⁴ Indeed, as Ann Whitehead mentions, “history invests names with documentary significance and...is complicit with the powerful: national censuses enabled the Nazis to round up the Jews in occupied territories, names were registered in ghettos and at deportation centers, the files of the concentration camps recorded lists of the dead” (76-77).

⁹⁵ The Nazi attempt to separate the Holocaust from logos is commented on by Agamben as he quotes Primo Levi:

However the war may end, we have won the war against you; none of you will be left to bear witness, but even if someone were to survive, the world will not believe him. There will perhaps be suspicions, discussions, research by historians, but there will be no certainties, because we will destroy the evidence together with you. And even if some proof should remain and some of you survive, people will say that the events you describe are too monstrous to be believed: they will say that they are the exaggerations of Allied propaganda and will believe us, who will deny everything, and not you. We will be the ones to dictate the history of the Lagers (in Agamben 157).

This secretive gesture, according to Agamben, is the epitome of the sovereign ban on speaking: it is an example of biopower’s efficaciousness in attempting to produce a bare life, a final biopolitical matter that is disconnected from testimony as speech. Drawing on Foucault, Agamben calls this the *arcanum imperii* that isolates even survival from life (as a speaking condition, not one of mere biological, vegetative presence) (156-157).

⁹⁶ This idea has been criticized for its normalizing of the horror of the bog men’s death with pseudo-romantic views about their resistance to being turned into dust like their killers, and the view that they are “so serene” (FP 49). Inasmuch as it makes their death, which is equated by the author to simply being “[a]sleep for centuries” a source of beauty, Michaels’s depiction may be complacent or even complicit to the violence done by the perpetrators themselves.

⁹⁷ This is a remarkable trait that Michaels ascribes to Ben, who – not dissimilarly from Athos – starts by wondering about the teaching value of the earth’s strata. In a chapter that is tellingly labelled “The

Drowned City” – similar in title to the one where Jakob surfaces and is saved by Athos – Ben starts musing about Toronto’s suburbs. He notes how past witnesses to the life lived next to the Humber River (objects, relics, etc.) are hidden and *yet* can be exhumed and read from the way one reads a book: “Excavate an inch or two and the legs of a chair will emerge. A few feet downriver, a dinner plate...sticks out of the bank horizontally like a shelf. You can slip a silver spoon out of the mud like a bookmark. The books and photos have rotted by now, but the buried tables and shelves, lamps, dishes and rugs remain...Fragments of a ceramic flowered border, or of the words “Staffordshire, England,” are underlined by reeds” (FP 202).

⁹⁸ These structural layers include Athos, who uncovers Jakob’s testimony, which gets materialized into memoirs that are discovered by Ben, who shares them with the reader. Beyond these, one may add the research component of Michaels herself, which – paradoxically – is what allowed her to ‘imagine’ the past.

⁹⁹ Ben is reminded of the difficulties of breaking free from the past by his father, “a man who had erased himself as much as possible within the legal limits of citizenship” and who can hardly bring himself to ask for his own pension as a result of the destitution that he endured during his traumatic experience (FP 232). Ben’s mother also suggests parallels between the Event and natural disasters. This makes it similar to other violent, unavoidable tragedies but with an aura of mysticism, as a cataclysm that follows rules and purposes that man cannot understand: “I [Ben] read to her about the effects of a Texan tornado, gathering up personal possessions until it in the desert it had collected mounds of apples, onions, jewelry, eyeglasses, clothing – “the camp”. Enough smashed glass to cover seventeen football fields – “Kristallnacht”. I read to her about lightening – “the sign of the Ess Ess, Ben, on their collars” (FP 224-225).

¹⁰⁰ This is the verb Jakob uses for his sister Bella, whom he internalizes – “Bella inside me” (FP 14) – and who becomes a continuing presence, a “ghost” (FP 125).

¹⁰¹ Derrida tries to find an acceptable manner in which to think the ethical way of responding to traumas (his starting point is the “final solution”) even earlier. In his *Force Of Law*, he reflects that in order to face the namelessness of the Event, one has to show a certain “readiness to welcome the law of the phantom, the spectral experience and the memory of the phantom, of that which is neither dead nor living, more than dead and more than living, only surviving, the law of the most commanding memory, even though it is the most effaced and the most effaceable, but for that very reason the most demanding” (64).

¹⁰² Jakob’s motive is rather different from that of Ben and Michaels, while the latter try to uncover truths about the past, Jakob’s attitude is rather similar to that of Ben’s parents – an escapism or a will to avoid the encounter with the traumatic moment: “I tried to bury images, to cover them over with Greek and English words, with Athos’s stories, with all the geologic eras...Years later I would try a different avalanche of facts: train schedules, camp records, statistics, methods of execution. But at night, my mother, my father, Bella, Mones, simply rose, shook the earth from their clothes, and waited” (FP 93).

¹⁰³ Benjamin’s angel of history is a figure that serves as a condensation of an apocalyptic discourse. Benjamin’s depiction of the painting *Angelus Novus* shows

an angel who seems about to move away from something he stares at. His eyes are wide, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how the angel of history must look. His face is turned toward the past. Where a chain of events appears before us, he sees one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it at his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise and got caught in his wings; it is so strong that the angel can no longer close them. This storm drives him irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows toward the sky. What we call progress is this storm (257-258).

The angel’s backward gaze denotes the fact that Benjamin values forgotten histories. The standstill – also in the fixed nature of the image – reflects the Benjaminian messianic epistemology that superimposes the tenses to a temporary halt: the past fuses into the present and also influences the future. This idea is shared by Michaels, who stresses the crucial nature of what she labels the “compost of history,” threatening to come back as a repetition of violence: “History is the poisoned well, seeping into the ground water. It is not the unknown past we’re doomed to repeat, but the past we know. Every recorded event is a brick of potential, of precedent, thrown into the future. Eventually the idea will hit someone back in the head. This is the duplicity of history; an idea recorded will become an idea resurrected” (FP 160-161).

¹⁰⁴ This is a postmodernist position of distrusting grand narratives, according to Eaglestone, since it considers that “history is just another genre of representation, ‘a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse’ put together following deep-seated ideological, ‘epistemological, aesthetic and moral’ demands and ‘implicit, precritical sanctions’” (110).

¹⁰⁵ This is reflected, for instance, in the following textual declaration: ““a single “screw you” (...) that’s the real response to history...history only goes into remission, while it continues to grow until you’re silted up and can’t move. And you disappear into a piece of music, a chest of drawers, perhaps a hospital record or two, and you slip away, forsaken by those who claimed to love you most” (FP 242-243).

¹⁰⁶ This idea has repeatedly been expressed in Holocaust literature, notably by Geoffrey Hartman, who unequivocally states: “An organic relation to place is what I lacked and would never recover...We underestimate how important the feeling for place is as a physical memory” (*The Longest Shadow* 19-20). That place may rhyme with (the memory of) death is reflected in Michaels’s text in the form of what may be called survivor’s guilt, expressed by Jakob, who feels it painful to have been in a *better place* compared to those who perished:

I didn’t know that while I was on Zakynthos, a Jew could be purchased for a quart of brandy, perhaps four pounds of sugar, cigarettes. I didn’t know that in Athens, they were rounded up in ‘Freedom Square’ (...) I didn’t know that when there were too many for the ovens, corpses were burned in open pits, flames ladled with human fat. I didn’t know that while I listened to the stories of explorers in the clean places of the world (snow-covered, salt-stung) and slept in the clean place, men were untangling limbs, the flesh of friends and neighbors, wives and daughters, coming off in their hands (FP 45-46).

¹⁰⁷ Freud indeed reads human *life* as traumatized by having missed its encounter with destruction as a possibility that looms over it. It is life – as a traumatic departure from death – that paradoxically gives rise to the compulsion to repeat as an inherent and necessary sign of the traumatic awakening that marks human existence. Accordingly, Caruth notes that, for Freud, “[l]ife itself...is an awakening out of a ‘death’ for which there was no preparation” (65).

¹⁰⁸ Freud analyses the two moves in this game as the child’s re-enactment of the departure and return of his mother:

This good little boy, however, had an occasional disturbing habit of taking any small objects he could get hold of and throwing them away from him into a corner, under the bed, and so on, so that hunting for his toys and picking them up was often quite a business. As he did this he gave vent to a loud, long-drawn-out ‘o-o-o-o’, accompanied by an expression of interest and satisfaction. His mother and the writer of the present account were agreed in thinking that this was not a mere interjection but represented the German word ‘fort’ [gone]. I eventually realized that it was a game and that the only use he made of any of his toys was to play ‘gone’ with them (...) The child had a wooden reel with a piece of string tied round it. It never occurred to him to pull it along the floor behind him, for instance, and play at its being a carriage. What he did was to hold the reel by the string and very skilfully throw it over the edge of his curtained cot, so that it disappeared into it, at the same time uttering his expressive ‘o-o-o-o’. He then pulled the reel out of the cot again by the string and hailed its reappearance with a joyful ‘da’ [there] (*Beyond* 13-14).

This has been read as the child’s compensatory attempt to master the timing of this motherly absence – and move from passivity to activity – or as a mastery of his hostile reactions towards that absence. It has, however, been used by Freud as a proof that the repetition of the first part as a game in and by itself (despite being less pleasurable) more often than the second part (the return) means that there are tendencies more primitive than the pleasure principle – i.e., the death drive.

¹⁰⁹ Cathy Caruth cites Weber’s position as one that emphasizes the fact that Freud’s own wavering is indicative of his own need to depart from a view of the game (as a “movement of identity” or a repetition of sameness as resolution) towards a different view (one that considers the game to be an affirmation of trauma as origin). Otherwise put, the game is the symptom of a drive which repeats the realisation that the ‘here is gone’ – the *da* is *fort* (133-134 ff.).

¹¹⁰ Kandiyoti notably asserts that whereas “[f]ascinating and urgent discussions have arisen around such issues as, for example, the imbrication and separation of history and memory, the veracity of testimonial/historical narrative, the reliability of historical memory, the “truth” about historians’ construction of the Holocaust, and the “Historians’ Debate”...place-based experience and the geographical imaginary are less prominent” (305).

¹¹¹ Athos is also described in somewhat mystical terms to denote his role as a linkage between the world of the dead (civilization or people) and the living (survivors, following generations). In addition to saving Jakob and proclaiming himself his godfather, he is a medium between different worlds for Jakob: “His left arm reaching down to earth, his right arm reaching up, palm to heaven” (FP 21).

¹¹² Ben notes: “Even my father’s humor was silent. He drew things for me, cartoons, caricatures. Appliances with human faces. His drawing offered me the glimpse: how he saw” (FP 218).

¹¹³ This is observed in the fact that, on arrival to his house, Ben addresses (the dead) Jakob in a way that confirms the parallel with Jakob as a father figure. In fact, the void of Jakob’s house is described in the same terms used to denote the emptiness of Ben’s parents’: “When I saw your jumble of sandals by the door, I saw my parents’ shoes, which after their deaths retained with fidelity not only the shape of their feet, but the way they walked, the residue of motion in the worn leather. Just as the clothes still carried them, a story in a rip, a patch, their long sleeves. Decades stored there, in a closet or two” (FP 265-266).

¹¹⁴ Michaels repeatedly insists that the bygone generations of victims and survivors are a (re)source that provides the later ones with a sense of belonging and direction. In addition, she seems to regard it as ethically responsible to accept the guiding teachings of the past generations. Since their other calls (for help, notably) have only become noticed belatedly, Michaels uses the stars as a metaphor for the past generations: “I felt compassion for the stars themselves. Aching towards us for millennia though we are blind to their signals until it’s too late, starlight only the white breath and an old cry. Sending their white messages millions of years, only to be crumpled up by the waves” (FP 54). This is a redemptive stance that indicates that at least a lesson should be taken from the victims’ experiences, lest they be dead for nothing.

¹¹⁵ Again, this is reflective of the same position as Jakob himself, who also sees real life traces as more immediate narratives of the past: “Athos’s family house – where I now sit and write this, these many years later – is a record of the Roussos generations” (FP 155).

¹¹⁶ Going beyond the physical earthly notion of place, Laub and Allard also deplore the lack of spaces in construed post-World War II national histories for the *subjective* historical récit of survivors: “[t]here is no place for personal history, for personal testimony in these myths of national memory” (802). Accordingly, this turns the survivor into what they call “an ideological abstraction” – a myth, a statistical entry, or a faceless martyr (801-802).

¹¹⁷ This is a textual duty that would bring the reader into the realm of action by necessity. A morally implicated reader will respond to the trauma depicted because it destabilized their sense of the world. This conception of textual effect stems from the idea that the “knowledge produced in the relation with a work translates into universal ethical action” and has obvious bearings on the expected nature of the textuality that would trigger such a readjustment from its readers/receptors (*Witnessing the Disaster* 12).

¹¹⁸ Ben declares: “now, from thousands of feet in the air, I see something else. My mother stands behind my father and his head leans against her (...) Like a miraculous circuit, each draws strength from the other. I see that I must give what I most need” (FP 294). The linkage between new insight and personal connections also emphasizes the role of the intersubjective networks in dealing with the traumas inherited.

¹¹⁹ Recording this very subjective aspect of memory is even more important than the accuracy of the events remembered, or (re)told, for Rothberg and Stark, who assert that it is “not enough to preserve a factual or artifactual record of the past” (85). Memory perception is insightful to the following generations as it provides ways of remembering: the text must then “archive the survivor’s very memory—not only what he has seen, but how he sees, how he remembers” (85).

¹²⁰ An interesting analysis of this defamiliarizing effect of traumatic images is offered by Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer, who emphasize the capacity of the testimonial medium to disrupt its own frames of reference. Hirsch and Spitzer label the destabilizing element a “point of memory” – this is a minor element that “can convey the fragmentariness of the vestiges of the past (...). The sharpness of a point pierces or

punctures: like the punctum, points of memory puncture through layers of oblivion, interpellating those who seek to know about the past” (246). It is interesting to signal the fact that Barthes’ concept of the punctum also joins the element of traumatic affect as contagion or transmission that inheres in the idea of textuality as speech act that destabilizes the readers’ worldview. Hirsch has noted this similarity elsewhere, asserting the fact that Barthes’ punctum takes the perceived detail “outside the normative cultural script” where it is expectedly plain and “finds in the image something so unfamiliar and unexpected that it acts like a ‘prick’ or ‘wound’” (*Acts of Memory* 10, emphases added). It is via this traumatizing effect that points of memory “not only signal a visceral material connection to the past and carry its traces forward, but they also embody the very fractured process of its transmission” (237).

¹²¹ Ben’s action is similar to that of Michaels herself, who also excavated historical details to transmit them to the readers (taking them from a silence imposed by the temporal gap between the now of their happening and the present). In fact, Michaels also makes the listening/receiving gesture one of Jakob’s attractive traits, in Ben’s eyes: “You listened...like a sinner, who listens for his own redemption” (*FP* 208).

¹²² The narrative attempts to find a possible way of representing the Event from a multiplicity of views that will keep its effect upon the reader as a disturbance that refutes any stabilization into coherence. This is especially relevant since, as Friedlander notes, “if we make allowance for some sort of ritualized form of commemoration, already in place, we may foresee...a tendency towards closure without resolution, but closure nonetheless” (262-263). In fact, there is an extent to which one can see that the ending of *Fugitive Pieces* allows for such a reading: Ben’s return seems to suggest that receiving the wisdom of the past generation via archival traces has the benefit of providing a better conceptualization of the second generation’s position vis-à-vis a trauma they have inherited without experiencing firsthand.

¹²³ My use of the words “Native Americans,” (or “Aboriginals” or “Natives”) and “Euroamerican” is not meant to essentialize or be insensitive to the experiential differences of the former group, nor to systematically indict every individual belonging to the latter. It simply reflects, in line with Arnold Krupat’s view, the fact that the analysis of the historical links between the two entities “cannot proceed by attention to an infinite number of incomparable and unique patterns, so generalization is both unavoidable and necessary” (5).

¹²⁴ This traumatic situation has prevailed for more than five centuries and is broadly summarized in a report by Cynthia C. Wesley-Esquimaux and Magdalena Smolewski, who both assert that Native Americans have experienced multiple oppressions deriving from different types of colonization (from the politico-religious to the cultural). They were also victims to several forms of emotional and physical violence and segregation (from imperialism to racism and sexism). The “Aboriginal people have experienced unremitting trauma and post-traumatic effects... since Europeans reached the New World and unleashed a series of contagions among the Indigenous population” (iii). Henceforth, Natives Americans were subjugated to “conquest, warfare, slavery, colonization, proselytization [defined as ‘recruiting’ or ‘converting’], famine and starvation, the 1892 to the late 1960s residential school period and forced assimilation” (1). Both researchers straightforwardly connect the current degrading conditions of Natives to the “unremitting personal and collective trauma” that has plagued them in the past.

¹²⁵ The novel itself can be positioned as a resistant mode of asserting the presence of Native expression on its own terms, since, as Jack Forbes indicates, “[c]olonialism has a powerful impact upon literature. It distorts, suppresses, oppresses, falsifies, changes, wraps and destroys...conquest interferes with traditional literature, to the point of destroying it or forcing it underground. It makes fun of it, shames it, ossifies it, museumizes it, stereotypes it, classifies it, romanticizes it, and reduces the tradition to impotency” (19).

¹²⁶ Hogan purposely omits the name of the tribe to which the characters belong. By “fictionalizing the tribes” in the text, she hopes that “nobody feels like they’re being invaded once again” (qtd. in Cook 43).

¹²⁷ Hogan’s text is a depiction of the danger of “generational grief,” or the “continuous passing on of unresolved and deep-seated emotions...to successive descendants” (Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski 2). The text also offers remedies to the phenomenon, as will be shown in a following section.

¹²⁸ There is a sense in which Hogan presents the return of Angela as something expected, because emanating from a severed connectedness that is essential to the Native persona and predicted by her foremothers as well, possibly because they understand such a need. For example, Dora-Rouge tells Angela:

“I always called you the girl who would return” (SS 31). These lend credence to Hogan’s statement that “there is a magnetic pull of place, of people, land, home, for indigenous people” (qtd. in Jensen 128).

¹²⁹ *Solar Storms* is a fictionalized account of the 1971 Hydro-Quebec James Bay Project, which was launched in the Boundary Waters between Minnesota and Canada in order to provide New York with electricity. The project had considerable effects on both the wellbeing of the Native American communities and the ecosystem of the region. The building of a hydroelectric dam necessitated the rerouting of waterways, changing the landscape, submerging plants and animals, and leaving dehydrated riverbeds. The project resulted in contentions between the communities of Cree, Inuit, and mixed-blood Native Americans and governmental and corporate representatives. The former accused the government of Quebec of violating common treaties, committing illicit expropriation, and destroying a vital resource for survival (the lands about to be flooded because of the rerouting of rivers had been the Natives’ traditional hunting and trapping areas). Furthermore, there were no consultations with any of the tribes that had lived there for millennia before the project was authorized. Colin G. Calloway describes the resulting devastation as follows:

People were relocated to make way for dams that flooded ancient hunting territories and sacred places. Migrating birds found nowhere to land. A sudden release of water from one reservoir drowned ten thousand migrating caribou in 1984...Many Crees experienced *nimass akwiwin* or ‘fish disease’ – methyl mercury poisoning. The drowned plants and trees decomposed, releasing methane, which converts inorganic mercury present naturally in the soil to methyl mercury, a lethal poison...Alcoholism, violence, crime, and suicide rose dramatically (488-489).

¹³⁰ The difficulty of having a voice that is acknowledged by the oppressing Other is expressed by Louis Owens as a narcissistic trick of the dominant power that eliminates any articulation that undermines its own authority:

European America holds a mirror and a mask up to the Native American. The tricky mirror is that Other presence that reflects the Euro-American consciousness back at itself, but the side of the mirror turned toward the Native is transparent, letting the Native see not his or her own reflection but the face of the Euro-American beyond the mirror. For the dominant culture, the Euro-American controlling this surveillance, the reflection provides merely a self-recognition that results in a kind of being-for itself... In order to be recognized, and to thus have a voice that is heard by those in control of power, the Native must step into that mask and be the Indian constructed by white America. Paradoxically, of course, like the mirror, the mask merely shows the Euro-American to himself, since the masked Indian arises out of the European consciousness, leaving the Native behind the mask unseen, unrecognized for himself or herself (*Native American Representations* 17).

¹³¹ Furthermore, some of the appellations reserved to Native Americans indicate the degree of invisibility that is conferred upon them as subjugated groups. For instance, the trope of “vanishing Indian” is a doubly offensive depiction of Native Americans. First, it expresses the idea of an Indian, which – according to Vizenor – is nothing but “a simulation and loan word of dominance,” the reflection of an epistemological violence towards Native Americans that deprives them even of the right to name themselves (14). Accordingly, what the name really signifies is not an innocent categorization, if any categorization could be innocent, but rather “the romantic absence of natives,” the repressed epistemic violence at the heart of the colonizer’s political objective. This first meaning is magnified by the standard and repeated use of the adjective ‘vanishing,’ which emphasizes an ever-disappearing quality that is supposedly *inherent* to these Native American peoples. Second, as noted by Maximilian C. Forte, this “romance of the vanishing Amerindian was couched in terms of European regret and remorse which, paradoxically, served to reinforce the image of the European as a stronger, fitter, sturdier being” (*Extinction* 18). The systematic linkage of indigeneity to the vanishing trope adds to the surreal depiction of Native Americans as cannibals living in a pristine universe. In fact, as Hogan notes, “[f]or white Americans, even today, we Indians came to represent spirit, heart, an earth-based way of living, but the true stories of our lives were, and still are, missing from history, the geography of our lands changed...While the living bodies of tribal people were

destroyed, photographs and paintings romanticized Indian lives. It was, and still is, a turned-around world” (*Birthing from Scorched Hearts* 43). By connecting the Native to its lost way of being in the world (a state of communion with the living creatures), the dominant culture also facilitates the claim that it is the rudimentary character of the Aboriginal culture that ‘naturally’ explain their fading away in the face of the modernization – which essentially accompanies Euroamerican settlers – into the marginal places where they are allowed to exist: museums, reservations, etc.

¹³² In a dramatic episode in the beginning of the text, Angela gets wounded, literally by cutting herself, and psychologically when Frenchie, a neighbor, asks her:

What happened to your face, anyway, dear” She said it straight out. *The forbidden question*. No one had asked it in a long time. I had hit people for asking that question when I was younger. I had left schools for people’s curiosity. I’d moved out of houses, run away as if running from ugliness or pain. It was what no one was allowed to say. Even I had stopped asking about it. At first I’d tried to find out what had caused the scars, but eventually I gave up (*SS* 51, emphasis added).

¹³³ Although this appellation seems to call for a categorization of the text as a post-colonial one, the reading of Native American texts as a reply to an imperialist agenda is more complex. Indeed, according to Arnold Krupat, the “contemporary Native American literatures cannot quite be classed among the postcolonial literatures of the world for the simple reason that there is not yet a “post-“ to the colonial status of Native Americans. Call it domestic imperialism or internal colonialism; in either case, a considerable number of Native peoples exist in conditions of politically sustained subalternity” (30).

¹³⁴ Treasuring the very object of colonial destruction or its created artifact is an inconsistency that Renato Rosaldo calls “imperialist nostalgia”, a conception that normalizes racial domination by turning the mnemonic act of the colonizers towards the past of the colonized culture not into a source of “moral indignation” but into “an elegiac mode of perception” (68). In this paradoxical longing for the past, the “agents of colonialism long for the very forms of life they intentionally altered or destroyed...mourn[ing] the passing of what they themselves have transformed” (69). According to Rosaldo, this stance attempts to hide a complicity in the destruction of the colonized by assuming a regretting attitude towards imposed change and showing a yearning towards ancient, stable situations. Moreover, Dean MacCannell asserts that this maneuver makes “the human status of Indians...a site of semiotic instability,” aggravating a paradox by which “a kind of unrealized mourning in which all of life has become reorganized around something that ‘died’; upon the “purportedly dead” are bestowed all the “honors, privilege, and prestige denied them in life” (qtd. in Rainwater *Who May Speak* 262). This very inconsistency of the will to remember, in positive terms, that which is the object of planned annihilation has been noted by Hogan herself:

Look at the history of coinage, and its symbolism. You have a coin with a buffalo on it at the same time buffalo were being exterminated, and the face of an Indian person at the same time there was a policy of genocide against Indians. What does this say? *Abstraction takes the place of matter; idea becomes as important as life*. As the wilderness is destroyed, audiotapes of endangered animals are being sold...Wilderness on television replaces the real economy (qtd. in Jensen 126, emphasis added).

¹³⁵ For instance, Hogan intensifies her amalgamation of real and fictional as she asserts that “there was a nineteenth-century policy to actually starve people into submission (...) [In *Solar Storms*] there’s a scene, which really did take place, where a tribe was so hungry they ate carcasses of animals they had found, not knowing they were laced with strychnine to kill the local wildlife, bears, wolves, bears...people do these things in the name of progress and money. And they put a veneer over it. That’s what Manifest Destiny was...a framework, a belief system, to allow them to take what they want, to make it right, make it legal. People do this all the time. Now it’s often called denial, sometimes it’s called law” (Jensen 126-127).

¹³⁶ As Elaine Scarry has argued in *The Body in Pain* (1985), corporeal suffering necessarily involves a split between one’s own sense of reality as a suffering subject and the reality of others who can only learn of one’s pain *at one remove*. This splitting is essentially dangerous since, unless a feat of the imagination or creation spans this divide, others not only fail to empathise, they can in fact feel permitted to inflict pain themselves (4–12).

¹³⁷ Hogan's position is a bit ambiguous in this respect: while she mentions a lack in the English language, she does not totally reject it as expressive medium (she writes in it). While she seems to offer its supplementation with Native insight, thus avoids the risk of remaining trapped within a binary structure, she also expresses ideas about English being inherently unable to convey the Native cosmology: "English seems to be a language that has more to do with economics than emotion. We do not have words in English for our strongest feelings. It's not a language that can touch the depths of our passion, of our pain. English has trouble with the idea of wilderness... English has little to express about reverence for the land or the human need for wilderness" (Jensen 122-123). It is quite interesting to contemplate Hogan's position in light of her highly militant perspective of her texts: "when people...[write] in angry ways, the response they get is angry, resistant. You almost have to think of it as being a spy. *You're infiltrating*, and you don't infiltrate a place wearing a weird outfit – *you try to blend in*. And you don't go in with your hackles up, because people are not going to listen to you. They'll match your hackles with their own" (130).

¹³⁸ This idea of an ecologically sound language, one that re-situates the human within nature as just another creature rather than the one in control, has been frequently advanced by Hogan. Indeed, she talks about "a language larger than human...a language spoken from and to the body...a vocabulary of senses, a grammar beyond that of human making" (*First People* 6). Moreover, Hogan says that her main objective has been "to find a language that expresses a care for the land and its creatures, that bypasses the mind. When words go straight into the body, the inexplicable happens to a person. You know those moments you have to enter a silence that's still and complete and peaceful? That's the source, the place where everything comes from. In that space, you know everything is connected, that there's an ecology of everything" (qtd. in Jensen 123).

¹³⁹ In *Skin Dreaming*, Alaimo claims that the

dual images of nature, the idealized and the debased, work as two sides of the same system, a system that maps a Cartesian dichotomy onto nature: the idealized version of nature is associated with the human mind or spirit, while the debased version is associated with the human body. Dividing nature into the ethereal and the abject allows the 'higher' races and classes to use nature as a dumping ground, even while reserving another nature as an idealized place to which they only have privileged access (125).

¹⁴⁰ Even on the level of literary discourse, the value of communal ties is significantly present. In fact, Native writing strives to heal the group *into* wholeness and fight the notion of fragmented struggles. According to Beth Brant,

[i]ndividuality is a concept and philosophy that has little meaning for us. Even while being torn from our spiritual places of home, having our ancestors names stolen and used to sell sports teams, automobiles, or articles of clothing; having our languages beaten out of us through residential school systems even while having our spirits defiled and blasphemed, our families torn apart by institutionalized violence and genocide; even after this long war, we still remain connected to our own (88).

¹⁴¹ Hogan, in fact, asserts that it is "no coincidence that the Indian people are under the Department of the Interior along with forests and wildlife. Indians have been called 'wild' and seem to represent an unfathomable mystery to Christians and European colonists...The fear of wilderness, the fear of indigenous people, and the fear of not having control are all the same fear" (qtd. in Jensen 123).

¹⁴² In this respect, water – specifically in its liquid state – is used by Hogan to denote a sense of love and caring that is transmitted to Angela from the natural world. This is especially striking because Hannah, her mother, is depicted also in terms of water, but water that is at a rigid, solidified state. This is loaded with negative connotations in the novel, whether it is used to depict Hannah detachment from her daughter or the possessive lust of white men. Angela indeed talks about how everyone was "all afraid of the naked ice inside her [mother]" (SS 104). Dangerous trends were showing in Hannah's person, she was an example of "the frozen heart of evil that was hunger, envy, and greed, how it had tricked people into death or illness or made them go insane" (SS 12-13). Hannah's destruction of lives around her was almost a hopeless illness that nothing could treat because Hannah was "as strong as ice" (SS 115).

¹⁴³ Indeed, biblical time, the hi/story of Human creation which moves or progresses perpetually towards the future, is directly linked to the view that time is linear. Moreover, in *Solar Storms*, the insulation of humans

from their natural element is traced back to Christianity's "dominion theology," which theorizes the legitimation of expansion as God's reward to His surrogates (*Things of the Spirit* 296). According to Kirkpatrick Sale, the disconnection from the natural is rooted in the Christian myth of creation, as the "Hebraic Yahweh, [is] so little a part of nature that He actually spends most of His time using its elements to wreak vengeance on His flock" (80-81). This is echoed by several other critics, such as Catherine Rainwater, who notes a double standard following it, a hierarchy within the hierarchy:

The Eurocentric story of "progress" underlying the doctrine of Manifest Destiny was constructed around biblically and philosophically grounded differences between nature – phenomena to be exploited and subdued – and humanity – the superior, rational beings chosen by God to preside over the rest of creation. In the Western grand design, nonhuman animals and the land fell unambiguously to the inferior, "nature" side of the equation, but often and paradoxically, so did some human beings, including Indians ... [Thus reflecting a] Eurocentric ambivalence concerning the ontological status of native people (*Who May Speak* 261).

In addition, Noble David Cook mentions that the pervasive ideological belief amongst the new-world settlers was that "the Natives were sinful and lawless; they did not want to experience God's grace and they were being rightfully punished for their lack of piety...God had deliberately made Indians die in order to clear a path for "his chosen ones" and those people that would cultivate land properly" (1998). In line with the logic that makes the natural elements subservient to divine anger against creation, the "Christian tradition of attributing plague and pestilence to God's wrath provided colonists with a space of reason and acceptance of the massive de-population of Aboriginal people" (Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski 40). What is remarkable is that, as she reacts to past wrongdoings of this type, Hogan operates a revision, not a rejection, of the Christian religion through Bush's ambiguous altar with its mixture of religious signs: it carries a cross but also pictures of loved ones – as if to add the compassionate quality that the Natives see lacking in the Christianity that imposes a hierarchy that relegates them to a bitter existence. Hogan's expansion of the theological mould, which is also a reflection of Native creativity in the real world, does not merely reverse the binary. This resonates against the historical conversion attempts of Christian missionaries, who tried to veer Natives away from their spiritual world and persuade them that "they were irrational and illogical, their beliefs meaningless and empty, their moral and ethical systems perverted and corrupted" (40).

¹⁴⁴ Hogan variously adheres to the position that equates the colonizing encounter with the beginning of traumatic history for the Natives. At times, she expresses this view as a lament, a longing for a nostalgically remembered identity and worldview: "We white men have a disease of the heart, and the only thing that can cure it is gold." With those words, with that disease, came *the end* of many worlds" (*SS* 203, emphasis added).

¹⁴⁵ Again, Hogan's textual description of Angela's movement is reminiscent of Freud's own perception of the primal scene as both the result of regressive and progressive analytical moves, back and forth between the assumed source of trauma and its affect. Angela indeed asserts: "*I was traveling backward in time toward myself at the same time I journeyed forward*, like the new star astronomers found traveled in two directions at once" (*SS* 64, emphasis added).

¹⁴⁶ This qualification takes on a major importance, especially that Hogan keeps the status of the ceremonial tale itself suspended between being one that Agnes told when alive or a story 'from beyond the grave' that Angela learns otherwise. In either case, however, the story is given structural and effectual primacy upon Angela's progression.

¹⁴⁷ Whether the departed are actually dead or not is kept ambiguous in Bush's ceremony. In her analysis of this ritual, Catherine Kunce notes the several levels of complications with which Hogan surrounds her prologue:

[S]omething is amiss, for Hogan *only hints* that the person honoured at the feast might not be dead...Although the narrator of Bush's feast apparently addresses another, the tone and presentation of the story induce us to forget that the "you" addressed might be another living person – we suspect, falsely, that the narrator speaks to a spirit. In confusion we turn once again to the prologue's beginning lines – the only two sentences

of the prologue not printed in italics. Juxtaposed with the italicized words, those first two sentences baffle us: “Sometimes I now hear the voice of my great-grandmother, Agnes. It floats towards me like a soft breeze through an open window” (11). Is great-grandmother Agnes, then, someone dead addressing the living narrator who remembers the words? All we know for certain is that Hogan presents Bush’s mourning feast oddly – as a prologue – and we cannot determine who lives and who, if anyone, has died. This confounding of the reader appears deliberate... (54-55, emphasis added).

¹⁴⁸ Hogan links it to a disease or madness rather than a temporal point of reference. For instance, Hannah is described in the following terms:

In the dream I saw your mother beneath ice in the center of the lake. I was afraid of her. We all were. *What was wrong with her we could not name* and we distrusted such things as had no name. She was like the iron underground that pulls the needle of a compass to a false north. Whatever your mother was in that dream, whatever she is now, it wasn’t human. It wasn’t animal or fish. It was nothing I could recognize by sight or feel (SS 12, emphasis added).

¹⁴⁹ There is a dimension in which healing is primarily configured as the reintegration of one’s communal group (becoming a member once again, re/membering) and, simultaneously, perceiving one’s rightful position within the larger creation, which eliminates the dissociative utilitarian perspective. Describing the sweat lodge ceremony, Hogan indeed emphasizes its connective atmosphere and its status as

a place of immense community and humbled solitude; we sit together in our aloneness and speak...our deepest language of need, hope, loss, and survival. We remember that all things are connected. Remembering this is the purpose of the ceremony. It is part of healing and restoration. It is the mending of a broken connection between us and the rest (qtd. in Hirschfelder 226).

Interestingly, this positions the text as Hogan’s own ceremonial gesture, because it does precisely that which is ritualistic: it makes several Natives (Angela foremothers take turns narrating her story and others) address their issues and fears in language, it reintegrates them within their community (e.g. Angela), and it denies a parochial connection to nature as a resource. Indeed, it would not be an inappropriate reading to claim that Hogan’s text is her rendering into the textual, a narrativization, of an Oral ceremonial tradition, since she herself declares being aware that stories impart and transmit knowledge, perspective: “a story is a container of knowledge...[a] story is also how we find ourselves and our place of location within this world, as species, as Indian people, as women...Story is a power that describes our world, our human being, sets out the rules and intricate laws of human beings in relationship with all the rest” (*First People* 9).

¹⁵⁰ According to John P. Wilson, this established tribal reaction to trauma is reflective of certain autonomy in facing the suffering of the past: “the Native American tribes and natives were forced to evolve their *own distinct rituals* for restoring members of their community to wellness and health. Indeed, they developed elaborate and complex ritualistic practices that were not “medical treatments,” but *part of a way of living to maintain healthy harmony and consistency of “ideology” and religious cosmology in the tribal community*” (104, emphases added). The ceremonial, thus, is inherently communal and inclusionary.

¹⁵¹ Catherine Kunce has also noted the fact that

[i]n constructing her prologue to perplex, Hogan countermands classical literary protocol and invites readers to reconfigure notions regarding the living and the dead, both textually and physically... Hogan disorients readers by dismantling conventional notions of structure, presaging the dismantling of mourning-feast conventions even while asserting the underlying value of ritual... Hogan forces us to ask, for whom is the feast held and why? Locating the answers to these questions requires us to read the novel *both progressively and retrospectively* (52-55, emphasis added).

¹⁵² For Hogan, animals and humans share a commonality of objectification by the Euroamerican utilitarian perspective:

Animals as well as colonized peoples have been used to enrich the nonindigenous, or Western, human world at the price of their own diminishment. In this world, animals reside primarily inside human constructs: parks, zoos, fences, even inside the human

mind as we reimagine and totemize them. They have been reviled or sentimentalized or eroticized but seldom known by us. They have lived for human convenience. We have become the boundary, the cage, the walls of captivity for all the rest (*First People* 17).

Conversely, the traditional conceptualization of Native Americans is based upon closer ties of both utility and respect; “through our relationships with animals and plants that we maintain a way of living, a cultural ethics shaped from an ancient understanding of the world, and this is remembered in stories that are the deepest reflections of our shared lives on earth” (10).

¹⁵³ The text insists that true tradition comes from “the map inside ourselves” (SS 17). This togetherness with the universe is repeatedly established as a feature that distinguishes Aboriginal knowledge from Euroamerican detached ‘objectivity’. In fact, the Natives’ sensitive attention to the living world and the land is opposed to the view of settlers. It is Angela who explains how, after internalizing her people’s values, she

was intrigued by the fact that history could be told by looking at paper...They were incredible topographies, the territories and tricks and lies of history. But of course they were not true, they were not the people or animal lives or the clay of the land, the water, the carnage. They didn’t tell those parts of the story. What I liked was that land refused to be shaped by the makers of maps...Its wildness, its stubborn passion to remain outside their sense of order made them want it even more (SS 123).

¹⁵⁴ There is an interesting parallel between Angela and Hogan herself in that the malaise with the world/views of the dominant culture provides the drive to reconnect with their cultural backgrounds. Hogan states:

What finally turned me back toward the older traditions of my own and other Native person was the inhumanity of the Western world, the places – both inside and out – where that culture’s knowledge and language don’t go, and the despair, even desperation, it has spawned. We live, I see now, by different stories, the western mind and the indigenous. In the older, more mature cultures where people still live within the kinship circle of animals and human beings there is connection with animals, not only as food, but as “powers,” a word which can be taken to mean states of being, gifts, or capabilities (*First People* 10).

¹⁵⁵ Agnes relates this event to Angela:

Bush, the wife of your grandpa, had struggles with your mother’s cold world. She tried to keep you with her, to protect you from the violence that was your mother. There was a time she heard you crying in the house when you were not there. I heard it, too, your voice, crying for help, or I would not have believed her. It was a chilling sound, your soul crying out, and Bush turned desperate as a caged animal. She fought for you. In that battle with what amounted to human evil, Bush didn’t win, but she didn’t lose either. It was a tie, a fragile balance that could tip at any time. That was the reason she cooked the mourning feast (SS 13).

¹⁵⁶ Angela’s mother and possibly grandmother function as embodiment of this folly or madness. In fact, Loretta is said to bear that odor of death. Hannah herself, in an allusion to the pressing desire for ownership, is a thief that keep taking what is not hers as a young girl. Functioning by the western values of encroachment and possession, the text hints, turns the Native individual into a dysfunctional one. Indeed, Hogan stresses that

the belief that the Western way has been the best seems to me to be the shape of a *madness* that has been turned around and stated as logic and rationality, and it is this confusion that characterizes the culture that now dominates. Where is the logic, we Indian women are asking, in the extinction of species, in deforestation that takes away our air, in emptying the sustaining oceans. What’s being lost is almost everything, including our own lives” (*First People* 16).

¹⁵⁷ At one instance, Agnes tells Angel “let me see you...You are getting busty. Are you gaining weight? It’s about time” (SS 104). Another time, she remarks “You’re getting hips” (127).

¹⁵⁸ These additional corporeal scriptures and Angela's own behaviour revolve around her inability to forget her primal disfiguration. Her attitude and actions reflect how she is caught within the obsessive need to 'mask' these scars or at least turn attention away from them. The vocabulary that, introspectively and retrospectively, Angel uses to describe her own reaction to her defacement continuously places her inability to understand the scars as the impetus for their concealment, be it behind a mask of toughness, a 'curtain' of hair, or by drawing attention to other bodily modifications such as the tattoos. The tattoo of the cross itself is not without significant resonances, for it stands itself for another corporeal mutilation that is squarely inscribed with the Christian worldview. It is the tale of Jesus Christ as he undergoes cruel torture and is ultimately crucified in his fleshly shell in order to ascribe meaning and redemption upon the deeds of the Christians and – even more importantly, perhaps – to become a limitless supply of narratives within the Christian tradition, as Peter Brooks mentions in his *Body Work* (4).

¹⁵⁹ Hogan goes further and declares that the "West" produced a "death-loving culture" (qtd. in Arnold 294).

¹⁶⁰ Hogan criticizes the institutionalized view that "what my own, indigenous people once knew were the stories of superstitious and primitive people, not to be believed, not to be taken in a serious light" (*First People* 9-10).

¹⁶¹ Louis Owens has expressed the idea that it is extremely difficult to perceive the possibility of a Native literary current operating autonomously and separately of the Western idiom to which it speaks back: "we already function within the dominant discourse...The very act of appropriating the colonizer's discourse and making it one's own is obviously collaborative and conjunctural" (*Mixedblood Messages* 52). This view also rhymes with the idea of a needed expansion of the colonizer's imagination to allow for Native epistemologies and signifying practices.

¹⁶² Following the ancestral trail is a driving textual element that epitomizes Louis Owen's argument that "[w]hat sets Native American fiction apart is among other qualities an insistence upon the informing role of the past within the present" (*Mixedblood Messages* 22).

¹⁶³ These routes allow Angela to move from displaying external (i.e., bodily) traumatic traces to internalizing nature, and thus towards healing. This is highly reflective of Native values, which, as Hogan mentions, stipulate that "the soul lies at all points of intersection between human consciousness and the rest of nature. Skin is hardly a container. *Our boundaries are not solid; we are permeable*, and even when we are solitary dreamers we are rooted in the soul outside. If we are open enough, strong enough to connect with the world, we become something greater than we are" (*The Great Without* 156). Furthermore, Hogan's insistence and celebration of the inner maps that the women on the journey hold within themselves – as opposed to the material maps of exploitation – gives credence to "a geography of spirit that is tied to and comes from the larger geography of nature," and to the fact of being "alive to processes within and without the self" (155).

¹⁶⁴ It also teaches her, and literally speaks to her, in her dreams – accentuating the factual presence of that "language beyond human language, [the] one that rises from the land itself" (Jensen 124). This teaching starts when Angela, in company of her foremothers, leaves the Western order of time and its daily sequence and gets in touch with that "place inside the human that spoke with the land" (SS 170). Angela states:

as soon as I left time...plants began to cross my restless sleep in abundance. A tendril reached through darkness, a first sharp leaf came up from the rich ground of my sleeping, opened upward *from the place in my body that knew absolute truth*. It wasn't a seed that had been planted there, not a cultivated growing, but a wild one, one that had been there all along, waiting. I saw vines creeping forward...Field, forest, swamp. I knew how they breathed at night, and that they were linked to us in that breath. It was the oldest bond of survival...Somewhere in my past, I had lost the knowing of this opening light of life...Now I found it once again...*the plants and I joined each other*. They entangled me in their stems and vines and *it was a beautiful entanglement*" (SS 170, emphasis added).

¹⁶⁵ Angela discovers that "[s]omething lived there [in the wild], something I didn't understand, but would always remember by feel. And when I felt it, I would call it God" (SS 170).

¹⁶⁶ The protagonist does not fail to comment, rather sarcastically, on what Louis Owens, in *Other Destinies*, labels "systematic oppression by the monocentric "westerling" impulse in America" (4). Angela indeed states: "Outside...were all the *cut-down trees and torn-apart land*. *Starvation and invasions* were there, in

the shape of yellow machines. The men were shielded inside [were]...certain that *this* was progress” (SS 284-285, emphases added).

¹⁶⁷ There is an interesting parallel between the views of Angela and Hogan, since the latter also finds the world civilization “confusing” as “it seems that it always implies Western civilization and certain kinds of behavior and ways of being in the world that are in conflict with the environment...Something happened in Europe, in Western civilization, that created a breakdown of a healthy knowledge system...I spend all of my time reading, writing, thinking about what it is that created people who thought they were civilized but really were the harshest and cruelest people in any time and any place from the beginning” (Murray).

¹⁶⁸ Interestingly, this image is repeatedly used by Hogan to qualify the Western knowledge system. For her, white men’s “human darkness, continues today. It is the darkness that makes us want to drink, the story of war and its tidal wave of violence, the falling of countries and civilizations. We human beings need to greatly reflect on what it means, the inhumanity that lives within a human” (*Birtherd from Scorched Hearts* 42).

¹⁶⁹ Angela states: “Not to strike back has meant certain loss and death. To strike back has also meant loss and death, only with a fighting chance” (SS 325).

¹⁷⁰ Around the end of the text, Angela muses: “Take...what a strange word it is. To conquer, to possess, to win, to swallow” (SS 339).

¹⁷¹ Interestingly, Ashraf Rushdy also identifies a sense of re-appropriation of voice as a major impetus in the rise of the neo-slave narrative in the sixties. He indeed mentions that the genre permits the articulation of

sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit comments about white appropriations of the slave's voice and challenge white authors who attempt to contain and regulate the first-person representation of fugitive slaves. In this way, the authors of the Neo-slave narratives are able to comment on cultural politics in America, especially the politics of canonization and the issue of appropriation in American cultural history. In this act of recuperation, the authors of the Neo-slave narratives were replicating the acts of the fugitive slaves who had originally written slave narratives in order to assert the authority of their experience—sometimes against the will and machinations of their abolitionist editors, always against the prevailing national sentiments regarding the testimony of people of African descent. Moreover, by using a form of writing that had been excluded from the academic study of slavery for so long, the authors of the Neo-slave narratives were able to make a critical comment about the historiographical tradition whose often romanticized representation of slavery was enabled by the exclusion of firsthand African American perspectives on the “peculiar institution”. Second, the writers of Neo-slave narratives wished to return to the literary form in which African American subjects had first expressed their political subjectivity in order to mark the moment of a newly emergent black political subject (*Neo-slave Narratives* 6-7).

¹⁷² In this respect, one can assert that Morrison is – to use the concept introduced by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. – Signifyin(g) upon the previous slave narratives. It acts “as a metaphor for formal revision, or intertextuality, within the Afro-American literary tradition” (xxi). Morrison states, in fact, that she is intent on achieving such an enrichment of the traditional slave narrative, and that she is “so deadly serious about fidelity to the milieu out of which I write and in which my ancestors actually lived. Infidelity to that milieu – the absence of the interior life, *the deliberate excising of it from the records that the slaves themselves told – is precisely the problem in the discourse that proceeded without us*. How I gain access to that interior life is what drives me” (Site 111, emphasis added).

¹⁷³ Ironically enough, Nancy J. Peterson has pointed out a similar criticism of *Beloved* itself, which has been virulently described as “a blackface holocaust novel,” which “seems to have been written in order *to enter American slavery into the big-time martyr ratings contest*, a contest usually won by references to, and works about, the experience of Jews at the hands of Nazis” (*Introduction* 464, emphasis added). While I believe that *Beloved* is not simply a book that estheticizes the victimization in search for sensationalism, it would be interesting to note that Morrison herself has expressed a vision of the history of slavery in terms of a holocaust:

If Hitler had won the war and established his thousand –year-Reich, at some point he would have stopped killing people, the ones he didn't want around, because he would have needed some to do the labor for nothing. And the first 200 years of that Reich would have been exactly what that period was in this country for Black people. It would have been just like that. Not for five years, not for ten years, but for 200 years or more (Washington 235).

¹⁷⁴ This term is synonymous with secrecy as well, a concealment of facts that is, as Herman points out, subservient to the defenses of the perpetrator:

In order to escape accountability for his crimes, the perpetrator does everything in his power to promote forgetting. Secrecy and silence are the perpetrator's first line of defense. If secrecy fails, the perpetrator attacks the credibility of his victim. If he cannot silence her absolutely, he tries to make sure that no one listens. To this end, he marshals an impressive array of arguments, from the most blatant denial to the most sophisticated and elegant rationalization. After every atrocity one can expect to hear the same predictable apologies: it never happened; the victim lies; the victim exaggerates; the victim brought it on herself; and in any case it is time to forget the past and move on (7-8).

¹⁷⁵ Morrison clearly associates the prerogative of deciding the utility and relevance of racial matters with the victims of racially-based abuse:

For three hundred years black Americans insisted that “race” was no usefully distinguishing factor in human relationships. During those same three centuries every academic discipline, including theology, history, and natural science, insisted “race” was *the* determining factor in human development. When blacks discovered they had shaped or become a culturally formed race, and that it had specific and revered difference, suddenly they were told there is no such thing as “race,” biological or cultural, that matters and that genuinely intellectual exchange cannot accommodate it (*Unspeakable* 126).

¹⁷⁶ This is inevitably bound to a postmodernist critique of Eurocentric historiography. In a later section about the ghostly in *Beloved*, I will explore how the text attempts to challenge the selective historical chronicles, which deny the articulation of the subaltern's pain, by reversing their logic of exclusion (from a safeguarded realm of self). The ghost is the textual insertion of re/memory as a polyphonic counter-history to subvert a monolithic and narcissistic perspective. In other words, the forcing of this unacknowledged historical remnant in the texture of the novel permits “to write the silenced experience of slavery into history, to imagine and convey the unspeakable, and by mobilizing the resources of experimental narrative forms, to expose the complicity of literary conventions of realism with the historical position of the Master” (Kawash 77).

¹⁷⁷ Morrison has referred also to the racist and monologicistic dismembering that the Canon – the discursive keeper of the Empire – has operated against a literary depiction of slavery that would accommodate the whole view of the institution and the human qualities and insights of its victims. In fact, she asserts that refusing access to the spontaneous narratives of the survivors of slavery traumas is part of the hypocritical mechanism by which the dominant discourse remain supreme, even while it superficially allows these subaltern a space (which is nothing but margin). Morrison notes how “[s]lavery wasn't in the literature at all. Part of that, I think, is because on moving from bondage to freedom...we got away from slavery and also from the slaves, there's a difference. We have to *re-inhabit those people*” (qtd. in Gilroy 179, emphasis added).

¹⁷⁸ Within the rather incohesive American Gothic literature, the fissures in historical knowledge – and the repression of ‘knowledge’ about the traumatic past and its violence – require the ghost to enact the literalized, or embodied, revival that challenges Western rationality. Simultaneously enacting the Freudian return of the repressed and exemplifying the Derridean politics of the supplement, the ghost hovers between the realms of the human and the supernatural. According to Eric Savoy, the haunting figure does more than just destabilize the narrative of the “national ego” by colliding it with the buried horrific alterity that tears its fabric (iix, 167-168). For example, Morrison's ghost personifies a traumatic past that

stubbornly inhabits the official version of history and questions its authority, and – formally speaking – makes the text of *Beloved* both an ambiguous staging of the dead’s eruption into the world of the living and a tortuous troping around language that calls attention to its fragmentation– a feature reminiscent of traumatic remembering itself. At the same time, one of the remarkable effects of the resurgence of elements that are excluded from the homogenous historical account is to expose the aporias within the mythologized national self, thereby subverting its muting mechanisms via the excess they symbolize. *Beloved*’s ghost forces an encounter with the sordid that generates an alternative to the amnesia about slavery within (canonical) American history. As Fred Botting notes, Morrison’s spectral rem(a)inder “uncover[s], in the interweaving of repressed individual history with a suppressed cultural history, the external and internal effects of racial oppression” (105). It also sheds a new significance on the African American experience of trauma and allows for the possibility of re-defining the victims’ position as individuals who may be able to move beyond its sequelae. In *Beloved*, the textual/historical ghost permits the transgression of the dominant discourse that consecrates sameness; it names the transformative alterity that counters the belief in a history of innocence by foregrounding the borderline/margin from which it emanates. Morrison’s poetics of spectrality rethink a history of wrongdoings that masquerades as an immaculate chronicle of self-identity. She reworks an established and ideologically-motivated narrative in order to interrupt it, to disrupt it, to manifest its impurity, and to contest its totalizing repressions.

¹⁷⁹ Indeed, Derrida states that one of attributes of a timeless time of present, “a time without tutelary present, would amount to this...to learn to live with ghosts, in the upkeep, the conversation, the company, or the companionship, in the commerce without commerce of ghosts. To live otherwise, and better. No, not better, but more justly. But *with them*” (*Spectres* xviii).

¹⁸⁰ This is squarely and precisely where Derrida’s destabilization of the time and space of presence, via the secret, undistinguishable, *a* of differance (both temporal deferral and spatial difference) operates. Derrida did, in fact, comment on how the play of repetition disturbs the very notion of presence to itself, and

It is because of difference that the movement of signification is possible only if each so-called “present” element, each element appearing on the scene of presence, is related to something other than itself, thereby keeping within itself the mark of the past element, and already letting itself be vitiated by the mark of its relation to the future element, this trace being related no less to what is called the future than to what is called the past, and constituting what is called the present by means of this very relation to what it is not: what it absolutely is not, not even a past or a future as a modified present. An interval must separate the present from what it is not in order for the present to be itself, but this interval that constitutes it as present must, by the same token, divide the present in and of itself, thereby also dividing, along with the present, everything that is thought on the basis of the present, that is, in our metaphysical language, every being, and singularly substance or the subject (*Margins of Philosophy* 13).

¹⁸¹ Elsewhere, Morrison has pointed to the fact African Americans still endure the effects of narratives – or, to use her own appellation “antagonistic fabulations” - that are *about* them as one that contribute to their abuse. She states that

Black people, as a group, are used to signify the polar opposites of love and repulsion. On the one hand, they signify benevolence, harmless and servile guardianship, and endless love. On the other hand, they have come to represent insanity, illicit sexuality, and chaos...They are interchangeable fictions from a utilitarian menu and can be mixed and matched to suit any racial palette. Furthermore, they do not need logical transition from one set of associations to another (*Friday on the Potomac* xv-xviii).

¹⁸² Baby Suggs talks in fact about the commonality of ghostly figures, which is yet another allusion to the urgency, the responsibility, of encountering them for the attainment of what Derrida regards as social justice. Baby Suggs continues:

My husband’s spirit was to come back in here? or yours? . . . You lucky. You got three left. Three pulling at your skirts and just one raising hell from the other side. Be thankful why don’t you? I had eight. Every one of them gone away from me. Four taken, four chased, and all, I expect, worrying somebody’s house into evil . . . My firstborn. All I can

remember of her is how she loved the burned bottom of bread. Can you beat that? Eight children and that's all I remember (*Beloved* 5).

¹⁸³ Morrison has stated, in an interview with *The Guardian*, on Jan. 29, 1992, that “[i]n this country American means white. Everybody else has to hyphenate”.

¹⁸⁴ In her analysis of the intersections of utopianism and postmodern American texts, Marianne DeKoven points out that Morrison's text, in its allusions to a “Sweet Home,” which is an impossible home for a slave, that is, in its indictment of the thought structure that sees as a heavenly continent the very place that reifies the displacement and traumatic existence of those deracinated from their old communities, and denied even into their ‘humanity’. She states that the

acerbic irony of that plantation's name exceeds its allusion to “Home Sweet Home,” forcefully undercutting America's claim to Edenic status. As in Eden, the power of naming at Sweet Home belongs to the patriarch; in this case, in this country, he is the white patriarch. The power of naming, both oneself and one's children, is crucial to this novel. Sethe and her mother insist on their right to name their children; Baby Suggs and Stamp Paid insist on the right to name themselves. The fact that all but two of the Sweet Home men are named Paul both highlights the de-individuation of slaves and also provides yet another ironic reference to the master's Christian tradition. The tree planted on Sethe's back by schoolteacher's student's whip is the Edenic tree of knowledge with a vengeance. There is no possibility of antebellum utopia in *Beloved*, because, simply, of slavery (78).

¹⁸⁵ Morrison articulates both the denial of this innocent history of America with the traumatic return of the repressed via Paul D and Sethe's following exchange: “Paul D laughed. “True, true. She's right, Sethe. *It wasn't sweet and it sure wasn't home.*” He shook his head. “But it's where we were,” said Sethe. “All together. *Comes back whether we want it to or not*” (*Beloved* 11).

¹⁸⁶ Derrida notes that “[h]egemony still organizes the repression and thus the confirmation of a haunting. Haunting belongs to the structure of every hegemony” (*Spectres* 46).

¹⁸⁷ Castricano states that “[w]hether in psychoanalysis or text analysis, Derrida's use of the word ‘address’ to describe the crypt's effect is significant because it links the crypt...to writing and sending” (45). I find this verb especially useful as it connects the notion of verbal interaction, the listening that one owes to the ghosts of the past in order to live justly, with both the interactive aspect that permeates the text (the African American call and response pattern) and the idea of address as destination or location, i.e. the reference to ‘124 Bluestone’ as the place where haunting takes place, the meeting connection between the world of the living present and the returning dead, or ghost.

¹⁸⁸ Morrison has in fact commented that images constitute the traces around which she structures her text 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,” of course, I don't mean “symbol”; I simply mean “picture” and the feelings that accompany the picture (*Site* 112).

The detours I hint at, however, are not only formal. They also affect the paucity of details about the traumas endured by African Americans during slavery.

¹⁸⁹ According to Derrida, this turns the ghost into the master figure that refutes a total annihilation of memory and thus makes it the prime reason why the perpetrators of trauma cannot be absolutely safe from its re/appearance as *just* haunting. Derrida links the absence of marks as signification to a status of a perfect victim:

One of the meanings of what is called a victim (a victim of anything or anyone whatsoever) is precisely to be erased in its meaning as victim. The absolute victim is a victim who cannot even protest. One cannot even identify the victim *as* victim. He or she cannot even present himself or herself as such. He or she is totally excluded or covered over by language, annihilated by history, a victim one cannot identify (*Passages* 389).

¹⁹⁰ Derrida evokes this as the “unreadability that stems from the violence of foreclosure, exclusion, all of history being a conflictual field of forces in which it is a matter of making unreadable, excluding...that is to say, not only by marginalizing, by setting aside the victims, but also by doing so in such a way that no trace remains of the victims, so that no one can testify to the fact that they are victims” (*Passages* 389).

¹⁹¹ This tension is shown in the following dialogue between Sethe and Paul D, as she encourages him to share his narrative of trauma with her:

“You want to tell me about it?” she asked him.

“I don’t know. I never have talked about it. Not to a soul. Sang it sometimes, but I never told a soul.”

“Go ahead, I can hear it.”

“Maybe. Maybe you can hear it. *I just ain’t sure I can say it. Say it right, I mean*” (*Beloved* 71, emphasis added)

¹⁹² For Gates, the Signifyin(g) trope subsumes the master tropes and colonizes them back so as to dilute their exclusionary process of signification, which is based on the reduction, annihilation or repression, of all ‘signifieds’ to create a homogeneous correspondence of meaning. In fact, signifyin(g) acts as a supplement to signification, which Gates views as “(white) convention” at work (46). While “signification depends for order and coherence on

the exclusion of unconscious associations which any given word yields at any given time...Signifyin(g) stresses “all of the associations that a signifier carries from other contexts...Everything that must be excluded for meaning to remain coherent and linear comes to bear in the process of Signifyin(g)” (49-50).

¹⁹³ The fact that the gaze, or the notion of ‘visual pleasure’, reflects hierarchical power relations has been noted by several critics. In fact, the imperial project, from its very early stages, has paraded black women’s bodies like curiosities. According to Maria Cristina Nisco,

the black (and African) female body can be regarded as the symbol par excellence of darkness, with all the different layers of signification applied to it. Saartjie Baartman, known to the Western audience as the Hottentot Venus, can be said to fully embody darkness for her being both African and a woman. Her black body was a mystery to the white European gaze, which consequently caged it and turned it into a mere object of curiosity and knowledge: the excessiveness of her genitalia and buttocks were shown as a proof of the wild sexuality characterizing black women. Parts of her body were exhibited during her life as well as her death (65).

In Morrison’s text, the horror of infanticide is juxtaposed to the horror of the racist gaze that Sethe denies, which is exemplified by Schoolteacher’s incomprehension of her act and which reiterates his view of her as an animal/commodity, even when he feels that she was subject to abuse at the hand of his nephews:

the woman schoolteacher bragged about [Sethe], the one he said made fine ink, damn good soup, pressed his collars the way he liked besides having at least ten breeding years left. But now she’d gone wild, due to the mishandling of the nephew who’d overbeat her and made her cut and run. Schoolteacher had chastised that nephew, telling him to think--just think--what would his own horse do if you beat it beyond the point of education. Or Chipper, or Samson. Suppose you beat the hounds past that point thataway (*Beloved* 115).

Morrison’s indictment of slavery is also clear in the way she shows that Schoolteacher reverts to the safety of racist ideology to accept the loss of Sethe as property, by denying her humanity another time, calling her a creature:

Never again could you trust them in the woods or anywhere else. You’d be feeding them maybe, holding out a piece of rabbit in your hand, and the animal would revert--bite your hand clean off. So he punished that nephew by not letting him come on the hunt. Made him stay there, feed stock, feed himself, feed Lillian, tend crops. See how he liked it; see what happened when you overbear creatures God had given you the responsibility of--the trouble it was, and the loss. The whole lot was lost now. Five. He could claim the baby struggling in the arms of the mewling old man, but who’d tend her? Because the woman--

something was wrong with her. She was looking at him now, and if his other nephew could see that look he would learn the lesson for sure: you just can't mishandle creatures and expect success (115).

¹⁹⁴ Racism posits the African American as an empty entity, a void signifier whose significance can only be assigned via the intervention of the language of whiteness; blackness is equated with the pre-history of white grace and civilization. In addition to creating an intangible, imaginary identity for the African Americans, discursive violence constructs them simultaneously a threat and a desired object. They are at the same time commodified, seen as exotic objects which depend on their established masters for meaning. Moreover, the projected denial of prior knowledge, concomitant with a displacing of the history of blackness and the erasure of African names, leaves the racial object in a state of innocence that is highly eroticized and desired by the white subject, who tries to turn the African Americans into an apprentice white men, to be patronized if they comply or annihilated if they rebel against this condition.

¹⁹⁵ Furthermore, as will be explored further below, Morrison investigates the body's potential to offer a theory to live by after catastrophe, via Baby Suggs' character.

¹⁹⁶ For a thorough analysis of hieroglyphics, as they impact on American literature, consult John T. Irwin's *American Hieroglyphics: the Symbol of the Egyptian Hieroglyphics in the American Renaissance*.

¹⁹⁷ Morrison notes that the "whole business of color was why slavery was able to last such a long time. It wasn't as though you had a class of convicts who could dress themselves up and pass themselves off. No, these were people marked because of their skin color, as well we other features. So color is a signifying mark" (Schappel 84). As color is being borne by the body, it becomes the first distinguishing sign that already discredits the bearer from claims to humanity, rationality, or property ownership (denying them even the basic ownership of their bodies).

¹⁹⁸ In her text "The Site of Memory," Morrison mentioned that the age of Enlightenment produced a discriminating pseudo-scientific tendency that denied the black individual any history or intelligence, let alone the linguistic structures to voice opinions via narration (108). Interestingly, she asserts that the same practice of enforced disregard is widespread in literary criticism and theory, proving that "[c]anon building is empire building" (*Unspeakable* 132).

¹⁹⁹ Schoolteacher operates as the enforcer of a language that is perverted so as to silence the degradation of the African American individual, to erase it from the record and deny it any importance by focusing on the objective, pseudo-scientific data. He thus effectively epitomizes the Eurocentric grand narratives' erasure of the traumatic memories from the historical accounts on slavery as irrelevant. It is his awareness of such an exclusion of reality from the chronicles of the white master that makes Paul D, extremely suspicious about the untenable discursive practices through which transpires the ideology of excluding otherness. Moreover, as Wolfe notes, the entrance of the former slave into the discursive practices of subjugation is, at least, as traumatic as the other traumas that the grand narratives of legitimation attempt to rationalize. Indeed Wolfe notes, how Sethe's encounter with the linguistic tools of the oppressor reiterates her exploitation, and reinforces her position in that discourse as an object:

Just five pages into Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, we discover how Sethe barter her body for the one word she will ever write. Sethe's prostitution before the stonemason is just one of many written texts in the novel that are literally as well as figuratively inscribed on the material bodies of African women. These written texts include the brand Sethe's mother bears under her breast; the columns "human" and "animal" Schoolteacher uses to record Sethe's characteristics; the whipping that nearly causes Sethe to bite off her tongue and leaves a scar shaped like a chokecherry tree (reminiscent of the cherry ink Sethe made for Schoolteacher) on her back; and the newspaper article that prompts Paul D to tell Sethe she has two feet, not four. Like these other texts, Sethe's single word is carved into the body of an African woman...[it] names, labels, and identifies an Other: in this case, the Other of her dead baby girl (263).

²⁰⁰ "Whitegirl. That's what she called it. I've never seen it and never will. But that's what she said it looked like. A chokecherry tree. Trunk, branches, and even leaves. Tiny little chokecherry leaves. But that was eighteen years ago. Could have cherries too now for all I know" (*Beloved* 13).

²⁰¹ It is interesting that Sixo, who attempts to negotiate the fact of being defined by the dominant authority, ultimately detaches himself from that system of signification, since “he stopped speaking English because there was no future in it” (19). This, however, ends up costing him his life, which emphasizes the grip of the institution of slavery.

²⁰² Schoolteacher stands as the emblem of the evils of a discursive violence that operates around the denial of the Other’s insight and the forceful stereotyping that masquerades as rational categorization. The text tells one “schoolteacher arrived to put things *in order*. But what he did broke three more Sweet Home men and punched the glittering iron out of Sethe's eyes, leaving two open wells that did not reflect firelight” (*Beloved* 7). It is this attitude that leads to a profound distrust of White people which is expressed, for instance, by Paul D, as he warns Denver: “Watch out. Watch out. Nothing in the world more dangerous than a white schoolteacher” (266).

²⁰³ This sexual abuse extends to the males in the “chain gang” as well. Morrison’s text only obliquely refers to it forced fellatio in order to achieve what Katrin Amian calls the quick retreat from a “benign image” to the “disquieting effect” (132), for the reader is immersed into another register operating through a misnomer before the veil is withdrawn so that one can the abjection of rape itself:

"Breakfast? Want some breakfast, nigger?"

"Yes, sir."

"Hungry, nigger?"

"Yes, sir."

"Here you go."

Occasionally a kneeling man chose gunshot in his head as the price, maybe, of taking a bit of foreskin with him to Jesus. Paul D did not know that then. He was looking at his palsied hands, smelling the guard, listening to his soft grunts so like the doves', as he stood before the man kneeling in mist on his right. Convinced he was next, Paul D retched--vomiting up nothing at all. An observing guard smashed his shoulder with the rifle and the engaged one decided to skip the new man for the time being lest his pants and shoes got soiled by nigger puke (*Beloved* 84).

²⁰⁴ Morrison is highly critical of the “pressure of the voyeuristic desire, fuelled by mythologies that render blacks publicly serviceable instruments of private dread and longing” (*Friday on the Potomac* xvii-xviii).

²⁰⁵ In some of the rare passages of the text directly addressing the racist distortion of blackness as savagery, Morrison subverts the entire framework intended to imprison African Americans by showing how the definers becomes encaged within their system of definitions:

Whitepeople believed that whatever the manners, under every dark skin was a jungle. Swift unnavigable waters, swinging screaming baboons, sleeping snakes, red gums ready for their sweet white blood. In a way, he thought, they were right. The more colored people spent their strength trying to convince them how gentle they were, how clever and loving, how human, the more they used themselves up to persuade whites of something Negroes believed could not be questioned, the deeper and more tangled the jungle grew inside. But it wasn't the jungle blacks brought with them to this place from the other (livable) place. It was the jungle whitefolks planted in them. And it grew. It spread. In, through and after life, it spread, until *it invaded the whites who had made it. Touched them every one. Changed and altered them. Made them bloody, silly, worse than even they wanted to be, so scared were they of the jungle they had made. The screaming baboon lived under their own white skin; the red gums were their own. Meantime, the secret spread of this new kind of whitefolks' jungle was hidden, silent, except once in a while when you could hear its mumbling in places like 124* (*Beloved* 198, emphasis added).

²⁰⁶ This is common reaction of the slaver women in the text. For instance, Ella, who is marked by “scars from the bell [that are] thick as rope around her waist,” refuses to care for the baby that results from her rape: “She had delivered, but would not nurse, a hairy white thing, fathered by “the lowest yet.” It lived five days never making a sound” (*Beloved* 193). Also, Baby Suggs, in a similar situation, has a similar reaction; after “coupling with a straw boss for four months in exchange for keeping her third child, a boy, with her--

only to have him traded for lumber in the spring of the next year and to find herself pregnant by the man who promised not to and did" (18).

²⁰⁷ Morrison presents this character in rather ambiguous terms, hinting that he internalizes some of the racism which causes slavery in the first place: he and his sister "they hated slavery worse than they hated slaves" (105). In a postmodern denial of purity or innocence, Mr. Bodwin is depicted in ambiguous ways that probably hint at the fact that he 'misuses' Sethe's infanticide for personal political gains. This variance of depiction is seen in this exchange between Denver and the Bodwins' servant, Janey:

"They used to be good whitefolks."

"Oh, yeah. They good. Can't say they ain't good. I wouldn't trade them for another pair, tell you that."

With those assurances, Denver left, but not before she had seen, sitting on a shelf by the back door, a blackboy's mouth full of money. His head was thrown back farther than a head could go, his hands were shoved in his pockets. Bulging like moons, two eyes were all the face he had above the gaping red mouth. His hair was a cluster of raised, widely spaced dots made of nail heads. And he was on his knees. His mouth, wide as a cup, held the coins needed to pay for a delivery or some other small service, but could just as well have held buttons, pins or crab-apple jelly. Painted across the pedestal he knelt on were the words "At Yo Service" (255).

²⁰⁸ The oral quality of Baby Suggs' sermons and her redefinition of the meanings originating from within the body are strikingly contrary to Sethe's capitulation into the discursive system of signification in the beginning of the text, as she offers her body again so as to 'buy' the one word that she would place over Beloved's grave. Thus, Baby Suggs practically implements the view of bell hooks that the margin constitutes "a space of resistance" where the oppressed can speak up. Rather than replace a binary with another, hooks underlines the need to formulate a multi-vocal expression that emanates from margin, which she perceives as "a space of radical openness," where it is possible to avoid erasure: "Our living depends on our ability to conceptualize alternatives, often improvised" (*Yearning* 149). By opposition, Sethe's entry into the white network of written signification further dispossesses her of her body, through prostitution. As Wolfe notes, because "her written word is intended to answer "one more preacher, one more abolitionist and a town full of disgust", her reiterated experience of bodily violation reflects a discursive violence that re-inscribes her own corporeality within the antagonistic economy of desire/repulsion. The damage that she incurs as a result of this will to assert herself, and her love to her daughter, by accessing to the dominant discourse, is reflected in Sethe's qualifying of that trauma: "those ten minutes... were longer than life, more alive, more pulsating than the baby blood that soaked her fingers like oil" (264).

²⁰⁹ Baby Suggs was separated from her husband, was raped repeatedly to procreate more slaves, and was separated from her children and has a broken hip that makes her walk "like a three legged dog" (141).

²¹⁰ Baby Suggs' resignation seemed to have a theological element: "God take what He would," she [Baby Suggs] said. And He did, and He did, and He did and then gave her Halle who gave her freedom when it didn't mean a thing". This religious element is important to note because, when she starts her own preaching, she deviates from the common Christian line of telling people how they are supposed to behave. In fact, as she instructed the women, children, and men in the Clearing, she "did not tell them to clean up their lives or to go and sin no more. She did not tell them they were the blessed of the earth, its inheriting meek or its glorybound pure" (88).

²¹¹ There is an interesting overlap between what Baby Suggs and Morrison ultimately try to achieve, which is nothing less than "disentangling received knowledge from the apparatus of control" (*Unspeakeable* 132-133). In addition, Morrison herself has repeatedly acknowledged that the ancestors function as her guide as she tries to rescue the untold past:

these people [the ancestors] are my access to me; they are my entrance into my own interior life. Which is why the images that float around them – the remains, so to speak, at the archaeological site – surface first, and they surface so vividly and so compellingly that I acknowledge them as *my route to the reconstruction of a world*, to an exploration of an interior life that was not written and to the revelation of a kind of truth. 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 (*Site* 115-116, emphasis added).

²¹² The nature and interplay of communal connections is far from being a minor focus in Morrison's text, and will be the subject of the last section.

²¹³ After the infanticide, Baby Suggs is hopeless. Just before her death, she transmits "to Sethe and Denver the lesson she had learned from her sixty years a slave and ten years free: that there was no bad luck in the world but white people. "They don't know when to stop," she said, and returned to her bed, pulled up the quilt and left them to hold that thought forever" (*Beloved* 100).

²¹⁴ Morrison suggests that one needs to contextualize what she qualifies as an "all-consuming love, which is an exaggeration of course of parental love, involved loving in a fierce, unhealthy, distorted way under circumstances that made such a love logical. I mean Sethe's not merely psychotic; *she didn't just erupt in the world that way*" (Silverblatt 172, emphasis added). This means that, in significant ways, Sethe is symptomatic of a wider systemic problem that is articulated through her own life and body.

²¹⁵ In, her book *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*, Laurie Vickroy writes that Sethe is "compelled to make unilateral decisions concerning their children's lives in circumstances so adverse any choice they would make would have tragic consequences" (54).

²¹⁶ The text comments that, "[b]y the time she faced him, looked him dead in the eye, she had something in her arms that stopped him in his tracks. He took a backward step with each jump of the baby heart until finally there were none. "I stopped him," she said (*Beloved* 164).

²¹⁷ When Paul D visits 124 Bluestone Road for the first time, it is remarked that

It had been a long time since anybody (good-willed whitewoman, preacher, speaker or newspaperman) sat at their table, their sympathetic voices called liar by the revulsion in their eyes. For twelve years, long before Grandma Baby died, there had been no visitors of any sort and certainly no friends. No colored people. Certainly no hazelnut man with too long hair and no notebook, no charcoal, no oranges, no questions (*Beloved* 9).

²¹⁸ As Deborah Horvitz notes, "Beloved gets rid of Paul D and eventually excludes Denver from their play. Just as the disembodied baby ghost Beloved hauntingly possessed Sethe, so the flesh-and-blood adolescent Beloved tries to own and dominate her. Sethe is as haunted by the girl's presence as she was by her absence because possession of any kind involving human beings is destructive" (97).

²¹⁹ Both of these actions are heavily influenced by Baby Suggs' persona and advice. Stamp Paid was a firm believer in the duty that Baby Suggs had to say the word, to preach. He also paid homage to her memory by trying to visit her isolated daughter-in-law's home, but was prevented by its haunting plurality – at which moment he sighed and thought in Baby Suggs' rhetoric: "Spirit willing; flesh weak" (173). Baby Suggs is also the one to help Denver to summon the courage necessary to reconnect with the neighbours and ask for their assistance. As Denver almost fails to literally take a step towards the others, her grandmother intervenes:

"You mean I never told you nothing about Carolina? About your daddy? 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? Is that why you can't walk down the steps? My Jesus my".

But you said there was no defense.

"There ain't."

Then what do I do?

"Know it, and go on out the yard. Go on" (182).

²²⁰ The supplement presents an addition, an extra, a thing from outside, but it also forms part with that which it supplements or rids of a void. As McQuillan notes, the "supplement is that which escapes the system and at the same time installs itself within the system to demonstrate the impossibility of the system" (20).

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