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Narrative Ethics in Postcolonial Fiction

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Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	3
ABSTRACT.....	4
INTRODUCTION: INTRODUCING A RADICAL ETHICS OF POSTCOLONIAL NARRATIVES....	6
CHAPTER ONE: POSTMODERNISM, POSTCOLONIALISM, AND CRITIQUES OF THE IRREDUCIBLE.....	17
WHICH THEORY: POSTMODERN OR POSTCOLONIAL?.....	17
POSTCOLONIALITY AND DECONSTRUCTION: CONTRADICTIONARY TERMS OR ETHICAL IMPERATIVES? ..	25
SPIVAK: CAN CRITICISM INCLUDE THE ETHICO-POLITICAL?	32
OTHER NOTIONS OF THE IRREDUCIBLE: UNSPEAKABLE REPRESENTATIONS OF TERROR.....	39
<i>BELOVED</i> AND RADICAL SUBJECTIVITIES.	44
READING <i>BELOVED</i> 'S BODIES THROUGH FOUCAULT AND HABERMAS.....	48
USING THE UNSAYABLE AND THE IRREDUCIBLE IN A POSTCOLONIAL ETHICS OF NARRATIVE.	54
CHAPTER TWO: EXAMINING AN ETHICS OF NARRATIVE STRUCTURE.....	59
<i>SHAME</i> : CAN WE EVER FIND AN ETHICS IN POSTMODERN LITERATURE?.....	59
THE RESURGENCE IN ETHICAL (VERSUS MORAL) LITERARY CRITICISM, AND THE INFLUENCE OF LEVINAS.	70
CAN NARRATIVE STRUCTURES PRODUCE A NON-DISCURSIVE ETHICS?	75
RECONSIDERING NARRATIVE STRUCTURE AS EXPERIENTIAL FORM AND DISCURSIVE CONTENT.	85
LEVINAS, NEWTON AND THE RESPONSIBILITY OF READING STRUCTURE AS <i>SAYING</i> AND <i>SAID</i>	94
RESPONSE AND RESPONSIBILITY DUE TO STRUCTURE IN <i>SHAME</i>	98
CHAPTER THREE: <i>TRACES</i> OF RESPONSIBILITY IN TONI MORRISON'S <i>JAZZ</i>.....	105
GETTING AWAY WITH MURDER: <i>BENITO CERENO</i> AND THE PROBLEMS WITH A LEVINASIAN ETHICAL CRITIQUE OF NARRATIVE CONTENT.	105
ETHICS VERSUS POLITICS.....	111
ETHICS AND FICTIONALISED CHARACTER: DOCHERTY'S POSTMODERN ETHICS.	113
<i>JAZZ</i> : MUSICAL FORM AS A STRUCTURE OF NARRATIVE EXPRESSION.	117
NARRATIVE STRUCTURE AND THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE READER.	121
ORIGINS OF THE <i>TRACE</i> : DERRIDA AND LEVINAS.	130
TRACES OF DERRIDA AND LEVINAS IN <i>JAZZ</i>	134
TRACES OF THE REAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF POSTCOLONIAL NARRATIVE.....	141

CHAPTER FOUR: VIOLENCE AND EXPRESSIONS OF OTHERNESS IN THE STRUCTURE OF THREE HISTORICAL NARRATIVES.....	145
BEN OKRI'S <i>THE FAMISHED ROAD</i> , LEITMOTIF METAPHORS, AND POSTCOLONIAL HYBRIDITY.	146
ETHICS AS CREATIVE ENGAGEMENT DURING READING AND WRITING.	156
CAN THE TEXT BE A FACE?	161
READING AND WRITING PERFORMATIVITY AND THE UNKNOWABLE IN ROMESH GUNESKERA'S <i>THE SANDGLASS</i>	165
AHDAF SOUEIF'S <i>THE MAP OF LOVE</i> : THE RESPONSIBILITY OF CREATIVITY WITHIN THE NARRATIVES OF POSTCOLONIAL MEMORY.....	172
CHAPTER FIVE: TRACES OF SILENCE IN NARRATIVES OF THE POSTCOLONIAL BODY IN PAIN	185
PHYSICAL DEVASTATION AND ITS UNSPEAKABLE EXPRESSION IN <i>BELOVED</i>	185
REPRESENTING THE TORTURED BODY IN SOUEIF'S <i>IN THE EYE OF THE SUN</i>	193
THEORISING THE IRREDUCIBILITY OF THE BODY IN PAIN.	201
ARUNDHATI ROY'S <i>THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS</i> : IRRATIONAL STRUCTURES IN THE POSTCOLONIAL NARRATIVE OF PAIN.	206
LOCATING THE IRREDUCIBLE POSTCOLONIAL BODY WITHIN MODERN DISCOURSE.	214
THE SILENT BODY IN LEVINAS.	219
CHAPTER SIX: ETHICALLY READING THE BODY OF POSTCOLONIAL NARRATIVES	228
<i>TRISTRAM SHANDY</i> AND THE BOOK AS BODY.	228
J.M. COETZEE'S <i>FOE</i> : LOCATING THE IMPOSSIBLE TRACES OF THE MARGINALISED OTHER IN NARRATIVE STRUCTURE.	232
REPRESENTING THE IMPOSSIBLE IN THE TEXTUAL BODY: <i>FOE</i> AND THE SILENCE OF THE SUBJUGATED BODY.....	239
VIOLATING THE <i>SAYING</i> THROUGH THE NARRATIVE STRUCTURE OF J.M. COETZEE'S <i>DISGRACE</i>	251
RECALLING THE RADICAL AESTHETIC: ARMSTRONG AND SCARRY.....	269
DOES THE IRREDUCIBILITY OF BODY MAKE <i>DIFFÉRANCE</i> POSSIBLE?.....	276
ACKNOWLEDGING <i>DIFFÉRANCE</i> : <i>DAVID'S STORY</i> AND REPRESENTATION WITHOUT WORDS.	279
<i>ANIL'S GHOST</i> : SITUATING THE BODY AT THE HEART OF RADICAL POSTCOLONIAL AESTHETICS.....	284
CONCLUSION: THE UNSPEAKABLE ETHICS WITHIN NARRATIVES OF VIOLENCE	293
IS A POLITICS OF THE POSTCOLONIAL POSSIBLE?	298
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	302
APPENDICES	335

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Abstract

When considering the ethico-political task of postcolonial criticism Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak claims that “ethics is the experience of the impossible,” and that “deconstruction cannot form a political program of any kind.”¹ Both these ideas motivate the central question of this thesis: if ethics is an experience of the impossible and deconstruction cannot form a political program, can we produce an ethical critique that radically considers the narrative representation of violent oppression within different postcolonial cultures and histories? This question will be addressed via four modes of enquiry:

- 1) By considering the current role of deconstruction within postcolonial criticism and asking whether deconstruction is a concept of writing that can be incorporated into reading strategies which intend to identify an ethics within writing;
- 2) by examining recent critical investigations into the idea that literary-linguistic structures themselves have ethical characteristics, and asking whether it is possible to identify an ethics within the structure of certain postcolonial fictions;
- 3) by investigating the representation of violence and physical oppression intrinsic to these fictions, and asking how the inscription of that violence affects their narrative structures; and,
- 4) by arguing that the representation of the postcolonial body in pain not only affects the structures of the narratives considered, but also plays a vital role in the radical ethics of that fiction. This last concern is initiated by Elaine Scarry’s claim that pain itself remains utterly resistant to language.²

¹ See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Translator’s Preface and Afterword to Mahasweti Devi, *Imaginary Maps*” reprinted in Landry and Maclean, eds., *The Spivak Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p.270, and “Practical Politics of the Open End” (interview) in Harasym, ed., *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), p.104.

² Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1985), p.4.

These enquiries will be made alongside critical examinations of twelve international postcolonial novels and their narrative structures. In doing so this thesis will ask whether it is possible to identify a radical ethics of fiction that is common to various postcolonial cultures, rather than a discursively informed ethics that is culturally or historically specific.

Introduction: Introducing a Radical Ethics of Postcolonial Narratives

Now such imponderables as justice and ethics can be seen as “experiences of the impossible:” experiences of radical alterity. As such they are undeconstructible...

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999), p.426

Whatever pain achieves, it achieves in part through its unsharability, and it ensures this unsharability through its resistance to language.

Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain* (1985), p.4

While postcolonial fiction shares many of the narrative strategies associated with postmodern fiction, the critical discourses associated with the two genres often seem incompatible, especially in terms of their political objectives. Postcolonial discourse has a committed political interest, whereas it is generally accepted that postmodern discourses dispute the totalising perspectives generated by such politics. On the other hand, many texts regarded as politically committed by postcolonial critics are often considered postmodern by critics outside the discipline, thus generating obvious differences in opinion and debate that remain unresolved (Loomba, p.xii).

If one charts the development of this debate in postcolonial literary studies it becomes clear that the difference in opinion often centres around the inclusion of so-called poststructuralist discourses within postcolonial literary criticism (Slemon, 1994, pp.50-51). The critics who oppose the application of poststructuralist reading strategies to postcolonial literature do so with the view that poststructuralism’s rigorous questioning of the validity of concepts such as history, narrative, reality, and even the basis of literary-linguistic structures themselves, can have little role in examining literature which generally deals with the objectification and historical oppression of socio-cultural groups on an international scale (Epko, p.122). Others also argue that poststructuralism is a set of Eurocentric discourses which reinforce a hegemonic relationship between the Western academy and those non-western cultures it theorises about (Loomba, pp.247-8; Moore-Gilbert, p.161). The irony of these points of view is not lost on the large number of postcolonial critics who in fact view poststructuralist reading practices as the most beneficial way of approaching the

non-traditional, innovative, and often radical narrative strategies that politically committed postcolonial fiction often seems to employ (Gandhi, p.25).

It is because of this difference in opinion that my own study turns to the concept of ethics in recent critical theory. While it is acknowledged that the idea of an ethics of literature has not enjoyed much critical attention during the past three decades, it might come as a surprise to sceptics of poststructuralism that the concept of ethics is central to many of the foremost 'poststructuralist' theorists. I use this term with caution in relation to critics such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Jacques Derrida who often voice their opposition to being defined as such. In fact, it is the adherence of these critics to the critical concept of *deconstruction* that engenders this opposition, though as we shall see deconstruction is often viewed as being largely responsible for the apparent non-political and non-ethical engagement of recent literary criticism. This study proceeds by claiming that though it is often overlooked, the foremost proponents of deconstruction do indeed foreground a concept of ethics within their own work, and that this ethics is something from which postcolonial narrative criticism can benefit. Even so, this ethics departs radically from the traditional understanding of the concept as a form of moral discourse, grounded as it is within deconstruction's view of writing as a literary-linguistic structure that constantly undermines its own logocentric claims to truth and objectivity.

The thesis asks whether it is possible to formulate a postcolonial narrative ethics that takes into account both the historical and real oppression of postcolonial cultures and the radical ethics promoted by deconstructive theorists. As is implied by this introduction's first epigraph, this will involve examining a concept of ethics that is *undeconstructible*. Such an ethics resists objectification and possibly even eludes conscious understanding, and yet at the same time influences and shapes the narrative representations of historical oppression that we find in recent postcolonial fiction. What then is the relationship between this radical ethics and the structure of postcolonial narratives, and how does this affect our reading experience of these fictions? I will be suggesting that such structures force the reader to respond to the undeconstructible elements which inform them, by involving readers in a necessary acknowledgement of a radical alterity and the real historical reasons behind its

indescribable otherness. I will attempt to identify such ethics via four modes of enquiry:

- 1) By asking whether deconstruction is a concept of writing that can be incorporated into reading strategies which intend to identify an ethics within writing;
- 2) by examining recent critical investigations into the idea that literary-linguistic structures themselves have ethical characteristics, and asking whether it is possible to identify an ethics within the structure of certain postcolonial fictions;
- 3) by investigating the representation of violence and physical oppression intrinsic to the postcolonial fictions examined, and asking how the inscription of that violence affects their narrative structures; and,
- 4) by arguing that the representation of the postcolonial body in pain not only affects the structure of the narratives considered, but also plays a vital role in the radical ethics of that fiction. This last concern is initiated by Elaine Scarry's claim of the second epigraph, that pain itself remains utterly resistant to language.

The thesis's overall argument is that while deconstructive accounts of writing might be able to propose a radical and irreducible ethics within writing itself, it is only by considering the irreducible qualities that characterise postcolonial representations of the body in pain that we can relate this ethics to the historical and cultural concept of postcoloniality.

An example of how this concept might be beneficial to postcolonial criticism can be seen if we consider the passage below from Spivak's recent work, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999). The text follows on from her explication of how the notion of the impossible is central to Derrida's concept of writing and how he sees us experiencing radical alterity:

Ethics as experience of the impossible [is] therefore incalculable... Justice and law, ethics and politics, gift and responsibility are structureless structures because the first item of each pair is neither available nor unavailable....

The structureless structures described above, where an item of a pair is both available and unavailable in an experience of the impossible, can be aesthetically figured in various ways.

In the novel *Beloved* (1987), Toni Morrison places the “Africa” that is the prehistory of Afro-American or New World African – to be strictly distinguished from the named contemporary continent – in the undeconstructible experience of the impossible. As this call of the other is lived in the calculus of an Afro-America conscious of its rights, *Beloved* figures this disclosure, in effacement, as a maternal sacrifice, “not to be passed on”... Historiality is not changed into genealogy. (Spivak, 1999, pp.427-31)

It is clear that Spivak also envisages an ethics that is incalculable and yet nevertheless affects the aesthetics of postcolonial histories and cultures. Here we get an insight into how she sees this impossible ethics affecting a postcolonial narrative. For her Toni Morrison’s innovative representation of an “impossible” and horrific past of which little now remains is an ethical move as it allows contemporary African-Americans to experience an unknowable African past. This past, whilst impossible to retrieve or recall, nevertheless plays a central role in informing contemporary African-American culture and its vision of its “rights.” As we shall see in chapter five, Morrison’s representation of this past isn't reduced to historical narrative specifically because of the radical narrative structure she employs. Though the reader of *Beloved* experiences a *trace* of that past, it ultimately remains undocumented. Here the “‘necessary but impossible’ move” (Spivak, 1999, p.424), identified by Derrida as *différance*, occurs during the meaningful experience of writing and its radical alterity that is aesthetically represented in the narrative itself. For Spivak, this ethical experience, whilst impossible to record, nevertheless has the opportunity to influence the socio-political world we live in today. It sets up a “structureless structure” because a political perspective evolves out of this ethics that is “neither available nor unavailable”; the ethics/politics binary exists and yet is undone. Here the common idea that a lawful politics evolves out of an ethical or moral proposition is complicated by the fact that this ethics makes no proposition – it cannot be reduced to text.

This thesis develops Spivak’s perspective by first considering the role that ‘real-life’ violence plays in affecting the representation of ethics in postcolonial fiction, and then by examining the ways in which narrative structures are affected when they attempt to represent the indescribable effects of this violence. This involves reformulating the idea of narrative structure as an entity that is made up of

both a form and a content, and that it is the unique relationship between these two aspects of it that produces an expression of ineffable otherness. For Spivak the concept of the undeconstructible in all writing is central to her ethics, out of which she develops a concept of impossible responsibility with which to approach novels such as *Beloved*. My thesis on the other hand proposes that an irreducible ethics becomes apparent in the postcolonial narratives examined specifically because of the innovative structural methods they use to represent the irreducible realities of violent oppression, such as the experience of physical pain. Here narrative content is understood to be the discourses which make up narratives, and narrative form is the actual shape which that content takes as it is expressively represented to the reader.

This allows me to theorise a concept of irreducible experience during the event of reading which occurs due to the non-discursive aspects of narrative structure – content is discourse, but form on the other hand is not, since it is the entity which in fact shapes and arranges the discursive content. This concept of narrative structure is closely based on Emmanuel Levinas’s view of the “Saying” and the “Said,” where the *Saying* is an irreducible aspect of the structure of the discursive act. It is an unspoken appeal to the other person which occurs prior to discourse, whereas the *Said* constitutes the content and words of the actual discourse itself (Levinas, 1993, pp.141-42). The concept of the *irreducible* is therefore central to this thesis. As we shall see, within Derrida’s theory of deconstruction it is an aspect of writing central to our ability to form ontological meaning. Yet it is also an intrinsic element of the ethics that Levinas locates within the discursive encounter between the subject and his or her others, and it is the defining characteristic of the physical experience of pain as examined in the work of theorists such as Scarry who base their findings in recent medical research. As such, the ethics I locate in postcolonial fiction defies reduction to discourse, but it nevertheless asks that its readers respond to and become responsible for the traces of alterity in this fiction, and the historical realities which make possible these traces.

The four aims of the thesis I outlined above do not inform separate sections within the study. Though the first and second are largely carried out in the first two chapters, and the fourth in the last two chapters, the second and third aims investigate concepts whose influence on postcolonial narrative structure will be evident

throughout. It is to be hoped that as the thesis progresses the concept of violent oppression and its representation will come to be seen as an intrinsic aspect of the narrative structures I examine, and integral to the theoretical narrative ethics that I locate in postcolonial fiction. In the study a selection of international postcolonial novels will be critically considered in order to regularly examine the thesis's theoretical proposals. I have chosen novels from different nations and cultures with the aim of examining an ethics common to these fictions and yet not culturally or historically specific. This goes against the common view that critiques of postcolonial literatures should always be non-generalist, and historically and culturally grounded, a critical approach that is undoubtedly necessary and important.¹ However, this study does not ignore the idea that postcoloniality is often a nationally and culturally specific experience; rather, it proposes that certain aspects of these narratives – their representation of the body in pain for example – cross historical, linguistic, and cultural divides.

The study is split onto seven chapters. The first considers some of the arguments that have arisen in the postcolonial/poststructuralist debate introduced above and asks why certain foremost postcolonial critics maintain that the use of poststructuralist, or more specifically, deconstructive discourses can have ethico-political consequences. This is one of the main points of view proposed by Derek Attridge and Spivak, two theorists for whom Derrida's view of deconstruction is central to their perspectives on the ethico-political potential of different postcolonial fictions. In both we see an enthusiasm to engage with the irreducible aspects of writing and its representation of radical alterity, and to relate these features to an ethics. This concept of the irreducible isn't specific to deconstruction though, and can be related to theories of non-discursive experience in other forms of critique, such as Paul Gilroy's view of the unspeakable elements of Black Atlantic aesthetics. I consider this relationship by turning to *Beloved* and examining how its innovative representation of violently subjugated subjects introduces an irreducible element to

¹ See Ivison, p.2024 on the degree to which “postcolonialism privileges the localized and specific over the general and global.” See also Childs and Williams, p.3 on the critical contentions that arise when critics group different histories and cultures under the definition of the postcolonial. They point out that such a use of the term necessarily elides the specifics of the “periods, processes and practices” particular to different cultures.

the narrative that problematises the Foucauldian view of discursive subjectivities. This raises the idea of the postcolonial body as a site of unspeakable and violent experience, a perspective that benefits from Habermas's critique of Foucault by illustrating some of the unresolved issues surrounding the poststructuralist view of the discursively informed body. This critique of both theory and fiction introduces the central issues that will concern the thesis's investigation of an undeconstructible narrative ethics: the non-concept of irreducibility and the ineffable in writing, the effect of violence on postcolonial narratives, and the radical narrative structures needed to represent the body in pain.

Can an ethics though be differentiated from a moral proposition?

Traditionally the terms ethics and morals are used interchangeably to refer to metaphysical concepts which "attempt to formulate codes and principles of moral behaviour" (Honderich, p.586). Chapter two argues that Salman Rushdie's *Shame* (1993) proposes an ethics in the traditional sense, whilst at the same time presenting an ethics that cannot be reduced to discursive, moral propositions. It has been argued in recent years by critics such as Adam Zachary Newton, Martha C. Nussbaum, and Andrew Gibson, that it is possible to identify an ethics that occurs as a result of narrative structure, rather than through a narrative's moral proposals. These critics propose that we can consider the possibility of an ethics in literature that doesn't involve making universal and moral assumptions, and in most cases the work of Levinas has played a prominent role in many of their findings. They examine with enthusiasm the idea of an ethics of literary form, yet there appears to be no clear agreement on what constitutes this form. Because of this, and as I outlined above, it might be beneficial if we were to consider narrative structure as an entity that is made up of both discursive content and non-discursive form, and examine whether such a proposal might account for narrative structure producing an irreducible experience during the event of reading.

Postcolonial and narratological criticism have recently been examining the relationship between literary structure and certain aspects of lived experience, proposing that certain ontological experiences necessarily affect their literary representation. Examples of these include physiomenal experiences, such as illness or pain, and other acute sensations. Newton proposes something similar with his

view that there is a relation between our experience of narrative structure and Levinas's theory of the *Saying* and the *Said*. I develop this perspective and argue that this relation foregrounds certain irreducible qualities within structure and the way it affects narrative expression. These irreducible features encourage the reader into a responsive relationship with narratives which foregrounds their ethical concerns, thus raising the idea of a reader's responsibility to the narratives s/he read. *Shame* is again used to explore this idea by asking whether its fragmentary structure uncovers any irreducible aspects of the narrative, and whether these indescribable features can be related to postcolonial cultural experience.

In Newton and Gibson we see examples of critics who claim to carry out Levinasian critiques of narratives, though in the third chapter of the thesis I argue that their reading of Levinas produces flawed examples of ethical criticism which continues to employ content, as opposed to structural, analysis. Morrison's *Jazz* (1992) is important as a text that uses a radical narrative structure to initiate an ethically responsive relationship with the reader, and when considering its structure I ask whether this ethics might influence a pragmatic political perspective. Because of the novel's self-conscious concern with the traces of otherness and silence within postcolonial narratives, it exemplifies how when considering traces of alterity within narratives we should do so not from the perspective of either Derrida or Levinas, but by considering the influence both philosophers have on each other's theory of the *trace*. *Jazz* is a novel that not only allows us to examine how alterity influences narrative structure, but also how this other of ontology and metaphysics is arguably theorised at its most radical in Derrida and Levinas. Nevertheless, this critique of the novel also makes it clear that such an ethics of narrative structure and the non-presence of alterity cannot inform a dogmatic political discourse on postcoloniality.

Chapter four is the first to deal with a series of recent postcolonial novels and to examine the role played by radical alterity in their representations of history. In Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991), Romesh Gunesequera's *The Sandglass* (1998), and Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love* (1998) we see an expression of otherness that again instigates an ethical relationship with its readership, but it is clear that this non-presence is also an effect of the novels' attempts to represent the violence of postcolonial history. In these texts *leitmotif* features affect their structures

throughout, but they do so by specifically evoking concepts of irreducibility and the ineffable. These novels also exemplify narrative structures that can be considered as the other of a discursive relation that the reader becomes interactively responsible for. One of the effects of this responsive discursive relation is that an element of imaginative creativity on the part of the reader and the writer is necessary to instigate an ethics between the reader and the narrative. This is intrinsic to successfully expressing and experiencing the unknowable features which are non-present and yet integral to the narrative representations of a violent past.

It is not only postcoloniality's representations of a violent reality that inform the radical alterity so prevalent in these narratives though. These irreducible features can also be closely linked to the difficulty of representing the unspeakable experience of the postcolonial body in pain. This is the main claim of the thesis's fifth chapter. In recent theory the body has been perceived very much as a discursive, culturally informed entity, an idea that is borne out by its representation in Soueif's *In the Eye of the Sun* (1992). Importantly though, while much of this novel devotes time to examining the social effects of the discourses which influence western, middle eastern, and female bodies, when it comes to representing physical pain it incorporates extremely radical structural strategies which are offset against a largely traditional narrative structure. Theories as to why the representation of physical pain might affect literary structures in this way can be found in the work of Scarry, David B. Morris, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, as well as several pain researchers. These critics consider the now medically verified idea that physical pain is a completely irreducible phenomenon, and examine the effects this has on its literary representation. Like *In the Eye of the Sun*, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) is another novel whose narrative structure seems to be affected by its attempt to represent certain irreducible experiences, even to the point that it incorporates a structure that arguably defies logic itself. Central to a consideration of these structural features is the often overlooked aspect of Levinas's ethics which proposes that one of the reasons that the experience of the *Saying* is irreducible is because of the indescribable pain that the human body is vulnerable to during discourse relations. Considering this claim in terms of the narrative structure of these novels suggests that there is a strong case to be made for the idea that Levinas's irreducible

ethics and Derrida's non-concept of the trace are non-discursive entities precisely because of the role played by the human body when experiencing them.

To what extent are these claims borne out by other postcolonial narratives? The sixth chapter turns to two of the novels of J.M. Coetzee, *Foe* (1986) and *Disgrace* (1999). Assuming that the representation of the postcolonial body in pain is an intrinsic element of a postcolonial narrative ethics, is it possible to argue that we read these novels as examples of textual bodies with which we initiate an ethical relation partly because of the vulnerability of our own bodies and the physical aspects of narratives themselves? *Foe* for example is a novel whose textual body and its representation of subjugated postcolonial bodies forms a complex ethical relation with the reader. This ethics reinforces both Derrida's concern with the undecidability of writing and Levinas's concern with the body's pre-ontological experience of physical vulnerability and the risk of violence. In *Disgrace* on the other hand while the issue of the vulnerable and non-discursive body doesn't seem to be exclusively foregrounded in the narrative content, Coetzee's complex narrative structure in fact reinforces the idea that bodies of discourse are also vulnerable to suppression and subjugation in much the same way that physical bodies are. Central to this idea is Derrida and Levinas's conviction that discourse and writing always retain an element of epistemological violence which can be related to the physical violence of the ontological world. Like the other novels considered, *Disgrace* has a complex structure which incorporates unknowable features and because of this involves the reader in a responsive and interactive ethical relation. Thus readers find themselves in the position of having to responsibly respond to a text because of its self-conscious (non-)representation of an unknowable otherness and silence.

Can it be argued that the irreducible aspects of physiomenal experience are intimately related to the *différance* that for Derrida makes the meaning in writing both possible and impossible at the same time? Recent studies by Isobel Armstrong and Scarry claim that the representation of the body and the way in which we always use our own bodies, often unconsciously, to relate to aesthetic form, is an idea that should be central to any radical reconsideration of the aesthetic. For both theorists the unique relationship between the body and aesthetics presents us with a means of investigating a text's radical potential. Armstrong's study in particular is partly

informed by the view that poststructuralism has failed to present us with ethico-political methods of aesthetic critique, an idea that is questioned throughout this thesis. Yet Armstrong and Scarry nevertheless foreground the need to readdress the role played by the body when we ethically engage with literature, and a consideration of their findings alongside the work of body theorist Drew Leder raises the question of whether the body's indescribable features make possible *différance* itself. This idea is examined in my readings of Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story* (2001) and Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* (2000), two novels which consider postmodern proposals about the status of narrative and authority, yet also demonstrate a self-conscious awareness of the role played by irreducible physical experience in the deconstruction of postcolonial historical narratives.

Early in the thesis I point out that the on-going disagreements over the role of poststructuralism in postcolonial discourse is not only a feature of postcolonial criticism, but that it is possibly its *central* feature. This seems to be a rather cynical perspective from which to consider what is meant to be a politically motivated form of criticism, but it seems to me that it is out of this paradox that the necessity for this study takes its origin and its significance. Postcolonialism does find itself in an often contradictory and ambiguous relation with those discourses that inform it, but that may be to its benefit. As I hope to show, a narrative ethics that on the one hand appeals to historical realities, and on the other to a radical alterity that escapes conscious thought can only reinforce its necessity by taking into account the contradictions of its own position. It is only by doing so that it can at the same time remain convinced of the need to examine within postcolonial narratives those unspeakable experiences that elude writing itself.

Chapter One: Postmodernism, Postcolonialism, and Critiques of the Irreducible

Whatever the fate of textual/literary studies in the twenty-first century, postmodernism, or specifically post-structuralism in *alliance* with post-colonialism has determinedly and successfully eroded the centrality of [British literature and] canon-based studies within academic institutions. But as well as the positive effects of this alliance, we must also understand the tensions and stresses, the power relations within and between the two discourses if we are to chart the course of literary history and its relationship to world cultures and politics this century. (Tiffin, p.xv)

Which theory: Postmodern or postcolonial?

The debate surrounding the interactions and distinctions between postcolonial and postmodernist discourses is not a new one, its relevance to contemporary critical theory having been specifically highlighted and examined in a collection of essays for the first time ten years ago.² The above passage, which forms part of the introduction to that collection of essays, outlines how mainstream postcolonial critical discourse sees itself at this juncture, as well as inadvertently foregrounding the difficulties that *still* arise when attempting to analyse postcolonial criticism's continued relation with postmodernist, or more specifically, poststructuralist, discourse (Williams and Chrisman, p.13). Academic literary critics are now for the most part aware of the role critical theory has played in dismantling the previous canonical emphasis incorporated in the teaching structures of English Studies departments, especially during the closing decades of the last century.³ For

² See Adam and Tiffin, eds., *Past the Last Post* (1991). As its introduction makes clear, this is the first critical text to specifically "characterise post-modernist and post-colonial discourses in relation to each other" (p.vii). The distinction between these discourses is examined in a more conservative and oppositional manner in the earlier and more well-known Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, eds., *The Empire Writes Back* (1989). For more on the distinctions between the two texts and their insights into the postcolonial/postmodern debate see Williams and Chrisman, pp.12-14.

³ See for example Said, 1994 for recent decentred readings of central canonical texts such as those by Conrad and Austen. Also Punter, 2000 (especially pp.4-9) on the degree to which non-British fiction in English has affected the teaching content of English departments largely as a result of critical theory, and Moore-Gilbert, Stanton, and Maley, pp.21-27 on the effect of influential texts such as

academics in the field of postcolonial literary studies itself on the other hand, the matter of fully reconciling a politicised critical perspective with the alleged ambivalence of poststructuralist discourse still often remains unresolved. This is evident in Said's claim that contemporary literary theory's concern with textuality has meant it has ignored the fact that texts are "part of the social world, human life, and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted" (Said, 1984, p.4), an idea that has recently been reiterated by Punter (Punter, pp.11-13). This sentiment can also be seen in Feldman's recent examination of Anton Shammas's *Arabesques* (1988), when she claims that her criticism "is framed by the ongoing debate over the relation between postcolonialism and postmodernism" (Feldman, 1999, p.374). She follows this up by classifying the debate as composed, on the one hand, of deconstructive theorists of "cultural ambivalence," and on the other, proponents of postcolonial literature's ability to reaffirm subjective agency.⁴

Theorizing the origins of this debate, Tiffin puts forward two "hazardous" generalizations concerning the postmodern and postcolonial critical relation. She claims that

post-colonialism is more overtly concerned with politics than is post-modernism; and, secondly, the post-modern (in conjunction with post-structuralism) has exercised and is still exercising a cultural and intellectual hegemony in relation to the post-colonial world and over post-colonial cultural productions. (Tiffin, p.x)

This statement forms an appropriate point of departure for a brief examination of the debate's current relevance to ongoing postcolonial literary criticism. Firstly, it can be stated that the former claim generally still stands: postcolonial fiction's political employment of narrative strategies that might otherwise be considered postmodernist has been commented on by a range of critics during the past fifteen years. As Hutcheon points out, the term "'post-modern' could... be used... to describe art which is paradoxically both self-reflexive (about its technique and its material) and

Said's *Orientalism* (1978) in the fields of "English literature, history, comparative literature, anthropology, sociology, area studies and political science."

⁴ Feldman names Bhabha as exemplary of a postmodern postcolonialism that employs a degree of "cultural ambivalence," and Hutcheon and Appiah of a postcolonial criticism that appeals for a universal ethics.

yet grounded in historical and political actuality.” Among the writers she cites as evidence of this are Salman Rushdie, Michael Ondaatje, and Toni Morrison, writers “who would be categorized by others as... post-colonial... in preference to the label ‘post-modern’” (Hutcheon, 1991, p.168).⁵

The claim itself is not unproblematic though: if the two critical perspectives are so distinctly divided on political terms, how is it that both so often draft the same texts into their respective canons? There is no doubt, for example, that the work of writers such as Salman Rushdie, Toni Morrison and J.M. Coetzee is considered overwhelmingly to be politically incisive from a postcolonial critical standpoint. Yet if we turn to Marshall’s undergraduate text *Teaching the Postmodern* (1992), we find that these writers make up three out of the seven “postmodern” novels it examines. The terms postcolonial and politics are not listed in its index. There is evidence here of the claim that “Western post-modernist readings can so overvalue the anti-referential or deconstructive energies of postcolonial texts that they efface the important recuperative work that is going on within them” (Slemon, 1991, p.7). This appropriation of political literature by postmodernist discourse is also evident in its central critical-theory texts, such as those by McHale and Jameson.⁶ As Sangari points out, Rushdie’s work in particular, perhaps partly due to the author’s renown, is often to be found drafted into such theoretical and critical discourses. He claims that Rushdie’s “nonmimetic, non-western modes” provide a reference point for “a peculiarly western, historically singular, postmodern epistemology that universalises the self-conscious dissolution of the bourgeois subject” (Sangari, p.216), an idea reinforced by Baker’s view of Rushdie’s fiction as “postmodern anti-foundationalism” (Baker, 2000a, p.174). The difficulties such innovative literature poses for proponents of a humanistic, politicised approach to postcolonialism is most emphatically outlined in Ahmad’s critical take on Rushdie’s apparent literary representation of “poststructuralist philosophical positions” (Ahmad, 1992, p.127). In contrast, Baker defends Rushdie’s politicised incorporation of postmodern narrative

⁵ For other critics interested in the postmodern aspects of postcolonial fiction see Slemon, 1991, p.5, Brydon, p.199, Appiah, pp.119-124, and During, 1987.

⁶ See for example McHale, 1992, p.31 on Gabriel Garcia Márquez’s *One Hundred of Years of Solitude* (1967), and Jameson, 1991, pp.28-9 on Bob Perelman’s “China” (1988) (“in some curious and secret way a political poem”), and Jameson, 1986 & 1987 on political “third world” literature.

strategies against Ahmad's claim that the use of such strategies undoes the political potential of his fiction (Baker, 2000b, pp.43-6 & 2000a, pp.164-9).⁷ These divisions were the critical differences that Tiffin and Adams set out to defuse, and yet their point about the hegemonic categorizing of literary texts within critical discourses seems as prevalent now as ever.

This brings us to Tiffin's latter claim, and the fact that unlike the former, this one seems outdated. The idea that poststructuralist discourse (as an aspect of wider postmodern thought)⁸ maintains an intellectual *hegemony* over postcolonial cultural production seems flawed because poststructuralist thought is now widely accepted as a central, if not the main, theoretical procedure of postcolonial critical practice, rather than a "hegemonic" discipline to be reckoned with. In her historical breakdown of the development of postcolonial theory, Gandhi claims that it is only through its relationship with "poststructuralism and postmodernism" and their decentralising concerns that postcolonialism gains its critical mode and impetus, and in doing so reinforces its significance to English Studies departments (Gandhi, p.25). The relevance of this claim can be seen in comments made by other critics, when they note that Edward W. Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Homi K. Bhabha are the three most prominent and influential practitioners of postcolonial literary theory

⁷ Baker 2000b is specifically referring to "The Politics of Literary Postcoloniality" by Ahmad, 1996, p.276, and Baker 2000a to Ahmad 1992. For other views on the political veracity of Rushdie's fiction and its use of postmodern strategies of self-reflexiveness and fragmentation see During, 1987, p.460, Srivastava, p.76, and Slemon, 1991, pp.7-8.

⁸ See Spivak, 1999, p.312 on the often made – and often inaccurate – conflation of poststructuralism with postmodernist discourses. She rightly points out that postmodernism refers to the set of discourses that theorise ontological experience in the wake of the high modernist period, important examples of which include Jameson's essay "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" (1984), and Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (1979). Poststructuralism on the other hand refers to the critical discourses which have arisen in the wake of structuralism, and refute in particular the idea that signs have a set significance within different cultures and are organised around a structural centre. Thus Foucault's theory of power/knowledge undermines the validity of transcendental knowledges and the uniform subject, and deconstruction challenges the idea that meaning evolves out the opposition of cultural signs. It should be noted though that Derrida is insistent that deconstruction isn't a poststructuralist phenomenon, though in literary criticism it is often defined as such, and that as we will see *deconstruction* isn't actually a form of discourse – it is an effect of writing. He warns us that "deconstruction is not... a specialized set of discursive practices, even less the rules of a new hermeneutic method, working on the texts or utterances in the shelter of a given and stable institution" (quoted in Bernstein, pp.86-7). Throughout the thesis I will try and emphasise the specific role played by deconstruction in terms of postcolonial criticism and how it differs from poststructuralist discourses. For a straight-forward example of how the work of Foucault, Lyotard, and Derrida can be "loosely dubbed" poststructuralist within theoretical debates see Spivak, 1984, pp.18-19.

(Young, p.7 & Moore-Gilbert, Stanton, and Maley, pp.21-38). Of these three, the latter two are conscious and purposeful employers of poststructuralist theory, in particular engaging with the central tenets of Derridean deconstruction. Said's work owes much to his appropriation of Foucauldian discourse theory.⁹

For critics such as Ahmad and Punter, the adoption of poststructuralist criticism by Western-based postcolonial critics is indeed evidence of hegemonic practices,¹⁰ and yet for the most part it is generally accepted that Spivak and Bhabha are politically engaged academics who have – almost single-handedly to some minds – shaped the present condition of postcolonial literary criticism. Such has been their influence in fact, that even critics of deconstruction acknowledge its pragmatic use at the hands of these two. Most interesting of these is probably Said himself, who whilst taking issue with the political pragmatics of academic poststructuralist discourse, still finds time to praise the insights of the aforementioned.¹¹

Even so, this apparent reliance of postcolonialism on poststructuralist discourse continues to pose problems within the field of critical theory. A well-known, if notorious, example of this recently occurred when Eagleton reviewed Spivak's *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999). As the title of the text might suggest, Spivak's publication was looked forward to by many readers as a definitive corpus on the postcolonial critical discourse that had developed over the past 15-20 years. What they were provided with was, in part, a specifically deconstructive reading of four central western philosophers and certain English canonical texts with the intention of tracing "a subliminal and discontinuous emergence of the 'native informant': autochthone and/or subaltern" in traditional western cultural production (Spivak, 1999, p.xi). As such it proposes a vision of justice, ethics, and politics that is

⁹ See for example Spivak, 1999, p.423 on what she calls the need for a "setting to work of deconstruction," and 1980, p.101 on its ethico-political potential. See Bhabha, pp.66-84, on how deconstruction allows us to undermine the absolute objectification of colonial otherness. Said's debt to the Foucauldian notion of discourse in *Orientalism* has been commented on by Gandhi, p.25, and Ahmad, 1992, p.3. This is not to say that these three are solely influenced by poststructuralist discourse. Spivak is traditionally Marxist, and Bhabha derives much of his work from Lacanian psychoanalysis.

¹⁰ See Ahmad, 1992, p.68 on Bhabha's poststructuralism, and Punter, pp.9-10.

¹¹ See Said, 1984, p.3 & pp.159-60 on what he sees as the political disadvantages of literary criticism's current enthusiasm for poststructuralism. Yet elsewhere he refers to the "extraordinary subtlety" of Bhabha's theorisation of postcolonial hybridity (Said, 1994, p.431, n.39). See also

of universalising assumptions yet is concerned with uncovering the marginalized, the silenced, and the oppressed in western culture. As noted in this study's introduction, she tells us that,

[j]ustice and law, ethics and politics, gift and responsibility are structureless structures because the first item of each pair is neither available nor unavailable. It is in view of justice and ethics as undeconstructible, as experiences of the impossible, that legal and political decisions must be made, empirically scrupulous but philosophically errant. (Spivak, 1999, p.427)

Eagleton's response on the other hand (amongst his other criticisms, one being an attack on Spivak's allegedly inaccessible theoretical language) was to claim that her book's

flamboyant theoretical avant-gardism conceals a rather modest political agenda. Where it ventures political proposals at all, which is rare enough, they hardly have the revolutionary élan of its scandalous speculations on desire or the death of Man or the end of History... [It suggests that] [t]he current system of power can be ceaselessly 'interrupted', deferred or 'pushed away', but to try to get beyond it altogether is the most credulous form of utopianism... this book assumes (rather than openly argues) the dogmatic Post-Modern case that almost all universalism is reactionary, almost all transgression or disruption positive, and almost all attempts at precise calculation a form of dominative reason... (Eagleton, 1999, p.6)

I am not citing this passage here in an attempt to validate or reject Eagleton's views, but rather as an example of the continued disagreement over the political potential of postcolonial discourse. For example, it shares similarities with San Juan's view that Spivak's "grammatological" reading of the "otherness and difference" of Gramsci's subaltern foregoes his revolutionary view of its status (San Juan, p.85-6). As we shall go on to see though, while Spivak might be accused of failing to propose a radical political perspective on the part of postcolonial criticism, her application of deconstructive reading practices should not be so quickly dismissed as politically ambivalent simply because they refrain from employing generalist ethical and

Kennedy, pp.111-37 on the similarities and divergences between Said's work and that of Bhabha and Spivak.

political agendas – such generalising, universal claims are the very discursive structures that she seeks to undermine in the name of the ethical.

Even so, Eagleton's attack on 'postcolonial deconstruction' is not unique. Parry created a similar upheaval with her claim that Spivak and Bhabha's poststructuralist critiques are,

marked by the exorbitation of discourse and a related incuriosity about the enabling socioeconomic and political institutions and other forms of political praxis... their project is concerned to place incendiary devices within the dominant structures of representation and not to confront those with another knowledge. (Parry, 1987, p.43)

Parry's difficulty with such criticism is that while it envisages the complete subversion of the coloniser/colonised opposition and its associated discourses of domination, it disables the validity of anti-colonial discourses. And while Spivak is right to remind us that the discourses and narratives of liberation also deconstruct themselves, they have and do nevertheless play central roles in the emancipation of oppressed socio-political groups (Smyth, p.48).

An even more scathing take on the constant poststructuralist deferral of structures of representation and its refusal to provide a socio-political counter-discourse is vented in Easthope's reading of Bhabha's theory of postcolonial hybridity. He argues that Bhabha's hybridity can be read as an appropriation of Derridean *différance* that undermines the Cartesian secular man with the postcolonial hybrid individual. In other words, if Derrida undermines the idea of transcendental presence with the non-concept of *différance* which makes the idea of presence and meaning possible – an idea I will be considering in detail later – then Bhabha undermines the culturally dominant Eurocentric subject by pointing to the different and constantly deferred hybrid individual which the dominant culture necessarily presupposes (Easthope, pp.342-3). Easthope argues that this effectively undermines any unifying element or collective principle within hybridity, and ignores certain universal discursive aspects that for him have shaped postcolonial counter-cultures throughout modernity – “the protracted battle for the franchise, forms of elected government and parliamentary politics, the whole struggle since 1789 for the rights of man and woman – a struggle which had incalculable importance in the process of

decolonization from Gandhi to Mandela” (pp.345-6). He claims that it is exceedingly difficult to relate a theory of “the disturbing distance in-between” the coloniser/colonised, self/other relation to a coherent political project. He argues that were individuals to occupy this space and “understand the anxiety provoked by [hybridity], activated in the anguish associated with vacillating boundaries – psychic, cultural, territorial” (Bhabha, p.59), they would experience something close to “the state of psychosis [of] the sad old man muttering to himself... [who] has fallen into the gaps coherent identity would conceal – he indeed inhabits an ‘interstitial passage between fixed identifications’” (Easthope, p.345). While much of the literature considered in this thesis would seem to suggest that such views perhaps too easily turn a blind eye to the fact that the narratives of unilateral civil rights and democracy are no more realities in many decolonised states than they were during colonialism, it needs noting that these misgivings about the political potential of deconstructive postcolonial critique are far from uncommon.

Wicomb demonstrates this by commenting on the conservative exploitation of these allegedly subversive hybrid categories. In language notably reminiscent of both Bhabha and Easthope, she asks “[h]ow... do people who live in communities inhabit, spookily and precariously, a rim of inbetween reality?” (Wicomb, 1998, p.101). Her reply, “[s]ymbolically of course,” allows her to exemplify the political dangers that critics should associate with ambivalent theories of identity.

Commenting on democratic elections in South Africa, she points out that “it is precisely the celebration of inbetweenness that serves conservatism, as in the use of the word *brown*, introduced into the unwieldy title ‘Coloured Liberation Movement for the Advancement of Brown People,’” before deconstructing and undermining the discriminatory trace and the self-serving effects of the use of terms such as “advancement” and “brown” by the South African National Party slogans (pp.102-3). This is an example of the difficulties many critics have combining theories of hybridity, ambivalence, or in-betweenness with the real ethico-political consequences of postcoloniality.

An interesting perspective on such arguments is provided by Gandhi in a text which also aims at providing a corpus of postcolonial critical thought. She provides an up-to-date, informative introduction to postcolonial theory, early in which she

acknowledges the sometimes heated debate over the opposed humanist and poststructuralist approaches within postcolonial criticism, and the fact that the debate between humanists and “poststructuralist anti-humanists remains unresolved on the subject of ethics and politics” (p.27).¹² In the final chapter of her study, she concludes that

it could be said that postcolonialism is caught between the politics of structure and totality on the one hand, and the politics of fragment on the other. This is one way of suggesting that postcolonial theory is situated somewhere in the interstices between Marxism and postmodernism/poststructuralism. (p.167)

In effect, it would seem that Gandhi’s initial insights ironically become the main concluding premise of her text itself, if not the central feature of postcolonial criticism as well. As such, her postcolonialism negotiates the space between what Parry calls Spivak and Bhabha’s incuriosity about enabling, political praxis, and Appiah’s call for a non-generalist, post-modern humanism. Bearing this in mind, I wish to turn to an examination of some of difficulties that arise when critics employ poststructuralism from a politically motivated perspective, and in doing so ask if there are other critical perspectives that might enhance the ethico-political potential of postcolonialism’s current, poststructuralist, perspective.

Postcoloniality and deconstruction: Contradictory terms or ethical imperatives?

Numerous critics have pointed out the complex and allegedly contradictory position in which poststructuralist, and more particularly deconstructive, criticism finds itself in relation to the various political perspectives that its users often espouse. During, who sees poststructuralism as a discourse within the wider field of postmodern thought, highlights this by pointing out the inherent contradiction that postmodern literary criticism holds for postcolonialism. Postmodernism, he claims, “refuses to

¹² Gandhi is speaking here of what she calls Marxist humanism, though she acknowledges that humanism is a discursive category applicable across various fields (such as science and existentialism). She claims though that these various discourses are “unified in their belief that underlying the diversity of human experience it is possible... to discern a universal and given human nature, and... to find it revealed in the common language of rationality” (p.27).

turn the Other into the Same,” and it does so by rejecting the idea of an autonomous agent. By opposing traditional objectification in this way, it idealistically creates a theoretical ‘space’ in which the Other might inscribe itself. And yet he also reiterates the point famously made by Spivak: the “Other can never speak for itself *as* the Other.”¹³ Thus, though some might argue that postmodern discourse foregrounds the issue of the marginalised Other, for During the postmodern condition has been theorized in poststructuralist terms that “intentionally wipe out post-colonial identity” (During, 1987, p.449). If it is the aim of postcolonialism to represent the historical, non-Western individual as an autonomous subject, and not an object, it is difficult to see how poststructuralism in this case might achieve this.

It is with a greater vehemence that Christian approaches poststructuralism’s use of language and its enthusiasm to theorize minority literature. Its critical concern with categories such as discourse, the centre, the text, and the periphery, is for her evidence of a still prevalent dualism which undermines non-Western political literature by claiming that “reality does not exist, that everything is relative, and that every text is silent about something” (Christian, pp.40-2). She does not reject the last of these claims though. Her aim in mentioning it is to show that such insights are not actually poststructuralist, though its protagonists might claim otherwise. According to Christian they are part and parcel of the historical experience and knowledge of minority communities. As well as this, she points out that the development of poststructuralism’s insights into the structure of textuality is primarily based upon the reading of traditional Western male texts, and proffered as “theories of reading proliferate” (p.43). In her view, such reading practices cannot adequately address or critique literatures from communities whose forms of knowledge differ from those in the West, and whose literature has traditionally been discredited.

If we consider that nowadays the most influential postcolonial theorists are poststructuralists, perspectives such as Christian’s and During’s go some way to explaining why the following claim by Keenan is still true: “[t]hat deconstruction could contribute something to the question of justice, possible or impossible, is taken

¹³ During, 1987, p.449. He is referring to Spivak’s famous claim that the subaltern cannot speak, an idea which will be considered later in this chapter. See Spivak, 1985, and for a more recent explication of this perspective 1993a, p.291.

as either self-evident or met with outrage these days,” and that this opposition is still inadequately resolved 25 years after the publication of *Of Grammatology* (Keenan, p.263). As such, postcolonial deconstruction finds itself in an interesting position. On the one hand we have influential academics who deny its pragmatic purpose, and on the other critics such as Spivak and Bhabha who have used it with political aims, and yet still receive criticism. My thesis proceeds from this point by suggesting that these differing perspectives might be reconciled by examining the main issue of contention they raise. What I want to ask then is whether it is possible to develop an ethical critique of postcolonial narratives with practical implications.

Attridge’s work on what he calls the ethico-political possibility of literary criticism provides a valuable insight into the paradoxical position of postcolonial deconstruction. Attridge is a proponent of Derridean teaching, and is insistent that “deconstruction is not a technique or method... hence there is no question of ‘applying’ it,” a perspective often reiterated by Spivak (Attridge, 1992, pp.109-10; Spivak, 1990, pp.133-5). Accordingly, the attributes of deconstruction do not develop by applying certain types of critique to certain literary texts: deconstruction – or the ability of literature to undermine the logocentric ground of traditional philosophy by highlighting its linguistic premise – arises within the literary-linguistic structure of texts themselves.

To examine this it is worthwhile reminding ourselves of what Derrida himself meant by logocentricity and the need for it to be questioned. He conceives of *logocentrism* as

the metaphysics of phonetic writing (for example the alphabet) which was fundamentally... nothing but the most original and powerful ethnocentrism, in the process of imposing itself upon the world, controlling in one and the same order:

1. *the concept of writing*... where the phoneticization of writing must dissimulate its own history as it is produced;
2. *the history of (the only) metaphysics*, which has... always assigned the origin of truth in general to the logos: the history of truth, the truth of truth, has always been... the debasement of writing, and its repression outside “full” speech.
3. *the concept of science* or the scientificity of science – what has always been determined as *logic* – a concept that has always been a philosophical concept, even if the practice of

science has constantly challenged its imperialism of the logos, by invoking, for example, from the beginning and ever increasingly, nonphonetic writing. (Derrida, 1976, pp.3-4)

Or to put it otherwise:

For Derrida, what defines logocentric philosophy is the attempt to conceive reason – the *logos* – as essentially independent from linguistic embodiment, thought as essentially separate from linguistic mediation. Logocentric philosophy, according to Derrida, conceives reason as complete and perfect mastery over whatever it reasons about. (Lawlor, p.4)

From this perspective, logocentric philosophy conceives of the *logos* as an unfettered set of truths that can be used reasonably and objectively, as a method of epistemologically interpreting and understanding ontological experience. It is a method of producing subjective knowledge that is based in objective truth. What it does not conceive reason as is a narrative or a set of narratives that is constructed around a set of Western values. Reason's claim that it is not a narrative, and its assumption that its ideals can be recreated and propagated within literary-linguistic structures such as speech and literature is the opportunity that allows us to challenge it (see Spivak, 1984, pp.18-20). As we shall see in more detail later, the differences in the meanings upon which literary-linguistic structures base their reference to transcendental presence undermines the possibility of the absolute truths they are used to represent. Derrida claims that it is impossible

that a sign, the unity of a signifier and a signified, be produced within the plenitude of a present and an absolute presence... Before thinking to reduce it or to restore the meaning of the full speech which claims to be truth, one must ask the question of meaning and of its origin in difference. (1976, p.69-70)

What I want to emphasise at this point is the idea that the origin of meaning in difference (or more specifically in *différance*, the role of which we will look at more closely later) occurs *within language itself*, and not within the critiques we apply to it. This questioning, or *deconstructing*, of narratives by the very structures of which they are made allows Attridge to argue that the “ethical and the political are not avoided by deconstruction, but implicated at every step” (Attridge, 1995, p.110).

Therefore, when we critically consider deconstruction in literature, we do not do so by applying ‘deconstruction’ to the text. We do so by asking how a certain text deconstructs itself.¹⁴ For example, how it *figures* the other within its narrative and yet claims not to do so, or how it fails to acknowledge the ways in which it silences other voices and experiences by providing its own narrative as *the* narrative. Encountering deconstruction means considering how a text makes claims to universal truth, and yet how its own use of language undermines that possibility. As Attridge points out, these “encounters” with deconstruction also allow us the opportunity to respond to such figurations and silences. He explains:

We might get a better sense of the status of these encounters if we hold on to Derrida’s word *events*, events of responding as responsibly as possible to the event of the text, answerable to the uniqueness of the text and thus producing their own uniqueness... The responsibility involved in such an event of response is a responsibility to the other... and at the same time a responsibility to the future, since it involves the struggle to create openings within which the other can appear beyond the scope of any programs and predictions, can come to transform what we think or think we know. (Attridge, 1995, p.118)

Thus by reinforcing their own inherent undecidability, literary texts unsettle traditional philosophical categories and dominant discourses, leaving the way open for other readings to evolve. Importantly, this interaction with literature remains distinct from the moralistic questioning applied to literature by humanistic criticism, thereby remaining devoid of the logocentric tendencies of such discourses. Here the text’s own literariness – its own staging and unsettling of structural relations – asks us to examine how “*this* reading of *this* text at *this* time... [exemplifies] the differences between readings, styles of reading, historical periods, cultural sites, and so on” (p.116).

Deconstruction has an ethico-political principle then because it allows us to ask questions of the narratives, cultures, and voices we encounter in literature. We can consider the veracity of those voices and the voices that they necessarily silence, as well as the cultures that are rendered invisible during the cultural staging of a text.

¹⁴ Derrida also claims that we cannot approach deconstruction as a “*literary* method” or a “method of reading” (Derrida and Kearney, p.124).

Bernstein backs this idea up by noting that an “ethical-political horizon” is always implicated in Derrida since his work is always involved in a critique of “metaphysics, logocentrism, phonocentrism, phallogocentrism, and ethnocentrism” (p.187). Though in the quoted passages Attridge doesn’t examine whether these ethico-political readings have political implications for societies, he does demonstrate how deconstructive ways of thinking can unlock the ethico-political *potential* of literary criticism.¹⁵ He claims that any critical interaction with a literary text that acknowledges its undecidability and creativity also acknowledges

the singularity of the other, of the text, but also necessarily betrays it, does violence to it (otherwise it could not be singular, but merely an algorithmic reaction); and we touch here on the difficult, and essential, question of the violence at the heart of the ethical relation. (p.119)

It is at this point for me though that Attridge’s discussion becomes less convincing. Though he notes that the question of violence is central to Derrida’s work, he fails to describe why we need to consider the “difficult, and essential” question of violence within writing, and why he feels it is “at the heart of the ethical relation.” While he notes in a footnote that Derrida raises this issue of violence in other essays, though not in relation to literature, it is possible to relate this reference to violence with Derrida’s discussion of ethics in *Of Grammatology*. There Derrida claims “that there is no ethics without... absence, dissimulation, detour, différance, writing. The arche-writing is the origin of morality as of immorality. The nonethical opening of ethics. A violent opening” (1976, pp.139-40). As Siebers notes, “[e]thics emerges as a defense against the violence of human relations, but Derrida understands that the primary oppositions that it establishes to bring about order are also a form of violence” (Siebers, p.95).

The result of Attridge’s allusion to the ethical context of violence is that it seems to reaffirm the liberal humanist notion of violence as unethical itself, since he never attempts to explain *why* violence has an ethical context. If deconstructive

¹⁵ Bernstein, sympathetic to the ethical-political potential of Derrida’s work does accept though that “despite Derrida’s own insistence and attempts to demonstrate the relevance of deconstructive questioning to the critique of political and social institutions (such as the modern university), the gestures in this direction have, thus far, been rather feeble” (p.188). This would seem to bear out Attridge’s reluctance to situate deconstruction in an identifiable and socio-political context.

approaches to texts are meant to undermine such beliefs and claims, why should the *traditional* notion of violence not also undergo such a questioning? Is what Siebers calls the “violence of human relations” understood as a universally unethical category? And what exactly is the violence of writing that deconstruction unmasks? Is the ‘violent’ “absence, dissimulation, detour, différance” in writing comparable with acts of physical violence to which we are all vulnerable in the socio-political sphere *outside* literature? For example, though Derrida notes that writing always has an intersubjective violent aspect (1976, pp.127-8), and he elsewhere calls the use of critical conceptual frameworks the “first violence of all commentary” (1978a, p.312, fn.7), can we make moral judgements about such violence in the way we might about *physical violence*? I ask this not to imply that Attridge is wrong to consider the ethics of violence in literature, but that there seems to be some unclarified similarities between his use of the term and its unethical interpretation within traditional liberal humanist discourse. Thus though Attridge does not offer a humanist interpretation as such, he fails to explain his own use of the term and what it means ethically to allude to “violence” in texts and in the worlds they represent, something that he does successfully throughout to other traditional philosophical and moralistic notions. If we turn to Armstrong for instance, we see a critic intent on engaging and ethically judging the violence that she, through Levinas, claims is inherent in discourse and thus constantly affects the self/other relation,¹⁶ even during reading (Armstrong, pp.93-4). For her though, the ethical import of the notion of violence is related to *persecution* in intersubjective relations, a perspective that she admits carries some humanist undertones. Though a stringent deconstructive critic, Attridge seems to forego critiquing the prevalence of such notions in his own use of the term.¹⁷ In chapter four I will suggest that the question of violence in postcolonial fictions is ethically important specifically because of its relation to the violent world of its

¹⁶ In Levinas’s own work he often distinguishes between “l’autrui” (the personal Other i.e. “you”) with “l’autre” (others in general). The translations from the French of Levinas’s major works have attempted to maintain this distinction by utilising the “Other” and “other” respectively (see Lingis, translator’s note in Levinas, 1969, p.24, n.). I have maintained this distinction when quoting translations of Levinas, but have also used the capitalised “Other” to apply to specific definitions of others, such as the Other of Western man, or the Other of imperialism, and the non-capitalised “other” to apply to the general others of the everyday self/other relation.

¹⁷ It should be pointed out that Attridge nowhere states that violence is unequivocally unethical.

readers, though the effects of this violence on narratives should not be understood in simple liberal humanist terms.

Spivak: Can criticism include the ethico-political?

I want to continue this consideration of the ethico-political potential of deconstruction by turning to the work of its most fervent postcolonial supporter: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Spivak occupies a curious position within postcolonial discourse because whilst being heavily involved in fieldwork within oppressed Bangladeshi communities,¹⁸ her own theoretical work is amongst the most inaccessible to the subject of her ethico-political critiques, the subaltern. This is a point that has been made most vehemently by Eagleton, but by others also.¹⁹ In characteristic self-reflexiveness though, it is a point that Spivak willingly acknowledges, not just of herself, but also of those who have shaped Western critical theory, such as Foucault and Derrida.²⁰ In her view, there is a distinction to be drawn between critical philosophical discourse, that which theorizes ‘real-life,’ and dogmatic philosophy, that which attempts to turn theoretical principles into practical use. She claims that this distinction is a “necessary crisis between theory and practice” made evident by deconstruction (Spivak, 1992, p.145).

Spivak’s critical intention then is not to reject outright the possibility of positive socio-political action in the real-world, but to allow deconstruction to unmask the contradictions upon which allegedly practical philosophies – that of liberal-humanism for example – lie. Like Attridge, deconstruction for her provides the possibility of undermining discourses that make claims to universality, objective truth, and the autonomy of the subject. It does not, as she makes clear, provide the possibility of a political program in itself, but is rather a “political safeguard” against the claims of logocentric discourse (1987, p.104).

¹⁸ For more on Spivak’s work with the Alternative Development Policy Research group see Spivak, 1997.

¹⁹ See Mishra, p.414. Spivak has also stated since that her most controversial essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” is “too complicated” (Spivak, 1993a, pp.287-8).

²⁰ See in particular her conclusion to “More on Power/Knowledge,” an essay that investigates the ‘onto-phenomenological ethical potential’ of reading Foucault’s theory of the *pouvoir/savoir* structure from a Derridean perspective, when she points out that the ethico-political claims of academics such as Foucault and Derrida need to be made, but they “will never be seriously tested either in large-scale decision-making or among the disenfranchised” (Spivak, 1992, p.166).

One of her aims then is to outline how deconstruction might offer a way of considering the postcolonial condition from an ethical perspective. In her view the oppression of this condition is most apparent in the absolute silence of the female subaltern subject. The formulation of an ethics for the subaltern means several things. Firstly, such an ethics should strive to make the subaltern heard, and in doing so eradicate the condition of subalternity itself. As she has reiterated in response to criticism of her claim that the subaltern cannot speak, once the subaltern makes herself heard – by the privileged sectors of the ‘First’ or ‘Third’ world – she is no longer a subaltern. To eradicate the condition of the subaltern ethically is therefore to universally *hear* such individuals speak (Spivak, 1994, pp.289-92). The main point we must take from this is that to ethically engage with or work on behalf of the oppressed is not to speak for them (Loomba, p.241). To do so would merely serve to re-objectify such individuals, and thereby reinforce their silence. For Spivak ethical relations evolve out of what she calls reciprocal one-to-one “deconstructive embraces” where the subject experiences an ethics that it “cannot comprehend” (1993b, p.190), and yet would be “something relating to the need for a civil code for men and women, not personal codes that keep women minors” (p.188). This is an ethics then that would evolve in an embrace that refuses to objectify others (in this example ‘women’), and acknowledges the construction of the self “as writing” (p.190).

Secondly, as already pointed out, Spivak maintains that “ethics is the experience of the impossible” (1995, p.270). Such a claim is exemplary of why Spivak and her use of deconstruction attract criticism for being politically ambivalent, and is typical of how dogmatic theories are problematised by poststructuralist discourses. Yet as Spivak makes clear, her claim is not the same as stating that “ethics is impossible.” Rather it is an acknowledgement that if we consider ethics as the attempt to singularly and responsibly interact with the subaltern, then the intended goal of that ethics – the interaction with *every* subaltern so that they may be allowed to speak and be heard and thereby cast off their subaltern status – is an experience of impossible proportions. This isn’t a prescription for political ambivalence then, but a realisation of the need for “collective political

struggle” and the impossible ethical engagement that, as we shall see, must, in a Derridean sense, *supplement* that struggle.

On the one hand this seems an understandable perspective. It becomes more difficult perhaps if we turn our attention to what Derrida’s means by the “supplement:”

If [the supplement] represents and makes an image, it is by the anterior default of a presence... an adjunct, a subaltern instance which *takes-(the)-place* [*tient-lieu*]. As substitute, it is not simply added to the positivity of a presence, it produces no relief, its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness. (1976, p.145)

What the supplement does then, like *différance*, is make meaning possible by producing a (false) impression of the “presence” of the signified meaning in literary structures. It makes “the opposition of presence and meaning possible” (Derrida, 1976, p.143), and yet “it is neither presence nor absence” (p.154). It is something unknowable then, an impossibility and an irreducible aspect of signifying which makes meaningful representation possible by supplementing that meaning. This admittedly difficult idea is also what Spivak is referring to when she claims that ethics is the experience of the impossible. It is an impossibility which supplements and makes meaningful notions such as ‘justice’ and ‘ethics’ possible, and at the same time provokes an awareness of the impossibility of a universal ethics “in the one-to-one way for each human being” (Spivak, 1995, p.270). It is therefore the impossibility of an ethics that nevertheless makes it possible to strive for that ethics in the first place, makes possible “a collective struggle *supplemented* by the impossibility of full ethical engagement” (p.270).

Ironically then, as with Attridge, Spivak’s ability to ‘read’ how humanist morality deconstructs itself – it is to all intents and purposes impossible in a universal sense – in fact reinforces her insistence that we attempt to ethically and *critically* engage with oppression on a universal level. It is a rejection of the rhetoric of rationalism and its morality, and the persistent attempt “to critique those dogmas for the few (in the name of the many) that we *cannot not want* to inhabit” (1992, p.161, my italics). The italicised phrase is one that Spivak often uses when considering the possibility of ethics, and it emphasises the impossibility of its

necessity to dedicated political activists. Its intended effect is this: one should be critical of universal moral propositions, but the ethically committed cannot help seeking for ethico-political solutions to universal oppression. A universal ethics then is a worthy cause, but we need to be critical about how we should attempt it. We need to realise its impossible proportions, since it envisages a one-to-one relation with all oppressed individuals, and refrain from applying general claims about justice and truth to distinct oppressed individuals and groups. The hegemonic relations faced by disenfranchised minority communities in Bradford, for example, differ vastly with those faced by the impoverished in Bangladesh.

To some the argument mapped above might seem less reliant on deconstruction's ethical potential, and more on the basis of open-minded common-sense. For example, those of us who read history know that agents of imperialism who have acted in the name of reason throughout modernity have done little to provide the possibility of justice on a universal scale. Yet, those of us who reject modern reason's claims about the possibility of universal justice because of this do not necessarily stop believing in a possible justice because of the proportions of the task. Taylor for example argues that it is pointless to examine things ethically from the perspective that meanings are endlessly deferred, or predicated on the impossible, since we need to agree on what we mean by a *possible* ethics in the first place (Taylor, p.72). Yet Spivak is right to point out that by *supplementing* the idea of collective struggle with impossibility we remain aware of the importance and size of the task fieldworkers such as herself are involved in, as well as rationalism's previous ethical failures.²¹ In later chapters we will see just how important this idea of the impossible is to the construction of textual meaning. For now it is enough to realise that the notion of the *impossible* supplements and make *possible* those "notions of political activism... deeply rooted in the bourgeois revolution from whose inheritance Derrida and Foucault, descendants of 1789, have taken distance" (Spivak, 1992, p.160). Deconstruction uncovers the fact that political possibilities are predicated due to *différance* on notions of impossibility. Spivak wants us to realise

²¹ See Critchley, 1992, pp.189-200 for example on the idea that deconstruction might very well provide the beginnings of political critique, but that ultimately it fails to produce decisions concerning the ethico-political. This idea will be explored again over the next two chapters.

that it is only by acknowledging this impossibility that we refrain from subsuming ourselves in objectifying narratives of idealistic political emancipation. As she points out elsewhere, any mobilising discourse on global social change must be supplemented by the responsible awareness of impossibility that arises when discoursing with others in a one-to-one relationship (Spivak, 1999, pp.382-5).

Awareness of this impossibility also makes us necessarily question our own positions as privileged, western individuals involved in a dissociated, critical discourse. This “*historical critique*” of one’s own subjectivity is for Spivak central to the western critic’s ability to engage ethically, or in one-to-one terms with the other (Spivak, 1986a, p.62). For example, she refers to her own “impossible” “neocolonialist anticolonialist” stance as a professional in the west who is from a formerly colonised country. She claims that to be within a “structure that one critiques yet inhabits intimately is the deconstructive position, which has its historical case in postcoloniality” (1990, p.16). To this end deconstruction does operate as the political safeguard that we saw her refer to earlier. And yet it is perhaps helpful to apply Spivak’s thinking to a more specific example of this ethics at work in the socio-political world, and one which exemplifies how Derrida’s work undermines *logos* by uncovering the undecidable and disseminated literary-linguistic structures on which it claims not to be based.

Spivak recalls a comment made by Ngugi Wa Thiong’o when asked at a conference what he thought of “recent [1989] developments toward a rapprochement in South Africa.” He concluded his response by saying that his greatest fear was that “South Africa should fall into neocolonialism.” For Spivak this is an example of “the voice of caution, raised at the moment of negotiated independence, a critique of what one cannot not want” (1992, p.161). It is a cautionary take on a post-apartheid South Africa made possible by the deconstruction of discursively constructed rationalist ideals. By presenting us with this example, she sets up an historical binary relation concerning the social politics of South Africa i.e.

‘an undemocratic apartheid state’ vs. ‘a democratic, post-apartheid state’

or,

the overtly bad vs. the naively good

What is constructed here is a binary relation of power that encapsulates a rationalist perspective on democracy. She posits Ngugi at the site of the in-between, at “the moment of negotiated independence,” a place of deferred meaning which makes the opposition possible and yet undermines both oppositional categories. Such a critical perspective is of course not unlike Bhabha’s take on the in-between site of postcolonial hybridity, where it is neither pole in an oppositional power-relation which informs postcolonial identification but a “space of splitting... the tethered shadow of deferral and displacement [which is] the disturbing distance in-between” binary relations. He goes on, “it is in relation to this impossible object that the liminal problem of colonial identity and its vicissitudes emerges” (Bhabha, p.45).

The implication of this reading tactic is this: Western interpreters of the evolution of a democratic South Africa will consider the end of apartheid as a victory for democracy and humanity itself, the development of ‘a democratic, post-apartheid nation-state,’ when in fact the people involved in the on-the-ground effects of political negotiations do not have the luxury of such idealised categories. The transformation from apartheid to democracy does not insure its own success, and one of its risks is that other forms of oppressive government might develop, such as a neo-colonialist one. Here Spivak demonstrates the ability of Western onlookers to idealistically appropriate language when in fact the meaning of terms such as ‘post-apartheid’ and ‘democracy’ is affected by *différance* and therefore should not be uncritically appropriated. In this case one of the undisclosed, non-idealistic meanings of the term post-apartheid *supplements* Ngugi’s use of it, unmasking the real socio-political risks such a condition actually presents, and the impossibility which informs its meaning.

Spivak presents a similar case in her reading of Mahasweta Devi’s work. She claims that “[t]he space that Mahasweta’s fiction inhabits is rather special... It is the space of the ‘subaltern,’ displaced even from the catachrestic relationship between decolonization and the Enlightenment” (1992, p.164). She goes on,

the event of political independence can be automatically assumed to stand in between colony and decolonization as unexamined good that operates reversal... There is however a space that did not share in the energy of this reversal, a space that had no firmly established agency

of traffic with the *culture* of imperialism... Conventionally, this space is described as the habitat of the *subproletariat* or the *subaltern*. Mahasweta's fiction suggests that *this* is the space of the displacement of the colonization-decolonization reversal. This is the space that can become, for her, a dystopic representation of decolonisation *as* such. In this context, "decolonization" becomes only a convenient and misleading word, used because no other can be found.

In this example Spivak clearly shows how in theoretical terms deconstruction critically undermines the progressive, democratic meanings associated with the term decolonisation in the colonisation/decolonisation binary. From the perspective of the subaltern the undecidability of the term decolonisation provides it with other dystopic meanings. In this ontological space it is not only the master narrative of colonisation that deconstructs itself, but modern claims of progress made by postcolonial governments themselves.²²

Again then we see how deconstruction provides an ethico-political perspective from which to view the subaltern condition through the reading of postcolonial texts and the political terms used to euphemistically describe that condition. Yet there is a difficulty here if we return to Spivak's claim that ethics must arise in everyday one-to-one relations. The ethics we are considering here is part of a *critical* discourse, and as Spivak freely admits, must therefore remain within theoretical terms. Drawing on Foucault's theorization of the power/knowledge structure as *the* ontological phenomenon that constructs the modern subject, she claims that "if the ethical subject is *not* to be taken to be without historical, cultural, or linguistic limits, then a study of its constitution(s) is the place to begin ethical investigations" (Spivak, 1992, p.156). It is only as such that ethical investigation can, via deconstruction, take the discourse of modernity to task (pp.156-7).

As shown, poststructuralist critique, and specifically deconstruction, provides the possibility of disclosing how the social politics of modern life are in fact discursive constructions whose meaning should be questioned every time they are proclaimed. Yet what if part of the experience of everyday, one-to-one relations that

²² See Bhatt, pp.38-9 on Spivak's attempts to carry out such a critique, and an insight into how her ethico-political concern with social and ecological difficulties amongst the impoverished of Bangladesh amounts to the ineffable.

Spivak refers to were partly based on a degree of *pre-discursive* knowledge? Or, what if the experience of certain oppressed social and cultural groups lies so far removed from rational experience that their own cultural products incorporate methods of irrational expression? As Attridge and Spivak show, deconstruction does undermine the morality of western political discourse by highlighting its literary-linguistic construction, yet if the literature we want to ethically critique made the assumption that its historical and cultural experience could not be expressed in rational terms, how would we critically analyse these other methods of representation? Would deconstruction still provide a method of interrogating the ethical potential of such literary forms, especially if those literary forms attempted to highlight aspects of experience that exist prior to “historical, cultural, or linguistic limits”?

While Spivak acknowledges that aspects of meaningful representation and one-to-one relations do remain irreducible, she seems convinced that it is only ethically worthwhile to consider such impossible concerns when they exist as a result of historical and cultural discourses. In the next section I argue that there is a case to be made for the idea that irreducible meaning or experience does not always exist as a resultant feature of ontological objectification, and that such experience might have a profound bearing on our idea of ethical life. While Spivak is right to argue that we should consider the effect modern discourse has on ethico-political relations in the real-world, we should also, as literary critics, be prepared to consider fully any non-discursive or even pre-discursive aspects of ethics and how they might or might not affect the representation of ethics in literary texts. I will introduce this idea by turning to the work of Gilroy, and by providing a reading of what is now arguably the most well-known and acclaimed postcolonial text, Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987).

Other notions of the irreducible: unspeakable representations of terror.

The idea of the irreducible within recent theoretical discourse is contentious for obvious reasons. On the one hand it problematises Derrida’s claim that there is no outside text (1976, p.158), since it implies that not all experience can be textualized, and on the other, its existence is a central aspect of Derrida’s view of deconstruction.

As we shall see in chapter three, the idea of unknowable or non-present elements within literary signifying is in fact crucial to the idea of *différance*: “*Différance* produces what it forbids, makes possible the very thing that it makes impossible” (1976, p.143). The notoriety surrounding the claim that there is nothing outside the text has arisen due to the inability on the part of certain critics to accept that Derrida is not refuting the actuality of the ‘real-world’ we inhabit outside the texts we read, but that he is making the claim that everything within that world can be reduced to, and is therefore in fact figured within, literary-linguistic structures.²³ This perspective is currently generally accepted by academics within the fields of critical theory (see Mills, pp.48-76). For Derrida then, the impossible and unknowable features of signifying always feature in our textual construction and understanding of the ontological, a necessary “*trick of writing* [that] is irreducible” (1976, p.24).

As we shall see, theorists and critics other than Derrida, such as Attridge, Levinas, Merleau-Ponty, Critchley, Armstrong, and Scarry, have also directly confronted the issue of irreducibility in language. It can be generally stated though that the idea of irreducible realities and experiences is not overly engaged with by literary critics, or at least hasn’t been until recently.²⁴ Said for example argues that as critics we must “accept the notion that although there is an irreducible subjective core to human experience, this experience is also historical and secular... accessible to analysis and interpretation” (Said, 1994, p.35). Spivak similarly notes that though such “preontological” experiences probably exist, the fact that “these are the conditions within which ethics are *performed*, by subjects constituted in different ways” forces us to recognize that ethical investigation must always consider the (un)ethical subject as ultimately constructed by reducible, deconstructible structures of philosophical discourse (Spivak, 1992, p.147). It is not difficult to understand why such critics insist on this point. Literary theorists, by definition, engage with textual structures that are distinguished by their referential, reducible qualities. As such, why should irreducible aspects of experience warrant their attention? And yet, perhaps there are other, less practical reasons. Were it proven that pre-discursive individual

²³ See for example Ellis’s refutation of a textual world in possession of no absolute knowledge (Ellis, pp.113-36), and Norris’s response (Norris, 1990, pp.134-161).

experiences make up a significant part of our daily subjective existence, it would undermine the claim that subjectivity is a wholly discursive construction – a view held by the large majority of the theories of Foucauldian poststructuralism and its critical offspring. The centrality of the discursive subject to poststructuralism will be looked at both here and more fully in chapter five. My aim here is not to undermine poststructuralism though, but rather to make the case that when we approach texts with an impoverished sense of the tenets of deconstruction we may fail to note the innovative ways in which certain cultures figure experiences and subjectivities which cannot be easily described as discursively or rationally informed. West for example claims that because writing harbours irreducible and impossible features and offers the possibility of meaning outside knowledge-communication, it therefore “does not communicate law-like knowledge,” and as such “presents an ethics” (West, pp.191-2). It is writing’s deconstruction that for West allows the possibility of meaning and justice by undermining the possibility of a “law-like knowledge.” Here the possibility of an ethics of writing is closely bound to the irreducible features that that writing can produce.

Gilroy is a cultural critic whose ethico-political aims relate to those of Attridge and Spivak, and yet he is convinced that non-discursive or non-reducible experience has an intrinsic bearing upon the cultural products of certain socio-political groups. Using the example of the African-American culture descended from slavery, he too warns of and highlights the futility in attempting to undermine the discourses of Euro/American-centric, rationalist power structures with oppositional yet similarly totalising discourses (Gilroy, 1993a, p.30). When discussing the Black American counter-discourse to modernity which he sees developing through the work of Martin Robison Delaney, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Richard Wright he argues that

[t]he political project forged by [such] thinkers... in the difficult journey from slaveship to citizenship is in danger of being wrecked by the seemingly insoluble conflict between two distinct but currently symbiotic perspectives. They can be loosely defined as the essentialist

²⁴ See Harrison, pp.19-28 on the need to acknowledge the often ignored “notion of an essentially extra-linguistic meaning” in the deconstructive idea of writing.

and the pluralist standpoints though they are in fact two different varieties of essentialism: one ontological, the other strategic. (Gilroy, 1993a, p.31)

Gilroy's own philosophical and political project is therefore based around the attempt to define a Black critical perspective that does not simply appropriate the logocentric principles of Western rationalism.²⁵ He claims this requires "not a counter-discourse but a counterculture that defiantly reconstructs its own critical, intellectual, and moral genealogy in a partially hidden public sphere of its own" (pp.37-9).

Gilroy argues that such a counter-culture gains these characteristics and remains partially hidden by incorporating a utopian perspective, yet one that isn't just a rational appeal for the unfulfilled promise of modernity and its hopes of "non-racialised justice and rational organisation of the productive processes." Rather it is a utopian vision that incorporates non-linguistic forms of resistance and communication that develop in the extreme circumstances fostered by the power structures of the slavery institution (p.37). Such an ethico-political perspective and purpose remains outside the literary-linguistic structures of modern power because it developed at a site where signs of resistance meant death or worse – the institution of slavery:

Created under the very nose of the overseers, the utopian desires which fuel the complementary politics of transfiguration must be invoked by other, more deliberately opaque means. This politics exists on a lower frequency where it is played, danced, and acted, as well as sung and sung about, because words, even words stretched by melisma and supplemented or mutated by the screams which still index the conspicuous power of the slave sublime, will never be enough to communicate its unsayable claims to truth. (p.37)

Here then the truth of the inexpressible and unimaginable horror that marked the slave experience and its sublime is beyond reduction to literary-linguistic structures. It is specifically this that for him defines the African-American counter-culture to modernity and endows it with irrational features that distinguish it from conventional Western discourse and its cultural forms. These cultural forms struggle to "repeat the unrepeatable, present the unrepresentable" (p.38), and are evidence of the "anti-

discursive and extra-linguistic ramifications of power at work in shaping communicative acts” (p.57).

The necessity to form critical perspectives which “partially transcend modernity [by] constructing both an imaginary anti-modern past and a post-modern yet to come” is doubly informed. As he points out, the memories and imaginary representation of the terror of slavery not only produce anti-modern cultural forms, they also question whether or not terror itself is a complicit characteristic of modern reason. Ironically, he suggests that the awareness of this complicity amongst Western theorists is one of the little cited reasons that the traditional teaching of practical and moral philosophy has come to an end – an act that reinforces the idea of our apparently postmodern condition (p.39). The most often cited example of the need to question universal rationalism is the Holocaust or Auschwitz, an event famously proposed as heralding the death of the grand narrative by Lyotard, as well as other postmodern critics (Lyotard, 1992a, p.48). Its occurrence is evidence of modern reason’s “incipient barbarous tendencies” (Docherty, 1993, p.11), tendencies which Benjamin claims are present and identifiable in any “*document of civilisation*” (Benjamin, p.258, my italics).

Theorists exhibit a willingness then to engage with the terrifying methodologies that have at times historically supplemented the dictates of Euro-centric rationalism, even though an acknowledgement of the similarities between the rational of the Holocaust and the slave industry has been slow in coming within western critical discourse.²⁶ And yet we must necessarily ask whether or not the effects of what Gilroy calls the “extra-linguistic ramifications” of such brutal appropriations of modern power (p.57) can actually be found in ‘post-terror’ literary texts, a point on which he seems to differ from other theorists of the post-modern. Jameson for example argues that representations of terror, anxiety, and alienation “are no longer appropriate in the world of the postmodern,” since the experiential

²⁵ See Foucault, 1980, pp.141-2 on the need to oppose power by other means than the appropriation of reactive homogeneous discourses and perspectives.

²⁶ I take this as evidence of an ironic historicity on the part of Western postmodern critics. The idea that the European Holocaust should be any more a marker of the futility of the narrative of Western reason than the modern international slave trade makes the claims of postmodern theorists seem just as Euro-centric and historicized as the narratives they claim to undermine. For more on the difficulty

human itself is no longer a valid subject of aesthetic expression due to concept of the *decentred* subject or psyche in postmodern theory (Jameson, 1991, pp.14-15).

Beloved and radical subjectivities.

I want to argue here that in *Beloved* certain features of the novel's structure seem to bear out the claim that postcolonial cultural products bear the traces of irreducible subjective experience. Sethe's story is a rewriting of Margaret Garner's, an ex-slave who killed her infant daughter and attempted to do the same to her other children so that they might never experience slavery themselves. According to Morrison, at the time Margaret Garner said, "I will not let those children live how I have lived."²⁷ She chose an extreme, 'logical' solution to a terrifying problem to insure that her children would not suffer inhumanely at the hands of others. In Morrison's rewriting though this act is presented as a cruel logic caught in an inhumane world with few rational features. Beloved, the daughter that died at Sethe's hands, returns to live with her mother as a ghost. Though this idea will be examined further in chapter five, it can be noted here that Beloved comes to represent impossibility itself, the experience of horror that defies rational representation and informs what Gilroy calls the "unsayable" aspects of slave subjectivity. Or as Bowers puts it: "One of the questions which *Beloved* asks is whether it is possible to transform unspeakably horrific experiences into knowledge" (Bowers, p.212). It is Sethe's representation as a 'post-terror' character that I wish to examine here though. What I will consider is whether the narrative representation of her subjectivity and actions can be explained as counter-discursive reactions against the dominant power-structure, or whether they defy modern categorisation and reduction to the rational/irrational binary.

It is immediately noticeable that the novel's representation of ex-slave subjectivity is closely linked to character experiences of the natural world, and in particular the slave-body itself. Sethe's body is portrayed as a natural, corporeal site of experience that rejects the traditional, optimistic interpretation of nature common to American nationalist and geographical discourse. As Ruland and Bradbury point

of philosophically considering Auschwitz in view of other large-scale, non-European atrocities see Daring, 1987, pp.456-8.

²⁷ For an insight into Morrison's own early reading of the Margaret Garner story see Naylor, pp.583-84.

out, optimistic discourses on nature and the landscape, and their beneficial appropriation and colonisation by the American people, are themes common to the American transcendentalists and the American consciousness itself.²⁸ Sethe's body on the other hand is a relentless reminder of the colonial violation of nature, for upon her back she carries a large scar she received after being sexually molested and severely whipped by her owners. She ironically refers to the scar numerous times throughout the novel's early chapters as a "tree" (Morrison, 1987, p.15), a tree which is immediately noticeable to the reader for being the very antithesis of the symbolic promise of progress and growth encompassed in the American transcendentalist appropriation of nature.

The importance of symbolic nature, in both its promise of progress to the American coloniser, and its incongruous effect on the conscious experience of an ex-slave, is reinforced numerous times early in the text. The passage below provides an example of the reversal that is undergone by traditional, optimistic appraisals of nature within the narrative:

Unfortunately her brain was devious. She might be hurrying across a field... Nothing else would be in her mind... Just the breeze cooling her face as she rushed toward water... Then something... 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 want to make her 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.
(p.6)

Sethe subjectively links these images of America's natural landscape to the physical experience of her body and the brutal personal history that her tree-scar reminds her of. Whereas initially the reader is presented with an idyllic scene and Sethe's unperturbed experience of it, the phrase "Then something" instigates a temporal and spatial shift in the focalised narration. The intense terror that she associates with the American idyll is suddenly articulated by the ironic juxtaposition of its ability to

²⁸ See Ruland and Bradbury, p.139 for an examination of the relationship between the aspirations of the American transcendentalists and territorial expansion. For a similar take on the traditional philosophical and scientific interpretation of such natural images in terms of Sethe's scar, see Härting, p.36.

“make her scream” with its “shameless beauty.” The latter phrase here introduces a moral element to nature’s beauty in Sethe’s focalised experience. This uncommon ascription of morality to nature emphasises that it is not nature that she fears, but the brutal realities of colonial America that the idyllic portrayal of nature deceptively obscures. Throughout the narrative Sethe fights to forget her terrifying past, but the beauty of nature and the insidious tree on her back are constant reminders of her own historicity – the complicity between her unspoken history and colonial America’s abuse of the natural. As she later makes clear through dialogue, it is the unsayable effects of the painfully natural physical suffering that mark her history and experiences: “I got a tree on my back and a haint in my house, and nothing in between but the daughter I am holding in my arms” (p.15). In Sethe’s world, it is the irrational or impossible itself that horrifically marks her present due to the terror of the past.²⁹ As Doyle points out, in this novel trees “function... as more than metaphors. They manifest the phenomenal effects of the history of slavery” and as we shall see in chapter five, raise the idea of “intercorporeal” experience (Doyle, pp.213-15).

Interestingly, Jameson’s consideration of Edvard Munch’s painting “The Scream” also locates a discrepancy between the physical experience of terror and our inability to aesthetically represent it. For Jameson “The Scream” illustrates the artist’s inability to represent the unspeakable – what he calls “the realm of the sonorous, the cry, the raw vibrations of the human throat” – whilst predating a postmodern aesthetic acceptance of the inability to reduce *any* concept of common humanity to aesthetic form (Jameson, 1991, p.14). The point about a current postmodern artistic consciousness notwithstanding, Jameson still succeeds in aptly exemplifying the difficulties involved in attempting to objectify the concept of terror and its physical experience.

²⁹ This idea of a female subjectivity which defies representation is close to Mishra’s definition of the postcolonial sublime, which he also envisages as closely linked to the irreducibility of the postcolonial body. Though this thesis does not specifically engage with the postcolonial sublime, it should be noted that the idea of the irreducible as an imaginative experience of irrational and horrific excess provides an interesting rewriting of the European Romantic sublime. Mishra’s consideration of the postcolonial sublime leads to the claim that the body should perhaps be examined as the site of postcolonial struggle, an idea intrinsic to chapters five and six of this thesis.

The complicity between terror and the inexpressibility is further demonstrated by the temporal disruptions in narrative content that shift from the focalised portrayal of the present to the remembered past in Sweet Home. Paul D, who was a slave with Sethe at Sweet Home and yet who refuses to accept Sethe's cynical view of nature, provides an example of this narrative strategy in the representation of his inspection of her scar:

Not a tree as she said. Maybe shaped like one, but nothing like any tree he knew because trees were inviting; things you could trust and be near; talk to if you wanted to as he frequently did way back when he took the midday meal in the fields of Sweet Home. Always in the same place if he could, and choosing the place had been hard because Sweet Home had more pretty trees than any farm around. (p.21)

In the space of a sentence Paul D temporally shifts the narrative content and unconsciously drops into a focalised digression on Sweet Home. These shifts disrupt the narration of present events throughout the next six pages. While Paul D's unspoken history is also located in his experience of slavery at Sweet Home, these focalised shifts in the early narrative make it clear that for now he has forced himself to forget its especially brutal moments. Unlike Sethe, at this point he retains faith in the benevolence of nature and the landscape. In the description of his flight from the slave prison into the "Free North" for example, we are told he uses "tree flowers," the blossoms of spring, as his guide (p.113).

Sethe's historical experience of colonial discourse and its relation to nature and the body is marked on her back: "[t]hem boys found out I told on em. School-teacher made one open up my back, and when it closed it made a tree. It grows there still" (p:17). For Paul D at this stage, "trees were inviting; things you could trust and be near" (p.21). And yet we are also told that after fleeing north with the tree flowers, "[i]t was some time before he could put [the past] into the tobacco tin lodged in his chest. By the time he got to 124 nothing in this world could pry it open" (p.113). Unlike Sethe, and at the expense of repressing the horror of his history, he still unconsciously accepts that beneficial aspect of nature that has been a central element in the discourse of American colonialism. These differences in Sethe and Paul D's subjective resistances to slavery, and the degree to which they are informed by

traditional American and rationalist discourses, has important bearing upon the later narrative content and plot – Paul D leaves Sethe when he learns she killed her own daughter, a fact that leads to Sethe’s descent into madness.

Reading *Beloved*’s bodies through Foucault and Habermas.

What we are provided with then in *Beloved* is two characters whose relationships with the power structure of slavery have resulted in distinct formations of their own resistant subjectivities. What I want to examine is how such distinct forms of resistance might evolve in terms of Foucault’s theory of the power/knowledge relation. For him the interdependence between the constitution of power on the one hand, and the constitution of fields of knowledge on the other, has bearing on the formation of subjects located within power-knowledge relations. The “subject of knowledge,” as Foucault describes the intelligent individual, cannot be thought of as a producer of knowledge for the greater good of society, or as socio-political agent “who is or is not free in relation to the power system.” He states that

it is not the activity of the subject of knowledge that produces a corpus of knowledge, useful or resistant to power, but power-knowledge, the processes and struggles that traverse it and of which it is made up, that determines the forms and possible domains of knowledge.
(Foucault, 1977a, pp.27-8)

Accordingly, it is impossible to envisage a subject-centred resistance which might produce a “corpus of knowledge” independently of *pouvoir-savoir* relations. Because power-knowledge is pervaded in the form of discourse, a phenomenon that is reducible to literary-linguistic structures, *all* knowledge within communities is discursively informed by the social power base.

As Bhabha points out, it is because of this that poststructuralist discourse encounters difficulties when it attempts to speak of concepts such as meaning, truth, and being:

For poststructuralist discourse, the priority (and play) of the signifier reveals the space of doubling (not depth) that is the very articulatory principle of discourse. It is through that space of enunciation that problems of meaning and being enter the discourses of poststructuralism, as the problematic of subjection and identification. (Bhabha, p.45)

Bhabha raises an issue that I touched upon earlier. How can we theorise a meaningful resistance for subjects who are shaped by “the problematic of subjection and identification” if discourse (resistant or otherwise) undermines its own veracity and signals its constructiveness within the power-knowledge relation? As Foucault points out, “[w]here there is power, there is resistance... consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (1978, p.137). If discourse, resistant or otherwise, is constructed within the rationalist structures of the power base itself, then, as Spivak and Attridge point out, it will deconstruct its own ethical and political claims to truth. How do we read the ethics of Sethe’s resistance then? Can it be read as meaningful only to the degree that it is irrational, a sign of madness, the radical other of reason?

I would like to adopt parts of Habermas’s criticism of Foucault to raise the possibility that resistance might evolve independently of power itself, or at least that resistance cannot always be theorized as an aspect of discourse. Reading Habermas alongside Foucault we see how both emphasise the role played by the body in power-knowledge relations. Foucault claims that,

in our societies, the systems of punishment are to be situated in a certain ‘political economy’ of the body... it is always the body that is at issue... power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs. (Foucault, 1977a, p.25)

And Habermas likewise notes that we can trace the “complex [base] of power” back to the Classical age when power was “concentrated around the sovereignty of a state with a monopoly on violence.” In the modern age this power base finds itself situated in the discourses of the human sciences and the panoptical form of supervision which allows power to “penetrate into all the pores of the subjugated body and the objectified soul” (Habermas, p.271). Such objectification is evident in *Beloved*’s narrative representation of the slave-prisoner camp. It is represented as a trench patrolled by guards, “one thousand feet of earth—five feet deep, five feet, into which wooden boxes had been fitted,” each with a cage door of bars, and within which all forty-six of the prisoners can be left, in their boxes, and yet still chained together as

one. And as the focalised representation of Paul D's thoughts makes clear, it is the change in his bodily experience that registers his fear while there: "A flutter of a kind, in the chest, then the shoulder blades... As though the further south they led him the more his blood... began thawing, breaking into pieces... Sometimes it was in his leg. Then again it moved to the base of his spine" (pp.106-7). Here, as Habermas through Foucault makes clear, rational objectification within modern power-knowledge relations operates upon an individual's very "pores," the corporeal fabric and nerve endings of the physical body. This is the site where power-knowledge relations turns inhumanity itself into rational function.

Power is therefore a catalyst that forms subjectivity by interpolating discourse *into* the subject by manipulating the "political economy" of the body through the threat of violence. It is only able to do this through its monopolisation of legitimate violence that is inscribed in law. As Foucault points out,

the manifold relationships of force that take shape and come into play in the machinery of production, in families, limited groups, and institutions, are the basis for wide-ranging effects of cleavage that run through the social body as a whole... Major dominations are the hegemonic effects that are sustained by all these confrontations. (1978, p.94)

This idea maintains that the "machinery of production" that informs individuals and groups is a result of the various discourse formations that the "body" is subject to. It should be emphasised that Foucault refers to this entity as the "social body," a site that is constantly split and manipulated by discourse. The effect of these disruptive forces on the body is to inform and sustain the subjective acceptance of hegemony, as Paul D's experience at the prisoner camp makes clear. It is only when he is given a sledge-hammer and set to work in the chain-gang that his "hands disobeyed the furious rippling of his blood and paid attention" (p.108).

Habermas departs from Foucault by examining the sensuous aspect of the body – what he calls its "experiential potential," rather than simply its socially constructed elements (Habermas, p.285). Eagleton calls this the issue of "how the world strikes the body on its sensory surfaces, of that which takes root in the gaze and the guts and all that arises from our most banal, biological insertion into the world," and goes on to argue that this "most gross and palpable dimension of the

human” should be considered in any valid critique of the aesthetic and in any “political order” (Eagleton, 1990, pp.13-4). In Habermas’s view it is this aspect of the body that is first and foremost prone to pain and punishment and ultimately beyond conscious control. He argues that in Foucault “‘power’ preserves a literally aesthetic relation to the perception of the body, to the painful experience of the mistreated body,” and yet that this is a non-social, or indeed a non-discursive aspect of bodily experience that Foucault refuses to acknowledge. Thus for Habermas the hegemonic effects of power do not

hold primarily between powerful wills and coerced subjugation, but between processes of power and the bodies that are crushed within them. It is always the body that is maltreated in torture... that is taken hold of in drill... and manipulated; that is objectified and monitored by the human sciences, even as it is stimulated in its desire and stripped naked (p.285)

Opposing the theorisation of the body as a social construction, Habermas proposes that power, modern and pre-modern, enforces discourse through its brutal domination of the *non-social* body of the subject, that sensitive, vulnerable, and inarticulate part of the body which is prone to pain. Discourse is *inscribed onto* the body from the location of power, a fact that Sethe’s tree-scar embodies. He argues that

‘power’ preserves a literally aesthetic relation to the perception of the body, to the painful experience of the mistreated body... If Foucault’s concept of power preserves for itself some remnant of aesthetic content, then it owes this to his vitalistic... way of reading the body’s experience of itself. (Habermas, p.285)

The veracity of Foucault’s interpretation of “the body’s experience of itself” and his claim that the body only interprets maltreatment within a social context is questioned here. Moving away from this idea that the reaction of the body to maltreatment is always informed by power-knowledge, Habermas identifies a subjective awareness in the individual that is non-discursively informed. He argues that within poststructuralist theory a subjective ethical resistance develops “only from the signals of body language, from that *nonverbalizable* language of the body on which pain has been inflicted [and] which refuses to be sublated into discourse” (pp.285-6,

my italics). Experiencing this non-discursive resistance of the violated body becomes the only means for the subject to develop a subjective awareness outside the formations of discourse. It depends upon the corporeality of the human body that draws its awareness from sensory experience beyond conscious control. This resistance is not strictly a counter-discourse because it undermines discourse operation by allowing a subject-centred and non-discursive element to inform its knowledge of the power relations.

In *Beloved*, Sethe and Paul D form counterpoints from which to view Habermas's critique of power. On the one hand there is the early Paul D, whose refusal to remember his violent yet officially sanctioned past at Sweet Home forces a conscious acceptance of his oppressed disposition within the power structure. His early view of nature as "inviting," a thing "you could trust and be near" situates him within a colonial history, a temporal site of existence within the discursive formations of modernity. His own history ceases to exist, as indeed is made clear through his repression of it.

Sethe, on the other hand, revokes those same formations. The tree growing on her back and the unspeakable experiences it entails force her to reject the traditional American appropriation of nature's promise. Härting reinforces this by viewing the tree-scar as a "physically inscribed" symbol which resists becoming the displaced referent to her physical treatment. She claims that contrary to poststructuralist accounts of "the image as 'metaphoric substitution'," the scar as a metaphor "can be read as the cause or the naming of what it refers to" (Härting, p.35).

Sethe's resistance to slavery can thus be read as influenced by her body's non-discursive, natural experience of severe physical subjugation, the scar of which forces her to unavoidably, and at great cost, remember her experience of the past. The horror of the scar is doubly figured. It represents both the natural horror that physical brutality engenders within the physical body, and the degree to which colonial discourse, such as America's benevolent nature or the lawfulness of slavery, unmask its own construction when enforced through violations of the body of the subject. Sethe's killing of her child represents not so much a resistant reaction against her slave-owners, but more a simple need to know that her child will not suffer the horror that she herself went through and is marked by. The *knowledge*

Sethe requires here is final, self-fulfilling, and ultimately beyond the effects of *power*. It develops not as a function of power, but from a subject-centred awareness of the horror such power can enforce upon the inarticulate physical self.

I would suggest that this distinction between Sethe and Paul D's subjective interpretation of modern American discourse provides an example of why Foucault's theory of modern power and discourse fails to account for the non-discursive aspects of subjectivity that Gilroy claims specifically arise in (post)colonial settings. As already noted, Foucault draws a distinction between the operation of power on the body and subjectivity within the modern and pre-modern eras. In the pre-modern era power's influence on subjectivities operates through the direct implementation of torture and mutilation on the publicly displayed body of the criminal. It reinforces "through the criminal, the unrestrained presence of the sovereign" and forces the public to witness "the power relation that gave [the sovereign's] force to the law" (1977a, p.49). Foucault claims that this pre-modern form of power relations can be traced through the practices of the Inquisition to the ancient torture of slaves (p.39).

This method of informing subjectivity is distinctly different from the operation of discourse in the modern era which manipulates the social body through scientific objectification and the threat of incarceration. Foucault claims that

this [modern] discourse provided, in effect, by means of the theory of interests, representations and signs... a sort of general recipe for the exercise of power over men: the 'mind' as the surface of inscription for power, with semiology as its tool; the submission of bodies through the control of ideas; the analysis of representations as a principle in a politics of bodies that was much more effective than the ritual anatomy of torture and execution. (p.102)

It is the development and implementation of this discourse that for Foucault marks the shift from the pre-modern to the modern in terms of power and its manipulation of subjectivity, or the "soul" (p.101). Yet while Foucault correctly relates the rise of modernity to the development of capitalist economies and imperialist expansion (p.77), he fails to account for the prevalence of ancient machinations of power, such

as the private ownership and punishment of slaves, within the modern colonial era.³⁰ In such a social setting the subjugated individual is not only subjected to colonial discourse, but also to the horrifying effects of power when it is enforced upon the body in its unadulterated brutality. This can be seen in Sethe's experience of it, her 'irrational' interpretation of the nature of the scar/sign it leaves her with, and the lengths she goes to insure such experiences are not the fate of her children. Her actions articulate a reaction to the memory of pain that cannot be explained by modern reason, nor categorised as rational or irrational. As we shall see in chapter five, representations of irreducible experience pose questions for critics who investigate the ethico-political aims of communities and individuals undergoing severe physical oppression, a fact which as we shall see has consequences for postcolonial readings of Foucault. In such situations, can categories such as ethics and politics be fully understood as discursive structures informed by the site of dominant power?

Using the unsayable and the irreducible in a postcolonial ethics of narrative.

One of the things made clear by this reading of *Beloved* is the idea that, in this case at least, the literary texts produced by historically subjugated socio-political groups cannot always be considered representative of rational experiences portrayed through rationalist discourse. During this study, we shall see how other postcolonial writers use even more radical techniques in their attempts to represent experiences that withstand rational objectification within fictional narratives. As this theme of the irreducible or indescribable experience of the physically oppressed is developed, attention will be paid to the role that the corporeal, biological body plays in the development of postcolonial or post-horror subjectivities. Such concerns are not new to postcolonial theory – the role of the hungry body in informing postcolonial consciousness has been paid particular attention by Fanon (Fanon, pp.35-106). But as shall be shown in chapter five, the ethico-political concern with the body in critical theory is one that has often been aligned with more recent poststructuralist theorisations of the discursively constructed body, and for Fanon the idea of bodily

³⁰ For more on this see Said, 1994, p.47.

violation and depravation is also a useful metaphor for the social subjugation of the native himself (Plasa, p.122). I will show that a consideration of the non-discursive, fleshy body, and in particular its universal vulnerability in the face of oppression, might provide the means to reconsider a universal ethics of postcolonial theory which resists the oppression of rationalist discourse.

In this chapter we have seen that the idea of irreducible experience, or experience that lies outside the confines of discourse – and here I mean discourse in both a conversational and a Foucauldian sense – is one that is often readily acknowledged by critical theorists. We have also seen that Derrida and Spivak acknowledge the necessity of such impossible elements in literary-linguistic structures, and in every-day relations. In the case of Derrida though such claims are often overlooked, the majority of his work being appropriated to examine the degree to which subjectivity is dependent on the textual constructiveness of ontological experience. Indeed, when he claims otherwise, Spivak warns us that he risks “his disciplinary practice through the rhetoric of the everyday.”³¹ This is a clear indication of the risks open to the deconstructive philosopher who considers pre-ontological categories and the importance of the ‘everyday’ – s/he may find that the form of critique risks portraying a concern with a universal irreducible experience. As we shall see, this risk, and its benefits, is perhaps more clearly exemplified in Derrida’s own (often incorrectly read) interactions with Levinas’s work.

The importance of considering Levinas when forming an ethical perspective that incorporates the idea of pre-ontological, pre-discursive experience is noticeable in Bhabha’s reading of postcolonial fiction. For him the ghostly, indecipherable languages which come to haunt Sethe’s home after Paul D has abandoned her are representative of the unknowable, irreducible aspects of otherness which for Levinas constitute the very possibility of ethical relations between the self and the other (Bhabha, p.15). This can be read as further evidence of the unsayable aspects of postcolonial experience which figure the characters of Morrison’s novel. Here though, perhaps unwittingly, Bhabha draws this concept of the unsayable away from

³¹ See Spivak, 1992, p.156. She is referring to Derrida’s examination of the self/other relation in the essays “The Politics of Friendship” in *Journal of Philosophy* 85:11 (November, 1988), and “Violence and Metaphysics” in *Writing and Difference* (1978).

the specifically postcolonial and into the wider realm of everyday self/other relations. As we shall see, Levinas sees his ethics developing out of the radical alterity experienced by the self when approaching the other in a one-to-one relation. This experience is affected by the real, *pre-ontological* vulnerability of the self when faced with the unknowable other, an experience that he claims is universal and *irreducible* to human subjects.

And yet for the most part Levinas's theory of universal pre-ontological experience has been ignored in literary criticism, at least until recent years (Buell, p.9). As the next chapter will make clear, his influence is steadily rising through the specifically ethical forms of literary criticism that have developed in very recent times.³² And yet the contribution that could be made by a theorisation of an ethics based upon irreducible experience is one that is repeatedly alluded to and then passed over by postcolonial critics. In the examples given above, neither Bhabha nor Spivak go on to fully examine what such an ethics might mean to a postcolonial theory that is, as Spivak admits, first and foremost concerned with the condition of the subaltern in the 'real' flesh and blood world, the world within which the postcolonial fictions we read are produced. We saw in the introduction how Spivak acknowledges that *Beloved* places "the prehistory of Afro-America... in the undeconstructible experience of the impossible" (Spivak, 1999, p.430), an experience that for her because of its undeconstructibility possesses ethical value. This perspective relates back to those considerations of Attridge and Spivak provided above: deconstruction plays an ethical role because it undermines the discursive construction of Western texts. An experience of the impossible can be ethical then because it is defined by its own non-discursiveness, its awareness of its own impossibility – it is not constructed within the power-knowledge relations of any political base, and according to Spivak makes a struggle for the impossible possible. Yet just because certain narratives acknowledge that certain subjective experiences cannot be reduced to literary objectification, does that make those narratives ethical in themselves?

³² An example of this can be seen in Attridge's work. As we shall see in chapter four, Attridge's later critical and theoretical examinations of a literary ethics – or more specifically the ethics of *writing* – utilise a deconstructive outlook that is reliant on Levinas's idea of discursive relations and its similarities between it and Derrida's later work.

I will suggest that if narrative structures such as *Beloved* succeed in figuring inexpressible, undeconstructible experience, this does not automatically insure their ethico-political potential. *Beloved* does not figure history as an experience of the impossible simply because African-American history has been silenced by both traditional white America and the descendents of that history, or because acknowledging its impossibility makes it possible to attempt its reclamation. Such a history *could* be reduced to narrative, and in fact this task is being carried out today by groups campaigning for slavery-retribution payments in the United States. One of the self-stated aims of such groups is to provide a history of the silenced African-American experience for future generations – for them it is a self-evident moral responsibility.³³ As we shall see in chapter four, history in many postcolonial novels on the other hand becomes unknowable because attempts at its expression are marked by the unspeakable, incomprehensible terror that its participants knew. I will argue that it is because of these ‘real-life’ factors which inform the notion of the irreducible that the reader’s experience of postcolonial narrative structure becomes an ethical one. Readers can be made aware of the past, indeed can subjectively understand how such terror cannot be reduced to text, and yet like narratives refrain from objectifying that horror themselves. And it is perhaps here that such experiences of the impossible might become ethical, for such an acknowledgement of the unsayable historical experience of subjects is based on an awareness of both the socio-political factors that shaped that history – brutal oppression, a practice not specific to African-America – *and* a human vulnerability not constrained by historical, cultural, or linguistic limits.

A central concern then is to ask how a critique of postcolonial fiction’s attempts to figure the impossible or irreducible might inform a *practical* ethical criticism which gains from the distinctions drawn between postmodern critical theory and postcolonialism’s pragmatic intentions. As Appiah points out:

Postcoloniality... and its post, like postmodernism’s, is also a post that challenges earlier legitimating narratives. And it challenges them in the name of the suffering victims of ‘more than thirty republics’. But it challenges them in name of the ethical universal; in the name of

³³ See Allen-Mills, p.28 on N’Cobra, The National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America.

humanism... And on that ground it is not an ally for Western postmodernism but an agonist: from which I believe postmodernism may have something to learn.

For what I am calling humanism can be provisional, historically contingent, anti-essentialist (in other words, postmodern) and still be demanding. We can surely maintain a powerful engagement with the concern to avoid cruelty and pain while nevertheless recognizing the contingency of that concern. Maybe, then, we can recover within postmodernism the postcolonial writers' humanism – the concern for human suffering... while still rejecting the master-narratives of modernism. (Appiah, p.123)

Until now such a form of universal, ethical critique has had little role alongside the critical theory of postcolonial deconstruction, though it is one which I believe might facilitate deconstruction. When Spivak asks us to consider how deconstruction provides a non-aligned political perspective on the real-life experiences of Devi and Ngugi, she does so by deconstructing the terms used to describe the histories associated with such individuals. But if the real-life experiences of individuals who have experienced oppression are also figured by an experience of the unspeakable, the undeconstructible in everyday scenarios, then these are aspects of postcolonial texts that we should also be willing to consider, especially from an ethico-political perspective. To paraphrase Appiah, we can surely maintain a powerful engagement with the unspeakable effects of cruelty, pain, and oppression, while nevertheless recognising the contingency of that concern across different histories and cultures. As has been shown, it is the literary articulation of these experiences that postcolonial criticism for the most part has been unwilling to address or examine. This thesis will address the representations of these experiences, asking on the one hand, what makes them irreducible, and on the other, what makes them ethical. And it is to the latter of these definitions that the next chapter turns. Are we in critical theory even certain of what we mean when we refer to ethics? And can it have a valid purpose when we consider the cultural, historical, and linguistic formation of narrative structure?

Chapter Two: Examining an Ethics of Narrative Structure

Shame: Can we ever find an ethics in postmodern literature?

Consider the passage below from Salman Rushdie's *Shame* (1993):

Pakistan is not Iran. This may sound like a strange thing to say about the country which was, until Khomeini, one of the only two theocracies on earth (Israel being the other one), but it is my opinion that Pakistan has never been a mullah-dominated society...

What I am saying will probably be anathematized by the present regime in that country. Too bad. My point is that Islam might well have proved an effective unifying force in post-Bangladesh Pakistan, if people hadn't tried to make it into an almighty big deal...

Few mythologies survive close examination... And they can become very unpopular indeed if they're rammed down people's throats.

What happens if one is force-fed such outsize, indigestible meals? – One gets sick. One rejects their nourishment. Reader: one pukes...

In the end you get sick of it, you lose faith in the faith, if not *qua* faith then certainly as the basis for the state. And then the dictator falls, and it is discovered that he has brought down God with him, that the justifying myth of the nation has been unmade. This leaves only two options: disintegration, or a new dictatorship ... no, there is a third, and I shall not be so pessimistic as to deny its possibility. The third option is the substitution of a new myth for the old one. Here are three such myths, all available from stock at short notice: liberty; equality; fraternity.

I recommend them highly. (Rushdie, 1983, pp.250-1)

Does the above passage espouse an ethics? Is there a morality being voiced here, a politically-driven discourse on the Pakistani nation-state and society? These are rhetorical questions obviously, and taken together it is likely that a straightforward, singular response is possible – a confident “yes.” Even if we forego the charismatic narrator's ironic, derisory tone, his apparent disillusion for the topic in which he is engrossed, and his Tristram Shandy-like appeals for reader attention, the bathetic finality of the last sentence and the solemn optimism of the change in tone which leads up to it would seem to imply that the speaker here *is* ethically judging the social-politics of Pakistan. He is presenting a moral solution to the adversity of that situation. And yet this optimism is not to be considered all good. The morality he proposes he admits to as “myth,” in fact a number of myths, and these myths we find

are central tenets of liberal humanism – “liberty; equality; fraternity.” If we also consider the fact that this speaker is a creation of Salman Rushdie, one of the most often cited authors of the postmodern canon,³⁴ even the humanists amongst us would probably be forgiven for declining to reply in the affirmative to the original queries. Promoting the founding principles of liberal humanism is not the business of postmodernist fiction.³⁵

Leaving the ironies of this critical paradox aside for a moment though, I think it is still plausible to assume that most readers would agree there is an ethics, or a morality, being considered here. Postmodern author or not, it would not be unreasonable to assume that one of the speaker’s intentions here is to force readers to consider the possible positive political attributes that might be gained if the people and politicians of non-fictional Pakistan were to try out these myths. What this speaker is proposing then is a matter of *choice* for the people of Pakistan. He is presenting a situation in which national politics has the opportunity to do *good* for the welfare of its people, as opposed to the continuing coups, corruption and oppression which, up until this point, were the main socio-political images and events shown to us by the novel.

What the speaker is presenting then is an *ethical consideration* in the traditional philosophical sense of the phrase. As recent comments on moral philosophy make clear though, the ethical value of such considerations is far from clear-cut, due to the different theoretical approaches within the field of ethical enquiry.³⁶ Even so, while Williams acknowledges that the notion of what counts as an ethical consideration is “vague,” he also points us in the direction of certain ideas

³⁴ See previous chapter for this common critical prejudice towards writers such as Rushdie, and also Sangari, p.216 on this enthusiasm to draft such fiction into “a peculiarly western, historically singular, postmodern epistemology.”

³⁵ We have a very postmodern moment of intertextual allusion in *Shame* here – myths was the term Lyotard used to describe the grand narratives of modernity (“metanarratives”) such as “the progressive emancipation of reason and freedom,” which he argues find legitimation “not in an original founding act but in a future to be accomplished” (Lyotard, 1992b, p.29) i.e. they do not exist. See also Docherty, 1993, pp.5-14 on the twentieth-century theorists responsible for promoting this postmodern outlook.

³⁶ See for example Williams's *Morality An Introduction to Ethics* (1972) in which he cogently describes the various theoretical outlooks that have been applied to moral philosophy. These include objectivism, subjectivism, relativism, theories of goodness, transcendental and non-transcendental perspectives, and utilitarianism. See also Norman, pp.1-11, for a brief introduction to different

and human qualities that are generally considered to correspond to the idea of the ethical. One of these is the notion of obligation; another is the defining of actions as *unethical* (i.e. theft or murder); and yet another the idea of individual virtue (Williams, 1985, pp.7-9). Moore goes so far as to generalise that “where we make statements involving any of the terms ‘virtue,’ ‘vice,’ ‘duty,’ ‘right,’ ‘ought,’ ‘good,’ ‘bad,’ we are making ethical judgements” (Moore, p.1). And for Plato, morality and ethics is conjoined with the central question posed by Socrates in *The Republic*, the one which he claims influences “our whole way of life”: does the leading of just, moral, and ethical lives mean that one lives a better and happier life than the unjust, the immoral, and the unethical? (Plato, 352d). Aristotle derives his account of rational, moral virtues out of the claim that “every sort of knowledge, and every undertaking, seeks after some good,” and that foremost among all achievable “goods” is “happiness” (Aristotle, *NE*, 1095a14-22).³⁷ In terms of traditional moral philosophy then, the speaker of the above passage is engaged in the act of *narrating* an ethical consideration, and in doing so is passing moral judgement on the social and political history of the Pakistan he describes. As such, he prescribes an ethics for more contented and just ways of living in future Pakistan.

Perhaps the one query that should be raised against this simplified and non-contentious view of ethics can be found when we consider the myths upon which the speaker bases his ethics: “liberty; equality; fraternity.” As noted already, these are precepts of liberal humanism, and as such are very much, though not exclusively, modern concepts. Yet often when we generally think of ethics we think of universal concepts that aren’t limited to historical epochs (MacIntyre, p.11). Even newcomers to philosophy probably are aware of the importance of the term in ancient Greek philosophy, and the continued usage of the term (though not necessarily the meaning) today. And yet as Morris points out, the most common modern usage of the term comes in “gaudy, headline-grabbing issues such as abortion, euthanasia, genetic engineering, and the right to die” (Morris, 1991, p.186). Evidence of this can

historical traditions of ethics, from Plato and Aristotle to the major modern ethical philosophers. Also Honderich, p.591 on the problems of moral philosophy.

³⁷ See also Walsh and Shapiro, pp.1-2, and Gauthier, p.10 on this aspect of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*.

be seen if we consider recent journalistic usage of the term.³⁸ Certainly its use within the British media is reserved mainly for controversial medical issues, the majority of these relating to profession practice and issues of cloning, a reason for this perhaps being that the British Medical Association has an ethics committee. The use of the term ethics would still seem to widespread then, though it is by no means clear what it actually means – in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (1995) it is listed under 24 categories – or what the relation is between its common modern usage and its ancient one. What *Shame*'s narrator perhaps more properly provides us with is a modern, *moral* solution to Pakistan's political difficulties, in much the same way as a Protestant morality or an environmentalist morality defines a particular way of life for certain groups and individuals.

Interestingly, Williams makes the point that though often used interchangeably, there is a subtle difference between the meanings of the terms ethical and moral. This originates in their respective derivation from the Greek and Latin languages: “the Latin term from which ‘moral’ comes emphasizes rather more the sense of social expectation, while the Greek favours that of individual character” (Williams, 1985, p.6). He goes on to point out that in modern western culture the idea of morality incorporates specific ethical notions as opposed to others, which means strict boundaries can be applied to its use, and accordingly is “something we should treat with special scepticism” (p.6). For MacIntyre, morality is clearly a historical and cultural discourse, as he demonstrates by exemplifying several of the moral debates that are specific to modern western thought (MacIntyre, pp.6-11). Similarly for Said, “morality is in fact not separable from its social basis” (Said, 1994, p.111). As this chapter develops, the relevance of this distinction will be given more consideration. For now though it serves our purpose to conclude that *Shame*'s narrator has indeed a viewpoint he deems worth making due to its ethical – or at least moral – implications.

Now consider the passages below, also from *Shame*:

³⁸ See for example “‘Tiniest baby ever born’ goes home from hospital” in *The Observer*, Sunday, May 26, 2002, “Doctors back change of law on body part removal” in *The Guardian*, Monday, January 29, 2001, and “‘Designer baby’ ethics fear” in *BBC News Website*, Wednesday, October 4, 2000.

But suppose this were a realistic novel! Just think what else I might have to put in... genocide in Baluchistan... the extra hangings – the first for twenty years – that were ordered purely to legitimize the execution of Mr Zulfikar Ali Bhutto... anti-Semitism, an interesting phenomenon, under whose influence people who have never met a Jew vilify all Jews for the sake of maintaining solidarity with the Arab states which offer Pakistan workers, these days, employment and much needed foreign exchange... Imagine my difficulties!

By now, if I had been writing a book of this nature, it would have done me no good to protest that I was writing universally, not only about Pakistan. The book would have been banned, dumped in the rubbish bin, burned. All that effort for nothing! Realism can break a writer's heart.

Fortunately, however, I am only telling a sort of modern fairy-tale, so that's all right; nobody need get upset, or take anything I say too seriously. No drastic action need be taken either.

What a relief! (pp.69-70).

As for me, I, too, like all migrants, am a fantasist. I build imaginary countries and try to impose them on the ones that exist. I, too, face the problem of history: what to retain, what to dump, how to hold on to what memory insists on relinquishing, how to deal with change. (pp.87-8)

The above passages epitomise some of the reasons that critics so often conflate Rushdie's novels with postmodern discourse. As in *Midnight's Children* (1981), here history loses its western, teleological trait, taking on the narrative nature that so characterises its description with postmodern discourse (see White, pp.20-22). For McNab, the "constant digressions [and] admissions of authorial fallibility... enforce a relation to history not as fixed entity but as shifting act of narrativisation" (McNab, p.142). As Srivastava points out, this is a particularly Foucauldian view – not only of history as *discourse*, but history also as tropological force that unsettles our traditional perspective of the unified subject (Srivastava, pp.70-1).³⁹ Undertaking a role as a writer or recorder of history means that our speaker faces not only "the problem of history: what to retain, what to dump," but also the problem of maintaining some semblance of *himself*: "to hold on to what memory insists on

³⁹ See Foucault, 1973, pp.367-9 on the idea that the human is "dehistoricized" within modernity due to the fragmentation of the "Western *épistème*" by the human sciences, and also on the "erosion" and "destruction" undergone by the modern subject who is wrenched "loose from a calm, rooted, and

relinquishing, how to deal with change.” As he tells us elsewhere – immediately after depicting his life as a well-to-do Pakistani immigrant living in England – “My story, my fictional country exist, like myself, at a slight angle to reality” (Rushdie, 1983, p.29). It would seem that within this novel wealthy, authoritative figures – whether migrants or not – are not afforded the comfort of a unified and well-rounded consciousness of self.

As well as this the problems presented by the Foucauldian take on counter-discourse are outlined, especially concerning the narrator’s ability as a writer to comment on the socio-political difficulties of Pakistan. He tells us that the country of which he is writing “is not Pakistan, or not quite. There are two countries, real and fictional, occupying the same space, or almost the same space” (p.29). There are intimations here of Foucault’s concern both with history as *épistème* (Foucault, 1973, xxii),⁴⁰ and with the futility (or at least possible political dangers) involved when oppositional voices attempt to confront repressive power structures with their own legitimating discourse: Foucault claims that such voices ultimately reinforce and normalise the very repressive discourses they are trying to undermine, as he shows in terms of the discourses on sex that have evolved since the eighteenth century (Foucault, 1978, pp.29-30). Wary of presenting a singular historic and political reality, *Shame*’s narrator ironically ends up giving us several. The effect of this mirrors the claims of critics such as McHale, who foregrounds the ontological plurality of the postmodern novel and the worlds it projects (McHale, 1987, p.39); Eco, who argues that postmodern text can only revisit the past by “rethinking” it through ironic pastiche (Eco, p.227); and finally Hutcheon, who claims that in postmodern fiction the “clashing of various possible discourses of narrative representation... [makes] us aware of the irreducible ideological nature of every representation – of past or present” (Hutcheon, 1989, p.54). Hutcheon goes on: “postmodern art acknowledges and accepts the challenge of tradition: the history of representation cannot be escaped but it can both be exploited and commented on

definitive positivity” (p.372), an aspect of which was the “great [pre-modern and historical] narrative common to things and men” (p.367). See also Foucault, 1977b, p.164.

⁴⁰ See Mills, pp.26-7, on Foucault’s view of history.

critically through irony and parody” (p.58).⁴¹ Such critiques of contemporary art and fiction would seem to sit well with our narrator’s self-reflexive decentring of any totalising historical narrative of Pakistan’s political past.

Also, this canny and ironic self-reflexiveness stretches beyond postmodernism’s theoretical premises to its literary ones, for it is not only history or the consciousness of self which the narrator unsettles, but the idea of realist literature itself. One cannot write of ‘real’ events such as “genocide in Baluchistan” or anti-Semitism in Pakistan – or at least if one wants to it has to be done in a doubly-ironic, tongue-in-cheek method such as that above – for the reality of such events is that the reality cannot be pinned down, for it, like history, is prone to the capriciousness of discourse and the precession of simulacra. As Baudrillard points out about postmodern representation, “[i]llusion is no longer possible, because the real is no longer possible. It is the whole *political* problem of the parody, of hyper simulation or offensive simulation, which is posed here” (Baudrillard, p.197).⁴² For Lyotard, “[m]odernity... cannot exist without a shattering of belief and without discovery of the ‘lack of reality’ of reality, together with the invention of other realities (Lyotard, 1984, p.43), and for McHale, contemporary fiction’s attempts to derail traditional ideas of metanarratives and knowledge means a widespread incorporation of “postmodernist suspensive irony” within its structural features, which, “far from aspiring to master disorder, simply accepts it” (McHale, 1992, p.21).⁴³ Hutcheon echoes this by stating that postmodern fiction’s political ambivalence is evident in its fractured form, a technique that Brydon argues allows it to “see all sides, to defer judgement and refuse agency” (Hutcheon, 1985, p.130; Brydon, p.192). And while both McHale and Barth see this penchant for formal liberty within postmodern fiction as a welcome and innovative aesthetics that combats the world-weary

⁴¹ Huyssen takes the postmodernist question of history in more cynical direction: “The problem with postmodernism is that it relegates history to the dustbin of an obsolete *épistème*, arguing gleefully that history does not exist except as text, i.e. as historiography.” (Huyssen, p.229). See also Jameson, 1991, pp.21-25.

⁴² See also Jameson, 1991, p.48 on the postmodern “transformation of the ‘real’ into so many pseudo-events” due to the “prodigious expansion of culture throughout the social realm” which engenders, “a society of the image or the simulacrum.”

⁴³ Unsurprisingly, neither of the indexes to McHale’s *Postmodernist Fiction* or *Constructing Postmodernism* contains any references to politics or ethics.

pessimism of modernist fiction, it is, by its very nature, at the expense of any unifying and traditional ethics (see Barth, pp.62-6 & pp.193-206).

It is ironic, of course, that in this case the ‘harsh reality’ of alleged historical dissolution and multifarious world-views, satirised by the hyperbolic thought that such realist books “would [be] banned, dumped in the rubbish bin, burned,” lost its parodical quality with the publication of the author’s next “modern fairy-tale,” *The Satanic Verses* (1988). It was that novel’s fate to be banned and burned on an international scale. It would seem that *Shame*’s narrator’s claim to a non-political, postmodern amnesty didn’t hold much sway with Rushdie’s later extremist opponents.

Even so, it is not hard to see why critics such as McHale and Hutcheon see Rushdie’s work as exemplary of postmodern theoretical concerns. Bearing this in mind, it is intriguing to return to one of his less flattering commentators, for whom the very postmodern style and tone of his work renders it politically, and ethically, problematic. In the last chapter I briefly noted how Ahmad has little time for postmodern theory, especially the type that theorises minority groups, or conditions of *migrancy*, and indulges in examinations of the so-called West/East, First/Third World opposition.⁴⁴ As a Marxist, he feels criticism should consider

the issue of the institutional sites from which that theory emanates; the actual class practices and concrete social locations, in systems of power and powerlessness, of the agents who produce it; the circuits through which it circulates and the class fractions who endow it with whatever power it gains... (Ahmad, 1992, p.6)

The need for critical self-reflection emphasised here is similar to Spivak’s claim that western critics need to carry out a historical critique of their own positions of privilege before earning the right to criticise – or theorise – their others.⁴⁵ Hartsock relates the political practicalities of recent critical theory in even starker terms: “Why is it, exactly at the moment when so many of us who have been silenced begin to

⁴⁴ See for example Ahmad’s critique of Jameson’s “Rhetoric of Otherness and the ‘National Allegory’” (Jameson, 1987) where he takes to task Jameson’s reductive theorising of Third (versus First) World literature (Ahmad, 1992). See also Sangari, pp.242-43 on the dangers and inadequacies of using postmodern discourse to theorise the “economic, class, and cultural formation of ‘Third World.’”

demand the right to name ourselves, to act as subjects rather than objects of history, that just then the concept of subjecthood becomes ‘problematic’?” (Hartsock, p.26). Such critics see a distinction between postmodernism’s theorisation of universally decentred histories and subjects, and what Sangari has called “different modes of de-essentialization which are socially and politically grounded and mediated by separate perspectives, goals, and strategies for change in other countries” (Sangari, p.243).

This is borne out by Ahmad’s critique of *Shame*. Whereas for critics such as Hutcheon, McHale, and Baker, Rushdie’s use of intertextual parody undermines dominant historical discourse, for Ahmad it risks undermining its own radical potential. He argues that,

those parts of the book which attempt to create fictional equivalents of the literal facts of recent Pakistani history tend too much towards parody... one is in danger of forgetting that Bhutto and Zia were in reality no buffoons, but highly capable and calculating men whose cruelties were entirely methodical. (Ahmad, 1992, p.141)

And when speaking of the portrayal of Sufiyya Zinobia, an imbecilic child capable of shape-changing into a murderous, man-raping beast, he claims that,

so wedded is Rushdie’s imagination to imageries of wholesale degradation and unrelieved social wreckage, so little is he able to conceive of a real possibility of regenerative projects on the part of the people... the powers which he... bestows upon [Sufiyya] in her moment of triumph are powers only of destruction. (pp.149-50)

It is little wonder that ethical criticism has had difficulty developing when the work of the author who created the most politicised literary controversy in recent years is described as such! Ahmad’s comments on Rushdie have been widely criticised though,⁴⁶ and it is notable that he fails to comment on the politically-charged passage which I used to open this chapter, even though he claims that the transparent “repeated, direct, personal interventions on the part of the narrator... is, for the purposes of our interpretation here, mainly Rushdie himself” (p.132). It is also ironic

⁴⁵ See previous chapter.

that the praise he keeps in reserve for Jameson's "hypothetical reconstruction" of works of Taiwanese writer Wang Wenxing as "postmodernist" is severely undermined by Chow's rejection of Jameson's attempt "to include contemporary Chinese literature in... 'the logic of... late capitalism'" (Chow, p.471). It would seem that Ahmad could do with paying more self-reflexive attention to his critical disdain for theorists who make generalised claims about non-First World literatures of which they have little first-hand knowledge.

As well as this the idea that a text's refusal to serve up a realistic regenerative project necessarily renders it politically invalid is easily refuted.⁴⁷ As made clear in the last chapter when considering Attridge's work, politics and ethics can be about unmasking the traits of objectification and oppression within discourse, as well as about providing solutions to them. And as noted in relation to Williams, making general ethical considerations can be about gauging the *unethical* nature of events. This is an effect of the portrayal of most of the actions of the generally immoral characters which surround Sufiya Zinobia. We cannot help acknowledging their general immorality.

Yet Ahmad's criticisms do deserve attention. Can we, for example, read his reference to Rushdie's "attempt to create fictional equivalents of the literal facts of recent Pakistani history" as evidence of an acknowledgement that Rushdie is in fact embarked on a very politicised and moral project here? A project which Ahmad then goes on to disregard due to its incorporation of postmodern narrative strategies and its alleged non-desire to envisage an emancipatory project? Or to put it another way, whilst on the one hand Ahmad seems to suggest that Rushdie has a political agenda here (and he does indeed note that Rushdie has made this agenda clear in several interviews), he also believes that due to the form (postmodern) and content (politically ambivalent) of the fiction, those political/ethical/moral concerns on the part of author are undone. The difficulties voiced by *Shame*'s migrant narrator,

⁴⁶ See for example Baker, 2000b, p.44 critiquing what he sees as Ahmad's use of a "traditional, Marxist ideology critique" that "posits the literary text as some reified object to be subjected to the critique of equally reified and transhistorical criteria of judgement."

⁴⁷ See Ahmad, p.143 on the "legitimate and necessary" need to locate an "emancipatory project" in Rushdie's novels. This claim is obviously related to Eagleton's view that postmodern art's fundamental, parodic element "mimes the formal resolution of art and social life attempted by the

placed alongside Ahmad's critique clearly demonstrate the problematic faced by any form of contemporary ethical literary criticism. Even if one wanted to produce an ethical fiction, one could not, because the fragmentary nature of the contemporary novel, alongside its reluctance and/or its inability to outwardly engage in emancipatory rhetoric, would seem to deny that choice.

Such perspectives provide an insight into why an ethical literary criticism has been so demoded during the decades in which poststructuralism has dominated the critical field of English Studies. It also begs the question as to whether we can realistically attempt to locate an ethics in literary forms which ultimately owe their existence to reducible discursive structures. An example of this can be seen in the moral myths that *Shame's* narrator promotes above. Though these might be interpreted as ethical considerations on the part of the narrator, in the last chapter we have seen via Derrida, Spivak, and Attridge that they have no more claim to moral virtue or eminence than any other discourse. Morality, in its many different forms – Christian, Islamic, feminist, liberalist, Marxist, socialist, etc. – is a discursive construct, which can no more exemplify the idea of an irreducible, objective ethics, than it can escape the deconstructionist charge that it is non-transcendental and indeterminate – and therefore a potentially oppressive, and thus unethical – concept (de Man, p.206).

Consider for example the three statements that Williams makes as an introduction to the subjectivist view of morality:

- (a) A man's moral judgements merely state (or express) his own attitudes.
- (b) Moral judgements can't be proved, established, shown to be true as scientific statements can; they are matters of individual opinion.
- (c) There are no moral facts; there are only the sorts of facts that science or common observation can discover, and the values that men place on those facts. (Williams, 1972, p.28)

And turn now to Derrida's consideration of Kant's moral law, after having critiqued it through Freud:

avant-garde while remorselessly emptying it of its political content" (Eagleton, p.386). Similarly, see Hutcheon, 1991, p.168.

Nobody would have encountered [the origin of the moral law] in its proper place of happening, nobody would have faced it in its taking place... However, this pure and purely presumed event nevertheless marks an invisible rent in history. It resembles a fiction, a myth, or a fable... this quasi-event bears the mark of fictive narrativity (fiction *of* narration as well as fiction as narration: fictive narration as the simulacrum of narration and not only as the narration of an imaginary history)... It is the origin of literature at the same time as the origin of law. (Derrida, 1992, p.199)

It is not difficult to see the resemblances between these subjectivist and deconstructive views. Both insist that that morality has no empirical basis, and both imply that any value that it appears to hold can be located in the narrativity of men that marks its use within general discourse. Derrida of course takes this one step farther – the fictive narrativity that marks morality not only undermines its objective claims, it uncovers the reducible and indeterminate origins of literature itself. This necessarily begs the question: how can we consider literature from an ethical perspective when its own literary-linguistic base undermines any rationalist moral claims that it might make?

The resurgence in ethical (versus moral) literary criticism, and the influence of Levinas.

On the other hand, a renewed ethical approach to literature is exactly what has been called for by many critics for the past fifteen years. Significant examples of this would include Booth's attempt to renew interest in the ethical value of literary form (see Booth, 1988), Miller's *The Ethics of Reading* (1987), Newton's *Narrative Ethics* (1995), *PMLA*'s issue on ethical criticism (see Buell, 1999), as well as numerous other interjections such as Critchley's *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas* (1992), Eaglestone's *Ethical Criticism: Reading after Levinas* (1997), Harpham's *Shadows of Ethics* (1999), and the conference entitled *Literature and Ethics* held at University of Wales, Aberystwyth, out of which arose several publications (see Hadfield, Rainsford, and Woods, 1999, and Rainsford and Woods,

1999). As Berman notes in a recent review of several theoretical ethics texts, “[e]thics, it seems, is all the rage” (Berman, p.941).⁴⁸

There are different reasons for this upsurge in an area of critical theory that has not been *en vogue* within literary studies since the 1950s. The most commonly cited is the critical reaction towards the alleged ambivalence of poststructuralist discourse, a sentiment which has gained a certain credibility since the exposure of Paul de Man’s collaborationist war-time writings (de Man was arguably the deconstructive critic most vehemently opposed to the idea that the literary text could have moral implications for the ‘real world’ outside the text).⁴⁹ Buell for example claims that the “ethical turn” in recent criticism, whilst often varied, “concerns itself with exposing the intellectual reductionisms and moral hazards of the ‘out-and-out skepticism’ that supposedly characterized poststructuralism” (Buell, p.10).⁵⁰ Yet as Rainsford and Woods point out, it may have other, less academically-centred influences – the Gulf War is one they cite, pointing to the moral dimension entailed in critiquing its value as a mass cultural narrative.⁵¹ Our increased access to and awareness of conflict and suffering internationally has also drawn the attention and energies of many prominent academics. Said’s ability to raise awareness of the Palestinian situation would be an example of this, as would the academic interest in the introduction of democracy to South Africa.⁵²

It is worth making several observations about this renewed interest in literary ethics. Firstly, though some see this change arising ‘in the wake of deconstruction,’

⁴⁸ For a valuable insight into the development of this renewed ethical interest in literary criticism see Parker, 1998.

⁴⁹ See Eaglestone, p.71, and Newton, pp.39-43 on de Man’s approach to ethics, something he called a “referential (and therefore unreliable) version of a linguistic confusion” (de Man, p.206). It is also worth noting that many critics saw de Man’s criticism as politically and ethically motivated, but that ultimately his deconstructive outlook would not allow the promotion of totalising political solutions (Eagleton, 1990, p.10). For Rainsford and Woods, this is an idea that can be applied to the prominent poststructuralists whose work is often accused of being ambivalent (Rainsford and Woods, p.4).

⁵⁰ Buell quotes here from Norris, 1994.

⁵¹ See Rainsford and Woods, pp.1-19, and Hadfield, Rainsford and Woods, pp.1-13 for comment on all these perspectives.

⁵² It is important to note that academic exchanges about such political situations are rarely congenial, though perhaps this adds to the ethical dimension of debates that evolve out of them. See for example the exchange that took place between Said and Whitman when Said was elected as president of the MLA (see Said and Whitman), and that between Derrida and McClintock and Nixon, in which they called Derrida’s critique of apartheid “deficient” (McClintock and Nixon, p.339) and of “limited strategic worth” (p.353). Derrida responded by claiming they exhibited a common “incomprehension” of deconstruction and its ethical import (Derrida, 1986, p.367).

or at least due to a perceived non-political engagement on the part of deconstructive criticism, many researchers within the field are reluctant to encourage a return to a traditional ethical philosophy. Rather, they wish to develop an ethical literary criticism that incorporates the poststructuralist theories of language that have been influential in shaping contemporary criticism. The return to ethical criticism thus does not mean a return to Leavis's view of the critic as morally obligated to "the common pursuit of true judgement" – an endeavour he derives from Eliot (Leavis, p.v) – and the examination of the "intellectual and spiritual" elements which express an "inherent human nature" (p.184). As Hadfield and Woods point out, if ethical criticism has been neglected during the past forty years due to the Left regarding it as "a liberal humanist apology for the bourgeois subject," and poststructuralists seeing it as "contaminated with metaphysics," then a return to a Leavisite/humanist form of ethical critique is "nothing to get excited about" (Hadfield and Woods, p.3).

Secondly (and undoubtedly partly due to the former claim) these theorists have chosen overwhelmingly to turn to the work of Levinas in their attempts to provide such perspectives. Again, reasons for this are varied, but they retain a certain 'logic' within the current critical environment. For a start, Levinas's work has been the subject of and even influence for a considerable amount of Derrida's own insights (see Bernasconi, 1988 & Gibbs, 2000). As well as this, Levinas's ethics is concerned with alterity and the alienation of the subject, ideas that at first sight would seem to draw certain parallels with the decentring and non-essentialist tactics of postmodern discourse (Rainsford and Woods, p.3). As he points out, the radical alterity experienced during the self/other relation – an unavoidable aspect of human existence – creates "an ego without rest in itself, a hostage for everyone, turned away from itself in each movement of its return to itself – man is without identity" (Levinas, 1972, p.150). Also, his approach to ethics, even his definition of it, is quite distinct from that of traditional philosophy. In fact, for Levinas ethical relations, or the responsibility of the subject towards others, is the first basis for subjectivity itself, and thus he terms ethics the "first philosophy" (see Hand, 1989, p.5 & Woods, 1997, p.53). This ethical philosophy doesn't mean investigating the result of 'good' or 'bad' actions on the part of a knowledgeable subject, but rather this ethics *is* "[a] responsibility for my neighbour, for the other man, for the stranger or sojourner, to

which nothing in the rigorously ontological order binds me” (Levinas, 1989a, p.84). As we shall see, this perspective theorises the very responsibilities upon which “being and life” in our societies are based, envisaging a *universal* ethical experience of the other as an “absolutely foreign” and yet “essentially transcendent” being with whom we share affinities (Simms, p.9). Thus our experience of the other – both during discourse and, more importantly, prior to it – always retains an unknowable, irreducible element (Cohen, 1986, p.5). It is important then to consider why Levinas is so influential for those critics who wish to ethically engage with literature in ways which poststructuralism (apparently) has not done, and yet do not wish to reintroduce Leavisite forms of critique.

Cohen highlights four points concerning Levinas’s ethics:

- 1) ethical experience occurs as a result of the alterity of the other person,
- 2) this radical alterity of the other *affects* the subject prior to any conscious act,
- 3) this ethical experience of otherness is something that is universal and unavoidable for the subject, and
- 4) this makes the subject *responsible* for the otherness that s/he cannot avoid experiencing prior to any other conscious act. (Cohen, 1986, pp.6-8)

All of these points make Levinas attractive to contemporary literary theorists with an interest in ethics, with points 1 and 4 bearing similarities to the ethics we saw espoused by Spivak in the last chapter. Yet points 2 and 3 hold obvious difficulties for critics who see the ontological subject as a primarily textualised being, and for those who disavow the possibility of universal experience. These issues and the effects they may or may not have on postcolonial narrative structures will be examined in different ways in each of the chapters of this thesis. For now though we can proceed by acknowledging that the ethics Levinas envisages is non-foundational, pre-discursive (though discourse impinges upon it) and irreducible. It provides an ethical alternative that doesn’t complicate deconstruction’s attention to the textuality/literariness of literature and discourse, but insists that nevertheless as individuals we have responsibilities and *obligations* to the others that we encounter

through *all* discursive relations (Cohen, 1986, p.5). In doing so it sets up an opposition between ethical and moral experience (Levinas, 1981a, p.120), which is one of the main points raised by contemporary ethical critics, even when they are not enthusiasts of Levinas.

A simplified way of looking at this distinction between the moral and the ethical in the context of this study would be to ask whether the moral narratives provided by *Shame*'s narrator, because of their discursive and deconstructible nature, can be distinguished from any other ethical implications the novel may have. As noted, its innovative, 'postmodern' literary form undermines the political statements that Rushdie elsewhere claims he tries to make through the novel. And yet it could be argued that it is its very postmodern-ness – the ironic, self-reflexive and self-satirising form and tone of some of the book's content – that draws reader attention to the disturbing "literal facts of recent Pakistani history" (a very non-postmodern concept). The shameless hyperbole of exclamations such as, "All that effort for nothing! Realism can break a writer's heart," and the sidelined sarcasm of, "nobody need get upset, or take anything I say too seriously. No drastic action need be taken either... What a relief!" doesn't just emphasise the predicament of the social realist writer. Their bathetic juxtaposition against the unspoken and un-narrated injustices of Pakistan's past also serves to ironically emphasise the historic reality of those injustices. In this instance at least it would seem that the very radical tendencies of the narrative form itself enforces an ethical consideration upon the reader – a consideration of the unethical and unacknowledged acts of Pakistan's socio-political past.

In this example a general Levinasian take on the novel's ethical implications would concur with a traditional moral theorists – one of the repeated points made by the narrator is the degree to which death, or more accurately murder, is a characteristic of the government policy in the fictional "palimpsest-country" (p.88) he describes. For Levinas the edict "thou shall not kill," and idea of "the primacy of the other's right to exist" are central to his idea of an ethics not based in ontological knowledge (Hand, 1989, p.5). He claims that our absolute estrangement from the other provokes the subject to experience an unspoken "primordial *expression*," a result of the infinity of transcendence of the other, and one which is encompassed in

the claim “you shall not commit murder” (Levinas, 1969, p.199). This is an idea that will be returned to in chapters five and six, but for now it is worth pointing out that it bears similarities with Williams’s ethical consideration of the human individual’s right to live (see Williams, 1985, p.148). And yet as noted, this ethics arises in the narrative due to the formal, or structural, techniques employed within the novel itself. The speaker never describes the atrocities of Pakistani history, though he does digress into hyperbolic, satirical images of atrocities in his invented country. Our comparison between such atrocities and Pakistani history is therefore not an effect of the narrator’s endorsement of a liberal-humanist morality, but is instigated rather by the novel’s self-conscious use of a fragmented structure. Here we have an ethical relation between reader and text that arises due to the novel’s ironic formal techniques – the very methods by which the narrative is presented to the reader – rather than its straightforward appeals to a conventional, deconstructible morality. It is not just the narrative content that influences this ethical relation then between reader and text, but the form that that discourse takes as it is presented to the reader. Here I am purposely conflating the idea of narrative structure with form, yet as I shall demonstrate later, it is important that structure be understood as a relationship between content and form, or the way in which content is formally constructed.

I would like to examine this idea of a literary ethics distinguishable from the traditional moral considerations made within literary discourse. In particular I wish to develop this idea of an ethics bound to literary, or more specifically, narrative form, and in doing so will turn to some of the critics who in recent years have argued that a literary ethics, distinguishable from conventional discourses on morality, is a valid concept that complicates general poststructuralist notions on the ethical potential of narrative fiction. As well as this, I wish to propose that such an experience of literary form bears similarities to Levinas’s idea of an ethics that Gibson has claimed is both “non-cognitive” (it does not assume prior knowledge of moral categories), and “immediate and singular, a question of responsiveness and responsibility to what is at hand” (Gibson, pp.16-7).

Can narrative structures produce a non-discursive ethics?

This distinction between the ethical and the moral is very important... By morality I mean a series of rules relating to social behaviour and social duty... As *prima philosophia*, ethics cannot itself legislate society or produce rules of conduct... It does not operate at the level of the manifesto... When I talk of ethics... I do not mean indifference; I simply mean that it is a form of vigilant passivity to the call of the other, which precedes our interest in being... (Levinas and Kearney, p.65)

Above we can see the distinction Levinas makes between a social morality and an ethics experienced prior to ontological relations. It is an ethics which resists reduction to legislation or manifesto; an experience that as such resists literary discourse itself. As noted, recently a number of critics have claimed that contrary to general poststructuralist thought it is possible to locate an ethics within narratives that can be distinguished from other discourses (ideological, moral, etc) that inform narrative content. Similarly to my consideration of *Shame*, such critiques prioritise the role played by literary form as opposed to discursive content, many of them emphasising the ethical role of the former, as opposed to the moral constructed-ness of the latter. Newton emphasises the distinction that can be drawn between “the conventionally understood synonymy of the words *moral* and *ethical*.” For him, literature does indeed present us with ideologically construed moral lessons, which once learnt we can apply to our lives in a “conscious and external act of *imitatio*” (Newton, p.5). But beyond this he also foresees a separate effect of narrative which occurs through the *act*, or performance, of story-telling itself. As we shall see, the ethics of this act differ from any other moral claims made through narrative discourse, since obligations arise here due to “narrative as relationship and human connectivity.” This ethics confers risks and responsibilities upon narrator, listener, reader and character by creating and making possible discursive relations between them. From this perspective narrative expression implies “fundamental ethical questions about what it means to generate and transmit narratives, and to implicate, transform, or force the persons who participate in them” (p.7).⁵³

⁵³ See also Fultz, p.83, on the need to draw a distinction between an *ethics* “based upon necessity and expediency” – i.e. indispensable to everyday life – and *moral* principles of right and wrong in African-American literary criticism. Booth makes a similar distinction by pointing out that one might benefit ethically (ie for his/her own good) through the immorality of others (Booth, p.179).

Gibson also spends time considering the distinctions that must be drawn between a humanist morality and a pre-discursive ethics in order to argue “for a close relationship between theory and ethical criticism” (Gibson, p.12). By theory Gibson means literary poststructuralism, and in particular the attention it pays to the deconstructible properties of literary structures. He points to the difficulties that arise within humanist ethical theories, such as those proposed by Nussbaum and MacIntyre, due to their unwillingness to acknowledge the discursive constructedness of their metaphysical claims:

At some stage or other, [traditional moral criticism] must revert to an apodictic ‘wisdom’ that, as a mode of knowledge, carries negligible conviction. In the end, it is at least an unwillingness to hear their own discourse self-reflexively, to get the measure of its blindspots, that seems equally a problem with the work of those who are seeking a return to the tradition, if in a modified form. (Gibson, p.10)⁵⁴

Gibson thus aptly identifies the ethical conundrum that literary poststructuralism places before ethical criticism – how can criticism identify an ethics in literature which accounts for the undecidability of language, and doesn’t seem “as much the product of ‘prior ideas’ (or a prior discourse)” (p.10). Or to put it another way: how can we identify an ethics in texts that is not simply yet another deconstructible moral discourse?

Eaglestone also considers the role that poststructuralist perspectives might play in attempting to locate an ethics – rather than simply a moral discourse – within texts. Via Donoghue, he provides two definitions of the function of criticism in order to incorporate the deconstructive perspective: any act of reading or criticism is one of either two sorts: “epi-reading” or “graphi-reading” (Donoghue, p.146). Eaglestone claims that “[f]or an epi-reader, language is transparent, a window through which the world of people, actions and events can be seen.” Examples of traditional epi-readers would be Rousseau and Lévi-Strauss. Derrida famously shows that they see writing

⁵⁴ Gibson also takes issue with Booth’s idea of an ethical critique of literary by arguing that whilst both pluralist and pragmatist, Booth “connects the idea of ethics to an essentialist conception of *ethos*,” especially in terms of an ethics of criticism (p.9).

as an effect of human cultural experience, a representational tool that develops alongside social and cultural progress (Derrida, 1976).

For Eagleton, graphi-reading on the other hand,

prioritises language, text, and reading over a nostalgia for the human... [it] reads the words and refuses to pass beyond, or create a world behind, them... All deconstructive criticism is graphi-reading, suspicious of a nostalgia for a person within a text. (Eagleton, 1997, p.4)

Miller is an example of a graphi-reader who sees an ethical experience occurring during the event of reading which isn't actually influenced by the moral themes raised within the text. For him an "ethics of reading" is the

aspect of the act of reading in which there is a response to the text that is both necessitated, in the sense that it is a response to an irresistible demand, and free, in the sense that I must take responsibility for my response and for the further effects... social, political, or historical, of my act of reading. (Miller, 1987, p.43)

Miller therefore identifies an unavoidable aspect of reading. For him, when we are involved in the event of reading we necessarily have to subjectively respond to what we read, whether we like it or not. Importantly though, this ethical effect has nothing to do with the moral content of the text itself. It doesn't matter what we read, we will respond in some way or other. Miller's view of reading therefore might seem to reinforce the idea of the dissemination of literary-linguistic meaning, since he denies writing's logocentric claims, yet he nevertheless identifies a shared and general aspect of the reading event. This idea is central to the ethics of reading postcolonial fiction looked at later in this chapter and in the ones which follow.

Gibson is also a graphi-reader who wishes to exemplify an ethics of reading without rejecting deconstructive accounts of language and its take on totality and *presence* (Gibson, p.87). As such, he argues for what he calls a "postmodern ethics," and one which favours the adoption of Levinas's "non-foundational" ethical insights above all others (Gibson, p.13 & p.16). When considering *Satanic Verses* for example, he remarks that it is its particularly postmodern de-alignment of history that allows it "to displace and disrupt the temporal logic that 'realism' might appear to present as ungainsayable, inexorable, transhistorical" (p.208). For Gibson this is an

ethical aspect of its postmodern form, even though – as we saw in chapter one – this exemplification of the decentring effect of Rushdie’s fiction is not in any way an original observation. Postmodern discourse is again employed here in what Sangari terms its “ever-polite readiness to recycle and accommodate other cultural content” (Sangari, p.216), though in this instance it has a renewed ethical interest in mind. It also of course claims to be distinct from a traditional objective view of ethical philosophy.

Though this might seem at odds with my previous consideration of *Shame*, my project differs from Gibson’s is that no such priority is given to the role played by postmodern literature or theory, which as we have seen can be problematic when considered from a postcolonial perspective. While for Gibson postmodern narrative structures make possible new ethical outlooks, I am interested in the idea that it is because certain structures arise within postcolonial cultures that they foreground ethical considerations which merit our attention as readers and human beings. Just as Levinas makes clear his belief that contemporary theory has an aversion to Western humanism but has “no grip on the reality of violence and exploitation” (1972, p.141), Todorov makes the following comment concerning the application of general postmodern principles to postcolonial literature,

[t]here is something futile about approaching these texts, which speak of tortures and lynchings, passionate love and hatred, with a critical apparatus that precludes any interrogation concerning their truth and values, or which combats the very idea of seeking truth and values. (Todorov, p.379)

Or as Gandhi says about the political veracity of Rushdie’s fiction, “the concerns of the world about which he writes exceed the exertions of textual *jouissance*” (Gandhi, p.158). All these perspectives reinforce the importance of examining an ethics of narrative structure as Gibson and Eaglestone argue, and highlight the need identified by Miller to uncover a narrative ethics that cannot be explained as simply another moral construct based in historical, social, and linguistic parameters. Importantly though, I also intend to examine whether such an ethics is affected by the reality of violence that was and still is common across distinct postcolonial cultures and histories.

To examine whether the structure of postcolonial narratives might perform such an ethical role, I wish to turn to the work of Nussbaum, Schwarz, and Nissen, critics who through different methods have promoted this idea in recent years. Nussbaum for example points out that,

form and style are not incidental features. A view of life is *told*. The telling itself – the selection of genre, formal structures, sentences, vocabulary, of the whole manner of addressing the reader’s sense of life and of value, a sense of what matters and what does not, of what learning and communicating are, of life’s relations and connections. (Nussbaum, 1990, p.5)

This view of a narrative form that essentially influences our intersubjective relationships with individuals in the world has obvious similarities to Newton’s narrative ethics. Unlike Newton though, Nussbaum’s attempt to locate an ethics of form bears little difference from the general view of ethics as an informed morality – or to use Henry James’s terms as she herself does – she attempts to locate “the projected morality” of a literary work by considering its formal features (p.10). As such, her incisive inquiries into the ethical role form might play are inhibited by the fact that the ethics she is describing, to adopt de Man’s phrase, “is a discursive mode amongst others” (de Man, p.206). As well as this it, isn’t always clear what Nussbaum means by form or style, as opposed to other areas of narrative such as its content. For example, in her reading of James’s *The Golden Bowl* (1909) it is specifically the *content* of the narration of Adam’s thoughts that provides her with an insight into the characters’ “individual moral effort” (Nussbaum, 1990, pp.151-3). A further examination of critics who employ content analysis when formal analysis is the critical aim will be looked at again in the next chapter.

Schwarz, in Donoghue and Eaglestone’s terms, is like Nussbaum a forthright epi-reader, and enthusiastic to proclaim his humanistic views of general reading practices. Leading from Newton’s idea of the intersubjective relation that exists between reader and text, Schwarz claims that we experience an ethics *while* reading that makes clear the “responsibilities, commitments, and values” that we harbour as agents within our communities, or at least as human beings within human relations:

[r]eading complements one's experience by enabling us to live lives beyond those we live and experience emotions that are not ours; it heightens one's perspicacity by enabling us to watch *figures* – tropes, that is, personifications of our fellow humans – who are not ourselves, but like ourselves. (Schwarz, p.195)

What this perspective, like Newton's, sees as imperative to our ethical experience of reading is that *participatory* link drawn by the act of reading between the experiences of narrator, character and ourselves, and the actual external world(s) in which we live. He repeatedly emphasises that this experience of narrative, "asks what ethical questions are involved in the act of transforming life into art, and notices such issues as Pound's or Eliot's anti-Semitism and the patronizing racism of some American nineteenth century and early twentieth-century writers" (p.191).

Schwarz differentiates himself from Newton though by arguing that for political reasons certain types of literature are more self-consciously aware of the ethical task they undertake. He points out that in postcolonial literature "this involvement is much more intense," since such literature generally foregrounds the awareness of the socio-political interests of certain historically disadvantaged groups as one of its intended hermeneutic effects. This conviction is evident in his claim that the general humanist concerns of such literatures, and the recent growth of interest in it, "challenges the tenets of deconstruction" (p.195). Criticising both de Man's idea of reading and what he considers his questionable ethics, he asks us early in the essay, "[w]ho really reads in terms of discovering where meaning goes astray?" (p.190) – and if I might add to this myself – is this how readers generally approach postcolonial literature?

According to Schwarz, reading postcolonial literature means not only gaining an insight into how other cultures live and tell stories, but also an understanding of "historical circumstances [of postcoloniality] and... the writer's ordering of that history." This ethical reading provides an understanding of

not merely what patterns of provisional representation are created by language but the historical, political, and social ground of that representation. We need to be open to hearing the often unsophisticated and unironical voice of pain, *angst*, and fear. (pp.195-6)

For Schwarz then, experiencing the ethics of postcolonial narratives – or reading responsibly – is to acknowledge the “pain, angst, and fear” which such literatures provide a voice for. While as reading subjects we remain distanced from the actual experience of that history and culture, our involvement with it through narrative entails responsibilities that affect our lives as cultural agents. Booth similarly argues for an ethical criticism that is socially and politically alert, allowing narratives to be judged by the beneficial role they might play in drawing reader attention to the (oppressive) histories that have shaped their communities and culture (Booth, p.70).

When commenting on *Shame*, I suggested that we only develop an insightful ethical critique of the novel’s political aspirations when we consider not only its narrative discourse, or content, but also the unique formal strategies employed to *narrate* that content. Following Newton and Schwarz then, it is not simply the narrative itself that we turn to when carrying out an ethical critique, but the method, or *act* of narration it carries out. Since our experiences of narrative are always related to textual structure – both the *content* and the *form* of narrative – it follows that the an ethical experience of narrative must also be linked to the structure of content and form and our interaction with it. Schwarz seems to believe this as well. He claims that while we need to be aware of a text’s “racist, sexist, and anti-Semitic nuances, we also need to stress reading the words on the page in terms of the demands made by the text’s context and form – in particular, by its structure of effects” (p.195). We do not respond responsibly to a narrative’s ethics then simply because we disapprove of its moralistic content, but because of the way in which a narrative’s structure forces us to makes certain ethical considerations. In Schwarz’s view this means that narrative structure draws our attention to experiences of pain and fear.

Yet ultimately Schwarz does not convince us of this claim, because for him ethical criticism means relating to the *unsophisticated* and *unironical* voice of postcolonial pain and fear. Why should the literary articulation of pain and fear necessarily be ‘unironical’ or ‘unsophisticated’? Such suggestions seem to imply that it is not formal, sophisticated narrative structures (the “patterns of provisional representation”) that impart these experiences, but some other humanistic discourse grounded in general “historical, political, and social” ontological phenomena which we can all relate to. As we shall see, an ethical critique of narrative that relies solely

on such general principles cannot provide an ethics of narrative structure, but rather reverts to a more traditional moral critique of the content of narrative discourse.

Nissen on the other hand is particularly keen to investigate the ethical components of textual form. He draws on Nussbaum's belief that, "[s]tyle itself makes its claims, expresses its own sense of what matters" and the idea that we need to develop "an ethical understanding [of literary texts] that involves an emotional as well as intellectual activity" (Nissen, p.263). He advises that we differentiate between the ethics *of* narrative and the ethics *in* narrative. The latter of these he sees as the ethical implications of specific events in the narrative – the actions of characters for example. The former of these, on the other hand, he describes as the "study of the ethical aspect of narrative form," which he sees as necessary because

any formal choice within a communicative situation is value-laden... Whether or not the author is making systematic and ethical claims in or through her story, she cannot avoid making claims through the story's form. Who is given voice? Who is silenced? Who is characterised directly, who indirectly? Who is focalizer? Who is focalized... As far as these choices guide us in determining our attitude to the novel's characters and events, they are ethical choices. (Nissen, pp.265-6)

This perspective would find affinity with Attridge's view that ethical criticism consists of the "supremely difficult ethical act of responding to the singularity and otherness of the unique instance – whether person, act, or text" (Attridge, 1995, p.119). For Nissen the "ethics of narrative" – the ethical effect of formal decisions on the part of the author – and the "ethics in narrative" – the ethics or morality of action and event – are intrinsically linked. The choices made by an author when shaping narrative form affect the reader's ethical experience of character action and events. This can again be exemplified by turning to the reading of *Shame* – the ethics of that narrative depend on its self-reflexive and ironic appropriation of the speaker's voice which juxtaposes itself against his sometimes ambivalent and sometimes moralistic claims that he makes throughout the narrative discourse.

This brings us to a central difficulty when considering the idea of ethical criticism. Though numerous critics attempt to define an ethical critique of narrative, there is no common agreement among them about how to differentiate between the ethical implications of narrative form and narrative content. Newton, for example,

claims that “narrative ethics implies simply narrative *as* ethics: the ethical consequences of narrating story and fictionalizing person.” He considers how structure, as both content *and* form, operates to bind “teller, listener, witness, and reader” in an intersubjective process that has ethical implications for our everyday lives (Newton, p.11). Booth’s ethical critique on the other hand depends upon his use of the metaphor of ‘books as friends’ – i.e. he sees them as either harmful or beneficial – and his theory of “coduction”: the examination of characterisation and figurative language through discussion which enables different readers to jointly evaluate the ethical value of a text (Booth, pp.70-75). For Booth then, the ethical import of a novel evolves by producing a critique of it *with others* and their opinions. For Phelan ethical criticism initially considers the events portrayed and then evaluates how the structure of a text promotes an ethical understanding between author and the responsible reader. Reading *Beloved*, he argues, as we shall see, that though the novel cannot force readers to adopt a specific outlook when considering the ethical consequences of Sethe’s actions, an ethics arises through Morrison’s ability to “clearly designate some positions that we ought not occupy... without positively establishing her own ethical assessment” (Phelan, p.329).

Bearing these different perspectives in mind, it is clear that as Booth says, “there are many legitimate paths open to anyone who decides to abandon, at least for a time, the notion that an interest in form precludes an interest in the ethical powers of form” (Booth, pp.6-7). In terms of *this* project, these uncertainties leave me in the rather opportune position of being able to define my own outlook with reference to these others. As I will show, I am in agreement with Nissen’s Aristotelian perspective that ethics involves posing questions “about how best to live in the world” (Nissen, p.263). In particular though I will be examining Newton’s view of an ethics in narrative that is concerned with the intersubjective relationships we form between ourselves as subjects and those other individuals around us, and how this might affect the way in which we relate to narrative discourse as an ‘other’ that, as Miller points out, we have no choice but to relate to. Narrative ethics in this sense foregrounds the intersubjective nature of the lives we lead and how narrative fiction might or might not affect those lives. I intend to examine exactly how a narrative

structure might have an ethical effect on us as readers, but at the same time examine how this ethics is related to the postcolonial nature of the fiction itself.

Reconsidering narrative structure as experiential form and discursive content.

If we return once again to *Shame* and consider its narration of the ethical concerns I have identified there, one of the problems of ethical criticism is laid before us: is this ethical concern simply a popular or moralising reaction common to politically correct western readers who abhor terror and brutality, or does the structure of the narrative itself in some way provoke a pre-ontological or irreducible ethical response, such as the “non-ontological” and “pre-cognitive” responsibility for the other that Gibson identifies in Levinas’s ethics (Gibson, p.25 & pp.56-7)? The following section intends to argue that while narrative form and content are intrinsically related, it is the imposition of an innovative and radical form on the content of postcolonial narratives that allows certain non-discursive ethical perspectives to present themselves to the reader.

The idea of a ‘non-discursive’ ethics within postcolonial fiction might at first seem problematic – postcoloniality is itself a discursive construct and related to a specific political project. As Schwarz points out, the existence of different socio-political discourses amongst individual readers implies that we should not, indeed cannot, aim to uncover “correct,” or singular, readings in narratives (Schwarz, p.204). This is also one of the implications of Booth’s theory of co-duction – the ethical value of a narrative cannot realistically be considered until different readers have applied their subjective world-views to the text and discussed their experience of it. Yet as I hope to show, just as narrative form influences reader experience of a text, so too does it unavoidably narrow the possible readings that are available to us as readers. As already noted, this is the conclusion Phelan draws from his ethical critique of Morrison’s structuring of Sethe’s horrific actions in *Beloved*. He reminds us that due to their very ability to challenge and unsettle political discourses, narratives can “extend [the reader’s] vision of human possibility” (Phelan, p.325). This argument serves as a warning to those critics who Booth claims have rejected ‘unfashionable’ ethical critiques of narrative due to poststructuralism’s claim that

“nobody [can] any longer believe that ethical appraisals [refer] to any independent reality attributable to texts or readers” (Booth, p.88). Such perspectives forget that art, as Schwarz points out quoting Gordimer, reflects “the substance of living from which the artist draws his vision” (Schwarz, p.195). Narratives thus do not only develop as ideologically or discursively constructed structures, but also – possibly – exist as a link to ‘real life’ scenarios with which we are, as human beings, all to some degree familiar.

Phelan’s project is at this point central to the distinction I draw between the ethical implications of content and form. Firstly, he concentrates on examining the event in the narrative which presents the most morally difficult scenario for readers: Sethe’s killing of her daughter, Beloved. We assume that the moral dilemma this poses for readers arises because infanticide is generally outlawed within modern societies, and yet as Phelan points out, the text itself provides no clear-cut moral resolution on the event.

Phelan’s main point is simple: we are provided with an event within the narrative – I shall call this event narrative ‘content’ – and yet our reaction to this event is based not simply on its content but on the intricate fashion in which it is presented to us. The event is transcribed several times, in each case the content is constant – Sethe kills her child – and yet the form of its presentation is always altered in some way. Factors such as narrator identity, modes of focalisation and the use of temporal and spatial shifts are different each time the event is retold. The outcome of this is that a final moral judgement of Sethe’s actions on the part of the reader is repeatedly made more difficult, and as such we are inhibited from assessing Sethe’s actions from the perspectives of the social, political, and judicial discourses of the historical moment in which we live. We do not immediately condemn or condone Sethe from the perspective of the modern maxim that infanticide is morally wrong. Or as Wyatt puts it: “The novel withholds judgement on Sethe’s act and persuades the reader to do the same, presenting the infanticide as the ultimate contradiction of mothering under slavery” (Wyatt, p.476).

This, for Phelan, is one of the ethical effects which *Beloved*’s form entails: any attempt to adopt a moral view of Sethe’s actions is unsettled by the variety of subject positions from which the event is transcribed. We as readers are, to use

Docherty's term, *dispositioned* when attempting to relate to fictional characters – our relation to the other (the fictional character) is figured by a fracturing of the self so that no discursive, ideological or political outlook is subjectively constant (Docherty, 1996, pp.58-67). Interestingly, Gibson, like Docherty, reads this fracturing of the self as indicative of a postmodern ethics, but does so by applying Levinas's theory of the other as absolute alterity, something that is always "radically in excess of what my ego, cognitive powers, consciousness or intuitions would make of her or him" (Gibson, p.25). As Levinas realises, "[n]o one can remain in himself: the humanity of man, subjectivity, is a responsibility for the others... The return to the self becomes an interminable detour" (Levinas, 1972, p.149). We, as morally independent readers, are not given the opportunity to outrightly judge Sethe's actions from our own perspective. Her actions, as the actions of an *other* are beyond our possession and our objective, politically-correct righteousness. As Levinas points out, it "is in the laying down by the ego of its sovereignty (in its 'hateful' modality), that we find ethics" (Levinas, 1989a, p.85). The other effect, as touched upon in the last chapter, is that the natural imagery and metaphors employed warn the responsible reader that ex-slave's such as Sethe's are unable to endorse the traditional American perspective of nature and the landscape as symbols of opportunity and abundance. These effects are achieved by portraying an event of general moral outrage within unconventional and innovative formal structures. What the novel achieves then is not unlike what Said sees as the ability of texts to undermine limitless interpretation, which is for him an unfortunate perspective advocated by recent literary criticism. He argues that texts aren't simply elements of the textualised world we live in or endlessly deferred representations of an external reality, but that they are indeed *part* of our world and can only be understood as part of the world which places "restraints upon what can be done with them interpretatively" (Said, 1984, pp.39-40).

Maintaining this emphasis on form or structure, I wish to turn to some of the conflicting outlooks that have been presented about these phenomena within historical literary criticism. As Crane points out, twentieth-century criticism has on the whole adopted the thesis first put forward by Aristotle that literature, being distinct from other uses of language, needs be examined under headings such as "form," "arrangement," "construction," or "design." It is the discussion of literary or

poetic “structure” then, through “structural analysis,” that for the most part defines the methods and aims of modern criticism (Crane, pp.3-4). Within the twentieth-century this trend can be seen to run from literary impressionism through Russian formalism, American New Criticism, French structuralism, poststructuralism, culminating in deconstructive criticism.⁵⁵

Even so, Crane shows us that an examination of literary structure does not lead to a straight-forward understanding of the distinctions that can be drawn between literature’s ‘form’ and ‘content.’ Indeed, if we make the common assumption, as Wellek does, that literature is made up of an inseparable and reciprocal interaction between form and content (Wellek, 1963, p.55), then it would seem sensible to view narrative structure as a careful arrangement of content – the narrative of fictional events – within a formal apparatus that shapes the narrative act, and is unique and internal to the poem or prose itself. From this perspective structure is a relationship that exists between the narrative content and its form. It should be noted that this definition of structure does not cross all critical fields – this version is close to that proposed by the American New Critics.⁵⁶ For proponents of French structuralism literary structure corresponds to the systematic way that a *language* is structured, in Barthes’ words, within a “grammar of narrative” (Barthes, 1981, p.172).⁵⁷

Crane isolates two critical approaches to the nature of literary structure. The first of these, which he calls Aristotelian, makes the claim that the expression of meaning only functions *within* the poem or prose itself, being reliant solely on the author’s use of figurative language. As such,

⁵⁵ See Norris, 1982, p.18 on for a history of criticism up to deconstruction.

⁵⁶ For more on the New Critics theory of structural criticism as opposed to other forms of literary critique, see Wellek, 1960, p.555.

⁵⁷ For a brief analysis of this distinction see Abrams, p.72, though for a detailed one see Genette, 1982, pp.10-13. When contrasting the critical approaches of the New Criticism and structuralists, Genette claims that, “[a]ny analysis that confines itself to a work without considering its sources or motives would, therefore, be implicitly structuralist, and the structural method ought to intervene in order to give to this immanent study a sort of rationality of understanding that would replace the rationality of explanation abandoned with the search for causes” (p.12). I assume that by the “rationality of explanation” Genette is referring to the critical exercise of the New Critics. Nevertheless, he is guilty of grouping different critical theories together, such as Russian Formalism and New Criticism, against the structuralist exercise.

it will be there... only indirectly, as what is symbolized by the totality of particular relationships and 'tensions' observable in all the parts of the poem and on all the levels – from metaphors to plot or central image – on which meaning can be found. (Crane, p.124)

This approach would seem to bear some resemblance to poststructuralism and the claim that meaning can only exist (“only indirectly”) within the linguistic structures that we encounter since “texts refer neither to readers nor to readers’ worlds, but only to themselves” (Newton, p.40). We must remember though that poststructuralist critics denounce the privileged value and meaning attributed to literary form by the New Critics. As Norris puts it when examining de Man and Derrida, “[s]ince *all* forms of writing run up against perplexities of meaning and intent, there is no longer any question of a privileged status for literature” (Norris, 1982, p.22). And as he puts it elsewhere on Derrida: “Writing is the endless displacement of meaning which both governs language and places it for ever beyond the reach of a stable, self-authenticating knowledge” (p.29).

The second Platonic approach Crane outlines operates with the view that literary structures are not free-standing creations internally related only to the text within which they are bound, but that they somehow serve as participants within and effects of

the common symbolic operations of the human mind, and hence on the structures of meaning which, because they are basic and universal in man’s experience, are in a sense given to poets rather than created by them. (Crane, p.116)

Crane uses an argument made by Frye to exemplify the this second mode of structural critique at work, pointing out that *Moby Dick* “cannot remain in Melville’s novel: he is bound to be incorporated into our total verbal experience of leviathans... from the Old Testament onwards” (Crane, p.128). I might also add that the lived verbal experience of numerous whalers has a large influence upon Melville’s invention of Ishmael’s narrative. A similar case can be made for the example of *Beloved* given above. When a renewed ethical emphasis is placed on Sethe’s actions due to the intricacies of Morrison’s narrative form, it affects the responsible reader’s appraisal of the female African-American slave’s encounter with America’s white political world. It also unavoidably alters our perception and understanding of the

real-life Margaret Garner case of infanticide on which Sethe's story is based. Even *Shame*, a novel whose narrative voice seems to self-reflexively acknowledge the fact that its narration of history, fictional or otherwise, lays itself open to deconstruction, seems difficult to imagine existing and being read without relation to the social realities of historical Pakistan.

Unlike Crane though, I am not enthusiastic to adopt his naming of these two critical approaches "Aristotelian" and "Platonic" respectively. Doing so seems to ignore Aristotle's belief that "the origin of the art of poetry is to be found in two natural causes," these being the *a priori* gifts of imitation and rhythm, human attributes that Aristotle believes we experience prior to language (Aristotle, *Poetics*, pp.7-8). This idea actually bears similarities to Crane's second "Platonic" critical approach and the view that literary form creates meaning both through the use of figurative language *and* by relating that language to prior lived experience on the part of author and reader through the "common symbolic operations of the human mind."⁵⁸

It is interesting that this emphasis on natural rhythm and imitation seems comparable to the views of the postcolonial critics Braithwaite and Powell. Braithwaite espouses the Aristotelian view that pentameter rhythms in poetry do indeed imitate certain (Eurocentric, according to Braithwaite) life experiences, and that these literary structures are imposed upon the non-European language speaker in colonial situations through the dominance of the colonial tongue. He argues that if we examine the form of Caribbean poetry we find that it in fact utilises a non-western form, the "calypso," which incorporates dactyls that necessitate "the use of the tongue in a certain way, the use of sound in a certain way." He claims that this is the structure that Caribbean poets are now employing more and more frequently. The metaphor Braithwaite employs to describe the life rhythms of the Caribbean is the "hurricane":

⁵⁸ As if to reinforce this criticism of Crane, this idea of literary form is close to that which Nussbaum calls the "Aristotelian conception" – "a distinctive ethical conception... that requires, for its adequate and complete investigation and statement, forms and structures such as those that we find in... novels" (Nussbaum, 1990, p.26).

[T]he pentameter remained, and it carries with it a certain kind of experience, which is not the experience of the hurricane. The hurricane does not roar in pentameters. And that's the problem: how do you get a rhythm which approximates the *natural* experience, the *environmental* experience? (Braithwaite, p.313)

Here literary structure, albeit poetic, gains its model and rhythm from both natural and environmental experience, as well as no doubt being influenced by the counter-discursive role it plays in resisting the literary-linguistic forms of colonialism. Cultural hybridity here takes on a different hue from Bhabha's since the opposition of slave descendent and coloniser is undermined not by creating "heterogeneous hybrid sign[s]" out of the symbols of historical opposition, but by using the ahistorical, natural structure of the hurricane – an inevitable chance attribute of *this* postcolonial environment – on which to base its 'newness.'⁵⁹

We see a similar argument when reading Powell's examination of the relationship between narrative focalisation and hybrid identities. She appropriates Bal's view that events in narrative "are presented from as many angles as there are focalizers, depending on the orientation of the agent or agents" (see Bal, 1985, p.101), noting that these angles are affected and influenced by the "physical, historical and psychological" position of the agent or agents (see Rimmon-Kenan, pp.79-82). She claims that

what is commonly called the text becomes both context and pre-text; that is, the text is not only influenced by the here and now, its immediate physical and psychosocial environment, but also by the history and the experience of the seeing and speaking agents. (Powell, p.65)

Focalisation in these terms is both ideologically and psychologically influenced, a phenomenon which Powell is quick to point out is non-verbal though it manifests itself through the psychologically influenced narratives of fictional speakers and observers. She argues that focalisation, being dependent on the effects of so many psychological influences and socio-political ideologies, "enjoys an inwrought

⁵⁹ See Bhabha, pp.207-9 & p.219 for more on postcolonial hybridity as the moment in which narrative meaning is "undecidable... the subject of discourse split and doubled between native informer and colonial enunciator (p.206). Braithwaite attributes the undecidable or unknowable aspects of Caribbean poetic structure to the non-human and unalterable force of nature itself.

relationship with hybridity, and it is this mutual essentiality, hybridity, that allows the [focalisation] theory to create an analytical dovetail, so to speak, with Caribbean literature” (Powell, p.69). In Braithwaite and Powell then we see a strong link being theorised between the postcolonial cultural individual and the non-traditional form of postcolonial literature. Both critics see the respective literary strategies they examine as being reciprocally and inseparably related to the real-life experiences of subjects within postcolonial cultural communities.⁶⁰

Yet why all this emphasis on trying to argue that literary creations are at some formal level representative of human lived experience? Isn't that a foregone conclusion for the majority of readers? In fact, as Crane's first approach to literary critique shows, and as Newton and Norris claim, recent criticism in particular has rejected this perspective. Considering “the extent to which language may be thought of as affording referential access to a domain of real-world (extra-discursive) objects, processes, and events,” Norris claims that for “structuralists – and even more for poststructuralists – the notion of our having such access can only be a product of those current... signifying codes that constitute ‘reality’ so far as we can possibly know it” (Norris, 1999, p.55). Highlighting what he sees as the overbearing emphasis placed solely on textuality by structuralism, narratology, and deconstruction, Newton argues that within these critiques the interrelation of form and content can never be viewed as playing an ethical role in representing the world outside the language of the text itself. For Newton these critical positions insist that “narrative discourse is, like any other, prey to tropological forces it cannot control,” and claims that “all criticism devoted to analyzing stable linguistic structures assumes the same “tragic burden” (Newton, p.52).⁶¹ His response to this charge is to reconsider the form/content binary upon which he feels such critiques are based. He argues that narrative criticism, being aware of both “deep syntax” and “textual surface,” should attempt to analyse narratives “in terms of messages as well as codes” (p.53), and

⁶⁰ Interestingly, Gandhi also makes the claim that postcolonial literary theory has a lot in common with the extra-textual provenance that the New Critics located in literary form (Gandhi, p.160).

⁶¹ The reference here is to Godzich's description of deconstruction's critique of narrative poetics. Godzich claims that as a critical practice narrative poetics in the wake of deconstruction is “tragic because at once inescapable and doomed to alternate, without the possibility of totalization, between its dependant constituents” (Godzich, xiii, quoted in Newton, p.52). Newton interprets “dependant constituents” as narrative content and narrative form.

consider how both form and content affect the ways in which readers relate narratives to lived experience. He asks us to

[c]onsider... that “theme” or “topic” can be interpreted narratively (what or how a story tells), discursively (what or how subjects tell), or figurally (what or how grammar, syntax and lexis tell); “content” suddenly appears a far weightier analytical matter. “Voice” possesses both a form and a content; “point of view” involves an interdependence of percepts and concepts. Structural entanglements of teller and listener defy analyses which privilege their independent roles. (Genette’s clarifying distinction between “who speaks?” and “who sees?” still resolutely avoids filling out the truncated predicate in each case, because the subject’s positionality presides for him over intersubjective relations.) Whereas deconstruction cannot allow the ethical category status, narratology tends to deny it formal consideration. (p.53)

Newton’s aim then is to provide an ethical role for both form and content and affirm the idea that critical privilege should not be given to either category during the reading event. He envisages ethics as an effect of narrative structure itself (an idea rejected by narratology), and attributes ethical status to the formal features of narrative. Thus while deconstructive criticism points to narrative content’s inherent ability and tendency to undermine its own truth claims, Newton claims that it fails to consider the formal aspects of narrative that might provoke ethical consideration. He also points out that narratology fails to consider ways in which structure might be ethical. For him these are “the extent to which strictly figurative properties such as metaphor become experiential,” and “the way characters... can become inculcated figures of speech” (p.53). He warns us not to confine our examinations of temporality, point of view and agency “to thin descriptions of autonomous narrative structures” but rather to examine, and in doing so extend, the links that narratives uncover between themselves and subjective experience. For example, is it possible to envisage an intersubjective ethical relation between narratives and their readers? As we shall see, Newton’s work is important here because it allows the possibility of such questions, yet it is perhaps wise to raise a word of caution. Newton argues that such questions are necessary because of the failure of deconstruction, in particular, to address them. As I have already noted though and as will be further emphasised in the next chapter, there is a convincing case to be made for the idea that

deconstruction – or at least Derrida’s idea of it – is indispensable to any notion of a narrative ethics, and that ethics in fact becomes indispensable to Derrida’s later work. As well as this, Newton is incorrect to imply that according to deconstruction “narrative discourse is prey to tropological forces it cannot control.” As Norris makes clear, it is deconstruction’s aim to rigorously uncover the “tropological forces” which affect meaning and in doing so interrogate that meaning (Norris, 1990, pp.144-6 & 155-6). The idea that deconstructive criticism views our reality and the discourses that evolve in it as simply signs, marks, or texts that are infinitely reducible is a misguided point of view that has been criticised by Attridge, Derrida, Miller, and Spivak. In fact, as we shall see, one of the effects of deconstruction is that we are able to consider experiences irreducible to language, or as Derrida puts it, the “other of language.”⁶²

Levinas, Newton and the responsibility of reading structure as *Saying and Said*.

Related to the content and form of discourse is the *answerability* the reader is subject to when encountering *an other* – or the discourse of another – in narrative. The term answerability is apt in that it emphasises the role played in responding to, or answering, the discourse of others – in responding we provide an *answer* of a certain content, but we also engage in the act, or *expression*, of answering. We have noted how Levinas locates the disruption of the pure self in its relation with others, how “in its non-intentional identification, identity recoils before its affirmation” (1989a, p.81). Here I want to briefly examine how Levinas’s idea of the subject’s responsibility for the alterity of the other might be related to the subject’s experience of narrative discourse. For Levinas, the result of this experience of absolute alterity is that the subject has a responsibility to respond to the other, to *answer to* that

⁶² See Attridge, 1992, p.20 for this Derrida quote and his own comments on this aspect of deconstruction. The quote is from an interview where Derrida counters the claim that deconstruction is a “suspension of reference” and makes clear the vast difference between deconstruction and the majority criticism claiming to be “post-structuralist” (Derrida and Kearney, pp.123-4). Miller has made similar observations about the view that “deconstruction removes all grounds of certainty or authority in literary interpretation” (Miller, 1987, pp.9-10). Also see Spivak, 1986b, pp.52-53 on the critical misjudgement that critics such as herself are “trying to reduce hard reality to nothing but signs.”

unknowable presence. As Levinas makes clear, the pre-cognitive and unavoidable spontaneity of this experience of the other,

precedes the formulation of any metaphysical ideas on the subject, that very justice of the position within being is questioned, a position which asserts itself with intentional thought, knowledge and a grasp of the here and now. What one sees in this questioning is being as *mauvaise conscience*; ⁶³ to be open to question, but also to questioning, to have to respond. Language is born in responsibility. (1989a, p.82)

Our complete alienation from the others we encounter is therefore negotiated by our responses to them, and the form and content of the discourse that these responses take. Or to use Levinas's phrase, one exposes "oneself to [the other's] response and his questioning" through *expression* (1969, p.200).

Newton's consideration of the form and content binary provides an insight into how narrative might meaningfully allow readers to intersubjectively relate to a novel. He claims they are given the opportunity – indeed have no choice – but to participate in responding to the narrative structure they encounter. To this degree, via Levinas, form and content both influence the reader's "responsibility toward an Other which no one else can undertake" (Newton, p.12). What is unique here is the idea that an intersubjective ethical responsibility exists outside, or prior to, the literary-linguistic structure of discourse, and that that pre-discursive and non-cognitive responsibility ultimately affects the discourse that we 'give' to others. To this end then, narratives provide us with an ethical encounter – they place us in a position to respond with a discourse of our own, and in doing so we must undertake an ethical consideration concerning the structure of *their* discourse, and the structure ours will take.

When introducing his view of narrative ethics Newton points out that for Levinas "narrative, as participatory act, is part 'Said' – the content of the discourse, what it narrates – and part 'Saying,' the latter – the intersubjective relation that arises through the act of narration – being the site of surplus, of the unforeseen, of self-exposure" (p.3). In explaining this distinction he turns to Coleridge's *The Rime of the*

⁶³ See Levinas, 1989a, p.81 for an explication of *mauvaise conscience* as spontaneous non-intentionality.

Ancient Mariner (1798) and its use of a framed oral narrative. While the role of the *Saying* and the *Said* in affecting intersubjective signification will be looked at in more detail in chapter three, here I initially wish to encourage an awareness of the distinction between narrative as an *act* of structured *expression*, and its discourse as literary-linguistic content. The realm of the narrative poem's *Said*, we are told, is the realm of "moral propositionality." For example, the poem can be interpreted as containing a moral, but that ideological lesson will be interpreted differently from reader to reader, culture to culture, and history to history. Thus the *Said* is literary-linguistic content and is indeed "prey to tropological forces it cannot control."

The domain of the *Saying*, on the other hand, the poem's *expression* of discourse, is where Newton locates its representation of ethical experiences that, according to Levinas, originate prior to "decision and understanding." It is here that the very *moment* of the mariner's narrative comes to life – the act of *Saying* the story – encapsulating as it does the ancient act of story-telling, the relation between the mariner and his listeners, and the relation between the poem and its readers. Yet the *Saying* is an experience immediately prior to discourse, and as such maintains an element of irreducibility during discourse and the reading event. It is this interactive and volatile moment in the poem that for Newton exemplifies an ethics of "intersubjective relation" within its narrative (Newton, p.7). It is evident in the shift in form that occurs as the poetic content moves a third-person narrative voice to the direct discourse of the mariner's tale itself (Coleridge, line 20).

It is here then that we can see the similarities between Newton's theory and Crane's second approach to criticism, as well as Aristotle's poetics. Narrative structure, consisting as it does of a content and form, contains elements that relate narratives to lived experience and our discursive interactions with others. Using the *Rime* to explicate this point is apt due to its use of a framed *oral* narrative. The point at which the mariner *stops* each of the wedding guests to bestow upon them his tale provides us with an insight into the role played by each of us as readers and audience. In the act and the moment of reading we are ourselves 'stopped' and forced to respond to the narrative presented before us. We become *answerable* to it. Part of that response involves acknowledging our absolute estrangement from the mariner and his text, which means experiencing something irreducible in the form of the

reading event. The content is laid before us, but in our experience of its form there remains an element of the irreducible and the pre-discursive.

This view of structure as form *and* content perhaps bears a resemblance to Derrida's view of literature as *force* and *form*, where force is the origin of the phenomenon of language, and form is the stifling occurrence which gives that language its meaning (Derrida, 1978d, p.26). Importantly, Derrida uses this notion of irreducible force to undermine the structuralist form/content binary. In the view I have outlined above, form, like force, is a non-discursive entity – it provides the *shape* and impetus of discursive content, but it isn't made up of literary-linguistic signs itself. It is worth noting that Derrida later re-examines the concept of form, reiterating the point that form's presence and meaning have been associated with the "language of metaphysics" since Ancient Greek philosophy, and that as such, form has always been considered within a "system of oppositions in which something like form, the formality of form, can be thought, is a finite system" (p.158). Yet he goes on to ask if "some irreducible complicity, between Being as being-present in the form of meaning... and Being as being-present in the so-called preexpressive form of sense, has not been operative, welding the strata to each other" (p.171). In fact, he points out that this "*logicity* of the preexpressive stratum" is always related to form and ultimately allows the conversion of the "not being-present, into an experience in the form of being-present" within an irreducible relationship (p.170). Thus for Derrida an aesthetics always depends on the "preexpressive" aspects of form in order to create ontological meaning out of the "not being-present." This can be related to the pre-discursive form I outlined above. A narrative structure can be made up of its content (the words on the page), and its form (it consists of x number of chapters), yet the *occurrence* of this form isn't made up of words. An example of this would be the blank sections of page which occur between chapters. While the discursive content is shaped by them, they themselves have no describable meaning. Nevertheless, both this form and the content it affects produce a meaningful structure. I suggest that as readers we have no choice but to relate to this 'silent' form whilst reading, and in doing so interact with the indescribable otherness that makes possible a meaningful narrative discourse in the first place.

Whereas Docherty argues that the fracturing the reading subject undergoes when encountering the other entails an ethical dispositioning of the reader, Levinas interprets this ethical formation of the self differently. For him this unsettling of the self in front of the other provides the basis of an “intersubjective” ethics – rather than trying to ‘possess’ the other, the self realises the possibility of ‘offering’ himself over to the other, of responding responsibly to him or her. According to Levinas, this responsible ethics is “the very heart of the relationship with the other that characterizes our social life [where] alterity appears as a nonreciprocal relationship. As such, he claims that “intersubjective space is not symmetrical” (1987, pp.48), which implies that the subject therefore has an element of *choice* in his/her treatment of the other. Unlike Docherty’s, this view of identity encapsulates an ethics which reaffirms both subjectivity and the responsibilities placed before the self in its interactions with others both in life and when reading narrative. Importantly this is due to an irreducible element within the structure of discourse, and in particular the form it takes. I now want to examine how such a theory might relate to the innovative structure of *Shame*.

Response and responsibility due to structure in *Shame*.

Consider again the moral that *Shame*’s narrator uncharacteristically places before us when considering actual Pakistan: “liberty; equality; fraternity... I recommend them highly.” As we noted before, this can be read as a moral discourse encapsulated within a narrative content – that which Nissen calls an ethics *in* narrative, and Newton a moral proposition. In Levinasian terms it is the *Said* of spoken discourse, that which the speaker contextualises and places before us as understandable content. Ultimately though, as deconstruction teaches us, such statements undermine their claim to truth, their inherent appeal to a notion of *logos* or Reason that lies outside subjective, reducible values.

And yet like the ancient mariner, this discourse by *Shame*’s speaker also brings his readers/listeners to a sudden *halt*. When introducing it the narrator interrupts the story of “Peccavistan’s” political history to ask, “May I interpose a few words here on the subject of the Islamic revival? It won’t take long” (p.250). This narrator, like the mariner, therefore purposely interrupts the narrative in order to

suddenly command the reader's attention. This passage quite obviously and self-reflexively contrasts with the content and the form of the preceding, and following narration. It is concerned, quite sombrely, with the oppressiveness of theocratic governments, such as Israel, Iran, and Pakistan, who appropriate religious dogma for their own ends, and even mentions real historical figures. It effectively interrupts what until this point had been an ironic, satirical, and even fantastical historiographic metafiction in Hutcheon's sense,⁶⁴ with a moralising (though still quite comic) gripe about recent middle-eastern politics and religion. Thus it fractures what had been up until this point an already fractured magic realist novel, with a serious dose of realism. As well as this, it addresses the reader as implied listener during the interjection. What I want to look at are the ethical implications of this self-conscious fracturing on the deconstructible, moralising claims made during this radical shift in narrative structure.

Newton claims that as narrative *The Ancient Mariner* presents us with access to "that territory inside the poem shared by Mariner and Wedding Guest in their communicative, interlocutionary relation – in their immediate claim on each other – and that territory outside the text marked out by the claims it makes upon its reader" (Newton, pp.5-6). Similarly, the interjectory, moralising passage in *Shame* also forces the reader to consider the implications of this intersubjective relation between speaker and reader on "that territory outside the text." We can argue that the structural effect of this passage upon the reader operates on several moral levels. Firstly, as already noted, it presents a moral stance in the traditional way, by appealing to popular moral outlooks – in this case liberal-humanism.

Secondly, the interjection obviously creates parallels between events in the narrator's history of Peccavistan, and events in the apparently 'real' history of Pakistan. Our narrator, for example, does not describe for his readers the suffering that he obviously feels the inhabitants of Pakistan undergo due to their non-democratically elected leaders tendencies to endorse Islamic doctrine as a means of national cohesion and social justice. He calls such doctrines mythologies and warns, with a note of both satirical and solemn finality, that "they can become very

⁶⁴ See Hutcheon, 1988, p.14 on the role of "historiographic metafiction" in forcing readers to question the "textualized accessibility" of the past.

unpopular indeed if they're rammed down people's throats... What happens if one is force-fed such outsize, indigestible meals? – One gets sick. One rejects their nourishment. Reader: one pukes.” The language here – both formal (the use of the pronoun “one” several times) and slang – sardonically relays the distress of common Pakistan, and produces the amusing and belittling metaphor of indigestible meal as oppressive religious doctrine. The actual suffering of Pakistan therefore remains very much untold here, and very much a reducible, malleable, and metaphorical quantity. For whatever reasons, our speaker leaves its realist articulation unsaid.

And yet, unsaid or not, this uncharacteristic interjection by the speaker allows us as readers to elaborate on this suffering for ourselves. If we turn to the narrative immediately prior to this digression, we find depictions of the fictional brutalities that the fictional Raza Hyder hands out upon the people of Peccavistan in the name of Islam:

What Raza did: he banned booze... On the Prophet's birthday Raza arranged for every mosque in the country to sound an alarm at nine a.m. and anybody who forgot to stop and pray was instantly carted off to jail... In the first year of his rule Raza Hyder incarcerated one hundred thousand beggars and, while he was at it, a further twenty-five hundred members of the now-illegal Popular Front

... [T]he women of the country began marching against God... But Raza was circumspect; he told police to avoid hitting the ladies on the breasts when they broke up the demonstrations.

(pp.247-9)

The structure of a frame narrative around the speaker's interjection creates a moral parallel between the two stories – though the narrator refuses to elaborate upon 'real' brutalities that may or may not have occurred in Pakistan, he leaves us under no illusion as to the form these oppressive measures took in Peccavistan. While he refuses to make 'unfashionable,' totalising claims concerning the fate of the people of Pakistan, the ironic, self-reflexive parallels between these two realities once again projects a moral consideration for the reader about that fate.

This leads us to the third ethical effect of the narrative structure: the realisation that the reader has to interact with the text – i.e. consider the ironic, yet non-committal comparison it draws between oppression in Peccavistan and Pakistan

– and draw upon his/her own experience of the “territory outside the text” to consider the ethical implications of this narrative. What, for example, are the moral dilemmas produced by “incarcerating one hundred thousand beggars” because they mass demonstrated for the alms that Islamic discourse claims should be given to them? People might argue differently concerning the ethics of this act – no doubt Raza Hyder’s (or even President Zia’s) interpretation of it might be different from that of many of Rushdie’s readers. What about the ethics of the beating of women – except on the breasts – who march for civil rights? Can we agree that this is unethical? Many might, but so-called Islamic fundamentalists regimes might claim otherwise. In any case, these are not moral dilemmas that the majority of western readers would have much experience of, though it is likely that the overwhelming majority of us might agree in principle that such actions are unethical. What about puking due to force-feeding? It is, after all, an experience that we all can to some degree relate to – everyone has vomited at some time or another. Is there an ethics involved here? Would we all recoil from such literal experiences? Almost certainly.

The point of these rhetorical questions is to highlight how this narrative forces us to consider an ethics due to the irreducible aspects of its structure, *and* through the way that structure relates to our own experience and knowledge of suffering in the world. The narrative incorporates a temporally and spatially disjunctive interjection, which as an aspect of radical form necessarily brings a *pre-discursive* element to the structure by so obviously departing from its prior representation of Peccavistan. Its sudden references to Pakistan foreground the “preexpressive” element of structure highlighted by Derrida’s identification of the “not being-present” during expression and the irreducibility of Levinas’s *Saying*. This in turn allows the structure to relate its *discursive* content to oppression in the lives of our narrator’s characters, and to physical stress in our own worlds. This innovative representation of suffering as an aspect of human experience therefore intersubjectively connects those fictional and ‘real’ scenarios. It is the irreducible elements of the innovative narrative structure then, *and* its representation of suffering, that link the “territories” which Newton identifies both “inside” and “outside” literary structure, by radically appealing to the reader’s experiential repertoire. As Williams claims, suffering, especially physically painful suffering, is

perhaps the one human experience which can be universally claimed to affect a person's ethical life (Williams, 1972, pp.89-90).

In concluding I want to specifically highlight the role played by this non-traditional narrative structure in producing a non-traditional ethics within the text, and briefly consider the role that the representation of physical suffering might play in a narrative ethics. I am suggesting that it is in this innovative aspect of the narrative, the part that noticeably forces us to consider fictional suffering in our own real terms, that a literary ethics arises as an aspect of narrative *expression*. This *action* on the part of the structure compels us to respond to the discourse before us. It is this pre-discursive element – the act that shapes the eventual discourse – that finds itself “contaminating,” to appropriate Newton’s phrase, the ethics of our reading of the text. This is an *ethics* of narrative expression, as opposed to the *morality* of a narrative discourse. As Nussbaum points out, “[l]ife is never simply *presented* by a text; it is always *represented as* something... [T]he style... itself expresses choices and selections, and sets up in the reader, certain activities and transactions rather than others” (Nussbaum, 1990, p.5).⁶⁵ As already noted, in this case it is unlikely that the reader will not be able to relate to the metaphor of physical illness, and thus bring her own personal subjective insight to the unethical treatment of the people of Pakistan. Here we see how responsibilities arise through discursive interaction with narratives during the reading event itself. We have a responsibility to respond, to interact with narrative structures, and to consider the fictional events they place before us in terms of our own human experience. This is what Miller calls “an experience of an ‘I must’” in his ethics of reading (Miller, 1987, p.127), except that unlike Miller I propose that the need to attend to postcolonial narratives during the reading event may also foreground human suffering as a common experience available to us all. As Derrida has said of Levinas’s ethics, its authority is never based in any discourse: “It seeks to be understood from within a *recourse to experience itself*. Experience itself and that which is most irreducible within experience” (Derrida, 1978a, p.83).

But what of the moral claims of liberal-humanism that are also made? They are undoubtedly deconstructible concepts, rational claims whose veracity can be

⁶⁵ Nussbaum equates narrative form with narrative style (p.5).

questioned. Yet they remain encapsulated within a narrative structure which foregrounds both an irreducible relation between readers and text that isn't easy to undermine, and a desire to articulate the immoral events of postcolonial history. To this degree they perhaps remain reminders of those forms of justice that in the last chapter we saw Spivak calling those things which we cannot not want. And yet they perform an even simpler task: to remind the reader of the non-liberal, unequal, and unjust realities of life in certain postcolonial states, even while contemporary critical theory rejects the existence of the *antithesis* of these concepts. The morality of discourses on “liberty; equality; fraternity” might be easy to undermine, but it is not so easy to question the real flesh-and-blood experience of non-liberal and unequal suffering that the narrative structure represents for us here.⁶⁶

It would seem then that perhaps there are two separate elements of an ethics at work within *Shame*. One of these relates to Levinas's account of discourse which Newton develops, the experience of interacting with discourses and relating them to intersubjective human experience due to the pre-discursive elements of narrative structure. The narrator's interruptions for example force us to attend to his digressions – we cannot avoid this during the reading event. The other ethical element relates to the consideration given by readers to the representation of postcolonial suffering and how it relates to their own experiences of physical suffering. Yet as we shall see in chapters five and six, the differences between these aspects of a postcolonial narrative ethics may not be distinct. Although Newton does not address the issue, Levinas also emphasises that we should be aware of the role played by the human experience of pain and suffering within an irreducible ethics – a point which as we shall see in chapters three and six severely undermines Newton's rejection of the political validity of deconstruction. For now what I hope to have exemplified is the idea that an ethical critique of postcolonial fiction must necessarily turn to the pre-discursive elements of narrative structures. Also, I hope to have provided an insight into some of the recent critical attempts to formulate an ethics which arises out of narrative structure rather than moral discourse, and outlined the

⁶⁶ See During, 1987, p.461 on the idea that Rushdie's postmodern form “certainly does not reflect postmodernity... [*Shame*] remains connected to those concepts of justice and reason that totalizing denouncers of our postmodernity assure us are in their safekeeping.”

need for further investigation into such a concept. What I wish to do now is develop this Levinasian idea of an ethics within the structure of discourse, and investigate, in terms of postcolonial fiction and deconstruction, how it might benefit the examination of an irreducible ethics both in narratives and in literary theory.

Chapter Three: *Traces of Responsibility in Toni Morrison's Jazz.*

Getting away with murder: *Benito Cereno* and the problems with a Levinasian ethical critique of narrative content.

As for the black – whose brain, not body, had schemed and led the revolt, with the plot – his slight frame, inadequate to that which it held, had at once yielded to the superior muscular strength of his captor, in the boat. Seeing all was over, he uttered no sound, and could not be forced to. His aspect seemed to say, since I cannot do deeds, I will not speak words...

Some months after, dragged to the gibbet at the tail of a mule, the black met his voiceless end. The body was burned to ashes; but for many days, the head, that hive of subtlety, fixed on a pole in the Plaza, met, unabashed, the gaze of the whites; and across the Plaza looked towards St. Bartholomew's church... and across the Rimac bridge looked towards the monastery, on Mount Agonia without; where, three months after being dismissed by the court, Benito Cereno, borne on the bier, did, indeed, follow his leader. (Melville, 1855, p.307)

The above quotation from Melville's *Benito Cereno* (1855) seems to self-consciously lend itself to the close ethical analysis I wish to apply to the narrative form and content of postcolonial fiction, though the short story itself is not considered postcolonial. Newton also considers the short story, though for him *Benito Cereno's* prejudiced figuration of the black face, a technique he calls "monstration," coupled with the refusal to grant its Negro characters any substantive voice to address the book's mainly white audience, means that the text fails to ethically represent an historical moment of African-American slave insurrection (Newton, p.211).

Benito Cereno is a story of insurrection upon a slave-ship, described in several narrative discourses. The first of these is the third-person narrative of Captain Delano's experiences, who after meeting the slave-ship at sea strikes up a relationship with its captain, Benito Cereno. Delano fails to notice the predicament of the captain who is forced by the Negroes to act and appear as though all were normal. It is only at Delano's departure that he realises the ruse, and in doing so attacks and regains the ship, saving Cereno. The rest of the story is made up of official court depositions of eye-witness testimonies.

Newton's critique of the novel engages with its characterisation and its representation of the face of the oppressed other. He adopts a theoretical perspective we will be investigating throughout the next two chapters – the Levinasian theory of the face of the other as *unknowable expression* in the discursive self/other relation (see Levinas, 1969, pp.50-1) – and argues that the novel presents a particularly unethical representation of the faces of its principle Negro characters. Yet for me, the passage above uncovers some of the difficulties of such an approach to narrative ethics. These can be shown if we examine the figuration of the face of “the black” within the larger narrative structure, and by asking who is devolved to monstrosity in the above passage. Is it Babo (“the black” and leader of the slave revolt), punished in view of his monstrous actions? Or is it his judges, at whose religious sites he gazes in silence, not only in death, but also in decapitation?

Answers to these questions are possible if, unlike Newton, we engage with not only narrative content but formal structure as well. His claim that the text doesn't give voice to the slaves' experiences is correct, but in these closing passages that seems to me to be one of the narrator's overwhelming concerns. If we consider the prepositional phrase in the following self-conscious omniscient interjection – it was Babo's “brain, not body, [that] had schemed and led the revolt, with the *plot*” (my italics) – we are ironically reminded that this “plot,” of which we are told nothing by Babo, is completely objectified within the narrative *plot* Melville provides us with. We are told that now totally oppressed his “aspect *seemed to say*, since I cannot do deeds, I will not *speak words*” (my italics). Both here and throughout the passage the collocated references to speech are numerous, a fact that suggests to me that the narrator here is overly conscious of the fact that Babo, with his apparently large brain, has had all omniscient knowledge of his thoughts and actions silenced.

This silence halts any insight into Babo's subjectivity, and reminds the reader that while several *other* narratives are provided to make up for this silence – official court depositions for example – his narrative hasn't been told.⁶⁷ The dominant discourses of the historical moment that is the institution of American slavery mean that Babo remains objectified. The narrator's final ironic comment on the insidious

⁶⁷ See Lee, pp.503-4 on the idea that using “doctored court documents” amongst other discourses assists in the purposeful silencing of the voices of lesser characters in the narrative.

nature of these discourses comes in the text's penultimate image. For Babo's "voiceless end" is not ephemeral: though silent, his bodiless face "unabashed" – for how else would one feel without a body? – meets the socio-political landscape of his oppressors head on. Newton's question of monstration is left to the reader: which of these entities is figured as monstrous? The silent face, or that which is faced?

Like Phelan's critique of *Beloved's* narrative structure, this reading of *Benito Cereno* provides an example of how ethical critique uncovers the restricted readings that a text places before us. While it could be argued that Melville's authorial intent is negatively affected by the racial discourses that permeate the historical moment in which he was writing, it is also clear that the text's innovative form and its use of physical imagery problematise such a partial reading (Stuckey, p.167). Where my reading differs from Newton's is that for me the narrative's formal strategies – its use of purposely prejudiced official depositions to inform the plot for example – undermines the neglected answerability and lack of authority which Newton sees figured in the decapitation and monstration of the silent Babo. For him, the story "makes and unmakes a black monster" (Newton, p.211), and presents a scenario where the reader cannot be answerable to Babo's narrative since it doesn't exist.⁶⁸ For me, the self-conscious interjections of the narrator and his/her collocated references to silence within a structure concerned with authority mean that that making of such a monster is highly ironic and unsettles the clichéd image of a black monster altogether. This raises another important point, fully examined in chapter six: is Newton right to assume that it would be more ethical for a white author to provide a voice for Negro slave character, rather than let him retain his/her subjective silence?

What is exemplified here are the dangers that arise if we engage in an ethical critique that deals primarily with narrative content. The last chapter raised Levinas's idea of the ethical answerability and responsibility of the subject when involved in discursive self/other relations. In terms of the ethical considerations that arise when reading, I implied that Levinas's *structuring* of discourse – its inclusion of an

⁶⁸ Newton's argument follows a vein in American criticism that claims Melville was anti-black, and was first suggested by Kaplan (see Kaplan, pp.287-301). For contrary perspectives, see Stuckey,

irreducible relation to the other (*Saying*) that can shape the content of the discourse itself (*Said*) – finds affinity with a reader’s experience of narrative structure. S/he too has a responsibility to consider the narrative as a discourse from the other and respond. It is not the content of verbal and narrative discourses that we relate to ethically, but their structure. Newton’s reading of *Benito Cereno* on the other hand, speaks of the “ethical culpability which witnessing entails, the share watchers have in the production or creation of images” (Newton, p.214). Strangely, the term watchers does not include the reader, but rather the fictional characters, and perhaps the inclusion of Melville himself:

Accordingly, within Delano’s mild and balmy ken, we find Babo’s dark and villainous “aspect” engendered, as Melville’s text in turn, I would insist, preserves, sustains, and extends it outward; one order of monstration... breeds another. (Newton, p.214)

Newton’s refusal to engage with *Benito Cereno*’s structure, and specifically its use of multiple narratives and narrators, means that he fails to address the question of responsible answerability that it poses for its contemporaneous white readers, and the intersubjective link that the narrative draws between the experiences of narrator, character and ourselves, and the actual world(s) we relate them to.

To exemplify this we can return to Levinas. He has written that the relationship between the subject and the face of the other is “beyond rhetoric” (Levinas, 1969, p.75) – an apt idea concerning Babo’s condition – but he also tells us elsewhere that while the *Saying* is an “intrigue of meaning that is not reducible to the thematization and exposition of a *Said*” (1993, p.141), it is an address which “even without leaving the lips... *appeals* to the other [in] the risk of disinterest” (p.33). Reading Babo’s predicament (beheaded and voiceless yet *facing* his persecutors), *within a structure that self-consciously draws attention to the issue of voice and authority*, casts doubt on the idea that he is simply being figured as a monstrous black insurgent. The fact that Babo has been completely objectified by the discourses that make up the narrative, that his “appeal” to those characters – and readers – whom he faces is forcibly silenced within this structure means that his image

p.172, and Morrison, 1989, pp.14-19, who according to Duvall sees Melville as a “traitor to the

expresses a subtle ironic insurgency, “even without leaving the lips.” For the responsible contemporary American reader the novel’s unsettling question of answerability should prove to be just that – the juxtaposition of Babo’s unabashed yet voiceless face against the religious and political landscape of colonial American is suddenly much more ironic and subversive than it may at first appear.⁶⁹

Newton’s reading of fictional characters’ faces in terms of Levinas’s theory of the face is not unique in recent ethical criticism. It is also a tactic adopted by Gibson when reading Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1902). He too relates Levinas’s face to facial figuration in narrative and the responses made to them by other characters. He argues, for example, that Marlow “cannot but respond” to the face of the “Intended,” Kurtz’s betrothed, and offers this as evidence for Marlow’s ethical responsibility to the woman – he lies to save her feelings, and her impression of Kurtz (Gibson, p.64; see Conrad, pp.117-21). Such a technique seems strange from these critics who emphasise the need to engage with aspects of narrative form in order to provide an ethical critique of narrative. In these examples both engage in straightforward content analysis – the literal representation of face becomes a metaphor for Levinas’s theory of the face-to-face relation between self and other.⁷⁰ As we shall see in more detail later, for the early Levinas it is the face of the other that silently appeals to the subject during discourse relations – the “proximity of the other is the signifying of the face” (1989b, p.23). Thus when two individuals enter into discourse, it is the expressiveness of their faces that makes possible the silence of the *Saying* before divulging the discourse of the *Said*. As such, how can we justify Gibson’s assumption that Marlow’s treatment of the betrothed is a narrative representation of a Levinasian ethics? Surely Marlow’s dishonesty, while apparently carried out with the betrothed feeling’s in mind, reinforces the patriarchal construction of the psychologically fragile Victorian lady? And if we could argue that the betrothed’s “pale visage, this pure brow” makes a silent appeal to him, surely

cultural construction of whiteness” (Duvall, p.18).

⁶⁹ See Sundquist, p.101 for more on Melville’s ironic portrayal of New World institutions in *Benito Cereno*.

⁷⁰ As pointed out in the last chapter, this idea of engaging in content analysis where formal analysis is the intention is a criticism that can at times be made of Nussbaum, as Eaglestone does when examining what he calls her “interpretive approach” (Eaglestone, 1997, p.55). Ravvin also uses

his appraisal of her “awful desolation” again belies a socially constructed view of womanhood, as opposed to an irreducible ethical reaction? As Driver notes, the Intended is figured as “the feminine ideal, so unsullied by the business of empire that she may not be told the truth about colonial exploitation” (Driver, p.248).

Neither critic seems to feel it necessary to point out that Levinas’s theorisation of the face-to-face relation is based on the actual flesh and blood interaction between individuals within the ‘real world’ when about to enter into direct speech.⁷¹ In fact, it depends upon the “nudity” of the face as an expression of the vulnerable exposure of the other (Levinas, 1987, p.107). As I hope to show here and in later chapters, using certain fictional content as a metaphor for the real risks and responsibilities that occur during actual direct speech is a misreading of Levinas’s philosophy. In much of his own work, Levinas himself was reluctant to apply his ethical theory of facial expression to other art forms (see Robbins, 1999 & Hand, 1996, pp.64-7). Emphasising the ethical primacy of oral discourse over other forms of language he tells us that, “Speech refuses vision, because the speaker does not deliver images of himself only, but is *personally present in his speech*, absolutely exterior to every image he would leave” (Levinas, 1969, p.296, my italics).

Yet if I claim that there are ethical considerations evident within the *structure* of *Benito Cereno*, is this idea still valid if we turn to the more structurally innovative contemporary postcolonial novels? As we have seen, this question is especially problematic if we consider that many critics read such novels as indicative of literary postmodernism, a category generally thought to represent the non-legitimacy of narratives’ representation of universal ethical values. In chapter one we saw how *Beloved*’s various authoritative narrative voices, coupled with their distinct representations of landscape, disrupt poststructuralist theories of the subject by bringing the notion of the indescribable to narrative representations of subjectivity. In the last chapter we saw how narrative structure itself is an *expressive* site which calls the reader into a responsive relation to *Shame*. Whilst bearing in mind what we

Levinas to argue that the literal images of faces in post-Holocaust fiction “develop a commitment toward the absent other that supports an ethic of humane development” (Ravvin, p.58).

⁷¹ For example, though Ravvin’s examination of Levinas’s influence on post-Holocaust Jewish fiction also indulges in this interpretive reading of facial imagery, he does acknowledge the difficulty in

have said already about the postmodern aspects of postcolonial literature, both these lines of argument will be incorporated into this chapter's ethical critique of Morrison's *Jazz* (1992). Their relevance will be judged alongside Booth's warning that we need to consistently recognise the relations between ethical criticism and socio-political criticism. As he points out, when texts are examined ethically it is inevitable that such ethics has bearing upon the political landscape in which the texts are created and read (Booth, p.12 & pp.136-7).

Ethics versus Politics.

As Bernstein points out, within traditional practical philosophy the definitions of ethics and politics are inseparable. More than this, they form a "symbiotic relationship" which defines our understanding of each term: "we cannot understand ethics without thinking through our political commitments and responsibilities. And there is no understanding of politics that does not bring us back to ethics" (Bernstein, p.9). Newton foresees a similar dependency, especially when considering the role of texts within communities (pp.179-80). Though for him and Levinas ethics affects the discursive encounter in an irreducible way unrelated to socio-political ideology, both nevertheless claim that this ethics has the potential to affect our socio-political worlds (see Smart, pp.73-4; Levinas and Kearney, pp.57-8). Gibbs similarly describes this primordial moment of ethics as a "responsibility [which] defines the position and is not the choice of a being who first has independent substantial existence" (Gibbs, p.5). For these critics then ethical experience is not a subjective decision – it is an inescapable aspect of human discourse. Such views stress the possibility that this predicative, if theoretical, ethical responsibility occurs prior to socio-political concerns which, as Belsey points out, inevitably shape discursive interaction (Belsey, 1983, p.403).

Miller also considers the idea that ethical criticism might have a positive role to play when considering socio-political relations in the public-sphere, though he distinguishes more specifically between the two categories:

equating the Levinasian face-to-face relation as an "ethical language relation" in works of art (see Ravvin, pp.58-65).

[n]o doubt the political and the ethical are always intimately intertwined, but an ethical act that is fully determined by political considerations or responsibilities is no longer ethical... The same thing could be said of cases in which the apparently ethical is subordinated to the epistemological, to some act of cognition. If there is to be such a thing as an ethical moment in the act of reading, teaching, or writing about literature, it must be *sui generis*, something individual and particular, itself a source of political or cognitive acts, not subordinated to them. (Miller, 1987, pp.4-5)

Such an ethical experience comes prior to political ones, and Miller stresses that such an “ethical moment” could itself affect socio-political acts. And though he does not emphatically state that such an influence would always be positive, his syntax does hint at this belief; ethics here is aligned with “responsibilities,” and free of epistemological or cognitive influences. It is important then that we see Miller’s view of the ethical in a particularly deconstructive light – it arrives prior to ontological experience, and as such is irreducible, unlike metaphysical discourses which deconstruct themselves.⁷²

Newton is less vague. For him, “[t]he only just politics begins as an ethics” (p.179), and as he later points out, the representation of character in narrative

grafts [degrading] political meanings onto *originally* intersubjective images and tropes; neutral faces thus become either black or white, the ‘simple’ act of looking becomes marked as white (objectifying) or black (objectified). (p.227)

Though ethics therefore provides the possibility of a just politics, the intersubjective moment (“*originally*” ethical) always runs the risk of being usurped by the political, or as the early Foucault would argue, the social self, even at the level of the biological body, is in the modern age always constructed by the discourses of macro institutions.⁷³ These are observations that I will place alongside my ethical critique of *Jazz*, thereby initiating the question of whether an ethical reading of its structure can uncover a socio-political responsibility in the novel. I am looking then for evidence of Nussbaum’s apt claim that “the novel... is a morally controversial form,” a

⁷² For a critique of Miller’s intended deconstructive approach to literary ethics see Eaglestone, 1997, pp.75-92.

⁷³ Foucault, 1975, pp.199-212, and 1991, pp.73-169.

structural relation in which readers not only face ethical considerations, but also because of these have the possibility of developing subversive ethico-political positions (Nussbaum, 1998, p.224).

Ethics and fictionalised character: Docherty's postmodern ethics.

Phelan describes *Beloved*'s narrator as "protean" since s/he provides the reader with insights into the consciousnesses of the novel's major characters (Phelan, p.323). Yet this narrator's role departs from that of traditional omniscience since these depictions of subjectivities are often strongly focalised from the characters' perspectives, or even narrated solely by interior monologue. In the latter case the voice of the narrator is completely subsumed by the character's. This protean narrator therefore incorporates both "external" and "internal" focalisation (see Rimmon-Kenan, p.74). Yet the use of interior monologue and *addressee-less* direct discourse also means that the story regularly acquires a non-conventional intradiegetic narrative function – it incorporates internal, independent character narratives (see Rimmon-Kenan, pp.91-2).⁷⁴ For Phelan this adds an ethical emphasis to the representational and hermeneutic elements of *Beloved* – its representation of character and the interpretive relationship between the reader and the story. At first glance *Jazz* seems to present us with a similar narrative technique, and, taking my lead from Phelan, I wish to examine the structural effect of utilising such a narrator.

Consider the opening passage of the novel:

Sth, I know that woman... her name is Violet, went to the funeral to see the girl and to cut her dead face they threw her to the floor and out of the church... like me, they knew who she was... because they knew that her husband, Joe Trace, was the one that shot the girl.
(Morrison, 1992, p.4)

The opening passage from *Jazz* is now well-known amongst critics of Morrison's work, one of the reasons for this being its troublesome use of exposition-like apostrophe. Some critics see the functionless sound "Sth" as exemplary of the

⁷⁴ Rimmon-Kenan outlines a hierarchical structure within stories whose central, "extradiegetic" narrative contains inner, "intradiegetic" narratives narrated by characters within the story. The terminology is derived from Genette, 1983, and Bal, 1977.

participant-narrator's construction as a jazz-music formulation (Ryan and Májoza, p.129). For Rodrigues, it is like "the muted soundsplash of a brush against a snare drum" (Rodrigues, p.154). Its use in the representation of black female direct discourse in *Beloved* perhaps casts doubt on such views, reducing it to simply another aspect of Morrison's representation of African-American oral expression.⁷⁵

All these readings are plausible, if tenuous, and they highlight the intriguing narrative subjectivity that the reader is presented with at this point and throughout the novel. In terms of narrative authority what is most interesting is the self-conscious assumption of omniscience that accompanies the opening sound. The narrator claims to "know" Violet, though s/he at once distances herself from the physical community: "like me, they know who she was, who she had to be." While the community has to work out who the attacker is ("who she had to be"), the narrator does not. While the community is "like" the narrator in terms of what they know, the narrator retains an intrusive omniscience they do not possess. This point of view is later challenged by the narrator's self-conscious admissions of inconsistency and failure when reporting events at which, as we shall see, she is apparently not present. The effect of this is that traditional definitions of narrative point-of-view are rendered unusable: we cannot even define it as first or third-person.⁷⁶

We could read such an unconventional narrator-figure as confirmation of Docherty's view that we need to critically reconsider fictional character with an awareness of the "seduction of characterization." He claims that

in postmodern narrative, character as such is never produced (it 'disappears'); rather, we have the seduction which radically involves the confusion of the ontological status of character with that of reader and author. (Docherty, 1996, p.40)

This view is exemplary of a typical postmodern reading of character where the subject is replaced by a heterogeneous "subject-in-process" derived primarily from Foucault's theory of socio-political discourse and Lacan's theory of the subject

⁷⁵ See Morrison, 1987, p.187 where Ella uses the sound to emphasise her derogatory feelings about Sethe.

⁷⁶ For more on the elusiveness of the identity and type of *Jazz*'s narrator, see Duvall, pp.132-3, and Mayberry, pp.304-5.

constructed within the linguistic system of difference.⁷⁷ Indeed, the construction of this “disembodied narrator” leads Duvall to view *Jazz* as Morrison’s most “postmodern” novel (Duvall, pp.131-3). Yet for Docherty such an outlook not only brings to the fore the non-essential nature of the subject, but also allows the development of a postmodern ethics of the subject which he calls an *ethics of alterity*. This ethics reacts against traditional theories of character by rejecting the previous phenomenological situation wherein reader and character position each other around the axioms of empirically and imperially constructed identities.⁷⁸ An example of such a traditional reading would be Defoe’s contemporary European readers identifying with Crusoe and his bourgeois maxims, and with the *reasonable* subjugation of the savage Friday.

Contrary to this practice of “character-as-position,” Docherty sees a more ethical reading arising out of the awareness of character-as-*disposition*. This view disrupts essential identity and allows the “subject-in-process [to move] towards a historical futurity in which she or he constantly defers the production of identity or of an empirically determined selfhood” (p.41). The reader, in other words, has the ability to question objectifying narratives due to her knowledge that narratives, both fictive and ontological, are numerous and prone to change. It is interesting to consider how Docherty’s “postmodern ethics” differs from Gibson’s. As seen in the last chapter, in Gibson’s Levinasian perspective the subject undergoes a fracturing due to the ethical need to give oneself over and respond to the unknowable alterity of the other. Selfhood here always undergoes an ontological disturbance by constantly having to respond to alterity. The distinction between Docherty and Gibson places the idea of a postmodern ethics under interrogation. Both critics call their ethics postmodern due to the fracturing of the subject they envisage, but in each case this fracturing occurs for a different reason. One is due to the need to constantly distinguish evolving subjectivities from dominant social discourses, and the other

⁷⁷ See for example Hunter who investigates how the Foucauldian concept of discourse affects “the practical deployment of a public apparatus of reading, in which what is to count as character is determined” (Hunter, p.247). See also Rice and Waugh, pp.119-121 on the Lacanian subject, and Martin, p.121 on the effect Lacan has had on developing a non-static view of character.

⁷⁸ Why Docherty should deem this to be specifically ethical, as opposed to moral, isn’t clear. He never describes what he means by ethics, leaving the reader with no choice but to make the assumption that what Docherty is actually providing us with is yet another historico-political morality.

occurs due to the need to constantly and responsibly react to the alterity of the other. What these critics ironically provide us with is yet another example of ethics as a discursive construction; here we have two ethics defined not by a non-political ethical value, but by their vision of a subject which corresponds to the discourses of traditional postmodernism.

Even so, Docherty's perspective does provide a useful starting point from which to consider Morrison's representation of both the narrator and characters of *Jazz*. As we have seen, *Beloved*'s innovative narrative strategies constantly question constructions of the African-American subject and its representation within historical America. We could argue then that the formal strategies affect what Newton calls the novel's representational ethics – the ethical implications of “fictionalising oneself or others by exchanging ‘person’ for ‘character’” (Newton, p.18). *Beloved*'s representation of character subjectivities could be considered ethical as it reveals that a slave's oppressed *positioning* within American discourses on the natural-world is repeatedly undermined and disrupted by the various representations the slaves themselves provide of American nature.

Yet Docherty's enthusiasm to envisage characters within a specifically postmodern context compromises and somewhat over-simplifies the representational ethics *Jazz* examines. For example, he claims that postmodern narratives, rather than producing characters, reveal a “series of fleeting instantiations of subjectivity” which abjure the notion of a definitive reality – thus, “[a]t best... the progression of a postmodern narrative cannot move from appearance to the enlightenment of a reality, but only from appearance to disappearance to *different* appearance and so on” (p.64). McHale's perspective is similar, though ultimately less fatalistic: “[P]ostmodern fiction does hold the mirror up to reality; but that reality, now more than ever, is plural” (McHale, 1987, p.39). These postmodern arguments seem to rest rather uncomfortably alongside critics who see Morrison's representation of character as formally innovative, but ultimately linked to certain African-American experience of socio-political reality.

For Jones, Morrison's representation of the heterogeneous subject paradoxically allows a new concept of modern African-American identity to form, the “pieces” which she “frets... into a strategy for survival that makes identity and

wholeness possible” (Jones, p.493). Dobbs reads the fracturing of Morrison’s characters as not simply evidence of their ephemeral nature, but closely related to the cultural significance of physical subjugation: “Loss of mother and self are... not only physiological phenomena, but also historically determined, physical realities” (Dobbs, p.571). Both these readings to certain degree share Docherty’s awareness of the unstable nature of the modern subject, especially the anamnestic function via which subjectivity is always affected by a ‘rememoration’ of the personal past. Even so, they call into question Docherty’s enthusiastic espousal of the idea that “realities” are also impossible to define due to their being constructed and therefore non-essential. Along with other critics, both argue that Morrison’s work not only *refigures* the representation of African-Americans, but that those refigurations have profound bearing upon the actual experiences of black people in modern America.

Docherty’s description of such criticism is derisive. He claims that “judging the characters and actions as if they did indeed exist independently of... fiction” is moralistic, contrived only through the consideration of “‘personal’ existence” and in his view “profoundly *unethical*” (Docherty, 1996, pp.36-7). In my view this distinction between postcolonial and postmodern views of the fractured subject provides the opportunity for a new ethical critique of narrative to be introduced. If, as Newton argues, a narrative ethics investigates both the intersubjective nature of literature and its participatory link to the reader’s external world, then perhaps it might offer ways of examining how the heterogeneous aspects of fictional character have ethical implications for the realities with which readers are familiar.

Jazz: Musical form as a structure of narrative expression.

The latter part of *Jazz* describes the armed hunt by Joe, one of the novel’s protagonists, for Dorcas, his teenage ex-lover, through the streets of the “city” (it is never named for us). This section describes the murder which links all of the characters whose pasts and present thoughts the narrator divulges. The self-conscious unreliability of *Jazz*’s narrator is foregrounded afterwards though when she admits that her interpretation of Joe’s hunt for Dorcas – the one presented here – was

flawed.⁷⁹ She tells us that at the time she believed he was simply looking for Dorcas, yet realises now that his thoughts and feelings were influenced by the memories of other hunts he made as a teenager for the wild-woman mother he never knew: “To this moment I’m not sure what his tears were really for... All the while he was running through the streets in bad weather I thought he was looking for her, not Wild’s chamber of gold” (p.221). The question of authority is raised here then, with the reader reminded of McHale’s claims concerning the unreliability of postmodern narratives,⁸⁰ and perhaps also a sense of Fludernik’s warning that sometimes when the reliability of their speaker is undermined non-conventional narrative structures may threaten “to disintegrate into a congeries of unrelated discourses” (Fludernik, p.278).

These postmodern readings of narrative legitimacy are compromised by the fact that the narrator is not making her admission of unreliability with a view to remedy her flawed narrative. The delegitimate or unreliable aspect of the narrator’s account is rectified by the fact that the description of the hunt (given through Joe’s direct discourse) was fragmented by the interjections of an alternative speaker who recounts Joe’s subjective recollection of his past. The form utilised by this unknown speaker (we assume it is not the original narrator since she denies knowledge of it) is intricate and unpredictable – initially third-person and omniscient, then at times highly focalised through Joe with interspersions of interior monologue. For example, when hunting Dorcas, Joe’s direct discourse presents his conscious thoughts, though we do not know to whom he is speaking, “When I find her, I know – I bet my life – she won’t be holed up with one of them. His clothes won’t be all mixed up with hers. Not her. Not Dorcas. She’ll be alone. Hardheaded. Wild, even. But alone” (p.182).

This discourse is followed by a physical pause in the text and an extended ellipsis, after which the narrative content is revived with a third-person presentation of the younger Joe’s focalised search for his mother:

Beyond the tree, behind the hibiscus, was a boulder. Behind it an opening so badly disguised it could only be the work of a human. No fox or foaling doe would be so sloppy. Had she

⁷⁹ For ease of writing I will assume the narrator is female, though as Gates points out the idea that the narrator is “*both and neither*” male or female adds to the novel’s theme of indeterminacy (Gates, p.54)

been hiding there? Was she that small? He squatted to look closer for signs of her, recognizing none. (p.183)

The transcription of events from varying points of view plays an important role if we consider them alongside the narrator's later claim that she misinterpreted Joe's thoughts and actions. The admission is ironic not only because it undermines the narrator's omniscience, but also because the reader has already had access to the knowledge the narrator claims to be ignorant of. The extended paragraph breaks that repeatedly figure and mark spatial shifts in the narrative point of view make it clear that Joe's discourse is closely, and anamnestically, related to events in his past. While on the one hand this is an example of the narrative's ability to undermine homogeneous interpretations of character, it also presents a many-sided yet composite picture of a character's thoughts and actions in the face of the narrator's self-conscious admission of unreliability. This disparity between reader knowledge, the subjectivity of the narrator and the 'composite' fragmentation of the characters is not as incongruous as it first appears if we consider the similarities between the novel structure and jazz music itself.

Critics such as Burton, Lewis, and Rodrigues have commented on the parallels that can be drawn between *Jazz's* structure and the music form.⁸¹ And as we shall see, theorists such as Gilroy and Snead have examined the form of jazz and other African-American music not only in relation to literary texts, but as a signifying practice that occurs across the cultural spectrum of diasporic-African forms. Peterson fittingly links *Jazz*, jazz music, and wider African-American culture:

jazz offers another example of a (narrative) line that resists predetermination... the room for improvisation and the spontaneity of performance create a fluid and shifting text. Jazz as a genre revisits its own past melody to claim what is useful... it is, in other words, a model of a useful black history. (Peterson, p.210)

⁸⁰ See McHale, 1992, p.29, and 1987, pp.197-215.

⁸¹ See Burton, pp.185-6, Lewis, pp.272-3, and Rodrigues, p.156.

Taking this view of the jazz structure's symbolic relation to African-American cultural consciousness as given, what I want to examine is the role played by the reader in the complex narrative structure placed before him/her.

The structure is centred around the narrator's story of events and, as shown above, the narratives of several main characters which sometimes complement and at other times undermine the narrator's account. The characters' narratives are in general highly focalised from their perspectives, though sometimes shifting to interior monologue pieces that completely subsume the narrator and attain full voice and authority over the content. Thus the "fluid and shifting" discourses that shape the structure are formed by the distinct voices which engage the narrative with varying intensity and volume, and which inform the story provided. This technique mirrors that of syncopation and improvisation which Southern explains as jazz's most salient features: "Jazz is a vocally orientated music; its players replace the voice with their instruments...but it is the personality of the player and the way he improvises that produces the music" (Southern, p.363).

A further description of this improvisatory form by Bond aptly highlights how such techniques might be used in alternative art-forms. He tells us that jazz

relies upon introduction, statement of theme, repetition, and Wham! an improvised reworking of the familiar which depends upon everyone knowing the original reference sound, in order to appreciate where [the artist] took it then [took] off. (Bond, qtd. in Jones, p.487)

Joe's hunt for Dorcas is an example of such disjointed shifts and reworkings in the novel's structure. Another example is the consistent practice of allowing the closing clause of each chapter to semantically and syntactically relate to the first clause of the next chapter's first sentence. The fact that these chapter breaks often signal a shift in narrative focalisation reinforces Bond's description of jazz. The opening statements of each new chapter depend on a reworking of the familiar simply because they semantically relate to the closing clause of the preceding chapter – they can be read as a continuation of preceding syntax. The close of chapter one reads: "He is married to a woman who speaks mainly to her birds. One of whom answers back: 'I love you'" (p.25). The following two pages are blank and in the next chapter the narrative resumes with the phrase "Or used to" (p.27). While the syntax of the

resumed narrative marks a semantic continuation of the previous chapter's closing clause, it also marks a radical shift in the temporal and spatial site of the narrative voice. Events in the previous chapter were related in the present tense, whereas now the narrative subjectivity has jumped forward to transcribe events, in the past tense, that followed those of the first chapter.

Morrison further reinforces this replication of performative technique by placing a blank page physically between the chapters to accentuate the "Wham!" and reworking effect of the structure. As such, the attempt to replicate jazz performance in language means momentarily taking the reader outside the narrative itself, to the blank page of the unwritten, the unknown, just as jazz music itself momentarily places the unknown before its audience during each improvisory pause. What I want to suggest is that *Jazz's* structure not only mirrors musical form, it also attempts to reflect jazz as *performance* and *expression* as well. As Peterson insists, such innovative forms of expression rely on the listener/reader to render coherence and recognition to a communicative performance that would otherwise risk devolving into the unrecognisable (Peterson, p.216). The reader needs to self-consciously interact with the narrative performance then to make sense of what Gilroy calls the "radically unfinished forms" of "black diaspora" music which are expressive of ex-slave culture (Gilroy, 1993a, p.73 & p.105). As we saw earlier, Fludernik points out that the risk of dissolution is one of the marks of radically unreliable narrators, a risk that would seem to be removed here by the self-conscious appeal to reader-involvement.

Narrative structure and the responsibility of the reader.

It is this self-conscious inclusion of the *reader* as text's 'listener' or 'audience' that is fundamental to the representational and hermeneutic ethics that *Jazz* espouses. In the previous chapter I introduced Levinas's theory of the *Saying* and the *Said* in the structure of discursive relations in order to consider the *halting* effect that narratives can impose on the reader. What I want to emphasise here is the element of risk and responsibility that Levinas envisages in the *Saying* and how for the reader it might add to an ethical consideration of *Jazz's* structure.

Whereas the early Levinas, as we have seen, repeatedly emphasises the primacy – and responsibility – of the relationship with the other in defining our own reality,⁸² later he spends more time investigating how this responsibility is related to discourse. This is not only the act of signifying (speaking) with the other, but the expressive-ness which is antecedent to speech (Levinas, 1981a, p.5). The ethical relation entailed in the bringing of signifying to the other is no longer hinged simply on being responsible for others during discourse. Its presence is also based on the fact that involving oneself *in discourse* opens the speaker and listener up to an element of personal risk which is evident in the structure of discourse, in particular the distinction between *Saying* and *Said* (Critchley, 1992, p.7). All intersubjective signifying is dependent on this exposure to the other:

Saying is communication, to be sure, but as a condition for all communication, as exposure... The ethical sense of such an exposure to another, which is the intention of making signs... is now visible. It is not due to the contents that are inscribed in the said and transmitted to the interpretation and decoding done by the other. It is in the risky uncovering of oneself, in the sincerity... and the abandoning of all shelter, in the exposure to traumas, vulnerability. (Levinas, 1981a, p.48)

Here we have a brief introduction to the operation of the *Saying* and the ethical relation it encompasses, and the manner in which it is presupposed by the *Said*. I will be arguing that the prevalence of the everyday nature and responsibilities of this encounter – “presupposed by the Said” and experienced by the listener of discourse – is emphasised by the structuring of discourses in *Jazz* itself.

As we shall see in chapters five and six, the ethics of this relation is closely connected to the flesh and blood physical status of the subject, and the degree to which this corporeality is put at risk when engaged in discourse. In terms of *Jazz* though it is important that we grasp the intricate relationship between communication and responsible ethics. Consider Derrida’s idea that within Western thought a moment has passed when,

⁸² See for example Levinas, 1969, pp.178-9 where he argues that exposure to the Other “engenders me for responsibility; as responsible I am brought back to my final reality.”

language invaded the universal problematic, [and] in the absence of a center or origin, everything became discourse... a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. (Derrida, 1978b, p.110)

If as critical theorists we hold with this well-known view then we must necessarily return to one of the problems that arose in the reading of *Shame* in the previous chapter: can we locate an ethics within postcolonial narratives that can be convincingly related to a reality ‘outside the text,’ or that might exist “outside a system of differences”? Can ethics ever be anything but a discourse itself? This brings us back to Docherty’s account of how texts should *not* be read as ethical encounters which can be related to any singular reality outside the text. Yet, if one of the main aims of *Jazz* is to create a structure that presupposes a symbiotic relation with its readers, as jazz music does with its listeners, then surely it might also presuppose a necessary relation with the ultimate realities which its ‘real’ readers are familiar with?

The opening sound of *Jazz* and its narrator’s closing comments present some clues to answering such questions. As will be shown, the semantic sign “Sth” initially warns readers that the narrative structure they are about to engage in is closely linked to a phonological based aesthetics. What I want to suggest is that it immediately complicates the deconstructive view of written text as a series of signifiers which can be subjectively (mis)interpreted by readers. Considering the historicity of *all* Western texts Derrida argues that “the person writing is inscribed in a determined textual system. Even if there is never a pure signified, there are different relationships as to that which, from the signifier, is *presented* as the irreducible stratum of the signified” (Derrida, 1976, p.160). Writing, though never capable of *presenting* a “pure signified,” does refer, through the use of understandable signifiers, to an apparent “irreducible stratum of the signified” (a transcendental reality or presence which would appear to preclude language).

Therefore though writing seemingly refers to an origin outside of language in a secondary relation to speech, Derrida claims that in fact

writing – no longer indicating a particular... form of language in general (whether understood as communication, relation, expression...) – is beginning to go beyond the

extension of language. In all senses of the word, writing thus *comprehends* language... The secondarity that it seemed possible to ascribe to writing alone affects all signifieds in general... There is not a single signified that escapes, even if it is recaptured, the play of signifying references that constitute language. (Derrida, 1976, pp.6-7)

Speech therefore, as a manner of producing signifieds, is in fact a form of writing. Like writing, speech ‘puts into play’ signifying references. Interestingly, in the opening line of *Jazz* the startling effect of “Sth” is that it is not put in play – it is unrecognisable amongst the “signifying references that constitute language.” This phonological signifier ironically does, *at this moment*, apparently refer to something outside semantics. It therefore problematises the claim that Western texts are traditionally based upon the “the idea of an immediate, intuitive access to meaning” (Norris, 1982, p.30). As Morrison has written of a similarly disorientating start to another of her novels, it risks “confronting the reader with what must be immediately incomprehensible in that simple, declarative authoritative sentence” (Morrison, 1989, p.32). As we know, jazz music relies upon syncopation and the improvisation of the as yet unknown. As a text of musical notes (or musical signs) *it does not actually exist until played*, the listener always risking an encounter with the unfamiliar.⁸³ What we see originating in this novel is a risk of *responsiveness* on the part of the reader, due to a narrative structure that complicates traditional conceptions of reading and writing.

The closing paragraphs of the novel reinforce this idea and at the same time seem to show a concern with Docherty’s dispositioning of the reading subject. The narrator tells us that she longs to “say out loud what [public lovers] have no need to say at all,” and claims, “You are free to do it and I am free to let you because look, look. Look where your hands are. Now” (p.229). Jones reads these lines as a closing order from the narrator to the reader which demands to be taken up immediately: “Look where your hands are. Now.” The simple syntax and the finality of “Now” would seem to suggest that she is right. Since the narrator’s discourse is aimed at us – and assuming we obey her – we realise that at this point of reading our hands are holding *Jazz*, and that we are self-consciously participating in the act of responding

to the text, in much the same way a jazz musician responds to the music by placing her hands on an instrument and performing her improvisation. It would seem that what is being emphasised here for the listener/reader figure is the fact of his or her own role in responding to and interacting with the jazz structure placed before her. For Matus it reminds us that “[s]ince the book is powerless unless picked up and read, its pages turned, the reader’s response is the very condition of its existence” (Matus, p.124)

We can see how this resembles Snead’s theory of the response expectation in black cultural forms. For him such structures imply

[n]ot only improvisation but also the characteristic ‘call and response’ element in black culture (which in eliciting the participation of the group at random...) requires an assurance of repetition... the beat... must at any point be ‘social’... The typical polymetry means that there are at least two or more rhythms going alongside the listener’s own beat. The listener’s beat is a kind of ‘horizon of expectations’ whereby he or she knows where the constant beat must fall in order properly to make sense of the gaps that the other interacting drummers have let fall. (Snead, p.68)

This interpretation of black cultural form borrows heavily from the structure of jazz music. Importantly we see Snead emphasising not only the improvisory aspects of the jazz form, but the responsibility placed upon the audience to envisage and sustain “a kind of ‘horizon of expectation’” through their provision of a beat. The exact form of the musicians’ next improvisory departure is itself unknown, but is nevertheless dependent on the audience’s participation in the “social” act of expressive communication. In view of *Jazz*, it would seem the reader has the opportunity to respond to those others involved in the *expressiveness* of this novel – those others being the narrative itself and the distinct discourses of which it is made. What we see here then is the type of text that Said says “seems to self-consciously... incorporate the explicit circumstances of its concretely imagined... situation” and one which “deliberately conceives the text as supported by a discursive situation involving speaker and audience” (Said, 1983, p.40).

⁸³ Or as Morrison has said in interview: “jazz: it is open on the one hand and complicated and inaccessible on the other” (Leclair, p.124).

It is interesting to consider how this view of jazz form and narrative structure relates to Gibbs's view of the ethical dimension of pragmatic semiotics (the relations of signs and their users). He claims that unlike general pragmatic theory where attention is given to the degree to which understandable signs are dependant on the cultural context of usage (see Levinson, p.9), we need to also examine the responsibility entailed in the "handing over of signs" (Levinas, 1981a, p.62). Obviously influenced by Levinas, he claims that this ethics "examines responsibility in the medium of signs because a sign is something that refers to something for someone. When we look to signs, we are already in the midst of relations *for* another (and not only *to* another)" (Gibbs, p.6). As with Levinas and Newton, the radical aspect of this claim lies in its conviction that responsibility and ethics should not be looked for solely in the semantic content of narrative or speech, but in the actual *action* or *expression* (*Saying*) that anticipates the passing of signs between self and other. Gibbs contentious claim then is that the

claim of ethics always occurs in the dimension of ought that governs signifying practices, but ethics is not an account of the motives of the author or speaker... to examine our motives in using signs would be to take recourse in the medium of consciousness. *Why we should listen, for instance, is the reason within the practice and may often be ignored or transgressed in our intentions...* Relations are struck in performances that exceed our intentions... We do use words and other signs to know the world, but the reason why... has to do with the social relations for the sake of justice and responsibility for each other. (Gibbs, pp.6-8)⁸⁴

Accordingly, a pragmatic ethics isn't found by considering the morality of human actions and motives, as it is in traditional ethical inquiry, but rather in the intersubjective meaning that is always already present in discursive practice – the "meaning that pervades the practice" (p.7). '*Why we should listen*' to another person is a question always made partly redundant by the fact that *we do*. Whether we agree with what another person has to say, whether we like or dislike the other person, even if we discard their views, or interpret it in ideologically informed ways, the fact is we will listen to what they say whether we like it or not. We have no choice but to

react to the speech of another, even if it is in conscious silence or violence. This fact is ignored by the actual discourse we respond to them with. The ethics of ‘passing signs’ is therefore something which all of us engage in, but its ethical meaning is found in the responsibilities one takes on when about to enter into discourse, not in the content of discourse itself – we are obliged to listen to others no matter what. Like the jazz structure we have examined here, it is not so much the improvised content of the narrative discourse that harbours a social responsibility, but the necessary participation of both musician and listener to make the evolving syncopated structure possible. This can be reaffirmed by returning to the active or performative element of *Jazz*’s hunt sequence.

When *Jazz*’s narrator tells us of her ‘mis’-telling of Joe’s hunt for Dorcas it foregrounds for us the “call and response” element of black aesthetics that Snead examines, as well as the improvisory syncopation of jazz music. The reader is immediately made to ask questions of the hunt narrative: how could the narrator be unaware of Joe’s focalised consciousness *within her own narrative*? Snead contextualises the aesthetics that necessitate this question in the first place. As noted, the scene consists of repeated shifts in temporal and spatial narrative content, and the markedness of these disjointed discourses is reinforced by the narrator’s ignorance of them. Though the narrator is a central character who exercises a certain amount of control over much of the narrative, the jazz structure insists that she relinquish that control at times to other participants in the story, in this case an unknown speaker with access to Joe’s consciousness. The success of this improvised syncopation depends upon the reader “knowing the original reference sound” – the narrator’s introduction to the narrative of the hunt and Joe’s dialogue. The repeated shifts between the various speakers – the narrator, Joe, and another speaker – reflect Snead’s claim that there are always at least two or more rhythms going alongside the listener’s own beat – the reader has the overall beat and knows the theme, the separate discourses of other speakers provide the juxtaposed yet complementary rhythms.

⁸⁴ This definition of pragmatics is based on Morris’s splitting of semiotic theory into the study of its three main aspects: syntactics (the relation of signs to other signs), semantics (the relations of signs and their referents), and pragmatics (the relations of signs and their users).

This reading therefore rejects Ryan and Májoza's view of the narrator as "the character, jazz" (Ryan and Májoza, p.129), emphasising rather the novel structure itself as representative of the jazz form.⁸⁵ Thus though the narrator is never permanently silenced within the narrative, but merely in breaks, the responsibility for the narrative is repeatedly shifted away from her towards the other characters, and as I have implied, the reader. The other effect is that the hierarchical relation Rimmon-Kenan draws between extradiegetic and intradiegetic narrators is interrupted and undermined: for the jazz structure to successfully 'perform' its story it is necessary that the relevance of all character rhythms (discourses) be juxtaposed and incorporated against that of the initial narrator.

The central narrator's admission of misinterpretation bears interesting relation to Ryan and Májoza's claim that

[g]overning the blues is an ethic that insists on a declaration (sounding) of wrongdoing... The singer admits his/her responsibility for a variety of wrongful actions ranging from infidelity to extravagant spending... Blame or responsibility is never displaced. Instead, the singer takes responsibility for *what has happened* and for *what must happen*. (Ryan and Májoza, p.150).

Though I share the view that ethics is a matter of acknowledging responsibility, the claim that it is the singer who must accept responsibility seems to me to ignore the wider implications the jazz structure has on the idea of reader participation. Snead's claim that the listener forms an intricate and necessary part of jazz aesthetics is borne out by Jones's view that reader participation is fundamental to uncovering *Jazz's* aesthetic intentions – jazz is, after all, call and *response*. We need to consider that it is not only the narrator and characters that are held accountable for the implications of the narrative, but that the reader has a responsibility for them as well.

What *Jazz* exemplifies then is a reader-text relationship wherein the onus lies on the reader's responsibility to interact with *narrative structure* as opposed to *narrative content*. The reader here is no longer simply an interpreter of narrative discourse which, according to Fish, was non-existent prior to the reader's arrival

⁸⁵ Matus proffers a similar idea: "the book itself is conceived as a narrative performance, the narrator becoming indistinguishable from the story it makes" (Matus, p.124).

(Fish, pp.322-3). The novel emphasises the degree to which the reader must interact with this narrative even before considering the content of what is actually said. Responsibility in this case does not mean being responsible for simply *subjectively interpreting* narrative, as with Fish, but rather attending to the fact that the reader undergoes other experiences prior to and alongside interpretation, and that the structure of narrative is central to this relation (see Fish, p.314). Joe's discourse, though apparently directed at no-one in particular, is not the sole reason that the reader has to interact with the text to gain an insight into the anamnestic relation between Joe's present hunt and his past. This is also due to the pauses that fragment and 'rework' the narrative and necessarily enable a particular form of reader participation, as well the highly focalised interjections of an unknown narrator, and the initial narrator's self-reflexive admissions of unreliability. As Willis points out, Morrison's narratives "disrupt" the everyday reader experience by incorporating what she calls "eruptions of funk" within her narratives, which are "really nothing more than the intrusion of the past in the present" (Willis, p.265 & 280). Reader responsibility therefore arises here not through the interpretation of writing, but in the unavoidable and necessary experience of narrative structure, a perspective that has obvious similarities with Levinas's view that responsibilities arise during direct discourse due to its structure.

Even so, one of the difficulties with this perspective is the fact that Levinas himself was strongly opposed to applying his theory of discourse to books, writing, and aesthetics in general, as he strongly advocated the distinction between the "privilege of the living word" and "the word that is an image and already a picaresque sign" (Levinas, 1949, p.148).⁸⁶ What I would like to do then is return to the work of Derrida, who examined this aspect of Levinas's work, and posit *Jazz* as

⁸⁶ See Ravvin, p.65, and Eaglestone, 1997, p.99 on this aspect of Levinas's early philosophy. See Levinas, 1948; 1969, p.74 & p.176; and 1981b, pp.122-28 for his own commentary on it. See also Hand's in-depth account of Levinas's relationship with aesthetics where he claims that though Levinas denounces art, it also occupies a complex and even self-contradictory place within his work (Hand, 1996). He also examines how Levinas's ethical view of aesthetics was influenced by an opposition to the "violent or triumphalist" aesthetic proposed by Heidegger's 'nationalist metaphysics' (1996, pp.79-81).

exemplary of some of the theoretical influences that Derrida and Levinas have on each other, and on an ethics of reading.⁸⁷

Origins of the *trace*: Derrida and Levinas.

Jones draws our attention to the relation that can be drawn between the ‘breaks’ in the narrative that the reader is forced to respond to and the Derridean *trace* we encounter when interpreting signs. She does this by reading the narrative’s breaks and ‘cracks’ as an “absence of presence” within the reconstruction of African-American history, and points out that such traces within the historical narrative mark an absolute alterity within it, as Derrida’s definition of the trace does within writing (Jones, p.483). For Derrida the trace or “tracings” are always marked in signifying, but “are not present in themselves since they always refer, perpetually allude or represent” (Derrida, 1981a, p.162). An explication of how the trace makes meaning possible within writing by constantly deferring to the non-presence of the other is provided below. It also exemplifies how the trace figures in Derrida’s wider project of re-conceiving the role of writing as no longer secondary to speech.

Why traces?... It is a question... of producing a new concept of writing... The play of differences... [forbids] at any moment, or in any sense, that a simple element be *present* in and of itself, referring only to itself. Whether in the order of spoken discourse or written discourse, no element can function as a sign without referring to another element which itself is not simply present... Nothing, neither among the elements nor within the system, is anywhere ever simply present or absent. There are only, everywhere, differences and traces of traces. (Derrida, 1981b, pp.26-7)

While the trace on the one hand undermines the mimetic claim of narratives, and the authority of writing itself, it also opens up a space (“hymen”) that “both sows confusion *between* opposites *and* stands *between* the opposites ‘at once’” (Derrida, 1981a, p.164). As Bhabha has shown, it therefore provides an in-between space which undermines the logocentricity of Western texts and can exemplify the ambivalence of the homogeneous and silenced Other of these texts (Bhabha, pp.52-

⁸⁷ See Critchley, 1992 for what is probably the fullest account of the unacknowledged degree to which Levinas and Derrida were in an almost reciprocal relationship of influence on each other. For introduction to this idea see Critchley, 1992, pp.9-13.

3). Derrida also points out though that in trying to expose the trace of the other, and write or speak about it, we always fall into the trap that is language, and as such create more traces. We cannot, for example, make generalising claims about the possibility of a universal ethics without leaving our own writing open to deconstruction, a fact that Derrida exemplifies by citing the example of Western philosophy and attempts made to undermine it. He claims that because changes in perspective fail to mention “all the other forms of... perspective... the simple practice of language ceaselessly reinstates the new terrain on the oldest ground” (Derrida, 1982a, p.135). Unless we carry out that impossible act of considering all perspectives on a matter, we always leave a trace of otherness within our writing, a fact that makes meaning – through difference – possible in the first place.

Interestingly though, it was Levinas, not Derrida, who first examined the idea of a trace that arises in discursive relations between the self and its other.⁸⁸ For Levinas the trace is something beyond our knowledge which we experience as we approach the face of an other person. It exposes the other as absolute alterity and calls our idea of rational objectification into question:

When a stone has scratched another stone, the scratch can, to be sure, be taken as a trace, but in fact without the man who held the stone this scratch is but an effect. It is as little a trace as the forest fire is a trace of the lightning... The absoluteness of the presence of the other... is not the simple presence in which the last analysis things are also present. Their presence belongs to the presence of my life. Everything that constitutes my life with its past and its future is assembled in the present in which things come to me. But it is in the face of the other that a face shines; what is presented there is absolving itself from my life and visits me as already ab-solute. Someone has already passed. His trace does not *signify* his past, as it does not *signify* his labor or his enjoyment in the world... A face is of itself a visitation and a transcendence. But a face, wholly open, can at the same time be in itself because it is in the

⁸⁸ Derrida acknowledges the role Levinas's trace plays in informing his own view of *différance*: “A past that has never been present: this formula is the one that Emmanuel Levinas uses... to qualify the trace and enigma of absolute alterity: the Other. Within these limits, and from this point of view at least, the thought of *différance* implies the entire critique of classical ontology undertaken by Levinas. And the concept of the trace, like that of *différance* thereby organizes, along the lines of these different traces and differences of traces... the network which reassembles and traverses our ‘era’ as the delimitation of the ontology of presence” (Derrida, 1982b, p.21). See also Bernasconi, 1985, pp.13-15 for a useful introduction to the origin and influence of the Levinasian trace in Derrida's formulation of *différance*. For more on the origins of certain terms in Derrida, see Attridge, 1992, pp.9-10. It should be noted that the trace is a term also used by Nietzsche and Freud.

trace of illeity. Illeity is the origin of the alterity of being in which the in itself of objectivity participates, while also betraying it. (Levinas, 1963, pp.358-59)

A face is not the appearance or sign of some reality... It is a trace of itself, a trace in the trace of an abandon. It obsesses the subject without staying in correlation with him, without equalling me in a consciousness, ordering me before appearing, in... obligation. These are the modalities of signification irreducible to... presences, different from the present... (1981a, pp.93-4)

For Levinas then, there is always a trace of otherness in the face-to-face relation and in ontological experience that resists objectification (1969, pp.79-81), and this trace manifests itself in the silence of the *Saying* (1981a, pp.46-47). Yet as the passages above suggest, in much of Levinas's early work the role of the trace in calling us to responsibility in front of the other's face is an occurrence of one-to-one speech relations – the other needs to be present for us to experience their presence as a trace of the ab-solute. Its non-presence in the world of discourse does not exceed speech and 'contaminate' writing (Eaglestone, 1997, p.99). For the early Levinas literature is a determined entity, "completed *in spite of* the social or material causes that interrupt it. It does not give itself out as the beginning of a dialogue" (1948, p.131). While the content of literature is language that attests to the existence of an author, it nevertheless lacks the physical embodiment of the author with whom we can enter into ethics through dialogue. For language to harbour the responsibility of the *Saying* which precedes the content of discourse, the early Levinas asks us to realise that the "face, pre-eminently expression, formulates the first word: the signifier arising at the thrust of the sign, *as eyes that look at you*" (1969, p.178, my italics). An irreducible trace of the other thus arises prior to and during discourse and calls us into question, but it depends upon being in close proximity to the other. As such, using Levinas to responsibly locate the other within narratives isn't as straightforward as critics such as Newton and Gibson seem to suggest.

Derrida's attention to Levinas's work changes that. One of Derrida's specific intentions of this attention is to draw into question the emphasis that the early Levinas places on the role of speech, much as he similarly questions the primacy

accorded to speech within *logos*.⁸⁹ Somewhat satirically, Derrida notes that for Levinas,

[o]nly living speech, in its mastery and magisteriality, is able to assist itself; and only living speech is expression and not a servile sign... The written and the work are not expressions but signs for Levinas... Is “oral discourse” “the plenitude of discourse?” Or is it, in another sense, the “speech activity” in which I “am absent, missing from my products” which then betray me more than they express me?... Is it not possible to invert all of Levinas’s statements on this point? By showing, for example, that writing can assist itself, for it *has time* and freedom, escaping better than speech from empirical urgencies... That the writer absents himself better, that is, expresses himself better as an other, addresses himself more effectively than the speech of man? (Derrida, 1978a, pp.101-2; quotations are from Levinas, 1969)

What Derrida effectively does here is throw into question any chance of applying Levinas’s ethical theory of the self/other discourse relation to literary discourse. As Bernasconi puts it, for Derrida the trace in writing and signifying is the trace “of a text and not [simply] of the Other” (Bernasconi, 1985, p.24). This critique of the primacy placed upon responsibility during speech is also reinforced by Derrida’s exemplification elsewhere that writing, due to the risk of its failure to communicate its intended meaning (also an effect of the unknowable trace within written language), does indeed call the reader into responsiveness and responsibility.⁹⁰ What we see here then is a conviction on the part of both critics to acknowledge the non-presence of otherness in language, though both disagree on the primacy to accord speech or writing. This has led Bernasconi to argue that Derrida isn’t so much criticising Levinas’s work as *deconstructing* it (Bernasconi, 1986, p.187). It is Derrida’s intention to prove that Levinas’s radical view of language and his theory of

⁸⁹ The primacy accorded speech in the early Levinas can be seen here: “Speech is an incomparable manifestation: it does not accomplish the movement from the sign to the signifier and the signified; it unlocks what every sign closes up at the very moment it opens the passage that leads to the signified, by making the signifier *attend* this manifestation of the signified. This attendance measures the surplus of spoken language over written language, which has again become signs” (Levinas, 1969, p.182). For the early Levinas then de Saussure’s distinction between signifier and signified operates only within language as speech, of which writing is merely a representation.

⁹⁰ See Derrida, 1987, p.5 on the idea that *The Postcard* draws its readers into an uncertain though interactive relation with it as a text. See also Derrida, 1987, pp.28-30, and Gibbs, pp.72-4 for a commentary on the responsibilities it unmasks for both writer and reader.

speech “remains under the sway of metaphysics” as he attempts to transcend it (Derrida, 1978a, p.151), yet he provides no firm rebuttal of Levinas’s claim that discourse originates in the non-violent silence of the *Saying* which offers a “transhistorical” distinction from the violence which both theorists identify in the historicised discourse of the *Said* (pp.147-48). In fact, he leaves his final comment on Levinas’s theory of the irreducibility of the other’s non-presence as a series of questions: “Has not the concept of experience always been determined by the metaphysics of presence? Is not experience always an encountering of an irreducible presence, the perception of a phenomenality?” (p.152). While Derrida claims then that Levinas’s work cannot escape metaphysical language, his consideration of Levinas’s proposals seem less a critique and more an investigation into their possibility. The importance that this idea of an irreducible non-violence holds for Derrida’s later work will be looked at again.

Turning again to *Jazz* then, I want to propose that neither Derrida or Levinas provides a definitive answer to a postcolonial ethics of reading *Jazz*, but rather that *both of them through each other do*. It is my view that the novel self-consciously investigates the role of the *trace* when attempting to draw the reader into a responsive reading of its structure, as well as its ethics. Yet unlike Jones, I wish to do this by attending to Derrida and Levinas’s attention to each other. An example of this influence can be seen in Derrida’s consideration of the anamnestic trace in Mallarmé, when he contends that it is the “plays of facial expression and the gestural tracings” which offers up a “past, *under false appearance of a present*” (not dissimilar to how the representation of Joe’s past *during* the hunt expresses it under a false appearance of a present). The idea of a trace reliant on physical expression immediately alerts us to Levinas’s unmentioned influence, and its relationship with the “other absolute origins” of memory *in the present*, is acknowledged in Derrida’s first major essay on Levinas (Derrida, 1978a, p.132).

Traces of Derrida and Levinas in *Jazz*.

All the silences and breaks in the narrative, and the anamnestic aspect of Joe’s experience of the hunt, allude to a trace of the unknowable aspects of the narrative that the reader is forced to acknowledge and respond to. Even his very name (Joe

Trace), alludes to the untold story of his parents about which he knows nothing for sure, and about which we have only disjointed and unverifiable details. Without the breaks that shift the narrative away from the main narrator the reader cannot gain an insight into Joe's subjective past and its relation to the present. The interaction here between the reading subject and the fictional character of Joe as other bears little relation to Docherty's view that postmodern characters are constructed as a "series of fleeting instantiations of subjectivity" which abjure the notion of a definitive reality. On the contrary, the reader of *Jazz* who takes up the narrator's invitation to question the structure through her admission of irresponsibility uncovers an intradiegetic narrative which self-consciously invites the reader to participate in its construction and in doing so consider the 'real-life' implications of the silences and traces that figure the stories of characters such as Joe and Violet. The trace that marks our reading of Joe's story is exposed as anamnesis: it is a re-memoration of a silenced personal history that the reader must attend to.

As Jones points out, the narrative portrayal of Violet shares similar features. The narrator figures her as a character full of "private cracks," "dark fissures" that deface the "string of small, well-lit scenes" that make up Violet's day. These cracks are presented as the cause of Violet's "public craziness": "Sometimes when Violet isn't paying attention she stumbles onto these cracks, like the time when, instead of putting her left heel forward, she stepped back and folded her legs in order to sit in the street" (pp.22-3). This craziness is also figured in Violet's random inability to involve herself in semantic discourse: "Violet had stumbled into a crack or two. Felt the anything-at-all begin in her mouth. Words connected only to themselves pierced an otherwise normal comment" (p.23). Interestingly, this bears close relation to the later Levinas's description of those medically defined as mad and their inability to involve themselves in logical discourse:

It is in the association of philosophy with the State and medicine that the breakup of discourse is surmounted. The interlocutor who does not yield to logic is threatened with prison or the asylum... violence... ensures to the rationalism of logic a universality... But the State does not irrevocably discount folly... It does not untie the knots but cuts them. The said thematizes the interrupted dialogue or dialogue delayed by silences, failure or delirium, but the intervals are not recuperated. Does not the discourse that suppresses the interruptions of

discourse by relating them maintain the discontinuity under the knots with which the thread is tied again? (Levinas, 1981a, pp.170-1)

The “thread” that Levinas refers to here is *logos*, the discourse of Western philosophy which defines Western reason. The interruptions or “knots” are intercessions into logical discourse (like Violet’s semantically troublesome “Words connected only to themselves”) which the *Said* of rational discourse subsumes and maintains in silence.⁹¹ As Eaglestone puts it, “[t]he thread – the ‘Said’ – is interrupted with knots – the ‘Saying.’ These knots are dependent on the thread and yet are not the thread” (Eaglestone, 1999, p.83). It is this otherness (otherwise than ontological Being) that Levinas claims it is his task as a philosopher task to uncover.

Logical discourse (*Said*) therefore ironically maintains discontinuity by considering it irrational and silencing it, or, as Levinas also puts it, Western “discourse is ready to say all the ruptures in itself, and consume them as silent origin or as eschatology” (1981a, p169). This is a similar finding to that of Foucault in the study of the institutional construction of madness. Like Foucault, Levinas realises here that narratives, in particular official historical discourses on events, construct both history and the irrational itself (see Foucault, 1975, pp.204-5). What it is important to realise is that Levinas here is referring to *philosophical discourse*, not to speech, and in doing so is attempting to relocate the ethical importance of the trace of the *Saying* in literary-linguistic structures as well as speech. Several critics have noted that this attempt comes in the wake of Derrida’s critique of his early work. (Bernasconi, 1985, p.25; Eaglestone, 1999, p.83). It is evidence for Eaglestone that the later Levinas offers an ethical philosophy “through representation, through the phenomenon of language” – rather than just speech – in response to Derrida’s claim that language, or ‘arche-writing,’ precedes ethics (1997, p.35). Thus for Levinas a book – literary discourse – becomes an “interrupted discourse catching up with its own breaks... [which] in the end are interpreted in a saying distinct from the said” (Levinas, 1981a, p.171). Or as Eaglestone puts it, the interruptions of language in literature open up the *Saying*, which evokes an ethical responsibility for the other

⁹¹ See Bernasconi, 1985, p.18: “Levinas’s intention is to pass beyond the discourse of Western philosophy; he summons us to a dislocation of the Greek *logos*.”

(1997, p.158). Derrida's 'reading' of the silent "madness" which *interrupts* the discourse of Reason and yet is not "said" (Derrida, 1978c, pp.36-7) would seem to concur with Levinas here, though for Derrida this inconceivable silence is a *subsequent* effect of the dominant logical discourse, not a silence which 'occurs' prior to the discourse itself (p.38). In Levinas the silent interruptions of the *Saying* in literary discourse opens the reader to the responsibility to acknowledge those silences.

Violet's "public craziness" and its effect on her ability to communicate logically can therefore be viewed from a Levinasian perspective as interruptive "breaks" in language that develop out of illogical, "silent origins." Morrison herself claims that one of her aims is "to urge the reader into active participation in the non-narrative, non-literary experience of the text" (Morrison, 1984, p.387), an idea that allows Dubey to argue that her fiction disavows "the literate and literary mode" (Dubey, p.187). This leaves Morrison's readers and students in the rather precarious position of having to consider what exactly could be described as the "non-narrative, non-literary experience of text." In terms of contemporary narratology such ideas verge on the controversial: according to Genette critics *cannot* speculate that any part of narrative might relate to non-verbal aspects of consciousness since narratives can only represent character experience verbally, even though he does accept that the non-verbal exists (Genette, 1988, pp.58-61). As we have already seen to some degree, the idea of the ineffable is central to deconstruction, and to the expression of cultures of oppression. In the following chapters we shall go on to see just how intricate the link is between unspeakable experience and the postcolonial narrative structure.

As with Joe then, *Jazz*'s structure does give Violet the opportunity to *express* the unspeakable traces of her subjectivity. Her awareness of the "cracks" within her own personality arises as she ponders her attempt to deface Dorcas in her coffin. The representation of subjectivity here is again marked by a radical shift in the representation of character consciousness. The third-person omniscient voice which initially narrates this scene is steadily elided over several pages during which the intensity of Violet's focalised anger rises:

They had to wrestle her to the floor before she let go. And the sound that came from her mouth belonged to something wearing a pelt instead of a coat.

By then the usher boys were joined by frowning men, who carried *that* kicking, growling Violet out while she looked on in amazement. She had not been that strong since Virginia, since she loaded hay and handled the mule wagon like a full-grown man.

...

And that's why it took so much wrestling to get me down, keep me down and out of that coffin where she was the heifer who took what was mine, what I chose, picked out and determined to have and hold on to, NO! *that* Violet is not somebody walking round town, up and down the streets wearing my skin and using my eyes shit no *that* Violet is me! The me that hauled hay in Virginia and handled a four-mule team in the brace. (pp.92-6)

The reader is presented with the narration of a scene in which a character's subjectivity is allowed to completely subsume the narrator's, reflecting once again the jazz technique of introducing a theme and then allowing alternative voices to break it and pick it up in a different form. In Levinasian terms our attention is drawn not only to the semantic content of the *Said* (what the narrative *tells* us about Violet's present and past actions), but also to the unknowable trace of the anamnestic past, that non-presence in the silent, improvisory break which reworks the narrative from third-person discourse to interior monologue. To use Levinas's own terms, here we see the unknowable trace of the past "interrupting" and "catching up" with the narrative which it "breaks," opening up a "saying distinct from the said."

It is interesting to note that when considering how the trace of the other affects the Saying and opens up the possibility of responsible discourse, Levinas sees the subject as always already obeying an order which precedes the possibility of discourse:

A face as trace, trace of itself... does not signify an indeterminate phenomenon; its ambiguity is... an invitation to the fine risk of approach qua approach, to the exposure of one to the other, to the exposure of this exposedness, the expression of the exposure, saying... The mode in which a face indicates its own absence in my responsibility requires a description that can be formed only in ethical language. (Levinas, 1981a, p.94)

As he puts it elsewhere, "It is as though saying had a meaning prior to... the advent of knowledge... free of everything said, a saying that does not tell anything, that

infinitely, prevoluntarily, consents” (1972, p.147). This reminds us of the realisation the reader makes when s/he obeys the narrator’s order to “[l]ook where your hands are. Now” at the end of *Jazz*. S/he finds himself confronted with an “order” that his very reading presupposed – *Jazz* makes us realise that to read discourse is to involve oneself in an intersubjective relation that presupposes the fact that one picks up a book and becomes responsive and responsible for the act of engaging with literary discourse. And yet this responsibility is not completely subjective, or related solely to how we interpret literary discourse. It insists that the reader “yields oneself” to “others,” thereby realising the ontological “exposure” that both reader and the narrative as other undergo. “Exposure” in this sense refers to the risk of harm, loss, defacement – an experience which the traces of *Jazz* highlight as being closely entwined with the silenced histories of Violet and Joe. The reality of defacement is the very act which Violet, in her “public craziness,” tries to enforce on the dead Dorcas herself.⁹²

Importantly, in one of Derrida’s later essays on Levinas he too comes to recognise the link that might be made between reading and the flesh-and-blood world writing attempts to reflect.⁹³ Exploring the idea of the trace of the other in writing, Derrida says we experience it as though through a process of ‘crossing out.’ We realise the absolute alterity of the other

only after a series of words which are all faulty, and which I would in passing, have crossed out regularly, one after the other, while leaving each its tracing force, the wake of their tracing, the force (without force) of a trace the other’s passage will have left. (Derrida, 1991a, p.36)

But Derrida no longer leaves this trace as the mark of the other which only opens writing to a “system of differences.” In a change of tone he argues that these words and their traces can also be thought of as a

⁹² Interestingly, Rainsford also takes what he calls this “undeconstructive step” and asks us to ethically consider “the text as something you can actually see and hold in your hands” (Rainsford, p.219). Importantly though, Rainsford encourages us to consider Derrida’s *Glas* (1974) as a text that has “extra-literary ways of insisting in its own materiality,” and one which, amongst other more traditional literary works such as those by Blake, forces the reader to ethically contend with its non-present traces of the “outside world in general” (pp.223-4).

series of interruptions laced together, series of *hiatus* (gaping mouth, mouth opened to the speech cut short or to the gift of the other and to the bread from his mouth)... to no longer dissociate what is no longer dissociable in this fabric. (p.36)

Here for Derrida then the traces and non-presences ‘in’ writing can be related to an other who is no longer simply textually inscribed, but whose materiality is intrinsic to our relationship with that otherness. As we have pointed out above, the tying of signifying to materiality within fiction is a central aspect of a literary ethics that is all too often bypassed by contemporary commentators. Importantly though, the phrase used to relate this vulnerable materiality (a discursive interruption as giving the “bread from his mouth”) is very similar to Levinas’s own phrase: “the way that signification signifies before showing itself as a said in... the linguistic system [shows] that a subject is of flesh and blood... and thus *capable of giving the bread from his mouth*” (1981a, p.77). The similarities between the later Derrida and Levinas do not stop here. As West points out, Derrida uses the image and idea of ‘eating well’ as a metaphor for the infinite appeal to otherness that occurs in writing (West, p.190) – ‘to eat well’ for Derrida does not mean to nourish the self but “learning and giving to eat, learning-to-give-to-the-other-to-eat. One never eats entirely on one’s own... It is a rule offering infinite hospitality” (Derrida, 1991b, p.282). And as we shall see towards the end of this thesis, the later Derrida also adopts the idea that the ethical relation with the other is born in a silent responsibility prior to the violence of language (1992, p.68), and acknowledges the debt to “Levinas’s thinking” (pp.83-4). As Woods notes, the later Derrida “opens up the possibility of a fundamental pre-ontological structure of receptivity and donation which has *intrinsic* ethical significance, and which represents an attempt to restore a sense of ethical orientation and political possibility” (Woods, 1999, p.113).

It is both Levinas and Derrida then – and indeed their *supplementary* reading of each other – that can be read alongside *Jazz* to explore how its innovative structure self-consciously presupposes and draws our attention to the ethics of engaging with narrative as other. As both in different ways exemplify, texts can open up the trace of

⁹³ See Critchley, 1992, p.11 on the unnoticed importance of the essay “En ce moment même dans cet

the other as an experience of responsibility for their readers. For Robbins it is only by reading Levinas through Derrida and vice versa that we can contemplate an ethics that is “nonmetaphysical, nonlogocentric, not orientated toward the subject, consciousness, or any of the philosophemes of traditional ethics” (Robbins, 1995a, p.178). As Derrida himself has written of Levinas’s attempts to demonstrate the ethical relevance of the trace of the other in textual discourse, “[the trace of interruption] *does not belong to discourse and only comes to it from the Other*. That is true also of [official] discourse... but in [Levinas] the nonphenomenality should oblige... to read trace as trace, the interruption as interruption” (Derrida, 1991a, p.28, my italics). Or as Gibbs puts it, Derrida acknowledges that Levinas’s work makes certain the traces of otherness as “the threads of suffering, of otherness of other texts, of ruptures in our lives... Levinas’ text... serves to guard the traces, to protect them in order to leave open the possibility for someone else to find there ABSOLUTE INTERRUPTIONS” (Gibbs, p.110). It is Levinas’s later intent then, like Morrison’s in *Jazz*, to mark the trace of the other in the expression of discourse, and in doing so draw readers into recognising the responsibility that comes in acknowledging the silence of these traces and how they relate to real-life suffering.

Traces of the real responsibilities of postcolonial narrative.

In my earlier consideration of the narrative structure of *Benito Cereno* I questioned the idea that the literal figuration of faces could be used as a critical analogy for a Levinasian ethics. As we briefly saw, in *Jazz*, like *Benito Cereno*, a disfigured representation of a character’s face is also provided. It is the dead Dorcas’s face where Violet irrationally attempts to trace the silenced historical events that lead up to her husband’s infidelity and Dorcas’s murder. In both texts we could argue that the risk which Levinas theorises in the exposure of the face is exemplified by the silenced horror which surrounds the historical experience of such characters. As we saw though, the traces of Violet’s silenced history subsume the voice of the narrator and it is at this point, in one of Violet’s cracks, that she subjectively explains her reasons for trying to deface Dorcas in her coffin. The trace of the silenced historical experience of the other thus becomes non-present in the narrative through violent

ouvrage me voici” as a reflection on deconstruction and a Levinasian ethics.

fractures. As such, it is not enough to claim that critical appraisals of the narrative representation of faces can locate the trace of otherness in the *Saying*, because ultimately such appraisals do not engage with narrative as a structure of expression, of which the *Saying* is a part. Such traces are eminent in the structure of the narratives themselves, whether they provide images of faces or not.

As we have seen, the reader-to-narrative relation represented in both narratives does uncover a representational and hermeneutical ethics in their respective methods of characterisation. It is also an ethics that lies at odds with Docherty's idea of non-essential, unstable postmodern fictional characters distinguishable as "fleeting instantiations of subjectivity" which deny the reader "that very notion of a material or essential reality." As shown here in relation to *Jazz*, the innovative formal structures which often provide the textual evidence for such postmodern critical claims about heterogeneity in fact disclose a responsibility which finds its basis not in the textuality of represented experience, but in the intersubjective relations which exist between self and other, prior to the act of discourse itself. Here we have a narrative structure that purposely attempts to emphasise the degree to which narratives ask responsibilities of their readers before they have actually *asked* them anything. Morrison herself acknowledges that such an unsettling of the reader carries necessary risks, risks that she claims she is determined to take. One of these is the risk of confronting the reader with an unknowable trace of the other, and another is the risk of responsibility that comes from acknowledging that trace. Morrison is determined to exploit these risks because,

the *in medias res* opening that I am so committed to is here excessively demanding. It is abrupt, and should appear so... 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... (1989, p.32)

And as she says elsewhere:

I would like to... try to put the reader into the position of being naked and vulnerable, nevertheless trusting... in order to engage him in the novel. Let him make his mind about

what he likes and what he thinks and what happened based on the very intimate acquaintance with the people in the book, without any prejudices, without any prefixed notions, but to have an intimacy that's so complete, it humanizes him in the same way that the characters are humanized from within by a certain activity, and in the way in which I am humanized by the act of writing. (Ruas, p.109)

As we have seen, traces of the other as openings do erupt *in medias res*, traces which we are asked to be responsible for. If we consider this risk from a Levinasian perspective, its ethics imply that we don't simply relate to character as if they did have a 'real-life' existence, but that we also are made aware of the actual responsibilities always present in historicized discursive acts. For Levinas, like Morrison here, engaging in discourse, both inside and outside out literature, means risking "the exposure of one to the other, to the exposure of this exposedness, the expression of the exposure, saying." What it exposes is vulnerability itself, and the degree to which this affects discourse both inside and outside literature. All such experiences are based in the structures of language, and determine our responsibility to respond to those structures, and the real-life risks they relate to. Such a narrative is not unlike the postmodern structures that Tierney-Tello claims defy "the utopian desire for and unproblematic view of otherness" in the work of Diamela Eltit, and yet also "force the reader to encounter an uncomfortable *real*" (Tierney-Tello, p.81, my italics). Here so-called postmodern features in fact reinforce aspects of an essential reality that Docherty seems keen to disregard.⁹⁴

If, contrary to postmodern literary theory, it is possible to locate an ethics of responsibility in narratives that relates to 'real-life,' then it might also possible to encourage responsible political discourses alongside those readings. The representation of split-subjects in literature may indeed make us aware of the fact that social realities are often presented as narratives themselves, and that individuals are not blessed with homogeneous identities that can be based on the attributes of gender, skin colour, and sexuality, but these are all observations that relate to subjective experiences of an external reality itself. Said points out that in cases where a text seems to self-consciously develop a "discursive situation" between its own

⁹⁴ See chapter five for a consideration of Tierney-Tello's examination of Eltit's aesthetics.

discourses and its audience, that situation “is the text’s situation, its placing of itself in the world” (Said, 1984, p.40). Such narratives don’t disavow the notion of reality, but rather take up their positions within reality and its multifarious discourses. As Morrison herself has pointed out, subjects that live in cultures of oppression deal with the issue of being silenced and destabilised every day of their lives, and have done *throughout history* (see Gilroy, 1993b, p.178). This is therefore not a postmodern condition, and as Gilroy notes, these problems cannot be addressed by simply interpreting social realities as aspects of the discourses inscribed in ideology. The location of otherness in novels such as *Jazz* does concur with Docherty’s view that postmodern novels destabilise traditional, imperialist claims about the Western world’s Other, yet it also fulfils another role: it emphasises that such traces in African-American cultural expression point to a silenced, unspeakable past that can nevertheless be acknowledged and criticised responsibly. Even so, I must also conclude that an ethical acknowledgement of otherness within postcolonial narratives is not in a position to proffer political discourses on postcoloniality. For now, it remains a tool with which to emphasise the political problems that must at some point be addressed – oppression, violence, and the silences that result because of them. As we shall see, it is this silence, an aspect of the oppression in postcolonial history and a non-discursive call to respond to the narratives of that historical consciousness, that provides the unheard appeal for an ethical understanding of other postcolonial fiction.

Chapter Four: Violence and Expressions of Otherness in the Structure of Three Historical Narratives

[T]he work of subversive politics is inherently problematic. Here subversive implies not only opposition to prevailing ideologies but also a cunning use of narrative and tone that defies the public spirit of politics... we must, like Melville, closely attend to the potential responses of readers; for subversive politics are semiprivate. They must fool a suppressive, dominant culture while speaking the unspeakable to someone. (Lee, p.496)

Perhaps some of these writers... have much more to say than has been realized... To ignore this possibility by never questioning the strategies of transformation is to disenfranchise the writer, diminish the text and render the bulk of the literature aesthetically and historically incoherent... The re-examination of founding literature of the United States for the unspeakable unspoken may reveal those texts to have deeper and other meanings, deeper and other power, deeper and other significances. (Morrison, 1989, p.14)

What the last chapter shows us is how a structurally innovative postcolonial novel, *Jazz*, can be read as a self-reflexive attempt to provoke an ethically responsive relation between narrative and reader. The chapter did so by showing how the responsibilities that exist between the readers and narratives can be revealed by engaging with the *trace of otherness in discourse* as theorised by Derrida and Levinas. Importantly, this trace came to be seen as a *non-presence* in discourse, an *unspoken* aspect of narrative structure that nevertheless arises through narrative articulation itself. I argued that readers' experiences of silent non-presences in narrative might be indicative of what Morrison has called the "non-narrative, non-literary experience" of text.

In the second passage above we again find Morrison alluding to certain ineffable or unspoken aspects of narratives, this time in terms of the traditional American literary canon. In the first passage, Lee links a narrative's ability to "speak the unspeakable" to a subtle and subversive radical nature. While Lee obviously aligns the unspeakable with a subversive politics, I want to suggest that the allusion to the unspeakable within both these critical perspectives might also be compared to Spivak's theory of a "native informant" within traditional western texts, a non-

presence which through deconstructive readings reveals the repression of unacknowledged aspects of western culture.⁹⁵ What we saw with *Jazz* though is that the representation of unspoken politics in historically oppressed cultures is not limited to the founding texts of dominant western cultures. In fact, the link made between the recollection of an unspoken *past* and the ineffable elements of narratives in the *present* self-consciously unveils the need for a responsive and responsible reading of the novel. As such, it would seem that even recent novels informed by a postcolonial discourses maintain their fair share of silences and unspeakable features.

In this chapter I turn to other recent novels and examine how their use of narrative structure, in particular their use of certain *leitmotif* features, also attempts to express the ineffable aspects of postcolonial cultures and the silences of the past. I ask whether such a controversial category as the “non-narrative” aspects of narrative can be located in the structure of other postcolonial fiction and what its link might be to the narratives of postcolonial memory, in particular their representations of a *violent* past. Certain areas of concern will be given particular attention:

1. the *performative* role that is played by repetitive or structurally influential *leitmotif* features within postcolonial narratives,
2. the idea that these novels can be read as the other of a discursive ethical relation which the reader becomes interactively involved in, and
3. how the act of imaginative creativity on the part of the writer, and also the reader, is related to the non-discursive elements of ethics.

Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*, *leitmotif* metaphors, and postcolonial hybridity.

While running through the forest paths I stepped on an enamel plate of sacrifices to the road... I was so hungry that I ate what I could of the offerings to the road and afterwards my stomach swelled and visions of road-spirits, hungry and annoyed, weaved in my brain...

The road became my torment, my aimless pilgrimage, and I found myself merely walking to discover where all the roads lead to, where they end.

⁹⁵ See Spivak, 1999, p.4 on the role of the native informant in uncovering “an unacknowledgeable

And then I came to a place where I thought the roads terminated. An iroko tree had been felled across it... Beyond, the road sheered into a deep pit. Across, on the other side were sand-carrying lorries. (Okri, p.115)

The passage above is one of the numerous fabulous representations of the road provided by Azaro, the first-person narrator and protagonist of Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991). Azaro is an *abiku*, one of the spirit-children whose trait is to reject human existence and die upon every attempt at human-birth, thus maintaining an idyllic sojourn in the spirit-world amongst *abiku* companions.⁹⁶ Azaro's narrative is made up of his experiences and perceptions in the human-world – set in Nigeria just prior to the country's first independent elections – from birth and throughout early childhood. And yet, as the passage above shows, his conscious experiences are beset by hallucinations, and at other times the haunting of spirits, which he claims is his fate as an *abiku* who has forsaken his companions and remained in the human-world.

We are made aware of the theme of postcolonial hybridity through these hallucinations and their depiction of the mythic road which demands sacrifices of its users and yet is injuriously partitioned breadth-wise by a fallen tree to mark the oncoming progression of the modern road-makers and Western industrial technology. It symbolises the hybrid border site which Anzaldúa calls an “open wound... where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds... It is in a constant state of transition” (Anzaldúa, pp.2-3). For Azaro the road upon which so much of his narrative is centred is marked not only by the myths that his father tells of the ever-hungry-for-sacrifices King of the Road, but also by the social, technological and economic development that the pre-independence Nigeria is undergoing. As such the novel provides an appropriate representation of Bhabha's postcolonial hybridity “where difference is neither One nor the Other but *something else besides, in-between*... It... emerges *in-between* the claims of the past and the needs of the present” (Bhabha, p.219).⁹⁷ As well as this, the road which Azaro has

moment” in the major western philosophical texts.

⁹⁶ See Maduka, pp.17-18 on the origins and description of this Igbo and Yoruba myth. The term ‘*abiku*’ is the Yoruba translation, the Igbo word being ‘*ogbanje*.’

⁹⁷ See also Moreiras, p.377 on “border epistemologies,” and Bhabha, pp.40-65 on his theory of hybridity at the “third-space,” situated “*in-between*” the colonial discourses of Self/Other. For a

embarked upon is not only the physical road he fearfully envisages – “leading towards home and then away from it, without end, with too many signs, and no directions” – but also the metaphoric road which all beings embark upon within their own existence, the road that they follow through time and their history, until they face their fate, an analogy not unlike the river of Yoruba myth. It also, as I will show, provides a *leitmotif* metaphor that influences the structure of the novel throughout.

Cooper acknowledges that it is difficult to isolate the origins of many of the mythic symbols utilised in African magical realist fiction, or indeed any international magical realist fiction, within a specific cultural context (Cooper, p.16). She points out that what is common to the African genre is a “cultural milieu of borrowing, reading, and cross-referencing; of Yoruba, Igbo and Akan or any other proverbs, tales or poetry” (p.39), a claim reinforced by Maduka’s examination of the incorporation of the *ogbanje/abiku* myth as a cross-cultural phenomenon that “transcends the confines of specific ethnic groups” (Maduka, p.19).

Though by popular definition then magical realist fiction provides a narrative content that encompasses both pre-modern (or fantastic) and modern (or realist) imagery (Faris, p.163),⁹⁸ the fact that these pre-modern motifs are often impossible to locate within specific historical cultures foregrounds the claim that it is not the cultural symbolism of such narrative content which is paramount, but rather its ability to project various non-western voices onto the traditionally European novel form.⁹⁹ Thus in Marquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* we come across a galleon stranded in the middle of the jungle, and in doing so witness a motif of Spanish colonialism within a fabulous, non-realist and geographically unsure setting (Marquez, p.12), and in Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses* we watch as the immigrant Saladin Chamcha transforms into a goat-like devil figure whose origins lie in Western myth – an irony critically reinforced by the metropolitan police’s inability to see anything the matter with the migrant their culture and history has created (Rushdie, 1988,

historical appraisal of the issue of cultural hybridity up to Bhabha’s appropriation of the term see Young, 1995, pp.1-54.

⁹⁸ See Faris for explication of the shared tenets of magical realist fiction, as well as Faris and Zamora, p.3; McHale, 1992, p.31 on Marquez; and Sommer, pp.72-3 on the relationship between the genre and history.

⁹⁹ See Brennan, p.56 and Chanady, 1995, p.141 for more on this political aim of the magic realist genre.

pp.157-171).¹⁰⁰ Magic realism is therefore at first sight a genre that appropriately lends itself to contemporary theories of hybridity and the “elliptical *in-between*” (Bhabha, p.60), representing as it does subjectivities and cultures characterised by “[h]ybridities that result from the interminglings of disparate cultures [and thus] implicate cultures that themselves are already syncretized, always in the process of transformation” (Lavie and Swedenberg, p.163).

This is true also of Okri’s text, the symbolism of the road of its title having origins not only in the myths of African tribes, but within many pre-modern non-African cultures as well. Thus, whereas Fraser interprets this road as primarily derived from Yoruba and Igbo myths (Fraser, p.186), it can also be argued that given the magic realist genre’s tendency to appropriate non-realist images at will, this idea of a road can be traced through numerous cultures, both western and otherwise. Cases in point would include Irish folklore, and the symbolism of the Red Road in Native American Indian religion. Importantly, the metaphor of life as a journey – *ayé l’ajò* – popular in Yoruba myth, does not insist that that journey be interpreted as a road, but more often as a search or a river journey, a fact that would seem to undermine Fraser’s proposal (Drewal, p.199; Mason, p.421). The hybrid nature of this title is therefore doubly figured – it is both a signifier of on-coming western technological encroachment into postcolonial cultures, and a marker of the *transcultural* prevalence of pre-modern symbols and proverbs.

This idea of diversity in new African art forms finds an interesting reflection in Yai’s criticism, who points out that unlike western culture, in Yoruba philosophy there is no ‘centre’ in terms of identity and reality, but rather universal bifurcation and the idea that art forms provide something unique and new. Thus he argues that Yoruba influenced art does not try to replicate reality, but its diversity – the artistic intention is not to imitate, but to produce something new and multifarious (Yai, p.113). This also makes clear the over-simplicity of Fraser’s view that such pre-modern symbols are primarily used to oppose industrialisation (Fraser, p.161). Cooper’s warning that we should not too readily read the road of Okri’s title as a

¹⁰⁰ For a further insight into this aspect of Márquez and other Latin American magical realism see Chanady, 1986, p.50, and see Walker, 1995, for an exemplification of how magic realist

“colonial symbol of Western intrusion and technology” is therefore both apt and yet somewhat incomplete – she fails to go on to note that the inscription of pre-modern myth within its allegorical symbolism is not only African but arguably universal. As Azaro’s father tells him when describing the spiritual beliefs of the village he came from, “[a]ll human beings travel the same road” (Okri, p.70). The metaphor of the novel’s title then, while undoubtedly an example of a postcolonial hybrid *leitmotif*, does not undermine the opposed cultures of Nigerian past and present as specifically as might be supposed.

When examining the symbolism of Sethe’s “chokecherry tree” scar in *Beloved*, Härting claims that the use of certain specific metaphors can refigure silenced and unspeakable experience by articulating the palimpsestic structure of memory within marginalized cultures (Härting, p.25).¹⁰¹ This idea is reinforced by Doyle’s claim that *Beloved*’s trees function as “more than metaphors. They manifest the phenomenal effects of the history of slavery” (Doyle, p.213). Accordingly, this function of metaphoric signification, specific only to marginalized discourses such as postcoloniality, challenges the conventional notion of a metaphor as a “trope of substitution and resemblance” that generates a “dualistic and cohesive identity” (Härting, p.24).¹⁰² Though Härting’s claim homogenizes postcolonial discourse and ignores the structural features it shares with other fictional genres, such as the postmodern, she nevertheless provides an innovative insight into the relation between certain features of narrative structure and the silencing of historically oppressed subjectivities.

Arguing that metaphors ‘translate’ historical memory into text by “figuratively encoding and decoding the unconscious,” she claims that

metamorphosis in *The Satanic Verses* ironically reflects the social construction of the immigrant in the metropolitan United Kingdom.

¹⁰¹ The idea of the palimpsestic structure of metaphor is drawn from Genette essay “Proust Palimpsest,” see Genette, 1982, p.203. The importance of Genette’s critique of Proust’s view of the metaphor will be examined in more detail later in the chapter.

¹⁰² See Ricoeur, 1976, p.49, 1978, pp.25-26, and Ricoeur and Kearney, p.170 on this oppositional view of metaphor and the difficulties that arise when we consider text, or discourse, as “event.” Also, Genette, p.204 on metaphors as a “*miracle of analogy*” – “bringing together two sensations separated by time”; Barnes and Duncan, pp.10-11; and Steen, 1994, especially chapter 1. Derrida also examines in detail how the binary oppositions implied by metaphors have been employed in Western philosophy to create objective truths (Derrida, 1982c).

translation establishes metaphor as a contested and multi-accentuated textual space as the memories – which constitute a symbolic net of metaphors – are always already culturally and historically coded even before they enter the subconscious... Imagining or writing the interior lives of others (that is, the unspeakable and the repressed), also presupposes that the writer must balance her own unconscious desires and memories with the necessity to access the unconscious of others. (p.23)

Metaphors in this context therefore contain the possibility of undoing the dominant significations of language within oppressive social and political contexts by retaining an insight into the memories and interior lives of others in an historically marginalized culture. Härting argues that the chokecherry tree metaphor achieves this by juxtaposing the modern representation of the tree as genealogical, biological and evolutionary growth against the horror trees can come to symbolise due to the lynchings of slave culture.

Two points can be made about the implications of this argument for an ethical critique of *The Famished Road*. Firstly, this perspective again raises the issue of the unspeakable pain or horror within narrative representations of oppressive historical realities. Just as Sethe's scar is a permanent symbol of oppression, brutal realism is never far from Azaro's representation of the road – the “paths... dirt tracks... streets... [and] avenues” of which it is made are the same ones that the jeeps of the Party of the Rich and the Party of the Poor also traverse in force to brutally coerce and intimidate the nation's population. Secondly, Härting uncovers a specifically postcolonial *leitmotif* function in Morrison's metaphor which she claims “prompts and shapes” the structure of the text as a whole; though *The Famished Road* shares little of the volatility of *Beloved*'s form – its narrative point of view never unconventionally shifts between characters – I want to suggest that like the chokecherry tree, the symbol of the “famished road” repeatedly influences the novel structure. It too figures the silenced palimpsest of postcolonial memory, and fractures the modern motif of the road in Western culture and language. To exemplify this I will consider the structuring of Mum's stories which Azaro inserts into his narrative.

It is clear throughout the novel that the road is a metaphoric theme that influences the content of almost all of Azaro's narrative. An example of this would be the stories his mother (Mum) tells him, the telling of which he narrates to the

reader. In one of these stories the modern road is figured as a hybrid place of progress and poverty. In this tale Mum gives advice to a European man trying to escape Africa. He ignores Mum's advice, refusing to take heed that "[a]ll things are linked" (p.483), a motto that he sees scored on the side of a bus. Mum warns him not to reject this advice, which she claims was also told to her by a tortoise she met at a crossroads, both obvious symbols of Igbo and Yoruba myth.¹⁰³ When the European returns to see Mum a few weeks later he has been transformed into an African. He tells her that he finally found happiness and admits, "I discovered the road... The only way to get out of Africa was to become an African." Here the road becomes a hybrid site for the fictional character to be both African, European, and neither. As we shall see, the representations of the road as a metaphor of hybridity reoccur throughout the novel and continually affect the content of Azaro's narrative.

It is interesting to note that this repetitious structural feature might be considered as a method of uncovering *otherness* within narrative. Attridge notes for example that,

[t]he formal sequence [of literary structure] therefore functions as a kind of staging: a semantic and emotional performance. Every time I read a linguistic text as a literary work... I engage in and am taken through that performance... hence the need to repeat the work, as a temporal, sequential experience, if one wishes to repeat the apprehension of its otherness. (Attridge, 1999, p.27)

In Attridge's view, one of the aspects of "meaning" *performed* by literary-linguistic structures is the fact that it evolves within a repetitious experience of a text's *otherness*. As seen in the last chapter this otherness is a feature of a discourse's absolutely unknowable features, it is the trace of the silent other, the non-presence which makes possible *différance* and literary-linguistic meaning.¹⁰⁴ The trace, consisting "of all the nonpresent meanings whose differences from the present [utterance] invest the utterance with its 'effect' of having meaning," also means that a decidable meaning seemingly based in difference is actually always deferred

¹⁰³ Interestingly, the modern bus bearing cross-cultural motifs is also presented as a sign of hybridity in Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987), pp.200-3.

¹⁰⁴ See Derrida, 1973, p.130, and see also Brogan, p.36, and Bernasconi, 1985 for an explication of *différance* as Derrida's unnameable, the absolutely unknowable.

(Abrams, pp.226-7). Or as Derrida puts it, “[d]ifférance produces what it forbids, makes possible the very thing it makes impossible” (Derrida, 1976, p.143).

Importantly, as both Bhabha and Spivak make clear, it is Derrida’s concept of *différance* that allows the theorisation of postcolonial hybridity in the first place. Bhabha draws a distinction between the colonised Other of colonial discourse and the in-between “figure of colonial *otherness*” which for him undermines the homogeneous discourses of coloniser and the colonised (Bhabha, p.45, my italics).¹⁰⁵ And as we saw in chapter one, it is *différance* which for Spivak provides the possibility of undermining the oppositional structures of homogeneous identity.¹⁰⁶ In language reminiscent of the Derridean and Levinasian terminology we saw in the last chapter, Bhabha reminds us that the site of hybridity – the “interstitial passage between fixed identifications” – is reliant on repetition: he claims the experience of it, in literature and other texts, is “unknowable, unrepresentable, without a return to the ‘present’ which, in the process of *repetition*, becomes disjunct and displaced” (p.4, my italics). Our experience of hybridity, and the silence of unknowable *otherness* which informs it, is therefore reliant on the repetitious features of narrative structure itself. I want to provide an example of Okri’s novel now where its repetitious incorporation of a *leitmotif* metaphor not only uncovers an awareness of unspeakable cultural experience, but also complicates this view of poststructural hybridity.

Mum’s other brief historical tale goes back in time to the Igbo myths of the whites that are evident in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958), and tells of a time prior to western imperialism when both Africans and Europeans shared their knowledge and exchanged gods. It goes on to say that the white people,

¹⁰⁵ We have seen in the last chapter how both Levinas and Derrida exemplify the degree to which this *otherness* maintains a non-presence within discourse. According to Young, Bhabha’s hybridity is the moment “in which the discourse of colonial authority loses its univocal grip on meaning and finds itself open to the trace of the language of the other, enabling the critic to trace complex movements of disarming alterity within the text” (Young, 1995, p.22). For Moreiras hybridity’s irrational features make it “the ne-plus-ultra of any limit... the limit of limit... an impossible possibility” (Moreiras, p.400).

¹⁰⁶ In Spivak’s consideration of *différance* she claims that in “Derrida’s reworking, the structure preface-text becomes open at both ends. The text has no stable identity, no stable origin, no stable end” (Spivak 1976, xii). Elsewhere, she claims that applying *différance* to the “self-proximity of the ontic” means “‘identity’ differed-deferred from itself by randomness and chance” (1992, p.154).

forgot all this. They forgot many things. They forgot that we are all brothers and sisters and that black people are the ancestors of the human race. The second time they came they brought guns. They took our lands, burned our gods, and they carried away many of our people to become slaves across the sea... They are misusing the powers God gave all of us. (p.282)

Admittedly in this tale, as Cooper points out, a tradition of idealised negritude is promoted that does little to undo the traditional polarity of the two peoples (Cooper, p.71). She claims that Mum's closing comments – “[t]hey are not all bad. Learn from them, but love the world” – does little to mediate this binary. What Cooper fails to notice though is the ironic positioning of this tale within a chapter that is primarily devoted to representing the oppressive and brutal effects that the first independent elections are having on the impoverished compound dwellers.

The chapter opens with Azaro telling his mother about his day – spent wandering the roads between his home and the forest – in indirect discourse. The brevity of her response and its interruption of his indirect narrative emphasises the importance of what she has to tell him – not only in terms of the day's events, but, as we shall see, in terms of the narrative structure of the chapter itself. She tells him, “The thugs came again today. Election time is near.” (p.279). When Azaro's father (Dad) does not return home, they sit up that night in worry, and for Azaro, “It seemed our lives kept turning on the same axle of anguish.” The telling of Mum's story fragments Azaro's narration of the scene, and is framed by the wait for Dad and, at the close of the chapter, both of them searching for him on the road outside. They find him on the road beaten and bleeding after an attack by the thugs of the Party of the Rich, the one he refuses to vote for.

Cooper claims that Mum's conclusion to her tale (quoted above) is “rather peculiar” (Cooper, p.72), and goes on to imply that it is not “as complex” as Mum's other tale. In my view this passive and “peculiar” ending by Mum is a purposeful ploy on the part of the author to bring the other events in the chapter to ironically bear on Mum's words. The tale of ancient, idealised negritude is subtly undercut by Okri's narrative structure here, for the parallels between Mum's critique of the Europeans and the brutal actions of Nigeria's first independent politicians are impossible to ignore: “[t]hey forgot that we are all brothers and sisters... They are

greedy... Some of them worship machines. They are misusing the powers that God gave all of us.” This ironic authorial distance is apparent in the use of painfully brief character dialogue throughout the chapter, as well as the use of the framing technique itself. The chapter ends, like Mum’s framed story, with an image of oppression and pain: “The dried surface of his wounds came off on the sheet. His pain was reopened. He went to work as usual.” (p.284).

Like Achebe’s, Okri’s vision of postcolonial hybridity foresees a dangerous and brutal socio-political reality that overshadows the alleged progressive possibilities encompassed in interstitial, in-between spaces,¹⁰⁷ and is one that echoes Eagleton’s view of the repetitive repercussions of violence and corruption that he argues have characterised political power throughout history (Eagleton, 1996, p.51).¹⁰⁸ In Okri’s novel the metaphor of the road becomes divested of both modern and pre-modern discourses, acknowledging the progressive possibilities encapsulated in both and yet constantly aware of the dangers that lie in embracing a hybrid discourse. The silent trace that undermines the differences between these discourses is ironically a similarity shared by them all: a historical memory of unspeakable violence that is prevalent in African, European, and postcolonial cultures. As shown, this trace of violence in the road metaphor is not commented on directly by Azaro, but rather becomes noticeable through the metaphor’s repeated influence upon the content and form of his narrative. In Okri’s ironic structuring of Mum’s latter story it is not the idealism of negritude, or the possibilities of a hybrid postcolonial future that are emphasised when considering the road from ancient tradition to Nigerian independence, but the unspeakable and violent realities that universally infect all such discourses.

What we see arising in this structure then is an experience of hybridity that somewhat differs from Bhabha’s politically progressive hybrid site where “cultural

¹⁰⁷ See Gikandi, pp.7-8 on Achebe’s literary representation of a modern African culture that refuses to indulge in traditional “romance and nostalgia,” and yet remains self-conscious of remaining colonial anxieties. See Williams, 2001, p.8 on Achebe’s outspoken political critiques of postcolonial Nigeria, and p.13 on his disagreements with “hybrid-poststructuralist” postcolonial writers, in particular Salman Rushdie. Also Olaniyan, p.27 on Achebe’s idea that a hybrid state cannot “escape the logic of its origin in the colonial state.”

¹⁰⁸ As one of the characters surmises in *Anthills of the Savannah*, the representation of the hybrid, modern bus seems to express a hybrid acknowledgement of “suffering” above all else (Achebe, p.203).

differences... conflictually touch” (Bhabha, p.207). *This* hybridity isn’t only dependent on the differences that undermine the coloniser/colonised opposition, but on the silences that are non-present in the discourses of both.¹⁰⁹ Okri’s ironic employment of a generally conventional structure would seem to suggest that there is little to separate the violences of a colonised past and a postcolonial present and the silences that surround the representation of both.

Ethics as creative engagement during reading and writing.

Importantly then, it is the repetition of the *leitmotif* metaphor that informs a reconsideration of postcolonial hybridity and allows traces of the silences within various cultural discourses to affect the narrative structure. In the last chapter we saw how certain postcolonial fictions self-consciously drew their readers into an intersubjective relation with their acts of narrative expression. What I want to consider now is how this idea relates to recent ethical criticism, before going on to ask whether it might form an aspect of other postcolonial fictions, and in particular their use of specific structural features.

Burke envisages a relation between individual ethical action and creative self-expression by examining the *responsive* aspect of ethical interaction between subjects:

[t]he act, in being an assertion, has called forth a counter-assertion in the elements that compose its context. And when the agent is enabled to see in terms this counter-assertion, he has transcended the state that characterized at the start. (Burke, pp.38-9; quoted in Albrecht, p.51)

Interestingly, this claim concerning transcendence is very similar to Levinas’s idea that “[t]ranscendence is ethics... [because the subject] is under the accusation of the other... is a hostage for the other, obeying a command before having heard it, faithful to a commitment that it never made” (Levinas, 1978, p.178). As we have seen, the “command” that Levinas refers to here is the call to responsibility, a

¹⁰⁹ For criticisms of hybridity theory’s tendency to overly rely on a deconstruction of binary oppositions see Dukes, p.348, and Lavie and Swedenberg, p.167. See also Aizenberg, p.461, and Coombes, p.107 on the real political dangers that can arise when binary oppositions are deconstructed for commercial ends.

summons that he ultimately links with the idea of God and the prohibition of murder: “you shall not commit murder” (1969, p.199). The infinite transcendence of the other allows the subject to ethically transcend his own ontological condition. For Levinas, transcendence thus means two ethical experiences closely linked: the experience of absolute alterity – the other that we can never fully know or objectify – and also the experience of God – the otherness that makes possible responsibility for the other in the first place (1978, p.179). Without this active and infinite resistance to murder between individuals, no ethics is possible (1969, p.198).

Albrecht also points out that Emerson echoes this theory of interactive self-expression when considering the ever-present role of antagonism in the relationship between self and other. Appropriating Emerson’s perspective he points out that “[i]t is against the resistances of our environment that we know and develop our individuality” (Albrecht, p.51, see Emerson, p.140). Individuality here refers not only to the character of the self, but also to the creative faculties, and though this reference to the environment is made in a particularly naturalistic sense, I want to suggest that such ‘resistances’ can be encountered in social environments also. Thus to develop creatively an individual must encounter resistances, one of which, as Burke and Levinas show, is encountered when interacting with other individuals. The expressive interaction between self and other is therefore a performance based on reciprocal resistance – a “calling into question” (Levinas, 1989b, p.25) which “identifies individuals and concepts and distinguishes them from one and another, or, opposes notions to one another by contradiction or contrariety” (p.30).

Interestingly, when reading *Moby Dick* (1851) Toni Morrison also pinpoints this idea of imaginative and creative struggle as one of the performative functions carried out by Ishmael when attempting to articulate the unspeakable significance of “[t]he Whiteness of the Whale” in terms of idealized American culture and its treatment of its Others (Morrison, 1989, p.17). Ishmael despairs of his inability to relate the “vague, nameless horror concerning the whale... so mystical and well nigh ineffable was it... It was the whiteness of the whale that above all appalled me” (Melville, 1851, p.204, see fig.1). As Morrison notes, what follows in the narrative is a digression into whiteness idealized throughout history, its refinery in Ishmael’s words, “giving the white man *ideal* mastership over every dusky tribe” (my italics).

And yet we have seen evidence of Melville's ironic representation of racially 'ideal' images before; could this too be a satirical take on such idealism?

After a page and a half of reinforcing this refinery Ishmael tells us that

for all these accumulated associations, with whatever is sweet, and honorable and sublime, there yet lurks an elusive something in the innermost idea of this hue, which strikes more of panic to the soul than that redness which affrights in blood. (p.205)

Ishmael's attempt to grasp what is "ineffable" and "elusive" in whiteness swiftly turns it blood-red in this abrupt anticlimax to a page-long sentence. This unsettling structural and rhetorical effect reinforces Morrison's claim that it is not "white *people*" that Ishmael ponders but the silences that reside in any discourse that idealises *whiteness* as a cultural symbol – the 'ideal' of whiteness is suddenly juxtaposed against "the transcendent horrors" of the "white bear of the poles, and the white shark of the tropics." While Ishmael may admit he is unable to pin down exactly what "nameless horror" infects the ideal, his willingness to *engage* with its unknowable otherness still informs an evocative and ironic narrative for his readers. As I shall show, this imaginative attempt to express the inexpressible by Ishmael, and indeed Melville himself as an ironic authorial presence, is a creative project still undertaken by postcolonial authors and their narratives in recent times.

The idea of ethics through interaction is particularly pertinent if we turn to Haney's conviction that "the structure of the reader's interpretive relationship to a literary text has affinities with a person's ethical relationships to others," since a "person or text maintains its otherness [and is] not relegated to a clearly understood place in a system of conceptual or representational presence" (Haney, pp.38-9).¹¹⁰ This idea is also evident in the work of Attridge. In particular, Attridge investigates the definition of the other in different critical discourses, arguing that our relationships with otherness – i.e. as a reader of a text, as a writer of a text, or as an everyday individual meeting other individuals – always come with an ethics of responsibility and creativity attached (Attridge, 1999, pp.21-24 & p.29). He introduces this idea by examining how creative resistance – such as that which

Albrecht comments on and is outlined above – is present within everyday encounters, as well in the act of reading *and* writing.

Using Derrida's consideration of the other as a starting point, Attridge emphasises not only the absolute otherness of the other for the subject, but also the creativity the experience of encountering otherness engenders in the self.¹¹¹ The originality of this intention is mirrored by the inventiveness of his critical style: he uses the image of himself self-consciously engaged in the writing of his essay to provide an example of a writer's interaction with alterity – or the unknowable – during creative act. He notes that,

“creating the other”... emphasizes agency and activity: to be truly creative is to wrest from the familiar the hitherto unthought, to bring into existence by skilful and imaginative intellectual labor an entity that is absolutely different from what is already in being.
(Attridge, 1999, p.21)

The emphasis placed upon the inevitability of agency and resistant activity when the self encounters the other draws obvious parallels with the work of Albrecht and Burke. Yet Attridge develops this idea further: for him aligning the self/other relation with the act of creativity doesn't mean that creativity evokes the non-existent, but that engaging with alterity helps articulate or exemplify unformed ideas that the writer is partly aware of and wishes to put onto paper. In doing this he draws on Derrida's view of writing as a creative enterprise that has no prior prescription, but that brings into existence meanings that were previously indescribable and non-present (Derrida, 1978d, p.11). Like Attridge, Derrida points out that because meaning constantly differs from itself in writing, it possesses irreducible features which allow us to locate the other in writing and reading. This poses problems for Barthes' theory of writing as performance or act, for while Barthes reinforces the

¹¹⁰ Haney draws this view from his appropriation of theorists such as Levinas and Gadamer, but also through his examination of the poetry of prominent Romanticist poets.

¹¹¹ Attridge coins Derrida's phrase “tout autre est tout autre” – “every other (one) is every (bit) other – (Derrida, 1995, pp.82-4), to explain how the other, by its very nature of *being other than the self*, is completely unknowable to the subject. Importantly, in Derrida's own consideration of this phrase, he acknowledges the influence of Levinas in promoting it and the idea that the Other (i.e. God, and every man and woman) is ‘infinitely other’ in relation to the self. Ultimately though Derrida claims that Levinas fails to distinguish between the “infinite alterity of God and the ‘same’ infinite alterity of every human,” and that as such his ethics is always a religious one (1995, p.84).

idea of discursive enunciation as eternally written in the *here and now*, something that is spontaneous, incorporating an element of the unknown (Barthes, 1977a, pp.168-70), he nevertheless ignores the fact that such creativity can only result from an *author's* experience of the unknowable. He claims that while the structure of writing can be followed “like the thread of a stocking,” nevertheless, “there is nothing beneath” (1977a, p.171). As we saw in the last chapter this is the very metaphor used by Levinas and similarly so by Derrida to uncover the necessary traces of the irreducible within writing. Interestingly, Foucault rejects the idea of writing as act (Foucault, 1979, p.198), and though he does elsewhere admit to the role of invention played by the author, he refuses to entertain any notion of the non-discursive within writing (1970, pp.235-6). Thus whereas in Barthes' and Foucault's famous interjections on the subject we see authorship solely as an effect of cultural discourse, creative writing in Attridge's sense always contains an element of the unknown, that which can't be reduced to discourse – “I am not able to say how [the newly invented sentence] came into being, but I can say I did not produce it solely by means of an active shaping of existing, conscious, mental materials” (p.21).

Attridge's claims are reminiscent of Bisla's call for an examination of the importance of “those complications that might have been experienced by the author in the act of composition” (Bisla, p.105). Her aim is to take issue with what she calls the “conventional-framework-bound criticisms” that traditionally equates the critic, but not the author, with the reader.¹¹² More than this, she also sees a need to link the “complications (or complicatedness)” of creative writing to the interaction that take place between fiction and history – in this context the author also necessarily becomes a reader of history (p.112).¹¹³ Here the individual author, just like any reader, has an inevitable responsibility to respond to the silences or unknowable aspects of such ‘histories’ – an experience which necessarily entails interacting with alterity through an imaginative act. Writers in this sense are not only engaged in the creation (or appropriation) of the other, but also dependent on an experience of

¹¹² See also Rimmon-Kenan, pp.86-9 on the idea that the real author, as opposed to the implied one, is due reconsideration within critical discourse, especially in his/her relation to creative writing as communicative act.

¹¹³ See Rainsford, pp.216-7 & p.224 on the idea that acknowledging the *trace* of authorship also means acknowledging the personal “burden and obstacle” of creative writing.

absolute alterity. Subjective creativity – the production of text for example – cannot, as Barthes and Foucault argue, be solely a result of social and cultural discourses.

This introduces an element to the act of creativity and the act of being that “achieves what a logical or discursive account could not”: creative behaviour involves “both the refashioning of the old and of the unanticipated advent of the new” (Attridge, 1999, p.21). It finds support in Ricoeur’s belief that “human language is *inventive* despite the objective limits and codes which govern it” (Ricoeur and Kearney, p.19). Interestingly, this idea is reflected in the strong links that can be drawn between artistic creativity and the Yoruba idea of tradition. As Yai points out, the linguistic terms for these two concepts – *itàn* and *àsà* – are etymologically linked. *Sà* and *itàn* being semantically cognate means that without creative choice (*sà*), a tradition of cultural being (*àsà*) is not possible (Yai, p.113). Attridge’s argument also echoes Rorty’s view that writers, through their appropriation of the surplus of meaning within metaphors and figurative language, are producers of the wholly new (Rorty, p.17).¹¹⁴ Importantly, as Attridge outlines in detail, this ‘irrational’ aspect of encountering the other in the act of writing and in day-to-day existence bears a strong relation to Levinas’s view of the subject’s ethical responsibility for the other. As we shall see, this ethics of creativity has implications not only for the writer as artist, but for the reader and the ethico-political aims of the novel.

Can the text be a face?

As noted in the last chapter, for Levinas ethical responsibility entails being attentive to the trace of vulnerability that arises during face-to-face discursive relations. And as Haney points out, when engaged in the act of reading it is plausible to consider text as other, even an other person. For Attridge a similar interaction occurs in the act of writing, an act during which he claims responsibility for the other is no less pertinent that when encountering the other as person in life. Like Levinas, Attridge emphasises the risk that is always inherent when contemplating the other – “a crucial concept in any consideration of creativity... every such opening is a gamble. I trust the other before I know what the other will bring” (p.27). And also like Levinas,

Attridge strongly emphasises the distinction that must be drawn between what Levinas calls the “primordial” ethical demand of self/other responsibility (Levinas, 1969, p.199) which always involves unpredictability and risk, and *moral* obligations which are always predicated by the specific social settings in which they arise.¹¹⁵ As seen in chapter two, moral perspectives could be informed by the non-discursive ethics that Levinas uncovers, but they are nevertheless always preceded by such an ethics. This ethics then, effective during the creation and reading of narrative and yet nevertheless non-discursive, seems to bear strong similarities to that phenomenon that Morrison calls “non-narrative, nonliterary experience of... text” – the constant responsibility on the part of a reader or writer to *respond* responsibly to the otherness inherent in texts.

Woods also emphasises the need to consider our experience of texts as encounters with otherness (Woods, 2000, p.159). Like Haney and Attridge, he draws comparisons between written texts and the other of the self, but does so by examining how the representation of voice through language bears relation to Levinas’s theorisation of the “face” as a pre-linguistic expression of the other. In Levinas’s view the

proximity of the other is the signifying of the face. A signifying that is immediately from beyond the plastic forms that keep covering it up like a mask with their presence in perception. Incessantly it penetrates these forms. Before any particular expression – and beneath all particular expression that... covers and protects it – there is the nakedness and baring of expression as such... (Levinas, 1989b, pp.23-4)

Or as he puts it elsewhere, the face “*expresses itself*” (1969, p.51). As we saw in the last chapter, the other unexpectedly expresses the risk of discourse relations through the silent trace of alterity in its ‘face.’ But what exactly does this non-presence express before the other has even opened its mouth – if it has one – to give voice? And can we convincingly relate this aspect of the encountering the other with our experiencing of reading postcolonial fiction in general?

¹¹⁴ See also Barnes and Duncan, p.11 on this aspect of Rorty’s theory of metaphor.

¹¹⁵ Also see Critchley, 1992, p.3 on the distinction between the “primordial ethical experience,” and “civic duty.”

Woods reads this expression quite literally as the expression of a universal and subjectively shared aspiration: “Thou shalt not kill” (Woods, 2000, p.159). As noted before, this is the sixth commandment which Levinas sees as one of the transcendental demands of ethical relations (Levinas, 1989b, pp.25-30): a “summons to responsibility” which is the “word of God” (1981a, p.27).¹¹⁶ For Woods, ethics arises in literary structures through a text’s ability to articulate the speaker’s voice, allowing reading to become an activity during which we engage with an ethical vocal expression of the speaker as other: “Language attesting to the ‘heard word’ of the Other in sound, becomes the basis for an ethical poetics” (p.159).¹¹⁷ Yet such claims seem to suggest that the ethics of discourse relations depends on the phonetic quality of dialogue, an idea that ignores Levinas’s insistence that the face be seen as silent expression. Contrary to Levinas, Woods sees this summons to responsibility within literature as an effect of the effort of certain poets to enact “the performance of the tongue” – a replication of speech provides an “ethical attestation to the Other” (p.159).

On this evidence, Woods provides a flawed examination of how Levinas’s work might be applied to critical reading methods since he makes no attempt to differentiate between the silent call to responsibility that precedes discourse and that which he claims can be ‘heard’ in discourse. As Levinas points out, “the ‘Thou shalt not kill’ that is also the meaning of the face” occurs “before any verbal sign” (1981b, p.127). Or as Cohen puts it, this responsibility is, “paradoxically, the unspoken first word prior to the first word spoken” (Cohen, 1986, p.5). Even so, Woods’ enthusiasm – alongside that of Attridge and Haney – to look at the text as an other with which we can ethically interact certainly allows considerations of the unspeakable aspects of a Levinasian ethics to enter narrative critique. These critics uncover what Levinas has called “a way of subordinating knowledge, objectification, to the encounter with the other that *is presupposed in all language*” (Levinas, 1986, p.97, my italics).

¹¹⁶ See also Levinas, 1998a, pp.9-10 on the temptation to murder the other.

¹¹⁷ Note that Woods also draws from the poets David Miller and Bruce Andrews, both in their poetry and in their critical work, to produce evidence for his theorisation of the non-presence of the other’s face ‘in’ the reading of texts.

Taking Levinas's point that an ethical encounter is "presupposed in all language," it is interesting to note how his theory of the structure of face of the other can be compared to the structure of narrative discourse. It is the "plastic" structure of the face as form and content that betrays the silent expression within the face:

The face brings a notion of truth which... is... expression: the existent breaks through all the envelopings and generalities of Being to spread out in its 'form' the totality of its 'content'... the first content of expression is expression itself. (Levinas, 1969, p.51)

Form – incessantly betraying its own manifestation, congealing into a plastic form, for it is adequate to the same – alienates the exteriority of the other. The face is living presence; it is expression. (p.66)

References are made here to the "content" that is figured by the face, and the "form" that the face takes when the subject encounters the other. Both terms can be interpreted synonymously with their use in the literary critique of this project. Firstly Levinas warns us not to consider the face simply as a figuration of tangible content, as a "set of qualities forming an image," because the face "*exceeds the idea of the other in me*" (p.50) – it 'expresses' absolute alterity. Secondly, the form that the face takes, though recognisable as being similar to other human faces – "adequate to the same" – is in fact indicative of the unspeakable yet acknowledged expression of responsibility that lies within it. The form of the face, betrayed by its own possibility of expressiveness, alerts us to this expression of living presence (Levinas, 1981a, p.122). This pre-discursive expression of ethics undoes our impression of the face as a simple structure of form and content. We have seen this ethical responsibility similarly undo our perception of narrative as a wholly discursive structure.

Here we have an argument that reinforces those of Attridge, Haney, and Woods for the application of Levinas's view of self/other relations to narrative discourse, even when Levinas's work seems most concerned with the need for physical proximity in such relations. Structure, under the semblance of seeming familiar yet nevertheless unique from text to text, provides the means via which we as readers uncover the pre-linguistic ethics on which relations are based.

When considering *The Famished Road* we saw how the repetition of a *leitmotif* metaphor could reveal within the narrative structure a silent non-presence

related to the violent and unspeakable, yet shared, aspects of distinct cultures and their histories and discourses. Like in Genette's reading of Proust, metaphor here becomes a "necessary instrument for [the] recovery" of that "'hidden essence' that eludes perception" (Genette, pp.204-6), uncovering within the narrative structure the "psychological experience of involuntary memory... by bringing together two sensations separated in time" (p.204). And likewise it becomes easier to see what Ricoeur is referring to when he identifies the surplus of meaning in metaphorical analogy and argues that this an aspect of poetic discourse that brings to language "modes of being that ordinary vision obscures or even represses." As such, we as readers have access to an "experience that does not allow itself to be completely inscribed within the categories of *logos* or proclamation and its transmission or interpretation" (Ricoeur, 1976, p.60). Metaphors here retain an aspect of alterity that is necessarily experienced during the reading event. Importantly, Härting argues that this is also the effect of the repetition of the structural metaphor in *Beloved* – it produces "sites of narrative ambiguity, by marking a textual site of intervention that resists the reader's complete conquest of the text" (Härting, p.31). Reading such views alongside Albrecht, Attridge, Haney and Woods, it becomes possible to appreciate *leitmotif* metaphors not only for their ability to undermine (non-realistic) oppositional identity politics, but also because they uncover those unspeakable aspects of hybrid discourses whose otherness we as readers have a responsibility to respond to.

Reading and writing performativity and the unknowable in Romesh Gunesequera's *The Sandglass*.

Gunesequera's *The Sandglass* (1998) is another example of a novel where the title forms an introduction to a central *leitmotif* metaphor that affects its structure. Its examination here is useful because it emphasises the cross-generic, transcultural nature of such repetitive structural features in postcolonial fiction – *The Sandglass* is written by a Sri Lankan author and does not fall into the magic realism category. As well as this its structure is noticeably less conventional than Okri's. Its use of shifting focalisation and radical temporal features have more in common with the narrative techniques of Morrison and Rushdie, whilst the realism of narrated events exhibits

none of the supernatural elements which mark the fiction of all the aforementioned authors. As such it provides an opportunity to see if the irreducible aspects of repetitive structural features arise within less fabulous novels, and how they relate to the more radically innovative formal features that Gunesequera employs.

The metaphor of the sandglass as an archaic symbol of temporality noticeably affects the construction of content throughout the novel. As we saw in chapter two, in this context content refers to the events that the various narrators describe from both first and third-person perspectives, and the actual character discourse that is transcribed to the reader. As the novel progresses it transpires that time and its passing is an overwhelming concern of most, if not all of the characters, and that the sandglass – only once or twice referred to directly – possibly provides an alternative to the conventional appraisal of time as a linear progression within narratives. I do not mean to suggest that the manipulation of temporality within such postcolonial novels is unique. The interrogation of narrative representations of time, especially in terms of historic time, is a theme that many well-known recent novels deal with – Marquez’s *One Hundred Years*, Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* and Coetzee’s *Foe* are examples – and one which has led Walcott to proclaim that a writer’s radical representation of history, and his/her ultimate rejection of the narrative of “history as time,” is what defines him/her as postcolonial (Walcott, pp.370-4).¹¹⁸ What I want to argue rather is that the *leitmotif* of the sandglass is an example of a literary structure that influences the wider narrative structure of the novel, and in doing so raises ethical questions concerning the ‘silences’ that pervade postcolonial narratives.

The Sandglass tells the story of two wealthy Sri Lankan families, the Vatunases and the Ducals, who prospered in the wake of colonialism. The story is recounted mainly by Chip, a Sri Lankan immigrant living in London, though much of it is made up of the direct discourse of his friends who recount historical events from their families’ past to him. One of these is Pearl, an immigrant woman who lived in London and who died prior to the telling of the tale. It is Pearl’s obsession with time

¹¹⁸ See for example Feldman, 1999, pp.378-9 on the idea that postcolonial novels generally deny readers an “unequivocally linear reading of a re-membered past”; Bongie, pp.31-2 on structural representations of the past in *Foe*; and Richards, pp.79-80 on Okri’s exposure of a hidden history of social violence within his early writing’s representations of multifarious discourses.

and her constant references to it in Chip's recollections of their conversations that first alerts the reader to this central theme:

'We had buckets of *time* in those days.'... 'Time to care.' She said it as though she suddenly knew that she no longer had time, that suddenly time was no longer on her side. She had memory but no time. It made no sense to me then. Only now am I beginning to understand how time might run out. Will run out for all of us. (Gunsekera, p.41)

Such repetitive references to time, and its relation to the pre-migrant past and impending death, litter the discourse of the characters throughout the novel. Here though, we also gain an insight into how the discourse of characters such as Pearl eventually infects the discourse of Chip himself: the repetition of the word "time" in Pearl's discourse is ultimately doubled in Chip's subjective commentary. The importance of this idea will become apparent as the critique of the novel progresses.

The second of Chip's friends is Prins, Pearl's son, who whilst arranging his mother's funeral during a few days in London tells Chip of the violent events that he has been uncovering in his family's Sri Lankan past, and his suspicion of a conspiracy that has covered up the truth of these events. Prins constantly reminds Chip that he doesn't "have a lot of time" (p.58), and that he needs to return to Sri Lanka immediately to continue investigating the violent events that surrounded his father's death. Prins' relationship with the novel's representation of time has a direct bearing on the narrative structure. Though the novel begins and ends at the same point in Chip's narrative – with him having returned to Sri Lanka in search of Prins who has mysteriously disappeared – the whole of Chip's disjointed narrative which leads up to this point is provided during the space of the day and a morning that it takes him and Prins to arrange and go to Pearl's funeral. The fourteen-chapter structure self-consciously reflects this: the chapters are named after the time of day at which transcribed conversations between himself and Prins allows Chip to shift the narrative back to past events in the lives of the Vatunases and the Ducals. These chapters move from 'Morning' till 'Dawn' the next day and are framed overall by the brief opening and closing sections narrated by Chip in present-day Sri Lanka. The narrative therefore rejects a linear temporal structure in favour of one which repeatedly shifts from the events in London into lengthy digressions made up of the

different historical discourses amalgamated by Chip, and then back to Chip and Prins in London. Thus the discourses always return to the temporal and spatial setting from which they started. Unlike Pearl's personal obsession with time, Prins' actual presence with Chip serves as the impetus for the sandglass-like movement of the narrative's unconventional temporal sequence between different sites.

Like Feldman, who sees such "postmodernist poetics of memory" in postcolonial fiction as an attempt to articulate "alternative, formerly repressed memories," I want to suggest that Chip's narrative not only manipulates temporality in a way that questions traditional appropriations of historical time, but that it does so to specifically depict the silences that exist when constructing historical narratives. Chip's own discourse points this out when he describes Pearl's letters which he uses to make up his narrative as, "[e]ach telling its own special story and *hiding another between every line*" (p.268, my italics). As we shall see, this realisation manifests itself structurally in Chip's manipulation of the time and space of the narrative he provides and the discursive content he places within it. Unlike Feldman's reading of such unconventional temporal narrative structures though, I want to suggest that rather than simply questioning the operation of memory itself and unmasking the political structures that can enforce memory repression, Gunesekera's radical structure emphasises the relationships between such historical silences and an ethics of reading and writing narrative.

In the chapter entitled 'Darkness,' Prins shows Chip the clippings which he has used to investigate his father Jason's death. Chip immediately uses the fact that they are watching a Gene Kelly retrospective on television to temporally and spatially shift the narrative back to a recollection of Pearl's description of how the first time she saw *Singin' in the Rain* was the night Jason died. Several distinct discourses make up the narrative that follows: a direct discourse transcription of Pearl's memories of that night and her feelings towards Jason prior to his death; a third-person narration of the last tense conversations between Pearl and Jason that Chip constructs from Pearl's words and what he has read in Jason's journal; and several italicised third-person narratives of that time transcribed by a narrator that we have no choice but to assume is Chip. Throughout this the narrative briefly returns several times to Chip and Prins in London (see fig.2).

Although Chip admits that the discourses provided to him by Pearl and Jason are what allow him to “*reconstruct* something of those last few days” (p.169, my italics), the disjointed structure means that the reader must necessarily question Chip’s intention in providing this reconstructed version of the past in such an unconventional manner. Why not simply utilise a distanced first-person transcription of the conversations that Pearl and Jason had, and frame them with Chip’s thoughts on the matter and his admission of authoritative inventive license? I want to suggest an answer to this might be found if we return to the idea of the *performativity* of repetitive metaphors and Attridge’s insights into the ethical relation between self and otherness.

The use of the sandglass metaphor to repeatedly structure the temporal sequences here also allows Chip’s narratives to successfully uncover the unknowable trace of silence that is encountered when an individual subject attempts to interact with the discourse of others. His inventive discourses not only reconstruct the violently silenced past, they reconstruct several similar versions of the same historic moment and culminate with a shift into a final third-person italicised representation:

‘It was such an impossible situation,’ Pearl seemed to buckle under the tension of the scene she recalled.

‘You should take things slower. What is this mad rush all the time,’ she had said.

‘It’s business, my dear.’

‘Business? Jason, you do not understand the first thing about business.’

Jason’s face changes shape as his thoughts ricochet around his head...

‘What?’ (p.164, see fig.2)

Chip’s authoritative and italicised intrusion into the narrative after Pearl’s criticism of Jason’s business acumen signals his self-conscious aim of ‘filling in’ the silences that he, by the very nature of time itself, cannot have complete knowledge of. Importantly then, by altering the font of his narrative to further reinforce his imaginative intrusion into the structure of the discursive content, Chip reinforces the necessary performative and creative act that occurs when a subject enters into discursive relations with otherness *as an aspect of writing itself*.

This reaffirms Attridge’s conviction that an ethical self/other relation manifests itself in the performative “staging” of “semantic and emotional”

interaction in literary texts (Attridge, 1999, p.27). He claims that the interaction with the “singular otherness manifested” in literary texts is evident in,

the selection and arrangement of words. In these works otherness and singularity are inherent in the words themselves, their sequence, their suggestiveness, their patterning. To reexperience the otherness of a work of this type... it is necessary to recall the words, in their created order... the creative achievement is a formal one, whatever else it may be. (Attridge, 1999, p.26)

Evidence for Attridge’s views comes as we continue to read Chip’s shifting account of the lead up to Jason’s violent death. Chip signals just how performative his semantic staging of Pearl and Jason’s unknown past is by transcribing some of Jason’s phrases from his journal word for word in bold italicised font. The bold font of “*Then it sounded too hollow, he wrote in blue ink*” (p.169, see fig.2) immediately emphasises a concern with the graphological and that this is a transcription of written discourse.

Yet this unconventional emphasis is unnecessary – Chip follows it by immediately telling us that Jason wrote it. This extraordinary attention to the words themselves though allows the reader to remember that Chip used very similar words a page earlier in his invented narrative of Jason and Pearl’s disagreement prior to Jason’s death:

Pearl says nothing. Nothing for minutes. Finally she blurts out: ‘Do you know what Wednesday is?’

But Pearl’s words have a hollowness to them. She is speaking in a house that is empty.
(p.168)

Importantly, the two allusions to hollowness are used in different situational contexts. The bold italicised font of the final allusion reinforces the point that in order to articulate the silence that surrounds the painful history of Pearl and Jason and the violence they experienced, Chip has to respond to the discourses he has from them and performatively re-enact them in a form that seems suitable. He therefore draws our attention to Jason’s written discourse to remind us of his previous use of it to recreate Pearl’s unknowable experiences. He does not pretend that he is not being

inventive, for as the structure and form of his narrative illustrates, the recognition of these silences and the ‘impossible’ articulation of them is one of the central aims in creating such a narrative. Importantly, it is only through the repeated manipulation of temporality via the sandglass metaphor that makes this possible. The brief but frequent returns to Chip’s thoughts as he awaits Pearl’s funeral in London are what alerts the reader to the semantic staging of the various discourses that Chip has in his possession, and the imaginative ways he goes about articulating their inevitable silences.

Such a manipulation of available discourses on the part of Chip replicates what Hostettler calls a “discourse that is very playful and creative. It conceives meaning as a performative moment instead of a given, or a presupposition, or a test of time” (Hostettler, p.407). She does this by appropriating Nietzsche’s theory of the “truth” as an effect of figurative language.¹¹⁹ Interestingly, she also appropriates Morrison’s idea of silence, or the unspeakable unspoken, as a “signifier” of *real* historical events. She tells us that the historian “can only collect silence as a signifier, a caesura to history to mark that which, at the time when she collected it, was silent” (p.409). The historically unknowable for Hostettler therefore becomes the very signifier of the silenced ‘truth’ or realities of history, but the meaning of such realities can only be articulated in a discourse that is performative and therefore inventive. As we have seen, these are features of creativity that involve interacting with the silence of the unknowable. To this degree, Chip’s repetitious manipulation of the sandglass *leitmotif* perhaps produces something similar to what Miller calls the unaccountable and non-conceptual “empty space” which arises when literary repetition induces an “alogic” relationship of mimesis and difference (Miller, 1982, pp.6-19).

As Attridge points out, one of the ethical responsibilities of discursively engaging with the other “involves assuming the other’s needs [and] being willing to be called to account for the other” (p.27). Being responsible for the other in this sense therefore always involves the articulation of an element of silence through the self’s creative performance, for it is impossible to *completely know* the other whether

¹¹⁹ See Nietzsche, pp.46-47 on how we gain a “sense of truth” by employing “a mobile army of metaphors” that we use to objectify human relations.

face-to-face or in an historical context, for the other would no longer be *other* then. Or as we saw in the last chapter, there is always an unknowable trace of the other that we have to respond to and yet cannot describe; something about the other always remains *non-present*, and therefore beyond our attempts to objectify it. Thus when encountering others we creatively interact with their non-present traces to give them an ontological presence – *we imagine otherness as wholly present*. In the case of *The Sandglass*, this creative performance is something that is enabled by the repeated manipulation of a temporal metaphor which, in *leitmotif* fashion, becomes the central influence on the narrative structure itself.

As Pearl tells Chip, ““You see clearly only when it is empty... You can’t look back until it is it, but by then it’s over. Empty... You have to turn yourself upside down and start all over again”” (p.159). For Feldman, who finds it difficult to reconcile postmodern manipulations of temporality with a postcolonial political aspiration to engage with the silenced past, such innovative narratives attempt to “reconstruct mythic time while engaging historical memory” (Feldman, 1999, p.382). Such a critique might well be applied to *The Sandglass*, but Gunesekera’s use of the performativity of narrative structure to consider historical memory is also indicative of a desire to examine the ethical experiences of subjects when encountering the silences of others – both enforced and unknowable – that refer to the violence of the past. Interestingly, the self-conscious graphological emphasis of the narrative also encourages an inquiry into how its structure might be related to the ethical responsibility of encountering silence while *writing*, as well as a hermeneutic ethics of reading.

Ahdaf Soueif’s *The Map of Love*: the responsibility of creativity within the narratives of postcolonial memory.

We have seen then how the use of certain metaphors in postcolonial fiction raises ethical issues of historical silence and creativity, and to a degree how these concerns in literary discourse relate to socio-political concerns in the worlds inhabited by the writers of such fiction. Before finishing this chapter I want to suggest that it is possible to locate a common relation or theme that links these aspects of postcolonial narrative structures from the perspective of both writer and reader: the narrative

representation of memory. As we have seen with the novels already considered in this thesis, the articulation of characters' pasts can have pivotal effects on the structures used to represent their subjectivities. What I want to ask now is whether an understanding of performativity as a literary *act of ethical expression* could be used as an explicatory framework for the representation of memory itself in post-traumatised cultures. Can we, for example, apply the idea that "memory is a contestation of amnesia, where the waning of historical consciousness is countered by an ethical desire to censor the very forgetting of memory itself" (Woods, 2000, p.160) to an ethical critique of postcolonial narrative structures in a Levinasian sense?

Grass has examined some of the difficulties that face political writers who attempt to represent memories of the past, especially those that write from within nation states whose official versions of historic events oppose his or her own. He distinguishes between the subjective experiences of *memory* and *recollection*, arguing that authors who write about the past use memory as an aid, but it is in the presentation of recollection that they truly excel – "[a] recollection is allowed to cheat, to embellish or to pretend, whereas the memory is happy to be seen as a scrupulously trustworthy accountant" (Grass, p.63). Pleasing memories of an event, for example an experience during childhood, can lead to nostalgic yet distorted recollections of related events.¹²⁰

These inaccuracies that characterise the recollection of memory have also been commented on by Kermode in his examination of what he calls the "necessary doubleness" of memory. Working with Augustine's *Confessions* X.8 he concludes that the

experience as remembered is not, affectively, of the same quality as the experience itself; or... the experienced as remembered is not the same as the experienced remembered... another aspect of difference in doubleness [is that a] pain recalled is recognised as a pain, yet it may be recalled with pleasure; a past joy can be remembered with intense sadness.
(Kermode, p.89)

¹²⁰ See also Lodge, p.56 on the subjective selectiveness of recollection that intervenes when we reduce memories of factual events to discourse.

For both Kermode and Grass then the discursive recollection of memory is something that is not to be trusted, and yet both agree that it is being good at it that makes a writer successful at his/her job.¹²¹ For Grass, narrative *is* recollection (Grass, p.63). There is an acknowledgement here of the positive element of *imagination* intrinsic to the production of recollected memories and literary representations of them. As Brady points out when considering the inter-dependence of memory, history, and fiction, the traditional perception of memory as “stable, objective, and retrievable... is replaced by an awareness of the dynamic and reconstructive character of memory, pieced together from many separate fragments of experience, both mental and emotional, from both past and present” (Brady, p.17). Though writers – and all individuals – constantly engage in the production and discussion of memories, the act of remembering, or recollecting, is carried out for a variety of different reasons: nostalgia, political purposes, the desire to articulate the truth, the desire to manipulate and invent the truth, to provide a fictional story, to lie, etc. Whatever the different reasons for regurgitating the past, it necessarily harbours an imaginative element, and as Attridge points out, to engage in imaginative acts means to necessarily engage creatively and therefore ethically with the essence of otherness. What I want to suggest is that when attempting to represent memories of oppression the imaginative act that rearticulates or *recollects* historical voices and silences produces the ethical responsibilities of intersubjective relation. In doing this I wish to turn to another international postcolonial text, Ahdaf Soueif’s *The Map of Love* (1999).

As we saw, *The Sandglass* can be read as a novel whose use of *leitmotif* metaphor self-consciously assists its performative representation of the silences of postcolonial history. This complex structure, brought about through the access of a central narrator to the oral and written narratives of others, has similarities to the narrative of *The Map of Love*. In this novel the central narrator Amal has access to events in the past through a one-hundred year old trunk full of the letters and writings of several of her ancestors. Many of these were written prior to Egyptian independence and describe that period of its history. In *The Sandglass* Chip has

¹²¹ For example, see Kermode, pp.95-6 on Wordsworth and autobiography and anamnesis.

access to more recent yet also turbulent events in Sri Lanka's past through a biscuit tin full of a friend's old letters and diaries. To a degree then both novels operate as performative, metaphoric structures that represent the histories of different characters as narrative. Importantly though, neither of these narratives pretends to represent those histories with objective veracity; both self-consciously allow the focalised perspectives of Amal, Chip, and others to infiltrate and disrupt the narratives placed before them – numerous voices therefore interrupt and affect the historical narratives placed before the reader.

The Map of Love is made up of numerous discourses: dated first-person narratives provided by Amal, an Egyptian land-owner and divorcee living in Cairo, and Isabel, an American journalist, between 1997 and 1998; emails that they send and receive; diary entries and letters written by Lady Anna Winterbourne made between 1897 and 1911; diaries entries made by her Egyptian sister-in-law Layla during the same period; early twentieth-century British and Egyptian newspaper excerpts; and interjections by an unknown third-person narrator which often frames the other discourses at various points throughout the novel. The historical narratives are provided as Amal reads them, she herself having discovered them in a trunk brought to her by Isabel from New York.

The trunk was originally owned by Lady Anna Winterbourne, a member of the British aristocracy who travelled to Egypt in 1900 and controversially married the Egyptian Pasha, landowner, and lawyer, Sharif Pasha al-Baroudi, a public figure and an out-spoken supporter of the Egyptian nationalist movement. It transpires that Amal and Isabel are related through Anna, who is Isabel's great grandmother and Amal's great-aunt. The main story provided, that of Anna and Sharif's controversial love affair, is therefore disjointed and complex, its articulation repetitively interrupted by numerous other discourses set at the beginning and end of the twentieth-century.

The novel embarks upon this story through the voice of the unknown third-person narrator, and is situated in Cairo, 1998. It begins as it means to go on, by immediately foregrounding the idea of silence in discourse, through its choice of starting the narrative mid-sentence with the use of a hyphen: “ – and there, on the table... lies the voice that has set her dreaming again” (Soucif, 1999, p.4). Leaving

the first part of this opening sentence unknowable, the narrative introduces the reader to the self-conscious absences that permeate many of the discourses throughout. As we shall see, all retain an awareness of their inability to represent with complete authority the events that they attempt to recount. From the outset of the novel then the reader is purposely forced to contend with those unknowable aspects of otherness that we have seen Levinas, Derrida, and Attridge identify in discourse.

This unconventional start to the novel is compounded by the introduction of yet another absence as the narrative spatially shifts to the written (italicised) words provided by the voice that Amal hears:

Across a hundred years the woman's voice speaks to her – so clearly that she cannot believe it is not possible to pick up a pen and answer.

The child sleeps. Nur al-Hayah: light of my life. (p.4)

The words in italics are Lady Winterbourne's, written in her last journal entry after the politically motivated murder of her husband Sharif. Yet the reader is not yet aware of this information, its conspicuous absence creating the conventional 'lack' within the story whose necessary resolution gains reader attention. Yet importantly, it also does much more than this, its content and form immediately outlining the structural features which as we shall see form the basis for the ethical issues that will be considered throughout the novel. Importantly, the information that Amal "cannot believe it is not possible to *pick up a pen and answer*" (my italics) also draws our attention to the idea of writing as an almost dialogic response to otherness. This is one of the themes we saw foregrounded in *The Sandglass* through its representation of Chip's need to respond to discourses from the past. It also provides an interesting contrast to Woods's idea that readers can enter into a dialogic relationship with the text as other. The representation of Amal's thoughts here would seem to suggest that any such response to the otherness of text is a response to writing, and should be responded to in a textual form, rather than solely through dialogue.

The other effect of this representation of Amal's thoughts is that it situates a narrative distance between her and the unknown narrator. The futility of Amal's desire to respond to Anna's writing immediately places a question mark over her

ability to read these writings from an objective perspective, and we realise that the omniscient narrator will not always reinforce Amal's thoughts and beliefs, though s/he will unequivocally represent them. As we shall see, this ironic dissonance between other narrative discourses and Amal's is reinforced later in the novel as her emotional involvement with Anna's story threatens to affect her rational view of the world. Amal's reliability is therefore drawn into question from the start of the novel. As well as this though, Amal's subjective if emotional disposition underlines another of the novel's intentions and the relation between it and its complex structure – the idea that literary texts ethically engage with otherness by forcing us to performatively respond to another's *discourse*, a point made by the narrator's use of the word *voice* to describe historical documents. As we shall see, the discursive act that Amal embarks on forms not only a recollection of Anna's experiences from one hundred years ago, but also a willingness and a desire to intersubjectively relate and respond to the "voice" of the historic memories that her dead relative has left her with.

The degree to which Amal chooses to imaginatively engage with the various voices from the past alters as the novel progresses, invariably affecting its overall structure. Initially she simply relates the content – always dated in replication of the diary form – of Anna and Layla's various journals word for word, interrupting their discourse from time to time to consider her own views on the history that she is uncovering (see fig.3; the change in font on p.243 marks the shift in Amal's reading from Anna's English to Layla's Arabic). At times though, Amal's interjections change so that she herself assumes the role of Anna's third-person narrator, providing fictionalised introductions and commentaries on Anna's disposition. An example of this is provided in the diary entries marked 'London, October 1898 to March 1899,' when after having admitted she is "obsessed" with the journals, Amal begins the diary entry herself with the words, "The light is like nothing Anna has ever seen before... Anna looks down at her own hands... her wedding band gleaming dull against the pale skin" (p.26, see fig.4).

Here again we have an example of the magnitude of Amal's emotional involvement with Anna's story. We know from her own discourse that Amal herself is preoccupied with the failure of her own marriage, a personal aspect of her life that

she seems willing to graft onto Anna's narrative. She purposely uses a hyperbolic impression of "light" in the above quotation to represent the experience of wearing a wedding ring as something that transcends everyday sentience. Such obvious interjections again undermine her reliability as the teller of Anna's tale. More than this though, they also outline the degree to which Amal as a subject is gradually initiating a relationship with the otherness of Anna's 'voice,' and allowing herself to creatively and imaginatively respond to her discourse.

It is important to note that the first-person narrative sequences by Amal, and Isabel to a lesser degree, are also marked with dates and place-names as though they were diary entries, though the detail of the events described and the direct discourse related therein makes it clear that this is not the case. This provides an example of the ironic authorial presence that remains throughout the novel. The other effect of dating the narratives is that it forms one of the textual markers that uncovers the extent to which the intersubjective and responsive relation between Amal and Anna's discourses develops as the novel draws to a close. For example, the present-day entry marked '17th November 1997, Tawasi' (see fig.5) begins with Amal recounting the day's events in present-tense first-person narrative, but soon temporally and spatially shifts to the section of Anna's journal that Amal is reading. This again shifts, with no interjection by Amal, to a reading of Layla's diary. After Layla's entry though, the point-of-view disjointedly moves to a third-person representation of events in Anna's household one hundred years ago. The effect is somewhat unsettling – on the one hand the reader is provided with access to the historic past, yet along with this comes the realisation that we cannot be sure who is speaking – is it the original omniscient third-person narrator, or is it Amal who has assumed authority? This is a technique that is employed more and more as the novel progresses, with the narrator's omniscience allowing the focalised thoughts of the historic characters to present a fictionalised narrative made up of several voices.

The importance of Tawasi example (fig.5) is that it is at this point in the novel that it becomes clear that it is Amal herself who provides the unknown narrator's voice. As the scene is transcribed it is drastically interrupted in mid-sentence during a representation of Layla's direct discourse. The result of this is a spatial and temporal shift to a commotion that has suddenly ensued in Amal's present

day house at Tawasi. Amal, distracted from her reading of the journal, goes to see what is going on and is told that the men of her village have been rounded up for interrogation in the wake of the actual terrorist bombing at Luxor. The other effect here is that Amal's interaction with the discourses of the past is ironically de-historicised for a brief second – the violence which we see represented in the historical discourses is suddenly immanent in the recent non-fictionalised present. As Malak points out, while the Fellaheen (Egyptian peasants) traditionally experienced the brunt of violent British oppression, it is their descendants that are “once again paying the heavy penalty being caught in the cross-fire between armed Islamist militants and the government's heavy-handed security forces” (Malak, p.153).

Through Amal's creative appropriation of historical narratives then the novel succeeds in highlighting the creative element that is necessary when responding to the literary discourse of another person. It also emphasises the degree to which such *recollections* necessitate the subjective narrator to enter into a responsive relationship with the unknowable aspects of otherness that form the discourses of historical memory. As we have seen, Soueif achieves this by structuring the separate dated narratives around Amal's present-day narration and then by introducing the disruptive shifts that allow Amal to progressively assume control of the narrative history itself. As noted above though, Amal's third-person accounts of the past do not assume absolute authority – they are replete with focalised representations of the experiences and thoughts of the historic characters. Amal's account then, whilst apparently omniscient, is, like Chip's, dependent on engaging creatively with the silent otherness of the discourses of the past, and in doing so transforming her experience of the past itself.

As shown before, for Attridge the transformations that the subject undergoes during discursive relations are only made possible by the subject's use of the imagination. When considering how this might affect our reading of discourse as other he tells us that discourses call us into a responsive relationship that demands we imaginatively interact with them and thus ‘transform’ them. Responding to literary discourse would then

involve a suspension of my habits, a willingness to rethink old positions... To respond to the singularity of the text I read is thus to affirm its singularity in my singular response, open not

just to the signifying potential of the words on the page but also to the time and the place within which the reading occurs, the ungeneralizable relation between this text and this reader... [A] creative reading often moves to an articulation in words, as if the work being read demanded a new work in response. This articulation... may itself inventively make possible new ways of writing, new ways of reading. (p.25)

Soueif's achievement in *The Map of Love* is that her structuring of Amal's responsive reading of the discourses of the past represents for us the performative act that subjects involve themselves when reading *and* writing. In particular it is Amal's response to the unknowable and silent aspects of those discourses that eventually culminate in her unique recreation of historical memory. She takes responsibility for those silences and in doing so turns the recollections of past memories into a present, and impossible, recollection of that past.

In the last chapter we saw how Levinas shows that the disruptive traces of the silenced other that we find interrupting totalising discourses are the means by which such totalization undoes itself. Interestingly, by attending to the unknowable silences of the historical discourses that she has in her possession, the imaginative recollections that Amal creates are replete with interruptions by the focalised voices of the past. The interruption of other voices and discourses thus ironically becomes central to the ethical recollection of historical memory because it undoes the previous silent, unknowable aspects of those 'voices.' Woods also makes this point by noting that ethical responses when reading texts involves "attention to what interrupts," and that attention to the otherness in history is what makes it possible to "cancel the very forgetting of memory itself" (Woods, 2000, pp.159-60). *The Map of Love* goes beyond these perspectives, making it clear that an ethical recollection of history – and thus the undoing of oppressive historical narratives – involves not only an acknowledgement of other voices, but a responsibility to engage and respond to the unknowable aspects of those voices in a self-conscious and imaginative fashion.

What we see in Amal's rewriting of Anna's past recollections is therefore both an ethical aspect of the writing of historical recollection and an aspect of human experience itself. Having access to the thoughts and memories of another through their discourse means that we have a responsibility to respond to that discourse. What Amal's narrative makes clear though is the lengths to which a narrator must go

to *ethically* recollect historical memory rather than simply reproducing it. To do so is to attend to the voice of the other in that history, and acknowledge the responsibilities that that entails – an imaginative engagement with that history must be undergone. It is a reminder of Ricoeur’s claim that “creativity is always in some sense a response to a regulating order” (Ricoeur and Kearney, p.25). Amal’s creative narrative necessarily violates the regulating order of the discourses she has before her, and the official British and Egyptian histories, an act that has implications for the formation of those cultures themselves. This does not mean that she can reproduce that historical narrative in any way she chooses – we have already seen that her emotional attachment to this story makes her at times unreliable, and that this is clearly signalled to the reader. Rather what must be acknowledged is the ironic authorial presence that remains throughout, which at times undercuts the reliability of Amal’s narrative, but at other times reinforces just how necessary an intersubjective relation with other voices from our past is. Ultimately then it is not just Amal but we too as readers that have a responsibility to respond to the discourses of the past and their unknowable features. This is an essential performative action that must be undergone if we are to undermine the historical discourses that dominate the western view of colonialism in Egypt and its relation to the violence that occurred then and is reoccurring now in such countries. It is only by repetitively reflecting this performative aspect of historical recollection in the structure of novels such as *The Map of Love*, *The Sandglass* and *The Famished Road* that the intersubjective aspect of this process and its ethical responsibility to articulate silence is made clear.

What we have seen in this chapter is the degree to which these three novels employ innovative and performative structural features which reflect a Levinasian ethics of reading and writing. In particular, we have seen that such structures not only uncover the silence of otherness which is non-present in discourses, but the responsibilities that readers and writers have to respond creatively and imaginatively to such otherness. More than this though, we have also seen that in the novels considered here the shared silences which infect the numerous discourses considered often seem related to an inability to literally articulate the historic realities of violence. In conclusion and by way of introducing some of the themes of the

following chapters, I want to consider what this silent otherness of violent experience might mean for a postcolonial ethics in general. As noted before now, one of the characteristics of the otherness that we 'read' in discursive relations is that it demands not to be harmed, and that this involves the risk of personal harm that is a necessary possibility upon entering into intersubjective relations. I believe that such a correlation can be drawn between the narrative ethics inherent in the structure of the novels I have critiqued and the realities of the human terror in the cultural environments and societies in which the novels are respectively set.

I have shown that in terms of the repetitive metaphors employed in *The Famished Road* and *The Sandglass*, and in the innovative formation of narrative used in all of the novels, but most particularly in *The Sandglass* and *The Map of Love*, these structural features attempt to articulate some aspect of the silences that necessarily exist within the ethical relations between postcolonial subjects. Even so, these silences are, according to Levinas, Attridge, and Woods, not aspects of postcolonial intersubjective relations *per se*, but an aspect of the responsibilities all individuals have to one another when they enter into discursive relations. What I have tried to suggest in this chapter is that postcolonial narratives, or perhaps more specifically, narratives of 'post-oppression,' explicitly seem to engage with this aspect of pre-discursive responsibility through their structural features.

As well as this, though the novels examined here provide a cross-section of trans-cultural postcolonial literary concerns, all of them share, amongst other features, a self-conscious intention to deal with the idea of terror and violence in colonial and postcolonial settings. To this degree all of them are involved in what many see as the typical project of postcolonial cultural forms, the provision of a voice to the oppressed postcolonial Other that has been historically silenced by the logocentricity of Western culture. Hence the deconstructive desire to undermine *logos* in the projects of Bhabha (through hybridity as *différance*) and Spivak (through the non-presence of the native informant) when involved in literary critique. Yet, as shown, all of the novels looked at here also envisage a silent *otherness* that is not first and foremost a feature of Western rationalism, but rather an experience of the *primordial* irreducible ethics that Levinas sees in everyday discursive relations. This otherness is therefore not informed by the *discourses* that individuals actually

involve themselves in, nor is it affected by the other historical, cultural, and social discourses which inform social interaction. What I believe these novels do through their structure is link the ineffable silences of *this universal otherness* to the shared experience of violence and terror of individuals within 'post-oppression' cultures. This not only undermines logocentricity but provides an ethical imperative for doing so – the silent otherness that precedes all discourse calls on us to responsibly reject any discursive act that might harm those others we exist with.

In the case of *The Famished Road* we see this occurring during the telling of Mum's tale of ancient Africa's wisdom and negritude that was destroyed by the latest arrival of Europeans and their superior war technology. As shown, the idealistic morality of Mum's tale is undermined by its structure and the silent trace of violence that infects all such discourses, including 'progressive' hybrid ones. In *The Sandglass* the repetitive use of the metaphor of the title allows Chip to articulate a partly invented narrative that whilst providing a representation of past history, also uncovers the link that can be drawn between personal historical silences and the experience of violence. The silence in the past memories of those others that he knows turns out to be one that is filled with suffering, violence, and death. The terrible irony of the repetitive metaphor is that its effect on the narrative structure of the twelve chapters is framed by two brief sections at the beginning at end of the novel, in which Chip, having reconstructed a violent history that Prins was preparing to forget, finds himself in Colombo searching for Prins who it seems has also met a violent death. Finally, in *The Map of Love* the trans-historical nature and universality of violence is represented when Soueif examines the ethical relation involved in recreating past recollections alongside the real-life atrocities common to both that past and the present. As we shall see, one of Levinas's aims in questioning the rational subject of western philosophy with a pre-ontological ethics was to undermine the intrinsic link he saw between western ontology and physical violence (Woods, 1997, p.54). And as Derrida points out, Levinas's separating of a non-violent otherness in language from the actual violence which derives from discourse depends upon his envisaging it as a transhistorical phenomenon (Derrida, 1978a, p.148), something Soueif novel does for us here.

It is with these issues of violence and vulnerability in mind that I turn to the next chapter to examine how they might effect the ethical representation of physical bodies in postcolonial narratives.

Chapter Five: Traces of Silence in Narratives of the Postcolonial Body in Pain

It is really wonderful how many names there are in the world. There is no counting the names, that surgeons and anatomists give to the various parts of the human body; which indeed, is something like a ship; its bones being the stiff standing-rigging, and the sinews the small running ropes, that manage all the motions.

I wonder whether mankind could not get along without all these names, which keep increasing every day, and hour, and moment; till at last the very air will be full of them... people seem to have a great love of names; for to know a great many names, seems to look like knowing a great many things; though I should not be surprised, if there were a great many more names, than things in the world.

Redburn's narrative in Herman Melville, *Redburn* (1849), p.118

Physical devastation and its unspeakable expression in *Beloved*.

Beloved's description of Baby Suggs' sermon in the forest-place known as "the Clearing" (Morrison, pp.87-9, see fig.6) gives us an insight into Morrison's desire to articulate what hooks has called "a discourse that deals with the representation of Black bodies" (hooks and West, p.85). Baby Suggs' assertion – "in this here place, we flesh" – introduces her listeners to loving and precisely anatomized descriptions of the body, yet this is followed by harsh reminder of the perilous way that flesh is figured and beheld by the society outside the clearing – "Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it... Yonder they flay it" (Morrison, p.88). In the Clearing flesh is vulnerable, free, and loved, whereas elsewhere that vulnerability is exploited by others; it is Baby's realisation of this that provides the need for the sermons (Doyle, p.225). The litany of visible and invisible body parts which makes up Baby's direct discourse, and the importance she places on their need to be loved and caressed, undermines the pseudo-scientific thinking which West calls "white supremacist discourse associating Black being with Black bodies" (hooks and West, p.86). It considers what hooks has elsewhere called the need for Black people to "love blackness" in a physical sense in order to overcome supremacist cultural construction (hooks, p.10 & pp.61-77). The racist ideology Baby Suggs challenges is also disclosed by Sethe's accidental over-hearing of Schoolteacher's 'biology lesson'

on the difference between black and white characteristics (p.193), and is encapsulated by his note-taking as his sons 'milk' Sethe's pregnant breasts (pp.16-7).¹²² By attributing both human and animal characteristics to Negroes like Sethe, Schoolteacher demonstrates the racist content of late nineteenth century scientific rationalism, a feature of biological determinism outlined in Young's and Gilroy's considerations of early genetic hybridity theories, and in Doyle's examination of nineteenth century descriptions of materiality.¹²³

Even so, if hooks and West are correct in their call for a reconsideration of the representation of Black bodies, they perhaps too readily interpret Baby's sermon as a therapeutic reaction towards the "tremendous unease" felt by African Americans who know that the "issue of self-regard, self-esteem, and self-respect is reflected in bodily form." As Dobbs argues, the recurring images of different bodies and body parts, particularly the body in pain, would seem to suggest that it is not only the *social* construction of the black body that is emphasized here, but its non-discursive *physical* qualities. Indeed, Dobbs criticizes hooks and West for failing to note the radical nature of the aesthetic and phenomenological queries that this reclamation of the body stimulates, a criticism that is somewhat borne out by Gilroy's claim that "[s]kin, bone, and even blood are no longer the primary referents of racial discourse" (Gilroy, 2000, p.48). Similarly, Bisla sees Baby's sermon not only as a means of questioning white and black embodiment within the slave system, but also an attempt to "*practically* counteract the effects of that system, to put back what had been torn asunder" (Bisla, p.123). Ledbetter and Jones reinforce this perspective by arguing that the articulation of slave identity and resistance arises from "within the context of slavery" and therefore from the experience of physical body violation itself (Ledbetter, p.47; Jones, p.493). What we see here in both Morrison's fiction and in

¹²² See Hostettler, pp.403-4 on how Schoolteacher's lessons reflect the historical rationalism of racist discourses, and Lawrence, p.190 on the idea that the representation of Schoolteacher and his "chilling scientific rationality" reflects how "the question of authority over one's body is consistently related to that of authority over discourse; bodily and linguistic disempowerment frequently intersect."

¹²³ Young provides an etymological history of the term "hybridity" and tracks its historical use in cultural and scientific discourses (Young, 1995, pp.6-28). See Gilroy, 2000, pp.19-49 for an insight into biology's early links to a racist geneticism. Also Doyle pp.54-72 on the "racial-patriarchal lines of gender, race, class and nation" that informed nineteenth century biological determinism, and the scientific methodologies of its theorists. Also Lindqvist, pp.123-31 on the rise of scientific racism in imperial ideology.

critical discourse is an examination of the slave body as a site of painful physical subjugation, and not simply an oppressed cultural construction.¹²⁴

During the past twenty years theories of embodiment have become common within the humanities.¹²⁵ Shilling notes that “we now have discursive and material bodies... consumer and medical bodies... individual and social bodies... and medicalized, sexualized, disciplined and talking bodies.” He goes on to claim that due to these numerous perspectives, within postmodern discourse “the body is viewed simply as a ‘blank screen’ or ‘sign receiving system’ ever open to being constructed and reconstructed by external texts or discourses” (Shilling, p.39). The influence of Foucault is not hard to locate here; he contends that within modernity we see the production of a discursive body, a “body politic” objectified by “the power and knowledge relations that invest human bodies and subjugate them by turning them into objects of knowledge” (Foucault, 1977a, p.28). One of the effects of such embodiment, as Richards points out, is that the postcolonial body has been repeatedly misrepresented in ethnographic maps as primitive or exotic (Richards, p.78).

This idea of a modern body that even in its fleshy interior is wholly objectified is summed up by Kirby’s claim that “the body is more than a mere visitor to the scene of writing: the body *is* the drama of its own re-markability” (Kirby, p.154). Accordingly, when considering the body we invoke “a will to reflection that is interned within the prison house of linguistic deception... we simply can’t get outside the vagaries of our mediating representations” (p.157). It is this idea of embodiment which for Feldman makes the body as a site of political inscription, especially in examples where the body has been the victim of political violence: “The body... re-enacts political discourse... political violence is a mode of transcription; it circulates codes from one prescribed historiographic surface or agent to another” (Feldman, 1991, p.7).

Such views, while certainly predominant within current critical discourse, are not unopposed. Doyle for example points out that all too often modern philosophy

¹²⁴ In contrast, see Dubey, p.196 for a non-radical reading of the sermon as an attempted – and failed – reclamation of the Black body which is ultimately bound to Slave Law.

has bracketed bodies “as those things which words merely manipulate and displace,” (Doyle, preface) ignoring the idea that other experiences may also “speak from the domain of sense, but so as to embellish rather than usurp the body’s place” (Doyle, p.232). Ledbetter argues that we cannot think “apart” from our bodies; the constant presence of our body “suggests that the world is neither disconnected nor... ‘other’ than ourselves,” and that our constant use of body metaphors “lays claim to the world and narrows the distance between who we are and the experiences we have, by describing the world with the most personal terms we have, ourselves” (Ledbetter, p.12). This concurs with Low’s view that “metaphors of thought can be generated by the experience of the body as well as culture” (Low, p.143). The dangers of critiquing a body solely shaped by culture are raised by Bigwood who criticises body theorists such as Butler by arguing that “poststructuralist” attempts “to avoid metaphysical foundationalism leaves us with a disembodied body and a free-floating gender artifice in a sea of cultural meaning production” (Bigwood, p.102). Such views seem to reinforce Turner’s view of the paradox in body research that he sees arising due to what he calls a “radical deconstructionist” approach. He notes that poststructuralist critics are “typically not concerned with the phenomenology of experience of sex, or the phenomenology of pain, or the social and individual experiences of illness,” so much so that the “paradox is that the lived body drops from view as the text becomes the all-pervasive topic of research” (Turner, p.28). One of the effects of this is that the body risks becoming an overly-theoretical entity within sociology (p.32).

The importance such conflicting views might have for postcolonial narrative criticism can again be introduced by considering *Beloved*. I want to briefly examine a section of the novel that utilizes a highly collocative discourse to investigate the relationship between subjectivity and corporeality. This is the section that Dobbs refers to as Beloved’s story of the Middle Passage, a set of two chapters mostly made up of a difficult internal monologue, which forms a supernatural link between Beloved’s experience of loss as a murdered child, and the experience of being a child aboard an Atlantic slave-ship. Here the disjointed narrative – literally disjointed with

¹²⁵ For an analysis of this massively increased interest in the body across arts and humanities disciplines since Foucault see Turner, pp.1-34, and Judovitz, p.3.

a prolonged space rather than a full-stop between each articulated thought – presents the perspective of a parentless small child in the hold of a slave ship who is brought ashore to be branded and sold (Morrison, pp.210-13, see fig.7).

As Dobbs points out, it is likely that in this passage Morrison is attempting to articulate “an inexpressible state of infancy in which [Beloved] sees her self mirrored in Sethe’s face and experiences an attendant fear of a loss of self at the disappearance of that mirroring mother” (Dobbs, p.570). It therefore exists as an innovative representation of the Lacanian psychoanalytic experience of childhood, as well as Kristeva’s theory of the separation between childhood and motherless entry into the subjective world of language.¹²⁶ Even so, the passage’s radical syntax and general incoherence attempt to articulate more than linguistic incompetence – they also try to represent the experience of childhood terror. Not only the terror of losing that ‘othering’ face, but also the attendant fear of reoccurring physical pain – “the hot thing” of branding, physical collapse due to hunger and rape – a physical fracturing mirrored in the spatial representation of the interior monologue itself. It is not the detrimental cultural construction of the black body that affects subjective expression here, but the experience of those bodies as sites of reoccurring physical loss, suffering, and abuse which defies conventional literary-linguistic articulation.

Such images of physical dismemberment, death and dissolution rest rather uneasily alongside a psychoanalytical reading of psychic breakdown in this passage. As Dobbs remarks, within *Beloved* the “spectre of dismemberment is never merely figurative... a violent dissolution of the body is always a very [historically and physically] real possibility” (p.571). Doyle reinforces this by claiming that *Beloved* attempts “to move from metaphorical, protected renderings of the body [and] provides material facts and narrative causes rather than just symbols and motifs” of “bodily disorientation” (pp.208-9). This idea that the novel aesthetically examines the relationship between corporeality and what Gilroy has called the “inaugural experience” of Black modernity – its “imaginative proximity to terror” (Gilroy,

¹²⁶ It is interesting that Kristeva claims that “the ethical cannot be stated, instead it is practised to a point of loss, and the text is one of the most accomplished examples of such a practice” (Kristeva, p.234). Smith argues that Kristeva uncovers the fact that discursive relations with the other and the attempt to reproduce them in literature “projects one of the most intense forms of strangeness and

1993a, p.74) – becomes all the more forceful if we read this representation of the ‘loss of face’ in terms of Levinas.

As Smart points out, for Levinas

subjectivity is (to be) constituted through a primary relationship of responsibility for the other, a relationship of proximity in which ‘face’ is not a status or a property of self to be performed, maintained or saved, but rather the ‘original site of the sensible’ presence of the other which ‘summons me, calls for me, begs for me, and in doing so recalls my responsibility, and calls me into question.’ (Smart, p.72; Levinas quotations from Levinas, 1989a, pp.82-3)

As shown previously, in such a context the ‘face’ itself becomes the harbinger of subjectivity and the ethical responsibilities entailed when encountering the other. Yet Smart takes this further still by pointing out that in later work Levinas develops this notion of the face to signify not only the gaze of the other, but the ‘expression’ of the body as well. It is thus the “face, the expressive in the Other (and the whole human body is in this sense more or less face)” (Levinas, 1992, p.97) which constitutes our responsibilities towards others and their bodies (Smart, pp.72-3).¹²⁷ Or as Gibbs puts it:

My body [is] a sign in my relation to another person. This requires an interpretation of corporeality that focuses on how the body itself is first not for itself but for the other person. To ‘have’ a human body, according to Levinas, is to be for other people’s bodily needs. (Gibbs, p.51)

The speaker of the *Beloved* excerpt affirms this by yearning for the face of a certain woman and acknowledging the pain she is in: “the woman is there with the face I want... if I had the teeth of the man who died on my face I would bite the circle around her neck... she does not like the circle round her neck... I am sure she saw me... she was going to smile at me she was going to... the iron circle is around our

alterity imaginable” (Smith, p.127), an idea that as we shall see seems apt in terms of this section of *Beloved*.

¹²⁷ This differs from Newton’s claim that textual representations of face can become metonyms “for the body politic within a field of social representation.” (Newton, p.183). Certainly bodies and faces are always culturally construed, but it is the non-cultural and vulnerable fleshy substance of the body that I believe interests Levinas here.

neck... she took my face away” (pp.211-12). As this woman in turn, like the man who died, is withdrawn from the speaker’s gaze, she can no longer differentiate between herself and those around her. The dissolution of her own identity is compounded as the iron collars she sees on the slaves around her come to encircle her own neck, and she imagines her body as no longer her own, but part of them all. Without a face to acknowledge her, her own subjective embodiment dissolves and is replaced by one that is formed from the multitude around her. A sense of self here is based then not only on the presence of an ‘othering’ face, but on an awareness of the shared vulnerability of the bodies of self and other – an awareness that seems to precede linguistic comprehension. As Doyle puts it, “Morrison’s narrator makes flesh her narrative bridge [between] the African American slave past and ‘free’ present” (Doyle, p.218).

What I want to argue in this chapter is that recent ideas on physical, as opposed to cultural, embodiment have vital implications for the ethical criticism of postcolonial literature. Rather than reading postcolonial novels as texts that unmask unknowable realities previously silenced in historical narratives, as we did in the last chapter, I want to suggest that we also see authors attempting to articulate that which is always *literally* unknowable and thus unspeakable – in the case above this is an isolated child’s terror at being wrenched from those it knows and undergoing unimaginable physical pain. As Wyatt makes clear, character subjectivity in this example is violently removed from the social and political discourses on which it might otherwise be based: “The fragmented syntax and absence of punctuation robs the reader of known demarcations, creating a linguistic equivalent of the African’s loss of differentiation in an ‘oceanic’ space that ‘unmade’ cultural identities and erased even the lines between male and female, living and dead” (Wyatt, p.480). By looking at the narrative representation of postcolonial embodiment then, this chapter returns to a theme briefly touched on in chapters one, two, and four: the idea that through the use of radical structures certain narratives engage with what Gilroy calls a physically oppressed culture’s “ineffable” experience of terror.

What we see developing in such a critique of postcolonial or ‘post-oppression’ literature can be closely approximated to what Smart calls the need for an “explicit address of moral and ethical matters articulated with the body [which]

have been marginalized and displaced, if not erased entirely, from the field of social and cultural analysis” (Smart, p.76). While much research has been carried out during the past two decades into the different socio-political, cultural and even semantic roles played by the body, very little of that has addressed the *ethical* role of the body and its representation.¹²⁸ A similar concern is raised by the Kleinmans’ claim that the “trendy enterprise” of socio-political and cultural ‘deconstruction’ of the body ignores the psychobiological effects of culture on the body i.e. the detrimental *physical* effects of power (Kleinman and Kleinman, pp.710-11). My aim here though is not to explicitly take issue with this apparent over-theorising of the biological body – as critics such as Johnson, McDougall, and Butler make clear, the social construction and cultural representation of bodies has serious consequences for bodies in general and those individuals traditionally marginalised in terms of medical health, ethnic discrimination and every-day behaviour.¹²⁹ From this point of view theories which look at discursive embodiment have an undoubted pragmatic role.

I on the other hand will be arguing that the dominant Foucauldian view of the body as a *wholly* discursive entity cannot adequately account for the narrative representation of the experience of the subjugated body and its effect upon subjectivities within traumatised and post-traumatised cultures. As certain critics argue, and as I shall show in this chapter, modern attempts to scientifically and theoretically define the body succeed only in part.¹³⁰ My intention is to investigate how new readings of vulnerable corporeality might further an ethical critique of postcolonial literature. The past three chapters have shown how ethical relations between readers and narrative structures are affected by traces of irreducibility, the intersubjective role played by the reader, and the creativity required to engage with

¹²⁸ Whilst I pointed out in chapter two that recent media references to ethics are generally related to issues concerning human bodies, their rights, and their treatment at the hands of others, recent critical texts considering ethical criticism have largely ignored the role that might be played by the literary representation of the body.

¹²⁹ See Johnson, 1986 on discursive constructions of abortion in social and poetic discourse; McDougall, 1987 on the tribal body as subversive cultural signifier in Achebe; and Butler, 1990, pp.28-9 on the “political and cultural” construction of gender.

¹³⁰ See Doyle, pp.54-80 on the inability of dominant discourses to completely explain the body and its literary representation, and Eagleton, on the idea that popular poststructuralist critiques of the body provide “a convenient displacement of a less immediately corporeal politics, [producing] an *ersatz* kind of ethics” (Eagleton, 1990, p.7). Also Dobbs, p.567 on the idea that certain physical experiences require a new semantics to represent them, implying that the current discourse is not adequate.

postcolonial history and memory during writing and reading. What I consider now is the representation of embodiment in Ahdaf Soueif's *In the Eye of the Sun* (1992) and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997). In particular, I will examine how such embodiment is related to the expression of physical pain and terror in both novels, and ask whether and how such structures of innovative representation inform an ethics of postcolonial narratives.

Representing the tortured body in Soueif's *In The Eye of the Sun*.

The last chapter provided an insight into how silenced aspects of history – what Morrison calls the “unspeakable unspoken” aspects of narratives – affect the structure of literary representations of postcolonial cultures and their subjects.¹³¹ One of the difficulties we saw arising in these narratives was the need for writers to negotiate between a political willingness to raise awareness of the oppression that enforced such silences in the first place (thus retaining an element of that silence within the narrative), and a self-conscious need to undo those silences by providing historical subjects with a voice and situating them within an historical narrative. A good example of this was *The Map of Love*'s representation of Amal's self-conscious creativity in providing an historical recollection of the past without assuming complete authority over that history. We saw the ethical necessity of employing such a complex structure: by representing past oppression writers run the risk of providing that which they seek to critique – yet another questionable and authoritative narrative of the past.

All of the writers looked at engage with these problems through their specific use of innovative narrative structure. In *David's Story* (2001), Zoë Wicomb engages with the problematic of the silenced past in the first sentence of her novel's fictionalised preface. We are told – title notwithstanding – “This is and is not David's Story” (Wicomb, 2001, p.1). The narrator goes on, “I am, in a sense, grateful for the gaps, the ready-made absences, so that I do not have to invent them, but I take

¹³¹ It is interesting to note that the phrase “unspeakable things unspoken” in Morrison's critical essay is a play on the phrase “unspeakable thoughts, unspoken” used to describe what Stamp Paid hears emanating from Sethe's house whilst she, Denver and Beloved remain inside. Wyatt, p. 479 claims that what Stamp hears is “unspeakable” “because the accumulated sufferings under slavery overwhelm the expressive possibilities of ordinary discourse.”

no responsibility for the fragmentary nature of this story” (p.2). Like the other writers looked at, Wicomb exhibits a willingness not only to engage with the silences that inhabit the history of postcolonial cultures, but also with the question mark historical narratives leave over the nature of writing itself. The implication is on the one hand typically postmodern: narrative, or even writing itself, is inherently untrustworthy – note the ironic allusion to the narrator as an inventor of silences – and reality itself is never singular. The ironic self-reflexive allusion to the ‘invented’ “fragmentary nature of this story,” and the actual narrative’s eventual fragmentation, successfully mirrors this, exhibiting a deferral of singular meaning and its multi-ontological status.¹³² On the other hand, this engagement with the uncertainty of writing is obviously not Wicomb’s only concern. The disjointed personal histories she provides, and the silenced female voices which her narrator allows to inform those histories, provide an insight into the role enforced silence has played in shaping the culture of South Africa, both before and after its first democratic elections, and across distinct social and political groupings.

Certain writers are therefore aware of the need to acknowledge the silenced aspects of traditionally oppressed cultures, but they are also at liberty to innovatively draw attention to that silence by providing it with a narrative to inhabit. What I want to suggest now though is that when they engage with the historical silence which surrounds the treatment of the body within such cultures, the methods used to relate that silence take on an even more radical form.

Though not as structurally unconventional as *The Map of Love*, the narration of historical events in *In the Eye of the Sun* also has a non-linear temporal sequence. The first chapter and the epilogue are set in 1979 and 1980, whilst the rest of the chapters recall the family history of the central character Asya from 1967 to 1978. Each chapter is named after the period it narrates: thus chapter 1 is “July-August 1979,” the epilogue is “April 1980,” and chapters II through to X run from “May-June 1967” to “July 1976-February 1978.” This technique of framing an historical narrative within a narrative of present events is of course common to the realist novel

¹³² See Fludernik, p.275 on the idea that such “experimental writers... foreground the artificiality and constructedness of fictional narrative,” and Barthes, 1977b, p.162 on undecidability and play within literature.

form, making it all the more obvious when Soueif self-consciously disrupts it. This only occurs once, during the final scene of the first chapter (Soueif splits each chapter into a sequence of scenes, the majority of which are dated and narrated in the present tense) which is dated “May 1967, Cairo.” All preceding scenes of this first chapter run from “Saturday, 28th July 1979, London” to “Friday 3rd August 1979.” Examples of this temporal discrepancy and the structuring of scenes within the chapter can be seen in figures 8 and 9. What I want to argue here is that Soueif self-consciously incorporates this temporal irregularity in what is otherwise a regularly structured narrative in order to draw attention to one of the novel’s central themes: embodiment and its representation within postcolonial cultures.

The theme is immediately foregrounded within this first, relatively short, chapter. The first instance of this is when we learn that Hamid Mursi, Asya’s uncle, has only one arm, his other one having had to be amputated after a car accident in his youth. Rather than allow Asya, the character who maintains a focalised control over the third-person narration at this point, to relate this fact, the narrator chooses to describe Hamid through the eyes of two nannies he and Asya pass while walking in London’s Addison Gardens. We are told that,

[w]hat they see is a tall man... looking a bit military with his left hand tucked into the breast of his jacket... He has on a pair of gold-rimmed sunglasses and he is foreign of course. Darkish. Could be Spanish – or Greek – or Arab. (Soueif, 1992, p.4)

In preventing Asya from explaining Hamid’s condition, Soueif is able to introduce two anonymous English characters to foreground the reality of embodiment as a foreigner. The eminence of her unbiased and omniscient narrator’s voice maintains itself during the focalised observations by the nannies to culminate in an ironic uncovering of their preconceptions: “looking a bit military... he is foreign *of course*. *Darkish*” (my italics). Skin-colour denotes culture and the absence of an arm the possibility of a military career, the typical image of which Asya playfully indulges in on the next page: “‘I was just thinking’ – she smiles – ‘that you look a bit like Napoleon’” (p.5). The contrast between the intimacy of Asya’s direct-discourse and the focalised presumptions made by the two nannies ironically foregrounds the fact

that up until now the narrator has specifically objectified Hamid's physical representation from a socio-political perspective.

While the social construction of the body within cosmopolitan London is portrayed in a relaxed, almost humorous fashion at this point, the relationship between the socio-cultural body and corporeality is more critically examined in Scene 6. The scene begins as a numbered list of section guidelines Asya has drawn up for a series of lectures to be given to Egyptian village women on the benefits of contraception (p.20, see fig.8). Each point details the biological diagrams that she will use to explain sexual reproduction in order to eventually explain possible methods of contraception. The difficulties involved in incorporating western perceptions of the compliant reproductive body are made obvious in a narrative comprising of several competing cultural discourses. For example, the successful delivery of Asya's scientific representation of the female body depends upon her inclusion of religious rhetoric: "Each ovary, with the grace of God, produces an egg every eight weeks" (p.20). The contradiction encapsulated within this exercise is eventually acknowledged by Asya herself, at which point an internal monologue of her own misgivings interrupts the official line and drops into an exasperated and satirical take on the impossibility of realistically aligning traditional religious conservatism alongside liberal scientific discourse:

Oh dear – how is this going to go down now?

If for any reason a couple have decided to thwart the will of God already mentioned – how many? one, two, five times above, if, for any reason, a couple have decided to render this twin miracle of ovum and sperm as nought, we will show you how to implement that blasphemous decision. (pp.20-1)

These continued interruptions by Asya imply that in such instances bodies and biological functions are primarily *discursive* entities. This is reinforced later in the scene when non-Western embodiment is again underlined primarily through skin-colour – a physical reality whose construction in western society is mirrored by what Asya ironically calls the "labour" of the design department; certain sections of her lecture "come under the image of the two smiling faces that had been delivered with such labour from the design department: one moustached and male, the other long-

haired and female, both a warm, toasted colour meant to appeal to third-worlders from Chile to Afghanistan” (p.23). In these ironic examples bodies are reducible, objectified, and proof of Butler’s discursive body within which materiality and socio-political discourse are co-extensive (Butler, 1993, p.34). Importantly, Asya’s satirical exasperation makes clear the difficulties involved in incorporating western discourses on the compliant reproductive body within the traditional discourse on the Egyptian female body. The “body politic” exists here very much as it does in Foucauldian theory – the experience of the body and its representation is reliant on current social, political, and economic conditions.

I want to contrast this impression of the body with one that is represented for us shortly afterwards. At the close of the scene just described, Asya receives a letter from her sister Deena concerning the internment of her husband by the Egyptian secret police. The representation of Asya reading the letter is reproduced below at the point where Deena is describing meeting her husband after he has been interrogated.

He almost could not speak. He could not look at me. They have all been tortured: they have been beaten everywhere, *everywhere* on their bodies and their heads, they have been held down and raped, they have been hung upside down –

The hand holding the letter falls into *Asya’s* lap. *Asya* lifts her feet off the desk and sits up straight. Her heart is beating so hard she almost cannot breathe. She stands up and walks to the window... She walks back to the desk and sits down. She smooths the letter out and reads.

– they have been hung upside down for hours and had live wires put inside them. He said Zuku was paralysed from the waist down and that he himself was so afraid, he would do anything to get out... He was crying and could not look at me at all. (p.32, *my italics*)

It is immediately noticeable that Asya’s focalised control over the narrative – previously so evident throughout the scene – disappears at this point. This is emphasised by the awkward repetition of her name at the end of the first and at the start of the second sentences of the omniscient narrative which interrupts her reading of the letter (*italicised*). Asya’s subjective influence on the narrative structure is, for the time being, completely silenced. Her feelings and actions whilst reading are completely objectified, her own subjective impression of the torture unknown. This

is further reinforced when, having reproduced the letter in part, the scene ends immediately, disallowing any further comment by the narrator or characters on the torture. Importantly, this is the first and last insight we are allowed into the torture. What I want to suggest is that Soueif uses other methods rather than straight-forward first or third-person narration to express the silence surrounding such an indescribable experience.

This intention is evident in the unannounced shift the spatial and temporal settings undergo in the next scene (pp.32-3, see fig.9), where attention is again drawn to the human body, though this time emphasis is placed on its pre-social physical attributes, rather than on its discursively constructed ones:

He is sitting in a metallic chair. From the armpits down he is swaddled in white wraps. One arm is on an armrest and his head is leaning against the back of the chair. He appears to be part of a big, complex piece of machinery; hundreds of different-coloured wires and tubes loop themselves around him, attach themselves to him, enter him and exit to loop around again and plug themselves into a number of large instruments of varying heights that surround him. (p.33)

The above passage describes Hamid in intensive care after having had major lung surgery carried out. It should be noted that large sections of the preceding scenes are also concerned with articulating medical discourses on the detrimental condition of Hamid's biological body. The 'normality' of those previous discourses on his health are offset here by the fact that the above scene is juxtaposed against Asya's reading of Deena's letter. I want to suggest that the effect of this is that the reader initially relates the above precise clinical imagery not with that of an intensive care ward but with the torture described in Deena's letter. There is a particular resonance between the torture image of "live wires put inside [the victim]" and the hundreds of wires that we are told "enter... and exit" Hamid.

For reasons not immediately clear, what we have here is an innovative and self-conscious attempt by the narrator to provide a disassociated image of the body-destroying torture that Deena's husband has apparently experienced. This realisation is necessitated by the strange fact that though Soueif already has a dissociated and omniscient narrator at her disposal, who in turn has access to the subjective experiences of the individual characters, she refuses to employ these narrative tools

to represent the experience of torture. This is all the more apparent in view of the fact that as we have seen, cultural embodiment is the most foregrounded theme of Scene 6, yet in this instance the narrative representation of the body remains voiceless and silent. The only method used to ‘express’ the subjugated body is a disjointed but intentional alignment between a short reference to the torture and less disturbing images of the medically injured body.

It is at this point that the irregular temporal shift in the structuring of the chapter occurs. The penultimate scene of chapter 1, which follows the brief semi-focalised image of Hamid in hospital, is dated “May 1967, Cairo.” The purpose of this scene is to narrate the accident that occurred in Hamid’s youth and led to the amputation of his arm. It ends with the younger Asya’s experience of seeing Hamid in hospital on that first horrific occasion:

Asya looks at Khalu. At least, her mother says it’s Khalu. It could *have been* anybody for all *it is* is a human form covered in wraps and bandages and connected with different-coloured wires and tubes to what must be ten different bits of machinery. The left side of the face is a swollen, purple mass. (p.38, my italics)

This irregular temporal shift in narrative content allows an impression of anamnestic recollection to develop. The language used to describe the images of a “human form... connected with different coloured wires,” and a face which is a “swollen, purple mass,” alludes to and repeats the same language used to describe the image of Hamid after his 1979 surgery. As well as this, there is a curious temporal discrepancy in the passage between a body that in the *past* “could *have been*” anyone, and a human form that in the *present* “*is*” wired to different machines (italicised in the above passage). This is evidence that Asya is using recollection to anamnestically relate someone’s pain in the present, not the past.

This anamnestic narrative structure reminds us of Derrida and Docherty’s theories of anamnesis as a necessary aspect of textual representations of the subjective present.¹³³ And yet we as readers realise that this unusual representation of the body in pain is not provided to primarily acknowledge Asya’s subjective

¹³³ See Docherty, 1991, p.72, and Derrida, 1981a, p.150 on the idea that any representation of the subjective present is always “already the memory of a certain past.”

condition upon seeing her poorly uncle. Rather, the shifts in narrative structure occur simultaneously with the narrator's refusal to objectify the experience of torture. We realise that though Asya's subjective impression of the torture was silenced whilst reading her sister's letter, here her focalisation produces spatially and temporally disjointed images of physical suffering that we cannot help but relate back to the recently undescribed torture. What I am suggesting then is that while Soueif refuses to objectify the personal experience of torture, she leaves her readers no choice but to imagine the indescribable experience of such suffering for themselves. Interestingly, though we readers instinctively and involuntarily relate Hamid's condition to that of the tortured, there is no voice – neither the narrator's nor another character's – that is allowed to describe what that experience actually entailed. Our only insight into that experience is provided through the juxtaposition of unconnected and temporally disjointed scenes that relate to the body in pain, and in doing so force us as readers to subjectively link the images of the two events. The result of this is not unlike what we saw in chapter three in Morrison's consideration of a novel's ability to snatch or yank a reader "into an environment completely foreign," creating "first stroke of the shared experience that might be possible between the reader and the novel's population." As Cohen points out, when witnessing atrocities (either first-hand or in different media) our response is most-often one of denial or disbelief due to the "unimaginability" of what we are witnessing (Cohen, 2001, pp.140-7 & p.169). In the case of this novel, Soueif forces the reader to subjectively contemplate an experience that cannot even be described in ordinary language. While Deena's letter is an example of objectifying the *torture process* (in much the same way Amnesty International do for example), Soueif's radical structure makes it clear that within this novel there is no simple objectification possible for the experience of pain which accompanies that process.

Though the narrative consistently draws attention to the human body as a cultural and discursive entity throughout this chapter then, when it comes to describing the subjugated and oppressed body *in pain*, neither Soueif's narrator nor her characters have the language – or the knowledge – necessary to do so. All we are given are sudden, anamnestic-related images of a hospitalised body – a body whose condition can be rationally described by medical science – and a brief,

unfinished reference to torture. The effect of this is a reinforcing of the indescribability and silence which surround the unmentioned pain of this torture, to which the narrative never returns again.

Theorising the irreducibility of the body in pain.

Complicating the claims of theorists such as Derrida and Kirby who stress textualisation as *the* defining feature of the world(s) we live in,¹³⁴ Scarry argues that the human experience of pain is a constant biological phenomenon which refuses all attempts at objective linguistic description. For her, “[pain] (more than other phenomena) resists verbal objectification” (Scarry, 1985, p.12), a claim for which she finds evidence in the work of the few writers who have attempted to articulate pain.¹³⁵ Ultimately she insists that “[p]hysical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it [because] unlike any other state of consciousness [it] has no referential content” (pp.4-5). To exemplify this she refers to the McGill-Melzack Pain questionnaire (see fig.10), a tactic also used by Morris to emphasise what he calls the “utter inhuman silence” of the body in pain (Morris, 1991, p.3 & pp.16-7). This questionnaire is still the common method used internationally to judge and discern treatment for those suffering from physical pain.¹³⁶ Most striking about it is the fact that pain is so irreducible that it takes 20 different questions made up of 78 words in its attempt to approximate a description. Unlike the signifier/signified opposition that arises in the use of everyday literary-linguistic structures, here we face a new expressive difficulty with the realisation that pain, especially in the case of chronic pain, *has no identifiable object*, an observation made by both Merleau-Ponty and Wall (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p.93; Wall, 1999). The idea that pain contains no describable object is perhaps made more understandable if we consider the occurrence of phantom limb pain in amputees, an instance when pain’s lack of tangibility is most obvious (see Morris, 1991, pp.152-3; Melzack, p.319).

¹³⁴ See Derrida, 1976, pp.158-9, Foucault, 1972, and also Kirby, 1997, especially chapter 2, for qualifications of the semiological status of the ‘world.’

¹³⁵ See Scarry, 1985, p.4 on Woolf, and p.32 on Sartre and Nietzsche. Morris also draws attention to this theme in Tolstoy’s and Emily Dickinson’s work (Morris, 1991, p.33 & p.57). See also Delbanco, pp. xxii-xxvii on the difficulties of representing pain in Melville’s *Moby Dick*.

¹³⁶ See the Physiotherapy Pain Association website biography of Ronald Melzack, www.ppaonline.co.uk/melzack.html.

As the questionnaire demonstrates, pain, more than other objects of ontological perception, cannot be accurately reduced to a set of linguistic signs (there is one category that rejects this trend though: that which states “No pain”). As Morris points out concerning chronic pain, its “inarticulate silences serve as the expression of an otherness so alien that we have no words and no language with which to comprehend it” (1993, p.74). Due to this, medical discourse has had to reassess its view of pain as a symptomatic inscription of illness that can be ‘read,’ by acknowledging that “pain is sometimes completely illegible” (Morris, 1987, p.139). The irony of this reality is the same irony that Redburn remarks upon in the epigraph to this chapter – the language and names we use to textualize and understand the world and our bodies are of such a multitude that in medical and cultural terms it “seems to look like knowing a great many things.” In fact, the large number of terms used to describe pain – evident in the pain questionnaire and in Low’s study of the culturally informed terms used to describe cross-cultural embodiment in terms of pain and chronic nervousness (Low, pp.157-9, see fig.11) – displays a lack of knowledge when it comes to identifying pain and its origins.

These facts about the nature of pain and its resistance to objective representation have interesting implications if we turn to writers who specifically address pain within their work. Morris acknowledges this with the claim that, “[p]ain passes much of its time in utter inhuman silence, and writers who describe something so inherently resistant to language must inevitably shape and possibly falsify the experience they describe” (Morris, 1991, p.3). Singh has commented on the difficulties that arise for writers who try to express pain in postcolonial fictions in her reading of the silence that surrounds the representation of female pain and suffering in Amrita Pritam’s novella *Pinjar* (1987) (see Singh, 2000). The possible moral implications of such indescribable experience for critical theory are not difficult to work out: when arguing the case of a non-discursive materiality Bordo reminds us that while we are “embedded in language,” we are also “creatures with a physiology that limits us, even in the kinds of language we have developed” (Bordo, 1998, p.89). She warns that without considering the body’s non-cultural as well as its cultural aspects we lose sight of the physical vulnerability which dominant discourses can oppress. An example these “sickening” and damaging physiological effects of socio-

political discourse can be found in Gilbert and Gubar's well-known examination of the "socially conditioned epidemic of female illness" (Gilbert and Gubar, pp.294-6). Here illness and pain are certainly socially informed, interpreted, and represented, but we should not lose sight of the fact that it is the damaging effects discourses have on the fleshy, silent and non-discursive body that warrants our moral and ethical criticism in such instances. Social discourse may inform the subject, but we also need to recognise that its subjugating, painful effects are often irreducible. I am of course not suggesting that the idea of the irreducible is ignored in literary criticism; we have seen that Derrida insists that an unknowable trace is always necessary for language to produce meaning. But as I hope to show, were this aspect of narrative linked to aspects of the body that resist representation, we might have the opportunity to ethically reconsider the representation of the body in pain in postcolonial fiction.

Rather than directly addressing this inability on the part of writers to transfer the experience of pain into words, the first chapter of Scarry's study specifically addresses pain and its relation to language during the experience of torture. She claims that though the torture scene is a setting where "[i]t is difficult to think of a human situation in which the lines of moral responsibility are more starkly or simply drawn," it is also the most apt indicator of the division that exists between the subjugated body in pain and the inability of language to do justice to the experience (Scarry, 1985, p.35). This idea of bodily experiences which manifest themselves physically and resist discursive transcription has also been examined by Korte. She questions the idea that bodily experience is wholly reducible by noting that during discourse it is normal for 65% of communication to remain non-verbal, and that the unconscious non-verbal expression of one's inner state is an elemental trait of human behaviour (Korte, pp.25-8). Our bodies therefore 'express' certain experiences, such as pain, embarrassment, or illness, which remain removed from general discourse all the time, a fact which poses obvious problems for any discursive structure that attempts to represent such experiences. Korte's perspective therefore undermines claims such as, "it is language itself which, by differentiating between concepts, offers the possibility of meaning" (Belsey, 1980, p.59).

Scarry also examines the ways in which the silence surrounding subjugated bodies in pain benefits those in power. Since pain has no 'object' as such, it is

possible, through discourse, to provide painful experience with a causal site, and justify the event of the experience itself. This becomes clear if we consider the question-and-answer structure of interrogation during torture. Scarry notes that it has two outcomes: an absolution of responsibility on the part of the torturer, and a conferral of responsibility onto the victim. Thus while “[a]lmost anyone looking at the *physical* act of torture would be immediately appalled and repulsed... as soon as the focus of attention shifts to the *verbal* aspect of torture, those [moral] lines have begun to waver and change their shape in the direction of accommodating and crediting the torturers” (p.35). As such, the revulsion initially caused by witnessing an indescribable act is undermined by attributing the act with a rational explanation and justification. This is one of the more serious dangers of Feldman’s assertion that when considering histories of political violence, “[t]he event is not what happens. The event is that which can be narrated,” an idea that he derives from critics such as White and Ricoeur (Feldman, 1991, p.14).¹³⁷ The silence surrounding pain thus falls prey to domineering socio-political and historical discourses, a point reiterated in Pandey’s examination of how the silence which characterises political violence is inevitably misconstrued in historical discourse (Pandey, p.190). As Kleinman and Kleinman point out, “the alienating hurt... the brutalizing fear that affects bloodflow through coronary arteries, the motility of the gut, the reactivity of the central nervous system” are all physiological effects of political power that help inform the social subject. The silence surrounding the subjective reality of world-destroying pain thus becomes a malleable tool in the hands of oppressive power.

If we read Soueif alongside Scarry we can see that the narrator’s self-conscious choice *not* to objectively describe the experiences of the torture victims has two important effects. Firstly it is testament to the fact that pain resists verbal objectification. As shown, Soueif makes specific attempts in the first chapter of the novel to emphasise the degree to which the human body is constructed and thus interpreted through discourse. This preoccupation of the narrative is cut short when the opportunity arises for it to articulate the experiences of several characters who have experienced torture. Thus we see how Soueif outlines the hermeneutic void that

¹³⁷ See Ricoeur and Kearney, pp.20-21.

lies between the representation of culturally constructed bodies, and representing the experience of the universal biological body that is vulnerable to enforced physical harm. If, as Morris claims, the experience of pain is an “inarticulate discourse,” then here we see Soueif both acknowledging this fact and refusing to misrepresent the experience within her text.

Nevertheless, Scarry does suggest that it may be possible to transcribe certain painful experiences. She claims that if when describing pain “*the referent for these now objectified attributes is understood to be the human body*, then the sentient fact of the person’s suffering will become knowable to a second person” (Scarry, 1985, p.13). Thus if physical pain carries “visible body damage or a disease label” (p.56) its meaning is made all the more real to others. Unlike the political objectification of the pain of torture, physical pain in this instance is understandable because its referent remains the human body, a corporeality we all possess. Most of us may not know what it is like to be tortured, but we do know what it is like to be burnt, or bruised, or to break a limb.¹³⁸ The pain of others may not always be apparent, but as Scarry notes, “[t]o have pain is to have *certainty*” (p.13). If individuals can find a way of articulating the unknowability pain in constant referral to the body itself, then it should be possible to understand to some degree how that pain feels.

This is the second important effect of Soueif’s narrative structure: she makes the horror of torture and its resistance to language ‘knowable’ by other means. Hamid’s hospitalised body becomes a detached referent for Deena’s husband’s pain via a method of subtle and unannounced signification whose horror is experienced involuntarily and subjectively by the reader. While pain may resist reduction to language, its horror and its silence can, as Soueif shows, be demonstrated to us through a careful deployment of literary structure.

¹³⁸ See Ledbetter, p.13 & p.15 on our bodies’ ability to universally acknowledge the “certainty” of pain, and also Doyle, pp.72-3, on Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty’s claims to the pre-eminence of a universal understanding of the human body.

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*: Irrational structures in the postcolonial narrative of pain.

In *The God of Small Things* we see a similar authorial preoccupation with subjects in pain and their representation through literary structure. Like all the novels we have looked at, Roy employs several voices to present the narrative and radically manipulates its temporal sequence. From the outset though, the theme of voicelessness and silence most obviously centres around Estha, whom we are told,

had always been a quiet child, so no one could pinpoint with any degree of accuracy exactly when (the year, if not the month or the day) he had stopped talking. Stopped talking altogether, that is... It had been a gradual winding down and closing shop. A barely noticeable quietening. As though he had run out of conversation and had nothing left to say. (Roy, p.10)

Estha is the twin of Rahel, both of whom are reunited as adults at the beginning of the novel after being separated during childhood. Unlike Estha, whose unexplained silence is a voiceless presence throughout the narrative, Rahel becomes one of the central voices that influences the third-person narration. It transpires that the story told here is that of their family's past, and the events of one summer that led up to the separation of the twins and Estha's silence. The telling of this story though is fractured by the narrator relating events from the present, in particular Rahel's thoughts and Estha's actions. The effect of this is again an expression of anamnesis, the form of the narrative connecting present subjects with their subjective past – for Nair it provides a link between language and temporal structure that is “circular and mythic rather than linear” (Nair, p.50). What I want to do here is first discuss the event portrayed at the end of the novel that changed the twins' lives, and then comment on how the memory of it affects their representation and the structure of the novel, particularly in terms of the anamnestic silence that surrounds the event.

The text on the beating to death of Velutha, a member of the untouchable caste, by the police can be found in full in fig.12. Below is a shortened version:

The History House...

... Rotting beams supported on once-white pillars had buckled at the center, leaving a yawning, gaping hole. A History hole. A History-shaped hole in the Universe...

Esthappen and Rahel woke to the shout of sleep surprised by shattered kneecaps...

They heard the thud of wood on flesh. Boot on bone. On teeth. The muffled grunt when a stomach is kicked in. The muted crunch of a skull on cement. The gurgle of blood on a man's breath when his lung is torn by the jagged end of a broken rib...

... they watched, mesmerized by something that they didn't understand: the absence of caprice in what the policeman did. The abyss where anger should have been. The sober, steady brutality, the economy of it all...

The twins were too young to know that these were only history's henchmen...

What Esthappen and Rahel witnessed... was human history, masquerading as God's Purpose, revealing herself to an underage audience...

History in live performance

...

In the back verandah of the History House, as the man they loved was smashed and broken, [the twins], learned two new lessons.

Lesson Number One:

Blood barely shows on a Black Man. (Dum dum)

And

Lesson Number Two:

It smells, though.

Sicksweet.

Like old roses on a breeze. (Dum dum)

'It isn't him,' Rahel whispered to Estha. 'I can tell. It's his twin brother...'

Unwilling to seek refuge in fiction, Estha said nothing. (pp.306-311)

There are several reasons for quoting this passage. Firstly the language used provides an appropriate impression of the omniscient narrator's distanced, ironic tone. The impassiveness of phrases such as "History in live performance" exemplifies an ironic use of voice that is present throughout the novel. As shall be seen, this detached tone veils a subtle critical edge that dispels its apparent cynicism. Secondly, the above passage gives an insight into the repetitive emphasis placed on the idea of history by the narrator, and in particular the ways in which history, official or personal, is created, experienced, and represented. Thirdly, the above scene introduces the reader to the origin of certain unexplained phrases that have strewn the narrative up until this scene. As we shall see, all these aspects are inherently bound up with the way that the narrative is structured.

Another aspect of the narrative voice that should be considered is the fact that ironic omniscience notwithstanding, the narrator refuses to give an insight into Velutha's subjectivity during the beating. Like Soueif previously, Roy chooses to let her novel's victim remain silent. The difference here is that the subjugation of the victim's body and the victim's pain is witnessed by others uninvolved in the punishment process, others whose subjectivities we do gain access to in the preceding narrative. The novel therefore also considers the effect such experiences have on post-traumatic individuals, and how these subjectivities can be convincingly represented through narrative structure.

From the outset of the novel the reader is provided with hints of the horror that the young Rahel and Estha witnessed. These take the form of unexplained allusions to the past, phrases whose repetition and unusual use of language marks them out as being subjective and personal. When it is explained for example that Estha had to be separated from Rahel and "Returned" to his father, we are told that he

had a tiffin carrier with tomato sandwiches... He had terrible pictures in his head... Rain. Rushing, inky water. And a smell. Sicksweet. Like old roses on a breeze... The memory of a swollen face and a smashed, upside-down smile.

... Hoovering didn't seem to help. (p.32)

In Rahel's case this technique of obliquely and subjectively referring to the past within the narrative of the present is again used. As the narrator describes Rahel's recently divorced husband we are told that he

didn't know that in some places, like the country that Rahel came from, various kinds of despair competed for primacy... It was never important enough. Because Worse Things had happened. In the country that she came from... Worse Things kept happening.

... What Larry McCaslin saw in Rahel's eyes was not despair at all, but a sort of enforced optimism. (p.19)

In these two passages (both taken from the novel's first chapter) we again hear the detached and often ironic tone – in the bathetic finality of the Hoovering image for

example – of the narrator. In these examples though it is also juxtaposed against the interjections of subjective memories from the twins' past.

In terms of Estha we realise that the subjective memory of an unexplained smell – “Sicksweet. Like old roses on a breeze” – is something that he cannot get away from in the present – “Hoovering didn't seem to help” (the only employment he will take is house-keeping). In Rahel's case the narrator's detached description of India – a place where “various kinds of despair competed for primacy” – is juxtaposed against Rahel's subjective – and unexplained – knowledge that “Worse Things” had happened. The use of unconventional capital letters to relate the subjective thoughts of the twins is a technique used throughout. As the novel progresses it becomes clear that the capitalised descriptions of certain objects or ideas refer to phrases that the twins heard or were taught in childhood, most often by their mother Ammu. At this point though, explanations of all these subjective allusions are not provided. Indeed they never specifically are. The reader learns their relevance as piece by piece the childhood experiences of Rahel and Estha are represented within the temporally fractured narrative. This makes for a difficult read, one whose initial impenetrable structure reflects the silence that surrounds the characters' story of that childhood summer, and reinforces it by exploiting the reader's own lack of knowledge.

Reader nescience of these allusions to as yet unknown past events means the “silence [that hangs] in the air like secret loss” (p.91) imbues not only the characterisation of the twins, but the structure of the wider narrative itself. We as readers do eventually learn though that the root of this silence is the murder of Velutha that the twins witnessed. This realisation, brought to bear on the unexplained allusions to it throughout the text, awakens an awareness of the lengths Roy goes to represent the silence which characterises the political oppression of bodies. As already noted, the reader gains no insight into Velutha's subjective experience of being beaten, even though the narrator does articulate his thoughts at earlier points in the story. As well as this the narrator emphasises that it is not only the experiences of Velutha and the twins which remain in silence, but the actual historic fact of the event itself (Chanda, p.42). The police, described as “history's henchmen,” may provide for the twins a “[h]istory in live performance,” but they also make sure they

leave a “yawning, gaping hole” in that history once they realise they have mistakenly, and fatally, punished Velutha. They knowingly frame him to cover up their own mistake, forcing him to take responsibility for the event. As Scarry and Pandey point out then, the silence of physical subjugation is often reflected in the political silencing carried out by official historical discourse.¹³⁹

Several points can be made about the event and the twins’ reaction to it. Firstly, Velutha’s experience remains indescribable, and thus non-discursive in terms of the narrative content. Secondly, Estha’s reaction to the event, his experience of it, also remains non-articulated and therefore non-discursive: “Unwilling to seek refuge in fiction, Estha said nothing.” We know that this unwillingness to rationalise and articulate his experience is soon to become a permanent feature of Estha’s life. Though he continues to live in the world, he loses the ability, or the will, to involve himself in discourse. The terminology utilised here, though still presented in the detached tone of its narrator, ironically harbours a lesson for its readers: historical events – such as the inexpressible and unjust experience of pain – can be rationally explained and articulated, but only if we are willing to resort to fiction and similarly constructed discourses. The silence of the body in pain is maintained and its treatment rationally justified by constructing misleading official discourses around such events. It becomes a *political silence*, an official denial of historic events, which is how Chanda reads Estha’s silence (Chanda, p.43).

Yet as has already been shown, Roy’s novel does exhibit a willingness to engage with and uncover such silences and the effect they have upon individuals within postcolonial cultures. Whilst the narrator’s repetitive use of certain terms and his/her detached tone might be seen as evidence of a postmodern scepticism and an awareness of the ability of language to construct history – to turn ‘life’ into ‘fiction’ – the innovative narrative structure also displays a willingness to interrogate the silences that lie behind such fictions. For Nair, Roy *writes* “Estha’s silence as a powerful presence rather than an absence in the narrative... Roy thus gives shape to a *new rhetoric of silence which escapes the alphabet*” (Nair, p.51, my italics). What I want to suggest is that Roy is interested in trying to articulate not only those political

¹³⁹ This ‘transferral of silence’ is also noticeable in Cohen’s account of “interpretative denial” in official institutions (Cohen, 2001, p.105).

silences which have been erased from official history, but also those horrific historical events which Morrison, in terms of slavery, describes as “too terrible to relate” (Morrison, 1990, p.301). Importantly, she achieves this by incorporating specifically *irrational* elements of narrative voice within its structure.

The main way that this is done is by utilising Rahel’s consciousness *in the present* to articulate Estha’s past. The narrator tells us that the “quietness’ in Estha “stripped his thoughts of the words that described them and left them pared and naked. Unspeakable. Numb” (p.12). The result of this is that when we are given an insight into the effect of the past on Estha’s present condition it is through Rahel’s focalised narrative, not Estha’s nor the narrator’s:

Now, these years later, Rahel has a memory of waking up one night giggling at Estha’s funny dream.

She has other memories too that she has no right to have.

She remembers, for instance (though she hadn’t been there), what the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man did to Estha in Abhilash Talkies. She remembers the taste of the tomato sandwiches – *Estha’s* sandwiches, that *Estha* ate – on the Madras Mail to Madras.

And these are only the small things. (pp.2-3)

The narrator emphasises the present importance of these past events by pointing out that it is now, “years later,” that Rahel remembers these unpleasant events from Estha’s past. Again though, at this point in the novel these events remain unexplained, foregrounding in particular the centrality of Estha’s linguistic silence to the story that is to unfold.

We realise that the only way we are made aware of the significance of that silence is through Rahel’s irrational insight into the consciousness of her twin brother, in what Chanda calls an act of “psychic re-memberment” (Chanda, p.43). When the events are eventually explained to the reader, it is via the third-person narration and focalised through the younger Estha. But since Estha’s present subjectivity is made up of “thoughts [stripped] of the words that described them,” and therefore left unsaid, Roy introduces an ‘impossible’ element to her character’s narration, offering Estha’s twin sister as the only individual with access to his consciousness. Indeed, as the novel progresses Rahel’s focalised thoughts provide an insight into what seems to be not one consciousness but two. The focalised name

“Orangedrink Lemondrink Man” used by the older Rahel in the passage above is privately invented by the young Estha during a later chapter when his subjective and childish appropriation of capitalised words is emphasised time and time again. Estha’s never speaks to his sister of this man because as a child he was sexually abused by him. The ‘impossible’ reference to the “Orangedrink Lemondrink Man” here therefore emphasises that it is not only Rahel’s memories that are affecting the narrative voice, but Estha’s also, even though that’s not rationally possible.

The reasons for Estha’s present silence are thus articulated from his focalised perspective, but this is only made possible by providing Rahel with an impossible insight into his consciousness. This unconventional narrative technique is also reinforced by the omniscient narrative content. When describing Rahel’s look of “enforced optimism,” the narrator claims that it is actually “a hollow where Estha’s words had been... the emptiness in one twin was only a version of the quietness in the other” (pp.19-20). In terms of representing the present subjectivities of the twins then, it is clear that the narrative agent adopts an impossible and irrational narrative voice to do so. Because of this it could be argued perhaps that the implied author seeks “refuge in fiction” to represent the irreducible horror of an imagined moment in postcolonial history – s/he does after all incorporate specifically irrational elements within the narrative structure. I would suggest though that such a structure foregrounds an authorial intention to engage and articulate certain inexpressible aspects of postcoloniality. As such, the historical reasons for Estha’s silence are impossibly articulated here.

Many critics point out that as dizygotic, “two-egg twins” Estha and Rahel produce an innovative image of a hybrid self: “a rare breed of Siamese twins, physically separate, but with joint identities” (Roy, p.2).¹⁴⁰ For Chanda, Estha’s silent presence within this hybrid union symbolises “the silence of the alienated subject,” and the twins’ incestuous psychic and physical union when adults is a hybridity “redefined through the Self’s integration with its lost body, with the enabling and empowering Other” (Chanda, p.43). Because of this, Chanda goes on to briefly speculate that the impossible image of both voice and silence might possibly

¹⁴⁰ See Oumhani, p.85, Chanda, p.43, Nair, p.53, and Bose, p.67 on the image and ‘union’ of Estha and Rahel as politically subversive.

represent “the silent voice of the subaltern.” For Bose, Estha and Rahel’s sexual union represents an erotic and politically undermining of the traditional discourses of cultural conformity (Bose, pp.67-8), those “Love Laws... that lay down who should be loved and how much” (Roy, p.33). For Nair though, the incestuous union of the twins undermines traditional cultural categories by suggesting “a return to the mythic prelapsarian and nonrational state that is logically inexplicable” (Nair, p.53). It is this idea of an expression of the illogical or the *impossible* within the novel that I find particularly interesting, for as we have seen the notion of the impossible is central to deconstruction’s view of irreducibility. Though Chanda does not go on to say it, and as we have already seen, the idea of impossibility is also central to the idea of Spivak’s subalternity. The subaltern is a subject who can physically speak but has no voice – it is impossible for her to be heard by the dominant classes – since she signifies the absolute Other of the culturally dominant Self.¹⁴¹ And as Derrida and Levinas point out, the trace of an unspeakable irreducibility is non-present within all cultural signifying, a fact that Spivak regularly incorporates in her deconstructive readings of cultural texts.

What I want to suggest here is that Roy’s novel does indeed attempt to express such irreducibility within its structure. As we have seen she uses formal strategies and a content that seems to foreground a concern with the irrational and its impossible articulation. As well as this, that concern seems to be linked to the politically silenced aspects of postcolonial history, and the real and unspeakable experiences of oppressed bodies during that history. Silence is therefore figured here in several ways: as politically enforced (such as that which surrounds Velutha’s disappearance), as representative of the alienated cultural other (in Estha’s inability to speak of the past), and as irreducible aspects of historical and physical oppression that defy description (again ‘expressed’ through Estha’s inability to speak, but also through the nonrational voice that allows an insight into his past through his sister’s focalisation).

¹⁴¹ See chapter one on the absolute otherness that for Spivak must define the subaltern and is necessarily silent.

Locating the irreducible postcolonial body within modern discourse.

As pointed out in chapter one, Gilroy discusses the development of “anti-discursive” elements within historical cultures of oppression due to their experience of indescribable terror. There is an obvious resemblance here with Scarry’s thoughts on the “inexpressibility” of physical subjugation within oppressive cultures. Yet how is it that in the current critical climate where the body has been so strongly theorised as a political and discursive entity, such pre-discursive or irreducible aspects of its experience have generally gone unnoticed, or at least under-theorised? I want to suggest that part of the reason for this lies in the enthusiasm with which Foucault’s theory of the body-politic has been (rightly) adopted within the majority of critical discourse. It is no longer, for example, innovative to remark that the notion of gender is a social one, or that female bodies have been historically constructed by patriarchal discourse,¹⁴² though as Bordo points out, it is bordering on critical heresy to suggest that there are *universal* or *shared* aspects of our *material* bodies that resist representation (Bordo, 1998, p.88).¹⁴³

Butler’s work in the field of body theory, though strongly Foucauldian, seems to retain an awareness of this unresolved difference. Her own task of reformulating the materiality of bodies for example insists on an awareness that “the matter of bodies [are] indissociable from the regulatory norms that govern their materialization and the signification of those material effects” (Butler, p.2). Yet, she also points out that the “materiality of language, indeed, of the very sign that attempts to denote ‘materiality,’ suggests that it is not the case that everything, including materiality, is always already language” (p.68).¹⁴⁴ Spivak is another critic who maintains the idea that a trace of something non-present and pre-discursive remains when considering

¹⁴² See Harré, pp.13-24 on gender and sexed bodies as social construction, and Bordo, 1993, pp.292-302.

¹⁴³ This is because of the real risk, outlined by de Beauvoir and Young, that the differences between male and female behaviour be incorrectly defined – as they have been historically – by theories of *natural* masculine and feminine biological and psychological differences (de Beauvoir, 1953, esp. chapter 1; Young, 1990, pp.260-9).

¹⁴⁴ It is interesting to note that Kirby takes issue with Butler on this point, claiming that Butler ultimately encloses (i.e. reaffirms) the identity of matter as a sign, which in turn reinforces binary oppositions (see Kirby, pp.103-28). For Kirby the body is *always* a sign which deconstructs itself (pp.151-61).

socio-political representations of the body (Rooney and Spivak, pp.148-9).¹⁴⁵ As we shall see, Butler's point about an irreducible aspect of language and materiality may have important implications for an ethics of postcolonial narratives.

Similarly, Bordo claims that while a critique of cultural representation and social discourse is "an important part of the cultural study of the body – [it] cannot stand by itself as a history of the body." She goes on: "Those discourses impinge on us as fleshy bodies, and often in ways that cannot be determined from a study of representations alone" (Bordo, 1998, p.91). Coady and Miller make a similar point: "[N]ot all actions are social... of those that are social, most are not constitutively social... For example, most actions of eating, drinking, and having sex are in fact social in some sense, although eating, drinking, and having sex are natural actions" (Coady and Miller, pp.203-4). Feldman also raises the idea of a non-social body which cannot be fully described as discursively disciplined, but he does so from within a study into the cultural logic and politicisation of the body in the Northern Ireland political conflict. Of the hunger strikers he writes, "[t]he body denatured by prison conditions would be renatured in hunger striking. Hunger striking was implicitly the return to the prepolitical body through highly politicised action" (Feldman, 1991, p.244). In such an instance the politicised image of the body relies upon an understanding of its pre-discursive qualities, its unavoidable association with the fleshy vulnerability of its matter.

Interestingly, though these critics don't make direct reference to it, their claims – and Butler's in particular – seem to recall Merleau-Ponty's idea that embodiment is a universal primordial experience upon which subjectivity is initially grounded, an experience which occurs prior to language and all conscious thought, and thus defies objectification. As he reminds us, it is the experience of having a body that allows us to consciously consider other objects in the external world (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, pp.203-5) and yet,

¹⁴⁵ The interview which this quotation is from is in fact an attempt in part to resolve the differences between oppositional essentialist and anti-essentialist views of the female body. Spivak acknowledges what we saw Turner and Kleinman and Kleinman refer to as an over-theorising of the cultural body by poststructuralist discourse, and comments on the possible need to find a 'non-essential essence' of the

[o]bjective thought is unaware of the subject of perception... In so far as we believe in the world's past, in the physical world, in 'stimuli', in the organism as our books depict it, it is first of all because we have present at this moment to us a perceptual field, a surface in contact with the world, a permanent rootedness in it, and because the world ceaselessly assails and beleaguers subjectivity as waves wash around a wreck on the shore. All knowledge takes place within the horizons opened up by perception. There can be no question of describing perception itself as one of the facts of the world, since we can never fill up, in the picture of the world, the gap that we ourselves are, and by which it comes into existence... (p.207)

What Merleau-Ponty makes clear is that the unconscious experience of bodily perception – our embodied relation to the external physical world – is first and foremost an irreducible experience upon which all others are based. What Young infers from this is that “[such work] assumes that there is a general level of theorizing where gender (or class or cultural) differences does not appear in a phenomenological ontology, and then more specific, less abstract accounts where they do” (Young, 1998, p.287).¹⁴⁶

For Foucault, the inception of modernity – or the moment after which power/knowledge relations become represented and re-inscribed through discourse – develops around the end of the eighteenth century (Foucault, 1977a, pp.135-141). Bhabha's reading of Foucault situates it at the moment of the 1789 Revolution itself (Bhabha, p.243).¹⁴⁷ As we saw in chapter one, Foucault charts the rise of this “‘new micro-physics’ of power” through its “‘detailed political investment of the body” (1977a, p.137), and concludes that modern power “has as its correlative an individuality that is not only analytical and ‘cellular,’ but also natural and ‘organic’” (p.156). In such a historical moment the condition of the body and its actions can be completely understood as representative of dominant disciplinary discourses.

female body upon which to a base critical discourse. This is an idea that Kirby rejects and takes Spivak to task over (Kirby, pp.159-61).

¹⁴⁶ Doyle also promotes this idea that some aspect of embodiment precedes rational description (Doyle, p.72). See also Judovitz on Merleau-Ponty's idea that subjectivity “cannot be contained by the notion of rational consciousness nor imply the reduction of the body and the world to ideas” (Judovitz, p.176).

¹⁴⁷ Foucault sees the Revolution as a symbol of the modern disciplinary discourse that gives rise to the idea of social “progress” within history (see Foucault 1977a, p.160 & 1990, pp.92-5).

Yet Bhabha asks us to question such a Eurocentric view on the inception of modernity, suggesting that modernity is in fact “about the historical construction of a specific position of historical enunciation and address” (p.243). As such, it allows us to theorise a “signifying lag” between the European event of modernity and its enunciation in the geopolitical space of the colonies. Bhabha’s point is that the colonised or post-colonised individual may very well be aware of the values of modernity, but what does that knowledge mean if the colonising power “repeats the archaic aristocratic racism of the *ancien regime*?” I want to suggest that in such cases agency is articulated and figured via a hybridity that Bhabha in another instance calls “at once very cultural and very savage” (p.186). What this means is that a “time lag opens up the space... between enunciation and enounced, in between the anchoring of signifiers,” and that to consider such expression “one needs to think, outside the sentence” invoking a contingency between the cultural and the savage that is “indeterminate and undecidable” (p.186).

I believe this difficult idea uncovers a hybrid agency that is characterised by a trace of indeterminacy and silence during self-expression. This hybridity consists of an *ancien* element of savagery which according to Foucault manipulated bodies not through discourse but through the brutality of debased power – a power that represented itself to people through the mutilated body of the criminal. This idea corresponds to Scarry’s view of the operation of power during torture. As Scarry points out, the colonised and subjugated body in pain expresses itself in silence i.e. through the irreducibility of the experience, but power manipulates that silence for its own means. It inscribes its own meanings upon the silent mutilated body, and in doing so culturally constructs its wounds.

What Foucault fails to take into account in his genealogy of modernity is that such unspeakable acts were still being carried out on the body after 1789 in many parts of the world and without doubt continue today. This can be seen in the Amnesty International’s advertisements for prospective members. It attempts to relate the experience of having a heated domestic iron placed against one’s face by putting an everyday photograph of an iron on the front of their information booklet and juxtaposing it against the black outline of the iron hot-plate as if it had been burned onto the next, initially hidden page (see fig.13). The aim is that when the

reader opens the booklet s/he suddenly encounters the 'burnt' page and is asked to imagine that it is his/her face. I would suggest that this produces an automatic reflex on the part of the reader not unlike that which occurs when we involuntarily relate Hamid's hospitalised body to the undescribed experience of torture in Soueif's novel. The effect of this strategy relies upon the reader's own subjective, though universally acknowledged, experience of what it feels like to be burnt. Amnesty therefore finds itself in an ironic ethico-political predicament: on the one hand it is acutely aware of the inability and ineffectualness of reducing pain and torture to words, and yet, on the other, its political purpose insists it objectifies the event in some way, and yet still retain the subjective horror of such an experience. The booklet and the images of the iron-burn are a way of representing torture that is felt to be more effective than reducing it directly to literary text, or by providing photographs of burnt faces. In such advertisements Amnesty's main aim is to avoid a literal description of the event itself whilst nevertheless engaging readers in such a way that they imagine themselves actually experiencing the torture. As Scarry reminds us, literal descriptions lessen the reality of torture's unspeakable horror. Amnesty therefore uses innovative structures and various media which juxtapose different texts and intersubjectively involves its western readers in a consideration of torture by exploiting the impossibility of representing such experiences in writing and general objectification. Ironically, what we have here then is an example of an organisation who want to produce a realistic impression of a real event, and yet is fully aware of the dissemination that reality would undergo were it to utilise a traditionally realist literary form of representation.

Amnesty therefore attempts to express the unspeakable experiences of victims of physical oppression. Such hybrid victims – hybrid in such instances because they are aware of modern liberal discourses yet still are subject to savage subjugation – maintain a trace of impossible silence during any expression of their violent experience, an idea that relates well to the hybridity we saw articulated in Okri's novel in the last chapter. In such cultures power doesn't only affect the body through the disciplinary discourses which Foucault says are a sign of modernity, but also through specifically non-textual and transhistorical means – by inflicting unspeakable pain on the subject and by partly destroying his/her vulnerable and

corporeal body. In the following section I investigate whether we can relate this indescribable aspect of postcolonial embodiment to the irreducible traces which Butler, Spivak, and Kirby locate in the culturally constructed body.

The silent body in Levinas.

Chapter three examined how Levinas and Derrida's respective theories of the irreducible trace in language might aid ethical readings of postcolonial narratives by considering how the reader is obliged to become responsive to traces of otherness. There, and here, emphasis is placed on Derrida's claim that semantic meaning is always deferred because "no element can function as a sign without referring to another element which itself is simply not present" (Derrida, 1981b, pp.26-7). Meaning is always dependent on some sort of silence, a non-present and irreducible factor that undermines logocentric narratives. Yet Derrida is of course speaking about literary-linguistic meaning, and relies on the idea that all experience is textualized. As we have seen though, this is not a view shared by Scarry, who insists that the body in pain – as Soueif and Roy's use of narrative structure would seem to suggest – resists all attempts at discursive reduction. Such a perspective is reinforced by the realisation that in Levinas's original theory the trace of alterity arises not within texts or discourse *per se*, but because of the irreducible risk of harm experienced by physical bodies during discourse. He tells us that in "vulnerability there lies a *relationship with the other*... Vulnerability is obsession by the other or an approaching of the other... This approach is not reducible to the representation of the other nor to consciousness of proximity... Already on the level of the sensible the subject is *for the other*" (Levinas, 1970, p.146). This draws on Merleau-Ponty's idea of a body that is in a constant, unconscious, and reflexive relationship with its external world. Merleau-Ponty claims that "[a]ttention to life is the awareness we experience of 'nascent movements' in our bodies... reflex movements, whether adumbrated or executed, are still only objective processes whose course and results consciousness can observe, but in which it is not involved" (1962, p.78).

When considering the possibility of an irreducible ethics in Paul Celan, Levinas claims that for Celan a poem is an "interjection, a form of expression... a sign to one's neighbour," a conclusion he comes to when considering Celan's claim

that there is no basic difference between a “handshake and a poem” (Levinas, 1997, pp.40-6). According to Ravvin, Levinas’s critique uncharacteristically accedes that such an idea of ‘physicality’ could describe an ethical aspect of certain literature, for he claims that Celan’s poetry “is situated... at the moment of pure touching, pure contact, grasping, squeezing – which is, perhaps, a way of giving, right up to and including the hand that gives” (p.41). Such a perspective on the importance of corporeality and its representation within literature can only be considered uncharacteristic of Levinas if we fail to acknowledge that throughout his life’s work – as we saw in chapter three – Levinas’s idea of the ethical shifted from being located in the experience of absolute alterity encompassed in the face of the other and its affect on verbal discourse, to the silent traces and interjections which can be traced, as Derrida notes, in literature itself.

As Hand points out, for Levinas it is the “meanings that are irreducible to representation” which allow him to theorise ethics – or the responsibility for the other – as the basis of existence, discourse, and intersubjective relations (Hand, 1989, p.4). As we shall see, this idea of ethical existence is closely related to the irreducible phenomena which are aspects of embodiment within the world. Merleau-Ponty is crucial to this understanding of irreducible experience as an aspect of embodiment. We have already seen how he emphasises the unconscious reflexive relationship that is ongoing between the body and its situation in the world. To reinforce the unconscious nature of this relationship he claims the

reflex... opens itself to the meaning of a situation, and perception; in so far as it does not first of all posit an object of knowledge and is an intention of our whole being, are modalities of a *pre-objective view* which is what we call being-in-the-world. (1962, p.79)

For Levinas, foremost amongst the occurrences which reinforce the irreducibility of certain subjective experience is that of the physical pain or suffering undergone by the body whilst “being-in-the-world.” He claims that

physical suffering in all its degrees entails the impossibility of detaching oneself from the instant of existence. It is the very irremissibility of being. The content of suffering merges with the impossibility of detaching oneself from suffering... It is the fact of being directly exposed to being. It is made up of the impossibility of retreat. The whole acuity of suffering

lies in the impossibility of retreat... suffering is the impossibility of nothingness. (Levinas, 1987, pp.39-40)

The experience of painful physical suffering here opens up the “impossibility of nothingness” which makes subjective existence possible. He goes on: “The structure of pain... is prolonged... up to an unknown that is impossible to translate into terms of light – that is, that is refractory to the intimacy of the self with the ego to which all our experiences return” (p.40). It is the indescribability which accompanies intense pain which makes the conscious enjoyment of all other experience possible; or, our experience of the ontological depends upon our subjective experience of the irreducible. Again it is interesting to note the similarities between this view of pain and Scarry’s. For her “pain is... language destroying: as the content of one’s world disintegrates, so the content of one’s language disintegrates; as the self disintegrates, so that which would express and project the self is robbed of its source and its subject” (Scarry, 1985, p.35). The irreducible language-destroying aspect of pain is the antithesis, or as she goes on to call it, a framing event of all ontological experience (pp.164-5). It is an extremity of human experience outside of which other normal ontological objectification is possible.¹⁴⁸

As we saw in chapter three, this idea of a physical vulnerability which affects the ethical subject and discursive life is more clearly stated in Levinas’s (and Derrida’s) later work. Levinas claims that,

subjectivity is sensibility – an exposure to others, a vulnerability and a responsibility in the proximity of others, the one-for-the-other, that is, signification – and because matter is the very locus of the for-the-other, the way that signification signifies before showing itself as a said in... the linguistic system, that a subject is of flesh and blood, a man that is hungry and eats, entrails in a skin and, thus capable of giving the bread out of his mouth, or giving his skin. (Levinas, 1981a, p.77)

Importantly, here the ethical phenomenon occurs not only because of the approach of the face of the other prior to discourse, but because of a shared physicality or

¹⁴⁸ Scarry sees ‘pain’ and ‘imagining’ as the two “‘framing events’ within whose boundaries all other perceptual, somatic, and emotional events occur.” Pain is a state defined by its inescapable and

materiality that alerts the subject to the responsibility for the other. Responsibility arises because we are aware of the vulnerability of the body and *can* thus relate to the same vulnerability in another body. Or as Gibbs reads it, “[a] subject is material, vulnerable, and for the other – and only what is FLESH AND BLOOD, someone who knows lack and pain, someone who eats, can *GIVE* as response. For Levinas there is no ethics without bodies that know hunger, that need food, shelter, comfort” (Gibbs, p.52).

Drawing on Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological examination of the relationship between the body-as-flesh and intersubjective sensibility – in particular the “mutual knowledge” present during the intercorporeal moment of the physical greeting through handshake – Levinas asks if one may wonder,

whether such a “relation” (the ethical relation) does not impose itself through a *radical separation* between the two hands, which in point of fact do not belong to the same body, nor to a hypothetical or only metaphorical intercorporeality. It is that radical separation, and the entire ethical order of sociality, that appears to me to be *signified* in the nakedness of the face illuminating the human visage, but also in the expressivity of the other person’s whole sensible being, even in the hand one shakes. (Levinas, 1993, pp.101-2, my emphasis)

In the face-to-face encounter then the naked face is not the sole signifier of intersubjective ethical relation, but merely the most prominent one. It is in fact the “expressivity of the other person’s whole sensible being” – by which Levinas means “a movement of the sense organs and even of the hands and legs and the entire body” (1993, pp.96-7) – that constitutes the possibility of ethical life. This can be seen as a development from Levinas’s early work wherein as we have seen it is the *gaze* of the face that “supplicates and demands, that can supplicate only because it demands, deprived of everything... and which one recognizes in giving... this gaze is precisely the epiphany of the face as a face” (1969, p.75). What was once the silent expression of the face, in later work becomes the “expressivity” of the entire physical body.

In her attempt to “work out a new natural-cultural model of the body that goes beyond both the fixed, biological body and the poststructuralist culturally

impossibly irreducible features. The imagination is a pure and intentional objectification of self and world.

inscribed body,” Bigwood presents us with a body that is both naturally and culturally shaped (Bigwood, p.103 & p.105). Like that of Levinas and Gibbs above, it is “not a separate physical entity... but rather is of the same stuff as its environs... [it] is not fixed but continually emerges anew out of an ever changing weave of relations to earth and... things, tasks, and other bodies” (p.105). This body that continually affects consciousness by its constant sensory experience of the physical world is one that draws heavily on Merleau-Ponty’s idea of a “phenomenological body,” a body which presents “an organic tie, so to speak, between perception and intellection” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p.20).¹⁴⁹ She goes on to describe the lived experience of our bodies’ relation to the world as a precognitive one:

Experience shows that as living bodies we are sensibly attuned to, and harmonized with, our surroundings through a “latent knowledge” that is present before any effort of our cognition. It is not our intellectual judging that makes sentience possible but rather this **silent, non-cognitive**, intimate bonding of our body with the world-earth-home. As living bodies, we are not in full cognitive possession of determinate, sensed objects but are irretrievably immersed in an ever-changing and indeterminate context of relations. We find ourselves in a field constantly filled with fleeting plays of colors, noises, and tactile feelings that nonetheless usually emerge as meaningful, but by means of a communication with our surroundings that is more ancient than thought... the body is primarily nonrational and nonlinguistic in its communication [yet] has a way of ordering of its own... it is important to maintain this nonlinguistic, noncognitive *sens* or bodily meaning that poststructuralist feminist theory neglects in its affirmation of only cultural meanings. The poststructuralist culturally inscribed body... has left out this aspect of the body’s incarnate situation. (Bigwood, p.106, my emphasis)

It is important we realise that Bigwood’s aim here is not to reaffirm a naturalistic body which attempts an essentialist explanation of categories such as gender. She accepts that the body is not a “‘fixed given’ untouched by the dominant representational system,” but insists nonetheless that our bodies are the “medium for having a cultural world” and that its lived experience consists of relations with “the human and the nonhuman, the cultural and the natural” (p.108). For Bigwood,

¹⁴⁹ See also Evans and Lawlor, p.4 where they introduce the idea that for Merleau-Ponty the body is “an integral part of the subject-object relation.”

critiques of literary representations of the body need to engage with both its cultural and natural attributes, otherwise they only partly investigate how lived embodiment affects the creation of literature itself.

Interestingly, in Scarry, Bigwood, Merleau-Ponty, and Levinas, we see the idea of a silent, noncognitive embodiment within which Bigwood locates a “nonrational and non-linguistic” aspect of everyday experience. We have seen how important the idea of irreducible experience is to Levinas’s idea of ethics, as well how the expression of silence is central to certain postcolonial narratives. We have also considered the role played by the idea of irreducible non-presence in deconstruction and its reading practices. Perhaps an opportunity for further study in this area of criticism might be a deconstructive consideration of what Merleau-Ponty calls the perceptual “gap which we ourselves are,” that irreducible aspect of perceptual experience which makes impossible our attempts to complete or “fill up... our picture of the world.” Deconstruction makes clear the role of irreducibility and *différance* in informing meaningful signifying practices, practices which are based on perceptual awareness. Could the impossibility of bodily perception be one of the phenomena that makes *différance* itself possible? Could this constant non-presence be the ‘gap’ that exists within the sign between the signifier and its signified, just as it enforces a gap in our perception of the world? As Merleau-Ponty points out, when describing something “my experience breaks forth into things and transcends itself in them, because it always comes into being within the framework of a certain setting in relation to the world which is the definition of my body” (1962, p.303). This is an idea that will be returned to in the next chapter of the thesis. What I hope to have clarified in the course of this chapter is the role that painful embodiment and its irreducibility can have when considering postcolonial narratives from an ethical perspective.

Such a concern can be seen in Ledbetter’s attempts to pursue an ethics of postmodern narratives. While he is more concerned with examining bodies in narratives as metaphorical, and therefore wholly textualized entities, he nevertheless insists that physical vulnerability and its narrative expression should be central to ethical criticism:

The body woman is the place of rape and assault. The body child is the place of child abuse. The religious body of Muslims in Bosnia, the ethnic body of Jews during the Shoa... the body hurt and the body scarred. We cannot talk about victimisation without body metaphor; therefore I do not think that we can talk about a narrative ethic without reference to the body. (Ledbetter, p.14)

Though I am not convinced that the emphasis placed on bodies as general metaphors appropriately represents what seems to me to be primarily an exemplification of violations of the singular *physical* body because of its cultural construction, it is not difficult to see why Ledbetter feels a narrative ethics is of high political, and moral, importance. As well as this he draws attention to the idea, also raised by Bigwood, that the experience of our physical bodies 'tells us things,' especially in extreme cases such as when experiencing pain. Whilst doing so he also argues that such knowledge, whether it is irreducible or not, is something that is universally available: "Each of us who has been wounded... knows that our lives will always be referenced by the scars and wounds we bear. The scar is the crucial metaphor for body language and represents my essay's one moment of *approximating any certainty*. In a lifetime, you and I will be scarred" (p.15, my italics). This reinforces Low's idea that metaphoric embodiment i.e. the language we use to describe inexpressible physiological experience, is shaped by "local cultural usage and meaning," even though embodiment itself has physical "*cross-cultural* threads of common lived experience" (Low, p.141, my italics).

For Ledbetter the scar or wound is a sign used as "body language." For Scarry it is also a sign that can become a referent for the irreducible nature of pain. Importantly, and as Ledbetter bravely admits, it is perhaps the only instance when meaning is communicated with certainty between individuals. Ironically, it is a transferral of an unspoken and unspeakable knowledge between human beings, a communication that Bigwood calls "silent" and "primarily nonrational and nonlinguistic." It is the universal, though irreducible, acknowledgement of vulnerability and its ethical import to our own well-being.

The novels looked at in this chapter reinforce the idea that an irreducible trace of physical vulnerability is non-present in the expression of the other person's whole sensible being, and that this non-presence is (non-)evident in postcolonial narratives.

The innovative attempts to articulate this non-present silence within narrative structures would seem to verify Scarry's point that physical pain "has no referential content." In all these narratives we see the oppressed body resisting objectification, but also reinforcing the idea that though we are unable to represent pain in literature, its reality must remain undeniable. In a sense their effect seems not unlike one Tierney-Tello identifies in the art of Diamela Eltit: "language takes center stage, calling attention to its own insufficiency and schisms in order, perhaps, to attempt to represent the excesses and uncontainability of the subjects and what lies beyond rationality" (Tierney-Tello, p.90). In particular, Tierney-Tello emphasises that it is when attempting to represent material realities such as physical pain and deformity that Eltit seems most self aware of the "insufficiency of language" and the "impossibility" of attempting to express such experiences.¹⁵⁰

What this chapter attempts to demonstrate is that through the incorporation of radical and innovative narrative structures all the authors looked at have forced the reader to acknowledge the irreducible experience of the body in pain. As shown in the earlier chapters, it is clear that the foremost poststructuralist critics – Derrida, Spivak, and Butler for example – locate a silent trace of alterity within texts that universally undermines logocentric narratives. What I want to suggest is that such ethico-political critiques might benefit were they to consider how such traces can be related to the inexpressibility of the painful body. We have already noted that Levinas envisages his ethics as a responsibility to acknowledge the otherness in discourse which we are powerless to ignore. Here I am suggesting that in the later Levinas that responsibility is linked to vulnerable corporeality, a universal and irreducible sensibility that is impossible to ignore in these novels. As Lingis puts it, this ethics is a responsibility that is co-extensive with sensibility and "takes over and answers for a situation one did not initiate." But more than this he claims that its importance lies in making us acknowledge the

¹⁵⁰ Tierney-Tello is referring to two of Eltit's hybrid works, *El Padre Mio* (1989) and *El infarto del alma* (1994). Both incorporate fictional, philosophical, and testimonial discourses alongside other texts, such as Eltit's transcriptions of tape-recordings she made of the speech of delirious, homeless individuals in Santiago, and photographs of inmates of a state mental hospital.

pain of substantial wounding and sacrifice demanded of life. For it is depriving oneself to answer to others for the hunger of those who have no claim on one but their hunger, and in sacrificing oneself to answer for what one did not do, that responsibility is serious. (Lingis, p.230)

As Levinas points out, though the trace of alterity in discourse is irreducible, it is a silence that exists “[b]efore all particular expression” (1981b, p.126), a “denuding beyond the skin, to the wounds one dies from” (1981a, p.49) – it is the constant non-expression of vulnerability. As well as this, he insists that this trace of vulnerability during discourse summons us and calls us into question, producing a responsibility “not to leave the other alone in his or her last extremity” (1981b, p.127).

Levinas’s trace therefore sets up a structure of responsibility through which the reader becomes aware of the silent vulnerability of the body of the other. It is this silence that I believe these novels attempt to bring to the reader, whilst refusing to objectify such inexpressible experience within their own narratives. The silent body traced here confronts the conventional mapping (and mutilation) of bodies at the margin, and can be found in the unspeakable map traced in the McGill-Melzack pain questionnaire. It also maps the body and the non-present locations of its pain, but does so on universal grounds and in ineffable terms. The innovative articulation of this silence in Morrison, Roy, and Soueif not only alerts us to the indescribability of pain in literary-linguistic structures, but also to the responsibility we as readers have to recognize the historical, and universal, reality of such oppression.

Chapter Six: Ethically Reading the Body of Postcolonial Narratives

An awe that cannot be named would steal over you as you sat by the side of this waning savage, and saw as strange things in his face, as any beheld who were bystanders when Zoroaster died. For whatever is truly wondrous and fearful in man, never yet was put into words or books. And the drawing near of Death, which alike levels all, alike impresses all with a last revelation, which only an author from the dead could adequately tell.

Ishmael's narrative in Herman Melville, *Moby Dick* (1951), p.520

Can things take on a face? Isn't art an activity that gives things a face?... The analysis conducted thus far is not enough to give the answer. Yet, we wonder whether rhythm's impersonal gait – fascinating, magic – is not art's substitute for sociality, the face, and speech.

Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre Nous* (1998), p.10

Tristram Shandy and the book as body.

In his book *Writing and the Body*, Josipovici's analysis of Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gent.* (1759-67) contends that the novel provides a gripping literary example of the 'book as body.' Drawing on the work of Borges, Josipovici considers the potential for "communication *beyond words*"¹⁵¹ (Josipovici, p.4), and argues that *Tristram Shandy* provides "such a language: not in the words, not in the story, not in the book as object, but in the *book as it is read*: a living body" (p.33). To convince us of this Josipovici analyses how the unconventional and self-reflexive use of plot and metaphor throughout the novel affects its representation of time, reminding the reader that writing itself is constrained by temporality. The effect of this is that

what is happening to us [and to the writer] is really going by as it happens, the future is not at a distance, but is always becoming the present, and there is no graspable shape to our lives except this process. To avoid recognition of this is to avoid recognition of one's own body.
(p.29)

¹⁵¹ This is what Josipovici calls the "old dream" of the Renaissance and the seventeenth century "of a universal language, a language that would be understood at once by all and that would tell no lies" (p.3).

I wish to comment on one of the examples Josipovici draws from the novel to exemplify how this text reminds the reader of his/her constant relation to the ephemeral materiality of the human body. This is the description of Yorick's grave, which has been reproduced in figure 14.

In *Hamlet* the realities of the ephemeral body and corporeal fate are presented to the reader through stage direction: Hamlet literally holds Yorick's skull – a consummate symbol of physical vulnerability – in his hand. In the new and developing world of the eighteenth century novel, Sterne has no recourse to such an imminent, hands-on method of representation. The invention of an effective allusion to the human corpse necessitates something else, and at Yorick's grave this is achieved by transforming the pages of *Tristram Shandy* itself into a tomb. Sterne, eager to reproduce the distinction between the subjective spoken reading of epitaphs and the actuality of death, recreates part of the physical tombstone in his novel. The effect of the black rectangle of ink around “Alas, poor YORICK!” juxtaposes the materiality of the “plain marble slab” of Yorick's resting place against the irreverent, over-sentimental and now elegiac repetition of passers-by: “Alas, poor YORICK!” In fact, these exclamations are so over-sentimental and contrived that the capitalised font of the original epitaph is nonsensically reproduced in speech (see fig.14).

Through a manipulation of literary representation and structure then, Sterne succeeds in reminding the reader of death as a reality of physical vulnerability and of our ephemeral nature in the face of less reverential treatments of the issue. More than this though, Josipovici notes that whilst these pages become a specifically metaphorical reproduction of a tombstone, to read them simply as such is to “somehow miss the body which does lie behind it” (p.32). There is no dead body waiting for us as we pull aside this “marble slab” of a page, yet there is something else – the “black page” (see fig.14) – about which we are later told, “the world with all its sagacity has been [un]able to unravel the many opinions, transactions and truths which still lie mystically hid under [its] dark veil” (p.180). Literally then, ‘beneath’ or ‘beyond’ this reproduction of Yorick's tomb there does lie something cryptic and *indescribable* – aspects of physical death which Melville's Ishmael reminds us of in the first epigraph to this chapter when he claims that Death, “which alike levels all, alike impresses all with a last revelation, which only an author from

the dead could adequately tell.” Sterne, intent on a realistic reminder of the universal ephemeral nature of human existence, seems to acknowledge this thought and leaves the “opinions, transactions and truths” of that “last revelation” unconsidered, silent, *and yet upon the immediate page*. For Josipovici, this is one of the lessons of *Tristram Shandy*: communication beyond words is possible through texts, but only if we consider “the book *as it is read*,” as a living body that during the reading event reminds us of the condition and vulnerability of our own. The effect of this reading experience is similar to that which we saw when considering how *Jazz*’s unconventional structure reminds the reader that the text being read is literally held in her hands, thereby involving the reader’s ‘real-life’ physiomenal experience during reading in a responsibility to respond to the novel. Of course, no book is literally a “living” body, but *Tristram Shandy* nevertheless shows us that the physical structure of a book, or the body of its narrative, can create a unique relationship with our own bodies by representing certain indescribable features of corporeal experience, which as we saw in the last chapter are always resistant to writing. Here the bodies of narratives, just like our own bodies, are able to harbour meanings which nevertheless defy literal objectification.

In the last chapter we saw the extent to which the body in pain, both in fictional and theoretical literature, resisted textual objectification. We also saw that it is possible to relate this idea of bodily experience to the irreducible ethics of the Levinasian self/other encounter. For Levinas it is the subject’s “whole sensible being” that constitutes the possibility of ethical life. We saw the significance of the vulnerable body in an ethics that involves an “[o]riginal opening toward merciful care,” and that it is “through a demand for analgesia... in the groan... [that] the anthropological category of the medical, a category that is primordial, irreducible and ethical, imposes itself” (Levinas, 1998a, p.93). Here the other demands our ethical attention because of their *body* that is for all individuals universally vulnerable to pain. While the expression of this pain is silent – it has no identifiable object – we have seen that it still produces a *non-present meaning* during the self/other encounter. And though this meaning resists objectification, a trace of its non-presence can nevertheless be represented within radical narrative structures.

Above we saw the degree to which a text such as *Tristram Shandy* can serve as a metaphor – or more accurately, as an indescribable referent – of the vulnerable materiality of the human body. This significance of the book as body has also been commented on from different critical perspectives. For Sawday the effect of the early-modern debate on the order of discourse, strongly influenced by the idea that “[b]ooks were composed of parts that could be read and interpreted in the same way that bodies were made up of parts” (Sawday, p.136), is still evident in our contemporary “anthropomorphic language of books” (p.135). Ledbetter notes the degree to which the body metaphor is used to describe not only books but nearly *all* aspects of “our relationship to the world and each other” (Ledbetter, p.11). And Barthes argues that “writing’s truth is neither in its messages nor in the system of transmission which it constitutes for current meaning... but in the hand which presses down and traces a line i.e. in *the body which throbs*” (Barthes, 1985, p.154).

Merleau-Ponty similarly claims that our experience of narrative meaning depends upon us sensibly conceiving of novels as bodies which we read to engage in an “inter-human event.” For him novels are physical beings “in which the expression is indistinguishable from the thing expressed, their meaning, accessible only through direct contact, being radiated with no change of their temporal and spatial situation” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p.151). Thus, we experience meaning during the reading event partly because, like us, books express themselves through physical characteristics, in the structuring of their discourses for example, in the way their own bodies are formed. For these critics the widespread idea of books as bodies is closely related to the way we as embodied readers relate to the books we read. Previous chapters have shown the ethical relation that can exist between readers and narrative structures, and also raised the idea that the narrative representation of the body in pain can be related to this irreducible ethics. What I want to ask here is whether our “anthropomorphic” understanding of books as bodies is significant for our ethical relationship with them. Is Barthes right for example to claim that writing only creates meaning because of the relationship that is created between writing and the human body itself? And if so, what is the ethical significance of the relationship between our corporeal bodies and bodies of narrative we read?

In chapters two, three, and four we saw how novels use their structures to draw their readers into an ethical and *responsive* relationship with the characters and the historicized yet fictional world of the narratives themselves. This chapter will further develop this perspective of an intersubjective ethics between reader and text. In the last chapter we saw how Scarry, Bordo, and Bigwood argue that bodily experience itself contains silences which we can all relate to, if not reduce to representation. If texts themselves can be understood as bodies, might the silences that postcolonial narratives possess also draw the reader into an ethical, if irreducible, experience of those literary bodies, in a similar way to the bodies involved in the Levinasian self/other encounter? This question will be considered by examining two novels by J.M. Coetzee: *Foe* (1986), and *Disgrace* (1999). Thereafter, I will discuss some recent theoretical perspectives which propose that a reappraisal of the aesthetic representation of the body might produce an innovative ethico-political literary critique, and I will investigate this idea by turning to Zoë Wicomb's recent novel, *David's Story* (2001), and Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* (2000). In doing so I will also propose that it is important that we acknowledge a link between irreducible physical experience, and the *différance* which affects our interpretation of ontological meaning.

J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*: Locating the impossible traces of the marginalised other in narrative structure.

Foe, like many of the other texts we have examined, is known for its self-conscious examination of the difficulties involved in providing a voice for silenced histories within narratives. Much of the ample criticism of the novel notes that it seems to exhibit a willingness to engage with the silences that inhabit narratives from a particularly Derridean perspective, considering in particular how historical texts deconstruct their claims to veracity. Here I want to investigate the idea that Coetzee's narrative structure purposely problematises conventional deconstructive accounts of textuality by considering the text as body within a Levinasian face-to-face relation.

For many critics, Coetzee's novels, and *Foe* in particular, lend themselves to the teachings of deconstructive criticism, indeed seem imbued with its concerns. For Spivak his work "figures the singular and the unverifiable margin, the refracting

barrier over against the wholly other that one assumes is in the dark” (Spivak, 1999, p.175); for Attwell, *Foe* exhibits a “favouring of the signifier over the signified” (Attwell, 1993, p.104); and for Attridge, Coetzee’s style draws “attention to itself in a way that undermines the illusion of pure expression” (Attridge, 1996, p.173). This apparent authorial concern with concepts such as textual undecidability, *différance*, and the illusion of ontological presence is sometimes read as evidence of an insufficient political intensity, and has brought Coetzee his critics, some of whom see his work as theoretically and academically self-indulgent, as well as cut off from “real human concerns.”¹⁵² For Carusi his work is “blatantly postmodernist,” and because of this suffers from an “ambivalent” politics (Carusi, n.4), and for Parry it is “marked by the further singularity of a textual practice which dissipates the engagement with political conditions it also inscribes” (Parry, 1998, p.164), a perspective backed up by Korang (Korang, p.193). Further sustenance for these sentiments is also – though incorrectly – found in Coetzee’s own admitted reluctance to be drafted into the role of an intellectual commentator and literary spokesperson on the politics of South Africa.¹⁵³

Yet this criticism of the politically ambivalent *oeuvre* of literature which incorporates so-called postmodern narrative strategies seems at odds with the majority of critical sentiment surrounding Coetzee’s fiction. For some critics, Coetzee’s refusal to posit his views and his writing within a specifically South African context allows his work to address postcolonial issues of oppression on a more universal scale (Attridge, 1996, p.171; Marais, 2000, p.180, n.1). Attwell, responding specifically to the charges made by Parry, foregrounds the *Age of Iron* (1990) as a novel that represents “the grounds of ethical consciousness” specifically by paying attention to the general absence of such a transcendental consciousness within certain histories and societies (Attwell, 1998, pp.175-6). As we shall see, *Foe*’s assiduous examination of notions such as plurality, aporia, and the undermining of authority might very well show an awareness of

¹⁵² See Easton, p.587 where she outlines some of these criticisms, and presents Coetzee’s response to the idea that his work may be cut off “from real human concerns” (a phrase used by Coetzee in interview).

poststructuralist/deconstructive critical practices, but this does not take away from its conscious examination of the difficulties involved in bringing non-idealistic postcolonial, as well as female, voices to historical literature. In particular, I believe the novel interrogates the idea of irreducible experience itself – especially in terms of the colonised body – and the role such experience plays in the formation and structure of the postcolonial novel. I will be arguing that this concern with the irreducible does foreground an ethico-political commitment on the part of the author, and yet it also problematises the perspectives of deconstructive critics who find it difficult to come to terms with aspects of Coetzee’s fiction that place even their epistemological perspectives on textuality in question.

The body of *Foe*’s text is fractured from the outset. In all, it consists of four distinct narrative genres, and five separate narratives. The first of these genres is Susan’s written narrative of the events on Cruso’s island; the second a series of diary entries and letters she writes to Foe after having had returned to England; the third Susan’s first-person representation of the events which occur after she and Friday meet Foe and stay with him in London; and the fourth comprises of two fantastic narratives by unknown narrators which form the end of the novel. This disjointed structure self-consciously alludes to and *supplements*¹⁵⁴ Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Roxanna* (1724), “two English texts in which the early eighteenth century tried to constitute marginality” (Spivak, 1999, p.174).¹⁵⁵ Several critics have noted the responsibilities this innovative form of intertextuality places upon the reader. For Attridge the reader “is forced to ask questions which fiction seldom invites: on what occasion and by what means are *these* words being produced, and to what audience are they being directed?” (Attridge, 1996, p.173), and for Attwell the structural changes form a “gradual process [for the reader] of ‘getting behind’ the voice of narration that is staged from beginning to end” (Attwell, 1993, p.115). *Foe*’s

¹⁵³ See Gallagher, pp.167-9 and Dovey, p.18 for an examination of the reasons behind Coetzee’s reluctance to take on such a role. For Coetzee’s own comments in interview on the predicament of the South African novelist see Morphet, p.460.

¹⁵⁴ “Supplement” is used here in the Derridean sense. See chapter one for an examination of its function.

¹⁵⁵ The references to Spivak’s work on the novel refer to two separate critical pieces: the first is Spivak, 1990, an essay which she claims attempts to *supplement* Attridge’s work on the novel. The second is Spivak, 1999, where she reproduced a similar though shortened version of the same piece within a larger chapter on the representation of the silent native informant in Western literature.

structure then is concerned with the production and absence of voice in historical narratives, and self-consciously utilises Derridean notions of *aporia*, the *trace*, and *différance* to draw our attention to two of the non-presences which inhabit the margins of the founding texts of Western imperialism – the voice of the slave and the voice of the independent woman. As Attridge points out, canonical texts “rest on exclusion; the voice they give to some can be heard only by virtue of the silence they impose on others” (1996, p.181).

Foe thus becomes a text that is marked not only by the silences of imperialism’s historical narrative, but also by a subtle authorial presence capable of exploiting the indeterminacy of language to uncover the “(im)possible perspective... called the native informant” (Spivak, 1999, p.9). This phenomenon for Spivak is both impossible and possible because while for her the Other of colonial literature exists to allow the construction of the Western Self, to attribute it with a voice and substantive existence would be to obliterate that subjective existence through objectification. Or as Attridge puts it, the silencing of the imperialist’s other “is not just silencing by exclusion, it is a silencing by inclusion as well: any voice we hear is by that very fact purged of its uniqueness and identity” (p.181). It would also ignore the fact that the informant is a non-present trace that *supplements* Western fiction, rather than emerging from it as a character or presence in itself. What remains of this presence, as we have seen in previous chapters, is a trace of an unknowable alterity within texts which objectify the other. Accordingly, though we can locate the colonised other in historical literature, we cannot hear its subjective story.

Foe can be understood in these terms as a novel which consciously attempts to foreground the voices that have been historically excluded from narrative, and yet is reluctant to appropriate and articulate those voices within yet another narrative. Evidence of this occurs in the discussion Susan and Foe have about her first written narrative of the island – figured by its encompassing quotation-marks as “a representation *in writing of writing*” (Attridge, 1996, p.172) – within her account of the time spent with Foe. Rejecting Foe’s insistence that the story of the island

requires certain attributes – exotic characters common to the imperial fantasy, and a generic temporal structure – which the one she has written lacks,¹⁵⁶ she exclaims,

“I am not a story, Mr. Foe... to no one, not even to you, do I owe proof that I am a substantial being with a substantial history in the world... I am a free women who asserts her freedom by telling her story according to her own desire.” (Coetzee, 1986, p.131)

And yet, in what world can the marginalised ‘tell their own story’? For as Foe ironically reminds Susan later, and as Attridge has pointed out, those who claim to have a “substantial history in the world” sometimes unwittingly have that history inhibited by the social and political discourses of that world itself:

“[m]y daughter is substantial and I am substantial; and you too are substantial, no less and no more than any of us. We are all alive, we are all substantial, we are all in the same world.”

“You have omitted Friday.” (p.152)

This is the close of the third narrative, its final image being Friday, dressed up in Foe’s robes and wig, and learning to write, and yet failing to do so within the phonetic alphabet of Susan and Foe. We are therefore provided with no resolution to the narrative that Susan wanted to write – “[t]he history of ourselves and the island” (p.114). The aim of giving voice to Friday’s experience on the island is left unfulfilled, and in this forgetting of Friday’s substance we are given an intimation that she unconsciously realises that Friday’s story cannot exist in the world of her own.

This reinforces Spivak’s assertion that in *Foe* “we cannot hold together, in a continuous narrative space... Susan Barton’s narrative, and the withheld slate of the native who will not be an informant” (1999, p.193).¹⁵⁷ For Spivak, Susan partly succeeds in presenting her own experience of *her* margin, that of the independent woman, but ultimately “the text steps in and reminds us that Friday is in the margin as such, the placeholder (*lieutenant*) of the wholly other” (1999, p.174). Evidence

¹⁵⁶ See Said, 1978, p.1 on the exotic construction of the Orient, and Said, 1994, pp.xi-xiii & p.12 on the intrinsic relationship between imperialism and narrative construction of the “European realistic novel.”

¹⁵⁷ See also Spivak, 1990, pp.10-11 where she argues that *Foe* relates the “impossibility of restoring the history of empire and recovering the lost text of mothering *in the same register of language*.”

that Friday's story remains unrepresentable comes when we are told that whilst learning to write he repetitively writes a circular shape. Foe ironically misinterprets this as the letter 'o' of the English alphabet, but readers of *Robinson Crusoe* know that in that novel we are told it is the sound that the natives "say" whilst praying to their god (Defoe, pp.156-7). This intertextual effect means that Friday's 'o' isn't given up to the English alphabet – it is intimated to us, as assumed readers of *Robinson Crusoe*, that this shape doesn't signify the letter 'o,' thus allowing Defoe's 'o' to *supplement* the shape's meaning in this scene. Importantly, this ironic allusion is carried out whilst Friday is dressed up as the author Foe himself. This mimicry is close to Bhabha's view of it: Friday's withholding of his story can be read as an act of agency, for we cannot be sure that he is not undermining rather than performing the wishes of his masters. The ambiguity of his 'o' implies that the novel does not objectify his unknowable story, which imbues Friday's miming of Foe with ambivalence, thus continually producing the slippage, excess, and difference of mimicry at the margin (see Bhabha, p.86). For Spivak this is evidence that Friday "is the guardian of the margin" (Spivak, 1990, p.15), "the figure that makes impossibility visible" (1999, p.174). Accordingly, the novel foregrounds the *trace* of otherness in narrative – in this case the non-presence of Friday's subjective experience.

Further evidence of this agency comes with the picture of the 'walking-eye' that Friday draws, and yet will not show to Susan. Marais points out that in Coetzee's fiction the "metaphor of the gaze" is used to draw attention to the attempts of imperialist characters, as well as reading and writing subjects, "to master and possess the other."¹⁵⁸ I would argue though that the walking eye ironically reminds us that Friday can *see* and therefore perceive and experience the world around him, suggesting that he does have a subjectivity and history, though they remain unannounced. This reminds us of the idea of unconscious bodily perception becoming conscious metaphor that we saw in the last chapter. Here Friday's

¹⁵⁸ Marais, 1996, p.71. See for example in *Dusklands* (1974), where Jacobus Coetzee claims that "[o]nly the eyes have power... cutting a devouring path from horizon to horizon," (Coetzee, 1974, p.79) and that this power is greater than the vulnerable body. See also Foe's use of it as a symbol of the unknown story of Friday's experiences upon the slave ship (p.141). Interestingly, Susan responds

experience again remains irreducible and unobjectified, but I would argue that the symbol of the roving eye operates as a metaphor of unexpressed perception, and in doing so is suggestive of Merleau-Ponty's "primordial silence" that lies "beneath the chatter of speech" and writing, and which arrives with us during our unconscious physical perception of the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p.184). From this perspective Friday's body remains a "condition of possibility... of all expressive operations and all acquired views which constitute the cultural world" (p.388). Of course, Friday's physical experiences never become speech in the manner described below:

When the silent vision [primordial silence] falls into speech... this is always in virtue of the same fundamental phenomenon of reversibility which sustains both the mute perception and the speech, and which manifests itself by an almost carnal existence of the idea, as well as by a sublimation of the flesh. (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p.154-5)

Friday's "mute perception," while it harbours the possibility of writing in English, is not allowed to 'fall into' speech or writing in this novel. But his picture of the eye nevertheless reminds us of the primordial silence and mute perception which exist outside language, or least prior to it. This ironically overturns Marais's view of the eye as symbol of the imperialist gaze – Friday's eye retains a trace of the silent experience of the native informant which undermines the imperialist, *yet it does so by referring to bodily perception itself as an inexpressible phenomenon which creates meaning prior to language*. And yet the irony here is doubled by the novel's intertextual structure: Friday's story, that which he has *seen*, will not be reduced to representation and disseminated within a novel which reminds us of the dangers of the socio-political construction of historical discourse and language. What we are left with is the native who mimics the imperialist writer in a silence that "intensifies surveillance, and poses an immanent threat to both 'normalized' knowledges and disciplinary powers" (Bhabha, p.84).

Here again then the novel and its complex structure reminds us of the undecidability of writing. We know that in Derridean terms Friday can 'write,'

to Foe by calling it a silent *mouth*, thus equating perception of oppression with the *unspoken* story of that oppression (p.142), the narrative representation of which this chapter will consider.

because Susan recounts the story of him casting petals over the sunken slave ship.¹⁵⁹ But if Susan and Foe were to reduce Friday's experience to representation in *their* language, would it still be his story? The text seems to warn us that it would not. Susan, more than Foe, realises that to reduce his experience to written story is to withdraw from that experience itself. When Foe insists that they must "make Friday's silence speak, as well as the silence surrounding Friday," Susan replies

"It is easy enough to lie in bed and say what must be done, but who will dive into the wreck? On the island I told Crusoe it should be Friday, with a rope about his middle for safety. But if Friday cannot tell us what he sees, is Friday in my story anymore than a figuring (or pre-figuring) of another diver?" (p.142)

For Susan, the veracity of a story lies in its ability to accurately replicate subjective experience, something another writer cannot do for Friday. Likewise, many critics also realise that the restoration of Friday's tongue would not provide access to his experiences. Attridge argues that if Friday could acquire a tongue and voice, "he would melt into a class which is already constituted and socially placed by a pervasive discourse" (Attridge, 1996, pp.183-4), and for Gallagher Friday's silence "is not so much an ontological state as it is a social condition" (Gallagher, p.181).

Representing the impossible in the textual body: *Foe* and the silence of the subjugated body.

And yet, while such critical consent seems agreed that *Foe* is a political comment on the nature of historicised postcolonial narratives, it is also fair to say that its double-ending has caused divisions amongst poststructuralist critics. The difficulty posed by the ending is exemplified by Wood during an interview with Coetzee. During one question – lasting four and a half pages – Wood emphasises the deconstructive sensibility which marks Coetzee's novels. He claims that the final narrative of *Foe*

¹⁵⁹ The image of Friday involving himself in symbolically casting petals over the sunken ship reminds us of Derrida's exemplification of arche-writing in his reading of Lévi-Strauss's accounts of the Nambikwara tribe. Contrary to Lévi-Strauss's claims, Derrida shows that such tribes do have methods of writing, though they do not appear similar to western "intellectual" phonetics, and that in fact such 'writing' is necessary to any intersubjective communication (Derrida, 1976, pp.118-140). In doing so he dispels the belief that any form of knowledge, including speech, is "alien at once to writing and to violence" (p.127).

“leaves one puzzled,” especially in light of the fact (which Coetzee does not discount) that “your work is marked by an understanding of what is exemplified by Derrida’s notorious statement that ‘there is no outside to the text’” (Wood, p.191). The next two pages of Wood’s question are dedicated to exemplifying why the final narrator’s most emphatic and unambiguous claim, “[t]his is a place where bodies are their own signs” (p.157), is so very problematic for a proponent of deconstructive reading practices. This passage and Wood’s concern are reproduced below:

‘Friday,’ I say, I try to say, kneeling over him, sinking hands and knees into the ooze, ‘what is this ship?’

But this is not a place of words. Each syllable, as it comes out, is caught and filled with water and diffused. This is a place where bodies are their own signs. It is the home of Friday. (p.157)

[S]o is this perhaps... a tomb of fiction (“But this is not a place of words”) in the sense that here words not only have no currency but must perish? Most strikingly of all, “this is a place where bodies are their own signs.”

Now, this assertion *is* fiction; not just as the French say, to the power of two (as in *mis en abyme*), but to the power of three. It leaves one puzzled. After all, your work is marked by an understanding of what is exemplified by Derrida’s notorious statement that “there is no outside text”... [which means] that the world – the real world “of flesh and blood”... is always textualized... what textuality entails is precisely that there is no such place as one “where bodies are their own signs,” where identity is immanent.¹⁶⁰ (Woods, p.191)

If Wood describes the reasons why deconstructive critics of the novel are so unsettled by the suggestions of the final, impossible (not “impossible” in deconstruction’s sense) narrative, the differences in opinion between Spivak and Parry over the book exemplify the problems it poses for critics who disagree on the political viability of deconstruction’s ‘impossible’ critical stance. I wish to use these different points of view as a starting point from which to reappraise the ethical import of Coetzee’s narrative structure.

¹⁶⁰ Wood never clarifies the reasoning behind his idea that the body operating as pure sign would necessarily imply the possibility of an immanent identity.

In both her readings of *Foe*, Spivak ignores the first narrative of the final section of the novel and turns to the final one that the above passage is taken from. Reading the last two sentences of the above passage from *Foe* she claims that,

[f]or *this* end, texts are porous. They go through wish fulfilment. Yet we also know that Coetzee's entire book warns that Friday's body is not its own sign. In this end, which I can read as the staging of the wish to invade the margin, the seaweeds seem to sigh: if only there were no texts. The end is written lovingly, and we will not give it up. But we cannot hold together, in a continuous narrative space, the voyage of reading at the end of the book, Susan Barton's narrative, and the withheld slate of the native who will not be an informant. (Spivak, 1999, p.193)

What Spivak asks us to believe then is that Coetzee's novel, so self-reflexive and conscious of its use of language throughout (Attridge, 1996, p.173), withdraws to an enactment of wish-fulfilment in the second narrative of a difficult, double-ended close. Bongie also substantiates this claim, pointing out that we cannot "fully credit" this image of pure communication in a novel that up until now has constantly questioned the veracity of language, writing, and ontological signs (Bongie, pp.40-41). For Attwell and Parry though, other meanings can be drawn from *Foe*'s end:

Friday's home is the body: his existence is a facticity that simply asserts its own priorities. The trials of marginal authorship are irrelevant to Friday. This ending amounts to a deferral of authority to the body of history, to the political world in which the body politic of the future resides. (Attwell, 1993, p.116)

[T]he outflow of sounds from the mouth of Friday gives tongue to meanings? desires? which precede or surpass those that can be communicated and interpreted in formal language. It could be argued then, that speechlessness in Coetzee's fiction exceeds or departs from the psychoanalytic paradigm it also deploys, to become a metaphor for that portentous silence which signifies what *cannot* be spoken. (Parry, 1998, p.154)

For Attwell and Parry, the sudden insertion of Friday's violated, irreducible body into a text that concerns itself with the undecidability of the marginal voice draws attention to the role the oppressed body *itself* might play in communicating, or raising awareness of, the story of the historically marginalized. These views reinforce

those of Scarry, Bigwood, and Levinas who argue that the body does indeed harbour meaning within its own “portentous silence which signifies what *cannot* be spoken.”

Such insights also provide a reminder of the emphasis placed on the flesh and blood body before this in the novel. Spivak claims that “Coetzee’s entire book warns that Friday’s body is not its own sign,” yet is this really the case? Rather, I would say that the book warns of the dangers in assuming that the true story of the island will be heard when, “by art we have found a means of giving voice to Friday” (p.118). Susan and Foe debate this idea endlessly. Consideration of the significance of reducing the physical body to text is much less articulated in the discourses that ensue between Susan and Foe. The only comment on it is made by Susan, who when after telling Foe of Friday’s possible genital mutilation, exclaims, “I do not know how these matters can be written of in a book *unless they are covered up again in figures*” (my italics). Foe’s dismissive response is to ask for more details of Bahia (p.120). Interestingly, this is a very similar image to that of Sterne’s black page which also covers up “many opinions, transactions and truths” in a “dark veil” of ink.

In terms of body-representation, I want to suggest that the novel operates as a reminder of the difficulty in reducing the experience of the violated body to literary discourse. It is interesting to note how this affects the narrative body of the text itself. During the course of the third section, it becomes clear that Susan has purposely left silences within her story of the island, and within her letters and diary-entries. In particular, she fails to represent in any detail the mutilations that she suspects Friday has suffered. For example, in the first narrative she describes how she *imagines* Friday’s severed tongue might look, for she never actually witnesses it for herself, nor wants to. Rather, she gives thanks that his mutilation is unseen, and then uses a curious, parenthesised remark to describe this invisibility: “(as some other mutilations are hidden by clothing)” (p.24). This undoubtedly raises images of other mutilations within the reader’s mind, but the relevance of this effect is not made apparent until the third narrative, when Susan recounts for Foe her experience of seeing Friday bared from the waist down:

‘I have told you of the abhorrence I felt when Crusoe opened Friday’s mouth to show me he had not tongue... From that night on I had continually to fear that evidence of a yet more hideous mutilation might be thrust upon my sight...

‘The whirling robe was... settled upon Friday’s shoulders and enclosing him; Friday was the dark pillar at its centre. What had been hidden from me was revealed. I saw; or, I should say, my eyes were open to what was present to them.

‘I saw and believed I had seen, though afterwards I remembered Thomas, who also saw, but could not be brought to believe till he put his hand in the wound.

‘I do not know how these matters can be written of in a book unless they are covered up again in figures... I will say in plain terms what can be said and leave unsaid what cannot.

(pp.119-20)

Though there is an uncertainty left over whether Friday’s genitals are severed, this is brought about by the distinction that Susan draws between what she “saw” and “what was present” to her eyes. The implication is that the initial sight (“what was present”) produced a subjective revulsion that is complicated by subsequent rationalising thoughts on what she “saw.” Ultimately, Susan argues that she cannot articulate such experiences, a fact made clear in her discourse with Foe, and in the content of the narratives she produces.

Importantly though, if we return to the points in her narratives when Susan *could have* described these mutilations, we find that her language somewhat belies the personal feelings she has silenced. This can be seen in the parenthesised comment she makes concerning Friday’s tongue: she later admits to Foe that she feared the thought of other mutilations, though we now see that she could not *openly* admit this in her narrative. And in her early portrayal of Friday’s dancing, once again we see that she does not completely abandon her fears. It is here that she surmises that perhaps “the cutting out of his tongue taught him eternal obedience, as *gelding* takes the fire out of a stallion” (p.98, my italics). It is not difficult to see that Susan draws her inspiration for this analogy from the fact that she has just witnessed Friday’s ‘gelding,’ though she does not say so at this point.

By tracing these complex allusions across the first three narratives of the novel we gain an insight both into what Attridge calls a representation in writing of writing, and the ‘sign-posted’ silences that pervade such narratives when they involve the indescribability of bodily mutilation. Ironically, Susan’s unannounced admission of her inability to write of Friday’s ‘gelding’ comes at a point in her narrative when she believes she might communicate with Friday through a semiotic yet non-literary form – music and dance. As Parry points out, this is the closest that

Friday comes during the first two narratives to communicating his feelings (Parry, 1998, p.155). What these aspects of the novel structure make clear once again is that Friday's story of his subjective experiences certainly exists, it is just that for Susan it is exasperatingly irreducible to the English language. As Bongie puts it, "rather than inhabiting a world of figures that cannot be reduced to a body, [Friday] appears to stand as a body that cannot be reduced to the figural world of Barton and Foe" (Bongie, p.33).

The specific attempts made to draw attention to the immediate substance of Friday's body would seem to suggest that is not only important that we acknowledge Friday's unannounced subjectivity, but that we also consider the inarticulate signs that verify the presence of that subjectivity. We have already seen how other critics and fictional narratives stress the inarticulate nature of the subjugated body, an idea that is seemingly reinforced by this novel as well. If that is the case, then there is a doubly ironic misguidedness about Susan and Foe's attempts to get Friday to speak. We have already seen that it is implausible to expect Friday's subjective story to exist within an imperialist discourse. But isn't it also suggested that the story of the slave-body – the story of Friday's body to which reader attention is subtly drawn time and time again – cannot exist in *any* narrative discourse, even though its immanent scars signify that a painful narrative *is there*? The links drawn by the complex intertextual structure between the indescribability of physical mutilation and the silences that inhabit the margins of historical literature would seem to suggest that this is the case. This refusal to re-represent brutal colonial oppression, both in Coetzee's novel and in Susan's narratives, can be found in the critical work of Coetzee himself. He writes that "there is something tawdry about *following* the state" in reproducing acts of violence and thus "making its vile mysteries the occasion of fantasy." Rather than objectify and thus reduce the reality of such terror – which as Scarry notes is the aim of the terror regimes themselves (Scarry, 1985, p.56) – he argues that it is more politically beneficial "to imagine torture and death on one's own terms" (Coetzee, quoted in Marais, 1998, pp.46-7).

The body of text that forms the separate narratives of Susan's experiences is therefore disjointed, scarred by silences, and ultimately incomplete. It is interesting to note though that this only becomes clear when the attentive reader becomes aware

of the subtle allusions made within Susan's narratives to her untold thoughts on Friday's mutilations. Without comparing Susan's use of apparently uncalled for analogies (such as "gelding") to her revelations in the third section of the novel, the reader is left unaware of the silences that *self-consciously* shape Susan's narratives. As Marais points out, it is imperative that the reader realise that the "irreducibility" of Friday's experience is foregrounded not only in Coetzee's novel, but in the discourse and narratives of Susan as well (1998, p.55). While Marais identifies this in the content of Susan's direct discourse in the novel's third section, I also believe it is imperative that this silence is acknowledged in the structure of the novel's textual body itself.

As we saw, towards the end of the novel Susan too begins to deny the "substantial" reality of Friday in the world. The connotation of physicality is not accidental here – the authorial presence makes it clear that neither Susan nor Foe feel that Friday's corporeal experience is part of his 'story.' For Susan such "matters" cannot be reduced to "plain terms," and for Foe they are irrelevant to the colonial fantasy (p.120). It is interesting then, as Parry points out, that it is at this point in the novel that Coetzee chooses to incorporate "another narrative turn," and draw attention to the possibility of the body itself giving non-linguistic utterance within two fantastical narratives (Parry, 1998, p.155). Using Levinas, I want to suggest that here again we see the textual body itself taking on a disruptive structure as its form *and* content enforces acknowledgement of the silent, yet meaningful, attributes of the physical body.

We have seen that the critics who illuminate the dangers that come with attempting to provide a voice or story of the marginalised are correct to do so – Attwell asks us in warning if there is a discourse that could adequately represent Friday (p.113), and Spivak notes that for "every command of metropolitan anticolonialism for the native to yield his 'voice,' there is a space of withholding" (1999, p.190). These concerns with the aporiac elements of language also find support in Levinas. For him "rational signification," the reduction of experience to language, "places things in the perspective of the other... permits me to render things offerable, detach them from my own usage, alienate them, render them exterior." Objectivity thus results from language, which inevitably means that it undoes

subjective meaning: “the subject is detached from the things possessed as though it hovered over its own existence, as though it were detached from it” (Levinas, 1969, p.209).¹⁶¹ As such, language results in the dissemination of meaning due to *différance* – its repeatedly deferred meaning can never return to its origin.¹⁶² As Derrida makes clear, “[d]ifférance began by *broaching* alienation and it ends by leaving reappropriation *breached*... *différance* makes opposition of presence and absence possible” (Derrida, 1976, p.143).

And yet, if the reduction of experience to objective language (the aim of Friday’s writing lessons) means that the subject becomes partly detached from his/her own existence (his/her experiences are made textual, open to *différance*), what are the implications for this narrative when it attempts to represent human experiences that *literally* cannot be textualised? We saw in the last chapter this is the experience of physical suffering which “in all its degrees entails the impossibility of detaching oneself from the instant of existence... there is an absence of all refuge. It is the fact of being directly exposed to being” (Levinas, 1987, pp.39-40). In such a scenario the only way which we understand another’s pain is if the body itself becomes a referent for that pain, for physical sensations are an aspect of all human beings. Related to this is a universal knowledge of death, which also creates a relationship with otherness. Levinas argues that the awareness of death is the fear of absolute alterity, and is shared by all individuals (1969, p.234). For Scarry, pain and the idea of death “are the most intense form of negation, the purest expressions of the anti-human, of annihilation, of total aversiveness, though one is absence and the other a felt presence” (Scarry, 1985, p.31). Ironically, it is this shared relationship with pain and death as absolute alterity that makes possible an ethical relation with others: “The solitude of death does not make the Other vanish, but remains in a consciousness of hostility, and consequently still renders possible an appeal to the Other, to his friendship and his medication” (Levinas, 1969, p.234).

¹⁶¹ Levinas draws these perspectives primarily from Husserl’s phenomenological theory. See Simms, pp.6-9 on how Levinas’s draws on Husserl’s view of the intersubjectivity necessary for objective knowledge, and Levinas, 1998b, p.167 where in a study of Husserl he relates the possibility of objectivity to the irreducible vulnerability that results through the “inassimilable disturbance of the Same by the Other – an awakening that shakes the waking state.”

The shared realities and awareness of pain and death therefore make possible a concept of intersubjectivity. Levinas writes, “the passage of sensual qualities bound to carnal subjectivity toward the condition of objective qualities of the real [is] sought in intersubjective agreement on this sensible content. That presupposes the constitution of intersubjectivity” (1993, pp.99-100). Intersubjectivity therefore depends on an unconscious sensual relation with the world on the part of the self and its others. For Levinas and Merleau-Ponty such sensual intersubjective knowledge is “pretheoretical” and bound to the shared sensual experience of the world:

The other person and I “are like the elements of one sole intercorporeality”... The “esthesiological” community is seen as founding intersubjectivity and serving as a basis for the intrography of intellectual communication, which is not directly given, and is produced by reconstruction. (Levinas, 1993, p.100, quoting Merleau-Ponty, 1964b, p.168)

The structure of *Foe*'s final sections seems to be an attempt to express such a pretheoretical and intersubjective experience by allowing its narrative structure to become a referent for the silences common to human physicality. In terms of its narrative content, the image of a site of existence which is “not a place of words,” “a place where bodies are their own signs,” is not so much a representation of a ‘wishful’ (Spivak) or ‘paradisaal’ scene where “sign and object are unified” (Parry, 1998, p.155), but rather is indicative of human experiences that “cannot be spoken,” though they can be acknowledged. *This Friday* is not only a reminder of the deconstructive concern with the (im)possible aspects of language, especially when adopted by the marginalized, but also a reminder of the idea that certain experiences, central to the existence of human beings, cannot be reduced to objectification. It is, as Head points out, a “unvoiced history” that while silent, contains an “irresistible historical necessity” (Head, p.126). From this perspective, the idea that the “the loss of Friday’s tongue” holds the key to the island story takes on an ambiguous irony: the enforced loss of a tongue not only stops speech, the experience of the act itself – and other brutalities committed on the colonised body – are by their very nature

¹⁶² According to Spivak, Derrida’s ‘dissemination’ refers to “a sowing that does not produce plants, but is simply infinitely repeated. A semination that is not *in*semination but *dis*semination, seed spilled in vain, an emission that cannot return to its origin in the father” (Spivak, 1976, p.lxv)

indescribable. The experience of pain and death here become central to the idea of irreducibility in language. To this end then Friday remains voiceless, but also retains an agency that is resistant to discursive objectification, which, according to Marais, is the non-violent resistance of the Levinasian face-to-face ethical relation.¹⁶³

When the unknown narrator of this last scene refers to the body as unified sign, its meaning wordlessly communicated during a face to face encounter – “his face to my face” (p.157) – s/he echoes Levinas’s own views on intersubjective ethical relations. As noted before, for Levinas all ethics, and indeed all philosophy, must be based on the “face-to-face relation” between self and other which “signifies the philosophical priority of existent over Being,” and “creates an asymmetrical indebtedness... towards the Other’s moral summons which is based... on the primacy of the other’s right to exist, and on the edict: ‘You shall not kill.’” We have already seen how Levinas relates the presence of the other’s face to its body and flesh, a point of central ethical importance since in the face – and thus the body – “[p]rior to any particular expression and beneath all particular expressions... there is nakedness and destitution of the expression as such, that is to say extreme exposure, defencelessness, vulnerability itself” (1989a, p.83). It is his awareness of this shared vulnerability, this mortality, this *universal submission to physical suffering*, that allows Levinas to claim that ethics exist between the self and the other because of “the way the face summons me, calls for me, begs for me, and in doing so recalls my responsibility, and calls me into question” (1989a, p.83).

Its other attribute is that the experience of this ethics is voiceless: “There is here [in the face-to-face] a relation between me and the other beyond rhetoric” (1969, p.75). In terms of *Foe* an understanding of this voiceless, non-discursive, and ethical relation is vital. In both ends to the novel Coetzee presents an image of non-linguistic communication (p.154 & p.157), and in the final narrative it is an experience that “*flows up through his body* and... runs northward and southward to the ends of the earth” and “beats against my eyelids, against the skin of my face” (p.157, my italics). Thus though Wood notes that Coetzee’s novel is “marked” by the

¹⁶³ Marais provides an intricate and exceptional reading of several of Coetzee’s novels in terms of Levinas’s theory of ethics, but specifically refuses to engage with the role played by the representation

claim that there is no 'outside text,' this ending seems to suggest that Easton is right in arguing that there is an "ethical underpinning to Coetzee's work" in his enthusiasm "not to follow 'established' codes of... fiction [but to] to cross or redefine [such] boundaries" (Easton, p.588). The "slow stream" of 'meaning' that "flows up through [Friday's] body... to the ends of the earth" implies, via Levinas, that there exists a whole world of experience, of being and existence, that lies 'outside text,' even while the whole historical world is text. Or, perhaps more accurately, there exists a world of experience prior to textuality. There is then nothing outside text, yet there is meaning prior to it, meaning which ultimately refuses textual reduction. Interestingly, it is this very same image of the inability to speak underwater that Coetzee uses to represent Fyodor Mikhailovich's vision of his dead son in *The Master of Petersburg* (1994). There, as here, when the dead man tries to communicate he is underwater and "each syllable is replaced by a syllable of water" (Coetzee, 1994, p.17). The image recurs throughout the novel (see p.5 and pp.110-11). Once again then we see evidence of what Marais sees as Coetzee's willingness to pursue themes through the repeated use of certain symbols and images. In this case it could be argued that the theme of the unknowability of death is being followed, but that this unknowability is doubly figured by subtly reminding the reader that in certain physical scenarios phonetic speech itself is no longer reducible. Irreducibility is not just a matter for the dead then.

Yet we need to remember that these *traces of silence* in the representation of Friday inhabit the whole novel, not only the last few narratives. In the second epigraph to this chapter, Levinas asks if art can be a "face" which we might be capable of gazing upon in ethical reflection (1998a, p.10). I would suggest that if we adopt Levinas's later view that the face of the other can be equated with the body of the other, then it is indeed possible to ethically 'gaze' on the body of *Foe's* text. As we saw with *Jazz*, it is possible to approach and engage a text as other, and in doing so acknowledge the responsibilities that it silently asks of us. An example of how this occurs in *Foe* as a textual body concerned with physical bodies can be seen if we turn again to the end of the novel.

of the subjugated body in those fictions, highlighting rather the idea of the infinite, silent resistance that the absolute alterity of the other gives rise to in the self. See Marais, 1998, p.57, and 2000, p.172.

We must remember that the final two narrators have read and are reading Susan's story respectively – the first of these tells us that what issues from Friday's mouth is "as she said, the roar of waves in a seashell." S/he takes Susan's narrative literally, allowing Friday's silence to sound as Susan imagined it might, and thereby disallowing that silence to take on an alternative meaning – it remains merely an imagined and thereby objectified comment on the island (p.154).

The final narrator's experience is more complex, specifically because as s/he begins to read Susan's narrative of the island, s/he becomes the subject of the narrative and 'slips overboard.'¹⁶⁴ Unlike Susan and her characters, this one does enter the wreck which Susan judged so important to Friday's story. In *this* story of the wreck though, Friday is even more physically violated than before. For the first time we see the scars his body carries, reminders of the silences and ambiguities that mark Susan's narratives and Coetzee's novel, including those moments where we see Susan ambiguously yet consciously refusing to elaborate upon Friday's different mutilations. In a double irony then, this disseminated reading insists that here the crucial, non-textualised meanings harboured by Friday's mutilated body are similarly non-present in the body of the novel itself. There is an intrinsic link between Friday's physical silence and the traces of silence in the larger narrative structure. Like Friday, the narrative itself is a (textual) body scarred by the *meaningful* silences of the historical Friday's colonised and subjugated corporeality.¹⁶⁵ I would suggest that *encountering* these non-present traces during the reading event produces an "pretheoretical" and irreducible experience of discursive intersubjectivity. As we saw in chapter three, Levinas sees this experiencing arising through the traces non-present in textual discourse, and, as we saw in the last chapter, in the traces of vulnerability non-present during the 'expression' of the self/other physical relation.

As Attridge, Attwell, and Marais point out then, the text holds forth responsibilities to the reader. S/he needs to interact with its structure, with the effect the disjointed final narratives have on the preceding ones, and in doing so realise that it too, like Friday, is a body scarred by the historical realities of injustice, brutality

¹⁶⁴ See also Marais, 1998, p.57 on the role of what he calls this "reader-surrogate."

and silencing. As Marais notes, should the “actual reader’s response to the novel follow the course of the reader-figure in the text,” his/her obligatory “proximity to the other will inevitably affect his/her relations in the order of the political” (1998, p.58). To develop this further, just as the narrator/reader voice in the final sequence attends to the body of Friday within ethical relation, so too must the flesh-and-blood reader make ethical enquiry into a text whose own fractured silences acknowledge and “signpost” – but do not objectify – the indescribable realities of historical oppression.

Violating the *Saying* through the narrative structure of J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*.

While *Foe* provides an example of a text that self-reflexively raises ethical issues of the body and considers them within a fractured narrative, I want to now turn to a novel whose narrative ethics are not so obviously aligned with the physical structure of the textual body itself: Coetzee’s *Disgrace* (1999). As seen above, novels such as *Tristram Shandy* and *Foe* can specifically manipulate narrative structure in such a way that the relation between the body of a text and its specific literary effects – be they ethical, comical or otherwise – is foregrounded. As seen, this relation is initially made possible by disruptive measures – the insertion of a black page, radical spatial or temporal shifts, overt or subtle intertextual allusions – that interrupt conventional narrative form. Yet would we still be able to locate an ethical relation between the reader and the textual body if such interruptions did not occur? It is with this question in mind that I turn to *Disgrace*, a novel that marks a clear departure from the fragmentary form of *Foe*.

Disgrace utilises a realist structure. It incorporates a third-person omniscient narrator, and presents a linear narrative of the events that precede and follow its central character’s dismissal from a university professorship. Its content is ethically and morally orientated in a traditional sense: the central character David Lurie, a white South African academic, is dismissed after having an affair with one of his

¹⁶⁵ See Ledbetter, p.18 on the idea that the physical and emotional scarring of a narrative’s characters often affects the body of the text itself. See also Ledbetter, p.2 where he implies that the effect of this may be a “moment of ethical discovery.”

students; he is dismissed because whilst eager to admit his guilt to a university disciplinary board, he refuses to adopt a repentant tone in an official and public capacity. Leaving Cape Town, he moves in with his daughter on her small-holding in the Eastern Cape, and whilst there both are the victims of an attack by three black men; he is badly beaten, whilst she is raped several times. Disagreements between father and daughter arise in the wake of the attack due to her desire not to report the rape and his conviction that she must, as well her decision to remain on the farm and his insistence that she leave. Alongside this we are given an insight into the relationship that develops between David and the dogs he begins to work with at an animal rescue near his daughter's farm. The responsibility of having to care for and 'put down' injured dogs is an experience that alters his previously held views on the inconsequence of the morality of animal welfare. Such moral issues notwithstanding, *Disgrace* is a novel that will appeal to those critics who read Coetzee's fiction as evidence of his non-committal attitude to social politics – little, if any, obvious closure or resolution is placed upon the morality of the events or character actions I have mentioned. In contrast, what I want to argue is that Coetzee's use of structure here – most specifically his subtle manipulation of narrative voice – places the reader within an intersubjective ethical encounter that originates at the body of the text itself.

When considering the ethics of postcolonial narratives I have placed emphasis on the silences – both as indescribable aspects of experience, and as a politically motivated function of literary discourse – in fictional texts. For Spivak such silences are overwhelmingly of the latter sort, an effect of the impossibility of providing a voice to the marginalized in literary and theoretical discourse, as well as the enforcement of that silence by Western cultural aesthetics (Spivak, 1985, pp.87-90). Such silences occur throughout this novel – the subjective views of the black landowner Petrus are never allowed to interrupt David's highly focalized domination of the narrative voice for example – but I initially want to consider just one of them to introduce some perspectives on the ethical consequences of *Disgrace*'s narrative structure. This is the narrative representation of the rape committed by David Lurie upon Melanie, the student with whom he is having an affair.

He has given her no warning; she is too surprised to resist the intruder who thrusts himself upon her... 'No, not now!' she says, struggling. 'My cousin will be back!'

But nothing will stop him. He carries her to the bedroom, brushes off the absurd slippers, kisses her feet, astonished by the feeling she evokes... Strange love! Yet from the quiver of Aphrodite, goddess of the foaming waves, no doubt about that.

She does not resist. All she does is avert herself: avert her lips, avert her eyes... Little shivers of cold run through her; as soon as she is bare, she slips under the quilted counterpane like a mole burrowing, and turns her back on him.

Not rape, not quite like that, but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core. As though she has decided to go slack, die within herself for the duration, like a rabbit when the jaws of the fox close on its neck. So that everything done to her might be done, as it were, far away.

'Pauline will be back any minute,' she says when it is over. 'Please. You must go.'...

A mistake, a huge mistake. At this moment, he has no doubt, she, Melanie, is trying to cleanse herself of it, of him. (Coetzee, 1999, pp.24-5)

There are three voices present in the above passage: the omniscient narrator's, evident in information such as, "He has given her no warning"; David Lurie's focalized voice: "Strange love! Yet from the quiver of Aphrodite..."; and Melanie's, which is presented in direct discourse. But what event are we, as readers, actually presented with by these voices? As Rimmon-Kenan points out, we can accept a narrative event as "an authoritative account of the fictional truth" if we consider the narrator to be reliable (Rimmon-Kenan, p.100). This places us in an interesting position in terms of the above passage. Whilst on the one hand I would argue that the omniscient narrator *is* reliable – s/he tells us what *happened* at Melanie's flat – our certain knowledge of the *event* is problematised by the effect that the voices of the other two characters have on our interpretation of the event. After it has taken place we are told that it was "[n]ot rape, not quite like that," but according to whom? Is this the narrator's singular voice, or is David focalizing it? We know that Melanie said "No" whilst struggling with David, and that it was "undesired," so does that not constitute rape?

The uncertainty this places upon reader interpretation is not unlike the effect created by Humbert Humbert's representation of sex in Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955). In that novel too the narrative representation of sex sustained a certain ambiguity by refusing to allow an independent insight into the subjectivities of its female characters. There though the self-conscious authorial construction of Humbert's

overt unreliability constantly reminds us that he is purposely altering the facts i.e. “Frigid gentlewomen of the jury!... I am going to tell you something very strange: it was she who seduced me” (Nabokov, p.132).¹⁶⁶ That is not the case with David Lurie – he remains true to his interpretation of events, it is just that in doing so he completely silences any insight into the subjective experiences of those around him. Also, Humbert is the first-person narrator of *Lolita* – his arrogant and untrustworthy domination of the narrative provides much of the force behind *Lolita*’s satirical take on artists, men, and American consumer culture. David Lurie is a fictional character in the third-person – the interruptions of his voice introduce not untrustworthiness, but an insight into the ability of one person’s discourse to obliterate that of another.

Interestingly, the only voice represented in direct discourse is Melanie’s, when she says “No,” and when she asks David to leave. For both Rimmon-Kenan and Nissen, the use of direct-speech provides the closest possible imitation of the fictional reality presented by the narrative (Rimmon-Kenan, p.108; Nissen, p.278). By this logic, the reality of the event is that Melanie says no and David forces himself upon her – thus raping her – but this certainty is not immediately available to the reader. The omniscient narrator does not call it rape, nor does David, and ultimately nor does Melanie. Because of this ambiguity I would argue that individual readers will draw differing conclusions about whether this was an act of rape, according to their own socio-political beliefs and their own life experiences. In feminist deconstructive criticism the passage would very much be viewed as an example of the voice of the ‘othered’ female being silenced inside a biased and self-conscious masculine narrative.¹⁶⁷

What I want to argue here is that the specific manipulation of narrative and character voice on the part of the implied author very purposely draws our attention to the silencing of Melanie’s subjective experience. In narratological terms this occurs through the representation of the extradiegetic and hypodiegetic functions carried out by the various narrative voices.¹⁶⁸ The extradiegetic level is provided by

¹⁶⁶ See also Alexandrov, pp.161-2 on the effect of point-of-view upon Humbert’s reliability in *Lolita*.

¹⁶⁷ See Belsey, 1985, pp.593-609, especially her deconstruction of female objectification in *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* (1905) as classic realist text on pp.604-9.

¹⁶⁸ As in chapter three, these terms are drawn from Rimmon-Kenan’s theories of narrative fiction (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983).

the narrative voice that presents the central story within a narrative – in this case it is the omniscient narrator. The hypodiegetic level of narrative is provided by characters within the central story – an example of such character is Pearl in Gunesekera's *The Sandglass* who becomes a hypodiegetic narrator when she relates stories from her Sri-Lankan past to Chip, who is the central extradiegetic narrator. Though David is not in this case a hypodiegetic narrator in the strictest sense – he doesn't assume full authority over the narration of this event, since to do so would require his thoughts to be represented as direct discourse – the hypodiegetic function of his internal focalization certainly affects the ambiguity that surrounds the actual event. We are given several signs that what is portrayed is done so primarily from his perspective. The reference to Melanie's "absurd slippers" emphasizes the presence of David's subjectivity here, since the third-person narrator has already told us he finds them "silly, tasteless." The phrase, "Strange love! Yet from the quiver of Aphrodite, goddess of the foaming waves, no doubt about that," is also undoubtedly David, since we know about his passion as a literary academic for Greek mythology. Melanie's feelings on the other hand are not allowed to interrupt events; she is completely objectified – "like a mole burrowing" – in the face of the voices of the narrator and David, until we are told that the sexual intercourse was, on her part, "undesired to the core." As Marais points out, the scene can be read as "Lurie's attempt to possess the Other, to assert control over her" (Marais, 2000, p.175).

What we are provided with then is a narrative within which the extradiegetic and hypodiegetic functions of narrator and character voice move away from their traditional definitions in Rimmon-Kenan. The extradiegetic voice as an authoritative narrator of events is compromised by David's hypodiegetic focalization and the lack of consideration given to Melanie's experience. Yet this third-person narrator does not fit any of the descriptions of unreliable narration given by Rimmon-Kenan, which she claims is figured through his/her "limited knowledge," the level of "personal involvement," and his/her "problematic value scheme" (Rimmon-Kenan, pp.100-3). For some readers the conclusive phrase, "Not rape, not quite that, undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core" might be evidence of the narrator's opinionated involvement in the representation of the event, but as already pointed out, we cannot be sure if this isn't in fact David's voice, since he has already so

obviously appropriated the narrative voice on several occasions. The narrator's take on events is thus conspicuous by its absence. We know s/he is omniscient, and has access to the consciousnesses of the other characters, and yet if this is the case, then why isn't an unbiased perspective on this highly contentious event provided? Here again then we see evidence for Attridge's claim that the reader of Coetzee's fiction must ask "by what means are *these* words being produced," and Attwell's view that Coetzee's narrative voices are "staged from beginning to end."

Interestingly, in a move away from traditional accounts of narratology, Fludernik contends that only first-person narrators can be considered "properly" unreliable, and that when third-person narrators become "recognizably unreliable... the irony [lies] with the text as a whole, with the notorious *implied author*" (Fludernik, p.213). I would suggest that this is true of Coetzee's novel, involving a very specific ploy on the part of the implied authorial presence to draw the reader into a participatory and ethical interaction with the narrative itself. To provide evidence for this perspective I want to turn to another aspect of the novel that concerns the narrator's and David's representations of Melanie: the fact that they never announce that she is coloured. Even so, the reader is provided with enough clues to be sure of this fact: we are told early in the novel of David's preference for 'exotic' women (p.7), the fact that the prostitute Soraya has a "honey-brown body, unmarked by the sun" (p.1), and the lesson Melanie's boyfriend warns David to learn: "Stay with your own kind" (p.194). The fact that Melanie – "the dark one" (p.18) – is coloured, and yet no obvious mention of this is made in the text, might seem to be a glaring omission on the part of a novel concerned with the society of post-apartheid South Africa. And yet the clues are there in the narrative for the reader to uncover this important – or unimportant – fact for him or herself. And having placed those clues there, the authorial presence obviously wants us to work it out for ourselves. But why? Why not simply use the omniscient narrator to declare this fact, thereby explaining the degree of media-interest shown in the case of an academic who has, on the face of it, simply had a sexual relation with an adult student?

I believe Coetzee, as the implied authorial figure, constructs this text in such a manner because he wants his readers to consider the ethical implications of such silences in literature. As Fludernik points out, such unreliable third-person narrators

– what she calls reflectoral narrative consciousnesses – are often employed in innovative fiction to “foreground the artificiality and constructedness of fictional narrative, all the way from presenting clearly inept or unreliable narrator figures to a deliberate meta-narrative celebration of the act of narration” (p.275). I would include a deliberate meta-narrative examination of narrative silences within this range. The responsible reader must ask to what ends an authorial presence purposely ‘embodies’ silences within a narrative structure which mainly comprises of two voices – the narrator’s and David’s – which are fully capable of drawing attention to such silences. This is not the same as traditional imperialist texts where the other of such centralised literature is objectified and silenced due to complicity between author and narrator. The silences and injustices of such literature are straight-forward enough for a critical reader to point out and admonish.¹⁶⁹ As we have seen in *Disgrace* though, its silences are very much self-consciously constructed by its creator by allowing the focalised voice of the central character to appropriate that of the omniscient and ambivalent narrator. In asking why this is so I wish to return to Levinas’s theory of the *Saying* and the *Said* in the self/other face-to-face relation, and in doing so consider the implications that arise when the discourse of the *Said* silences the ethical implications of another’s *Saying*.

Let us first reiterate what Levinas means by the distinction between the *Saying* and the *Said*. The *Said*, to state it simply, is discourse. It is the semantic linguistic exchange made by individuals when they encounter each other in communicative relations: “as *Said*, language speaks of something and expresses the relation of the speaker to the object of which he or she speaks, saying how it is with it” (Levinas, 1993, p.33). It is an exchange of linguistic signs within which, due to *différance*, a literal and transcendental presence of meaning is impossible to define. We cannot locate the “authentic and stable meaning” which for de Saussure constituted “a stable and knowable object” (Attridge, 1987, p.203).¹⁷⁰ It is thus a

¹⁶⁹ See for example During’s critique of Boswell’s “Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides” (1785) (During, 1991, p.24) and Said, 1994, pp.1-35.

¹⁷⁰ See de Saussure pp.12-13 on the nature of the stable linguistic sign as *signifier* and *signified*. Attridge points out that linguistic meaning is in fact historicised (Attridge, 1987). It is interesting to note how close Levinas and Derrida are with regard to the difference and deferral of meaning inherent within signs. Levinas tells us that words are “on one hand, a kind of abbreviation of multiple contexts; on the other, bearers of the trace of their etymology. Thus they signify as the very divergence between

“handing over of signs” prone to deconstruction. The *Saying* on the other hand is that which occurs in the intersubjective relation prior to discourse, and upon which the possibility of discourse is dependent – it is the approach to the other and the moment in which that approach becomes a proposition to engage in discourse with the other: “The *Saying* is drawing nigh to one’s neighbour... It is communication not reducible to the phenomena of the *truth-that-unites*: it is non-indifference to the other person” (1993, p.142).

Importantly, the *Saying* – the *appeal* to the other for communication, for discourse, need not be a part of the discourse of the *Said*. As we have seen, its essence often remains non-linguistic. The *Saying* could therefore be considered as a meaningful, momentary silence that passes between individuals within a face-to-face relation and before they involve themselves in discourse. As seen before though, an approach towards the face of the other, a ‘giving up’ of oneself whilst ‘appealing’ to the other for interaction, carries with it the risk of harm being carried out on the physical body of the self:

Saying, the most passive passivity, is inseparable from patience and of pain, even if it can take refuge in the said, finding again in a wound the caress in which pain arises, and then the contact, and beyond it the thematization. Of itself saying is the sense of patience and pain. In saying suffering signifies in the form of *giving*, even if the price of signification is that the subject run the risk of suffering without reason. If the subject did not run this risk, pain would lose its very painfulness. (Levinas, 1981a, p.50)

Yet by this point we are well aware of the real flesh-and-blood risks that Levinas identifies in the face-to-face encounter. But is the risk to the body of the self and the other the only risk that subjects undergo as they approach each other in the silence of the *Saying*? Isn’t there also a risk that even if the physical body remains unharmed, the discourse of the other – the *Said* which the *Saying* of the self invites – might be usurped, rejected, or even completely silenced by the self? As Levinas points out elsewhere, this is indeed one of the risks that such an “ethics of proximity” undergoes. For him rhetoric within the *Said* – the use of figures of speech and of

meanings” (Levinas, 1993, p.136). It should be noted though that Levinas has said elsewhere that he rejects the “indefinite dissemination of meaning” (1999, p.173).

specialised eloquence – as well as the inherent instability of language itself, can “absorb the ethics of proximity” (1993, pp.135-6 & p.142). Or as he puts it elsewhere, to be human is to be a “being who can lie, who can live in the duplicity of language as the dual possibility of exposure and deception” (Levinas and Kearney, p.65). In everyday exchanges though an intersubjective ethics transcends rhetoric since the total alterity of the other always remains a flesh-and-blood reality – the vulnerability of the self and the other remains irrespective of the discourse indulged in, whether subjects use discourse deceptively or not.

Yet when we as readers intersubjectively interact with a text as other, there is obviously no flesh-and-blood entity to reaffirm the ethics of proximity which discursive communication is based on. As we have seen though, silences still remain within narratives themselves that alert us not only to the vulnerability of the physical body in the external world, but also to how that vulnerability affects the body of the text. The representation of Friday in *Foe* reminds us not only of the ethical implications we must acknowledge when considering the legacy of Friday’s body, but also of those that are present when authors attempt to usurp and represent Friday’s narrative in historical texts. The trace of Friday’s silence throughout the novel remains a reminder of *his Saying*, his silent right to ethical acknowledgement, in the face of the *novel’s Said*, its ability to appropriate and re-represent his story within an alternative discourse. As we turn to the silences in *Disgrace* – the result of a purposeful authorial consciousness – we see that they too are an aspect of a *Saying*. In the above case Melanie’s silent appeal for discursive acknowledgement is usurped by a narrative structure whose *Said* consists of two prominent voices that refuse to acknowledge her subjectivity or her colour. In terms of the story of David Lurie that the novel tells, her colour is in fact politically unimportant; it is clear that David is not overtly racist. The realisation of its non-expression is important though in that it forces us to ethically acknowledge the trace of Melanie’s silence and the other silences – and therefore the *Sayings* – that the narrative voices exclude.¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ Marais also presents a Levinasian critique of *Disgrace*, but rather than presenting an examination of the silencing of characters’ subjective discourse he examines how the novel ethically represents the silent Otherness that he claims is still unethically objectified in the socio-political sphere of post-apartheid South Africa. His critique thus examines the ethical implications of David’s relations with the other characters, rather than ethics of the narrative structure itself. See Marais, 2000, pp.174-9.

The following passage consists of a piece of dialogue between David and Bev Shaw, Lucy's friend and an animal rescuer, as they discuss Lucy's predicament following her rape by three black men:

[David's] vehemence surprises Bev Shaw. 'Poor Lucy,' she whispers: 'she has been through such a lot!'

'I know what Lucy has been through. I was there.'

Wide-eyed she gazes back at him. 'But you weren't there, David. She told me. You weren't.'

You weren't there. You don't know what happened. He is baffled. Where, according to Bev Shaw, according to Lucy, was he not? In the room where the intruders were committing their outrages? Do they think he does not know what rape is? Do they think he has not suffered with his daughter? What more could he have witnessed than he is capable of imagining? Or do they think that, where rape is concerned, no man can be where the woman is? Whatever the answer, he is outraged, outraged at being treated like an outsider. (Coetzee, 1999, pp.140-1)

What more could he have witnessed indeed? As we saw in chapter five and above in relation to *Foe*, the difficulty in reducing pain and physical abuse to literary texts – even to language at all – is an ethically charged problem faced by many postcolonial narratives and their writers. The same point is made obvious in *Disgrace*: Coetzee refuses to relate to the reader the indescribable horror Lucy experienced whilst being raped, except that she tells us they did it “[l]ike dogs in a pack.” The irony here is that David, the sole character who seemingly appropriates the narrative voice at will, cannot acknowledge that indescribability, the fact that he can never *know* what Lucy has experienced. In the passage above the voice of the detached extradiegetic narrator is still present in relating the dialogue and in summing up David's outrage, but look what happens at the end of the dialogue: “*You weren't there. You don't know what happened.*” The use of the italics, and the subjective interpretation of Bev's words (she never actually uttered the last sentence), clearly marks this out as another of David's hypodiegetic usurpations of the narrative voice. It is important to point out that the primary narrative voice never completely disappears though, but remains present as David's thoughts are focalised through it: “Do they think *he* has not suffered with his daughter?” (my italics). The result is a clear example of the degree to which one subjective voice is allowed to appropriate and manipulate that of

other characters and the omniscient narrator's. The ethical silence that surrounds Lucy's rape then, the silent *Saying* of her vulnerability which is echoed by the fact that Coetzee's narrator will not reduce it to text, is appropriated within the narrative structure by David's subjective need to maintain a rationalised view of the event.

Indeed, throughout the narrative leading up to this passage, David is portrayed as an individual whose own inability to save Lucy has compromised his idea of himself as the masculine father. During the scene where Lucy is raped, instead of hearing about her pain, we are given a focalised insight into what the event means to David:

So it has come, the day of testing. Without warning, without fanfare, it is here, and he is in the middle of it. In his chest his heart hammers so hard that it too, in its dumb way must know. How will they stand up to the testing, he and his heart?

His child is in the hands of strangers. (p.94)

David's focalised thoughts belie his central concerns at this horrific time – how will he, as a father, as a gendered male who prides himself on his masculine conquests, “stand up to the testing”? David's reasons for usurping the narrative voice, and the stories and discourses of the other characters around him, are made very clear – though he no doubt feels a genuine concern for his daughter, part of that concern is generated not by selflessness but by the gendered role he feels he must perform. His inability to see outside this masculine worldview is highlighted again later in the following passages. When he asks Bev Shaw about his daughter's condition, we are told she

[r]esponds only with a terse shake of the head. Not your business, she seems to be saying. Menstruation, childbirth, violation and its aftermath: blood-matters; a woman's burden, women's preserve.

Not for the first time, he wonders whether women would not be happier living in communities of women... (p.104)

A few paragraphs later, he meets Lucy for the first time since the rape:

‘This is not an easy thing to talk about,’ he says, ‘but have you seen a doctor?’
She sits up and blows her nose. ‘I saw my GP last night.’

‘And is he taking care of all eventualities?’

‘She,’ she says. ‘She, not he. No’ – and now there is a crack of anger in her voice – ‘how can she? How can a doctor take care of all eventualities? Have some sense!’

He gets up. If she chooses to be irritable, then he can be irritable too. ‘I’m sorry I asked,’ he says. ‘What are our plans for today?’ (p.105)

Faced with the unknowable – i.e. the reality of female experience – David chooses to treat it exactly as such – he wonders why women don’t all go and live somewhere where they can be understood. It is noticeable that Bev Shaw doesn’t actually say anything to provoke this reaction in David – he merely imagines her giving a condescending and alienating response. Shortly afterwards, the consequences of his inability to consider women as anything but absolutely other affects the exchange between himself and his daughter. Firstly, he fails to consider that a doctor might be female (especially glaring considering that Lucy’s reason for seeing a doctor is the rape), and having done so feels Lucy’s wrath for his practical approach towards the “eventualities” – the risk of pregnancy – that he feels needs taking care of. While his rational outlook might seem understandable, it is his annoyance at Lucy’s reaction that most betrays his narrow-mindedness. Rather than attempt to understand the distinction between his and her view of the rape’s “eventualities,” he decides to deal with Lucy’s obvious anger by getting irritable too, an unthoughtful response made all the more so by David’s focalised control of the narrative at this point.

When Levinas describes his view of the ethical face-to-face relation, he does so by exposing the universal vulnerability of the human body, an aspect of the absolute alterity of the other that is revealed in the moment that the self desires to negate that which it cannot understand, otherness, through murder:

Murder exercises a power over what escapes power. It is still a power, for the face expresses itself in the sensible, but already impotency, because the face rends the sensible. The alterity that is expressed in the face provides the unique “matter” possible for total negation. I can wish to kill only an absolute independent, which exceeds my powers infinitely, and therefore does not oppose them but paralyses the very power of power. The Other is the sole being I can wish to kill. (Levinas, 1969, p.198)

And yet it is exactly this possibility of murder that first draws us to ethical responsibility for the other, for we share an awareness of the physical vulnerability

for the other that stands before us. We are aware that s/he will oppose with infinite resistance any attempt made to harm the fleshy vulnerability of the body of which the face is a part. This infinite resistance is “stronger than murder, already resists us in his face, is his face, is the primordial *expression*, is the first word: ‘you shall not commit murder’... [and] gleams in the face of the Other, in the total nudity of his defenceless eyes” (1969, p.199).

Ethics exists then as we have seen because the face of the other “calls [us] into question.” In everyday life if we reject that call and commit murder we leave ourselves open to the repercussions of a society in which, at least to some degree, justice is based upon an aspect of this ethics. But what of this ethics during actual discourse? If we negate the presence of the other during discourse relations by usurping, appropriating or ignoring his/her discourse, even though we do not kill the other, is that also not unethical? I would like to develop this idea by turning to the passage below.

My daughter, he thinks; my dearest daughter. Whom it has fallen to me to guide. Who one of these days will have to guide me...

‘There are things you just don’t understand.’

‘What don’t I understand?’

‘To begin with, you don’t understand what happened to me that day. You are concerned for my sake, which I appreciate, you think you understand, but finally you don’t. Because you can’t.’...

‘On the contrary, I understand all too well,’ he says. ‘I will pronounce the word we have avoided hitherto. You were raped. Multiply. By three men.’

...

‘And?’ Her voice is now a whisper.

‘And I did nothing. I did not save you.’

That is his own confession.

She gives an impatient flick of the hand. ‘Don’t blame yourself, David. You couldn’t have been expected to rescue me. If they had come a week earlier, I would have been alone in the house...’

‘Hatred... When it comes to men and sex, David, nothing surprises me any more. Maybe, for men, hating the woman makes sex more exciting. You are a man, you ought to know. When you have sex with someone strange – when you trap her, hold her down, get her under you, put all your weight on her – isn’t it a bit like killing? Pushing the knife in; exiting

afterwards, leaving the body behind covered in blood – doesn't it feel like murder, like getting away with murder?'

You are a man, you ought to know: does one speak to one's father like that? Are she and he on the same side?

'Perhaps,' he says. 'Sometimes. For some men.' And then rapidly, without forethought: 'Was it the same with both of them...'

He thinks of Byron. Among the legions of countesses and kitchenmaids Byron pushed himself into there were no doubt those who called it rape. But none surely had cause to fear that the session would end with her throat being slit. From where he stands, from where Lucy stands, Byron looks very old-fashioned indeed. (pp.156-60)

This lengthy passage provides an insight into the origins of those silences that up until this point we have seen pervade the narrative. Initially we see through David's italicised thoughts that he is still playing the role of the protective father, whose daughter it has fallen to him to guide. This being the case we see that David still mistakenly believes that he can reduce Lucy's experience to words – ““You were raped. Multiply”” – and in carrying out this pronunciation assign an understandable meaning to her experience. The reason for this is made clear in “his own confession”: for him part of the horror of Lucy's experience is that he did not save her. This desire to reduce Lucy's experience to words is therefore not so much an attempt to understand how she feels, but rather a continued insistence on figuring her rape within his own personal narrative of events. The ethical significance of imposing one's own discursive interpretation of events on the experiences of another is more fully realised as the dialogue continues.

Lucy utilises the discomfoting analogy of murder to describe what she imagines sex must be like for men. The effect on David is two-fold. Firstly, his focalised thoughts betray the fact that he feels she is again undermining his role as father, considering him first and foremost as a 'man,' and secondly it causes him to avoid her question as to whether sex can feel like murder. It is the central narrator, not David, that tells us that it is “[w]ithout forethought” that he immediately changes tact, ignores Lucy's question, and asks her again about the experience. With David's focalised thoughts influencing the narrative voice so domineeringly up until this point, the reader has little option but to query where that unfinished thought might have led. An insight is provided as David turns his thoughts to Byron and the

different historical meanings that may or may not have been associated with the term 'rape.' The ironic absence in David's train of thought is of course that Byron's actions, the actions of a man he idolises, closely mirror his own in terms of the "legions" of women he too prides himself on having conquered. The narrative described his thoughts on this issue of virility early in the novel, after David has slept with and lost interest in one of the secretaries in his department: "He ought to give up, retire from the game. At what age, he wonders, did Origen castrate himself?" (p.9). More than this though, David's thoughts on Byron betray a more serious silence in the text, the story of yet another character that he indifferently silenced: that of Melanie, and the moment in which *he* forced himself upon her.

Can murder be used as an analogy to describe conflicts in discourse, just as Lucy uses it here to describe the sexual act? I would like to argue that it could. As we saw above, according to Levinas, the will to murder during the face-to-face relation is "also the situation of discourse" (Levinas, 1998a, p.10). This is because our fear of alterity arises as we enter into discursive situations with others, and because others will infinitely resist the attempt to murder him/her – the primordial will to usurp, overcome, or murder the other is always an experience closely linked to discourse relations. Thus for Levinas the "primordial essence of expression and discourse" is the other's vulnerable appeal to the self before discourse actually takes place (1969, p.200).¹⁷² As such, "[l]anguage is born in responsibility" (1989a, p.82). Before discourse takes place, an ethical relation is struck between self and other which evokes a responsibility to that unknowable other. In Levinas's later work this responsibility comes to be seen not only as an aspect of speech, but in other forms of signifying also, as the "pre-original saying... the irreducible divergency that opens here between the non-present and every representable divergency, which in its own way... makes a sign to the responsible one" (1981, pp.10-11). Considering Lucy and David's conversation, I want to argue that David's silencing of Lucy's perspective allows a non-present trace of Lucy's alternative point of view to infect the reader's experience of the wider narrative structure.

¹⁷² See also Bernasconi, 1988, p.21 on the idea that all language from the perspective of Levinas and Derrida presupposes the will to murder and the infinite resistance of the Other.

David makes the mistake of taking his daughter's words literally – “*Covered in blood*. What does she mean?” (p.159) – but the point that Lucy is making is not that sex ends in a blood-bath, but that part of the sexual act for a man includes silencing the experiences of the women in order to place the event within a narrative of masculine conquest. Ultimately, this too is the reason for the subjective silences that are figured in Coetzee's novel, the silences that its structure subtly asks us to consider. In terms of Melanie, we are awakened to the need to look for these silences due to the fact that her race is never mentioned, and that her direct-speech sharply contrasts with David's focalised prescription of their sexual relations. Her subjective experiences do not enter into the two-voice structure that dominates the narrative. In the case of Lucy, the indescribability of her rape is juxtaposed against David's conviction that he can understand her feelings, and her story in turn is silenced by the gendered priorities of his focalised thoughts. The irony of David's subjective and subjugative domination of the narrative is not fully realised by the reader until Lucy asks him to consider what rape actually entails – and in doing so he cannot bring himself to consider that he too, like Byron, is a party to this deed – both in discourse, and in life.¹⁷³

Ultimately then, the silences contained within the body of the text are there because of what is in Levinasian terms a *violent* subjugation of other characters' stories by David's domination of the two-voice structure. As Levinas points out, for individuals, “understanding carries out an act of violence and negation... [this] denies the independence of beings: they are mine” (Levinas, 1998a, p.9). And for Said,

[t]exts incorporate discourse, sometimes violently... the discursive situation is more usually like the unequal relation between colonizer and colonized, oppressor and oppressed... Words and texts are so much of the world that their effectiveness, in some cases even their use, are matters having to do with ownership, authority, power, and the imposition of force. (Said, 1984, pp.47-8)

¹⁷³ Though I do not wholly agree with his claim that “[t]he inference to be drawn from the parallels between these scenes is that the two acts are identical,” Marais also argues that the reader must acknowledge an ironic link in terms of David's distinct interpretations of his forced intercourse with Melanie, and the rape of Lucy (Marais, 2000, pp.175-6).

As shown, David cannot help figuring those around him within his own prejudiced narrative of events. This incorporation of his discourse into the textual body of *Disgrace* is similar to the violence that Said also sees occurring when discourses are represented in texts. Robbins has argued that Levinas's ethics can be viewed as an "interruption" of the self produced in the presence of the other through the silent appeal of the pre-discursive *Saying* (Robbins, 1995b, p.277). David on the other hand discursively interrupts the stories of those around him to incorporate them in his own narrative of events, his *Said*. The effect of this is the opposite of the self-conscious interruptions used in *Shame* in order to "call" the reader into question – David's interruptions silence the discourse of those around him and ignore their silent appeal to be heard. The effect of this is that the reader has to respond to a narrative that while not fragmented, insists on subtly drawing attention to the silences, rather than the stories of the characters that David finds himself interacting with. As Marais notes, in *Disgrace* "relations... are grounded in the violent denial of the otherness of the Other" (Marais, 2000, p.179). As we have seen, it is David's inability to acknowledge the otherness of the experiences of the people he interacts with which often results in his violent suppression of those other discourses. Within the body of the text itself then we encounter silences that mark the unjust discursive appropriation of other people's stories. It is evidence of the slenderness of what Derrida calls the "limit between violence and non-violence" within both speech and writing (Derrida, 1978a, p.102). Even so, David does at times come close to realising the silence that is necessarily created when he tries to imagine experiences of otherness such as Lucy's rape. Confronting the issue of whether he can "understand" what happened he claims that "he can, if he concentrates... be there, be the men... The question is, does he have it in him to be the woman?" (p.160). And as trying to come to terms with the violent silencing that has occurred when both he and Byron "pushed" themselves into women, he supposes that unlike Lucy these women "surely had [no] cause to fear that the session would end" with their throats slit (p.160). Yet as we have seen such definitions of rape and violence apply in context – David may not be guilty of raping someone at knifepoint, but he has indeed raped someone, and though he may not be an outwardly violent man, the complex narrative structure

indicates that there is a violent aspect to the discourse of his thoughts and speech when interacting with others.

But David's appropriation of the narrative – his story – is not all that the reader is left to consider. As pointed out, the juxtaposition of the ambivalent detachment of the omniscient narrator against David's prejudiced focalised thoughts often leave the reader having to ask why such silences exist. This innovative structuring on the part of the authorial force actually draws the reader into a questioning, participatory interaction with the novel's textual body itself. Just as David violently undermines the significance of the other characters' subjective experiences which form stories of their own – their *Said* – he leaves behind the ethical eminence of their *Saying* in the silence he creates. There is a *non-present trace of otherness* left after David's usurpation of the narrative. As pointed out before, for Levinas the silence of the *Saying* that exists prior to discourse calls us to responsibility as subjects for the other. The structure of the face-to-face relation – the non-linguistic and non-ontological summons and appeal for ethical life – is also the structure of the *Saying*. It is a structure that is based on bodily proximity, out of which discursive, communicative interaction evolves. In the everyday encounter of such structures the individual has a responsibility to acknowledge the ethics of intersubjective relations, to be accountable for the vulnerability of the other's body that is revealed in the *Saying*. During the literary encounter the reader is likewise called to account for the silences s/he is presented with, even if they do not amount to the physical subjugation of a flesh-and-blood individual. As Merleau-Ponty makes clear, novels are in a sense individuals, or bodies, as well. He calls them “beings in which the expression is indistinguishable from the thing expressed, their meaning, accessible only through direct contact... It is in this sense that our body is comparable to a work of art” (1962, p.151). For him *all* subjective ontological perceptions and sensations can only be understood by us as sensibilities that can be related to “a certain bodily bearing” (p.150).

What *Disgrace* makes clear to the responsible reader is that it is not only actual corporeal bodies that are vulnerable and at risk within an unethical world, but also the stories, discourses, and narratives that the bodies and minds of human beings give rise to. Here – to develop Barthes' view of the body as the truth of writing – we

can trace the silence of the body of the other in the 'writing' of the bodies of the novels themselves, and in this silence we have a postcolonial narrative ethics that foregrounds the relation between physical vulnerability and the structure of postcolonial literature. It is an ethical responsibility originating, as we saw Attridge arguing in chapter four, in the very structuring of a literary text's words. When Levinas tells us then that to witness pain and abuse is to be called to "duty" and recalled to "responsibility" (1998a, p.93; 1989a, p.83), the silences of the other's face, of his/her body, of his/her *Saying*, are not only identifiable when we encounter the fleshy exterior of s/he who encounters us. They are also non-present in the bodies of texts that articulate – or fail to articulate – the experiences, stories, and narratives of those others with whom we co-habit in a highly discursive world. We have seen that it is the silent traces of otherness, of the other's *Saying*, that informs the textual body of *Disgrace*. Importantly, this undermines Parry's claim that the effect in Coetzee's novels of "taking in nothing outside the narrators' world-views [sustains] the West as the culture of reference" (Parry, 1998, p.151). In fact, *Disgrace's* expression of the silent and vulnerable non-presence of the other implies that it is Lurie's "culture of reference," his "world view," that we have a responsibility to question from an ethical perspective.

Recalling the radical aesthetic: Armstrong and Scarry.

In a recent study that "is about the turn to an anti-aesthetic in theoretical writing over the past twenty years," Armstrong claims that certain theorists have "purified the aesthetic from political analysis, and [they] tend to write as if the political does not exist at all in the context of aesthetic experience" (Armstrong, p.1 & p.5). Scarry, in a book on the relationship between aesthetics and justice, claims that the "banishing of beauty from the humanities in the last two decades has been carried out by a set of political complaints against it" (Scarry, 2000, p.57). Both statements claim to be generally applicable across the humanities. Importantly, though they aren't saying the same thing, I feel they both exhibit an ongoing political interest in the idea of the aesthetic. I wish to close this chapter by considering that one of the ways *both* theorists go about re-addressing the relationship between politics and aesthetics is by reconsidering the place of the physical body within aesthetic experience. I want to

examine how this affects my claim that we can ethically relate to postcolonial novels as narrative bodies that represent impossible silences in a similar way to how our own bodies do. In doing so I will develop an ethical critique of two recent novels that seem especially concerned with the relationship between the ineffability of the body in pain and the deconstruction of postcolonial history: Wicomb's *David's Story* and Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*. I will use these fictional texts and theoretical perspectives to develop the idea that there might be an intrinsic relationship between the ineffable body and deconstruction itself.

From the outset of her argument, Armstrong strongly endorses the idea of shared human experiences which for her are features of a common humanity similar to that which Marx called the "species being." She posits them as "playing and dreaming, thinking and feeling" and claims that they are experiences universal and necessary to existence (pp.2-3). In her study though, it becomes clear that the site most often affiliated with this common humanity is that of physiological experience, the human body. Though he remains unmentioned, such a view seems not unlike that of Merleau-Ponty and his idea of the "primordial faith" he accords the body and its primacy of place within subjective perception. From Kant to Eagleton and on through to poststructuralist accounts, Armstrong marks out the problematics that have haunted our ontological, and non-ontological, 'reading,' and non-reading, of the body.¹⁷⁴ Sharing affinities with Bigwood, she criticises Butler for her poststructuralist and "extraordinarily idealist reading of bodies that abstracts them from their nature as substance" (p.218), and like Ledbetter and Scarry argues that there is an important relationship between aesthetic form and physiological experience. She examines the idea that

[f]orm is with us from birth in the living physiomental conditions of awareness and arousal. Form has no origins because it is an aspect of being alive. From the beginning, the rhythm of lack and demand jolt experience into breaks, disjunctions and imbalances, which are felt as phases and discrete states. (p.165)

¹⁷⁴ For Armstrong on Kant on the unknowability of the relation between body and mind see Armstrong, p.50, on Derrida on the body, and in particular 'vomit' as a "limit case of difference itself"

For Armstrong then, there is always a link between aesthetic form and the always somewhat-unknowable body which, as Barthes and Scarry note, lends art its ability to achieve form in the first place (Barthes, 1985, pp.154-55; Scarry, 1985, p.281).

In attempting to revive a radical aesthetic, Armstrong reminds us of the need to criticise the links that exist between modern aesthetics and violence. She points out, via Rose, that “modernity is in collusion with the violence it proposes to critique because the turn to discourse refuses to countenance a thinking through of contradiction and anxiety of the middle,” by which Rose means the site between extreme binary oppositions, such as utopia and dystopia, or good and evil (p.63). For Rose modern discourse violently enforces such binaries, rather than acknowledging them as cultural codes and constructs. This is a perspective that bears traces of the core of contemporary thought including Foucault’s theory of power and discourse, and Derrida’s claim that the narratives of power deconstruct their own claims to truth.¹⁷⁵ Importantly, in order to reinforce her view of a radical aesthetic, Armstrong also turns to Levinas’s ethics of discursive relations which always involve the risk, in her words, of “persecution, obsession, and paranoia,” partly due to the violence that always accompanies literary-linguistic structures (p.94). For her this ethics breaks down the power-ridden subject/object division “in the extremity of persecution”:

the perpetrator [subject], consumed by the image of the other, lives in violent identity with the persecuted [other]; the experience of persecution is to be forced to replicate the structure of paranoia unavoidably and without remission. Both live off each other’s experience to the death, a limit case of absolute understanding, absolute responsibility, a shocking kind of love, but where knowledge begins because of closeness and exchange. (p.94)

Here again we see yet another way of describing the pre-ontological and irreducible ethics that always pervades the self/other discursive relation – knowledge here is preceded by an experience of the physical proximity of interacting subjects.

in “Economimesis” (1981) see pp.47-50, on Scarry on beauty, materiality and bodily structure, see p.186 and p.194, n.8.

¹⁷⁵ Such a perspective slightly undermines Armstrong’s view of Derrida as a ‘demolisher’ of the aesthetic who suggests “that it can do little work except to accomplish the gesture of exposure” (p.16). As we have seen, Derrida’s work arguably uncovers an extremely politicised way of critiquing the textuality of aesthetic structures. As well as this Rose is largely critical of contemporary theory, yet

Importantly this perspective views the risk of discursive violence as not only epistemological but physical as well, an aspect that differentiates it from the violence of writing evident in the work of Derrida and Attridge. Armstrong also has an apt way of applying this ethics to the reader/text relation. For her reader and text again break down the subject/object power relation through a “celebration of identification” that redefines narcissism: “Primordially reflexive and ambiguous, consciousness cannot help but partly become the content of the text because its analysis is made from and shaped out of the same materials and emotions” (p.93). Obviously this view of textual content differs somewhat from the view proposed in chapter two of this thesis – there I emphasised the need for the reader to interact with the *structure*, i.e. content *and form*, of narratives, whereas for Armstrong form is a part of content – yet nevertheless this view still acknowledges the possibility of a “primordial” ethical experience arising from narrative structure.

Yet Armstrong never develops the idea that textual structures are intrinsically related to human “materials and emotions,” at least not from a Levinasian perspective. And to me this seems odd in view of the fact that elsewhere she is keen to promote the idea of a shared humanity that is in some unexplained way linked to common “physiomental” experiences. This seems especially strange considering her willingness to highlight Levinas’s promotion of the violence of discourse as both discursive and physical. As we have seen throughout this chapter and the last, it is this very feature, the ability to link the irreducibility of discourse to the silence of the persecuted body, that provides a way of radically re-addressing narrative aesthetics, at least in terms of postcolonial narrative structures.

Scarry is also keen to reaffirm an aesthetics of radical qualities, though her project is perhaps more forthright in claiming that aesthetics – or more particularly aesthetic beauty – is on some basic level always related to ideas such as ethics, justice and social equality (Scarry, 2000, pp.110-11). Like Armstrong though, she is convinced that such relations exist because of the links between aesthetics and universally shared experiences such as physiological sensory perception. Or as she puts it when considering the work of Weil, ethical experience, which for her like

her aim of theorising a “middle” site to deconstruct structuralist oppositions seems very similar to and Bhabha’s hybridity theory, which as we have seen is largely influenced by deconstruction.

Levinas involves a “radical decentering,” is “deeply somatic: what happens, happens to our bodies” (p.111). Importantly, Scarry is not just speaking of the beauty of aesthetics in visual art-forms. Here prose and poetry both possess the possibility of allowing us to experience beauty (pp.111-12). Thus aesthetics, and in particular beauty, can promote an “unself-interestedness” in us, which in turn provides the possibility of “ethical fairness... ‘a symmetry of everyone’s relation’” (p.117 & p.114).¹⁷⁶ This bears obvious similarities to Armstrong’s reading of Levinas’s ethics where the subject/object relation possesses the possibility of being neutralised and depoliticised, not only during speech, but during the reading of texts.

In order to develop this view of aesthetics as containing the possibility of ethical experience, or in Scarry’s words promoting the possibility of “being just,” I want to return to her earlier work and her conviction that aesthetic creations can be ethical specifically because, as we have seen here and in the last chapter, bodies of literature can also harbour irreducible meaning just as human bodies do (1985, p.283). For Scarry the book becomes a body, *is* a body, and is a body which we can ethically interact with. As she makes clear, the objects we create – be they bandages, photocopiers, statues, or prose – are always on some level a projection of our physiology (pp.281-83). As well as this, she makes clear that many objects also come to be endowed with aspects of bodily experience that cannot actually be objectified or located. For example, photocopiers, narrative history, computer hard-drives, and books themselves all embody our capacity for memory, rather than attempting to represent a certain site in the human brain where memories are stored. As we saw in the last chapter this is also true for Merleau-Ponty who claims that our perceptions of any ontological object, especially aesthetic ones, are only understandable because we relate to them as bodies which we in turn subconsciously relate to the corporeal experience of our own bodies. Thus the role *performed* by any object is only sensibly understood because we involuntarily relate it to the actions carried out by our own bodies. The example Merleau-Ponty uses is the perception of a cube. We do not initially look upon a cube as an object made up of six equal sized squares. Rather, we immediately experience it as a singular, uniform, and solid object, in much the same

¹⁷⁶ It is unclear if Scarry is quoting Weil or Murdoch here.

way as we usually look upon our arm as a singular and unified object, rather than a construction made up of different parts (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p.151).

More importantly though, Scarry makes it clear that the irreducibility of pain is a shared human experience that we constantly relate to created objects (pp.161-62). For example, it is clear that the external world of inanimate objects has no ability to understand the idea of human pain. Yet as she points out, we are forever reformulating such objects to construe them as though it could experience pain itself, and as though they are responsible for the pain they at times 'cause' us (pp.288-89). When we hurt ourselves due to inanimate objects, it is often those objects that receive our anger. As Scarry notes, if we hurt ourselves because a chair breaks under us, the hurt is usually the fault of the chair breaking, not ourselves for having sat on it. Our reaction in this scenario is often to further break the chair in anger and retribution, as though it too could experience part of the hurt that we ourselves have. Imagination, which we saw in chapter five is for Scarry the antithesis of pain, thus provides the method by which we make understandable our unconscious and unavoidable initial perceptions of the world, perceptions which are always influenced by our own physiology.

Scarry's point here however is not that we enter into intersubjective ethical relations with natural and humanly created inanimate objects (though we have all spoken and shouted at inanimate objects at one time or other), but that created objects alter our perception of the world, and that those perceptions are always influenced by physical experience, and by the unconscious symmetry we draw between such objects and our own bodies. What I want to suggest though is that literature, or in this case narratives, are different in that we undoubtedly do enter into a *discursive* relationship when reading. And as we have seen via Derrida and Levinas, that relationship constantly raises the question of our responsibility to the otherness we encounter there. This responsibility is often, if not always, related to the issue of violence – not only in an epistemological sense, but in the sense that otherness can always be related to the unknowable pain that actual violence causes in the real world. In this respect narratives are no different from other objects except that they can express that irreducibility through their use of language itself. My claim, via Armstrong, Levinas, and Scarry, is that if a narrative successfully

expresses such experience – as I have argued in the case of Coetzee’s *Foe*, for example, or in Soueif’s *In the Eye of the Sun* – readers must necessarily use their own imagination to acknowledge the shared but indescribable experience of that pain. The reader has no choice but to respond to the narrative discourse and the irreducible otherness it produces. Thus a responsibility for otherness is brought into play within cultural, linguistic, and historical parameters, and yet has its primordial base in the non-cultural aversion to physical oppression experienced both by the subject and his/her others. For Scarry then the possibility of experiencing an “ethical fairness” through aesthetics is always related to the physiological relation that is formed (sometimes unconsciously) between aesthetics and our own bodies. This critique of aesthetics is radical because whilst it acknowledges the irreducible aspects of literature, it nevertheless grounds this alterity in real physiomenal experiences. One of the outcomes of this is that we can through literature critically examine the realities of violence and oppression in the real world.

Punter also emphasises his belief in the need for a radical reappraisal of the aesthetics of oppression when early in a recent study of postcolonial literature he presents us with eight material facts about the socio-economic postcolonial world. Here is an example of one: “Fact 4: Americans and Europeans spend \$17 billion a year on pet food - \$4 billion more than the estimated annual additional total needed to provide basic health and nutrition for everyone in the world” (Punter, p.12). He claims that within poststructuralist discourse such facts cannot be made, since for him it puts the veracity of such facts into question, and he cites several examples of how the ‘poststructuralism’ of Said, Spivak, and Bhabha does this (pp.9-12). Now, though he does not make it abundantly clear what exactly such a fact has to do with the concept of the postcolonial (as opposed to other concepts, such as globalisation for example, or localised incidents such as economic sanctions on Iraq) his intention behind contrasting this claim against those of Said, Spivak, and Bhabha isn’t difficult to fathom. Punter is making the point that any critique of postcolonial aesthetics has certain real-life humanitarian implications that should form part of its critical remit. Like Armstrong and Scarry then, what is proposed here is an aesthetics which is capable of being critiqued to political ends, and to Punter’s mind poststructuralist

criticism doesn't achieve this.¹⁷⁷ While this is an idea that has been contested in this thesis, but it should be added that it also seems somewhat disingenuous to criticise Said's political commitment to the 'real-world' without taking into account the work he has done to address the Israeli/Palestinian situation.

And yet taken alongside Armstrong, Scarry, and Levinas, Punter's original point is significant: shouldn't a critique of literature created in conditions of oppression, or in the wake of oppression, maintain a link with the 'real-life' ethical issues of that persecution? As Newton reminds us when quoting Bakhtin: "All attempts to overcome the dualism of cognition and life, of thought and singular concrete reality *from inside theoretical cognition* are absolutely hopeless" (Newton, p.49). This, to my mind, does not and cannot discount the political role played by critical theory and its aesthetic considerations, but rather emphasises the need to incorporate and ground it within certain concrete realities. In the case of theorists such as Armstrong, Levinas, and Scarry, one of these realities is the irreducible experience of the human body, the foremost consequence of which is the shared, and objectless, reality of pain caused by violence.

Does the irreducibility of body make *différance* possible?

I want to turn now to the idea that *différance* provides us with the ability to ground the radical representation of pain within a radical aesthetics concerned with concrete, 'real-life' issues. We saw in chapter three the reciprocal reliance of certain works of Derrida and Levinas, especially concerning their respective considerations of the trace of otherness that is non-present in language. Towards the end of chapter five I suggested that it might be possible to relate Levinas's non-presence of the other's body during discourse to Derrida's non-concept of *différance* in writing. In particular I suggested that this might be achieved by relating the impossibility of bodily experience that we see in Merleau-Ponty and Levinas to the impossible trace of otherness critical to *différance*.

Barthes writes that signification is the "dialectical movement which resolves the contradiction between cultural man and natural man" (Barthes, 1985, p.16). By

¹⁷⁷ See Punter, p.9 on a rejection of Spivak's claim that the subaltern cannot speak, and p.15 on a critique of Bhabha's hybridity.

this he means that signification is always historically and socially motivated, and in saying so he recreates the traditional structuralist binary drawn between nature and culture. As deconstruction teaches us though, such oppositions do not in fact define how we create meaning out of signs. Derrida points out that writing also depends on *pure absence* in any structure of meaning, a fact that allows the restrictive announcement of *pure presence* “against which all possible meanings push together, preventing each other’s emergence” (Derrida, 1978d, pp.8-9). The literary-linguistic representation of presence is always dependent on the deferral of its meaning, on *différance*, a fact which actually liberates writing from totalitarian and structuralist forms of critique (1978d, pp.26-28).¹⁷⁸ This also reinforces Armstrong’s claim that the contradiction between the natural human and the cultural human, like the Cartesian distinction between the body and the mind, is in fact never fully resolved. As we saw in the last two chapters, there always remains an element of the indescribable in our considerations of the way in which the natural body draws meaning from the world.

This is one of the lessons of Leder’s development of Merleau-Ponty’s conception of body and flesh, and the idea of the “visible” and the “invisible” body. For Leder, bodies always “bear the imprint of otherness” (Leder, p.64), both in terms of the way we experience our own bodies, and the way we interact with the bodies of the other people and the objects that make up the external world. He uses Merleau-Ponty’s example of our right hand touching the left hand to exemplify how we construct our self-presence in difference – when we touch hands there is always a “divergence” that refuses to allow the body as subject to become the body as object – the body as subject and object cannot “merge,” though the difference between the two reinforces our sense of ourselves. Similarly, though we know that we are made of the same flesh as those others around us, even to the degree that we came *from* their flesh, as in the case of our parents, we nevertheless always remain somewhat removed from them. Something always remains visible yet non-visible as we approach and interact with others: “Being is fleshed out by virtue of invisible dimensions that are *not* ‘non-visibles’ opposed to perception but installed in the

¹⁷⁸ See Derrida, 1978d for a specific deconstruction of structuralism’s totalistic claims.

visible world.” Thus for all our similarities we can never “quite see another’s perceptual powers and subjectivity” when we consider the other’s body (p.64). Or as Rées puts it, while we can try and understand how others sensibly perceive the world, “we can never escape the fearful tautology that, whatever we may make of others, and even if we are as sensitive, sympathetic, and self-effacing as can be, what we think of others is still what we think” (Rées, p.22).

For Leder this sensible non-presence is central to our idea of our own self-presence, and like Scarry he points out that physical pain is an experience that emphasises the divergence between our flesh and that of others. Though it is objectless, it is marked by “an interiority another cannot share” (p.74), and yet at the same time it introduces to our own bodies an alien presence that whilst completely real remains wholly indescribable. As he points out, “[no] event more radically and inescapably reminds us of our bodily presence. Yet at the same time pain affects a certain alienation... The painful body is often experienced as something foreign to the self” (p.76). The body’s capacity for pain is therefore an impossibility whose reality nevertheless reaffirms our own identity and individual subjectivity. It is, as Brogan points out about Derrida’s *différance*, an otherness upon which Being depends and yet which is inaccessible to the self.¹⁷⁹

So it is possible to argue that subjects derive self-consciousness and self-meaning from the impossible otherness that is part of their experience of their own and others’ bodies. Also, this very real yet indescribable non-presence shares similarities with Derrida’s idea of *différance* – the announcement and representation of presence is only made possible through the non-presence of otherness within signification, a fact which results in an endless deferral of meaning. During this study I have examined the ways which the narrative representation of this otherness ethically affects our reading experience. Before concluding I will turn to two final novels and show how this relationship between the non-presence of the human body and *différance* might aid a radical ethical reconsideration of postcolonial aesthetics.

¹⁷⁹ Brogan is here debating the distinction between Heidegger’s ontological difference (an accessible otherness which *Dasein* transcends) and *différance* – a non-ontological non-concept which makes clear the radical contradiction between being and otherness (Brogan, pp.31-8).

Acknowledging *différance*: *David's Story* and representation without words.

Though culturally distinct, *David's Story* and *Anil's Ghost* share a self-conscious interest in incorporating actual historic events within the structures of their narratives. *David's Story* unusually contains an afterword by a South African academic, one of the aims of which is to contextualise some of the historic events around which 'David's story' takes place. As well as this real figures are mentioned in the narrative, such as Nelson Mandela. And *Anil's Ghost* contains a foreword which historically situates the fiction within the terrorist crisis which occurred in Sri Lanka during the late 1980s and early 1990s. In its acknowledgements section the author thanks the "doctors and nurses, archaeologists, forensic anthropologists, and members of the human rights and civil rights organisations" who were consulted during the research made for the novel. In each novel then, as we shall see and as has already been shown in the case of *David's Story*, fictionality is prioritised, but so too is the idea that such narratives have an intricate, and ethical, relationship with the postcolonial, or rather the *violent* realities of international sites of persecution, oppression, and death.

In the last thirty-five pages of *David's Story* its self-conscious author/narrator character grapples almost feverishly with her attempt to represent Dulcie's story alongside David's. Dulcie and David are both comrades from the guerrilla resistance movement in apartheid South Africa, and while David's story – the one he asks the narrator to write – is the story of David's attempt to reaffirm a sense of identity in post-apartheid South Africa, this fictional author, as we saw in the last chapter, is fully conscious of the construction, silencing, and dissemination that result from such so-called stories: "I no longer know which story I am trying to write. Who could keep going in a straight line with so many stories... chasing each other's tales" (Wicomb, 2001, p.201). And yet she is keen to relate Dulcie's experiences, experiences that David is reluctant to speak of. According to him "Dulcie and the events surrounding her cannot be cast as a story" (p.150), to which the narrator replies that there is no such thing "as a story that cannot be told" (p.151). Whereas in her preface she told us she was "grateful for the gaps, the ready-made absences" that created holes in David's story, the interest in Dulcie at this point would seem to

imply that she feels Dulcie does indeed have a story, “a straight line” that might be written down. Yet David, whose headstrong and stubborn convictions are often unsympathetically related by the narrator,¹⁸⁰ is already convinced on the matter. Speaking of Dulcie’s experiences he tells his biographer that “even if a full story were to be figured out by someone, it would be a story that cannot be told, that cannot be translated into words, into language we use for everyday matters” (p.151).

This belief and the language David uses to convey it seems reminiscent of Susan Barton’s doubtful view of Foe’s ability to write the story of Friday in *Foe* – she says that there are “certain matters” that she doubts can be written of, unless “covered up again in figures.” But the similarities between *David’s Story* and other texts looked at in this thesis do not end there. As the narrator increasingly attempts to represent Dulcie’s story through what she calls “invention” (p.198) one of the scenes she tries to describe is Dulcie being tortured by her former comrades, though the identities of the torturers are only hinted at and never made clear. Like Coetzee, Roy, and Soueif, Wicomb refuses to transcribe the torture itself, allowing her narrator instead to transcribe a part-hallucinated “storybook place” where “the body performs the expected,” that being the contorted movements associated with physical anguish (p.178). And yet it is during this scene that the narrator figure represents Dulcie’s thoughts on the predicament of the effective female guerrilla, and on the hypocrisies of a Movement premised on discourses of freedom and yet unwilling to face up to its own patriarchal and oppressive formation.¹⁸¹

And yet why will Wicomb not allow the physical damage of this scene to be shown? Ultimately, we cannot even be sure it actually happened within the events of David and Dulcie lives. When David breaks down after seeing an imaginary “screen full-bleed with Dulcie” he asks if it is his biographer that put the images there – we therefore cannot be sure if he actually witnessed them previously or not, or if he was involved in her torture. And after the torture scene Wicomb’s narrator makes clear her enthusiasm to engage with the issue of Dulcie’s body and flesh – perhaps unsurprising considering the novel’s epigraph and its reference to Fanon’s body and

¹⁸⁰ See pp.197-8 where David’s conviction that his biographer’s head is “filled with middle-class liberal bullshit” only encourages her to “push ahead with my inventions.”

black consciousness – by imagining her as a “large woman of indifferent looks... [s]itting with her legs apart” after failing to remember what Dulcie looks like (she claims to have seen her once at a party) (p.199).

Importantly, this possibly prejudiced and masculine image of the coloured female guerrilla commander is juxtaposed against a less understandable image, and one fearfully reminiscent of the torture that Dulcie may or may not have gone through. We are told by the narrator that David approached Dulcie at the same party and touched her on the shoulder. The scene is described below:

His fingertips pressed precisely into the wounds under her shirt, plunged intimately into her flesh, caressed every cavity, every organ, her lungs, liver, kidneys, her broken heart, with a lick of fire. She would not have been surprised to see those hands withdraw dripping with blood. (p.199)

So finally the reader is presented with an allusion to the damage done to Dulcie during the torture scene, and perhaps given an intimation again that David was present during it. But why does Wicomb place a gap between the event and this horrific and unreal allusion to it and its real bodily consequences? I want to suggest that the answer to this comes several pages later during two separate passages. They are reproduced below:

I no longer want to have anything to do with Dulcie’s story, as I fear inventions on the page might turn into a demon, an uncontrollable tokolos... (p.202)

I ought to explain that there is another page, one without words... I have had it right from the start.

There are geometrical shapes: squares, rectangles, triangles... hexagons... and especially diamonds. The cartoonist’s oblique lines that indicate sparkling are arranged about each diamond, but I now see that these have been done with another pen, perhaps added later.

There are the dismembered shapes of a body: an asexual torso, like a dressmaker’s dummy; arms bent the wrong way at the elbows; legs; swollen feet; hands like claws.

There is a head, an upside-down smiling head, which admittedly does not resemble her, except for the outline of bushy hair.

¹⁸¹ See also Driver, pp.238-242 on the sexual predicament of Dulcie and actual women involved in liberation struggles.

It would seem that whether the narrator likes it or not, the reader has in fact been given an uncontrollable tokolos lying mutilated on a page without words. Such a page, filled as it is with random shapes and no words is of course reminiscent of Sterne's "marbled page," an impenetrable "motly emblem" (Sterne, p.180), except that on this unseen page the narrator believes she can recognise something – a chaotic image of Dulcie's mutilated body – though the meaning of this seems no more clear than Sterne's marbled page. Readers could no doubt speculate on the different meanings of this unseen page – Dulcie's dismemberment is placed amongst "geometrical" shapes, all of which are given their mathematical names, though one retains a double-meaning – the diamond, which we are told makes up most of the shapes. This could be read then as an allusion to European scientific rationalism and the South African diamond trade which the colonisers generated, thus implying Dulcie's mutilation is an historical consequence of European rational. This though is of course speculation about a page which is literally unreadable, both for the narrator, and even more especially for the reader. I suggest that Wicomb is attempting to express for us the indescribability of Dulcie's body – that body that is both sexually subjugated within the ANC and then violently taken to pieces during torture – by taking us as close as she possibly can to a representation of it that literally is "without words." The implication of this is that David's words are ironically proved right in the face of the narrator's original doubt: this part of Dulcie's story, within a narrative at any rate, "cannot be told... cannot be translated into words, into language we use for everyday matters."

What is at stake here then is not only the issue of the violently subjugated female body, but the impossibility that arises when one wants to write about such an historical, and trans-historical, site of human experience. This narrative representation of Dulcie's horrifically painful experience therefore retains a self-conscious awareness of the dissemination it will undergo when we attempt to express it, of the deferral its flesh-and-blood actuality will be placed under when it is written and read about in a fiction that attempts to deal with the horrific silenced events that make up some of the experiences of the revolutionary woman in pre- and post-apartheid South Africa.

Here the deconstruction of historical narratives due to *différance* is as real an effect of literary-linguistic signification as anywhere else, and it is for this very reason that Wicomb refuses to reduce Dulcie's painful and violent experience to text. What we are given rather is an intimation of the trace of an impossible-to-understand otherness which is non-present in the written representation of the violently subjugated body of the postcolonial woman. Here the trace of otherness draws us not just towards an understanding of the ability of narratives to deconstruct themselves through *différance* – we knew that already – but also exemplifies how traces of non-presence and the 'resultant' *différance* are related to the physical vulnerability which is a shared experience of us all. There is an impossibility related here in this written articulation of Dulcie's pain – that is why we do not witness her torture, but nevertheless encounter collocated references to her tortured body, and that is why ultimately her mutilated body lies on a page *outside* the narrator's narrative, on page we are told has no words. What we given is an absence, an invisible non-presence that lies between the writing of Dulcie's body and our reception of it. The effect of this non-presence in terms of Dulcie's torture is that the reader here, as in the other novels looked at, inadvertently responds to the silence in the textual body of her story, and imaginatively recreates her physical experience by acknowledging the irreducible pain common to us all.

The inconceivable then, that non-concept which Derrida tells us lies between writing itself and the meaning it holds for all of us, is here that distance between absolute alterity and the self – an indescribable absence that nevertheless is understood by readers who impossibly relate to the pain that can be violently experienced by both the subject and its others. Wicomb to all intents and purposes has taken her readers through a radical articulation of the South African female revolutionary – she has given us a story that is at once never told and yet universally understandable – that of Dulcie's body, its pain, and the impossibility of putting it into words. Yet she *has* placed this 'story' before us in this book. When her narrator's computer is hit with a bullet and the realisation dawns that the narrative she is writing has become "the shrapnel of sorry words [where] whole syllables... tangle promiscuously with strange stems, strange prefixes, producing impossible hybrids" – literally dissemination – the narrator may indeed want to wash her hands

of this story (pp.212-13). The irony is of course that Wicomb has not, and in placing the impossibility of this story before us, it would seem that we are no position to do so either.

Anil's Ghost: Situating the body at the heart of radical postcolonial aesthetics.

Figure 15 contains a five page excerpt from *Anil's Ghost* that spans two chapters of the novel. Two aspects of it are immediately noticeable – firstly, parts of it are transcribed in italic script, and secondly, part of that italicised script in the second chapter is a list of names (Ondaatje, p.41). The fictional names are some of those who have ‘disappeared’ during the civil unrest in Sri Lanka.¹⁸² The italicised narrative which makes up the first of the chapters is by an unknown narrator who randomly interrupts the central story throughout. An earlier example of this is provided in figure 16. The central story itself follows the experiences of Anil, a forensic anthropologist attempting to trace the identity of a skeleton she found while excavating a government-controlled historical site. She finds that rather than being ancient, as it is officially claimed to be, the skeleton is in fact of a young age, and she suspects that it is that of a man possibly burnt alive by government forces in recent years. Convinced of this, she decides to try and prove it. One of the themes repeatedly referred to throughout is the extreme violence and killing which is occurring at massive levels across the country during this period due to the civil unrest, an example of this concern being related in the chapter provided by figure 16.

What we are given then in the first chapter of figure 15 is a self-conscious and unannounced interruption on the part of an unknown narrator which fractures the central narrative of Anil's experiences. The reader's attention is arrested here in much the same way we saw occurring in Morrison's *Jazz*, and in doing so the novel initiates the structure of the *Saying* and the *Said* between the reader and its narrative discourse. Indeed, the reader has little choice – is perhaps even forced – to question why such a tract describing the National Atlas of Sri Lanka is inserted here. As we

¹⁸² This is a rather inadequate way of describing the violence in Sri Lanka, which during the late eighties and throughout the early nineties was made up of fighting between the government, the antigovernment insurgents in the south of the country, and the separatist Tamil guerrillas in the north. Around 12,000 people are thought to have died in the year 1990-1991 alone.

saw in chapter two though, when considering the non-presence of the *Saying*, it is necessary to consider both the form and content of the narrative structure. In this case the narrative content draws our attention to the lack of *names* in the Atlas, arguing that because of this it provides “[n]o depiction of human life” (p.40).

The themes of physical disappearance, silence, and naming are therefore highlighted by these anonymous italicised interruptions, but we soon learn that these concerns are also the concerns of Anil herself. In a focalised description of her thoughts while pondering the identity of her skeleton, she considers the trans-historical nature of violence, its necessary historical reconstruction due to its unspeakable nature, and her own need to affiliate this skeleton with the untold numbers of people whose fates are simply not known:

The most precisely recorded moments of history lay adjacent to the extreme actions of nature or civilization. She knew that. Pompeii. Laetoli. Hiroshima. Vesuvius... Tectonic slips and brutal human violence provided random time-capsules of unhistorical live. A dog in Pompeii. A gardener's shadow in Hiroshima. But in the midst of such events she realized, there could never be any logic to the human violence without the distance of time. For now it would be reported, filed in Geneva, but no one could ever give meaning to it... she saw that those who were slammed and stained by violence lost the power of language and logic...

And who was this skeleton? In this room, amongst these four, she was hiding the unhistorical dead... Who was he? This representative of all those lost voices. To give him a name would name the rest. (pp.55-56)

What we have here then is a concern with silence, the silence that results directly from the devastation of human violence. But this concern is placed before us by a fractured narrative and with narrative voices that are known, unknown, and numerous. I would suggest that this is an example of the novel form and content making a self-conscious effort to address the issue of the violently silenced body in postcolonial Sri Lanka, yet doing it in a way that emphasises the ethics of postcolonial narrative and its structuring of the *Saying* prior to the *Said*. As with the other novels we have looked at, the silence of the *Saying* is related here through the non-discursive formal aspects of the narrative itself: the interruptive passages, the temporal and spatial shifts, the shifts between known and unknown narrators, and even the use of italics calls upon readers to respond and attend to the unknowable

elements of the structure placed before them, that otherness that initiates this radical form of discourse and is non-present as these structural shifts occur.

As the passage above implies, Anil is intent on using Sailor (the name she gives to her unknown skeleton) to represent the unknown dead that she suspects were and are the victims of government backed atrocities. For her it is a need to discover the 'truth' about these violent acts, a fact emphasised by the focalised depiction of her companion Sarath's thoughts on the matter. As is made clear in the passage below though, his thoughts on Anil's aspirations are less than optimistic as he considers his lengthy experience of the civil war:

The night interrogations, the vans in daylight picking up citizens at random. That man he had seen taken away on a bicycle. Mass disappearances at Suriyakanda, reports of mass graves at Akmeemana. Half the world, it felt, was being buried, the truth hidden by fear, while the past revealed itself in a burning rhododendron bush.

Anil would not understand this old and accepted balance. Sarath knew that for her the journey was in getting to the truth. But what would the truth bring them into? It was a flame against a sleeping lake of petrol. Sarath had seen the truth broken into suitable pieces and used by the foreign press alongside irrelevant photographs. A flippant gesture towards Asia that might lead, as a result of this information, to new vengeance and slaughter... As an archaeologist Sarath believed in truth as a principle. That is, he would have given his life for the truth if the truth were of any use. (pp.156-7)

What the novel – or at least Sarath – gives us here is a depiction of reality that closely resembles that of postmodern theory. This is a place where there is no such thing as 'the truth' in the traditional sense – or at least its traditional, singular meaning seems thwarted – and reality is to all intents and purposes constructed around texts and local narratives.

As well as this the passage also draws our attention to the role played by *writing* in shaping historic reality. The burning rhododendron bush Sarath refers to is one that was burned by him and his archaeologist mentor Palipana so that they could study some ancient images carved into the rock wall of a cave. The irony of this event being mentioned here is that Palipana, once the most celebrated academic epigraphist in Sri Lanka, has been disowned by the academia due to a world famous discovery that he ascertained from ancient rock graffiti: "a linguistic subtext that

explained the political tides and royal eddies of the island in the sixth century” (p.81). This apparently ancient narrative is elsewhere called the “interlinear texts” (p.105), ancient writings that Palipana claimed were written ‘between the lines’ of rock inscriptions and which could be read as a subversive counter-discourse to official interpretations of Sri Lankan history and the traditional ancient texts.

Unfortunately, like much humanities research, academic epigraphic archaeology is depicted here as being largely theoretical:

Archaeology lives under the same rules as the Napoleonic Code. The point was not that he would ever be proved wrong in his theories, but that he could not prove he was right. Still the patterns that emerged for Palipana had begun to coalesce. They linked hands. They allowed walking across water, they allowed a leap from treetop to treetop. The water filled a cut alphabet and linked this shore and that. And so the unproveable truth emerged. (p.83)

“The unproveable truth” of “interlinear texts” – these are the very structures and stuff about which postmodern literary theory makes its claims. And as Palipana himself says elsewhere to Anil about the ancient past, “Even then there was nothing to believe in with certainty. They still didn’t know what the truth was. We have never had the truth. Not even with your work on bones... Most of the time in our world, the truth is just an opinion” (p.102). Again then we see the idea of an historical truth being questioned, just as it has in all of the novels considered throughout this thesis.

So if we accept that one of the aims of the novel is to draw attention to the reality of violence in Sri Lanka during its civil war, and that another of its aims is to question the veracity of the texts and methods of writing used to do that, then surely we might conclude that *this* novel is indeed attempting to provide a representation of whatever the truth about such horror may be. One of the methods it uses to do this can be seen in figure 15, where the author inserts an unannounced and italicised list of fictitious names of disappeared individuals. It emerges that the list is an example of the UN files that Anil has been studying during her time in Sri Lanka, and the narrative that follows the list details different atrocities: “The disposal of bodies by fire. The disposal of bodies in rivers or the sea. The hiding and then the reburial of corpses” (p.43). Here is an example of narrative structure that draws our attention to

the historicity of this fiction, with its replica UN reports and its representation of horror.

Yet do such passages singularly force us to ethically acknowledge the horror of such postcolonial realities? The answer is unclear – the subjective effects of such structures no doubt vary from reader to reader, though for me the juxtaposition of this list against the previous italicised chapters does highlight the interruptive effect of the *Saying* that uncovers traces of alterity within the narrative, traces which we find ourselves responding to. More than this though, I believe the novel's ethical appeal arises and is reinforced by its concern with the bodies that suffer in the historic events described and the narrative bodies that attempt to represent the horror of that pain and violence. Here is what Gamini, Sarath's surgeon brother tells Anil about his experiences in one of Colombo's hospitals:

I mean, I know everything about blast weaponry. Mortars, Claymore mines, antipersonnel mines that contain gelignite and trinitrotolen. And I'm the doctor! That last one results in amputations below the knee. They lose consciousness and the blood pressure falls. You do a tomography of the brain and brain stem, and it shows haemorrhages and edema. We use dexamethasone and mechanical ventilation for this—it means we have to open the skull up. Mostly it's hideous mutilation, and we just keep arresting the haemorrhages... They come in all the time. You find mud, grass, metal, the remnants of a leg and boot all blasted up into the thigh and genitals when the bomb they stepped on went off... Anyway, these guys who are setting off the bombs are who the Western press call freedom fighters... And you want to investigate the *government*? (pp.132-33)

Initially, there seems to be nothing particularly innovative about the passage – it perhaps even provides an example of what we saw Coetzee in the last chapter calling the “tawdry” reproductions of the “vile mysteries” of horrific political violence. It is not until the introduction of the next chapter, which follows the above passage almost immediately, that we realise that the human body, and in particular its indescribable aspects, are foregrounded throughout the novel. The next chapter is very short – not even two pages long – and is temporally and spatially shifted back in time from the scene above. It begins with a solitary term: “*Amygdala*” (p.134). This is the name for a small knot of fibres made up of nerve cells near the stem of the brain, and its characteristics are described to us through a conversation between the

younger student Anil and her professor. It turns out that its function is medically unclear, though it is suspected that it is a “place to house fearful memories,” possibly anger, and that it consists of “pure emotion” (p.134). Anil suggests that it may in fact be an aspect of the brain that genetically houses historically informed fears, such as the unexplained fear many of us feel when in the presence of certain animals, even though they have never harmed us. The professor entertains this idea, but eventually admits that in truth, science really has no explanation for it – it is indescribable.

The interrupting nature of this narrative from Anil’s past again sets up a structure of *Saying* and *Said* for the reader, but as well as this its content draws the reader’s attention to the vulnerability of the human body. It also considers our inability to completely ‘write’ the body, and the fact that the inevitable destruction of that body in violence, while historically and culturally influenced, is a phenomenon whose indescribability bridges centuries. So while we previously saw that the reader certainly engages and responds to the silent traces of otherness non-present in the novel, here the idea of impossible silence is related to that indescribable and shared feature of humanity – the silence of the violated body. Importantly though, the only way which this trace of silence arises is through the innovative narrative *structure* employed in novels such as this one and the others we have encountered, in their use of form *and* content to look not only at how one conveys the silent risk of pain non-present in the *Saying*, but how that silence needs radical representation in the body of postcolonial fiction itself. Readers are forced to engage and respond to the *structure* of writing, not merely the moralistic or non-moralistic discourses it often provides us with. Here fractured narratives may seem representative of postmodern multifarious realities, but they also harbour the ability to draw readers into an ethical relation with the text singularly because of their intent to consider the representation of the postcolonial body in pain within *the bodies of postcolonial fictions themselves*. The reader has little choice but creatively respond to the fractured structure placed before her – without doing so it remains incomprehensible as a history, or even as a story. In *Anil’s Ghost* the irrational non-concepts which make *différance* in writing possible, and which would usually be highlighted as enabling the deconstruction of a narrative’s claims to truth, in fact become the very features which draw the reader in

an ethical consideration of the narrative's representation of the silent, violated body which lies at the heart of postcoloniality.

What is perhaps most striking about this narrative is that its own fractured body, that which the reader has to contend with and respond to in order to make historical sense of it, actually becomes a project of 'textual remaking' during the reading event itself. An example of how this 'textual remaking' occurs can be seen in the extracts selected from the novel (see figs. 15 & 16). They constitute fragments of a overall narrative and are provided by several unknown narrators and in different fonts and genres. If they are to constitute a narrative history they necessarily need to be arranged into some type of coherent order on the part of the reader. By this I do not mean that a unified linear history should evolve, but that the reader will most likely question why a list of random names suddenly appears in this story of Anil's, and why geographical discussions of Sri Lanka are also inserted into this narrative of Anil's experiences. Most important of all though, this 'textual remaking' on the part of the reader can be understood as a project directly associated with the one Anil undertakes with the skeleton. Anil's physical task, which I describe below, can be thought of as the same project that Gamini at one point inexplicably claims is the job of an epigraphist. Whilst speaking to Anil of some of the horrors he has witnessed as a surgeon ("[t]he bodies were coming in by truckloads") he ironically implies that history itself can no longer be studied as though it were a text, in the same way Sarath believes it can no longer be studied as a representation of the truth. The role of the epigraphist, he tells Anil, is "to decipher inscriptions... *To study history as if it were a body*" (p.193, my italics).

Importantly, this idea of studying "history as if it were a body" is precisely the project of 'textually remaking' a history that Anil carries out when she finds an artificer of ancient talent to rebuild the face upon Sailor's skeleton. She does this in an attempt to provide Sailor with an identity, in her original hope of providing him with a name, something that will historicise him, and in doing so hopefully implicate the government in his murder. As it turns out, Sarath and Anil do identify the skeleton, though in postmodern narrative fashion, there is no closure to Anil's quest, since we never find out if she was ultimately successful in officially implicating the government. Yet the assumption must be that she was partly successful, because

closure occurs in Sarath's story, shortly after we discover that he has risked his life to secretly bring Anil the evidence she needs to complete her investigation into Sailor's death. Gamini finds Sarath in the hospital mortuary, having been tortured and murdered. The reader is left with little choice but to assume he suffered this fate due to his role in helping Anil form a case against the government.

In confronting his horror and his past differences with Sarath, Gamini uses an unusual phrase to describe what we are told he knew "would be the end or it could be the beginning of a permanent conversation with Sarath" (p.288). As though in answer to the query as to what such a conversation could be we are told,

Sarath's chest said everything. It was what Gamini had fought against. But now this body lay on the bed undefended. It was what it was. No longer a counter of an argument, no longer an opinion that Gamini refused to accept. Oh, there seemed to be a mark like that made with a spear. A small wound, not deep in his chest, and Gamini bathed it and taped it up.

He had seen cases where every tooth had been removed, the nose cut apart, the eyes humiliated with liquids, the ears entered. He had been, as he ran down that hospital hallway, most frightened of seeing his brother's face. It was the face they went for in some cases. They could in their hideous skills sniff out vanity. But they had not touched Sarath's face.

The shirt they had dressed Sarath in had giant sleeves. Gamini knew why. He ripped the sleeves down to the cuffs. Below the elbows the hands had been broken in several places...

He was still there an hour later when the bodies started coming in from a bombing somewhere in the city. (pp.289-90)

What is this world in which meaning is communicated by dead body parts and where history itself is thought of as a body? Like the claim in *Foe* that "[t]his is a place where bodies are their own signs," here too Sarath's body we are told "was what it was." No longer a metaphor for the textual notions of an "argument" or an "opinion"; this body, like Friday's, simply was what it was.

Each of these ideas are of course impossible notions, but as this novel shows, whatever historical narrative it provides, its discursive content and non-discursive form constantly represents and examines the link between postcolonial historical narratives and the silent bodies that are ruptured within them. For Anil the exposure of historical truth is only possible by recreating a silent and murdered body upon a skeleton, and the ultimate price of this truth is the brutal silencing of her colleague Sarath. And in Sarath's case too it is the brutally silenced body that 'speaks' to

Gamini as he looks at his dead brother's torture wounds. What we have here is a novel that self-consciously represents the impossible idea of the meaningful silences and truths produced by subjugated bodies while considering the effect this has upon the textual body of history which is the book itself. This is a narrative, like *David's Story*, that foregrounds postmodern concerns time after time. It uses multiple narrators to question the idea of authority, it constantly undermines traditional notions of history and truth, and it refuses to give closure to the main story of Anil's quest for justice. Yet it nevertheless foregrounds the idea that not all meaning and truth can be objectified within reducible, textualised entities. It is a novel then that examines 'truth,' 'history,' and 'meaning' as entities always informed by the traces of silence which inform postcoloniality, and a novel in which we can see that such impossible traces are always related to the horrific realities experienced by the postcolonial body in pain. In this novel deconstruction and the *différance* which affect the writing of history are non-concepts which occur due the silent experience of the postcolonial body. These are "impossible but 'necessary' moves" which in turn ultimately affect the textual body that creatively represents the indescribability of that history.

Here, as in the other textual bodies considered throughout this chapter, is evidence of Armstrong's anti-poststructuralist claim that "the category of the aesthetic... is up for deconstruction" (Armstrong, p.1), at least in terms of a postcolonial narrative aesthetics. Ironically though, we have also seen that these novels' self-conscious awareness of their own deconstruction, and their willingness to ground the non-concepts that make that deconstruction possible in the flesh-and-blood realities of historical oppression, present a radical narrative aesthetics which intimately relates their own physical, textual structures to the vulnerable bodies about which they write. Such narratives pose obvious problems for Armstrong's criticism of deconstruction, because it is through the irreducibility of their own deconstruction that they foreground a radical ethics of postcolonial fiction. Uniquely, this ethics refrains from general moralist comment. Yet it nevertheless foregrounds the trans-historical and cross-cultural realities of oppression which subjugate the postcolonial body, and during the reading and writing events radically affect the bodies of literature that postcoloniality creates.

Conclusion: The Unspeakable Ethics within Narratives of Violence

At a recent international postcolonial literary conference, several prominent academics raised the idea that at present postcolonial discourse was finding it difficult to accommodate a valid political and pragmatic project.¹⁸³ Several international political situations were cited as examples of the need for a critical perspective that engages with literary issues and at the same time relates such literatures to ongoing postcolonial socio-political problems. Amongst others, Bill Ashcroft cited the Israeli/Palestinian conflict as an example of a situation in which the death of innocents occurred as a direct result of the inability of the marginalised to narrate their experiences, and Biodun Jeyifo cited the millions of political deaths in postcolonial Africa as a central reason to reappraise postcoloniality in that continent. Thus in each of the incidents cited it is the issue of physical violence that seemed to necessitate a postcolonial critique. In fact, it seemed that this issue – the reality of political violence or the risk of it – was the *only* issue that held in common the many diverse ideas voiced on different aspects of postcolonial literature and theory. Similarly, Lindquist's recent study into the historical influence of imperialism upon the Holocaust cites physical subjugation and extermination as an aspect of colonialism that is still prevalent in today's postcolonial world(s). In particular, he also emphasises that this oppression is not specific to different cultures and histories but common to all which have engaged in colonialism.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸³ Second International Conference of the United States Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies, Santa Clara University, April 26-28, 2002.

¹⁸⁴ See Lindquist, pp.142-3. It should be pointed out that Lindquist's aim is to historically ground the attempted extermination of the Jewish race during the Holocaust in a politics of extermination often – if not always – undertaken by the modern imperial powers. He sees extermination as the result of the combination of cultural, physical, and sometimes biological violence carried out upon a colonised people by the colonisers. Thus he is able to argue that the Holocaust was in fact the logical outcome of a German imperial policy which developed much later than the overseas imperial successes of the British, the Spanish, and the French. Yet because this later extermination was carried out in the heart of Europe onlookers have been unable to see it for what it was – simply another example of the mass violence and exterminations carried out throughout modernity in the name of imperialist progress. Lindquist's work therefore makes clear why Lyotard's comments on the death of the grand narrative in the wake of Auschwitz have been so influential in post-war Eurocentric philosophy, and yet also ironically underlines their historical misapprehension – Auschwitz was not the resultant failure of modernity, but rather a constant feature of modernity, it just so happened that this time its victims were predominantly white and European.

In chapter one I outlined and exemplified several ideas that would prove to be central to the thesis's main objectives. One was the need to examine the distinction between the discourses of the postcolonial and the postmodern, and the other the aim of critically considering, if possible, a valid ethical critique of postcolonial fiction. At that point we saw the opposition that is often voiced against the idea of incorporating postmodern, or more specifically poststructuralist, discourses within political postcolonialism. Such a perspective now seems somewhat naïve and certainly incorrect. What has been proved by this thesis is the fact that while one might employ the ethical perspectives of Levinas or the literary critics who appropriate his work, deconstruction plays an intrinsic role within the understanding of such an ethics of narrative structures. In particular, it is deconstruction that provides the means with which to locate the difficult and ineffable notion of irreducible alterity within postcolonial fiction.

Thus it is clear that postcolonialism isn't simply a critical position troubled by an ongoing debate with proponents of deconstruction – it is in fact a form of criticism that is centrally affected and characterised by this debate. Postcolonialism can therefore be understood as a set of discourses beset by contradiction and apparent ambiguity, a point which seems to foreground the real political importance of the claims made by Ashcroft, Jeyifo, and Lindquist. How can postcolonialism maintain an ethical imperative that concerns the real effects of historical violence when beset by such disagreements? I would like to conclude this study by reconsidering this question from the point of view that there is in fact ethico-political value to be gained from this apparently unsettled and ambiguous critical condition.

One of reasons that deconstruction is considered unhelpful in political terms is the degree to which the concept of the irreducible is central to its consideration of writing. This concept is a founding aspect of many of the terms associated with deconstruction; for example, *différance*, the *trace*, the *supplement*, non-presence, an impossible but-necessary movement, and the *Saying*. Even so, the specific idea of an irreducible entity – meaning or experience that cannot be objectified or reduced to text within the ontological world – is central to other issues related to the postcolonial as well. As we have seen, the notion of ineffable and indescribable historical experience is central to the critical work of postcolonial critics not usually

associated with deconstruction, such as Gilroy and Morrison. In their work, and in that of many others, we see an attempt to understand the ineffable not as the otherness always non-present in writing, but as the indescribable elements of histories shaped by horror and unspeakable physical oppression.

One of this study's intentions was to investigate the link that might exist between these two notions of irreducible experience, between the ineffable that is a real effect of a violent and painful history, and the irreducible non-presence which Derrida proves is an effect of all writing. Ultimately, the thesis hoped to relate such a link to an ethics of postcolonial fiction that maintained both its radical, irreducible elements, and its relationship with the realities of historical violence. As we saw, the self-conscious willingness on the part of Rushdie's *Shame* to express moral imperatives within an innovative narrative allows the novel to represent ethical proposals both in their traditional, historicised sense, and in the sense of an undeconstructibility that occurs as a result of narrative structure itself. Narrative here departs from its traditional conception and is made up of a discursive content and a non-discursive form, becoming a structure informed by irreducible features. As we have seen, the radical notion that narrative structure might possess irreducible features not only allows us to reconsider an irreducible ethics of structure, it also foregrounds Levinas's theory of the *Saying* and the *Said* and the idea of a general primordial ethics that resists reduction to discourse.

Even so, the role of the *Saying* and the *Said* is common to recent studies which propose a reconsideration of a formal literary ethics. All too often though, as in the case of Newton, Gibson, and Nussbaum, such attempts to engage with an ethics of 'form,' 'structure,' or 'style' actually proved to be examples of content analysis. What Morrison's *Jazz* makes clear is the idea that a radical reconsideration of narrative structure is possible but that it necessarily involves reconsidering the origins of the *trace of non-presence or otherness* in narratives as it is theorised in the interrelated works of Derrida and Levinas. The novel presents its readers with the non-concept of a trace that is intrinsically related to writing, and to the situation of discourse as described by Levinas. As well as this, the novel is an example of a text where these traces of otherness shape a unique narrative structure which involves the reader in a responsive relation with its discourse, creating a situation where she

becomes responsible for acknowledging these traces and their historicity. Reading Derrida and Levinas alongside *Jazz* also raises the idea that a flesh-and-blood vulnerability to physical harm is related to a radical ethics and the non-present traces represented within postcolonial narratives.

The question arises whether historical violence always informs a narrative representation of the unknowable, and whether the latter necessarily forces its readers to attend to its irreducible structural features in a responsible fashion. A definite response to this is beyond the scope of this thesis, but there is no doubt that as examples of postcolonial novels *The Famished Road*, *The Sandglass*, and *The Map of Love* all incorporate innovative structural features whose repeated attention to the idea of textual and historical irreducibility involves their readers in a response to unknowable alterity. This notion of the unknowable as an otherness with which individuals necessarily have to creatively involve themselves is a concept also raised by Attridge in his examinations of a literary ethics. Its relevance to *The Map of Love* can be seen when we consider that the novel provides us with a representation of historical memory that both foregrounds the prevalence of past violence and the silences that we necessarily must engage with when reading such narratives. Here creativity on the part of the reader and the implied author becomes an act intimately linked to both representations of a violent, ineffable history and the otherness which informs the deconstruction of history.

This study shows that work undertaken in recent years by researchers into the phenomenon of pain crucially resonates with the often overlooked aspect of Levinas's work which considers the ethical experience of the vulnerable body during discourse, an experience both universal and resistant to language. Pain, a unique human experience in that it refers to no ontological object, bears similarities to the irreducibility intrinsic to deconstruction, if considered via Levinas and Merleau-Ponty's concept of unconscious physical sensibility. Here the vulnerability of the human body itself becomes central to our ethical experience of narratives which specifically deal with representations of physical subjugation. In particular, *In the Eye of the Sun*, *David's Story*, and *Anil's Ghost* are examples of texts that self-consciously refuse to reduce the body in pain to text, and address the importance of examining the relationship between this real, physical body, and the deconstructible

narratives of postcolonial history. These novels exemplify the project of providing the reader with representations of real historical experiences that in fact resist all attempts at literal expression. Thus the irreducible aspects of narrative structure discussed earlier in the thesis are again shown to be central to representing an ethics of narrative that forces the reader into a responsive relationship when considering the physical body subjugated by postcolonial history.

Several aspects of narrative need to be considered then if attempting to identify an ethics of postcolonial fiction. Firstly this ethics is undeconstructible as claimed by Spivak, yet it is at the same time closely related to the violence which characterises postcoloniality across different histories and cultures. As we have seen, undeconstructibility here is not only an aspect of the traces which make possible *différance* and its effect on the meaning of writing. Its impossibility is also related to those physical experiences of violent history that literally defy objectification. As well as this, this ethics of narrative is an effect of a revised concept of narrative structure, one which considers structure to be made up of features that are both discursive and pre-discursive, in much the same way that Levinas envisages the situation of discourse itself. Centrally though, the irreducibility of this ethics forces the reader into a responsive relationship with the traces of otherness in the text. Here the ineffable aspects of a postcolonial history remain unknowable unless the reader engages creatively with the text. This is most convincingly exemplified in the postcolonial representation of physical pain – an experience common to postcoloniality – where its resistance to language is reinforced by its recent medical theorisation as an objectless sign. This experience, universal to humanity, finds strong links with the irreducibility and *différance* that deconstruction identifies as a central element of meaningful writing itself. Like Spivak then I propose that we consider an ethics that is irreducible; however, this study develops the question of such an ethics by locating the ethical within a reader's response to specific structural features found in the fictions considered here. Ultimately then, irreducibility is closely related to the experience of physical subjugation that is central to postcolonial history.

Is a politics of the postcolonial possible?

From the above perspective, deconstruction very much carries out an ethical role if we use it to consider narratives of postcoloniality. It is the literary-linguistic effect that allows us to experience the traces of otherness non-present in such novels. Even so, it is Levinas, to whom Derrida is indebted, who links this trace in discourse to the universal vulnerability of the body of the other, even though Levinas's initial work on the silence of the *Saying* placed the trace pre-eminently within oral discourse, and not within writing in a Derridean sense. Levinas is insistent though that his philosophy cannot be used as an ethics (1986, p.97), a point reiterated by Eaglestone who notes that a Levinasian ethics cannot become a critical methodology since it investigates the pre-ontological, those experiences which underlie knowledge (Eaglestone, p.176).¹⁸⁵ Even so, it is important that Levinas and Derrida's views of the trace and *différance* are understood as impossible non-concepts which can involve readers in a responsible acknowledgement of the otherness we encounter in postcolonial narratives. Most important though is the fact that we can relate our responsibility to this silent trace of otherness as a responsibility towards the *body of the other*. It is this aspect of human experience that we have seen to be literally indescribable and completely resistant to writing, and yet also a trans-historical and cross-cultural aspect of postcoloniality.

This often ignored emphasis that Levinas places on the silent sensory awareness of the body in his later work must form the backbone of any ethical critique of the structure of postcolonial fiction. The trace of otherness in the body of the other alone allows us to envisage a common human experience during discursive relations and during reading. As Derrida puts it, when he experiences this trace of the absolute other,

my absolute singularity enters into relation with his on the level of obligation and duty. I am responsible to the other as other... There are also others, an infinite number of them, the innumerable generality of others to whom I should be bound by the same responsibility, a general and universal responsibility. (Derrida, 1995, p.68)

It is only by experiencing absolute otherness then, which originates in the vulnerable body of the other and whose trace we have seen to be non-present in the fictions looked at, that can we begin to theorise a universal ethical responsibility addressed by postcolonial fiction and its narrative representation of violence and oppression.

And while the eventual description of pain in medical texts and the records of Amnesty International may illustrate the way in which even it cannot lie *beyond* writing, its irreducibility and lack of object undoubtedly indicate that it is an experience that is central to our existence *prior* to writing. Thus though deconstruction makes clear that there is nothing beyond text, it also provides the means of encountering the traces of experiences prior to writing, such as the immediate, silenced effects violence has on postcolonial cultures internationally. Even so, deconstruction alone cannot produce a case for how, or more importantly, why, such historic violence should be critically considered and opposed.

The other difficulty with attempting to *define* an ethics that is irreducible is that ultimately *this* cannot be done – one of the features of this ethics is that it resists objectification, and as such remains indescribable. It is therefore difficult to see how one might formulate a political perspective based on the experience of such an ethics in narrative. One way of considering such impossibility is perhaps to acknowledge that while we cannot describe this ethics, one of its lessons is that it foregrounds the universal suffering that occurs when bodies are colonised and oppressed. What the novels examined here achieve though, even whilst representing the ineffability of such suffering as a universal human condition, is a cross-cultural and trans-historical critique of colonial and postcolonial oppression that doesn't resort to making general, moralising propositions. And yet paradoxically, this refusal to generalise and objectify postcolonial experience occurs whilst representing the universality of pain's indescribability and our revulsion from it. Here then we see the central importance of the contradictory position of postcolonial discourse: it is able to always acknowledge its ethico-political objectives and yet at the same time maintain a commitment to avoid making broad, moralising proposals of the kind that it critiques in other universalist discourses. To answer the question I posed at the start of this chapter

¹⁸⁵ See also Bernasconi, 1990, pp.3-18 (esp. p.9), and Cohen, 1986, p.4 on the idea that ethics "escapes knowledge" as it is neither rational nor thematic.

then, it is possible here to see why the contradictory predicament of postcolonialism can be thought of as critically beneficial to its ethical project – it enables it to maintain a stringent critique of the narrative representation of oppression and yet avoid objectifying that oppression and horror.

Thus, as Spivak claims, deconstruction can provide a political safeguard, especially when we read postcolonial fiction. We have seen that it *produces the possibility* of an ethics of narrative, particularly when concerned with those narratives that deal with the representation of physical oppression. While for Critchley it is Levinas's ethics that provides a method of linking deconstruction to politics (Critchley, p.236), this thesis has shown that this is only possible within a postcolonial politics if we turn to the role played by physical vulnerability in ethics. The question as to whether an ethical critique of postcolonial narratives that incorporates Levinas's and Scarry's theory of indescribable pain might be able to produce an ethical and pragmatic postcolonial politics is one for further study. What this study makes clear is that the universal silence of the human body in pain is verifiable, and so too is the relation it bears to the *différance* which deconstructs our textualised ontological experience and makes it possible for us to identify the silent traces of horrific pain. What is also clear is the role played by these silences within narratives in involving the reader in a responsible consideration of postcolonial representations of physical oppression.

If in further study it was agreed that certain narratives do represent meaningful features of a shared humanity – a silent vulnerability that insures our desire to always withdraw from excessive pain and an understanding of the indescribability that it horrifically inflicts on others for example – then perhaps it might be possible to envisage a universal ethico-political critique evolving out of a postcolonial narrative ethics. Doing so would certainly provide a method of considering the violence common to international postcolonial contexts without having to incorporate the narratives of those cultures and contexts within a universalist discourse. It would also bring to prominence the idea of a radical aesthetic that takes account of the irreducible nature of the body, a necessity outlined by Armstrong and Scarry.

This is not to say though that readers of such novels will necessarily agree on their political and moral value – such categories must always be historically, culturally, and linguistically based – but they might nevertheless come away aware of the ethical issues that concern the human body and its trans-historical aversion to the experience of violence and pain. In the novels looked at here, readers can repudiate or justify the violence done to the bodies of these narratives, but at least they have had to respond to those bodies, to take the silence surrounding them into consideration. As I have shown, a narrative ethics undoubtedly can uncover the silences non-present in violent histories, but as Singh makes clear, it is unlikely that the literary representation of these silences is on its own *enough* of a politically subversive act to practically counter the violence such novels articulate and oppose (Singh, p.127). What readers ultimately choose to do about such experiences is in their own hands, just like the books they choose to read. What is at least clear though is that due to deconstruction, and the influence of Levinas and recent body theorists, we now have the possibility of theorising an ethics of narrative that can be used within postcolonial criticism to ethical effect, and uncover an aspect of postcoloniality that crosses cultural and historical differences. As Ondaatje's Anil comes to realise, “there is never any logic to the human violence without the distance of time... she saw that those who were slammed and stained by violence lost the power of language and logic” (Ondaatje, p.55). This is one lesson of an ethical critique of postcolonial fiction. Its further role is to attend critically to the shared silences that resist language and logic and yet nevertheless haunt these narratives of violence and oppression.

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Appendices

CHAPTER 42

The Whiteness of the Whale

What the white whale was to Ahab, has been hinted; what, at times, he was to me, as yet remains unsaid.

Aside from those more obvious considerations touching Moby Dick, which could not but occasionally awaken in any man's soul some alarm, there was another thought, or rather vague, nameless horror concerning him, which at times by its intensity completely overpowered all the rest; and yet so mystical and well nigh ineffable was it, that I almost despair of putting it in a comprehensible form. It was the whiteness of the whale that above all things appalled me. But how can I hope to explain myself here; and yet, in some dim, random way, explain myself I must, else all these chapters might be naught.

Though in many natural objects, whiteness refiningly enhances beauty, as if imparting some special virtue of its own, as in marbles, japonicas, and pearls; and though various nations have in some way recognised a certain royal pre-eminence in this hue; even the barbaric, grand old kings of Pegu placing the title "Lord of the White Elephants" above all their other magniloquent ascriptions of dominion; and the modern kings of Siam unfurling the same snow-white quadruped in the royal standard; and the Hanoverian flag bearing the one figure of a snow-white charger; and the great Austrian Empire, Cæsarian heir to overlording Rome, having for the imperial color the same imperial hue; and though this pre-eminence in it applies to the human race itself, giving the white man ideal mastership over every dusky tribe; and though, besides all this,

whiteness has been even made significant of gladness, for among the Romans a white stone marked a joyful day; and though in other mortal sympathies and symbolizings, this same hue is made the emblem of many touching, noble things—the innocence of brides, the benignity of age; though among the Red Men of America the giving of the white belt of wampum was the deepest pledge of honor; though in many climes, whiteness typifies the majesty of Justice in the ermine of the Judge, and contributes to the daily state of kings and queens drawn by milk-white steeds; though even in the higher mysteries of the most august religions it has been made the symbol of the divine spotlessness and power; by the Persian fire worshippers, the white forked flame being held the holiest on the altar; and in the Greek mythologies, Great Jove himself being made incarnate in a snow-white bull; and though to the noble Iroquois, the midwinter sacrifice of the sacred White Dog was by far the holiest festival of their theology, that spotless, faithful creature being held the purest envoy they could send to the Great Spirit with the annual tidings of their own fidelity; and though directly from the Latin word for white, all Christian priests derive the name of one part of their sacred vesture, the alb or tunic, worn beneath the cassock; and though among the holy pomps of the Romish faith, white is specially employed in the celebration of the Passion of our Lord; though in the Vision of St. John, white robes are given to the redeemed, and the four-and-twenty elders stand clothed in white before the great white throne, and the Holy One that sitteth there white like wool; yet for all these accumulated associations, with whatever is sweet, and honorable, and sublime, there yet lurks an elusive something in the innermost idea of this hue, which strikes more of panic to the soul than that redness which affrights in blood.

This elusive quality it is, which causes the thought of whiteness, when divorced from more kindly associations, and coupled with any object terrible in itself, to heighten that terror to the furthest bounds. Witness the white bear of the poles, and the white shark of the tropics; what but their smooth, flaky whiteness makes them the transcendent horrors they are? That ghastly whiteness it is which imparts such an abhorrent mildness, even more loathsome

than terrific, to the dumb gloating of their aspect. So that not the fierce-fanged tiger in his heraldic coat can so stagger courage as the white-shrouded bear or shark.*

Bethink thee of the albatross: whence come those clouds of spiritual wonderment and pale dread, in which that white phantom sails in all imaginations? Not Coleridge first threw that spell; but God's great, unflattering laureate, Nature.†

Most famous in our Western annals and Indian traditions is that

* With reference to the Polar bear, it may possibly be urged by him who would fain go still deeper into this matter, that it is not the whiteness, separately regarded, which heightens the intolerable hideousness of that brute; for, analysed, that heightened hideousness, it might be said, only arises from the circumstance, that the irresponsible ferociousness of the creature stands invested in the fleece of celestial innocence and love; and hence, by bringing together two such opposite emotions in our minds, the Polar bear frightens us with so unnatural a contrast. But even assuming all this to be true; yet, were it not for the whiteness, you would not have that intensified terror.

As for the white shark, the white gliding ghostliness of repose in that creature, when beheld in his ordinary moods, strangely tallies with the same quality in the Polar quadruped. This peculiarity is most vividly hit by the French in the name they bestow upon that fish. The Romish mass for the dead begins with "Requiem eternam" (eternal rest), whence *Requiem* denominating the mass itself, and any other funeral music. Now, in allusion to the white, silent stillness of death in this shark, and the mild deadliness of his habits, the French call him *Requin*.

† I remember the first albatross I ever saw. It was during a prolonged gale, in waters hard upon the Antarctic seas. From my forenoon watch below, I ascended to the overclouded deck; and there, dashed upon the main hatches, I saw a regal, feathery thing of unspotted whiteness, and with a hooked, Roman bill sublime. At intervals, it arched forth its vast archangel wings, as if to embrace some holy ark. Wondrous flutterings and throbbings shook it. Though bodily unharmed, it uttered cries, as some king's ghost in supernatural distress. Through its inexpressible, strange eyes, methought I peeped to secrets which took hold of God. As Abraham before the angels, I bowed myself; the white thing was so white, its wings so wide, and in those for ever exiled waters, I had lost the miserable warping memories of traditions and of towns. Long I gazed at that prodigy of plumage. I cannot tell, can only hint, the things that darted through me then. But at last I awoke; and turning, asked a sailor what bird was this. A goney, he replied. Goney! I never had heard that name before; is it conceivable that this glorious thing is utterly unknown to men ashore! never! But some time after; I learned that goney was some seaman's name for albatross. So that by no possibility could Coleridge's wild Rhyme have had aught to do with those mystical impressions which were mine, when I saw that bird upon our deck. For neither had I then read the Rhyme, nor knew the bird to be an albatross. Yet, in saying this, I do but indirectly burnish a little brighter the noble merit of the poem and the poet.

of the White Steed of the Prairies; a magnificent milk-white charger, large-eyed, small-headed, bluff-chested, and with the dignity of a thousand monarchs in his lofty, overscorning carriage. He was the elected Xerxes of vast herds of wild horses, whose pastures in those days were only fenced by the Rocky Mountains and the Alleghanies. At their flaming head he westward trooped it like that chosen star which every evening leads on the hosts of light. The flashing cascade of his mane, the curving comet of his tail, invested him with housings more resplendent than gold and silver-beaters could have furnished him. A most imperial and archangelical apparition of that unfallen, western world, which to the eyes of the old trappers and hunters revived the glories of those primeval times when Adam walked majestic as a god, bluff-bowed and fearless as this mighty steed. Whether marching amid his aides and marshals in the van of countless cohorts that endlessly streamed it over the plains, like an Ohio; or whether with his circumambient subjects browsing all around at the horizon, the White Steed gallopingly reviewed them with warm nostrils reddening through his cool milkiness; in whatever aspect he presented himself, always to the bravest Indians he was the object of trembling reverence and awe. Nor can it be questioned from what stands on legendary record of this noble horse, that it was his spiritual whiteness chiefly, which so clothed him with divineness; and that this divineness had that in it which, though commanding worship, at the same time enforced a certain nameless terror.

But there are other instances where this whiteness loses all that accessory and strange glory which invests it in the White Steed and Albatross.

What is it that in the Albino man so peculiarly repels and often

I assert, then, that in the wondrous bodily whiteness of the bird chiefly lurks the secret of the spell, a truth the more evinced in this, that by a solecism of terms there are birds called grey albatrosses, and these I have frequently seen, but never with such emotions as when I beheld the Antarctic fowl.

But how had the mystic thing been caught? Whisper it not, and I will tell, with a treacherous hook and line, as the fowl floated on the sea. At last the Captain made a postman of it; tying a lettered, leathern tally round its neck, with the ship's time and place; and then letting it escape. But I doubt not, that leathern tally, meant for man, was taken off in Heaven, when the white fowl flew to join the wing-folding, the invoking, and adoring cherubim!

shocks the eye, as that sometimes he is loathed by his own kith and kin? It is that whiteness which invests him, a thing expressed by the name he bears. The Albino is as well made as other men—has no substantive deformity—and yet this mere aspect of all-pervading whiteness makes him more strangely hideous than the ugliest abortion. Why should this be so?

Nor, in quite other aspects, does Nature in her least palpable but not the less malicious agencies, fail to enlist among her forces this crowning attribute of the terrible. From its snowy aspect, the gauntleted ghost of the Southern Seas has been denominated the White Squall. Nor, in some historic instances, has the art of human malice omitted so potent an auxiliary. How wildly it heightens the effect of that passage in Froissart, when, masked in the snowy symbol of their faction, the desperate White Hoods of Ghent murder their bailiff in the market-place!

Nor, in some things, does the common, hereditary experience of all mankind fail to bear witness to the supernaturalism of this hue. It cannot well be doubted, that the one visible quality in the aspect of the dead which most appals the gazer, is the marble pallor lingering there; as if indeed that pallor were as much the badge of consternation in the other world, as of mortal trepidation here. And from that pallor of the dead, we borrow the expressive hue of the shroud in which we wrap them. Nor even in our superstitions do we fail to throw the same snowy mantle round our phantoms; all ghosts rising in a milk-white fog—Yea, while these terrors seize us, let us add, that even the king of terrors, when personified by the evangelist, rides on his pallid horse.

Therefore, in his other moods, symbolize whatever grand or gracious thing he will by whiteness, no man can deny that in its profoundest idealized significance it calls up a peculiar apparition to the soul.

But though without dissent this point be fixed, how is mortal man to account for it? To analyse it, would seem impossible. Can we, then, by the citation of some of those instances wherein this thing of whiteness—though for the time either wholly or in great part stripped of all direct associations calculated to impart to it aught fearful, but, nevertheless, is found to exert over us the same

sorcery, however modified;—can we thus hope to light upon some chance clue to conduct us to the hidden cause we seek?

Let us try. But in a matter like this, subtlety appeals to subtlety, and without imagination no man can follow another into these halls. And though, doubtless, some at least of the imaginative impressions about to be presented may have been shared by most men, yet few perhaps were entirely conscious of them at the time, and therefore may not be able to recall them now.

Why to the man of untutored ideality, who happens to be but loosely acquainted with the peculiar character of the day, does the bare mention of Whitsuntide marshal in the fancy such long, dreary, speechless processions of slow-pacing pilgrims, down-cast and hooded with new-fallen snow? Or, to the unread, unsophisticated Protestant of the Middle American States, why does the passing mention of a White Friar or a White Nun, evoke such an eyeless statue in the soul?

Or what is there apart from the traditions of dungeoned warriors and kings (which will not wholly account for it) that makes the White Tower of London tell so much more strongly on the imagination of an untravelled American, than those other storied structures, its neighbors—the Byward Tower, or even the Bloody? And those sublimer towers, the White Mountains of New Hampshire, whence, in peculiar moods, comes that gigantic ghostliness over the soul at the bare mention of that name, while the thought of Virginia's Blue Ridge is full of a soft, dewy, distant dreaminess? Or why, irrespective of all latitudes and longitudes, does the name of the White Sea exert such a spectralness over the fancy, while that of the Yellow Sea lulls us with mortal thoughts of long lacquered mild afternoons on the waves, followed by the gaudiest and yet sleepest of sunsets? Or, to choose a wholly unsubstantial instance, purely addressed to the fancy, why, in reading the old fairy tales of Central Europe, does "the tall pale man" of the Hartz forests, whose changeless pallor untrustingly glides through the green of the groves—why is this phantom more terrible than all the whooping imps of the Blocksburg?

Nor is it, altogether, the remembrance of her cathedral-toppling earthquakes; nor the stampedes of her frantic seas; nor the tear-



Fig. 1 (cont.)

Fig. 2.

VIII

D A R K N E S S

'It's all there,' Prins pushed the clippings towards me and slumped back in my threadbare sofa. 'You can imagine what it was like, but I don't know why the rest of us were not there. My mother took us away from the house. Why?'

We had the TV on in my sitting room as Pearl would have done, with subtitles crackling out of its fractured circuits: a failing tube. I switched channels and found a Gene Kelly retrospective on BBC2.

I remembered watching *Singin' in the Rain* with Pearl once. When the credits rolled at the end, she knocked back the last of her sherry, 'You see clearly only when it is empty, no? You can't look back until it is, but by then it's over. Empty. Gone. You have to turn yourself upside down and start all over again.' She looked moody.

THE SANDGLASS

'When did you first see this film?' I asked. *Singin' in the Rain* was one of her regulars; she would be quite elated with the song and dance but at the end she never seemed very happy.

She looked at me as if she was trying to decide something. She spoke more slowly than usual. 'The first time was the night before Jason died. It was a terrible time, we were not getting on at all . . . The atmosphere was so stultifying, you know, that I even arranged for all the children to go to my outstation aunty. He didn't like that either. But we needed to sort so much out. I didn't know how. I needed something to cheer me up. My friend Ishrani was the one who suggested we go watch a film. Ishrani is Mira's mother, you know. Really tall and wears a lot of gold all the time. Enormous armful of gold bangles, and always gold around her neck, on her nose. Too much for me.' Pearl rubbed the cat's-eye silver ring she always wore. 'I prefer silver myself, but she was mad about gold. She loved dressing up - like Mira, you know. Lovely bright saris and always decorated by at least one gold thread. Sometimes, a big border of gold brocade. But even with all that metal, she always brought some light and air wherever she went. Must be that laugh she had. I'll never forget that.' Pearl heaved herself up and went over to a small cabinet under the TV set. She opened it and pulled out another bottle of sherry. 'I didn't even know what was on,

D A R K N E S S

but I remember Ishrani said, "*The Seven Year Itch* or *Gone With the Wind*." I could do without the seven-year nonsense . . . Here, open this, Chip *putha*.' She passed me the bottle.

'So we went. Ishrani parked her car - a tiny Fiat she could barely squeeze into - at the car park at the Majestic and started laughing. Shoulders rolling and getting bigger, swelling like something was going to burst inside her. "Why?" I asked "Why so hysterical?" "The film," she giggled, "*Gone With the Wind* is gone away." There was a notice about the film being cancelled. They had *Singin' in the Rain* as a special instead. "Never mind," she said, "it'll do the trick." "What trick?" I asked. "The trick of cheering a sourpuss up."

'She had to wriggle out of her car. Her husband, such a big-shot judge, always wanted to get her a new car. He told her that she was too big for her Fiat. Ishrani would get furious. "Why, what are you trying to say? You calling me fat now?" He would say, "No, it is just that your car is a baby car. It is too small." She would then hit the roof: "Millions of Italians go in these." She knew that her husband was a great fan of Sophia Loren; he would only go to see a film if it starred Sophia Loren. Ishrani liked to think she was *our* Sophia Loren; she was sure that Sophia Loren had stepped out of a Fiat just like hers in some film or the other. Every time she got out of her car, she imagined the

Fig. 2

scene in the film. And each time she would ask me whether what she needed to do was change her sari for a skirt. She'd ask, "Would you ever wear one?" I'd say I would change a baby Fiat for one of those new Studebakers any day, if Jason offered. Anyway, I told her, Sophia Loren is now wearing a sari in Roma. It was big news: she was getting ready to come to Colombo for the filming of *Elephant Bill*. Ishrani got into a real state although I was much more excited about our *Rekawa* that was being done around about the same time.'

'Did it work?' I asked. 'Did the dancing cheer you up?'

'I love watching a man dance. Gene Kelly is no Fred Astaire, but he is athletic. Jason didn't like dancing, you know. He moved so woodenly on the floor. He'd be the broom. He was happiest when he could sit down and order the food and drink. Giving orders, making rules, he liked that sort of thing. Following somebody else's invisible pattern was not for him. Even his golf, you know, was a little eccentric.'

○

For the last three days of his life, Jason had concentrated almost wholly on the job of securing the distillery he had

'You should take things slower. What is this mad rush all the time,' she had said.

'It's business, my dear.'

'Business? Jason, you do not understand the first thing about business.'

Jason's face changes shape as his thoughts ricochet around his head, pulling and pinching his skin, releasing a disconnected smile.

'What?'

'You are not a businessman. You like playing these games, but doing business is not going crazy like you are. What you are doing with all this rushing around and madness is what losers who are going out of business do.'

Jason stares at Pearl as though he had never seen her speak before. His face ceased its agitation.

'You've been successful Jason, but you don't seem to have learned why you have been successful. And if you are not careful, you will lose it all. I can see that.'

'How?'

'You'll lose it because you don't seem to know what you have. You won't even know when it goes, until it is too late.'

'What? What are you talking about?'

'Just stop everything for a while, Jason. Stop and look around you. Look at me, for God's sake.'

'I will. I will. But I can't go to the cinema this week. You

identified as the business of the future, as had Ezra Vatunas and his son Tivoli next door.

But the week had started badly for him. Pearl told me how she had asked him whether he would be free to go out on Wednesday evening.

'I can't,' He had been extremely brusque. 'There is this meeting on Thursday and I have to get everything sorted out.'

It was their wedding anniversary but he had forgotten.

'But you have all day,' Pearl held out her hand, re-enacting the scene.

'On Wednesday afternoon I have to play golf.'

'Golf? Have to?'

'I arranged to play with Chanmi. It's the only chance I'll get to talk to him before the meeting. I need the evening free.'

'Will you have *any time* for me this week?'

'I'm sorry.' His face had sagged. He had pulled his feet together in contrition, or perhaps to draw strength from the ground under his soles. The earth below the floor. The breathless rage at the centre of the world.

'I'll call Ishrani then,' Pearl had shrugged. 'If you can't come, you can't. I'll go somewhere with her.'

'Yes, you go. Please. I'm sorry but this week is hell.'

'It was such an impossible situation,' Pearl seemed to buckle under the tension of the scene she recalled.

have to understand. This week I have got to get this deal sorted out. After that I will take it easy. I promise. Everything will be much better.'

○

Jason and Pearl had been married for twenty years. He must have been stunned when, after all that time, his wife suddenly told him that his whole career was mismanaged. Flawed from the beginning.

I never divulged to Prins what I thought had happened. The sourness of those last few days that Pearl talked about. I let his question about why she moved them out of Arcadia hang between us and melt in the glare of a succession of show-time movie clips. Prins was breathing heavily; his upper lids slid halfway down his eyes like cowls. I suggested he go upstairs to bed.

'No,' he protested. 'The only way to handle the jet lag is to keep trucking until the normal bedtime of wherever you are.' But he looked exhausted. 'Flying in this direction should be easy,' he added with a frown.

After about a minute of silence, he gave in. 'But maybe I'll just go stretch out for a bit.' He got up quickly and hurried out of the room.

Pearl is sitting in a wicker chair by the gramophone.

Jason is opposite her.

'Do you want a drink?'

She refuses.

'Lemonade? Ginger beer?'

Pearl says no. 'No, no, no.'

He looks around. 'I think I need a beer.'

'It's Jinasena's night off.'

'I know, I know,' Jason retorts. 'I'll get it.'

He goes to the back of the house, to the refrigerator between the dining room and the kitchen. He finds a bottle of beer and opens it with the bottle opener tied to the door handle of the Electrolux. He picks up a glass from the teak cabinet and pours himself the beer.

'It's been twenty years, you know,' he lifts the glass at Pearl. 'Twenty years we have been married.'

She nods but says nothing. She looks at him as if she was trying to work out what is going on inside his head. It's too late now, too late to remember, to celebrate. She didn't think he realized, even then, about the anniversary.

'You remember the first years?' he asks.

'Before we came here?'

'Yes, but all those years, you know?'

'What are you thinking of?'

'I was thinking, why has it taken twenty years for you to

166

tell me what you told me today?'

'About what?'

'About getting involved in business. Like you think I am a fool or something.'

'I didn't say you were a fool.'

'You said I didn't know what I was doing. That I was acting like a failure. Isn't that what you said?'

Pearl sighs and turns away.

'You did.' Jason insists. 'You said that successful people, I guess like your father, knew how to behave. I suppose they were more conscientious. Is that it? But what about that trip to England? What about the easy times you had? We had.'

'All I said was that you were getting too busy.'

'Too frantic.'

'Yes, too frantic. You don't need to.'

'You think I don't need to do anything. You think it will all just roll along happily. But I can tell you, it doesn't all just happen automatically. Someone has got to put their shoulder to it. Someone's got to work to keep the show on the road. And it is not just someone, it's me. I have to. Nobody else will. Your father had it easy. He had sick people to deal with, grateful people.'

He tilts his glass, gulps the beer.

Pearl says nothing. Nothing for minutes. Finally she blurts out: 'Do you know what Wednesday is?'

167

THE SANDGLASS

But Pearl's words have a hollowness to them. She is speaking in a house that is empty. For a moment it seems as though they are back in the past of twenty years earlier, when it was just the two of them in a room that had nothing in it, in a town that had nothing of their two entwined lives in it, in a country that lay sleeping, waiting for the earth to heave and break into their dreams.

○

Jason and Pearl slept in the same room but in separate beds. She said, 'He liked a hard bed, but for me I can't sleep if it isn't as soft as a cloud.' On each of the last three nights of his life Jason had slept badly. He kept waking up, startled by a dream about an argument or some kind of conflict.

He wrote copiously, recording every move he made, each morning and each evening of that final week, in the last of the sad blue timebenders that survived him and survived Pearl to fetch up on the shores of my own rapidly degrading life. It seems as though he felt that only by writing it all down in his school-ruled notebook could he keep control of a life in danger of going awry. It is all that remains of that extraordinary week, but it is enough to give me a glimpse

168

DARKNESS

and allow me, now, to reconstruct something of those last few days as Pearl must have done. Prins never read Jason's words. He held the very same notebook in his hands once, but didn't even know whose writing marked its pages. By then he didn't want to know anything more, he wanted to break the stranglehold of the past. But even so his father's own words must count for something. → 'l' - r f...

'Have some Ovaltine before sleeping,' Pearl suggested to Jason in an effort at reconciliation.

'You know I can never drink it. The idea of it makes me feel sick.'

'Try it. Soothe your nerves.'

'Next week, it will be different,' Jason was sure.

'So you say, but next week is not in our hands.'

Jason laughed. 'Is it ever?'

Jason laughed for a long time. He could see that she was watching him laugh. She was not laughing. But he didn't stop. *Then it too sounded hollow*, he wrote in blue ink.

1 ...

○

In his office on Tuesday night Jason mapped out his strategy. He wrote down what he thought needed to be said,

169

Fig. 2 (cont)

and made notes on the Board members who needed to be reassured. For each person he had a list of concerns and a column of points he needed to make to address those concerns. He then went over each point to identify when and how he was going to ensure that this happened and used red ink to star the most important ones.

Chanmi – Stanislaus Chanmugam – a man about ten years his senior, was a major red star. Jason thought he would be the most difficult to convince. Chanmi was a constitutional pessimist. But he was also a bright economist whose opinion could easily sway the others. Fortunately he was also a golfer, and Jason had a plan to use this to his advantage.

Ever since his mentor Iain Stevenson first introduced him to the game, Jason had played golf regularly. According to Pearl, he played to break into the golfing fraternity: the professionals, urbanites, potential politicians practising their cabinet strategies, the new elite. 'He had an insatiable need to belong,' she said, a little dismissively. But, I think, he must have also played because he enjoyed the time it gave him, more or less on his own, to think through his own thoughts. From his journal entries he seemed sometimes intoxicated by his own thoughts, but unable to express them in their full glory to anyone. Hitting a golf ball, watching it define a curve through the air seemed to have released some of the pressure from his head.

A few days earlier he had called Chanmi at his house, 'How about some golf, *men?*'

'When?' Chanmi had answered cautiously.

'Wednesday? Four-thirty? Nine holes?'

There was silence on the line. It was always like that with Chanmi, Jason scrawled in his journal. He always needed a few seconds before speaking; as he did before choosing a club, or hitting a ball, or puncturing a business proposal.

'I thought just a quick trot around.'

Chanmi had agreed. It seemed to Jason a good bit of insurance before the Board meeting. *A stroke of genius.* But he must have also thought a walk around a few holes would relax him. *I really need to calm down,* he added.

On the Tuesday night he seemed to have gone over his financial proposal obsessively. There are incomprehensible calculations in the margins of his journal. Nothing quite like this had ever been attempted in the country before. *Buying into the tavern trade, rather than marrying out of it.* But Jason was sure that his economic assumptions made sense. His main worry was that Chanmi's scepticism might dissuade the others. *I need to give him a feeling that this is as much his idea as mine.*

o

Fig. 3.

It can't be that bad. Surely it can't be that bad. There must be a way, only we can't see it yet. A way of making a space for ourselves where we can make the best of ourselves - we just can't quite see it yet. But things move on and by the time you've plotted your position the world around you has changed and you're running - panting - to catch up. How can you think clearly when you're running? That is the beauty of the past; there it lies on the table: journals, pictures, a candle-glass, a few books of history. You leave it and come back to it and it waits for you - unchanged. You can turn back the pages, look again at the beginning. You can leaf forward and know the end. And you tell the story that they, the people who lived it, could only tell in part.

3 April 1901

No message. No note. Nothing. We have been back three days.

James Barrington knows something - enough. I deemed it best to remain as faithful as possible to the truth. Indeed, now that I have made the journey I do not see how an account depicting myself and Sabir travelling alone into the Sinai would be in the least believable. I did, however, omit the first section of our adventures and had us meet Sharif Pasha's party in the Eastern Desert where, learning of our destination and being bound that way themselves, they took us under their protection.

I relayed this amended version to Sabir, who grasped it with agility, and we rode together to James's house better friends - I

234

Cairo

5 April 1901

My dear Sir Charles,

I have now been back in Shephard's Hotel for almost a week and while it is pleasant enough to have a bathroom, a feather bed and a wardrobe full of clothes, I still miss the simplicity and the grandeur of life in the desert. I am conscious that I have not yet given you a full account of that life I enjoyed for some two weeks - but it was so different from anything that has come within my experience, the scope of it so vast and grand, that I fear my letters will not do it justice.

Now that I am returned to Cairo I find it harder than ever to sit back and listen to the complacencies uttered so uncaringly at the Agency - I fear I am becoming more prickly than is found becoming in a woman.

But on a happier subject my new friends only improve with further acquaintance. Yesterday I went out with Layla al-Baroudi to call on a lady named Nur al-Huda Hamm. I have heard the ladies at the Agency speak of the boredom of the visits they have to pay on occasion to the High Harem, and how after the greetings all the ladies sit silent in a circle and sip coffee until it is time to leave. Well, nothing could be more different from the gathering I was admitted into yesterday in a small jewel-like palace by the Nile. Nur al-Huda Hamm (being barely twenty-two) is younger than both myself and Layla, but she is very serious and formidably well educated. I found nothing in her, though, of that lightness of spirit that I treasure so much in Layla. In fact, she seemed rather sad. I learned later that she had recently consented to return to her husband after a seven-year estrangement and that this was an unwilling return undertaken only because her brother (who is older than she and whom she adores) had taken a vow not to marry until he saw her 'safe in her husband's house'.

In her company we found two ladies from France - one a Madame Richard, who is the widow of a French engineer who worked on the irrigation projects. She had elected to remain in Egypt after his death and has apparently been a companion and a

236

fancy - than when we started out. James was touchingly relieved to see us, although how much of that relief was due to his fear of having to face the Lord's music had some ill befallen us, I cannot tell. However, he forgot himself so far as to put his arm round Sabir's shoulder and punch him playfully a few times. And having changed back into my usual costume (how strange that seemed with all the lacing and fastening and fuss) and sent word to Emily of my return, I sat down - without a chaperone - and told him of our adventures. And perhaps my account showed something more than I intended for as I came to leave he took hold of my hands and said, 'You won't let it go to your head now, Anna, will you?' And I laughed and asked, 'Let what go to my head?' 'All that desert and stars business,' he said. 'You know it won't do.'

As for our earlier return to the old Baroudi house, it was so like a homecoming that tears of joy were in my eyes. It happened that our return coincided with the first day of the Festival marking the end of the Pilgrimage, and under what different circumstances we rattled up to the great door this time. As I slipped inside and threw off my veils, Layla came running to greet me. We embraced as sisters and she held me at arm's length and surveyed my appearance. 'What a handsome young man you have become - and so brown! You will have to put on lots of powder for your next English party.' She laughed. And little Ahmad called out my name and would not be content but I had to carry him and sit him on my knee while I drank my cold sherbet and told his mother about the journey. But when I was dressed again in my Englishman's clothes with my hat clamped firmly down on my head, Layla became uneasy.

'It's still me,' I cried.

'Oh, I know,' she said. 'But all the same . . .'

So I did a pantomime, clucked my heels and kissed the tips of her fingers, and she promised to send me a note; and indeed she has, and I am due to go with her on a visit tomorrow to some ladies of her acquaintance.

Tomorrow I may hear some news of him.

235

kind of tutor to Nur al-Huda Hamm since then. The other is a most interesting lady by the name of Eugène le Brun who is married to an Egyptian Pasha (well, a Turkish Pasha really) by the name of Hussem Rushdi. They make a distinction here between the Notables descended from Turkish lineage and those of Egyptian origin. She has made her home here in Cairo and, I understand, become a Moslem. The occasion of this gathering was a visit from a certain Zerah Fawcett who normally resides in Alexandria. She is originally Syrian and is very well thought of and has published several articles on the 'woman question' - I see you grow restless immediately but I do assure you, dear Sir Charles, that you would find these ladies congenial. They uphold the idea that a woman's first duty is to her family, merely arguing that she can perform this duty better if she is better educated. They also write articles arguing against the enforced seclusion of women and point out that women of the fellah class have always worked side by side with their menfolk and no harm has come to twenty as a result. Madame Fawcett has published a book which is a collection of short biographies of ladies of note - apparently our own Queen Elizabeth and Victoria are among them!

All in all, I do confess, I found the company and conversation most pleasing and quite contrary to the prevailing view of the life of the harem being one of indolence and torpor.

I shall stop now for I feel I am running on and you will start to think I am now become a 'feminist' which I am in truth, as ever, your loving daughter.

I find a changed and invigorated Anna now. Each morning she expects something new and good from the day. The 'something at the heart of it' which had eluded her now beckons her in. As a friend of Layla Hamm al-Baroudi and Madame Hussem Rushdi she is welcomed into the homes and gatherings of the ladies of Cairo. Emily notices the change and is glad to have a happier mistress but concerned that there seems to be no prospect of going home. And indeed, there is no prospect of going home - yet. For, while her mind is busy

237

Fig. 3

with all the new perceptions crowding into it, Anna's heart is waiting for something more.

4 April

Today, in the carriage, I took the occasion to ask Layla whether Sharif Pasha had returned well from the Sinai and to hope that his work had not suffered too much as a result of his absence. She replied that he was indeed back and that she was sure he could manage his work - in any case he did not seem troubled by it. 'He said you rode extremely well and showed no sign of weariness,' she reported. And that was all. But later I understood that he travels tomorrow to Upper Egypt to accompany his mother on her journey home. So now I know there is no possibility of hearing from him for the coming four or five days.

Cairo

8 April 1901

Dear Sir Charles,

I have received yours of 23 March and am glad that you are well and in good spirits and so hopeful of Irish Affairs - at their best, you say, since Parnell died. I hope that makes it up for you - a little - for the events in South Africa. I own when I hear the news from there my immediate concern is for the effect I know it must have on you.

We have had a sand-storm here yesterday and today and it is worse, to my mind, than our London fog. For at least with that you can take refuge in your home and forget its existence. Here, the sand has found its way everywhere, through the most firmly shuttered windows and into the papers and garments in every one of my cabinets. Emily was tugging as she brushed it out of my hair. I find myself thinking longingly of England. For now it is April and everything will be in bloom. I can see the smooth green of the lawns, shimmering with moisture, and I can smell the freshness of the first mowing. I find myself thinking particularly of the magnolia - for its blossoming is so short that I have now missed it for a whole year.

On our last drive I noticed a beautiful tall tree with almost

horizontal branches. It had no leaves but the branches were covered with large, solitary red flowers. I asked Layla its name, to my surprise she did not know but said that presently the red flowers would be surrounded by leaves. Mr S, on the other hand, told me immediately that the tree is a *Bombax malabarium*, also known as a Red Silk-Cotton Tree, and has been imported from tropical Asia. He did not know its name in Arabic. What I find most strange is that he - and others - seem to love this country as much as they dislike its inhabitants. They have a very clear separation in their minds between the two.

I had a somewhat unfriendly exchange two days ago with Mr S. We were walking along the rue Qasr el-Nil and we chanced to pass a coffee-shop where a group of Native gentlemen were engaged in a discussion of something in a newspaper. I saw one of them hand the paper to another, folded as though at a specific article. They paused as we drew near and glanced up at us, resuming their conversation when we had passed. Mr S took this as an occasion to inveigh against 'the older type of Nationalist' to be seen sitting at cafes, indulging in 'seditious talk' and 'embarrassing every passing European gentleman' with his 'bold and libidinous stare'. I said, quite gently, that I had not been aware of anything untoward in the gentlemen's looks and he told me - more or less - that I had not the ability to judge the 'Native character' and that it was my good fortune that I could not understand what they were saying about me even then and that he had it on good authority that they were all rascals who desired nothing more fervently than to dishonour a European gentleman - particularly, I suppose, if she be English. I did not point out that he knows even less Arabic than I, but I asked if he knew any Egyptians personally and he said most decidedly not of 'this type' but he was acquainted with Mr Fars Nime, the Editor of *al-Muqattam*, who is 'a true gentleman and an anglophile', and he has based his views on his conversations with Mr Nime. I confess that as I have not met Mr Nime, I do not know what to make of this.

On Thursday I shall go to the Opera with Madame Rushdi to see Sarah Bernhardt in *La Dame aux camélias*. I shall be in

238

239

a harem box and I am looking forward to it enormously and you may be sure I shall report on the evening at length. Till then, I remain,

10 April

Still nothing. But word from Layla that her Mama is back and would be sure to receive me. So I shall call on them tomorrow.

We had a musical evening at James Barrington's yesterday and Temple Gardner was in fine form. He has a true feeling for music and plays the piano like one inspired. Mrs. Baucher remarked to me privately that he does indeed have soul, she only wished it were occupied in something more to the general good than trying to convert Muslims.

I had a curious conversation with James. Among all the people here, he is the one I feel closest to, in part because he knows of my 'adventures' (although I have promised not to indulge in any more. It was hardly a difficult undertaking, as I have not any longer the need, for - since knowing Layla - I have so many more opportunities to learn about Egypt than wandering round dressed as a man could ever have afforded me) but mostly, I think, because he has a sympathy with people and is not so ready with his judgements and pronouncements. He said that I should be more careful and that I was becoming quite outspoken in defence of the Egyptians and that it would be noticed. 'For example,' he said, 'you were quite nasty to Mr S the other day, and you stopped only because I pinched your arm.' I said I had been sorely tempted to tell Mr S that I had spent sixteen nights under the protection of one of those 'rascals' of whom he spoke and only wished I could expect the same chivalry in an English country house as that I had received from him. 'It won't do, Anna,' he said again, shaking his head. 'You know it won't do. I thought you were sensible.'

And I do believe I am sensible - only I am sensible too of the wrong being done here and that there is a living world which people are refusing to see or even hear about. I know that this sensibility is born of my affection for my new friends but it is none the less trustworthy for that.

240

Cairo

13 April 1901

My dear Caroline,

You have been much in my mind tonight for I have spent the evening at the Cairo Opera House watching the *Divine Bernhardt* - a memorable experience and one you would truly have enjoyed. I went as the guest of Madame Hussein Rushdi, a French lady married to an Egyptian Pasha, and we were both guests of a 'Princess Inge' (although the Princess herself was not here) and so we sat in one of the boxes set aside for the Royal Harem, all red plush and red velvet with the softest wall-light and at the front a delicate wrought-iron screen decorated with tiled flowers to hide us from all eyes while not impeding our view of the House and the Stage. To watch the play and the people while so exquisitely cocooned was - I cannot quite find the words but it was delightful. I did so wish you could have been with me.

We had supper à deux at Madame Rushdi's afterwards. She is very clever and speaks both Arabic and Turkish and I mean to learn a great deal from her. As we were having coffee a servant appeared and whispered to Madame, whereupon she told me that her husband had arrived and was asking whether he could be received. Is that not charming? Upon my giving my assent, the servant disappeared and the Pasha came in shortly afterwards. He is quite elderly, but most charming and courteous and quite approving of my plans to learn Arabic and know all I could of Egypt. He said I could not have chosen a better teacher than Layla Hanum al-Banoudi. I laughed and said I could not claim the wisdom of the choice for it was Fate that had chosen for me, and he replied, 'Ah! What better guide than Fate?' So there we are.

I have been to Layla's home twice now. It is very beautifully furnished in the French style - but, to my mind, the old house in the Arab style is both more beautiful and more naturally suited to the climate here. I went there a few days ago and was introduced to Layla's mother, Zema al-Hanum al-Ghamra, a good-looking, dignified lady of perhaps sixty. She was very kind

241

Fig. 3 (cont)

with all the new perceptions crowding into it, Anna's heart is waiting for something more.

4 April

Today, in the carriage, I took the occasion to ask Layla whether Shanf Pasha had returned well from the Sinai and to hope that his work had not suffered too much as a result of his absence. She replied that he was indeed back and that she was sure he could manage his work – in any case he did not seem troubled by it. 'He said you rode extremely well and showed no sign of weariness,' she reported. And that was all. But later I understood that he travels tomorrow to Upper Egypt to accompany his mother on her journey home. So now I know there is no possibility of hearing from him for the coming four or five days.

Cairo

8 April 1901

Dear Sir Charles,

I have received yours of 23 March and am glad that you are well and in good spirits and so hopeful of Irish Affairs – at their best, you say, since Parnell died. I hope that makes it up for you – a little – for the events in South Africa. I own when I hear the news from there my immediate concern is for the effect I know it must have on you.

We have had a sand-storm here yesterday and today and it is worse, to my mind, than our London fog. For at least with that you can take refuge in your home and forget its existence. Here, the sand has found its way everywhere, through the most firmly shuttered windows and into the papers and garments in every one of my cabinets. Emily was tutting as she brushed it out of my hair. I find myself thinking longingly of England. For now it is April and everything will be in bloom. I can see the smooth green of the lawns, shimmering with moisture, and I can smell the freshness of the first mowing. I find myself thinking particularly of the magnolia – for its blossoming is so short that I have now missed it for a whole year.

On our last drive I noticed a beautiful tall tree with almost

238

a harem box and I am looking forward to it enormously and you may be sure I shall report on the evening at length. Till then, I remain,

10 April

Still nothing. But word from Layla that her Mama is back and would be happy to receive me. So I shall call on them tomorrow.

We had a musical evening at James Barrington's yesterday and Temple Gardner was in fine form. He has a true feeling for music and plays the piano like one inspired. Mrs Butcher remarked to me privately that he does indeed have soul, she only wished it were occupied in something more to the general good than trying to convert Moslems.

I had a curious conversation with James. Among all the people here, he is the one I feel closest to, in part because he knows of my 'adventures' (although I have promised not to indulge in any more. It was hardly a difficult undertaking, as I have not any longer the need, for – since knowing Layla – I have so many more opportunities to learn about Egypt than wandering round dressed as a man could ever have afforded me) but mostly, I think, because he has a sympathy with people and is not so ready with his judgements and pronouncements. He said that I should be more careful and that I was becoming quite outspoken in defence of the Egyptians and that it would be noticed. 'For example,' he said, 'you were quite nasty to Mr S the other day, and you stopped only because I pinched your arm.' I said I had been sorely tempted to tell Mr S that I had spent sixteen nights under the protection of one of those 'rascals' of whom he spoke and only wished I could expect the same chivalry in an English country house as that I had received from him. 'It won't do, Anna,' he said again, shaking his head. 'You know it won't do I thought you were sensible.'

And I do believe I am sensible – only I am sensible too of the wrong being done here and that there is a living world which people are refusing to see or even hear about. I know that this sensibility is born of my affection for my new friends but it is none the less trustworthy for that.

240

horizontal branches. It had no leaves but the branches were covered with large, solitary red flowers. I asked Layla its name, to my surprise she did not know but said that presently the red flowers would be surrounded by leaves. Mr S, on the other hand, told me immediately that the tree is a *Bombax malabricum*, also known as a Red Silk-Cotton Tree, and has been imported from tropical Asia. He did not know its name in Arabic. What I find most strange is that he – and others – seem to love this country as much as they dislike its inhabitants. They have a very clear separation in their minds between the two.

I had a somewhat unfriendly exchange two days ago with Mr S. We were walking along the rue Qasr el-Nil and we chanced to pass a coffee-shop where a group of Native gentlemen were engaged in a discussion of something in a newspaper: I saw one of them hand the paper to another, folded as though at a specific article. They paused as we drew near and glanced up at us, resuming their conversation when we had passed. Mr S took this as an occasion to inveigh against 'the older type of Nationalist' to be seen sitting at cafés, indulging in 'seditious talk' and 'embarrassing every passing European gentlewoman' with his 'bold and libidinous stare'. I said, quite gently, that I had not been aware of anything untoward in the gentlemen's looks and he told me – more or less – that I had not the ability to judge the 'Native character' and that it was my good fortune that I could not understand what they were saying about me even then and that he had it on good authority that they were all rascals who desired nothing more fervently than to dishonour a European gentlewoman – particularly, I suppose, if she be English. I did not point out that he knows even less Arabic than I, but I asked if he knew any Egyptians personally and he said most decidedly not of 'this type' but he was acquainted with Mr Fans Nimr, the Editor of *al-Muqattam*, who is 'a true gentleman and an anglophile', and he has based his views on his conversations with Mr Nimr. I confess that as I have not met Mr Nimr, I do not know what to make of this.

On Thursday I shall go to the Opera with Madame Rushdi to see Sarah Bernhardt in *La Dame aux camélias*. I shall be in

239

Cairo

13 April 1901

My dear Caroline,

You have been much in my mind tonight for I have spent the evening at the Cairo Opera House watching the *Divine Bernhardt* – a memorable experience and one you would truly have enjoyed. I went as the guest of Madame Hussein Rushdi, a French lady married to an Egyptian Pasha, and we were both guests of a 'Princess Inge' (although the Princess herself was not there) and so we sat in one of the boxes set aside for the Royal Harem, all red plush and red velvet with the softest wall-light and at the front a delicate wrought-iron screen decorated with gilded flowers to hide us from all eyes while not impeding our view of the House and the Stage. To watch the play and the people while so exquisitely cocooned was – I cannot quite find the words but it was delightful. I did so wish you could have been with me.

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241

Fig. 3 (cont)

and welcoming, but we did not have much conversation, as she does not speak French and my Arabic is as yet limited to greetings and expressions of politesse. But it was charming to watch her with her grandson. Layla complains that she spoils him terribly but I cannot see that the child is any the worse for it. He takes being with adults as completely natural and comes and goes as he pleases while his nanny sits in a corner and calls him to her from time to time to wipe his face or straighten his shirt or – more often – merely to give him a kiss. I observed her blowing in his ear and when I asked Layla she said, 'Oh, she thinks that will blow away any evil spirits!'

You will gather that I am having a most pleasant time. I still see my friends at the Agency but these new experiences of being 'in' Egyptian life, as it were, are – for the moment – of more interest to me. Perhaps merely because of their novelty. I wonder whether, if one of my new friends were to visit us in England, they would find us as interesting or as pleasant.

I have not received any letters from you for a long time. Pray do write and tell me all your news for I fear you may be forgetting your loving friend,

20 April

Today is the first day of the Moslem year 1319. There is still no word. I know he is in Cairo for this much I managed to learn from his sister. What can I – what must I believe? I go over our conversations. I reread my own journal. A friendship grew – of that I am in no doubt. And certainly after our conversation in the garden of the monastery I no longer felt my presence burdensome to him. He did not seek me out, it is true, but he cared for my welfare – but then he would have cared for the welfare of any stranger thrown into his care. We did not have another conversation like it – but then circumstances can hardly be said to have permitted such an occurrence.

I go over our farewell at the edge of the desert as – clad once more in my black veils – I waited for the boat that was to take me back to Suez. He merely waited silently at my side. He spoke to Sabir and to Mutlaq, instructing them, I imagine, on the

242

continued need for caution until we should arrive at his house in Cairo. And then, as the boat drew near, I heard him say, 'It has been a pleasure travelling with you, Lady Anna.' He did not wait for my reply but turned and mounted and rode – at a gallop – back into the desert.

I did not question but that I would see him again. I thought that he would call. I waited for a note. Layla and Zeinab Hanun are most welcoming and friendly but they do not speak of him except naturally, in passing.

MY BROTHER TOOK ANNA INTO the Sinai. She saw the desert and lived its life and visited the Monastery of St Catherine and climbed Jabal Moussa and her thirst for adventure was watered and she returned safely to my father's house here in Cairo. How happy I was to see her – and how happy she was to see me! She told me about her journey and I felt then in her mentioning of his name and her praise of him that my brother had left a good impression on her spirit – and I would almost say more.

When I met Abeih Sharif after his return I asked about the journey and all he said was, 'It ended safely, al-hamdu-l-illah.' I tried to lead him on a little and asked, 'And was Lady Anna a good rider?' 'Very good,' he said. 'Was she any trouble?' 'No, not at all.' I told him she had recounted to me the story of the trip and that she had praised him for the care with which he had looked after her – and he said nothing. But I noticed, as the days went by, that he seemed more abstracted and restless than usual. And when my mother came back from Minya she noticed it too.

And it happened that I was sitting with him and I mentioned that I had taken Anna to visit Nur al-Huda Hanim and that Madame Hussein Rushdi was there and what a pleasant time we had all had together and how happy Hussein Basha's marriage seemed to be, and he looked at me sharply and said, 'Madame Hussein Rushdi is a Frenchwoman. There's a difference.'

243

So I asked innocently, 'A difference between what?' 'A Frenchwoman and Englishwoman – in our circumstances,' he said.

'Ah, but you always said we should judge people as individuals,' I said, 'not as examples of a culture or a race.'

'So one should go with one's own feet looking for trouble?' he asked.

'I think in this case,' I laughed, 'trouble has come looking for you.'

'Thank you, my sister,' was all he said.

Cairo

21 April, 1901

Dear Caroline,

I received with joy yours of the 7th. I had heard from Sir Charles about poor Bron Herbert losing his leg in the Boer War and now yours with news of Miss Herbert joining the Theosophists and going off to live in California – how odd that two such things should happen in such a short space of time in one family! Do you think, perhaps, that one might have led to the other? I wish you were here and we could sit and converse with one another for I have so many new impressions now, but so vague that they seem to resist being rendered solid on paper. But I suppose it is too late in the year for it to be practicable for you to come to Egypt – even if you were willing.

The weather is starting to heat up now, although it is not yet anything like the heat I have heard described. I am making a study of the trees and plants – I saw a hoopoe flitting around on the polo ground at the Club at Ghezirah the other day. I am enclosing a drawing I did of him for you.

Cairo

24 April 1901

Dear Caroline,

I am just returned from the strangest party and wanted immediately to tell you about it. It is a kind of Salon, literary and political, held by a Princess Nazli Fadhil at her palace from time

244

to time. She is the niece (I think) of Muhammad Ali himself, and indeed is (again I think) quite old – in age but not at all in spirit.

Normally women are not admitted to her Salon, but I expressed such curiosity when I heard of it that Eugène (Madame Rushdi) persuaded her husband to ask the Princess's permission for me to attend. Permission duly granted, I accompanied Hussein Pasha there tonight.

There were maybe ten gentlemen there, Hussein Pasha and a Mr Amin being the only Egyptians. Our own Mr Young was there (he recounted a most amusing story that Mabel Cautland had told him. It appears that while shopping for some necessities at Harrods on her last visit to London she had fallen into conversation with an American lady tourist. After a while the lady, understanding that her new acquaintance did not live permanently in London, asked where she was from. 'From Egypt,' said Miss Cautland. 'Why, isn't that wonderful,' the American lady said, 'and you not black at all!') and also Mr Barrington, two French, two Italians, a German and a Russian. I see you frown, but since the Princess was there it was not improper, surely? She is an extraordinary lady: she wore a skirt and blouse in European fashion, her hair was coloured exceeding black, she smoked incessantly and spoke in a husky drawl in French, English, Turkish and Italian (using Arabic only to speak to the maids). She was amused by me, I think, and insisted on referring to me as 'la petite veuve' and 'la veuve'. The talk flew wildly from Feminism to the Cinématographe (of which apparently there are regular performances in Cairo and Alexandria) to the navete of Americans to the Boxer Rebellion to the interpretation of dreams to Karl Marx to the most recent discovery of Egyptian mummies – and heaven knows what else. And all the while the champagne corks were popping. Suddenly she calls in one of her maids (they are all dressed in the most sumptuous silk robes) and gives an order and without further ado a small ensemble is gathered of musicians with various instruments, of which the only one at all familiar to me was the lute – but the most important one of all was a kind of drum, held under

245

Fig. 3 (cont.)

Fig. 4.

Cairo, May 1997

I am obsessed with Anna Winterbourne's brown journal. She has become as real to me as Dorothea Brooke. I need to fill in the gaps, to know who the people are of whom she speaks, to paint in the backdrop against which she is living her life here, on the page in front of me.

I go to the British Council Library, to Dar al-Kutub, to the second-hand bookstalls even though they've been moved from Sur el-Azbakiyya up to Darrasa and browsing among them is no longer so pleasant. I even write to my son in London and ask for cuttings from old issues of *The Times*.

And I piece a story together.

London, October 1898 to March 1899

The light is like nothing Anna has ever seen before. Day after day it draws her back. Day after day it scatters itself on the rich carpets, on the stone or marble floors, on the straw matting. It streams through the latticed woodwork, tracing its patterns on mosaic walls and inlaid doors and layered fabrics, illuminating flowers and faces and outstretched or folded hands.

Anna looks down at her own hands, folded tight in her lap: her wedding band gleaming dull against the pale skin, her knuckles raised ridges of paler white. She unclenches her hands, stretches out the fingers and replaces the hands gently, open, on her knees.

26

He is not himself. I have heard this phrase before, and now it falls to me to use it. Edward, my husband, is not himself.

For seven months I followed, with Sir Charles, all news of the events in the Soudan. For seven months I prayed for his safety and for his return unharmed. And now he is back I hardly know him. He is grown thin, and though his face is flushed with the sun of the south, it is as though a pallor lurks beneath.

Mr Winthrop has seen him and says he has caught some infection of the tropics and shall be well again with tranquillity and nourishing food and, later, exercise. Upon his insistence (Mr Winthrop's) I go out for a walk in the air each day. And I have taken to walking to the South Kensington Museum, which is a most beautiful and calming place and where I have come upon some paintings by Mr Frederick Lewis. They are possessed of such luminous beauty that I feel in their presence as though a gentle hand caressed my very soul.

On a low bed, pressed into a pile of silken cushions, a woman lies sleeping. Above her, a vast curtain hangs, through the brilliant billowing green of which the fluid shadows of the lattice shutters can be made out, and beyond them, the light. One wedge of sunshine – from the open window above her head – picks out the sleeper's face and neck, the cream-coloured chemise revealed by the open buttons of her tight bodice. A small amulet shines at her throat. Anna glances at her watch: she has ten more minutes.

Today I found Sir William Harcourt in the hall, taking his leave of Edward and Sir Charles. Sir Charles, shaking him repeatedly by the hand, said (in his usual robust fashion) that it was a sad day for England when a man like Sir William resigns from the Leadership because of the conversion of the Party to Jingo Imperialism. He spoke harshly of Rosebery and Chamberlain calling them men of war and Sir William said it was the spirit of the age and he was grown too old to fight it. Edward became much agitated and retired to his chamber. He refused to allow me to sit with him or bring him tea.

27

Fig. 4.

Fig. 5.

17 November, 1997

Tawasi,

Isabel is pregnant.

'I told you it was meant to be,' she said on the phone last night. 'We've been seeing each other – but it was the first time that did it. I'm three months gone. I'm sorry I didn't tell you before but I wanted to be absolutely sure. I promised myself I'd tell you at three months.'

'Isabel, that's wonderful!' I said. Then I said, 'Isn't it?'

'Yes,' she said. 'Yes, I'm madly happy.'

'And 'Omar?' I asked.

'Well.' She hesitated. 'He – actually, he's quite upset. He didn't quite ask if I wanted to keep the baby. He didn't do that. But he is very concerned at the fact of being fifty-five.'

'Give him time,' I said.

'Absolutely,' she said. 'And a lot of space. I've not suggested either of us moving in. He can take his own time. I wait till he calls me – mostly.'

Trapped, I think. He must be feeling partly trapped, partly proud, partly what shall I tell the kids? His kids are grown up – older than mine. Will they be amused? Or resentful? He cannot have told Isabel about his affair with Jasmine yet; she would have told me. He must have put aside his fears – since he was seeing her anyway. But this will bring them all back. Father and grandfather in one – like Rameses or Akhenaton or any one of the great pharaohs. He would not appreciate

432

him perhaps excessively anxious to avoid any whisper of a link to the British – I believe he may have joined it. As it is, he remains a free man and publishes his writings where he chooses and works on those projects on which both the Watani and the Ummah are united.

We are very close now to seeing a School of Fine Art inaugurated. The Khedive has appointed Prince Ahmad Fuad Chairman of the Council for the National University and my husband and Ya'qub Artin Basha are working on its Charter. I believe on the whole that the tally for 1907 has been a good one, with the pardon for the Denshawai prisoners coming, as it does, at the end of the year. I wonder if it is any comfort to the widows and orphans of that village that the brutality committed against them has led to the fall of Cromer and has reverberated across the world? The odd thing is that Cromer was by all accounts most surprised and disappointed when he returned to find feeling in all quarters so united against him and he persisted to the end in ascribing this to the schemings of the Khedive rather than to his own actions. But enough! Enough of politics, as Zehab Hanim constantly says. Poor lady, her life has been completely governed by the politics first of her husband and then of her son. But she is happy enough now with three children running about the house. She looks at me kindly and says, 'Look at the wisdom of God, my daughter, sending you from far countries to my son after all those barren years.'

How I wish it were possible to say 'Enough of politics', truly and forever. I find myself thinking sometimes of life in London, occupied with nothing more than choosing the day's menu, attending to the children and doing odd things about the house. Perhaps walking in the Park. Perhaps going out in the evening to the theatre or to dinner with friends. And now, in December, I think of Christmas trees and lights and breaking off from shopping to have lunch with a friend. But when I imagine myself in Thurloe Place I see Nur come dancing down the stairs. When I enter the foyer of a theatre it is my husband's arm on which I lean. When I go into Harrods it is to choose a present for him and another for Zehab Hanum. And when I stop for lunch

434

that. He is a modern man: an Arab-American. And, I tell myself again, he is not her father.

She says she cannot make plans to come back just yet. She wants me to go over. I say, when I've finished. I think I am fairly close. Cromer has resigned and Eldon Gorst has taken over. In the new, more conciliatory atmosphere, four official political parties have sprung into being. The first, naturally, is the pro-British Free National Party with *al-Muqattam* as its mouthpiece. Its slogan is 'The Safety of the Fatherland and the Nation lies in Peace with the Reforming Occupiers', and it is generally despised. Then Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid and some of the notables and high-ranking civil servants form Hizb al-Ummah, the Party of the Nation. They establish *al-Garida* as its newspaper and call for gradual independence from Britain, ending Turkish rule, investing in education and industry, and government by constitution. Mustafa Kamel then forms the real Nationalist Party, *al-Hizb al-Watani*, speaking through *al-Liwa* and calling for immediate independence and a constitutional government within the Ottoman state. Finally the Khedive, acting through Sheikh Ali Yusuf and his *al-Mu'ayyad*, forms his own party, Hizb al-Islah. Its programme is immediate independence and a constitutional government but it soft-pedals on the Turkish ties and floats the idea of an Arab caliphate with the Khedive as the caliph.

*And my husband of course will join none of them. The Palace and the British parties are out of the question. He dislikes *al-Watani's* cleaving to the Ottomans, for he sees more and more of a divergence between the interests of Egypt and those of Turkey. The Hizb al-Ummah would have been the most natural place for him, indeed several of his friends are founding members, but other Parties will have it that the interests of the Ummah's members – being among the more wealthy Notables and Civil Servants – are close to those of the British and there is some talk of Cromer having given the Party his blessing before he left. Were it not for the fact that I am his wife – a fact which renders*

433

it is Layla with whom I compare purchases and lists across the table.

AND IF I INTERPRET ANNA'S presence among us as a sign that He willed good for our house, how then do I interpret those other, later events? Events that perhaps found their roots in that very presence. I do not know. I leave that question to other, wiser minds than mine. We lived our lives together and hardly a day passed but we were in each other's company for some of its hours.

The University, as everyone knows, was started in 1326/1908. What many people no longer remember is that in its first year it held special classes for ladies on Fridays. Nabawiyya Musa, Malak Hifni Nasif, Labiba Hashim and I were selected to conduct these classes. And we invited Anna to talk about art and Madame Hussein Rushdi to talk about European history. Anna joked that the harem had made a working woman of her, for she was constantly occupied in preparing for her classes, writing for the magazine and translating from and into English for my brother. She had information from her friends in Britain and he had a knowledge of Egypt, a clear mind and a gift for logical yet impassioned argument. And then she had a talent for the English style and so each article they published struck a true blow.

Mustafa Kamel Basha's death was a great setback to the country, but for a while it seemed that his work would be continued by Muhammad Bey Farid. My husband worked with him on the affairs of the workers and during 1908 we succeeded in establishing four trade unions. And with the CUP revolution in Turkey and the declaration of the Turkish Constitution and the Ottoman Parliament, it seemed that change was truly coming. The British Government refused to allow Egypt to have a Representative at the Parliament, and at the Army Parade in November the students and the people burst into spontaneous cries of 'Vive l'indépendence!'

435

Fig 5

And our domestic life was happy. My mother was like a hen with a great brood of chicks, my father was content to sit and watch Anna weave her magical tapestry, and though we were only blessed with one child each, the children grew up and with them grew their loving affection for us and for each other.

Nur is on her father's knee. She has pulled his gold watch out of his pocket and is staring at it thoughtfully. Thoughtfully he regards his daughter. In the silence Layla looks up from her book and reads her brother's mind:

'May He preserve you for her, ya Abeih, and you see her a bride. You'll deliver her with your own hand to Ahmad.'

He pays attention. 'How do we know they are for each other?' he asks his sister with a smile. 'Might they not meet other people and prefer them?'

'You can see they already adore each other,' Layla says. 'They can't bear to be separated for a day. When they -'

'Bass ya Sett Layla,' Mabrouka cuts in. 'The knowledge of what's hidden is with God alone.'

'And where have you popped up from all of a sudden?' Layla asks -

There is a great crying and wailing coming towards the house and I start up from my vision of ninety years ago as a loud hammering shakes my door. I run through the hall and fling open the door. Outside there is 'Am Abu el-Ma'ati's daughter, the midwife from the clinic and other women, a swarm of children following behind. The women are bareheaded, their black tarhas hanging round their necks.

'They've taken my father, ya Sett Hanim,' 'Am Abu el-Ma'ati's daughter cries. 'The soldiers came and they took him and took the men of the village. Help us, ya Sett Hanim! Who can we go to? Who can we speak to? God will avenge us -' She sits on the ground weeping, beating her head with her hands.

'Why?' I cry. 'Why? What happened? Where have they taken them?'

436

'Because of what happened in Luxor, ya Sett,' the midwife says. 'They've rounded up the men -'

'What happened in Luxor?'

'Don't you know what's happening? The world is standing on a leg -'

'Sett Amal works all day.' Khadra comes to my side. 'How can she know?'

'They killed the tourists at Luxor. Fifty or a hundred, we don't know. At the temple. And there was a battle and shooting and now the government has turned on the people -'

'They took my father, they took my father -'

'What's our village got to do with this?'

'They've turned on the whole of the Sa'id, not our village alone. War, ya Sett Hanim, war. Seventeen men they've taken from our village. And what are people to do? Where can we go?'

'Where did they take them? The police station?'

'The central police station, the markaz.'

'I'll get dressed and go.'

I run inside and stand in the middle of my room with my heart beating fast. All the things I've read - the things I've heard about what goes on when people fall into the hands of the police swirl round in my mind: the stripping, the blindfolds, the whipping - I sit on the bed and close my eyes and force myself to calm down. When I open my eyes, my mother is looking at me sadly out of her portrait. I take a deep breath and put on city clothes, stockings, a silk scarf. I brush my hair, put on some lipstick and put pearls in my ears. I pick up my bag, then on an impulse I take my British passport from the dressing-table drawer and put it in the bag next to my Egyptian ID card and driving licence.

All the women want to come with me but one woman knows the way to the police station so I take her and Abu el-Ma'ati's daughter and Khadra. My hands are shaking and I grip the wheel tight. I can feel myself starting to cry and I force the tears down and hold myself rigid. As we come to the edge

437

Fig. 5 (cont)

Fig. 6

IT WAS TIME to lay it all down. Before Paul D came and sat on her porch steps, words whispered in the keeping room had kept her going. Helped her endure the chastising ghost; refurbished the baby faces of Howard and Buglar and kept them whole in the world because in her dreams she saw only their parts in trees; and kept her husband shadowy but *there*—somewhere. Now Halle's face between the butter press and the churn swelled larger and larger, crowding her eyes and making her head hurt. She wished for Baby Suggs' fingers molding her nape, reshaping it, saying, "Lay em down, Sethe. Sword and shield. Down. Down. Both of em down. Down by the riverside. Sword and shield. Don't study war no more. Lay all that mess down. Sword and shield." And under the pressing fingers and the quiet instructive voice, she would. Her heavy knives of defense against misery, regret, gall and hurt, she placed one by one on a bank where clear water rushed on below.

Nine years without the fingers or the voice of Baby Suggs was too much. And words whispered in the keeping room were too little. The butter-smear'd face of a man God made none sweeter than demanded more: an arch built or a robe sewn. Some fixing ceremony. Sethe decided to go to the Clearing, back where Baby Suggs had danced in sunlight.

Before 124 and everybody in it had closed down, veiled over and shut away; before it had become the plaything of spirits and the home of the chafed, 124 had been a cheerful, buzzing house where

B E L O V E D

Finally she called the women to her. "Cry," she told them. "For the living and the dead. Just cry." And without covering their eyes the women let loose.

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.

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.

She told them 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.

"Here," she said, "in this here place, 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. 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.

Baby Suggs, holy, loved, cautioned, fed, chastised and soothed. Where not one but two pots simmered on the stove; where the lamp burned all night long. Strangers rested there while children tried on their shoes. Messages were left there, for whoever needed them was sure to stop in one day soon. Talk was low and to the point—for Baby Suggs, holy, didn't approve of extra. "Everything depends on knowing how much," she said, and "Good is knowing when to stop."

It was in front of *that* 124 that Sethe climbed off a wagon, her newborn tied to her chest, and felt for the first time the wide arms of her mother-in-law, who had made it to Cincinnati. Who 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, one who visited pulpits and opened her great heart to those who could use it. In winter and fall she carried it to AME's and Baptists, Holinesses and Sanctifieds, the Church of the Redeemer and the Redeemed. Uncalled, unrobed, unanointed, she let her great heart beat in their presence. When warm weather came, Baby Suggs, holy, followed by every black man, woman and child who could make it through, took her great heart to the Clearing—a wide-open place cut deep in the woods nobody knew for what at the end of a path known only to deer and whoever cleared the land in the first place. In the heat of every Saturday afternoon, she sat in the clearing while the people waited among the trees.

After situating herself on a huge flat-sided rock, Baby Suggs bowed her head and prayed silently. The company watched her from the trees. They knew she was ready when she put her stick down. Then she shouted, "Let the children come!" and they ran from the trees toward her.

"Let your mothers hear you laugh," she told them, and the woods rang. The adults looked on and could not help smiling.

Then "Let the grown men come," she shouted. They stepped out one by one from among the ringing trees.

"Let your wives and your children see you dance," she told them, and groundlife shuddered under their feet.

B 9

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." Saying no more, she stood up then and danced with her twisted hip the rest of what her heart had to say while the others opened their mouths and gave her the music. Long notes held until the four-part harmony was perfect enough for their deeply loved flesh.

Sethe wanted to be there now. At the least to listen to the spaces that the long-ago singing had left behind. At the most to get a clue from her husband's dead mother as to what she should do with her sword and shield now, dear Jesus, now nine years after Baby Suggs, holy, proved herself a liar, dismissed her great heart and lay in the keeping-room bed roused once in a while by a craving for color and not for another thing.

"Those white things have taken all I had or dreamed," she said, "and broke my heartstrings too. There is no bad luck in the world but whitefolks." 124 shut down and put up with the venom of its ghost. No more lamp all night long, or neighbors dropping by. No low conversations after supper. No watched barefoot children playing in the shoes of strangers. Baby Suggs, holy, believed she had lied. There was no grace—imaginary or real—and no sunlit dance in a Clearing could change that. Her faith, her love, her imagination and her great big old heart began to collapse twenty-eight days after her daughter-in-law arrived.

Yet it was to the Clearing that Sethe determined to go—to pay tribute to Halle. Before the light changed, while it was still the green blessed place she remembered: misty with plant steam and the decay of berries.

She put on a shawl and told Denver and Beloved to do likewise. All three set out late one Sunday morning, Sethe leading, the girls trotting behind, not a soul in sight.

When they reached the woods it took her no time to find the path through it because big-city revivals were held there regularly now, complete with food-laden tables, banjos and a tent. The old path was a track now, but still arched over with trees dropping buckeyes onto the grass below.

There was nothing to be done other than what she had done, but

Fig. 6

Fig. 7

I AM BELOVED and she is mine. I see her take flowers away from leaves she puts them in a round basket the leaves are not for her she fills the basket she opens the grass I would help her but the clouds are in the way how can I say things that are pictures I am not separate from her 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 the man on my face is dead his face is not mine his mouth smells sweet but his eyes are locked 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

BELOVED

I do not see her until he locks his eyes and dies on my face we are that way there is no breath coming from his mouth and the place where breath should be is sweet-smelling the others do not know he is dead I know his song is gone now I love his pretty little teeth instead

I cannot lose her again my dead man was in the way like the noisy clouds when he dies on my face I can see hers she is going to smile at me she is going to her sharp earrings are gone the men without skin are making loud noises they push my own man through they do not push the woman with my face through she goes in they do not push her she goes in the little hill is gone she was going to smile at me she was going to a hot thing

They are not crouching now we are they are floating on the water they break up the little hill and push it through I cannot find my pretty teeth I see the dark face that is going to smile at me it is my dark face that is going to smile at me the iron circle is around our neck she does not have sharp earrings in her ears or a round basket she goes in the water with my face

I am standing in the rain falling the others are taken I am not taken I am falling like the rain is I watch him eat inside I am crouching to keep from falling with the rain I am going to be in pieces he hurts where I sleep he puts his finger there I drop the food and break into pieces she took my face away there is no one to want me to say me my name I wait on the bridge because she is under it there is night and there is day again again night day night day I am waiting no iron circle is around my neck no boats go on this water no men without skin my dead man is not floating here his teeth are down there where the blue is and the grass so is the face I want the face that is going to smile at me it is going to in the day diamonds are in the water where she is and turtles in the night I hear chewing and swallowing and laughter it belongs to me she is the laugh I am the laughter I see her face which is mine it is

his body which is a small bird trembling there is no room to tremble so he is not able to die my own dead man is pulled away from my face I miss his pretty white points

We are not crouching now we are standing but my legs are like my dead man's eyes I cannot fall because there is no room to the men without skin are making loud noises I am not dead the bread is sea-colored I am too hungry to eat it the sun closes my eyes those able to die are in a pile I cannot find my man the one whose teeth I have loved a hot thing the little hill of dead people a hot thing the men without skin push them through with poles the woman is there with the face I want the face that is mine they fall into the sea which is the color of the bread she has nothing in her ears if I had the teeth of the man who died on my face I would bite the circle around her neck bite it away I know she does not like it now there is room to crouch and to watch the crouching others it is the crouching that is now always now inside the woman with my face is in the sea a hot thing

In the beginning I could see her I could not help her because the clouds were in the way in the beginning I could see her the shining in her ears she does not like the circle around her neck I know this I look hard at her so she will know that the clouds are in the way I am sure she saw me I am looking at her see me she empties out her eyes I am there in the place where her face is and telling her the noisy clouds were in my way she wants her earrings she wants her round basket I want her face a hot thing in the beginning the women are away from the men and the men are away from the women storms rock us and mix the men into the women and the women into the men that is when I begin to be on the back of the man for a long time I see only his neck and his wide shoulders above me I am small I love him because he has a song when he turned around to die I see the teeth he sang through his singing was soft his singing is of the place where a woman takes flowers away from their leaves and puts them in a round basket before the clouds she is crouching near us but

213

the face that was going to smile at me in the place where we crouched now she is going to her face comes through the water a hot thing her face is mine she is not smiling she is chewing and swallowing I have to have my face I go in the grass opens she opens it I am in the water and she is coming there is no round basket no iron circle around her neck she goes up where the diamonds are I follow her we are in the diamonds which are her earrings now my face is coming I have to have it I am looking for the join I am loving my face so much my dark face is close to me I want to join she whispers to me she whispers I reach for her chewing and swallowing she touches me she knows I want to join she chews and swallows me I am gone now I am her face my own face has left me I see me swim away a hot thing I see the bottoms of my feet I am alone I want to be the two of us I want the join

I come out of blue water after the bottoms of my feet swim away from me I come up I need to find a place to be the air is heavy I am not dead I am not there is a house there is what she whispered to me I am where she told me I am not dead I sit the sun closes my eyes when I open them I see the face I lost Sethe's is the face that left me Sethe sees me see her and I see the smile her smiling face is the place for me it is the face I lost she is my face smiling at me doing it at last a hot thing now we can join a hot thing

Fig. 7

Fig. 8

Scene 6

Friday, 3 August 1979

- (1) Large picture of abdominal area of pink dress: a slim waist flaring out into hips. Text: 'Here is a woman.'
- (2) Superimpose line-drawing of female reproductive organs. Text: 'These are the reproductive organs of a grown woman. This is the uterus - also known as the womb and the home of the child "beit el-weld". This is the vagina - and up here are the ovaries.'
- (3) Superimpose drawing of released ovum in fallopian tube. Text: 'The ovaries' job is to release the eggs out of which every new baby is created. God in His wisdom has given each woman two ovaries. Each ovary, with the grace of God, produces an egg every eight weeks. The ovaries alternate in the production of eggs.' Here invite audience participation by asking: 'So how often is a new egg released into the womb?' Correct answer: every four weeks.
It is possible here (depending on time available, sex and qualification of extension personnel and other situational factors) to invite more audience participation by asking the women whether they do, in fact, get their menstrual periods every twenty-eight days. Or more? Or less? After discussion, assure them that variations from twenty-eight days are normal.
- (4) Superimpose line-drawing of spermatozoa swimming up the vagina. Text: 'When copulation takes place between a man and his wife, the sperm of the man, by the will of God, are released into the woman. They swim up through the vagina and through the womb and eventually - if such be the will of God - one of them will meet the ripe egg up here in the tube. The sperm is a human cell. And the egg is a human cell. The sperm and the egg desire union even as the man and the woman desire union - and out of this union a new human being is, by the will of God, created. Now, if for any reason a man and his wife have decided -'

Oh dear - how is this going to go down now?

If for any reason a couple have decided to thwart the will of God already mentioned - how many? one, two, five times above, if, for any reason, a couple have decided to render this twin miracle of ovum

and sperm as nought, we will show you how to implement that blasphemous decision.

Shit. This won't do. OK. Go back and cross out all those references to the will and grace of God. Now what? Now it doesn't sound like the way anyone would talk in Arabic, let alone in a village. Far too definite and cocksure - so to speak. Positively asking for misfortune. Asya sits back in her chair and throws her pencil on the desk. Behind her, the window looks out on the bustle and the one-way traffic of Long Acre. At her left hand is a pile of rough sketches of figures using a variety of contraceptive devices. Next to them is a pile of detailed medical notes on the use, reliability and side-effects of each device. And next to that is another pile containing the directives of the Egyptian Higher Council for Family Planning concerning the formulation of the messages it would use in its forthcoming campaign. A fourth pile contains a number of pertinent quotes from the Qur'an and the Traditions compiled by Citadel Publishing Inc.'s religious advisor for the Visual Aids Project from the School of Oriental and African Studies. On the desk also are an A3 sketch-pad, five sharpened pencils and the blunted one Asya has just thrown down and a large Staedtler eraser. She has finally learned why she should call them 'erasers' and not 'rubbers' as she used to. At her right hand there is a telephone and she is waiting for it to ring. She and Nadia had left the house together that morning and her aunt had turned into the hospital while Asya had crossed the Cromwell Road and gone on to catch the underground from Earls Court station. That had been - Asya checks her watch - almost three hours ago and Nadia still hadn't phoned to tell her how her uncle was doing. Does that mean something has gone wrong? She reaches for the handbag hanging from the back of her chair and rummages in it for her address book. She picks up the receiver and dials the hospital.

'Good morning. You have a patient by the name of Hamid Mursi who was admitted for surgery yesterday. Last night he was in intensive care. I want to find out how he is, please.'

'Mr Haygold's.'

'Yes, I'm his niece.'

'No, that would be my aunt: his sister.'

The door opens and Gus comes in, bleary-eyed and grinning. He waves a blue envelope at her. She smiles and pats the desk and he puts the envelope down and leaves, giving her a wobbly 'thumbs-up' on his way out.

'Yes? He's still in there?'

Fig. 8

fig. 9

under the official Prison Organisation. I went there and of course they said he was not there and they did not know anything about him and all that. However, Daddy spoke to some people and two of our friends who are lawyers helped and I was able to see him yesterday. I am telling you all this because you are in England and in publishing and have friends in newspapers and all that. It may be a naïve thought but perhaps you could do something? I saw him yesterday and he said el-Prof was there too. He almost could not speak. He could not look at me. They have all been tortured: they have been beaten everywhere, *everywhere* on their bodies and their heads, they have been held down and raped, they have been hung upside-down -

The hand holding the letter falls into Asya's lap. Asya lifts her feet off the desk and sits up straight. Her heart is beating so hard she almost cannot breathe. She stands up and walks to the window. In the street people come and go. A delivery van is parked on the yellow line and the driver is arguing with the traffic warden. The sun shines. She walks back to the desk and sits down. She smooths the letter out and reads.

- they have been hung upside down for hours and had live wires put inside them. He said Zuku was paralysed from the waist down and that he himself was so afraid, he would do anything to get out. But there is nothing he can do. He was crying and he could not look at me at all.

If you can do something and need detailed information or anything at all, write to the address on the back of this envelope before 7 August. If you cannot do anything don't worry, I will get him out somehow.

I cannot believe how your newspapers there keep making like Sadat is this wonderful humanitarian hero. The only people he is 'humanitarian' to are the Israelis.

I am sure you will not tell Khalu any of this now. Ahmad is fine and looking forward to seeing 'Tante Asya'.

Much love,
Deena

32

Scene 7

Later that evening

He is sitting in a metallic chair. From the armpits down he is swaddled in white wraps. One arm is on an armrest and his head is leaning against the back of the chair. He appears to be part of a big, complex piece of machinery; hundreds of different-coloured wires and tubes loop themselves around him, attach themselves to him, enter him and exit to loop around again and plug themselves into a number of large instruments of varying heights that surround him. Behind his back red pulses appear and disappear and green dotted lines hesitate their way across a bank of screens. His mouth hangs slightly open and he appears to be asleep. He is almost bald. Asya peers further into the room. She can make out two figures lying in their beds with sheets and blankets over them. A green curtain is drawn across the far right-hand corner. At a desk, with her back to the glass panel through which Asya is looking, a uniformed nurse sits working by the light of a desk-lamp. Asya looks at her uncle. His face is bruised and swollen. He looks strange. Remote, yet terribly familiar. She has seen this face before, this bruised and swollen face. Only last time it was more vivid: there were more purple patches and weals and clots of red. And the swelling on the left side had been so exaggerated that Asya had not believed that Khalu would ever look like himself again. But this time he looks so weak. His one wrist is frail and thin. He had not seemed so weak, so tired then. But that was many years ago and he is older now.

Scene 8

May 1967

Cairo

In May of every year, Egypt is gripped by exam fever. The exam that matters more than all the others put together is the General Certificate of Secondary Education: the Thanawiyya 'Ama. Your performance in this exam, taken at the age of seventeen, determines which college and which

33

fig. 9

Fig. 10.

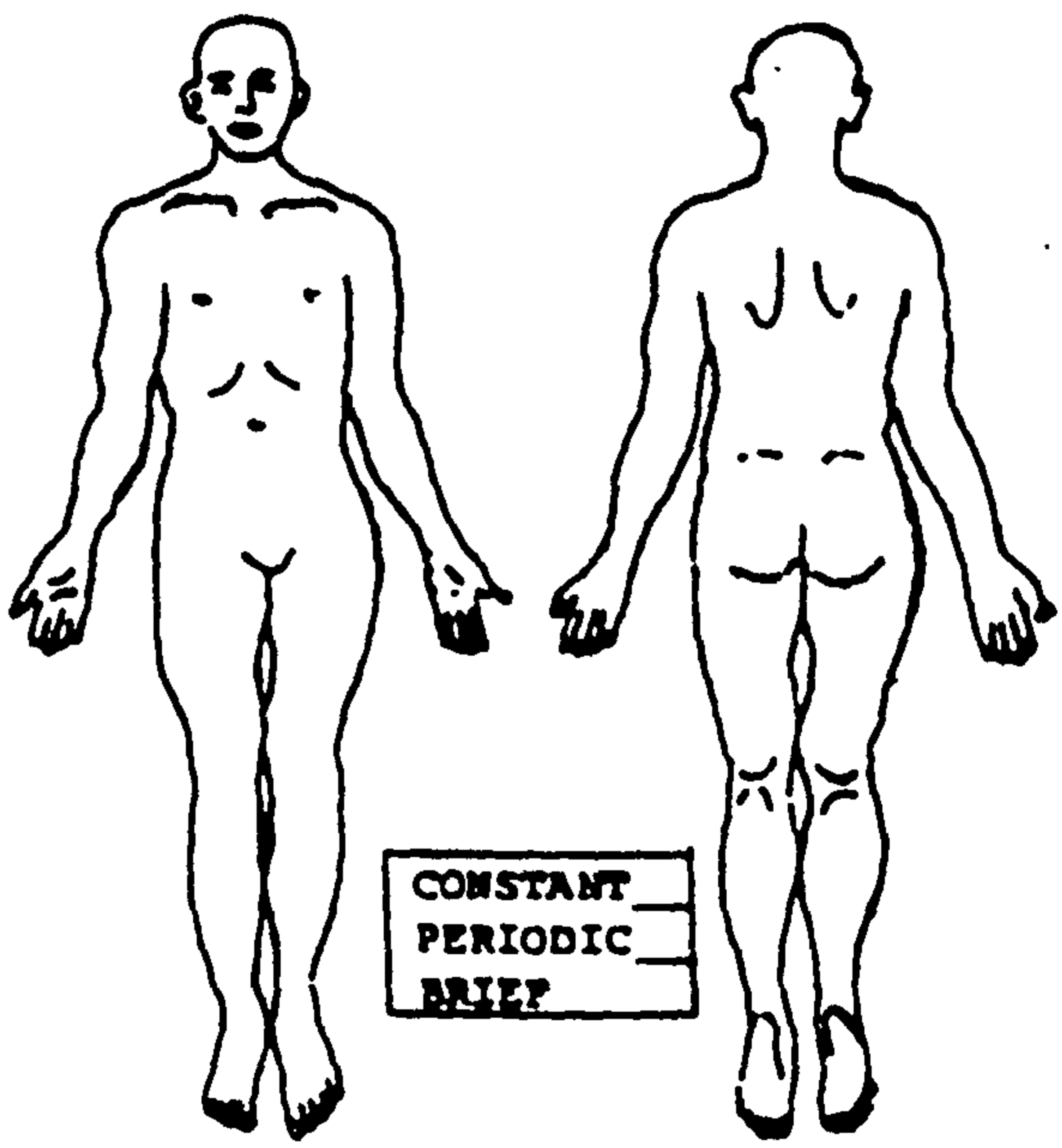
McGill - Melzack Pain Questionnaire

Patient's Name _____ Date _____ Time _____ am/pm
 Analgesic(s) _____ Dosage _____ Time Given _____ am/pm
 _____ Dosage _____ Time Given _____ am/pm

Analgesic Time Difference (hours): +4 +1 +2 +3
 PRI: S _____ A _____ E _____ M(S) _____ M(AE) _____ M(T) _____ PRI'(T) _____
 (1-10) (11-15) (16) (17-19) (20) (17-20) (1-20)

1 FLICKERING	11 TIRING
QUIVERING	EXHAUSTING
PULSING	12 SICKENING
THROBING	SUPPLOCATING
BEATING	13 FEARFUL
POUNING	FRIGHTFUL
2 JUMPING	TERRIFYING
FLASHING	14 PUNISHING
SHOOTING	GRUELLING
3 PRICKING	CRUEL
BORING	VICIOUS
DRILLING	KILLING
STABBING	15 WRETCHED
LACINATING	BLINDING
4 SHARP	16 ANNOYING
CUTTING	TROUBLESOME
LACERATING	MISERABLE
5 PINCHING	INTENSE
PRESSING	UNBEARABLE
GRAWING	17 SPREADING
CRAMPING	RADIATING
CRUSHING	PENETRATING
6 TUGGING	PIERCING
PULLING	18 TIGHT
WRENCHING	MUMB
7 HOT	DRAWING
BURNING	SQUEEZING
SCALDING	TEARING
SEARING	19 COOL
8 TINGLING	COLD
ITCHY	FREEZING
SMARTING	20 NAGGING
STINGING	NAUSEATING
9 DULL	AGONIZING
SORE	DREADFUL
HURTING	TORTURING
ACHING	PPI
HEAVY	0 No pain
10 TENDER	1 MILD
TAUT	2 DISCOMFORTING
RASPING	3 DISTRESSING
SPLITTING	4 HORRIBLE
	5 EXCRUCIATING

PPI _____ COMMENTS: _____



ACCOMPANYING SYMPTOMS:
 NAUSEA _____
 HEADACHE _____
 DIZZINESS _____
 DROWSINESS _____
 CONSTIPATION _____
 DIARRHEA _____
 COMMENTS: _____

SLEEP: _____
 GOOD _____
 PITFUL _____
 CAN'T SLEEP _____
 COMMENTS: _____
 ACTIVITY: _____
 GOOD _____
 SOME _____
 LITTLE _____
 NONE _____

FOOD INTAKE: _____
 GOOD _____
 SOME _____
 LITTLE _____
 NONE _____
 COMMENTS: _____

COURTESY OF PROFESSOR RONALD MELZACK

McGill-Melzack Pain Questionnaire.

Fig. 10.

Table 6.1. *Nerves as a disturbed sense of body*

Sensation	Sense of body	Culture
"body shakes" "trembling, prickling" "twitching of the body" "jerking of the body"	sense of the body surface or entire body moving	Costa Rica Guatemala Kentucky Puerto Rico Newfoundland
"body aches, headaches" "brain pain" "hot and cold sensations" "sweats" "queer feelings in my head"	body sense includes foreign sensations	Costa Rica Guatemala Puerto Rico Kentucky Newfoundland
"was spinning" "disoriented" "dizziness" "feel faint"	body perception is distorted	Costa Rica Guatemala Kentucky
insomnia weakness debility	sense of body functioning is reduced	Costa Rica Newfoundland Kentucky
"lost control" "blacked-out" "lost consciousness" "partially paralyzed" "fainting"	sense of body comes and goes; loss of sense of body for a short time	Costa Rica Puerto Rico Kentucky
"don't feel like myself" "not acting like myself" "feel outside of myself" "being temperamental"	sense of body is not there, or is so changed that it is not recognizable	Costa Rica Puerto Rico Kentucky Newfoundland
"going to pieces"	sense of body falling apart	Costa Rica Puerto Rico Kentucky Newfoundland

The History House.

Where, in the years that followed, the Terror (still-to-come) would be buried in a shallow grave. Hidden under the happy humming of hotel cooks. The humbling of old communists. The slow death of dancers. The toy histories that rich tourists came to play with.

It was a beautiful house.

White-walled once. Red-roofed. But painted in weather-

Asleep. Making nonsense of all that Touchable cunning.

The Surpriseswoop.

The Headlines in their heads.

DESPERADO CAUGHT IN POLICE DRAGNET.

For this insolence, this spoiling-the-sun, their quarry paid.

Oh yes.

They woke Velutha with their boots.

Esthappen and Rahel woke to the shout of sleep surprised by shattered kneecaps.

Screams died in them and floated belly up, like dead fish. Cowering on the floor, rocking between dread and disbelief, they realized that the man being beaten was Velutha. Where had he come from? What had he done? Why had the policemen brought him here?

They heard the thud of wood on flesh. Boot on bone. On teeth. The muffled grunt when a stomach is kicked in. The muted crunch of skull on cement. The gurgle of blood on a man's breath when his lung is torn by the jagged end of a broken rib.

Blue-lipped and dinner-plate-eyed, they watched, mesmerized by something that they sensed but didn't understand: the absence of caprice in what the policemen did. The abyss where anger should have been. The sober, steady brutality, the economy of it all.

They were opening a bottle.

Or shutting a tap.

Cracking an egg to make an omelette.

The twins were too young to know that these were only history's henchmen. Sent to square the books and collect the dues from those who broke its laws. Impelled by feelings that were primal yet paradoxically wholly impersonal. Feelings of contempt born of inchoate, unacknowledged fear - civilization's fear of nature, men's fear of women, power's fear of powerlessness.

Man's subliminal urge to destroy what he could neither subdue nor deify.

colours now. With brushes dipped in nature's palette. Moss-green. Earthbrown. Crumbleblack. Making it look older than it really was. Like sunken treasure dredged up from the ocean bed. Whale-kissed and barnacled. Swaddled in silence. Breathing bubbles through its broken windows.

A deep verandah ran all around. The rooms themselves were recessed, buried in shadow. The tiled roof swept down like the sides of an immense, upside-down boat. Rotting beams supported on once-white pillars had buckled at the centre, leaving a yawning, gaping hole. A History hole. A History-shaped hole in the Universe through which, at twilight, dense clouds of silent bats billowed like factory smoke and drifted into the night.

They returned at dawn with news of the world. A grey haze in the rosy distance that suddenly coalesced and blackened over the house before it plummeted through the History hole like smoke in a film running backwards.

All day they slept, the bats. Lining the roof like fur. Spattering the floors with shit.

The policemen stopped and fanned out. They didn't really need to, but they liked these Touchable games.

They positioned themselves strategically. Crouching by the broken, low stone boundary wall.

Quick Piss.

Hof foam on warmstone. Police-piss.

Drowned ants in yellow bubbly.

Deep breaths.

Then together, on their knees and elbows, they crept towards the house. Like Film-policemen. Softly, softly through the grass. Batons in their hands. Machine-guns in their minds. Responsibility for the Touchable future on their thin but able shoulders.

They found their quarry in the back verandah. A Spoiled Puff. A Fountain in a Love-in-Tokyo. And in another corner (as lonely as a wolf) - a carpenter with blood-red nails.

Men's Needs.

What Esthappen and Rahel witnessed that morning, though they didn't know it then, was a clinical demonstration in controlled conditions (this was not war after all, or genocide) of human nature's pursuit of ascendancy. Structure. Order. Complete monopoly. It was human history, masquerading as God's Purpose, revealing herself to an under-age audience.

There was nothing accidental about what happened that morning. Nothing *incidental*. It was no stray mugging or personal settling of scores. This was an era imprinting itself on those who lived in it.

History in live performance.

If they hurt Velutha more than they intended to, it was only because any kinship, any connection between themselves and him, any implication that if nothing else, at least biologically he was a fellow creature - had been severed long ago. They were not arresting a man, they were exorcizing fear. They had no instrument to calibrate how much punishment he could take. No means of gauging how much or how permanently they had damaged him.

Unlike the custom of rampaging religious mobs or conquering armies running riot, that morning in the Heart of Darkness the posse of Touchable Policemen acted with economy, not frenzy. Efficiency, not anarchy. Responsibility, not hysteria. They didn't tear out his hair or burn him alive. They didn't hack off his genitals and stuff them in his mouth. They didn't rape him. Or behead him.

After all, they were not battling an epidemic. They were merely inoculating a community against an outbreak.

In the back verandah of the History House, as the man they loved was smashed and broken, Mrs Eapen and Mrs Rajagopalan, Twin Ambassadors of God-knows-what, learned two new lessons.

Lesson Number One:

Blood barely shows on a Black Man. (Dum dum)

And

Lesson Number Two:

It smells, though.

Sicksweet.

Like old roses on a breeze. (Dum dum)

'Madiyo?' one of History's Agents asked.

'Madi aayirikkum,' another replied.

Enough?

Enough.

They stepped away from him. Craftsmen assessing their work. Seeking aesthetic distance.

Their Work, abandoned by God and History, by Marx, by Man, by Woman and (in the hours to come) by Children, lay folded on the floor. He was semi-conscious, but wasn't moving.

His skull was fractured in three places. His nose and both his cheekbones were smashed, leaving his face pulpy, undefined. The blow to his mouth had split open his upper lip and broken six teeth, three of which were embedded in his lower lip, hideously inverting his beautiful smile. Four of his ribs were splintered, one had pierced his left lung, which was what made him bleed from his mouth. The blood on his breath bright red. Fresh. Frothy. His lower intestine was ruptured and haemorrhaged, the blood collected in his abdominal cavity. His spine was damaged in two places, the concussion had paralysed his right arm and resulted in a loss of control over his bladder and rectum. Both his knee caps were shattered.

Still they brought out the handcuffs.

Cold.

With the sourmetal smell. Like steel bus-rails and the bus conductor's hands from holding them. That was when they noticed his painted nails. One of them held them up and waved

the fingers coquettishly at the others. They laughed. 'What's this?' in a high falsetto. 'AC-DC?'

One of them flicked at his penis with his stick. 'Come on, show us your special secret. Show us how big it gets when you blow it up.' Then he lifted his boot (with millipedes curled into its sole) and brought it down with a soft thud.

They locked his arms across his back.

Click.

And click.

Below a Lucky Leaf. An autumn leaf at night. That made the monsoons come on time.

He had goosebumps where the handcuffs touched his skin.

'It isn't him,' Rahel whispered to Estha. 'I can tell. It's his twin brother. Urumban. From Kochi.'

Unwilling to seek refuge in fiction, Estha said nothing.

Someone was speaking to them. A kind Touchable policeman. Kind to his kind.

'Mon, Mol, are you all right? Did he hurt you?'

And not together, but almost, the twins replied in a whisper.

'Yes. No.'

'Don't worry. You're safe with us now.'

Then the policemen looked around and saw the grass mat.

The pots and pans.

The inflatable goose.

The Qantas koala with loosened button eyes.

The ballpoint pens with London's streets in them.

Socks with separate coloured toes.

Yellow-rimmed red plastic sunglasses.

A watch with the time painted on it.

'Whose are these? Where did they come from? Who brought them?' An edge of worry in the voice.

Estha and Rahel, full of fish, stared back at him.

The policemen looked at one another. They knew what they had to do.

The Qantas koala they took for their children.

And the pens and socks. Police children with multi-coloured toes.

They burst the goose with a cigarette. *Bang.* And buried the rubber scraps.

Yooseless goose. Too recognizable.

The glasses one of them wore. The others laughed so he kept them on for a while. The watch they all forgot. It stayed behind in the History House. In the back verandah. A faulty record of the time. Ten to two.

They left.

Six princes, their pockets stuffed with toys.

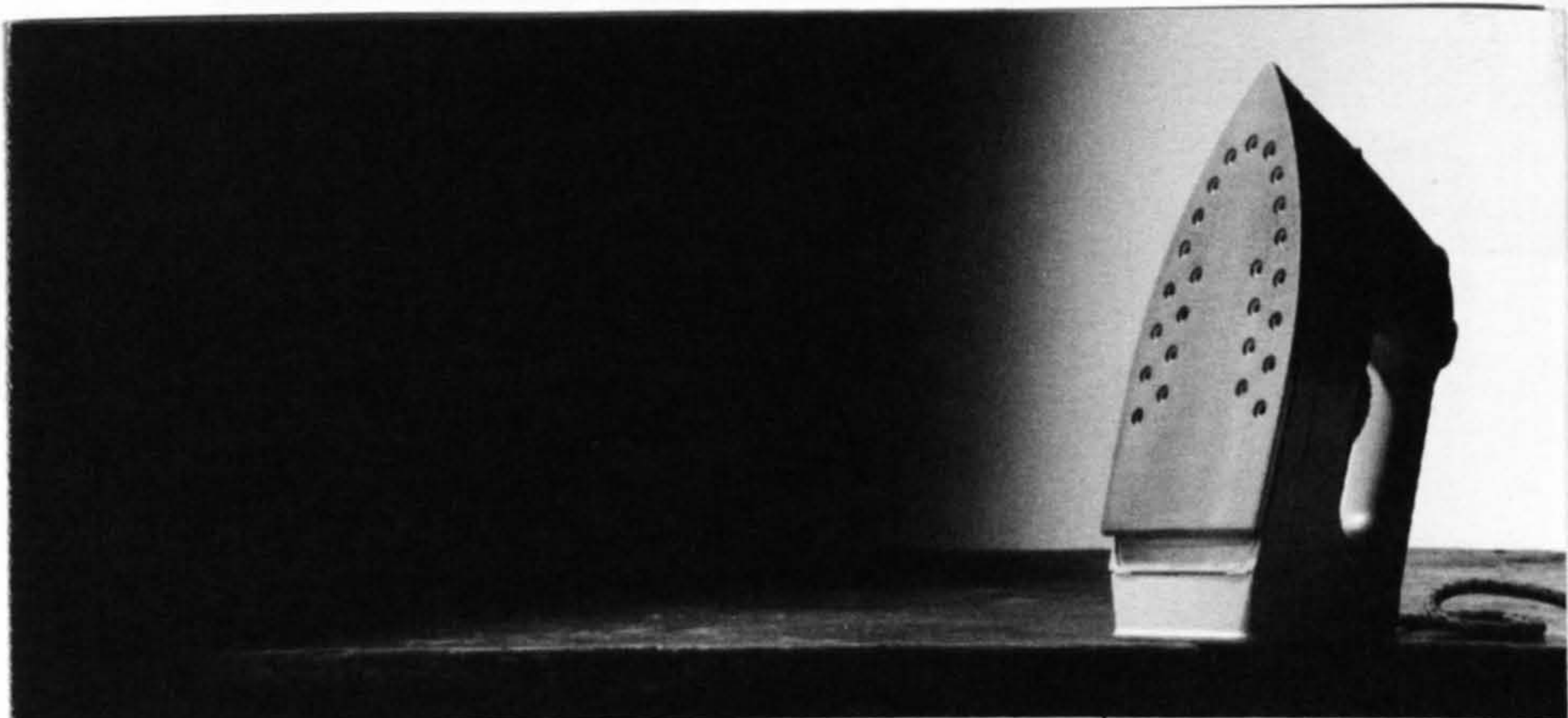
A pair of two-egg twins.

And the God of Loss.

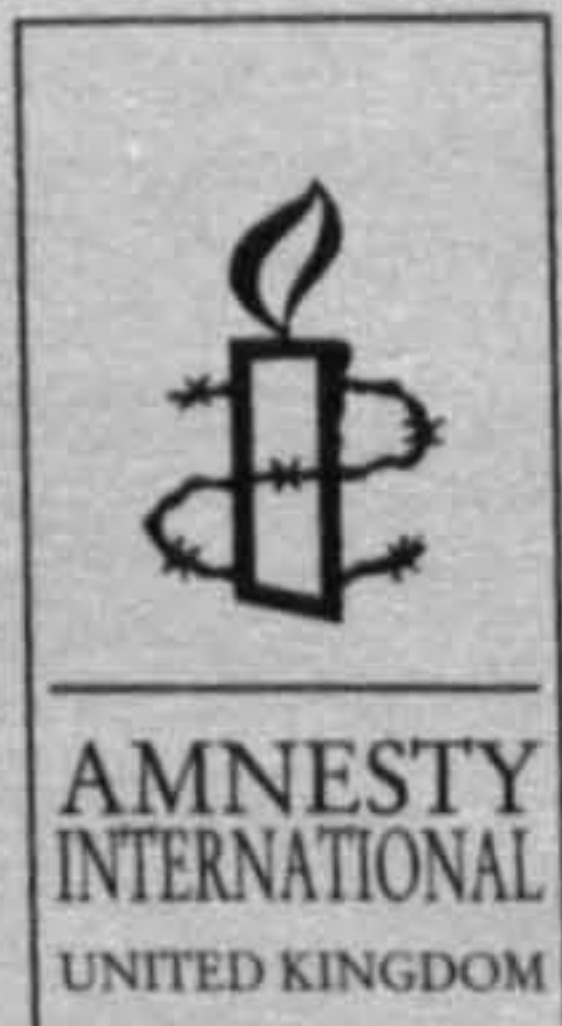
He couldn't walk. So they dragged him.

Nobody saw them.

Bats, of course, are blind.



IF YOU CAN'T IMAGINE
WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE
TORTURED
LET'S BRING IT
CLOSER
TO HOME



www.joinamnestynow.org.uk

Fig. 13

In 2001 we recorded
torture cases in 111 countries.
we believe the real statistics
to be much higher.

We've all burnt our fingers on a hot iron or pan. It was only for a fraction of a second. But it hurt. Just imagine that you couldn't remove your hand from the heat. That someone held it there. For a minute, maybe more.

You probably don't want to think about it. But we ask that you do. Because once you understand what it's like to be tortured, we know you'll join our fight to end such brutality.

As you're reading this leaflet, hundreds, possibly thousands, of torturers are using everyday objects like this iron to inflict horrifying pain.

Take the case of 24-year-old Nang Mai. Nang was seized by soldiers in June 1997 in her township in Myanmar - not for any particular offence, but simply for belonging to an ethnic minority. She was repeatedly raped, covered with wood and burnt alive.

Or Yassine Simozrag, who was captured by the Algerian army in 1993. And died in prison after soldiers used a blowtorch to burn his face.

At Amnesty International we deal with such atrocity daily. Yet we never lose hope. That's because we know that though brutality is disturbing, it's not unstoppable.

We understand that it's hard to imagine how your support can help. But believe us, it does. By applying pressure to governments around the world, our members have proven time after time that it's possible to stand up to even the most brutal and repressive governments. And actively put a stop to torture.

Our campaign against injustice depends entirely on our supporters' financial generosity. By giving a donation or becoming a member, you can ensure that our vital work continues. Of course, the more funds we raise, the more victims we can help, which is why we're asking you to give as generously as you can.

Join us today by completing the application form. Your money will make a real difference in giving torture victims a tomorrow.

PLEASE JOIN TODAY.

YES, I WANT TO SUPPORT AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

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Fig. 13

that I may live to see it.—I beseech thee, Eugenius, quoth Yorick, taking off his night-cap as well as he could with his left hand,—his right being still grasped close in that of Eugenius,—I beseech thee to take a view of my head.—I see nothing that ails it, replied Eugenius. Then, alas! my friend, said Yorick, let me tell you, that 'tis so bruised and mis-shapened with the blows which ***** and ***** and some others have so unhandsomely given me in the dark, that I might say with Sancho Pança, that should I recover, and 'Mitres thereupon be suffered to rain down from heaven as thick as hail, not one of 'em would fit it.'—Yorick's last breath was hanging upon his trembling lips ready to depart as he uttered this;—yet still it was uttered with something of a *Cervantic* tone;—and as he spoke it, Eugenius could perceive a stream of lambent fire lighted up for a moment in his eyes;—faint picture of those flashes of his spirit, which (as Shakespear said of his ancestor) were wont to set the table in a roar!

Eugenius was convinced from this, that the heart of his friend was broke; he squeezed his hand,—and then walked softly out of the room, weeping as he walked. Yorick followed Eugenius with his eyes to the door,—he then closed them,—and never opened them more.

He lies buried in the corner of his church-yard, in the parish of ———, under a plain marble slab, which his friend Eugenius, by leave of his executors, laid upon his grave, with no more than these three words of inscription, serving both for his epitaph and elegy,

Alas, poor YORICK!

Ten times a day has Yorick's ghost the consolation to hear his monumental inscription read over with such a variety of plaintive tones, as denote a general pity and esteem for him;—a foot-way crossing the church-yard close by the side of his grave,—not a passenger goes by without stopping to cast a look upon it,—and sighing as he walks on,

Alas, poor YORICK!

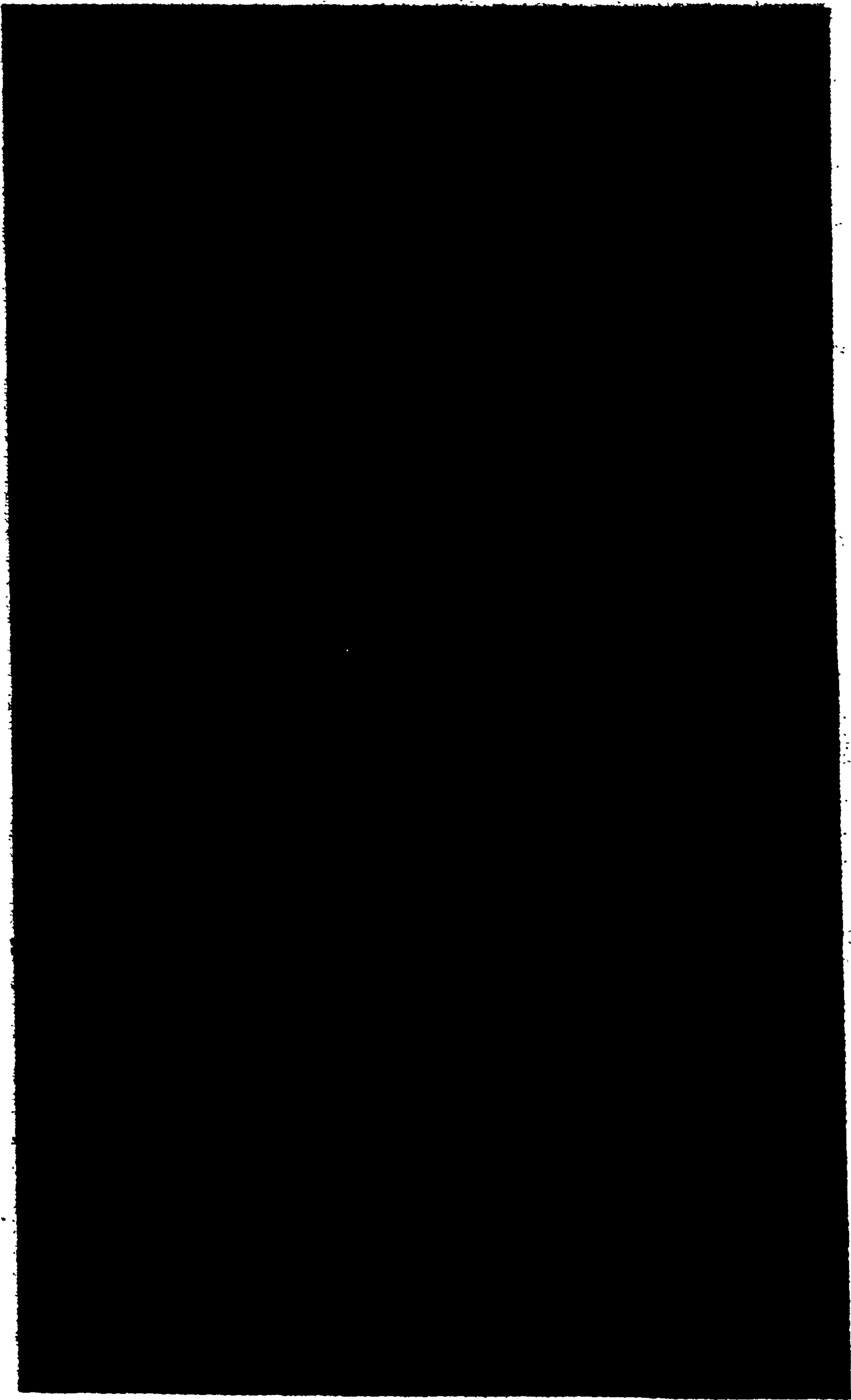


Fig 14 (cont)

Fig. 15

The National Atlas of Sri Lanka has seventy-three versions of the island—each template revealing only one aspect, one obsession: rainfall, winds, surface waters of lakes, rarer bodies of water locked deep within the earth.

The old portraits show the produce and former kingdoms of the country; contemporary portraits show levels of wealth, poverty and literacy.

The geological map reveals peat in the Muthurajawela swamp south of Negombo, coral along the coast from Ambalangoda to Dondra Head, pearl banks offshore in the Gulf of Mannar. Under the skin of the earth are even older settlements of mica, zircon, thorianite, pegmatite, arkose, topaz, terra rossa limestone, dolomite marble. Graphite near Paragoda, green marble at Katupita and Ginigalpelessa. Black shale at Andigama. Kaolin, or china clay, at Boralesgamuwa. Plumbago graphite—veins and flakes of it—graphite of the greatest purity (ninety-seven percent carbon), which would be mined in Sri Lanka for one hundred and sixty years, especially during the World Wars, six thousand pits around the country, the main mines at Bogala, Kahatagaha and Kolongaha.

Another page reveals just bird life. The twenty species of bird out of the four hundred native to Sri Lanka, such as the blue magpie, the Indian blue chat, the six families of the bulbul, the pied ground thrush with its fading hoot, the teal, the shoveller, 'false vampires,' pintail snipes, Indian coursers, pale harriers in the clouds. On the reptile map are locations of the green pit viper pala-polanga, which

ANIL'S GHOST

43

tre were the fragments of collected information revealing the last sighting of a son, a younger brother, a father. In the letters of anguish from family members were the details of hour, location, apparel, the activity. . . . *Going for a bath. Talking to a friend. . .*

In the shadows of war and politics there came to be surreal turns of cause and effect. At a mass grave found in Naipattimunanai in 1985, bloodstained clothing was identified by a parent as that worn by his son at the time of his arrest and disappearance. When an ID card was found in a shirt pocket, the police called an immediate halt to the unburial, and the following day the president of the Citizens' Committee—who had brought the police to the location—was arrested. The identity of others in this grave in the Eastern Province—how they died, who they were—was never discovered. The warden of an orphanage who reported cases of annihilation was jailed. A human rights lawyer was shot and the body removed by army personnel.

Anil had been sent reports collected by the various human rights groups before leaving the United States. Early investigations had led to no arrests, and protests from organizations had never reached even the mid-level of police or government. Requests for help by parents in their search for teenagers were impotent. Still, everything was grabbed and collected as evidence, everything that could be held on to in the windstorm of news was copied and sent abroad to strangers in Geneva.

Anil picked up reports and opened folders that listed disappearances and killings. The last thing she wished to return to every day was this. And every day she returned to it.

There had been continual emergency from 1983 onwards, racial attacks and political killings. The terrorism of the separatist guerrilla groups, who were fighting for a homeland in the north. The insurrection of the insurgents in the south, against the government. The counterterrorism of the special forces against

both of them. The disposal of bodies by fire. The disposal of bodies in rivers or the sea. The hiding and then reburial of corpses.

It was a Hundred Years' War with modern weaponry, and backers on the sidelines in safe countries, a war sponsored by gun- and drug-runners. It became evident that political enemies were secretly joined in financial arms deals. 'The reason for war was war.'

Fig. 15

in daylight, when it cannot see well, attacks blindly, leaping to where it thinks humans are, fangs bared like a dog, leaping again and again towards a now hushed and fearful quietness.

Sea-locked, the country lives under two basic monsoon systems—the Siberian High during the northern hemisphere winter and the Mascarene High during the southern hemisphere winter. So the northeast trades come between December and March, while the southeast trades travel in from May to September. During the other months mild sea winds approach the land during the day and reverse their direction during the night.

There are pages of isobars and altitudes. There are no city names. Only the unknown and unvisited town of Maha Illupalama is sometimes noted, where the Department of Meteorology once, in the 1930s, in what now seems a medieval time, compiled and recorded winds and rainfall and barometric pressure. There are no river names. No depiction of human life.

- Kumara Wijetunga, 17. 6th November 1989. At about 11:30 p.m. from his house.
- Prabath Kumara, 16. 17th November 1989. At 3:20 a.m. from the home of a friend.
- Kumara Arachchi, 16. 17th November 1989. At about midnight from his house.
- Manelka da Silva, 17. 1st December 1989. While playing cricket, Embilipitiya Central College playground.
- Jatunga Gunesena, 23. 11th December 1989. At 10:30 a.m. near his house while talking to a friend.
- Prasantha Handuwela, 17. 17th December 1989. At about 10:15 a.m. close to the tyre centre, Embilipitiya.
- Prasanna Jayawarna, 17. 18th December 1989. At 3:30 p.m. near the Chandrika reservoir.
- Podi Wickramage, 49. 19th December 1989. At 7:30 a.m. while walking along the road to the centre of Embilipitiya town.
- Narlin Gooneratne, 17. 26th December 1989. At about 5:00 p.m. at a teashop 15 yards from Serena army camp.
- Weeratunga Samaraweera, 30. 7th January 1990. At 5:00 p.m. while going for a bath at Hulandawa Panamura.

The colour of a shirt. The sarong's pattern. The hour of disappearance.

Inside the Civil Rights Movement offices at the Nadesan Cen-

Fig. 16

There were police officers all over the train. The man got on carrying a bird cage with a mynah in it. He walked through carriages, glancing at other passengers. There were no seats left and he sat on the floor. He was wearing a sarong, sandals, a Galle Road T-shirt. It was a slow train, travelling through rock passes, then emerging into sudden vistas. He knew that a mile or so before they got to Kurunegala there would be a tunnel and the train would curve into the dark claustrophobia of it. A few windows would remain open—they needed fresh air, though it meant the noise would be terrible. Once past the tunnel, back into sunlight, they would be getting ready to disembark.

He stood just as the train went into darkness. For a few moments there was the faint muddy light of the bulbs and then they went out. He could hear the bird talking. Three minutes of darkness.

The man moved quickly to where he remembered the government official was, beside the aisle. In the darkness he yanked him forward by his hair and wrapped the chain around his neck and began strangling him. He counted the seconds to himself in the darkness. When the man's weight fell against him he still didn't trust him, didn't release his hold on the chain.

He had a minute left. He stood and lifted the man into his arms. Keeping him upright, he steered him towards the open window. The yellow lights flickered on for a second. He might have been a tableau in somebody's dream.

ANIL'S GHOST

He jerked the official off the ground and pushed him through the opening. The buffet of wind outside flung the head and shoulders backwards. He pushed him farther and then let go and the man disappeared into the noise of the tunnel.

Fig. 16