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## Who Do You Think You Are?: Recovering the Self in the Working Class Escape Narrative

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WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?: RECOVERING THE SELF IN THE WORKING  
CLASS ESCAPE NARRATIVE

A Dissertation Presented

by

CHRISTINE MAKSIMOWICZ

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Department of English

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ABSTRACT

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CLASS ESCAPE NARRATIVE

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This project considers how socioeconomic impoverishment and society's failure to recognize working class women as valued subjects impinge upon a mother's ability to afford recognition to her daughter's selfhood. Situated within the larger North American literary tradition of fiction animated by flight in search of freedom, the texts here explored constitutes a subgenre that I term the "working class escape narrative." Combining close readings of fiction by Toni Morrison, Alice Munro, and Sigrid Nunez with sociological research and psychoanalytic theory, I explore a relationship between mother and daughter characterized not by mirroring and bonding but rather the absence of intimacy and the foreclosure of the daughter's idiomatic subjectivity effected through a particular way of relating shaped by economic necessity, imperatives of pragmatism, and a desire for respectability. This trauma of recognition failure not only structures the texts' plots and protagonists' psyches but also is embedded in the forms and narrative

strategies of the texts themselves. The subtle but significant differences in the ways in which the repudiation of selfhood is narratively approached and negotiated in the authors' early, middle, and late iterations of this subgenre reveal a transforming psychic relationship with intersubjective injury. My exploration of the working class escape narrative through time establishes it as a dynamic literary subgenre that offers insight into an evolving process of working through trauma via imaginative forms of narration.

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## INTRODUCTION

*There exists a poverty and marginality of experience to which (the middle classes) have no access, structures of feeling that they have not lived within (and would not want to live within: for these are the structures of deprivation).*

--Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives*

In 1986, Carolyn Steedman's personal and theoretical exploration of both her and her mother's working class lives became one of the first critical texts within cultural studies that created a means of altering this reality. Albeit small, *Landscape for a Good Woman* issued a sizable challenge to the then wide acceptance of female subjectivity as a "self-in-relation" as theorized by Nancy Chodorow, emerging from bonded relationality between mother and daughter and effecting in the daughter a strong desire to later recreate this relationship through mothering. In *Landscape*, Steedman details a very different experience between mother and daughter within the working class home, one of distance, estrangement, and lack of trusting intimacy, one that results not in a yearning to bear children, but rather its opposite, a deep sense of shame and worthlessness that makes the reproduction of the self an act that is refused. Since *Landscape's* publication, other challenges to Chodorow's theory have been mounted, and researchers within both sociology and psychoanalysis have identified the need to address how social class structures intrapsychic and intersubjective life and the experience of psychic suffering. Beverly Skeggs has offered an important in-depth examination of how social class impacts the construction of identity in working class women, yet no one has investigated the formation and development of a working class subjectivity in relation to specific forms of caregiving. Combining close readings of fiction by Toni Morrison, Alice Munro, and Sigrid Nunez with sociological research and psychoanalytic theory, I examine how

these texts uncover subtle and often unconscious ways through which internalized injury is affectively embedded and reproduced within the relational dynamics of the family. My project illumines one of the most pernicious of these ways: a mother's inability to recognize her child's individual subjectivity.

While furthering *Landscape's* overarching aim, my work also counters one of Steedman's primary contentions, her claim that existing texts, both fictional and scholarly, fail to adequately depict the complexity of working class subjectivity. Contra Steedman, I argue that these texts do in fact exist, but two critical factors have impeded their ability to bring intelligibility to the "poverty and marginality of experience" and "structures of deprivation" that shape a working class subjectivity. One factor is that these inter- and intrapsychic injuries have not yet been recognized as classed within various disciplines. Psychoanalysis, a discipline with immense potential to illumine the complexities of classed suffering, lacks an adequate lens for exploring the social and economic dimensions of recognition failure that I argue are requisite for understanding a working class subjectivity. In contrast, within the field of sociology, researchers have identified an impoverished parenting style characterized by the failure to attend to a child's internality as the logic of caregiving most frequently practiced within working class homes. Yet this data has been interpreted largely in terms of socioeconomic factors, neglecting a consideration of the emotional and psychological dimensions that likewise shape this parent/child dynamic. My study brings the insights of these two disciplines into conversation by way of psychosocial approach to engaging parenting practices that illuminates a classed form of recognition failure as produced by a complex interplay of material, social, and psychic forces.

This framework brings intelligibility to the dimensions of classed injury that literary texts also explore but until now have been primarily understood as produced by other forms of oppression. Bringing together three authors whose works have not yet been considered in relation to one another illuminates yet unexamined classed aspects of their work. While loosely connected by working class histories and the composition of fiction that realistically depicts painful aspects of their respective pasts, the authors are intimately linked by the strikingly similar ways each explores the particular injury that exists at the heart of the subgenre that I've identified and termed "the working class escape narrative." I locate this subgenre within the larger North American literary tradition of fiction animated by flight in search of freedom. Its principle distinction is the specific intersubjective injury that propels the protagonist's journey, the trauma of not being recognized as a subject.

A second factor that inhibits a psychologically complex engagement with classed injury is the economic construct through which social class is most frequently understood. While Pierre Bourdieu's dynamic concept of a classed habitus explodes this construct and is widely recognized within sociology as one of the most important contributions to sociological theory and practice made within the twentieth century, it remains woefully underemployed within literary studies. Habitus offers a way of understanding class not in terms of discrete categories such as income or profession, but rather dispositionally through one's orientation towards the world. Bourdieu describes it as a particular way of engaging reality that's been structured by one's everyday material conditions of existence, the conditionings they exert, and one's position within the social hierarchy. One's habitus, that is one's way of perceiving and acting in the world, is systematic and systematically

distinct from another habitus produced in different conditions of existence. A working class habitus is one that is constituted by a significant absence of economic, social, and cultural capital and a low-ranking position in social space; it is both these objective absences and this subjective stigmatized status that create a sensibility that perceives one's self as inadequate and experiences both the world and others as untrustworthy, not to be depended upon.

The foundational principles that Bourdieu's research has established serve as a pedestal to this project, as my readings closely attend to classed realities and the ways in which they not only structure the texts' plots and protagonists' psyches but also are embedded in the forms and narrative strategies of the texts themselves. As the injuries within these texts are socially, culturally, and economically structured yet experienced psychically and emotionally, the theoretical lens I employ is best understood as psychosocial in nature, informed equally by sociology, psychoanalysis, and trauma theory.

Building on the research of contemporary Bourdieusian sociologists and psychosocial theorists, I explore the psychic landscape of the working class habitus as characterized by feelings of inferiority, shame, and worthlessness.<sup>1</sup> As my own work explores the development of a female classed subjectivity, I draw upon research that focuses on working class women and briefly note below the particular strands my project extends. In Beverly Skeggs' qualitative study researching identity formation in working class women in Britain, Skeggs explores how shame produced and internalized in her subjects from the perception of their pathologized class status causes them to seek to

<sup>1</sup> See Ball; Charlesworth; Lawler, "Getting" and *Mothering*; Reay, "Rethinking" and "Beyond;" Savage, *Class* and "Review;" and Skeggs.

disidentify from their working class tag and to do so through acts that they understand to signify respectability. This foundational study, published as a book lauded as worthy of “a place equivalent to that occupied by Paul Willis’s *Learning to Labour*” (Ramazanoglu), has been followed by many more exploring the various ways by which working class women feel stigmatized, specifically marked as “Other,” and the psychic and emotional ramifications of understanding themselves through this derisive gaze. The research attributes working class women’s felt marginalization and shame to their sense of themselves as negatively judged by the dominant class for a lack of taste and style, possession of the wrong type or amount of femininity, an inappropriate expression of sexuality, and bad mothering.<sup>2</sup>

Steph Lawler’s study of mother-daughter relationships within working class culture likewise documents working class women’s pain and shame as well as their strenuous attempts to dissociate from their class identity. Referencing the above ways in which working class women understand themselves as pathologized by the dominant culture, Lawler claims there “is little wonder . . . that women might want to mark an ‘escape’” from such a predicament. The title of her article documenting part of this research, “Getting Out and Getting Away,” is excerpted from a remark by Barbara, one of her subjects, who, by way of marriage and movement into a different set of social relations, has sought to separate herself from her working class past: “(Barbara, subject): ‘(Childhood’s) been a phase I’ve pushed to one side and said, that’s it. I couldn’t wait to get out and get away’” (12).

I include Barbara’s own words about her working class past because I see it as a means of depicting a notable gap in this strain of sociological research investigating the

<sup>2</sup> See Walkerdine and Lucey; Walkerdine, *Schoolgirl and Daddy’s*; and Skeggs.

affective, relational dimensions of class. Although Lawler takes up Barbara's explicit desire "to get out and get away" as the locus of her research, she fails to engage what it is Barbara herself relays wanting to escape. Instead, Lawler frames and explains Barbara's feelings as reflecting the desire to escape "from a position marked in pathological terms" (12). Yet what Barbara expresses is a felt need to dissociate from her *childhood*, a phase in her life that may well include the pain of having internalized a stigmatized working class identity, but also intimates more than this. Indeed, when Barbara and the other women in Lawler's study go on to describe their respective childhoods, it becomes apparent that part of the pain and shame the women seek to escape when expressing the desire "to get out and get away" is that of not being recognized as a subject *by their mothers*, being denied the opportunity to express an individual self at home.<sup>3</sup> In its almost exclusive attention to the recognition denied to working class women by the dominant culture, current scholarship occludes this intimate failure of recognition that takes place between mother and daughter. My own research suggests that the absence of maternal acceptance and recognition of the daughter's subject status plays a critical role in producing the shame and sense of worthlessness felt by working class women.

<sup>3</sup> Some of the more direct expressions of this feeling of not being recognized as a full subject by one's mother are articulated by other women in Lawler's study and include the following: Gina (subject): "I was really, really upset by—by the fact that she couldn't see who I really was..."

Lynne (subject): "My mother established this idea that she... established who I was—my identity or my behavior or my thinking—and I had to internalize that, I had to be that."

Hazel (subject): "I just felt constantly in conflict (with my mother), in order to maintain who I was...and I was pushed to extremes—I went to extremes I probably wouldn't have gone to in order to do that, to be me" (101).

Lawler cites these remarks not in her shorter piece, "Getting Out and Getting Away," but rather in her book-length work, *Mothering the Self*, also based on this particular study of mother-daughter relations. Like in the article, Lawler reads and interprets the women's expressed feelings as effects of having internalized particular value judgments of the dominant culture.

In the texts I explore in this study, the protagonists fail to receive the kind of reflective mirroring, bonding, and fostering of idiomatic subjectivity that is required for the development of a self that knows itself to be worthy of love and acceptance. Informed by British object relations psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas's understanding of "idiom," I likewise use the term as a means of describing one's unique creative inner complex present at birth that in part fashions being as it is afforded the opportunity to express itself within its environment.<sup>4</sup> The mother's failure to recognize the daughter's emerging selfhood is communicated in language, gesture, countenance, touch, in effect, all kinds of direct and subtle means of interaction between mother and daughter. Steedman describes this felt refusal of subjecthood as "the sense of being absent in (her) mother's presence" "outside any law of recognition" (142) and attributes this negation to her mother's lack of "the self-esteem that enables mirroring" (142). Drawing upon this work, Elizabeth Abel has contributed to the theorization of a female working class subjectivity, describing this disposition as one emerging from a "daughter (who) internalizes from her mother not relationality and fluid ego boundaries but stoicism in the face of inequality" (194). This specific way of being in the world that Abel explains as socially and relationally inherited is further illuminated by Steedman's great-grandmother's response to being sent away from home at age eleven to work as a maid in a distant town: "she cried, because tears are cheap; and then she stopped, and got by, because no one gives you anything in this world" (31). Abel argues "the femininity (re)produced through this working-class female genealogy has more to do with self-sufficiency than with relationality" (195). It is

<sup>4</sup> In his Glossary in *Forces of Destiny*, Bollas defines "idiom" as follows: "the unique nucleus of each individual, a figuration of being that is like a kernel that can, under favorable circumstances, evolve and articulate. Human idiom is the defining essence of each subject, and, although all of us have some acute sense of the other's idiom, this knowledge is virtually unthinkable" (212).

withholding, not bonding, and the repudiation of feeling that structures female subjectivity through these generations of working class women (195).

The sociological research that provides evidence of the existence of a specifically working class logic of caregiving likewise describes this parenting style as predictive of attachment failure between mother and child, confirming Abel and Steedman's theorizing. One of the most comprehensive longitudinal studies of parenting styles and their developmental effects indicates that the two factors most strongly linked to what is variously termed "nonadaptive," "unreliable" and/or "insensitive" parenting, that is a form of caregiving that inhibits attachment, bonding, and intimacy between mother and child, are a mother's low socioeconomic status and her lack of education.<sup>5</sup> This study, as well as others reporting similar findings, explain them in objective terms: difficult material conditions of existence<sup>6</sup> and the failure to understand infant and child psychology<sup>7</sup> prevent mothers from securely connecting to their children and providing the intimacy and emotional nurture that leads to secure ego establishment and attachment. While I explore both of the above deficits in economic and educational capital in this study, I argue that these individual elements of a working class identity tell only part of the story. What is missing is how these absences (and other injuries that constitute a working class identity) combine and coalesce into a particular sensibility that expresses itself relationally in a distinct and classifiable form of caregiving. No single aspect of a working class identity is sufficient to explain this parenting style, but rather, all of them together create a dispositional way of being far more complex than the sum of its parts.

<sup>5</sup> See Sroufe et al.

<sup>6</sup> These include exhausting manual labor, economic exigencies that produce anxiety and strain, and unsafe and/or insecure living situations, among other factors.

<sup>7</sup> Researchers note in particular working class mothers' scant knowledge of age appropriate behavior and the developing child's dependency needs as well as those for autonomy.



Employing the dynamic concept of habitus--irreducible to its constituting injuries and absences--differentiates this approach from other theoretical frameworks and makes new forms of textual engagement possible.

Considering the unwanted white baby doll Claudia repeatedly receives for Christmas in *The Bluest Eye* through this lens in relation to existing scholarship illustrates some of the different kinds of interpretative possibilities opened by the dispositional nature of habitus. Heretofore what has been afforded extensive critical attention is the reason the text offers for why Claudia is given this present: "all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child treasured" (20). The criticism likewise frequently attends to the fact that in her dismemberment of these dolls Claudia resists what she then experiences as an assault to her very being while at the same time "not know(ing) why (she) destroyed those dolls" (21). Yet to my knowledge, no critic has addressed what Claudia does in fact claim to know beyond the shadow of a doubt about these disappointing Christmases:

...I did know that nobody ever asked me what I wanted for Christmas. Had any adult...taken me seriously and asked me what I wanted, they would have known that I did not want to have anything to own, or to possess any object. (21)

What Claudia relays is a hunger for an experience that allows her to relish her own individual sensory desires, "I want to sit on the low stool in Big Mama's kitchen with my lap full of lilacs and listen to Big Papa play his violin for me alone" (22). The fulfillment of this wish is not out of the realm of possibility in terms of its content; its impossibility resides in the fact that no adult registers Claudia as a subject. More specifically, her mother does not recognize Claudia as an idiomatic self with thoughts, feelings, ideas, and desires that would merit Mrs. MacTeer's interest and intentional consideration.

While exploring the white standards of beauty and desirability that shape Mrs. MacTeer's decision to buy Claudia a white baby doll each Christmas, present scholarship neither discusses this decision in light of the fact that Claudia dismembers the doll year after year nor inquires why Mrs. MacTeer never asks Claudia about this behavior. Moreover, it offers no account for why Mrs. MacTeer likewise fails to ask her daughter what she actually wants for Christmas. In short, no existing approach considers Mrs. MacTeer's inability to recognize, honor, and intimately engage Claudia's unique subjectivity. In contrast, countless critics discuss the recognition failure that occurs between Mrs. Breedlove and Pecola through the lens of internalized racism. That none discuss MacTeer's failure to recognize Claudia's subjectivity through this lens does not suggest to me that this relational breakdown might not also be inflected by race. The concept of class habitus allows for this possibility while at the same time it necessarily widens the lens for understanding this predicament. Such a framework is necessary because the recognition failure that exists at the center of the working class escape narrative occurs not only in African-American families within Morrison's work but also white ones in Munro's stories and those of various ethnicities in Nunez's novels. Reading these texts through a dispositional understanding of class allows for the exploration of intersubjective injury that exists across racial and ethnic boundaries in Morrison, Munro, and Nunez's texts as well as other working class narratives that escape the confines of this study.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Other writers of working class escape narratives that specifically explore recognition failure between mothers and daughters include Sandra Cisneros, Maxine Hong Kingston, Linda Hogan, Paule Marshall, Edwidge Danticat, Harriet Arnow, Anzia Yezierska, Dorothy Allison, and Bharati Mukherjee. While the focus of this project is the troubled relationship between mother and daughter, also included within the subgenre are texts that examine the estrangement felt by sons within the working class home and their subsequent flight from home. Authors writing male

In applying a classed lens to Morrison and Nunez's texts in which subjectivity is also indelibly shaped by race and ethnicity, my aim is not to prioritize one form of injury over another. Rather, the impetus for this project is to provide a dynamic means of engaging what is presently undertheorized and incompletely understood, the axis of class as it operates within an intersectional identity. The concept of habitus takes intersectionality as its starting point, as alluded to in Bourdieu's citrus analogy: "sexual properties are as inseparable from class properties as the yellowness of a lemon is from its acidity" (*Distinction* 106). Another scene from *The Bluest Eye* provides a way of illustrating this principle as it exists within the project.

When one of the MacTeer's white neighbors appears at Mrs. MacTeer's window to report that Claudia and Frieda are "playing nasty," Mrs. MacTeer runs outside, switch in hand, and no questions asked, begins both insulting and whipping her daughters. Mrs. MacTeer's response suggests a strongly felt need that her daughters not jeopardize the family's already tenuous respectability, a need so great that Mrs. MacTeer "destroys" Frieda with "stinging cuts on her legs" while Frieda "sob(s)" and attempts to refute neighbor Rosemary's claims (30). Mrs. MacTeer does not cease her thrashing of the girls until a menstrual napkin falls from Pecola's dress to reveal that what Mrs. MacTeer believed to be "nastiness" in her daughters is nothing more than their practical aid to a distraught Pecola, shaken by the arrival of her first period.

escape narratives include Jack London, Willa Cather, John Steinbeck, Theodore Dreiser, James Baldwin, Jim Grimsley, and Junot Diaz. Other findings that escaped the scope of this project suggest the working class escape narrative as not exclusively bound to a North American tradition of flight, but rather better understood as a subgenre that extends beyond national identity. The working class escape narrative as indicative of a transnational phenomenon can be seen in the works of Elena Ferrante, Anne Enright, Colm Toibin, Margaret Drabble, Mary Costello, Nadine Gordimer, V.S. Naipaul, and Zadie Smith.

The incident illustrates the impossibility of any attempt to tease out how much of the urgency to safeguard her family's respectability arises out of Mrs. MacTeer's raced position versus her classed one. Mrs. MacTeer's behavior is both raced and classed, not to mention at the same time gendered and sexed. Thus the stigmatized position within social space constituting one essential aspect of a working class identity cannot be understood in Morrison's fiction merely as classed. Yet by foregrounding class, what I seek to illuminate is the common thread among all of the texts in which a mother's lack of economic, social, and educational capital, and her failure to be recognized within the dominant culture together produce a form of caregiving that is best understood as a working class logic of parenting. In Morrison's fiction, it is at the same time inflected with internalized racial oppression, yet there is nothing explicitly raced about this form of parenting, a fact that has been established by extensive sociological research beginning as early as 1914 and most recently compellingly argued by Annette Lareau in her widely lauded book *Unequal Childhoods* elaborating the findings of her intensive qualitative study of variously classed and raced families. While acknowledging ways in which race impacts some dimensions of family dynamics, Lareau provides strong evidence in support of her overarching argument that it is class that determines distinct and classifiable styles of parenting.<sup>9</sup>

My project begins by establishing a theoretical framework for understanding how classed injury colors affective dimensions of the psyche and consequently shapes intersubjective ways of relating. More specifically, in Chapter One I explore a diminished ability to nurture a child's idiomatic subjectivity as inextricably linked to the various absences and injuries that constitute a working class identity. Chapter Two brings the

<sup>9</sup> I explore these findings in Chapter One.

above findings into conversation with particular moments in Morrison, Munro, and Nunez's escape narratives, exploring how a mother's refusal of her daughter's subjectivity takes various shape and form in everyday "ordinary" interactions. Chapters Three, Four, and Five perform close readings of different phases of the escape narrative, examining how recognition failure is negotiated differently in the authors' early, middle, and late escape narratives both in terms of structure and content. The title of my project refers to the most explicit form of recognition failure enacted within these texts while also alluding to the ontological injury effected by the repudiation of selfhood.

The expression "Who do you think you are?" as employed within working class communities functions as "a call to order" used to quell the assertion of an emerging "different" subjectivity that fails to comply with tacitly agreed upon "appropriate" ways of thinking and behaving. Bourdieu discusses this particular reproach as a means of enforcing conformity to working class norms and values, containing within it "a warning against the ambition to distinguish oneself by identifying with other groups" (*Distinction* 381). In Munro's words, "who do you think you are?," which serves as the (Canadian) title to one of her collections I examine in this study, comes "the minute you begin to let out a little bit of who you would like to be, as soon as you start sort of constructing somebody that is yourself." "I was brought up to think that that is absolutely the worst thing you could do" (Wachtel interview, *Brick* 49).

This knowledge of one's own individual subjectivity as unacceptable and meriting derision effects a psychic dislocation in the texts' protagonists that is also implied in the project's title. In this sense, the question is not rhetorical but a real ontological one that becomes embodied in the protagonist's existential journey towards selfhood. The

repudiation of one's very self by one's mother and the consequent struggle to recover this self constitutes the texts' core and its *raison d'être*.<sup>10</sup> For the protagonists, becoming a self, a subject, requires leaving home; the desire to forge a self in the face of a broken mirror and familial scorn is the spoken and unspoken impetus that fuels the flight from home.

These journeys, frequently narrated by the protagonist, allow readers access to an exceedingly rich and complex working class subjectivity. However, the painful psychological dimensions of recognition failure suggest yet one more explanation in addition to those offered above for why this subjectivity remains unexplored: the fear of further stigmatizing an already oppressed, marginalized group. Delving into such emotionally and politically charged terrain elicits anxiety and trepidation both in researchers outside of the culture or group they are analyzing (and potentially "exposing") and also in the members of the group themselves. In an essay that broaches but ultimately refuses to examine these kinds of injuries, African-American feminist E. Frances White expresses that which remains a stumbling block to the truthful, transparent investigation required for understanding and potential healing: "How dare we admit the psychological battles that need to be fought with the very women who taught us to survive in this racist and sexist world? We would feel like ungrateful traitors" (qtd. in Hirsch 177).

Yet what essayists and theorists may consciously avoid is not as easily escaped in fiction—even when the narrator herself, as does White, resists admitting these injuries. In

<sup>10</sup> This unmet need and longing for recognition and acceptance has been previously discussed in relation to Morrison's work and theorized as a structuring force in her novels--but never through the lens of class. Julia Eichelberger notes that all of Morrison's characters "wish, first, for unconditional acceptance of their unique natures" (69) and maintains that Morrison's novels are ultimately interested in the process in which an individual can be affirmed and nurtured.

the working class escape narrative, the psychic and emotional injury of being denied a self is revealed as trauma, and the effects of this intimate primary trauma structure these texts. While the most immediate response to trauma is often repression, as we have learned from Freud, return is inevitable, and psychoanalysis provides a framework through which to understand trauma's surfacing in these narratives.

Indeed, psychoanalysis not only offers a means of making sense of the splitting and dissociation enacted in the protagonists' psyches and the texts' narration, but also makes both visible and intelligible a processual pathway towards integration and recuperation from trauma that is evidenced in all three authors' bodies of escape narratives over time. A psychoanalytic lens illumines how psychic processes associated with trauma are written and embedded within the very structure of these texts and the narrative devices employed within them. The subtle but significant differences in the way in which the repudiation of selfhood is narratively approached and negotiated in the authors' early, middle, and late works reveal a transforming psychic relationship to intimate injury. As a dynamic narrative form that mirrors the work of the psyche, the escape narrative moves through three phases best described by the different impulses embodied in each: one, the exposure and undoing of injury; two, autonomy and self-exploration; three, integration and recuperation.<sup>11</sup>

In the first phase of the working class escape narrative, to which I turn in Chapter Three, the text is driven by opposing aims: the narrator's felt need to return to and grapple with painful aspects of her past and an equally strong desire to undo or disassociate from these distressing events. Examining the past not only awakens emotions

<sup>11</sup> This is not to say that there is no overlap between the phases; it is to say that in spite of some blurring of boundaries, a definite overarching trajectory emerges across the subgenre that can be made intelligible by the use of this developmental model.

that the narrator seeks to evade but also engenders guilt for “exposing” familial injuries. This is negotiated in part by the narrator’s attempts to counterbalance her exposure of maternal failure with justifications and explications.<sup>12</sup> Through the lens of psychic splitting and the related Freudian concept of “(de)negation,” the chapter explores how expressed trauma is simultaneously undermined through narration that denies or minimizes the experience of pain, rewrites it through a lens of nostalgia, or projects it onto a split off other. I examine how these disavowals are further evidenced in various textual practices that include fragmentation, omission, and shifts in narrative tense, perspective, and voice. For Nunez and Morrison, the texts that best represent this phase, *A Feather on the Breath of God* and *The Bluest Eye*, are also their first published novels. Munro’s *The Beggar Maid*,<sup>13</sup> her collection of short stories that I explore here embodying this phase, likewise comes fairly early within her career.

Escape narratives that represent the second phase of this psychic and literary trajectory include Morrison’s *Sula*, Nunez’s *For Rouenna*, and Munro’s *Runaway*. In this phase, which I examine in Chapter Four, there is a decisive turning away from one’s past and the severing of family ties. The protagonist’s journey is characterized by autonomy and individual integrity that neither looks back in efforts to reconnect with family nor outward towards relationality. In this chapter, I examine how the protagonist’s embrace of her own idiomatic self is mirrored in the narration of the text, which instead of

<sup>12</sup> Abel posits that the ambivalence that characterizes Steedman’s entire biography can be explained by these dueling impulses.

<sup>13</sup> This collection was originally entitled and published in Canada as *Who Do You Think You Are?*. It was Munro’s American publishing house that urged her to change this title for her American audience, arguing that this phrase would not be understood by her readers. Such a recommendation suggests non-familiarity with the significance and impact of this phrase within working class communities and/or a reasoned conjecture that the effects of this title would be lost on a largely middle-upper class readership.



splitting into a separate narrating persona and disparaging the protagonist's thoughts and feelings, illuminates the protagonist's inner life while supplying an interpretative framework through which to understand it. Using Winnicott's theory of the "mind-object," I explore how the creation of an inner imaginative space functions as an escape from recognition failure and external derision. Whereas this psychic defense has been primarily understood as pathological, I consider its recuperative possibilities.

My final chapter investigates the integrative work that characterizes third phase narratives. In these texts, the protagonist comes to recognize, mourn, and creatively negotiate the absence of familial acceptance through a psychic and symbolic process that allows one to travel backward in time to recover and incorporate prior selves, objects, and events into transformed ways of seeing and being. Using the Freudian concept of *Nachtraglichkeit* to explore the temporal dimensions of this journey, I examine how Morrison's *Love* and Munro's *The View from Castle Rock* enact a dialectical process that produces new meanings, perspectives, and a profoundly altered relationship between past and present. Both are relatively recent works, completed late in the authors' lives<sup>14</sup> and following an already sizable body of work. Nunez, twenty years Munro and Morrison's junior, has not yet created an analogous work, although *For Rouenna* in certain respects gestures towards this kind of integrative process.

Because I seek to highlight the synchronic and diachronic relationships among early, middle, and late escape narratives in the three authors' respective bodies of literature, the project is organized not by author but rather thematically. Revealing the negotiation of intimate trauma as structuring both psyche and text in specific and

<sup>14</sup> Both Morrison and Munro were in their seventies when these third phase texts were completed and published.

classifiable ways, my project widens present understandings of how trauma impacts psychic processes. In its exploration of narrative's ability to register trauma that the conscious mind rejects and negates, the study illumines art's unique capacity to tap and express painful affect and experiences that might otherwise remain underground. Moreover, examining the way in which the rejection and undoing of trauma embodied in early escape narratives ultimately gives way to acceptance and integration in late texts offers more than new insights into the process of working through trauma, it also suggests creative forms of self-narration as potential means of recuperation and recovery.

## CHAPTER 1

### RECOGNITION FAILURE AND THE FORECLOSURE OF SUBJECTIVITY

*"Mamma, did you ever love us?"*

*... "You settin' here with your healthy-ass self and ax me did I love you? Them big old eyes in your head would a been two holes full of maggots if I hadn't."*

*"I didn't mean that, Mamma. I know you fed us and all. I was talkin' bout something else. Like. Like...."*

--Toni Morrison, *Sula*

The ineffable quality that Hannah fails to articulate in this exchange provides an entry towards understanding the intersubjective failure between mother and daughter that exists at the center of the working class escape narrative. Hannah's longing suggests the absence of a particular kind of relational love that would afford recognition of her unique selfhood and knowledge of this self as acceptable and lovable for its own sake. Drawing upon Morrison's novel, psychoanalytic theory, and sociological research, this chapter explores the absence of maternal recognition as a kind of trauma. It does so by building upon what has been previously theorized within psychoanalysis by Masur Khan as "cumulative trauma" while also contributing to its reconceptualization through the lens of a working class habitus. The chapter explores the nonadaptive caregiving that produces cumulative trauma<sup>15</sup> as just one aspect of a more complex and wider-reaching phenomenon contributing to the foreclosure of subjectivity within the working class escape narrative. Specifically, I posit the existence of three interrelated forms of

<sup>15</sup> See Winnicott, "Mind," "Primary," and "Theory;" Kris; Benedek; and particularly Khan for more detailed discussion.

recognition failure--nonadaptive caregiving, idiomatic and emotional closure, and idiomatic extinguishment--and argue that together they constitute a fundamental yet unexplored dimension of what has been theorized as a working class logic of parenting.

As briefly discussed in the Introduction, the Bollasian concept of "idiom" refers to the existence of a genetically-based individual sensibility that must be recognized and fostered with a child in order to establish the personality of the child "in such a way as to feel both personally real and alive, and to articulate the many elements of his true self" (*Forces* 34).<sup>16</sup> The concept of idiom is central to my analysis of all forms of recognition failure that I examine within the literature of this study. While the foreclosure of idiomatic development and expression is more apparent in the designations I use to describe the latter forms of failed recognition occurring in childhood and adolescence, (i.e., "idiomatic and emotional closure" and "idiomatic extinguishment"), nonadaptive caregiving just as significantly contributes to idiomatic loss.

Each of these relational breakdowns has been interpreted and explained in various disciplines by recourse to individual classed variables; for example, numerous sociological studies cite low socioeconomic status as a critical predictor of unreliable and insensitive caregiving.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, it's important to note that none of these failures is exclusively bound to class; recognition failure occurs within variously classed homes. While sociological data establishes strong links between certain forms of parental insufficiency and particular classed variables, I argue that a dispositional approach in

<sup>16</sup> While I've slightly simplified my description of the concept above, Bollas' fuller and more complex definition of idiom is worth including. In his words, idiom is "an aesthetic of being driven by an urge to articulate its theory of form by selecting and using objects so as to give them form" (*Cracking* 151).

<sup>17</sup> See Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, and Klebanov; Huston, McLoyd, and Garcia; and Keating and Hertzman.

engaging recognition failure, (in other words, how myriad social and psychic structures work in concert to shape specific ways of seeing and being), provides a more complex and comprehensive understanding of this injury than by seeking to measure classed variables discretely.

A fuller exploration of habitus lays the foundation for this work. Habitus is best understood as a structuring mechanism that has been incorporated within the self in the form of mental and corporeal schemes of perception, appreciation, and action in response to the objective conditions and intersubjective relationships that one has known cumulatively over time but is most durably established in one's earliest experiences of life. While Bourdieu insists that it is not eternal, he acknowledges that there exists a probability "that experiences will confirm habitus, because most people are statistically bound to encounter circumstances that tend to agree with those that originally fashioned their habitus" (*Invitation* 133). Habitus explains how one's everyday conditions of existence, their conditionings, and the embodiment of one's place in the social sphere that is associated with those conditions account for distinct and classifiable ways of seeing and being (*Distinction* 170).

In other words, habitus is necessity internalized and converted into a disposition that generates practices and perceptions that make sense of that particular necessity. Habitus is differentiated by class, and class, as it is understood through the lens of habitus, is not an actual location but rather an orientation to the world lived out unconsciously through beliefs and practices. Habitus expresses a naturalization of the social world that functions both by way of "objective systems of position" and "subjective bundles of disposition" (Wacquant 3). While Bourdieu theorizes that habitus is principally

constructed in one's earliest experiences of life, he says but little about what transpires within them. It is here that my work critically intervenes through its examination of classed operations of care. More specifically, it explores how classed injury and absence impinge upon subject recognition in all three iterations discussed below: nonadaptive mothering, idiomatic and emotional closure, and idiomatic extinguishment.

### **Nonadaptive Caregiving: the Failure of "Being"**

At its origin, Winnicott describes primary "being" as a prelinguistic state of security that the infant experiences in and through his mother's reliable, sensitive continuity of care that allows him simply to exist or "be" without the need for any sort of mental work or "doing." In this bonded state, the mother provides a reflective countenance that mirrors the infant's emotional state back to him, affording an all-important representation of his emerging self. Winnicott imaginatively translates the infant's preverbal state into words, "when I look I am seen, so I exist" (*Playing* 114). "Being" facilitates within the infant a felt sense of the "I am" (Guntrip 251).

In the beginning, the mother's role is that of almost complete adaptation to the infant's world, "for unless this is so it is not possible for the infant to begin to develop a capacity to experience a relationship to external reality, or even to form a conception of external reality" (Winnicott, *Playing* 11). Thus, what is first understood to provide the ontological security the infant needs to experience a sense of self is at the same time the way through which he acquires a coherent relationship to objective reality. The mother

exists as the embodiment of the outer world that the infant comes to know either as trustworthy or unreliable.

While Winnicott's work was guided by an underlying belief that the experience of maternal impingement and unpredictability created in the infant an "unthinkable anxiety" that interrupted the formation of "being" with defensive mental vigilance, it was Masur Khan who termed this resultant state of precarity "cumulative trauma." Khan and others have described this ongoing experience of instability and unpredictability as producing the psychic effects of splitting, dissociation, shame, and distrust that are likewise engendered by catastrophic trauma, but with one essential difference. Whereas the experience of trauma located in the exceptional event *shatters* one's assumptions of about how the world operates, cumulative trauma *structures* the one's mental organizational constructs for perceiving and interpreting one's world, shaping a habitus that from the very first knows reality as fundamentally tenuous and the world as unable to securely and predictably support one's wants and needs. This experience of cumulative trauma results not in a subjectivity of "being" but rather one of "doing;" the child develops a mental defense characterized by vigilant observation and predictions as to what he must "do" in order to elicit the response he needs from his mother. When his efforts fail, this "doing" subjectivity renounces relational dependency and devotes its energies to meeting its own needs.

Jessica Benjamin distinguishes between "doing" and "being" by reference to a state of "givenness" which she understands as the essential dynamic of "being." Benjamin describes givenness as possessing the quality of "zero-coercion--in other words, it is an interaction in which nothing is demanded of you and, just as important, you have not had

to demand or extract anything. From within this interactive space it is possible to feel the most authentic sense of agency as emerging from within" (48). This internally derived "authentic sense of agency" offers a fuller sense of what Bollas is referring to when he describes idiomatic development as that which allows one "to articulate the many elements of his true self." Additionally, Benjamin compellingly unpacks and disarms Winnicott's more fraught terminology, "true self," from which Bollas develops his concept of idiom:

While many have critiqued the essentialism of Winnicott's term true self (see Mitchell 1993), I think the concept refers to this experience of agency as not reactive but inner determined. We are speaking here not of a reified thing but of a state, an affective state that allows for creativity. (48)

Given the continuing debate as to what constitutes a "self," as well as postmodernity's resistance against the notion of an "authentic" or "unified" self, I offer Benjamin's explication as a thoughtful starting point and lens for engaging my central contention that within the escape narrative, selfhood is denied. I posit that it is from this recognized and embraced state of "being" without "doing" that makes possible the expression of a full subjectivity. This I define as consisting of three related capacities: the ability to feel real, alive, and connected to one's inborn nature, in Bollasian terms, to one's idiom; the ability to imaginatively negotiate the space between the subjective and the objective through the expression of one's idiom and in so doing experience one's life as meaningful; and finally, the ability to forge and sustain relations of intimacy.

While I argue that recognition failure in all of its forms impinges upon the development of these related capacities, nonadaptive caregiving has been shown to produce very specific effects related to these ends. An extensive body of psychoanalytic



theory associates this loss with the foreclosure of trust in one's very self and in one's world, the latter including "all subsequent human relationships" (Mahler et al. 48).

The two central organizing principles of Sula's psyche, that "...there was no other that you could count on... (and) there was no self to count on either" (119), can be understood as the durable effects of this relational injury. The narrator's linking of the two is not incidental; the "truths" that shape Sula's reality are inextricably related. Without a reliable environment or (m)other as the ground of "being," not only is present and future relational intimacy inhibited due to an inability to trust another, so too are the very ontological foundations of selfhood: "(Sula) had no center, no speck around which to grow...no ego" (119). Understanding Sula's internalized psychic losses as the embodied effects of the maternal failure Khan theorizes as cumulative trauma illumines the accuracy of his conceptualization of this predicament as "trauma."

### **Idiomatic and Emotional Closure**

While Benjamin's elaboration of "givenness" suggests a connection between early adaptive mirroring and the development of the creative idiomatic self, Winnicott more explicitly establishes this link. Winnicott describes the possibility of idiomatic development beginning with the mother's sensitivity to the child's nascent ego needs, those that surface as he strives to imaginatively elaborate his inner experiences in "spontaneous creative gestures."<sup>18</sup> The mother's imaginative mirroring back to the child

<sup>18</sup> See "Primary Maternal Preoccupation" in *Through Paediatrics to Psycho-Analysis: Collected Papers* 300-305. According to Winnicott, the formation of the child's ego is contingent upon the caregiver's ability to sensitively respond to the infant's state of absolute dependence; mastery and

these expressions as achievements engenders a growing sense of personal identity and confidence in the authenticity of his own self-experiences, impulses, and desires.

Without this creative dynamic in the mother's mirroring that recognizes and encourages the child's exploratory impulses, idiomatic development (or what Winnicott more pointedly terms the state of "going-on-being") is thwarted. Unless one discovers an alternate source of recognition, connection to one's affective, libidinal self is replaced by a socially-conforming one that seeks recognition by forms of "doing" that garner external approval and praise. Psychoanalysis provides both an interpretative lens and language for understanding this absence as constituting a form of psychic injury, but without considering its classed dimensions.

Empirical research within the spheres of sociology and psychology both corroborate long-lasting negative effects of recognition failure as theorized in psychoanalysis (albeit in slightly different language) and establish that these forms of nonadaptive caregiving are strongly associated with low socioeconomic status.<sup>19</sup> In other words, both maternal mirroring and engaged exploratory creative play that fosters idiomatic development are less likely to occur in working class and poor homes than in middle and upper class ones. Moreover, exploratory play that is initiated by the child is often discouraged and actively quelled. A significant body of research aimed at discovering specific correlations between low SES and the particular failure of responsiveness to the emotional, cognitive, and psychic needs of one's child identifies mothers' low level of education, linguistic abilities, and knowledge of child development

integration of one's drives is the result of rudimentary needs and intentions first recognized and met by the mother.

<sup>19</sup> See Bradley et al., "Contribution"; Corwyn and Bradley; Dodge, Pettit, and Bates; Kelley, Power, and Wimbush; McLoyd; and Berger.

as most predictive of this dynamic.<sup>20</sup> These findings bring to the fore particular absences within the working class habitus that together constitute two of its structuring elements, that is a lack of economic capital and also of cultural capital (that which includes social, educational, and linguistic capital). The third element, the absence of recognition within the dominant culture, while studied in relation to the development of different kind of adult subjectivity, remains unexplored in terms of its impact on parenting practices.

While examining recognition failure through disaggregated variables is limited in its ability to provide a holistic understanding the phenomenon, the above findings nevertheless are important for identifying the critical roles the material and the social play in structuring interpersonal relations. Research focusing attention on one aspect of working class reality, for instance, economic poverty, usefully complicates Winnicott's postulation that all that is needed to provide a secure sense of "being" for one's child is the "ordinary devotion" of a mother. This Winnicott defines as a state of "primary maternal preoccupation" that generally arises from a mother's intense identification with her infant and her highly attuned sensitivity to her infant's inner and outer world that allows her to accurately sense and appropriately respond to his needs. Although Winnicott acknowledges that various factors such as maternal depression and a mother's own experiences of inadequate caregiving may impinge upon her ability to feel and express "ordinary devotion," what remains unacknowledged are the ways in which economic instability and moreover the psychic insecurity that often accompanies this state may likewise impact one's capacity to create the predictable, relaxed state of "being" through which ego security is established. Eva's preoccupation is with her dwindling supply of foodstuff, not with the nascent expressive gestures of her child's emerging ego.

<sup>20</sup> See Berger and Brooks-Gunn; Linver, Brooks-Gunn, and Kohen; and Sroufe et al.

The robust sociological literature establishing a strong association between insensitive, nonadaptive caregiving and low SES not only brings to the fore these kinds of materially structured impingements but also offers a rich source of data from which further theorizing becomes possible. If we understand preoccupation and intense identification with one's infant as potentially more difficult and less "ordinary" within working class homes, and relatedly, the establishment of ego security or "being" less prevalent, other important sociological findings outside the realm of parenting acquire farther-reaching interpretative possibilities and in turn broaden understandings of classed parenting practices.

For example, reading Skeggs' research theorizing the existence of a different kind of working class female subjectivity through the lens of an increased probability of insensitive caregiving allows for a more complex understanding of her findings. Skeggs describes this subjectivity as characterized by a deep sense of shame and worthlessness that is negotiated through attempts to construct a positive identity by "doing" a "respectable" self. While Skeggs attributes the women's sense of shame and related "performances" of respectability to the lack of recognition afforded them by the dominant culture, I suggest that the intimate failure of "being" within the working class home brings an additional layer of intelligibility to this shamed "doing" self. Interestingly, the primary means by which the women in Skeggs' study work to fashion a positive identity of respectability is through acts of caregiving. While the finding acknowledges a strong investment in caregiving, Skeggs explores its inherently problematic nature due to the instrumentality that inevitably attaches itself to a caregiving relationship that functions as one's chief means of self-construction and esteem. Elaborating on this troubled relational

dynamic, Skeggs reveals the fragile and contingent nature of an identity constituted by "the reiteration of reproductive caring performances" "dependent upon external validation and continually subject to scrutiny" (72).

For the working class women in Skeggs' study, "being" a self is inextricably bound to "doing" a "caring self," that which Skeggs describes as "both a performance and a technique used to generate valuations of responsibility and respectability" (69). At the same time, these performances are conflated with particular social dispositions, traits that are unreflexively internalized as that which defines a caring self. Selflessness is one such disposition unequivocally associated with caregiving; all of Skeggs' working class subjects maintained that a caring person was "never selfish" (68). Thus, for these women, subjectivity hinges upon internal and external recognition of themselves as selfless subjects who always put the other before the needs of the self. Not unlike Khan's formulation of cumulative trauma in which the infant is denied the ontological security of knowing the self as acceptable without any need for "doing," so too do the working class women in Skeggs' study suffer cumulative injury that likewise forecloses selfhood experienced as inherently valued without having to "do" something to "earn" acceptability.

Understanding the shame these women carry and their performances of selfless subjectivity as potentially linked to intimate recognition failure provides more explanatory power than solely attributing it to recognition failure by the dominant culture. Moreover, it provides broader framework for understanding a much larger phenomenon of classed shame and performative subjectivity observed within working class literature that cannot be fully explained by way of internalized societal stigma. For instance, for

Carolyn Steedman it is the very fact of state assistance, an experience often laden with stigma, that afforded her a form of recognition that helped to attenuate the worthlessness she felt growing up, a worthlessness moreover she explicitly attributes to her mother's failure to recognize her as a subject:

I think I would be a very different person now if orange juice and milk and dinners at school hadn't told me, in a covert way, that I had a right to exist, was worth something. My inheritance from those years is the belief (maintained with some difficulty) that I do have a right to the earth...the sense that a benevolent state bestowed on me, that of my own existence and the worth of that existence--attenuated, but still there. (122-3)

Julie Olsen Edwards, daughter of working class author and activist Tillie Olsen, likewise expresses an inherent sense of worthlessness that cannot be attributed to the contempt afforded working class women by the dominant culture, as she is a professor. A period in her life in which serious illness kept her from work brings these feelings to the fore: "What was amazing to me was the sense of shame. If I wasn't working I had no excuse for taking up space" (343). Olsen Edwards's sense of her self as valuable only through "doing" directly corresponds with Winnicott's description of the self formed in an environment in which "doing" has preceded and supplanted "being."

Additionally, considering this early failure as a potentially structuring force in the constitution of a working class habitus contributes to a critical conversation recently begun that seeks to engage Khan's concept of cumulative trauma for use within trauma theory. To my knowledge, Mary Childers was the first to directly appropriate this concept for describing the deprivation, anxiety, and fear felt by working class individuals as affecting ongoing, psychically disabling trauma. Seth Moglen, in his scholarship on the mourning of injurious social processes (classed and other forms) describes Khan's theory as a potentially productive means of understanding the psychodynamics of what he

describes as "gradually inflicted social trauma." In slightly different language, Maria Root and Laura S. Brown discuss systemic oppression as producing traumatogenic effects through the lens of what Root has termed "insidious trauma." Differentiating insidious trauma from a discrete traumatic event that "shatter(s) assumptions about how the world operates," Root posits the psychic pain produced by systemic oppression "shape(s) reality and reinforce(s) subsequent constructions of reality," "creat(ing) and reinforce(ing) assumptions that the world and life are unfair" (374-5).

This structured and structuring sensibility effected by "cumulative," "insidious" trauma closely parallels the infant's fundamental mistrust in the world structured by maternal impingement. In other words, the two can be understood as analogous in the way in which an expanded conception of cumulative trauma underscores not simply conditions of persistent impingement and impoverishment but also the fact that this state becomes internalized, psychically negotiated and lived as normative. Moreover, given the sociological research suggesting caregiving that facilitates "being" is less "ordinary" in poor and working class homes, it would seem that the profound sense of insecurity and mistrust felt by working class women that has been attributed to "injurious social processes" may well possess earlier familial origins. This is to hypothesize a possible relationship between the insecure sensibility of mistrust associated with maternal recognition failure and a similarly described disposition linked to "cumulative" "insidious" trauma as conceptualized above. It is also to suggest that the injurious social processes that constitute that latter may be experienced by working class individuals as the repetition of earlier deprivation, injury, and absence, confirming a much earlier established notion of the world and others as fundamentally untrustworthy.

The concepts of macro- and microhistory, theory developed by French psychoanalysts and social scientists Davoine and Gaudilliere shed further light on how this sensibility is lived and reproduced intergenerationally even in the absence of the objective conditions that originally structured it.<sup>21</sup> Emerging from their work with the children and grandchildren of victims of trauma, the theory allows for a more precise way of differentiating between the originary structuring forces of trauma and their continuing effects via interpersonal relations. Davoine and Gaudilliere term the original historical injury as macrohistory and the transmission of embodied pain, anxiety, lack, and insecurity in subsequent generations by way of everyday familial interpersonal dynamics as microhistory. I apply the concept of macrohistory to the objective and subjective injuries and absences that structure the working class habitus and the notion of microhistory to the intersubjective ways of relating through which these injuries are intergenerationally reproduced. In these ways, Davoine and Gaudilliere's concepts are especially useful in underscoring both the working class habitus as essentially constituted by trauma (etiologically traceable to various forms of impoverishment, insecurity, marginalization, and recognition failure) and also the way in which its dispositional conditionings persist in embodied forms of relating and continue to be reproduced even after absence and injury may appear to be outwardly "overcome" or are simply no longer visible.

The ways in which these concepts illumine the intergenerational transmission of cumulative trauma<sup>22</sup> that constitutes the working class habitus are perhaps most clearly

<sup>21</sup> Davoine and Gaudilliere's theory contains interesting resonances with Marianne Hirsch's notion of postmemory.

<sup>22</sup> My use of the term here refers to cumulative trauma as reconceptualized in conversation with classed injury, trauma theory, and insidious and systemic oppression--as discussed above.



evidenced in the multiple forms of recognition failure enacted through three generations of women in *Sula*. Microhistory sheds light both on Eva's unchanging distanced, pragmatic style of relating and also the seamless reproduction of this detached logic of caregiving likewise practiced by Hannah. Even after she is financially secure, Eva does not emotionally or imaginatively engage her children nor see this as a necessary or important aspect of parenting. Moreover, when the adult Hannah, longing for some evidence of her mother's affection for her, asks Eva if she ever played with her, Eva is nothing less than infuriated. While decades removed from the desperate poverty she earlier experienced, intimate play with her daughter still to Eva seems a ridiculous, extravagant request in light of the kind of sacrificial love she's practiced. And while Hannah has suffered the experience of a love characterized by her mother "doing for" her rather than "being with" her, this painfully felt loss of relationality does nothing to alter the way she relates to Sula. Hannah's own caregiving is duly pragmatic and emotionally disconnected; she provides for Sula and declares her love for her while admitting to not liking her or exhibiting any attempt to intimately engage Sula as a unique human being.

Bourdieu's elaboration of the organizing features that constitute the working class habitus sheds further light on the idiomatic and emotional closure illustrated within the Peace family. Bourdieu theorizes the working class habitus' most characteristic trait as an embeddedness within the realm of the practical and the concrete; he describes more than an insistent commitment to the realistic, pragmatic, and utilitarian but also a valorization of this way of being that excludes other possibilities. This habitus largely engages reality outside of the symbolic, the conceptual, and the abstract and defines itself oppositionally in relation to this sphere to which its absence of educational capital prevents access.

Proximity to necessity engenders a relation to reality characterized by instrumentality: things must have a use; bodies are valued for what they can do; practices are reduced to the reality of their function (*Distinction* 200, 212). Everyday demands crowd out what is seen as impractical and without real use. Because of a prevailing need to enter “the real world,” the working classes give up recreation earlier and to an extent not seen in other classes (212, 215). What results is a strict dichotomy between the realms of work and play, something I understand as connected to its primary split between the pragmatic and the symbolic. Together these divisions bring further intelligibility to the rupture between “doing” and “being” that I argue is fundamental to understanding the foreclosure of the idiomatic self within working class homes.

In *Unequal Childhoods*, a book that documents the findings of her recent qualitative study investigating differently classed parenting practices, Annette Lareau uses a Bourdieusian dispositional lens to describe these very splits as they are lived within what she describes as a working class logic of caregiving. In its ability to theorize and elaborate a working class habitus as embodied within interpersonal parent/child relations, Lareau's work sheds light on how fixity within the concrete and the material is expressed in a form of parenting that exists almost exclusively within this objective realm. Lareau describes a working class logic of caregiving as highly pragmatic, attending first, foremost, and almost exclusively to material wellbeing; parental responsibility is comprehended chiefly in terms of the provision of "comfort, food, shelter, and other basic support" (238).

In contrast, the middle and upper class parents Lareau observes understand the cultivation of a child's social, cultural, psychological, and emotional development as

equally important parental responsibilities. While these parents "actively foster and assess (the) child's talents, opinions, and skills" (31), Lareau describes the working class parents as taking little interest in their children's thought lives, feelings, and play; they do not link play to cultural and interpersonal growth, nor do they express a sense of parental obligation to involve themselves in stimulating their children's cognitive, affective, or imaginative development.

While invaluable for its descriptions and depictions of how a working class habitus is embodied in a distinct dispositional logic of caregiving, Lareau's analysis neglects to adequately attend to the various forms of recognition failure that also constitute the working class habitus. Overlooking this dimension of habitus, particular aspects of this style of relating remain difficult to explain, specifically the quashing of the child's idiomatic self.

Earlier in-depth qualitative research of working class families conducted by psychotherapist and sociologist Lillian Rubin provides data suggestive of a connection between working class parents' failure to be afforded recognition of their own idiomatic identities and an explicit aversion towards the subjective feeling self. Rubin offers psychically attuned observations of this aversion as it expresses itself in relation to their children's imaginative play and desires as well as within the everyday lives of the working class parents themselves. The parents' both explicit and veiled distrust, even fear, of the inner self, its impulses and inclinations suggest the loss of primary "being," that which allows one the sense that one's inherent needs and wants are acceptable and valid. The parents' intense need to quell desire not just within their children but also within the

self leads Rubin to explore this inclination as a part of larger dispositional phenomenon within working class subjectivity:

Over and over, both women and men disavowed the wish for some desired activity--whether to spend some time alone, to develop some personal interest...with the comment that they don't want to get into "bad habits." (*Worlds* 195)

If this disavowal does in fact issue from the absence of "being" from which the idiomatic self develops, it would follow that part of what is being repudiated is that which has not been allowed expression. And indeed, the working class individuals in Rubin's study who articulate the need to split off desire at the same time reveal that what they are renouncing is something vague, foreign, if not entirely unknown to them. One of Rubin's working class subjects poignantly illustrates how the desire the self simultaneously wants and fears might be best understood as yet unborn:

I'd like to have time for myself, just to do what I want. I don't know for sure what it would be, but it would be only mine. But I wouldn't like to make a habit of it. It can be dangerous to have habits like that, so I wouldn't want to do it a lot. (195)

Knowledge of this fraught relationship to one's own wants and impulses brings another layer of intelligibility to working class parents' widely observed strict control and tamping down of their child's exploratory nature. The creative libidinal energy that is not to be trusted within the self is felt as perhaps even more perilous when it surfaces and clamors for expression within an other.

Interestingly, through a concept developed without reference to social class, Bollas describes a psychic predicament that corresponds with this distrust and aversion towards the subjective self and its impulses expressed within the working class habitus. Bollas builds his theory on an earlier conceptual spectrum developed by Winnicott

created to consider psychic health and potential impingement as it relates to one's orientation towards the objective and the subjective. On one end of Winnicott's spectrum is a way of being and seeing created chiefly through the purview of one's objectively perceived reality; one's engagement with the world is immediate, concrete, and pragmatic. At the other is an almost exclusive engagement with symbol and the subjective at the expense of an impaired relation to reality. While Winnicott acknowledges that people existing at the extreme of either end of the spectrum may lead satisfactory lives and do valuable work, he posits that psychic health and thriving is achieved closer to the middle where playing and reality, imagination and fact, symbol and materiality are not severed but rather interact and shape one another.

Bollas's more recent work with individuals whose lives are characterized by a split from the subjective and a fixity within the objective, material realm has led to his development of a theoretical framework for understanding this phenomenon which he terms "normotism." Bollas describes normotism as typified by a numbing and eventual erasure of subjectivity and a normotic mind "characterized less by the psychic (by the representational symbolization of feelings, sensations and intersubjective perceptions) than by the objective" (*Shadow* 136). Its fundamental feature is a disinclination to engage the subjective element in life, whether within oneself or in the other. Bollas conceives of its etiology through the lens of the family, the normotic being only partially seen by parents whose reflective capacity was dulled, unable to yield more than a glimmer of an outline of a self to the child. In the way in which Bollas describes a normotic parent's inability to recognize and foster the subjective idiomatic self of the child, he provides psychodynamic lens through which to better understand this predicament within the

working class family. At the same time, what he discusses primarily in individual characterological terms, I see as potentially structured by particular injuries of social class, specifically, the macrohistory of the working class habitus. Considering the interrelationships between normotism and the absence of idiomatic nurture within working class homes offers the possibility of expanded understandings of each.<sup>23</sup>

In particular, the intersection illumines the critical role that language plays in a mother's ability to reflect and engage her child's expressions of his inner subjective self. Idiomatic nurture is structured in large part by language use that recognizes and explicitly articulates the emerging individuality of the other. Bollas helpfully elaborates the various psychic, subjective, and expressive dimensions of this form of relationality and its potential breakdown by reference to Bion's alpha and beta elements. Beta elements consist of "undigested facts" of somatic and sensory existence that for the infant remain unintegrated, chaotic experiences without the mother's ability to receive and metabolize these sensations by transforming them through thought, play, and speech into the material of mental life--dreams, reflections, subjective imaginative capacity--that is, "alpha function." What is achieved through this dynamic is an intersubjective procedure that comes to be internalized within the child as a means of transforming facts into reflected objects that in turn link to other mental objects, becoming part of intersecting chains of significations that allow for the formation of a complex and elaborated symbolic relation to reality. "In health, a child's play leads the parent to elaborate on this experience through affective participation, imaginative mirroring and verbal comment, so that the

<sup>23</sup> This is not to say that normotism is always structured by social class or that all working class individuals are normotic but rather to suggest that the particular absences and injuries that constitute the working class habitus make it particularly vulnerable to this disabling split from the subjective.

child evolves from playing to speaking, to feeling enhanced and enlarged by language" (*Shadow* 151).

While Bollas identifies the importance of a well-developed alpha function within the parent in order to provide the child with these resources, he offers little exploration of the factors that may inhibit its development (aside from those located within an individual history). Moreover, some of his language describing the stripped down form of expression that characterizes normotic parents' addresses to their children contain the suggestion of a volitional aspect to this mode of speech that obscures the powerful ways that social structure impinges on working class individuals' verbal ability to translate concrete, material "undigested facts" into subjective states of mind, the work of a well-developed alpha function.

Not unlike the way in which Bourdieu offers the concept of habitus to account for distinct, durable dispositional logics of seeing and being differentiated by class, Basil Bernstein theorizes discrete linguistic modalities produced and practiced within differently classed groups. Bernstein's recognition of the critical role the social plays structuring these classed linguistic codes and also the dynamic structuring potential of the distinct codes to initiate, synthesize, and reinforce particular ways of interacting and responding to one's environment makes his resonance with Bourdieu particularly strong. In fact, what Bernstein conceptualizes as differently classed forms of language use can be understood as analogous to what Bourdieu refers to as one's linguistic habitus. That is as one structured and structuring dimension of habitus' system of dispositions that governs practice. As such, the organizing features and effects of a "restricted code" of language use, the linguistic modality Bernstein understands as produced and most commonly used

within the working classes,<sup>24</sup> are closely allied with Bourdieu's theorization of the working class habitus.

Like the working class habitus, Bernstein's restricted code is also organized by a definitive split between the objective and the subjective and the privileging of the social relation over individual sensibilities. Yet while Bourdieu more thoroughly explores how the expression of individuality is actively quashed within working class communities, Bernstein examines how the preference for the harmonious social relation is embedded within a working class linguistic code *prior* to any explicit repudiation of idiomatic expression. Enlarging Bourdieu's theorization of the working class habitus's "ruthless closure to difference" discussed in terms of its multiple exclusions, "there is no other possible language, no other lifestyle, no other form of kinship relation; the universe of possibles is closed" (*Distinction* 382), Bernstein unpacks the language that *is* possible, widely used within working class communities, and the particular features within it that make individual expression the exception that must be extinguished rather than a norm to be embraced.

In contrast to what he terms an "elaborated code" more frequently employed by the middle classes, Bernstein describes a working class "restricted code" as characterized by the use of brief, often unfinished grammatically simple sentences containing a high proportion of commands, imperative statements, and commonly used repeated idioms in which symbolism is concrete, tangible, and marked by generality. Bernstein's portrayal is strongly substantiated by consistent findings in sociological literature. The studies not only note the radically different ways in which working class and middle/upper class

<sup>24</sup> Bernstein does not suggest a one-to-one relationship between the working classes and this form of spoken language but rather theorizes the probability of its use as very high.



parents use language but also, corroborating Bernstein's findings, register working class speech as characterized by less syntactic complexity, the use of authoritarian directives, and constituted by a far fewer number and variety of words, sentences, and conversation-eliciting questions than the form of language used by middle class parents.<sup>25</sup>

Yet most significant in relation to the foreclosure of idiomatic development are a restricted code's absence of personal qualifications and its dominant production of social rather than individual symbols. In contrast to a middle class elaborated code that Bernstein characterizes by sensitivity to the implications of separateness and difference and rich in personal, individual qualifications, the restricted code is constituted by concrete symbolism rooted within the objective realm and a strong preference for inclusive social relations and the demands of solidarity with the group. As such, the very structure of a restricted code resists the verbal transmission and elaboration of subjective intent and the individual's unique experience. Working class parents' closure to a child's idiomatic expression is constituted by more than a conscious aim to shut down the subjective within the self and the child; the organizing features of a working class linguistic modality severely reduces the capacity to access and engage this realm.

The code additionally inhibits a parent's ability to elaborate her child's inner life by way of its aversion towards the expression of what Bernstein terms "tender feeling" (50), a characteristic he associates not only with the inherent difficulty in articulating what is highly personal in nature within the confines of a restricted code, but also to the priority of the social relation which may be disrupted by the expression of individual feeling and thus avoided for fear of social isolation. The code's discouragement of the verbalization of tender feeling does more than foreclose a vital realm of emotional

<sup>25</sup> See Fries; Hess and Shipman; Lawton; Hart and Risley; and Lareau.

expression, it also relatedly produces the propensity towards "tough" responses by way of vocabulary and/or expressive style that communicate and reinforce the priority (and appropriateness) of one form of affect over another.

Bernstein argues these strictures not only foreclose certain kinds of verbal expression, they likewise impact the very shape of one's inner life. When the articulation of tender or simply personal feelings is linguistically inhibited, the obstruction "in its turn modifies the individual's ready entertainment of such feelings" (50). Moreover, when from an early age a child interacts with a linguistic form that is not used to verbalize experiences of separateness and difference and "the very means of communication do not permit, and even discourage, individually differentiated cognitive and affective responses," the individual learns to perceive the possibilities symbolized in language in a specific way: "language is perceived *not* as a set of possibilities which can be fashioned subtly and sensitively to facilitate the development of a unique, individual experience" (47).

In these ways, Bernstein's work strongly suggests a socially structured dimension to the failure of idiomatic nurture that is absent in Bollas's theory of normotism. When Bollas describes normotic parents' failure to use words to elaborate their child's inner life as the "disown(ing) (of) the imaginative element in their child" (*Shadow* 144), he illumines the fear and aversion towards the subjective within the parent but without considering the possibility Bernstein explores, that such parents may not possess a relationship to language that would facilitate this act. It is the juxtaposition of the two theories that most comprehensively illumines how the psychic and the social interact to

inhibit alpha function and thus impinge upon working class parents' ability to verbally provide shape and form to one's child's emerging individual subjectivity.

### **Idiomatic Extinguishment**

The repudiation of the daughter's idiomatic selfhood constitutes the most explicit form of recognition failure that working class protagonists suffer within the escape narrative. In one sense, the conflict at the heart of this subgenre can be straightforwardly defined as the daughter's felt need to express a self other than those modeled as appropriate versions of female subjectivity within her classed community and enforced by subtle and direct forms of censure. Yet at the same time, perceived through a more patently relational lens, the escape narrative's central rupture may be understood as the intense psychic split between mother and daughter reflecting an existential dilemma both unavoidable and irresolvable. In *Sula*, these related predicaments are vividly illustrated in the highly antagonistic encounter between Sula and Eva when Sula returns home after ten years of absence and articulates her desire to give life and form to her own subjectivity rather than bear children: "I don't want to make somebody else. I want to make myself" (92). Eva's response to Sula's yearning is palpable fury; she condemns her as selfish, deserving of hell fire, and in need of a man and some kids to "settle her."

While this particular moment in the text throws into relief idiomatic extinguishment with unparalleled clarity, it cannot be fully understood in isolation. The relational chasm here depicted between Eva and Sula (and likewise felt between Eva and Hannah as well as between Hannah and Sula) is at the same time framed within an

overarching context of the absences and injuries that constitute a working class macrohistory that prior to this scene have already been expressed in other forms of intimate recognition failure through three generations of mothers and daughters. This is to say that in Morrison's exploration of relational breakdown, this third more direct expression of idiomatic foreclosure arrives not as an anomaly, but as issuing from earlier iterations of recognition failure. In this way the novel provides a context for understanding all three forms as emanating from a dispositional way of seeing and being here theorized as the working class habitus.

The conflict between Sula and Eva also highlights the critical role that difference plays in the quashing of idiomatic expression within the working class home. Perhaps the most apparent difference contributing to the estrangement between the two is access to educational capital that allows Sula (as well as other escape narrative protagonists) to develop alternate conceptions of selfhood that exist outside her community's understandings of what constitutes acceptable ways of being. This difference acquires greater significance when it is understood as creating another more intimate, existential divide between mother and daughter.

In the escape narrative, education, that which opens a world of imaginative resources for the daughter, is the most frequently tapped alternate source of recognition. Bollas theorizes that in the absence of a parent's affirmative mirroring gaze a child may discover another reflective object, a substitute mirror that suggests one's idiomatic self is at least in part acceptable, that is worth protecting and preserving. In *Sula* (and in Morrison's fiction more generally) this alternate experience of recognition is also experienced through the affirmative mirroring gaze of a childhood friend. It is through

these relationships that protagonists come to experience a kind of "givenness" of "being" that profoundly alienates daughter from mother in the escape narrative, illustrating the clash between a "being" self and a "doing" one as irreconcilable. The daughter's expression of idiomatic "being," that which the mother has not experienced, makes her more than objectionable to her mother, but also indecipherable. Through this lens, the oft expressed censure of idiomatic otherness, "who do you think you are?," takes on yet another layer of meaning.

In his analysis of the working class habitus's rejection of the indecipherable as it is expressed within the realm of art, Bourdieu theorizes that the repudiation of art and cultural practices deemed illegible and/or lacking a discernable function does more than merely reflect the habitus's commitment to the pragmatic and the objective. It also acts as a means by which working class individuals attempt to maintain and affirm self-worth. Because the object that cannot be understood taps the classed shame and inadequacy already known within the self, rejecting and disparaging that which is unintelligible functions as a way of saving face and preserving esteem.

If we understand working class mothers' primary means of constructing a positive sense of identity by selflessly "doing" caregiving, her daughter's assertion of an idiomatic "being" self poses more than one potential threat to her mother's retaining a sense of worth. Not unlike the unreadable work of art, the unintelligible daughter similarly elicits feelings of shame and inadequacy within the mother. Quelling a daughter's expression of a language and a way of being that registers as incomprehensible becomes a face-saving act in two ways. In attempting to constrain and steer her daughter towards a more

appropriate iteration of female subjectivity, she seeks a reflection of her own tenuously constructed selfhood, both to the outside world and also to her self.

As much of the work of caregiving is performed behind closed doors, the "caring self" "dependent upon external validation" for knowing itself as "respectable and responsible" (Skeggs 72) requires more than her own "doing" of selflessness but also the conforming, selfless behavior of her daughter that signifies her success and thus value as a competent caregiver to the outside world. Rubin's research speaks to this reality. Her data suggests that for working class parents, a child's actions as perceived by others outside the family contain the power to buttress or alternatively undermine an always already dubious respectability:

For only if their children behave properly by their standards, only if they look and act in ways that reflect honor on the family, can these parents begin to relax about their status in the world, can they be assured that they will be distinguished from those below. This is their ticket to respectability—the neat, well dressed, well behaved, respectful child; the child who can be worn as a badge, the public certification of the family's social position. (*Worlds* 60)<sup>26</sup>

The way in which a working class mother's subjectivity is thusly constituted in the reflected image of her daughter is further illumined by Winnicott's theory of mirroring.

Not unlike her daughter, the mother also seeks in the other a mirror that can reflect back

<sup>26</sup> The darker side to this strongly felt need to produce obedient and "well-mannered" children in order to engender and sustain one's own sense of worth and value is illustrated in a response Sharon Hays reports in her examination of differently classed parenting practices. "Mecca," a subject who falls within the poor/working class category of the two logics of childrearing Hays explores, here seeks to explain why her neighbors were wrong to report her to the police as a child abuser. While she concedes that she does spank her children regularly, she explains that it is "only to keep them in line" (84):

And they say I'm an abusive mother. And I go, "How can you say I'm an abusive mother when the only thing I want is to have my kids to be in a place where people can say, 'Wow, those kids, her mom did something good for their education?'" You know, well-mannered kids and things like that. (84)

The break and immediate replacement of "those kids" with "her mom" in Mecca's report of what she hopes her childrearing practices will yield reveals a strong if not inextricable connection between her logic of caregiving and her desire to be recognized and afforded esteem by others.

to her an acceptable, valued self. The mirror that Winnicott describes as establishing "being" can be understood as simultaneously solicited by each and failing both. In her description of her final interaction with her mother after nine years of estrangement, Steedman alludes to this way in which recognition failure escapes mother and daughter alike:

I was really a ghost who came to call. That feeling, the sense of being absent in my mother's presence, was nothing to do with illness, was what it had always been like. We were truly illegitimate, outside any law of recognition: the mirror broken... (142)

In placing the image of the broken mirror directly after establishing the illegitimacy felt by both mother and daughter, Steedman suggests more than a one-way maternal failure of mirroring. The broken object may be understood at the same time representing the daughter's failure to reflect an image that would legitimate her mother's subject status.

What I mean to highlight by closing with Steedman's memory of recognition failure as jointly suffered by mother and daughter is the inextricable connection between the daughter's being denied idiomatic expression and the classed injuries accumulated, embodied, and daily experienced by the mother. The macrohistory that cannot be escaped within the escape narrative is the fact of cumulative trauma: the insidious, structuring trauma that denies both mother and daughter a foundation of trust, security, and acceptance from which to fashion selfhood.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE PRESENCE OF THE PAST: WHAT REMAINS INESCAPABLE IN THE ESCAPE NARRATIVE

*My mother.* Already she has interrupted this story several times.

--Sigrid Nunez, *The Last of Her Kind*

*...the bit about Mother, who probably doesn't belong in this at all but I can't come within reach of her without being invaded by her, then trying to say too much too fast to get her finished with. Even now I am tempted to put in my dream about her.*

--Alice Munro, "Home" (1974)

*The Mother.* She who constitutes often the largest and most powerful force in the working class home, it turns out, is inescapable. Some narrators, like those above, attempt to evade or explain her away, but nevertheless find themselves invaded by her. Others return home both literally and imaginatively to actively confront her actual and figurative presence in their lives. Such visitations, consciously chosen or imposed from within or without, illustrate in sharp relief the ways in which the presence of the past haunts these texts.

Via these myriad returns, the working class escape narrative explores the relational injuries that engender the protagonist's escape and sheds light on the ways in which these experiences shape the kind of split and shamed subjectivity that is shared by the protagonists of this genre. In this way it becomes evident that the escape narrative is not solely constituted by an advancing journey away from the family the protagonist has inherited. It is also fundamentally defined by the similar ways in which the past structures the journey and the protagonist on it.



In the previous chapter, I examined the various ways in which cumulative trauma (the particular absences and injuries that constitute the macrohistory of the working class habitus) creates various kinds of impediments in one's ability to afford subject recognition to one's child. In particular, I explored the working class habitus as defined by its commitment to the pragmatic and its closure to the subjective realm of "being." In this chapter, I explore how these characteristics as well as other effects of cumulative trauma manifest themselves within a dispositional, dynamic form of relating. The chapter poses the following questions: how is a "doing" pragmatic love lived and transmitted through the relational dynamics of parenting? What injuries are effected by this style of relating? What becomes embodied within the daughter and what can be escaped? Understanding the dispositional sensibility of the mother and the dynamic quality of a working class logic of caregiving that denies the other's subjectivity is critical to this endeavor because in the chapters that follow it is the dynamic created through this relational dyad internalized within the daughter that is negotiated psychically and narratively in the daughter's journey to selfhood. In other words, what is here described intersubjectively is embodied and worked through both intrapsychically and textually within the three phases of the escape narrative.

Defined by her pragmatism, stoicism, resilience, invulnerability, and strength, Eva provides an archetype through which to explore the classed sensibility of the mother within the escape narrative. If there exists one character that utterly explodes Steedman's postulation that existing literature fails to adequately portray the complexity of working class subjectivity, I would argue for Eva. *Sula's* fiercely courageous, self-sacrificing

matriarch offers a representation of the embodied strength and integrity of a working class mother's love for her children and at the same time registers its emotional and psychic insufficiency. In its ability to allow Eva to triumph over hardship and negotiate seemingly impossible circumstances, Eva's sensibility is upheld as positive. Yet as it is expressed in caregiving, it is interrogated both in and outside of the text for its inability to provide the emotional support that allows for psychic health and thriving. When discussing the character of Eva in an interview, Morrison emphatically states: "Parents who simply adore their children and really and truly want the best for them may, in fact, destroy them" (Bakerman interview 60).

In *Sula*, this destruction is evidenced in Eva's literal killing of her son Plum as well as in her psychically injurious relationships with her daughter Hannah and granddaughter Sula. I propose these various iterations of destructive parenting are made intelligible through one another, as intimately related, and issuing from the same working class logic of caregiving. It is a dispositional sensibility created by a macrohistory constituted by cumulative trauma that brings intelligibility both to Eva's burning of Plum and to her failure to recognize Hannah and Sula as subjects.

While Bourdieu's definition of the working class habitus includes a dimension of stoicism that makes possible its characteristic "resignation to the inevitable," Bourdieu fails to discuss the intersubjective dynamics of invulnerability that stoicism demands. Eva's burning of her son is unintelligible without understanding the disavowal of vulnerability and weakness that a macrohistory of poverty and hardship necessitates. For Eva, whose very survival has depended upon autonomy, strength, and resilience, there is no space for the kind of psychic frailty and dependency exhibited by her son in his state

of addiction and depression. While Eva is resolutely committed to doing battle against dangerous entities that are objectively intelligible, “floods,...tuberculosis, famine,” “plague,” and “drought,” she is utterly lacking the resources to understand Plum's illness as anything other a shameful attempt to crawl back into her womb. I suggest that Eva’s belief that it is preferable for Plum to die a man than revert back to a needy dependent being must be understood through the lens of the invulnerability that stoicism requires and the split from the subjective realm of feeling.

In the escape narrative, as here explored in *Sula*, emotions are felt as dangerous because they render the self vulnerable and weak. Thus, the response to the subjective feeling self within and without is rejection and closure as a means of protection. Carolyn Steedman’s great-grandmother’s emotional shift from tears to a stoical acceptance of her plight of being sent away to work as a maid when she was eleven is one that the mothers in these texts have also incorporated into their habitus. They too have learned to “g(e)t by because no one gives you anything in this world” (Steedman 31). They have experienced the world as neither a place of play nor of possibility: Eva’s world is one filled with “evil;” Christa’s past is described as “full of horror” (*Feather* 40); Flo’s childhood is characterized by abandonment and abuse (*Beggar Maid* 44-46). How these women have learned to “get by” has not been through sharing feelings and thoughts, but rather by closing off emotion and engaging in practical action.

*Sula* explores the foreclosure of the self’s emotional and relational capacity that might otherwise leave one susceptible to unnecessary pain and vulnerability. After BoyBoy leaves her, Eva has “no idea of what or how to feel” (32):

The children needed her; she needed money, and needed to get on with her life. But the demands of feeding her three children were so acute she had to postpone

her anger for two years until she had both the time and the energy for it. She was confused and desperately hungry. (32)

With exigencies consuming all of her energies, an emotional life is a luxury for Eva.<sup>27</sup> Having lost the ability to experience her own feelings, Eva becomes less capable of relating to her children's emotional needs. Eva's harsh rebuke of Hannah for asking for assurance of her mother's love illumines how deeply Eva's subjective self has been repressed and remains so. It is never fully recovered and incorporated into a subjectivity that allows her the expression of a full range of emotions—even after she is financially secure. Whatever emotions may be stirred by the loss of her lover, husband, and father of her children are reduced to a single, tightly controlled, defined entity, hatred:

Hating BoyBoy, she could get on with it, and have the safety, the thrill, the consistency of that hatred as long as she wanted or needed it to define and strengthen her or protect her from routine vulnerabilities. (36)

Eva's response to relational pain is much like her response to what she perceives as "evil" in the world, stoic strategic survival. Moreover, by diminishing her subjective inner world, Eva does more than survive her circumstances; she triumphs over them. She becomes one who is untouchable, existing above the fray and messiness of human emotions. Such a position allows her power; Eva acts as "creator and sovereign" of the Peace residence, "directing the lives of her children, friends, strays, and a constant stream of boarders" (30). Yet this is not without a price. In holding herself apart from the subjective realm of feeling, she forecloses the possibility of subject/subject relationality, that which is constituted by emotional give and take and some degree of vulnerability. As a result, Eva is admired without being known. She holds court with those who come to

<sup>27</sup> Victoria Burrows also notes Eva's lack of ability to experience her own emotions and similarly attributes this absence to the stresses and exigencies produced by poverty that consume Eva: "all feeling has been excised in the will-to-survive" (137).

visit, bestows advice to young wives and takes care of neglected children—but all from a position of distance and without emotional engagement. Although her chair always places Eva in the position of others having to look down at her when conversing, her phlegmatic reserve keeps her far above them: “all had the impression that they were looking up at her, up into the open distances of her eyes” (31). The part of the anatomy so often used as a means of connection between individuals does not function in this way for Eva. Eva’s eyes neither express the self’s inner world nor reflect the other’s interiority. They cast back “open distances,” keeping Eva protected from vulnerability and human need, both her own and others.

While affecting a steep price on their children’s emotional and relational development, this emotional closure is inextricably tied to a position of strength and invincibility from which working class mothers derive a positive sense of identity. Eva draws attention to her most dramatic and visible act of powerful, self-sacrificing love. By her choice of calf length skirts and her dressing up the beauty of her other leg,<sup>28</sup> Eva’s absent leg becomes her “mark of distinction from the other poor and abandoned mothers in Medallion” (264). Entwined with this invulnerability and relational closure is a strong sense of self-sufficiency; the working class mothers in these texts pride themselves in not needing anything from anyone, not help, sympathy, or even friendship. When Flo suffers pain, she will not “let on,” as her own hard life has taught her, “weep and you weep alone” (*Beggar Maid* 205). Christa keeps clear of friends and confidants: “She didn’t trust people. If anyone tried to get close to her, she backed away” (*Feather* 82). Instead, she surrounds herself with animals, stating her preference for dogs over humans “with a

<sup>28</sup> Marianne Hirsch similarly interprets Eva’s dress as engendered by her desire to call attention to the strength and intensity of her love for her children.

tinge of pride...as if it were superior, to prefer dogs” (64). Here Bourdieu's theorization that the working class habitus makes "virtue" of what is necessary manifests itself within the spheres of the inter- and intrapsychic. As the world and others are experienced as fundamentally unreliable, to depend only oneself is understood as essential; moreover, the more unassailable one becomes, the more esteem generated--from within and without.

Intimately related is an imperative of bodily invulnerability. *The Bluest Eye* allows readers to witness various ways in which this sensibility is transmitted via operations of care. When Claudia coughs, she is met with her mother's scolding; “how many times do I have to tell you to wear something on your head? You must be the biggest fool in this town” (10). When her body succumbs to illness, Claudia relays that “no one speaks to me or asks how I feel” (11). Alone in bed, she vomits, and her mother responds to her abject state with further admonishments:

“Don't you have sense enough to hold your head out the bed? Now, look what you did. You think I got time for nothing but washing up your puke?”...My mother's voice drones one. She is not talking to me. She is talking to the puke, but she is calling it my name: Claudia.” (11)

When first reprimanded for her coughing and sent to bed, Claudia is “full of guilt” (10). After her mother's indignant response to her vomiting, guilt turns to shame: “my mother's anger humiliates me; her words chafe my cheeks, and I am crying” (11). It is only in adulthood that Claudia comes to the realization that as a child *she* was not the object of her mother's rage, but rather it was her illness that provoked it. However, by this time, her mother's habitus of invulnerability and strength has already become her own:

I do not know that she is not angry at me, but at my sickness. I believe she despises my weakness for letting the sickness “take hold.” By and by I will not get sick; I will refuse to. (11-12)

While for Claudia it is Mrs. MacTeer's fury and indignation at her that causes her to purge weakness from her own being, in other texts, mothers communicate an imperative of strength in different ways. For Christa, encountering weakness in and outside her family "whetted her scorn" (63), and for Flo, it elicits her "disgust" (25). Thus Flo takes to taunting Rose whenever Rose's sensitivities and vulnerabilities are exposed.

Because of the filth of the school toilets and the abuses that occur within the facilities, Rose chooses not to use them. Occasionally she is not able to make it all the way home without having an accident, which prompts Flo's derision and jibes: "'Wee-pee, wee-pee,' she sang out loud, mocking Rose. 'Walking home and she had a wee-pee!'" (26). In *Feather*, illness and fear produce within Christa contempt and dismissal: "no sympathy for (her husband) when he was down with a cold—'He sneezes twice and it's the end of the world'—or when for a time he had nightmares and often woke her with his cries" (63-4).

Theirs is a habitus that refuses to tolerate vulnerability in any and all forms. When the narrator as a young girl in *Feather* wonders aloud why her family doesn't receive financial assistance like some of their neighbors, Christa is outraged: "'Welfare! Are you mad? Those people should be ashamed'" (54). In embodying this habitus of self-sufficiency and strength the mothers in these texts lose access to their own felt needs and believe that they are better off for it. In subtle and not so subtle ways they communicate to their daughters that the feeling self, the one that is vulnerable and needy, is unacceptable.

This aversion to weakness leads the mothers in these texts to turn away from their daughters' emotional self and needs. Mrs. MacTeer displays her inability to hold and

support her daughter in weakness not only in her repudiation of Claudia when she is physically ill but also through her behavior towards an emotionally distraught Frieda after she is molested. Having been made aware of Mr. Henry's advances towards Frieda and subsequently throwing him out of the house, Mrs. MacTeer retreats to the kitchen where she busies herself with housework.<sup>29</sup> All the while, Frieda, confused and frightened after the trauma she has just experienced, weeps in her bedroom. While Mrs. MacTeer does not display anger towards Frieda's vulnerable state as she does in response to Claudia's illness, she nevertheless distances herself from her.

Understanding this dispositional closure to the inner subjective world of feeling as something that is experienced by working class mothers as an imperative that allows one to "get on" while avoiding the possibility of experiencing potentially debilitating psychic and emotional pain brings intelligibility to this profound split from the daughter's pain. This closure likewise inhibits the fostering of a "knowing" love within the working class home that would provide the foundation for intimate communication between mother and daughter. The failure of intimate conversation between Mrs. MacTeer and Frieda following Frieda's molestation is not exceptional but rather the norm within the working class home. There exists not one intimate dialogue between mother and daughter in any of the escape narratives within this study. Further inhibiting the possibility of intersubjective relationality is the fact that the linguistic code most commonly employed

<sup>29</sup> While she cleans, Mrs. MacTeer sings. McKittrick offers an interpretation that theoretically endows Mrs. MacTeer's singing of blues songs with subversive, liberatory, feminist power. Yet if one considers the absence of emotional nurture and failure of recognition that characterize Mrs. MacTeer's relation to her daughters, it becomes more difficult to celebrate her songs as performances of an "unwritten black feminism" (McKittrick 136), especially in light of the fact Mrs. MacTeer is singing one of those "feminist" songs laundering curtains while her older daughter weeps inconsolably after having been molested by the MacTeer's boarder.



by working class individuals is one that lacks a vocabulary of "tender feeling." Claudia knows herself as loved not through verbal expressivity, but rather by way of practical caregiving. While her mother's stinging words humiliate Claudia, Mrs. MacTeer's readjustment of Claudia's quilt in the middle of the night assures Claudia of her mother's love. Yet when there is no explicit material need that requires attention, mothers seldom engage their daughters; little support is offered in helping daughters negotiate their emotional lives.

This lack of relationality between mother and daughter is presented in the working class escape narrative as altogether ordinary; it is but one facet of a larger split between children and adults that within working class communities is unreflexively accepted as appropriate and fitting. Claudia, in *The Bluest Eye*, describes these relations between children and adults in matter-of-fact terms: "Adults do not talk to us—they give us directions. They issue orders without providing information" (10). Children are not to engage in conversation with their parents: "We didn't initiate talk with grown-ups; we answered their questions" (23). Parents remain squarely in the world of work and "doing," and children are directed and expected to conform to the demands of this world.

The little communication that takes place between parents and children within the escape narrative is rarely dialogical; more frequently it consists of one-way directives or admonishments: Frieda is commanded to "get some rags and stuff (the) window;" Claudia is rebuked for "puk(ing) on the bed clothes;" the girls are ordered to "be nice to (Pecola) and not fight" when she comes to live with them; Claudia is instructed to drink her water on the spot so that she does not have the chance to spill it or break the jar her mother has directed her to use. Throughout the entirety of the text, there are few other

exchanges between Mrs. MacTeer and her daughters although a significant portion of the novel takes place within the MacTeer residence. This paucity of parent/child interactions is in part explained by Claudia near the end of the book: “Nobody paid us any attention” (191).

While the practical exigencies that constitute working class life shed some light on this reality, that parents do not recognize children as full subjects offers a much fuller explanatory lens for understanding this phenomenon. It illumines the otherwise perplexing fact of Mrs. MacTeer taking a boarder into her family's home without feeling any need to introduce her daughters to the new resident that will be living with them. Claudia recalls that they were “merely pointed out,” “like, here is the bathroom; the clothes closet is here; and these are my kids, Frieda and Claudia; watch out for this window; it don’t open all the way” (15). Moreover, Claudia and Frieda as children do not expect any more than this. Both she and Frieda are accustomed to not registering as subjects with whom adults might engage, and thus they anticipate little more than the kind of object acknowledgement of their presence that is afforded them by their mother: “We looked sideways at him (the new boarder, Mr. Henry), saying nothing and expecting him to say nothing. Just to nod, as he had done at the clothes closet, acknowledging our existence. To our surprise he spoke to us” (15).

In his simple acts of seeing the girls, speaking to them, and christening them with individual sophisticated nicknames, Mr. Henry offers subject status to Claudia and Frieda. In response, the girls are shocked and delighted. In this first meeting, Mr. Henry also plays with them, performing a magic trick to charm and amuse them. The exchange is significant, celebrated; in Claudia’s recounting of an entire year of her childhood, she

chooses to narrate this particular meeting—in detail. The focused attention that Claudia devotes to the encounter speaks to how significant this moment of recognition is for Claudia.

The escape narrative underscores how powerfully the lack of recognition within one's own family affects one by frequently portraying the protagonist's first experience of recognition outside the family as an altogether foreign experience that is highly charged. For Claudia and Frieda, the experience is so unique and delightful that the bestower of this gift is forgiven even of his molestation of Frieda: "We loved him. Even after what came later, there was no bitterness in our memory of him" (16). Like Claudia and Frieda, the narrator of *Feather on the Breath of God*, is entranced by the attention, affection, and intimacy she experiences for the first time at during her visits to the home of her upper class friend Portia. Relatedly, she is amazed and delighted by the way feeling is openly expressed:

"Aren't they two little jewels?" I had never heard anyone talk like that. But the ways of these people were all new to me. I had never seen people touch so much...they laughed a lot, and Portia's mother often cried... "My mother is very emotional," Portia explained...(108)

While in the midst of this affectionate and expressive family, the narrator decides that this is precisely the kind of life that she wants to create for herself. Yet like most escape narrative protagonists, the narrator eventually comes to reject it as not for her. While acknowledging a strong attraction towards the exotic world of recognition and relationality, *Feather* likewise explores the protagonist's need to disavow it. Within a few years, the narrator's fantasies have transformed into yearnings not for intimacy but rather for solitude:

A single room. A chair, a table, a bed. Windows on the garden. Music. Books. A cat to teach me how to be alone with dignity. A room where men might come and go but never stay. I began dreaming of this room when I was still in my teens. (127)

The narrator attributes these desires and her related “horror of marriage” to her own parents’ unhappy relationship and “the peaceless households of the projects” around her. Yet this text, as well as other escape narratives, reveals not just the absence of intimacy and expression of “tender feeling” within the homes of the protagonists but the explicit rejection of this way of being.

Eva rebukes and insults Hannah for simply expressing the desire to know herself as intimately loved by her mother. Christa and Flo attempt to shame their daughters’ sensitive feeling selves out of existence. When the narrator in *Feather* is emotionally moved by a romantic film that she and her mother have viewed together, Christa not only dismisses her daughter’s response but distances herself from her by linking her with a nationality that Christa sees as inferior to her own: “God. What you Americans call a tragedy” (80). Flo takes a more active role in excising emotional vulnerability from Rose’s sensibility in her humiliation of Rose for a crush she forms on an older schoolmate. When Flo finds out that Rose has stolen a bag of candy to give to Cora, the object of her affection, Flo ridicules her with a barrage of questions that eventually lead to Flo’s condemnation of Rose as an object of disgust:

“...what were you giving it to her for? Are you in love with her or something?” She meant that as an insult and a joke. Rose answered no, because she associated love with movie endings, kissing and getting married. Her feelings were at the moment shocked and exposed, and already, though she didn’t know it, starting to wither and curl up at the edges. Flo was a drying blast. “You are so,” said Flo. “You make me sick.” (37-8)

While others have focused on the way in which the syntactical overtones of this passage suggest that it is Rose's emerging sexuality that is "drie(d) up" by Flo,<sup>30</sup> I understand Flo's rebuke as an assault on the whole of Rose's inner subjective self that in this moment is "shocked" and "exposed" and begins to "wither" and "curl up." Flo's scorn towards Rose is not engendered by an aversion towards sex but towards the weakness Flo associates with love and intimacy:

It wasn't future homosexuality Flo was talking about. If she had known about that, or thought of it, it would have seemed to her even more of a joke, even more outlandish, more incomprehensible, than the regular carrying-on. It was love she sickened at. It was the enslavement, the self-abasement, the self-deception. That struck her. She saw the danger, all right; she read the flaw. Headlong hopefulness, readiness, need. (37-8)

Having been "given away by her father" to work on a farm to earn her keep at the age of twelve after her mother had died, and having endured physical abuse and emotional manipulation by the farming family to whom she was given, Flo has learned not to trust love. Like Eva, she rejects the possibility of intimacy and the vulnerability that accompanies it.

The disavowal of intimacy and relationality is one of the strongest legacies transmitted from mother to daughter within the escape narrative. Without exception, no daughter escapes this bequest. While in second and third phase texts, protagonists eventually come to recover and embrace the shamed and squelched idiomatic self, what remains unrecoverable is the capacity for sustained intimacy with another. While I propose that this is connected to the mother's invulnerability and her attempts to shame a weak, feeling, vulnerable self out of her daughter, I understand it as likewise effected by

<sup>30</sup> See Lynch 166-77 and Nicholson 52.

the mother's inability to recognize, reflect, and embrace her daughter's unique subjectivity. Intimacy requires a willingness to allow the inner subjective self to be known. Fairbairn suggests that when a child does not experience from the mother recognition and the sense of the self as lovable for its own sake, she comes to feel this self as shameful and unworthy of love. The inevitable outcome is a belief that one's most authentic feeling self must be hidden; visible, it would be recognized as unlovable and shameful.<sup>31</sup> Munro's oeuvre in particular establishes a strong connection between being recognized by an other and the fearful sense of being shamefully "exposed."

In "Fathers," when afforded interest and attention by the middle class parent of a schoolmate at a birthday party, the eight or nine-old-narrator is not only perplexed but also profoundly disturbed. The way in which her friend's father put himself "at the service of two children," asking and catering to their preferences in the playful role of "waiter," feels not only altogether inappropriate to the narrator but also produces shame: "such slopping-over of attention made me feel cornered and humiliated...(193). In "Hired Girl," when the protagonist's employer offers her a book that he had earlier observed her reading, the protagonist is "embarrassed" and acknowledges that "the thought of having a little corner of myself come to light and be truly understood stirred up alarm" (254). In "Lying Under the Apple Tree," the narrator self-consciously hides her "private passion(s)" for nature and poetry, for she knows to expose them "would have put (her) into a condition of permanent vulnerability...which (she) felt she was in already" (199). In "The Ticket" when her Aunt Charlie deduces the narrator's doubts about her impending marriage and offers her two hundred dollars in the event she decides to break

<sup>31</sup> Fairbairn's work is more thoroughly taken up in the following chapter.

off the engagement and embark upon a different path, the narrator responds to this moment of recognition as “danger(ous):” “I couldn’t let a soul see into me” (284, 283).<sup>32</sup>

The felt need to hide the subjective self is not unique to working class escape narrative protagonists; it is the norm within the communities in which they live. The ethos of working class community confirms both the appropriateness and necessity of keeping the self from being known. In *The Beggar Maid*, while Rose's father likewise possesses an imaginative sensibility, it is one that he only allows minimal expression in the privacy of his woodworking studio through quiet murmurings of bits of poetry and verbal play. When some of his utterances move from their usual indecipherable register into clarity, Rose’s father is immediately abashed: “when he realized they were out, there would be a quick bit of cover-up coughing, a swallowing, an alert, unusual silence” (5). Even when Rose’s father is alone and behind closed doors, he is fearfully self-conscious about the potential exposure of his subjective self. It feels dangerous to even privately express such a self.

The exposure is not only perilous for the one who might be exposed; it is just as distressing to be a witness to the other's inner self. When Rose passes by her father's shed, occasionally “some words would break through and hang clear and nonsensical on the air”: “macaroni, pepperoni, Botticelli, beans—“ (5). Such occurrences elicit curiosity that is immediately undone by alarm; Rose wonders the words' meaning but knows:

...she could never ask him. The person who spoke these words and the person who spoke to her as her father were not the same, though they seemed to occupy the same space. It would be the worst sort of taste to acknowledge the person who was not supposed to be there; it would not be forgiven. (6)

<sup>32</sup> All of these stories are part of Munro's autobiographical section "Home" in *The View from Castle Rock*.

On an occasion that she overhears him in his workspace reciting Shakespeare, Rose flees: “she had to run then, she had to get away” (6). Not only can she not acknowledge the existence of her father’s inner world, she also believes that should this reality come to light between them, “it would be terrible” (6).

Moreover, the narrator equates the exposure of the private subjective self with “bathroom noises,” or more precisely, the sounds of defecation. The necessity of disassociating one’s subjective feeling self from one’s public self is compared to the way that those in the kitchen next to the thin, beaverboard-walled bathroom pretend not to hear the “nether voices” produced by the one on the toilet: “the person creating the noises in the bathroom was not connected with the person who walked out” (6). While the comparison aims to underscore both the extent to which the inner world is considered absolutely private and how everyone in the family participates in keeping it so, the chosen metaphor relating the exposure of one’s subjective self with the act of defecation is nevertheless notable in its relation to the overarching existential shame that Rose embodies through the entirety of her life.

The feeling of shame for the subjective self is intensified by the communal ethic of pragmatism that explicitly repudiates not only art that is indecipherable and without use but also those individuals associated with nonutilitarian pursuits. Moreover, the sentiment is not implicit but directly expressed towards those who embody this difference. Rose is not only disparaged by Flo for her love of literature and poetry while growing up but also derided in adulthood. Her professional work as an actor is scorned by her family, evaluated as being of “no use.” This is an assessment that makes frequent appearances in the working class escape narrative, both to denigrate individuals who engage in



impractical endeavors as well as those who allow something of their subjective feeling selves to come to light. Below this sentiment is articulated by Rose's half-brother Brian in relation to her career:

In Rose's presence Brian had said more than once that he had no use for people in her line of work...Actors, artists, journalists...the entire Arts faculty of universities. Whole classes and categories, down the drain. Convicted of woolly-mindedness, and showy behavior; inaccurate talk, many excesses. (183)

These are insults known in one form or another by most if not all of the protagonists in this genre. All impractical imaginative pursuits are treated with irritation, if not outright contempt. Christa chafes at her daughter's passion for ballet while impatiently waiting for her to "outgrow" it (*Feather* 112). The narrator in "Hired Girl" explains that enjoyment of nature also falls within this category: "taking any impractical notice of the out-of-doors, or mooning around about Nature—even using that word, *Nature*—could get you laughed at" (233).

Considering the fact that it is not just "different" and imaginative daughters whose lives are inalterably structured by this communal ethos of shaming allows for a more complex understanding of it. Rose's complicated relationship with her father illumines what might be considered a dimension of its "unconscious." Rose's father's quashed creative self invariably impacts the way in which he relates to his daughter. While he may secretly indulge in poetry in the private space of his workshop, his public self embraces the norms of the community, a fact that ensures his participation in the quelling of Rose's emerging imaginative subjectivity. Although he remains a peripheral figure in the text, Rose's father nevertheless is noted expressing his opposition to the kind of woman that Rose is becoming in favor of the pragmatic femininity most often lauded within the working classes, a femininity that Flo embodies:

Flo was his idea of what a woman ought to be. Rose knew that, and indeed he often said it. A woman ought to be energetic, practical, clever at making and saving; she ought to be shrewd, good at bargaining, and bossing and seeing through peoples' pretensions. At the same time she should be naïve intellectually, childlike, contemptuous of maps and long words and anything in books, full of charming jumbled notions, superstitions, traditional beliefs. (47)

Instead of the Winnicottian ideal of the parent positively mirroring the emerging subjectivity of the child, in Rose's family, a different image is set before Rose, that is the appropriate and approved subjectivity that she must learn to reflect. The sensitive, imaginative, and clever girl that she is is reflected back to her as unacceptable, shameful, and deserving of both Flo's "cuffs and slaps" and her father's belt. In time, Rose, like most escape narrative protagonists, comes to see herself through her family's mirror of derision; through their gaze she knows herself as not having "turned out to be the right kind of woman" (48).

What complicates Rose's existential shame is her recognition that there exists another dimension to her father's disapproval of her; the feelings he expresses towards her also reflect his repudiation of the same qualities in himself. His hatred of these qualities in her thus suggests a kind of self-loathing, a relation to the self that Rose will also come to embody:<sup>33</sup>

The real problem was that she combined and carried on what he must have thought of as the worst qualities in himself. All the things he had beaten down, successfully submerged, in himself, had surfaced again in her, and she was showing no will to combat them. She mooned and daydreamed...her whole life was in her head. She had not inherited the thing he took pride in, and counted

<sup>33</sup> Kleinians have identified the practice of ridding oneself of a particular element of psychic life by putting it into another as "projective identification." When one feels guilt or shame about a part of the self, he often unconsciously seeks to rid the self of this unwanted part via an overly censorious relation to the aspect of his child that mirrors this unwanted part. As the child is unable to bear this repressive approach, the child's rebellion against it makes this "unacceptable" part more pronounced. In this, the parent has succeeded in compelling the child to "carry" this unwanted portion of himself. There seems to be an aspect of this psychic transfer taking place between Rose's father and Rose.

on—his skill with his hands, his thoroughness and conscientiousness at any work...the sight of her slopping around with her hands in the dishpan, her thoughts a thousand miles away, her rump already bigger than Flo's, her hair wild and bushy; the sight of the large and indolent and self-absorbed fact of her, seemed to fill him with irritation, with melancholy, almost with disgust. (48)

While Rose's internalization of this derision eventually transmogrifies into the overwhelming shame she carries with her throughout her life, at the beginning of *Beggar Maid* she is learning techniques that allow her to temporarily escape it. Rose recognizes that she feels this self-loathing most strongly when she is in the presence of those who disparage who she is; in this environment, she has difficulty not incorporating others' contempt of her: "until (her father) had passed through the room she was holding herself still, she was looking at herself through his eyes. She too could hate the space she occupied" (47). In time, Rose thus comes avoid looking into her father's face "because of the bad opinion of herself she was afraid she would find written there" (47).

Not being able to find a positive reflection of her emerging self in the gaze of her parents, Rose responds in two distinct ways that are defining characteristics of many protagonists in the escape narrative. She turns both inward towards the cultivation of her hidden subjective world and also outward towards a particular object, that of an actual mirror: "...the minute (her father) was gone she recovered. She went back into her thoughts or to the mirror..." (48). Her retreat within allows her a space of freedom for idiomatic development and play. Her turn towards the mirror and the various expressions, poses, and hairstyles she tries out before it suggests the cultivation of her performative self. This split between the inner self that feels most authentic and the outer one created for approval and acceptance emerges in part from the disapproving gaze of her parents. Fairbairn and Winnicott theorize that the split self results from the child "feeling not

loved for himself” by his parents and understand the performative self as an attempt to “show” oneself as worthy of respect, admiration, and affection. Rose’s need to be accepted and positively reflected not only engenders her cultivation of a performative role as an entertaining storyteller and mimic within her family but also impacts her decision to pursue acting as a profession. While the narrator (who is actually an older version of Rose, split into a separate narrating persona) reduces Rose’s motive for acting to her desire “to be known and envied, slim and clever” (72), a more generous assessment might equate Rose’s yearnings simply with the desire to be loved and accepted.<sup>34</sup>

Contra Renny Christopher and other resistance theorists who argue that those who leave working class communities suffer psychic splits and isolation *because* of their departure and their rejection of their community’s values, Rose’s psychic suffering begins *within* her community through its active rejection of her and her different sensibility. In addition, Rose’s taking leave of the community occurs long before she physically escapes; psychically and imaginatively she has already created an isolated interior space in which to dwell. However, in spite of her psychic escape and eventual physical one, what remains impossible for her to break free of is the overwhelming sense of existential shame produced by these rejections. The following chapter will explore how the first phase escape narrative negotiates this shame through splitting, both psychically in the emotional and relational life of the protagonist and also narratively in the way in which the text is constructed and the story told.

<sup>34</sup> The fact that this harsh assessment of Rose is actually made by Rose herself, who has so distanced herself from this younger feeling self that she has taken on a separate persona, illustrates the extent of Rose’s shame and self-loathing.

### CHAPTER 3

#### THE RETURN OF THE REPRESSED...AND ITS UNDOING

*Who told me to write this story? Who feels any need of it before it's written? I do. I do, so that I might grab off this piece of horrid reality and install it where I see fit...*

--Alice Munro, "What is Real?"

*One wants a way of looking back without anger or bitterness or shame. One wants to be able to tell everything without blaming or apologizing.*

--Sigrid Nunez, *A Feather on the Breath of God*

The first phase escape narrative arises precisely out of these two seemingly contradictory impulses: the desire to expose the injuries that one has suffered and the need to undo them, that is, to explain them away and grant absolution to the perpetrators. These opposing forces can in part be understood through the lens of the split and shamed self discussed in the previous chapter. Munro's above remarks refer to a whipping based on an actual event that she describes in "Royal Beatings;" they express something of the authentic subjective self that seeks to truthfully uncover and explore the "horrid reality" of earlier injuries. Yet the effects of some of these past injuries undo this impulse. The parent's failure to recognize and accept the child's idiomatic self impinges upon the self's ability to fully trust and own its feelings, ideas, and inclinations, i.e., the validity of its felt need to truthfully "tell." Early and sustained familial condemnation of the feeling self as selfish, weak, and of "no use" further undermines the subjective self's desire to explore emotional pain. The psychological inheritance of these past injuries becomes embodied as a structuring force in the first phase narrative that asserts itself via the impulse to diminish or explain away past pain.

The narrator of *Feather* in the above epigraph articulates one subtle means by which this is accomplished, that is through purging her story of any painful emotions that might be potentially read as imputing blame. This act both distances the narrator from the sensitive, vulnerable self that was earlier disparaged and also guards against the possibility of further derision. In “tell(ing)” without “anger,” “bitterness” or “blam(e),” culpability is skirted; there is no expressed emotional pain for which anyone may be deemed responsible. As such, the narrative is defanged: it avoids both the transgression of exposing the feeling self and also the consequent possibility of implicating others in its expressed pain. By eliminating negative affect, the narrator prevents the narrative (and the self that produces it) from being judged as objectionable (by both real and imagined detractors). Moreover, this split from emotion allows the narrator the ability to intellectually and aesthetically explore past trauma while retaining a safe emotional distance from it.

The impulse to “tell” that exists alongside of the desire to avoid re-experiencing painful feelings that were earlier repressed is further illumined through Freud’s concept of *Verneinung* or (de)negation.<sup>35</sup> Freud describes the process as the way in which “the content of the repressed image or idea can make its way into consciousness, on condition that it is negated.” While (de)negation involves “already a lifting of the repression,” it does not include “an acceptance of what is repressed;” the “intellectual function is separated from the affective process” (Freud, “Negation” 235-6). In this way, the ideational aspect of the repression is accepted intellectually and named by the subject

<sup>35</sup> Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis note that *Verneinung* in everyday German means both “negation” and “denial.” Informed by George Steinmetz’s exploration of (de)negation in relation to the socioanalysis of Bourdieu, I likewise use of the prefix “(de)” when discussing Freud’s concept as a means of both acknowledging and underscoring this duality of meaning in Freud’s original usage.

while affectively, distance is maintained; as such, the subject still refuses to recognize and own the (de)negated object as a part of the self (Steinmetz 445).

While Freud's concept of (de)negation provides the primary lens through which I explore the phenomenon of exposure and undoing of injury that characterizes the first phase escape narrative, both Bourdieu's socioanalytic work and Alice Miller's psychoanalytic theory also provide helpful means of understanding the psychic and narrative ambivalence embodied in these texts. Bourdieu and Miller's respective explorations may be read as grappling with similar issues through different lenses, or, in certain respects, elaborating aspects of Freud's theory albeit using different language. Bourdieu posits that individuals' notions of what is "reasonable" or "unreasonable" correspond to the formative conditions of their habitus. As one's earliest experiences structure one's habitus, they instill within the self a deep sense of the "rightness" of whatever conditions of existence the individual has known. This includes injuries that one has suffered. Moreover, habitus processes and (unconsciously) makes sense of this reality by transforming "necessity...into virtue" (Bourdieu, *Outline* 77).<sup>36</sup> As such, early

<sup>36</sup> Acceptance of necessity regardless how bleak and/or difficult becomes achievable by the unconscious dispositional purview (that is habitus) that allows one to see one's situation not only as inevitable but as possessing merit. For example, in the realm of work for the working classes, inescapable and often-uninspiring work in and of itself becomes valorized and a means of establishing an honorable and respectable identity.

In *Worlds of Pain*, Lillian Rubin's research exploring how working class subjects both understand and negotiate their difficult everyday lives offers numerous examples of how necessity is made virtue by individuals who come to accept and adapt to that which they come to recognize as inevitable. The difficult but necessary work/school relationship that one male subject navigated beginning at age fourteen is first described by him in matter-of-fact terms:

I worked in a bakery from 2am until school started. Then I came home and changed my clothes and I went to school. Then I came home again and changed my clothes again, and I went to work in a gas station. (45)

This predicament is never interrogated; rather, adaptation is unreflectively translated into virtue:

We learned to honor work. That's what it was about in my family—work, all work; I suppose I'm glad about that now, because I see a lot of people who don't

injury and absence that one has experienced become not only “reasonable” but also understood as possessing merit. In her book *For Your Own Good*, Miller explores this common phenomenon of interpreting the emotionally and physically painful treatment that one received as a child as ultimately beneficial.

Like Bourdieu, Miller traces this practice to one’s earliest experiences of life but explores its inter- and intrapsychic dimensions with more depth and complexity than Bourdieu’s socioanalysis permits. Miller’s analysis is especially relevant because Miller identifies this impulse to minimize and/or explain away past pain with the overarching primary injury defines first phase narratives. That is the inability of the mother to recognize, accept, and intimately relate to the child’s idiomatic self. Miller<sup>37</sup> suggests that during the early development of an infant’s selfhood, feeling the absence of the mother’s emotional support and full acceptance is psychically too difficult to bear. The most common psychic defense against this predicament is the child’s interpretation of the parent’s rejecting behavior as evidence of the child’s failure to be “good enough.” What results is the infant’s splitting off the needy, feeling self that the mother cannot accept and support. Repudiating this self allows the infant to preserve an image of the mother as one who truly loves him. This psychic process brings greater intelligibility to the first phase narrator’s attempts to explain away the injuries inflicted upon her by her parents. By blaming herself and/or diminishing her parents’ culpability in their failure to accept

know how to work...I’m not complaining, mind you, because now I see that it was good for me. If I didn’t have that kind of training, I’d be a lot worse off than I am today...My old man knew what he was doing when he made sure I’d grow up and appreciate the value of money and work. It’s just that kids don’t know that when it’s happening to them, because then all they want is to go out and have some fun. (Thirty-one-year-old mechanic, 45-6)

<sup>37</sup> Object relations psychoanalysts Winnicott, Fairbairne, and Guntrip describe this process in similar terms.



and embrace her, the narrator is able to avoid the painful recognition that perhaps they did not really know or love her.

These protagonists and the first phase escape narrative itself exemplify what object-relations theorists describe as the act of giving up one's self in order to preserve the object. The effects, depression, psychic dislocation, and alienation, are evidenced and explored in the emotional and relational difficulties that all first phase protagonists experience. At the same time, the escape narrative illustrates that psychic splitting is not a onetime and irrevocable act. The ongoing process of unconscious repression of one's feeling self can be undermined by "the return of the repressed," that which can be seen as fueling the first phase narrative's revisitation of earlier injuries and its impulse "to tell." However, as both the escape narrative and Freud's understanding of the process of (de)negation make apparent, intellectual return to past pain does not necessarily include emotionally grappling with the effects of these experiences nor does it insure an incorporation of them into a fuller integrated sense of self.

### ***The Beggar Maid***

Reading Munro's early fiction through the concept of (de)negation sheds new light on what has been termed by various critics as Munro's aesthetic of distanciation,<sup>38</sup> a stylistic sensibility that in Munro's fiction is evidenced in the creation of space between the depiction of the painful event and one's affective experience of it. While operative on multiple layers, it is most often discussed in relation to Munro's frequent use of a retrospective split point of view that divides into an observing narrator and a participating

<sup>38</sup> For further elaboration of this aesthetic, see Ildiko de Papp Carrington and Roxanne Rimstead.

protagonist. Third-person split narration, which is employed in "Royal Beatings" and all of the interrelated stories that make up *The Beggar Maid*, creates a more distinct separation between narrator and protagonist than does first-person. Munro has discussed third-person as "impersonal," a form that she sometimes uses as "sort of a backing off" (Struthers interview 23). Yet she has also acknowledged it as a vehicle that allows her to sometimes get closer to her material (24). This paradox is made explicit in the narration of injury in *Beggar Maid* by way of a complex dynamic between a participating protagonist and an observing narrator who are almost certainly the same person but remain narratively and psychically split.<sup>39</sup> The impulse to get closer to the difficult material depicted in this collection is expressed in the older narrator's return to the internality of her younger self, the protagonist Rose, who, in the context of the story, experiences these earlier painful events. However, the emotional distress engendered by this return is unable to be withstood, and thus narrative and psychic retreat is enacted by way of the narrator's shift into the role of detached chronicler of the scene. This narrative act frequently employed by Munro possesses a striking similarity to the phenomenon of dissociation as produced by trauma, particularly in the way in which it has been described as a split between an experiencing and an observing part of the ego.

Psychiatrists Russell Noyes and Roy Kletti's elaboration of the way in which becoming an "observer of that which is taking place, effectively remov(es) (one) from danger" touches upon a related aspect of this means of negotiating trauma and the limited form of power it affords (qtd. in Onno van der Hart, Nijenhuis, and Steele 68).<sup>40</sup> In relation to what Munro has described as "one's experience of the things in the world, the

<sup>39</sup> Although this is never directly stated, I hope the evidence examined here persuades readers to consider the story through this lens.

<sup>40</sup> For full detail of these findings, see Noyes, Jr. and Kletti 103-114.

experience with other people and with oneself" as "so confusing and humiliating and difficult," writing, she posits, is "a way of getting control" (Gibson interview 245). While critics have suggested various ways in which Munro's aesthetic of distancing effectively functions as a means of negotiating the painful and ungovernable aspects of life,<sup>41</sup> Canadian literary critic Roxanne Rimstead's discussion of this sensibility and practice evidenced in Munro's fiction also identifies Munro's complicated relationship to social class as embedded within it. Rimstead describes *Beggar Maid's* narration as "aesthetic and refined," locating the narrator as transported from the painful situation and commenting from a safely remote place:

Wherever that place is, it does not resemble poverty or one who is wrestling with a poor past; it seems to be a place where artistic sensibility is in control and able to construct a self by holding up the fragments of memory for scrutiny. (109-110)

For Rimstead, it is this aesthetic of distancing that prevents Munro's fiction from realistically engaging lived experiences of poverty and from "oppos(ing) the class boundaries it describes" (106). Yet whereas Rimstead critiques Munro's aesthetic for its failure to articulate a particular politics of social class, I see it as revealing a great deal about the psychological effects of classed realities, specifically the pain of being refused idiomatic expression and the need to escape this injury. Challenging the notion of a conscious authorial decision to aestheticize classed suffering that seems implied within Rimstead's analysis, I explore Munro's aesthetic of distancing as fueled by the unconscious dynamics of psychic trauma.

<sup>41</sup> Carrington's *Controlling the Uncontrollable* offers the most comprehensive examination of Munro's fiction through this lens. Part of what Carrington understands Munro's protagonists and narration attempting to control and master is a deep, pervasive and inescapable sense of shame. However, where Carrington connects this painful psychic state to Munro's fleeing her community and abandoning what she felt was her expected role in the family, I trace it to the earlier injury of Munro's idiomatic selfhood being denied recognition, and moreover, actively quashed.

While I argue that it is psychic trauma that fuels the creation of *Beggar Maid* (and all early escape narratives), in Munro's fiction this form of trauma is complicated by beatings. The beatings themselves represent a kind of trauma in their own right, both as they are depicted within Munro's fiction and in her descriptions of her own experiences of them in childhood and adolescence. In interviews, Munro explicates some of the classed dimensions of this form of discipline, reflecting on her beatings as representative of a wider practice within her working class community, frequently employed as a means of dealing with offspring whose idiomatic difference was disruptive to the principle of pragmatism established by necessity:

. . . the beating of a child was *by no means* reprehensible. It was a natural way to get the child whipped into shape. . . because of poverty, and the need for the child to contribute labor to the household, and not just be an interesting fixture of a child growing up. . . So all this was very practical. . . There just wasn't time or money to bring up children in a way that took account of their needs—*why* they're behaving in a certain way. . .(Awano interview 183)

Although her rational, measured explication borders on a kind of justification of the practice, the intimate injury belied in her matter-of-fact language is revealed in Munro's elaboration of how the beatings structured her identity:

And it was also very terrifying and probably—a lot of people would say—it was destructive. I. . . feel a kind of horror about it to myself. I feel that I was an unworthy person. . . that's what it makes you feel. . .(Awano interview 183)

While feelings of shame and worthlessness are common responses to the experience of physical violence inflicted by those upon whom one depends for love, what complicates these effects is the fact that it is the expression of one's very self that often provokes these lashings. In "Royal Beatings," the opening story in *Beggar Maid*, the threat of the beating is precipitated by protagonist Rose's idiomatic delight in imagery and wordplay embodied in a nonsensical chant. Decades later in "Fathers," the adult narrator makes even more

explicit the connection between the beatings she received and their aim to crush her expression of a uniquely differentiated subjectivity, "I felt as if it must be my very self that they were after, and in a way I think it was" ("Fathers" 194).

Despite its graphic depiction of the beating of a young girl, "Royal Beatings" has not been read through the lens of trauma. This, I maintain, is not because the kicks and blows of a father upon his daughter are not experienced as traumatic by the young protagonist, but rather because of the psychically complex ways in which the event is both exposed and narratively undone by the operations of (de)negation that structure the text. While the bulk of my analysis explores how this psychic defense is embedded in the narration of the beating, I also want to examine its role in obscuring the very reason the beating takes place.

As the title suggests, the beating is the story's *raison d'être*; the text's opening lines underscore its centrality and inevitable arrival: "*Royal Beating*. That was Flo's promise. You are going to get one Royal Beating" (3). But before this principal event is enacted, the narrator provides an introduction to the story's characters, the depressed, impoverished state of the story's setting of West Hanratty, and the violent histories of some of its oft-gossiped about inhabitants. The commanding figure within these recollections is Rose's stepmother Flo, a salty, pragmatic woman with whom intellectually- and poetically-inclined Rose regularly butts heads. The antagonism between the two is at first described in ambiguous terms by the narrator, as a "wrangle. . . (that) has been going on forever, like a dream. . . maddeningly dim. . . familiar and elusive" (13). However, as the text draws nearer to the anticipated beating, more details emerge.

Initially, the threat of violence is connected to the sing-songy chant<sup>42</sup> that Rose relishes and has taught to her younger half-brother Brian. Flo finds the nonsensical, slightly off-color wordplay objectionable and threatens Rose with "a good clout" if she "say(s) that again" (14). But Rose cannot resist the chant for its "tumble of reason" and its "spark and spit of craziness" (14), and eventually the "clout" promised is delivered by her father. Yet the exchange that transpires between Flo and Rose from the threat's utterance to its realization suggests that what so enrages Flo may in fact be less about the reiteration of a quirky children's chant and more about the expression of Rose's idiomatic self.<sup>43</sup> Within the subtext of Flo's denunciation of Rose's "smart(ness)" and "conceit" (15) are indirect rebukes and less subtle condemnations aimed at quashing a self not rooted in selflessness.

Flo's disapproval of such a self is intimated in the way in which Flo incorporates into her polemic against Rose a description of her own marriage to Rose's father as a kind of martyrdom performed for Rose's sake. Within the context of Flo's overarching critique of Rose's character, Flo's declaration that "it was for Rose that she sacrificed her life" (15) can be understood as signifying a measure of appropriate (female) subjectivity by which she assesses Rose. Further support for understanding Flo's anger as displaced aggression towards Rose's articulation of idiomatic selfhood can be seen in Flo's seamless shift from upbraiding Rose for exposing Brian to the chant to her overarching condemnation of Rose herself, "Oh, don't you think you're somebody" (15).

<sup>42</sup> Here we see an interesting resonance between Rose and her father's pure pleasure in words. While the latter has learned to keep such play hidden in private murmurings relished out of the earshot of others, Rose not only commits the offence of enjoying this idiomatic "difference" openly but also (in Flo's words) "corrupting" her half-brother with it.

<sup>43</sup> This is not to suggest that the two are not intimately related, but rather to make the case that the chant stands in for a much larger way of "being" that infuriates Flo more than the wordplay itself.

The intent to diminish this somebody that Rose desires to become is underscored by Flo's contemptuous amplification that follows a moment later, "Who do you think you are?" (15). At the same time, this intersubjective refusal of recognition is complicated by a corresponding textual refusal to recognize the injury. It is at the moment of Flo's repudiation of Rose's very self that the text, by way of narrative interruption via a customer's arrival at the adjoining grocery that Flo runs, swiftly transports both Rose and reader from the scene and from further reflection on the implications of the rebuke. Given that one of the primary effects of recognition failure is the self's loss of confidence in the legitimacy of its own impulses, desires and feelings, the narrative act of shifting attention away from this injury to selfhood can be understood as reflective of a self unable to perceive the injury as a trauma to the self. When feelings no longer serve as a dependable source of knowledge, trauma to the self fails to register as injury; rather it signals, in Munro's words, an "unworthy" self. If we understand the narrator of the text to be Rose, the story's failure to recognize psychic injury as such can be thus read as the narrative expression of this predicament.

Nevertheless, the desire to expose the trauma maintains a presence within the text. When the customer departs and Flo resumes her diatribe, her next accusation furthers the notion that her principal problem with Rose lies in Rose's expression and embrace of selfhood, "You never have a thought for anybody but your ownself!" (16). This allegation of self-centeredness can be read as further indication that what is unacceptable is not a particular act, but rather a way of being. Flo's demand for Rose to be a different kind of person who thinks less about her self reveals Rose as chiefly guilty of being a preadolescent girl who relishes an imaginative inner life. However, the suggestion of

Rose's innocence is clouded when Rose responds impertinently to Flo's charge, thereby establishing Rose as complicit within the acrimonious exchange. By way of this impudent retort, the text provides a concrete rationale for Rose's punishment and thus obscures what might otherwise have been understood as a beating performed for no other reason than Flo's discomfort with Rose's nonconforming expression of selfhood.

While these individual narrative acts serve as one means of deflecting attention from the refusal of idiomatic subjectivity, the beating's dominance within the story performs this function on a more comprehensive scale. Yet at the same time that the beating eclipses the more subtle psychic trauma discussed above, it simultaneously undoes itself as trauma. Munro has referred to "Royal Beatings" as "the story about the child being beaten" (Hancock interview 101), a statement that is suggestive of at least one kind of trauma, yet the story does not bear this out. While the beating is graphically enacted, the narrator obfuscates recognition of it as trauma by transforming it into a kind of performative drama. The historical events leading to *Beggar Maid's* inception offer insight into the complex relationship between exposure and negation that structure this text.

Munro recounts her desire to reengage painful autobiographical material through the writing of *Beggar Maid* as taking hold unexpectedly following her move back to her childhood home after many years away. At the time of her return, Munro had already written a good deal about growing up in the Ottawa Valley and had believed she "was finished with anything about this area" (Wachtel interview, *Queen's* 273). However, after her move Munro relates that she found herself keenly aware of "a lot of things that had to do with social class and the way people behave towards one another-things that a child



doesn't see" (273). Munro describes "the whole culture. . . hit(ing) (her) with a tremendous bang" (McCulloch and Simpson interview 243)<sup>44</sup> and notes particular sites of past injury as awakening an impulse to narrate material "probably so painful that for a long time I didn't think about it" (Wachtel interview, *Queen's* 275). What seems to be suggested in her description are reencounters with previously repressed trauma. These returns engender complex and conflicting desires that are evidenced not only *within* the narrative structure of "Royal Beatings" itself, but also in Munro's reflections *about* the particular factual events that gave rise to her felt need to explore them through fiction. Closer examination of the epigraph that frames this chapter illustrates this:

Who told me to write this story? Who feels any need of it before it's written? I do. I do, so that I might grab off this piece of horrid reality and install it where I see fit. . .("What is Real" 226)

While explicitly voicing what seems a potentially recuperative desire towards truth telling, Munro concomitantly backs away from it. Rather than grabbing *hold of* and *expressing* the pain of her own *injury*, she articulates a remote and general aim to "grab off" and "install" "*horrid reality*" where she "see(s) fit" (emphasis added). The terms "off" and "install" suggest more distance than proximity to felt injury, and "horrid reality" supplants the specificity of trauma with abstraction. At the same time, Munro's return to painful sites of memory does engender a change in her depiction of trauma. In "Royal Beatings" Munro manages to get closer to the trauma of being beaten than in either of her

<sup>44</sup> Elaborating, Munro contrasts "the real thing" she was startled to encounter upon returning home to what she describes as "a glazed-over world of memory" that she previously engaged when revisiting her past. She encapsulates the severity and cruelty of this earlier chapter of life in the person of Flo, whom Munro pronounces, "an embodiment of the real thing, so much harsher than I had remembered" (243).

earlier composed stories "At the Other Place" and "The Ottawa Valley"<sup>45</sup> that also explore beatings.

Perhaps the most notable feature that sets apart Rose's beating from those previously depicted is Munro's unusual employment of present tense narration in this scene. Understood as an iteration of the "dramatic Present," the narrative act creates between the speaker and the event an effect that possesses a strong resemblance to the experience of a flashback of a traumatized individual: "the speaker. . . forgets all about time and recalls what he is recounting as vividly as if it were now present before his eyes" (Jespersen 238-239).<sup>46</sup> For a brief spell within the story, the narration viscerally moves into the thick of the painful event as Rose experiences it:

At the first, or maybe the second, crack of pain, she draws back. She will not accept it. . . She runs, she screams, she implores. Her father is after her, cracking the belt at her when he can, then abandoning it and using his hands. Bang over the ear, then bang over the other ear. Back and forth, her head ringing. Bang in the face. Up against the wall and bang in the face again. He shakes her and hits her against the wall, he kicks her legs. She is incoherent, insane, shrieking. *Forgive me! Oh please, forgive me!* (19)

It is a hideous scene, yet critics have discussed it lightheartedly, playing up its theatrical nature. Canadian literary scholar Deborah Heller describes "Royal Beatings" as the "most memor(able)" example of the "theatricality Munro has shown in earlier stories in recounting the more extreme actions of her characters" (Heller 13). Even those who recognize the traumatic nature of the beating do not engage it through the lens of injury.

British literary critic Coral Ann Howells moves quickly from her claim that in realistic

<sup>45</sup> I credit Carrington for this keen observation in her discussion of beatings 42-51. Highly attuned to Munro's aesthetic of distanciation and the splitting that occurs during the violence enacted upon Rose, Carrington likewise draws upon psychoanalysis in her interpretation of the scene. However, the lens she applies is not that of (de)negation but rather structured by Freud's work on masochism and beating fantasies.

<sup>46</sup> I am grateful to Carrington's reference to Jespersen's understanding of the dramatic Present in her exegesis of "Royal Beatings."

terms the incident “might well be seen as a case of child abuse” to an analysis of it as a bizarre performance (Howells 58). That the horrific event can be baldly exposed and at the same time undone and framed as theatre is indicative of the force and efficacy of (de)negation operating within Munro's aesthetic of distanciation. By this I mean to underscore that what might otherwise be interpreted as calloused readings of a truly violent event is more accurately understood as criticism closely observant of the ways in which the text itself undoes the injury via detachment or theatricality each time proximity to pain becomes too much to bear.

Even when the narration slips into the immediacy of the dramatic Present, operations of (de)negation speedily undermine the self's return to the painful moment by way of the narrator's interjections and commentary on the event as it is occurring.<sup>47</sup> Intermittently within this short section, the narrator interrupts Rose's experience of the beating, establishing a clear delineation between the participating self who has returned to the painful event and the observing self who maintains a keen distance by establishing herself as a disinterested commentator. When Rose is transfixed by her father's “cold and challenging” gaze towards her, “fill(ing) with hatred and pleasure” (17-18), the narrator interrupts with a question, “is that just a description of anger, should she see his eyes filling up with anger?” (18) and follows with a putative answer, “No. Hatred is right. Pleasure is right” (18). This kind of interrogation and clarification of the participating protagonist's feelings not only allows the narrator to avoid experiencing painful emotions, but also functions as a means of distancing readers from the immediacy of Rose's

<sup>47</sup> The ellipsis in the above extended excerpt portraying the beating of Rose stands in precisely for one of these narrative interjections. In the midst of Rose's painful experience of the beating, the narrator interrupts with a chilly, detached assessment of Rose's behavior, “not an ounce of courage or of stoicism in her, it would seem” (19).

experience. This latter form of distanciation allows for readings like Heller and Howells' in which Rose's real suffering is interpreted as an imaginatively portrayed entertaining narrative drama.

Further underscoring the beating's performative nature are the specific terms the narrator uses to describe the scene. Rose's father is not depicted as abusive but rather "like a bad actor, who turns a part grotesque" (18). Likewise, Rose is transformed into a fellow thespian complicit within the drama, "play(ing) (her father's) victim with a self-indulgence" likely intended "to arouse (her father's) final, sickened contempt" (19). The event as theatre becomes more pronounced in the scene between Rose and Flo following the violence in which Flo delivers to Rose a peace offering consisting of a tray of all of Rose's favorite treats. What was earlier portrayed as drama here takes on comedic tones as Rose displays a quavering and eventual failure of willpower in her efforts to resist eating any of Flo's offering so as not to give up her "advantage" (20). Soon after justifying her decision to eat just one of the "little sandwiches (of) . . . canned salmon of the first quality and reddest color" "for strength to refuse the rest," she weakens and devours everything. Depicted as "sniff(ing) with shame" while simultaneously using her finger to get the last bit of "malty syrup out of the bottom of the glass" of chocolate milk (21), Rose's earlier humiliation at the receiving end of her father's twitching belt is supplanted with a kind of humorously depicted indignity engendered by an altogether ordinary failure of self-restraint.

The shift in narration from present to future tense within the above comedic interlude also suggests a kind of a "script" that Rose and Flo routinely follow with only minor variations. In the "drama" of the "Royal Beating," the scene following the

thrashing is presented as so predictable that the narrator need not depict it in real time but simply supply an outline of the things that are certain to occur: “. . . a tray will appear. Flo will put it down without a word and go away. . . (Rose) will turn away, refuse to look, but left alone. . . will be miserably tempted. . . (etc.)” (21). After the narrator provides this, “Royal Beatings” returns to a retrospective gaze, concluding with a final pointed allusion to the incident as performance: “one night after a *scene* like this they were all in the kitchen” (21; emphasis added). In one short transitional sentence, the beating is rendered both theatrical and routine.

The sentence underscores the way in which the normative as it implicitly exists within the performative also contributes to Munro's distancing. Sequentially, Rose's beating follows the narrator's recollections of various other beatings performed within the community, well known and oft-repeated during Rose's childhood as part of the town lore. These are remembered as lurid yet fascinating tales with horrific outcomes that Flo earlier relished telling with theatrical flourish. The text's rendering of such events as entertaining spectacles provides yet another lens for understanding the story's associative links between beatings and theatre, and moreover, the possibility of pleasure in dramatic enactment. Its depiction of a wider practice of violence permeating the community not only establishes violence as part and parcel of everyday life within West Hanratty but also creates a larger framework for registering degrees of injury, that is, a kind of spectrum upon which Rose's scrapes and bruises can be read as negligible in relation to other more severe instances of physical abuse. Whereas the various thrashings that frame Rose's are associated with indisputable and irreparable injury, Becky's physical

deformities<sup>48</sup> and her father Tyde's death, Rose's beatings are depicted as doing little or no damage. In terms of bodily injury, the narrator assures readers, "there is not really much the matter" (21).

In the end, the narrator further dispels the notion that anything out of the ordinary has occurred by presenting life as proceeding as usual in Rose's world: "they will all sit around the table eating again, listening to the radio news" (21). But even more than this, the narrator intimates the event as effecting a positive therapeutic outcome. Although Rose's family will feel "embarrassed" in the aftermath, its members will also experience "a queer lassitude, a convalescent indolence, not far off satisfaction" (21). With this final Aristotelian allusion to catharsis, the narrator brings the drama to a salutary conclusion, widening the split between the fact of trauma and the recognition of it as such.

Distanciation entwined with a dimension of performativity characterizes the whole of *Beggar Maid*. In "Privilege" the complexity and intermixing of various forms of psychic and narrative splitting are evidenced both in the performative storytelling that Rose comes to practice at parties and the narrator's derisive depiction of her behavior. Rose's transformation of childhood injuries and abuses into titillating and entertaining tales for others' amusement constitutes one kind of distanciation; the way in which the narrator describes Rose's "packaging" of her past as a means of maintaining an "advantage" over those with privileged upbringings illustrates another:

Rose knew a lot of people who wished they had been born poor, and hadn't been. So she would queen it over them, offering various scandals and bits of squalor from her childhood. (25)

<sup>48</sup> While Becky Tyde's bodily deformities are etiologically traceable to having suffered polio as a child, the community's failure to "understand about polio" (*Beggar Maid* 9) has effected within communal lore an inextricable connection between old man Tyde's beatings of his children and Becky's adult dwarfish and twisted physical state.

In “queen(ing) it over them” Rose imaginatively distances herself from past injuries through the power of narration; at the same time, the narrator's choice of this phrase suggests her condescension towards Rose, effecting narrative distance from what she intimates as immature behavior.<sup>49</sup> Additionally, the narrator’s characterization of Rose in this way creates a lens for perceiving Rose as a performer rather than one who has suffered real indignities that Rose herself experienced as incidents of “shame and outrage” (25).

Abrupt flashbacks and flash-forwards also contribute to the whole of *Beggar Maid*'s aesthetic of distanciation. In the title story, after visiting West Hanratty for the first time, Rose’s fiancé Patrick calls it “a dump” from which Rose “must (have) be(en) glad to get away” (91). He also declares that her “real mother” “can’t have been like (Flo),” suggesting she must have come from “a more genteel background” (91). Rose is consequently shamed for these things that are outside of her control and troubled as she herself does not know “any way to be comfortable with her own people” (91). In the midst of this humiliated confusion the narrator interjects a characteristically ironic flash-forward: “years later (Rose) would learn how to use it, she would be able to amuse or intimidate right thinking people at dinner parties with glimpses of early home” (91). The irony is located in the narrator’s use of the terms “use,” “amuse,” and “intimidate” as means of describing how an older, more sophisticatedly calculating Rose would later gain the capacity to manipulate past shame and pain to her own social advantage.

The complexity of the narrator’s role is evidenced in the way that it can be seen here to perform at least three functions linked to the processes of (de)negation. The first

<sup>49</sup> Blodgett likewise notes how the "queen(ing) it over them" functions differently for the participating Rose and for the narrator, reading the first as enacting Rose's mastery over poverty and the second as the narrator's mastery over Rose.

is a literal narratorial interruption of Rose's expressed feelings of humiliation that she experiences in her working class home in West Hanratty with Patrick; the second is the narrator's distancing of herself and readers from Rose's shame in this situation by providing the future knowledge that Rose will eventually gain a kind of mastery over that which presently renders her confused and humiliated; and third is a mocking jab at Rose for her method of mastery, a manipulation of difficult circumstances and people in her past into amusing or shocking stories to perform to her own "advantage." Rose's painful experience at home is undone on three counts.

The extent and severity of the psychic split driving *Beggar Maid's* narration are amplified when it is understood that the narrator is almost certainly an older Rose looking back on her life. While there exist myriad instances in the text in which the narrator seems to speak not just *about* Rose but from *within* Rose that suggest this, one particular moment in "Royal Beatings" provides the most explicit support for this proposition. It occurs during the narrator's description of the row between Rose and Flo: "'Yes,' says Flo, carrying on from *our* lost starting point. 'Yes, and that filth you taught to Brian'" (13; emphasis added). The narrator's odd and seemingly mistaken use of the first-person plural pronoun referring to Rose and Flo would suggest that Munro earlier composed the story in first-person retrospective narration and later reworked it into third-person with this one lone use of "our" escaping detection by Munro as well as her editors. If confirmed, the conjecture would leave little doubt that the narrator is indeed an older version of Rose reflecting on an earlier chapter of life.

As relayed by Canadian academic Helen Hoy, the complicated series of alterations *Beggar Maid* underwent over an extended period of time and the rapid



thoroughgoing changes Munro executed following a sudden decision to revise the book after a very different version was already in galleys reveal this to be the case. In her detailed account of this history, Hoy notes the existence of an early manuscript of seven of *Beggar Maid's* stories written in first-person as well as another manuscript of the same stories in "first-altered to third-person" (61). For a time, the third-person version was linked to an additional set of stories about a second protagonist named Janet. During this period, Munro conceived of the book as two sets of related stories; bearing the title *Rose and Janet*, the first half consisted of stories about Rose written in third-person and the second half, an equal number about Janet composed in first-person.<sup>50</sup> The idea behind the construction was that Janet, a writer, was in fact the author of the Rose stories and had created them based on her own experiences. The correspondence between Rose and Janet in this earlier version lends additional support for understanding the unnamed narrator in Munro's revised *Beggar Maid* as likewise reflecting on her own life. Moreover, the narrative layering that structures *Rose and Janet* can be read as yet another iteration of distancing from trauma: author Munro creates Janet; narrator Janet writes Rose; protagonist Rose suffers. The conceit pushes Munro's presence as author even further into the background<sup>51</sup> with Janet serving as a buffer between Munro's exposure of injury and Rose's experience of it. Finally, the division of the earlier manuscript into stories about two separate individuals may also be understood as an outward manifestation of self-splitting. As such, *Beggar Maid's* complicated history offers more than simply support for the reading that narrator and protagonist are one but also speaks to how

<sup>50</sup> Hoy's exploration reveals that some of the Janet stories were reworked from previous material, including stories originally written about Rose, and others were newly composed.

<sup>51</sup> John Orange has similarly noted this effect.

powerfully that one is internally split, and moreover suggests (de)negation as operative both in the text as well as the writing process.

### ***The Bluest Eye***

In *The Bluest Eye*, painful childhood wounds are simultaneously exposed and undone in the framing of injury through an other's suffering direr than one's own. For narrator Claudia<sup>52</sup> this is accomplished through her return to and depiction of the extreme devastation that Pecola suffers. The severity of Pecola's suffering occludes Claudia's own--for older narrating Claudia and relatedly, for the reader. Through the lens of Pecola's trauma, Claudia's own pain becomes less visible and consequently has received far less critical attention. Morrison herself has described Claudia's family as "average" as opposed to Pecola's "crippled and crippling family."

The way in which *Bluest Eye* moves between the exploration of Claudia and Pecola's respective histories and offers each girl a central role within the narrative not only distinguishes this escape narrative from the other two examined here, but also complicates what might otherwise be considered archetypal within the subgenre. While most escape narratives depict a single protagonist fleeing a psychologically and often physically injurious environment, in *Bluest Eye*, in certain respects Claudia and Pecola dually inhabit this role. Within their respective families, both girls know the absence of

<sup>52</sup> While *Bluest Eye* plays with different ways of narrating different sections of the text, here I am referring to the text's primary narrator, Claudia.

relational intimacy and long for recognition. Both also achieve some form of escape: Claudia, through the writing of Pecola's story and Pecola, via madness.<sup>53</sup>

Challenging Morrison's assertion that Pecola's family is "unlike the average black family and unlike the narrator's," Jerome Bump argues that the Breedlove and the MacTeer families are not different "in kind" but rather "in degree." While Bump supports his argument primarily through research drawn from psychological studies, I consider the ways in which oblique similarities between these families come to light when examining the effects and implications of the two very different and opposing styles of narration that Claudia employs throughout the novel. Claudia narrates her and Pecola's stories through two different "selves," the nine-year-old Claudia who poignantly and vividly expresses the immediacy of the pain she both witnesses and experiences and the adult Claudia who reinterprets and articulates these memories through a lyrical and elegant aesthetic of distancing. The romantic, nostalgic narrating voice of the adult Claudia serves to mute the suffering that the nine-year-old narrating Claudia exposes, but it does not obviate it. Only by attuning to the small voice of the child recounting pain, (one that is made even smaller by the aesthetic revisioning of history enacted by the adult narrator), does one come to recognize the extent of Claudia's pain and the ways in which her suffering suggests relational breakdowns in caregiving that correspond with those Pecola suffers.

When the young Claudia is rebuked and shamed by her mother for falling ill and vomiting on her bed linens the event is affectingly narrated by her childhood self as a traumatic incident and recounted with an immediacy underscored by her use of present

<sup>53</sup> Critics' focus on the character of Pecola and the numerous familial, communal, and societal injuries that propel her descent into mental illness has generated important readings about the transmission and internalization of racial self-loathing. Alternately, reading this novel through the lens of class offers the possibility of different insights.

tense, “my mother’s anger humiliates me; her words chafe my cheeks, and I am crying” (11). What immediately follows is a reinterpretation of this scene by an older Claudia in which the episode is romanticized and becomes an example of her mother’s deep and abiding love for her:

But was it really like that? As painful as I remember? Only mildly. Or rather, it was a productive and fructifying pain. Love, thick and dark as Alaga syrup, eased up into the cracked window. I could smell it—taste it—sweet, musty, with an edge of wintergreen in its base—everywhere in that house... When I think of autumn, I think of somebody with hands who does not want me to die. (12)

In its lyrical transformation of humiliation and suffering into a “thick,” “sweet” love, this passage vividly illustrates what Dix McComas identifies as the novel’s unique problem<sup>54</sup> of accurately communicating the pain of childhood injury. While McComas’ comments below are directed towards Cather’s fiction in particular, they express a predicament that frequently presents itself within Morrison’s work as well as the working class escape narrative in general:<sup>55</sup>

...what...complicates these narratives is that they often deploy their greatest gifts--that is, the beauty and passion of (the author’s) language--to elide the culpability of parents or caretakers in epiphanies of nostalgia. As such, this manner of textual repression is hard to detect unless one is equipped with a theoretical lens designed to track the often muted sufferings of children. (29)

Through the lens of (de)negation it becomes possible to comprehend how an adult Claudia comes to interpret the shame and guilt she experienced in response to her mother’s humiliation of her for being ill as “a productive and fructifying pain” (12).

<sup>54</sup> Here McComas is referring to a problem McComas understands as unique to medium of fiction and not alluding to any single novel in particular.

<sup>55</sup> It is not coincidental that some of the ways in which McComas describes Cather’s narratives functioning are also observable in working class escape narratives, as some of Cather’s works can be usefully understood as escape narratives.

For Claudia the adult narrator, undoing early injury and avoiding affective acceptance of it is most subtly and artfully accomplished through nostalgic, lyrical revisionings of the past. Gracefully intertwining memories of whippings with the budding and flowering of early spring, the adult narrator transforms pain into art:

The first twigs are thin, green, and supple. They bend into a complete circle, but will not break. Their delicate, showy hopefulness shooting from forsythia and lilac bushes meant only a change in whipping style. They beat us differently in the spring. Instead of the dull pain of a winter strap, there were these new green switches that lost their sting long after the whipping was over. (97)

While the older Claudia recounts the lingering sting that beatings with the forsythia twig produced, this fact is elegantly shrouded in lyrical yet carefully constructed prose.

Foregrounding any hint of pain is the “green,” “supple,” “delicate, showy hopefulness shooting” from the lilac and forsythia bushes. Pain and beatings are not the subjects of any of the above sentences nor is Claudia’s mother or father named as the perpetrators of these beatings. Moreover, when springtime switchings are mentioned, the fact that the pain they inflicted was crueler and longer lasting than those produced by the strap used for beatings in the winter is not expressed directly but rather obliquely. The narrator constructs the sentence in such a way that springtime switches are ones that “lost their sting...” While the content of the sentence communicates lingering pain, the carefully crafted graceful phrasing belies the stark, harsh reality of the fact and shifts the reader’s attention from it.

This reminiscence depicting different styles of whipping through the lens of spring’s flowers appears all the more elegant and aestheticized in its juxtaposition with the actual beating that Pecola endures in the same chapter for accidentally knocking over her mother’s blueberry cobbler. In contrast to the older narrator’s reflection upon

switchings in the abstract without reference to any particular incident, Pecola's beating is specific, described viscerally and directly by the nine-year-old Claudia:

Most of the juice splashed on Pecola's legs, and the burn must have been painful, for she cried out and began hopping about just as Mrs. Breedlove entered with a tightly packed laundry bag. In one gallop she was on Pecola, and with the back of her hand knocked her to the floor. Pecola slid in the pie juice, one leg folding under her. Mrs. Breedlove yanked her up by the arm, slapped her again, and in a voice thin with anger, abused Pecola directly... Her words were hotter and darker than the smoking berries, and we backed away in dread. (108-9)

The passage differs from the above lyrical entwining of blossoms and beatings by way of how close the young Claudia brings readers to the harrowing and charged encounter between Pecola and her mother. The young Claudia narrates not as a distanced observer but rather as a fellow participant in the scene commenting on a very particular moment in which she is fearfully watching Pecola crumpling under her mother's hand and sliding in blueberry juice. Here Claudia inhabits a very different voice than the nostalgic one employed to offer thoughtful musings on switchings and forsythia. Rimstead's description of an "aesthetic of distancing" as one that allows "the narrator and the character (to be) transported from the lived situation and... comment from some safely remote place" that she suggests Munro uses to obscure past pain also elucidates how the adult Claudia likewise narrates her own pain, thus diminishing its effects. In contrast, the nine-year-old Claudia remains present and affected by the painful events she both experiences and witnesses. While the older Claudia offers memories of her own beatings dreamily interspersed amidst green shoots of forsythia without reference to any actual event, the younger Claudia portrays Pecola's abuse while she is in effect not only a witness but a participant in the frightful scene, she and Pecola both cowering in the presence of Mrs. Breedlove's ire. The younger Claudia's feeling self viscerally responds

to this emotionally explosive event and relays a scene much “hotter and darker” than the “delicate, showy hopefulness” that blankets retrospective recollections of her own beatings: Pecola “crie(s) out;” Mrs. Breedlove’s voice is “thin with anger;” Claudia and Frieda “back away in dread.”

While the older narrator’s nostalgic revisionings of her suffering create effects of difference and distance between Pecola and Claudia’s childhood experiences, a closer examination of similarities in the young girls’ behavior lends support to the notion that the particular injury of recognition failure that both experience is not different “in kind” but rather only “in degree.” Both Pecola and Claudia engage in a kind of magical thinking that Bollas suggests results from a mother’s failure to actively adapt to her child’s needs and desires, i.e., to serve as “a transformational object” for her child. Without this adaptation, the child fails to experience a sense of omnipotence, that which allows him to feel himself as possessing power to manipulate his world, the foundation from which real agency later emerges. In the absence of this experience, the child (and later adult) comes to seek transformational objects *outside* of the self that he believes will wholly transform his reality.<sup>56</sup>

This psychoanalytic backdrop brings intelligibility to the way in which Pecola, Claudia, and Frieda all seek to effect change, that is via external objects, Pecola through a quest for blue eyes and Claudia and Frieda through magical spells and sacrificial offerings on behalf of Pecola’s unborn baby. As the degree to which the girls have experienced maternal failure varies, so too does the scope of the transformation believed in. While Pecola’s wish is all-encompassing, eyes that will transform her entire world, both making her acceptable to the children at school and also altering the behavior of her

<sup>56</sup> See Bollas's chapter, "The Transformational Object" in *The Shadow of the Object* 13-40.

parents, Claudia and Frieda's transformational object is one that is focused upon a single, specific outcome. Nevertheless, the miracle that Frieda and Claudia seek to "make" so that "everything (will be) all right" for Pecola and her baby similarly relies on fantasy rather than agency.

Not surprisingly, the nostalgic narrator retrospectively suggests the reverse. She frames her and Frieda's incantations and magical spells in a favorable light as actions that signify the girls' sense of their own power. Not unlike the positive interpretation the older narrator bestows upon her mother's rage at her vulnerable sickened nine-year-old body, this memory becomes another revisioning in which a distressing reality, "nobody paid us any attention," is transformed into a "fructifying pain" that yields beneficial effects. In this case, Claudia interprets her and Frieda's practice of magic as signaling a belief that they had the power "to change the course of events and alter a human life" (191) and attributes this self-confidence to the fact that no one paid any attention to them. But the belief is illusory, and moreover suggestive of early maternal failure. While the "good-enough"<sup>57</sup> adaptive mother allows her infant a felt sense of omnipotence by adapting to his needs, she also later helps the child to negotiate an intermediary space between subjective fantasizing and objective reality, that is a recognition of where fantasy ends and agency begins. Claudia as an adult may retrospectively judge her earlier felt sense of omnipotence as something to be celebrated, but ironically, it is the belief that Claudia, via magical spells, can become the savior of Pecola's baby that reveals her as caught in a predicament quite similar to Pecola's, one in which both girls are mere supplicants dependent upon "miracles" to transform their given realities. In spite of the adult

<sup>57</sup> Here I use the term to refer to Winnicott's notion of a not perfect mother but one who is well enough attuned and responsive to her infant's needs to protect him from environmental impingement.



Claudia's efforts to positively ascribe her childhood sense of limitless power to the painful reality of parental neglect, this kind of illusory omnipotence produced by a failed environmental provision reveals itself as bereft of actual agency<sup>58</sup> and further exposes Claudia as suffering from some of the same kinds of relational absences that Pecola also endures.

The two young girls mirror each other in other notable ways as well. What Claudia performs on a narrative level, Pecola literally enacts. The seemingly contradictory impulses to expose and undo injury implicated in Claudia's narration of the text are concretized in the splitting that takes place within the character of Pecola at the end of the novel. The split off part of her self that takes the form of an imaginary friend who continues to question what took place between her and Cholly represents the need to expose and make sense of the injury while Pecola's defensive retorts that deny the rape—"He just tried, see? He didn't do anything. You hear me?"—illustrate the act of negation that prevents affective acceptance and reconciliation of the event within an integrated

<sup>58</sup> Alternatively, Eichelberger reads Claudia and Frieda's attempt at making a miracle to save Pecola's baby as embodying an opposing paradigm to the "ideology of domination" that permeates the community. Other scholars have argued along similar lines. McKittrick also understands Claudia as countering "the universal love of white baby dolls, Shirley Temples and Maureen Peals" by her "cherishing" of both Pecola and her unborn baby. Yet these interpretations fail to acknowledge that Claudia, like the rest of the community, does not "cherish" Pecola but turns away from her, withdrawing the possibility of relationality with Pecola and denying her subjecthood. Eichelberger argues that Claudia's failure to save Pecola is only due to the fact that "Claudia herself is too young to do so" (89). Such a reading fails to recognize Claudia's efforts as based in the same magical thinking that constitutes Pecola's wish and Claudia's othering of Pecola as produced by the same absent mirror that has made subject status unavailable to either of the girls.

A notable exception to this line of argument comes from Rokotnitz, who does not equate Claudia's desire for the survival of Pecola's baby with Claudia's "cherishing" of Pecola. She understands Claudia and Frieda's urgent wish that the baby not die as emanating from their own needs and desires, the wish "almost as an existential equivalent of their own struggle for survival and recognition" (404).

self.<sup>59</sup> In this culminating scene, Pecola becomes an explicit embodiment of the novel's trope of (de)negation. This is immediately followed by the more subtle form of narrative (de)negation practiced by the adult Claudia in response to her own need to confront a painful past while remaining affectively distanced from it.

In the final pages of the novel, Claudia speaks in one voice, but notably it is the voice of the older observing narrator that seeks to explain the injury that is Pecola's, not her own. Moreover, the explanation lacks power; it is affectless. Claudia's feeling subjective self, that which was earlier expressed by the sometimes vulnerable and frightened nine-year-old participating narrator, is supplanted by the older self-possessed observer who brings intelligibility to Pecola's plight but no empathy: "(Pecola) stepped over into madness, a madness which protected her from us simply because it bored us in the end" (206). The younger Claudia's earlier vivid descriptions of not only Pecola's "hunching spine" but her own "hot tears of humiliation" that both expressed and elicited feeling are replaced by intelligent and thoughtful but affectively distanced explanations. At the end of the novel, the older narrator has failed to find a means of integrating the feelings and impulses of her younger subjective self into her present selfhood.

Additionally, the younger Claudia's poignant recollections of painful interactions with her mother are finally and completely silenced in the final section of the novel. The younger narrator's earlier descriptions of her mother's frailties and failures are replaced by retrospective reimaginings that culminate in an idealized portrait of her. The image of a good mother, one who is strong, powerful, smiling, is preserved:

<sup>59</sup> Laurie Vickroy discusses Pecola's splitting both as an attempt to attack one's own fears and as a sign of being caught in stasis. She also sees it as cutting Pecola off from reconciling herself to the knowledge of what she endured.

There was a tornado that year...Biting the strawberry, thinking of storms, I see her. One hand is on her hip; the other lolls about her thigh—waiting. The wind swoops her up, high above the houses, but she is still standing, hand on hip. Smiling. The anticipation and promise in her lolling hand are not altered by the holocaust...my mother's hand is unextinguished. She is strong, smiling, and relaxed while the world falls down about her. (187-8)

A lens attuned both to the often muted suffering of the child and to the adult's later efforts to diminish this pain allows one to recognize and to remember that this is the same woman whose unextinguished raised switch might be said to cause the young Claudia's own world to likewise "fall down about her." However, at the novel's conclusion, the earlier pain expressed by the young Claudia is replaced by the adult Claudia's retrospective image of the strong and smiling mother. These oppositions escape integration and reconciliation. In the end, the older Claudia's nostalgic reimaginings of the past win out, equivocating and silencing the parental culpability that the novel earlier registered through the feeling self of the young Claudia.

### ***A Feather on the Breath of God***

Like Claudia, the first-person narrator in *Feather on the Breath of God* also employs the narrative device of framing her own injuries through the other's putatively more severe trauma as a means of achieving distance from her own pain. This is effected in the very structure of the text. The two sections of Nunez's autobiographical work that focus on her own life are preceded by two sections devoted to exploring and explaining the tragic lives of her parents.<sup>60</sup> What notably differentiates this work from both Morrison and Munro's first phase texts is the self-conscious nature of the narration. Notably, on

<sup>60</sup> This focus is made explicit by the titles of these sections, "Chang" and "Christa," the names of the narrator's parents.

more than one occasion, the narrator describes her felt need to depict her history "without anger or bitterness or shame" (92, 94). This conscious, self-imposed imperative may in part explain the more radical forms of psychic and narrative splitting that occur in this text as compared to those previously discussed. The most poignant and extreme instances of this splitting are evidenced in *Feather's* abrupt shifts in narration. Throughout the text (with very few exceptions), the narrator relays her memories, observations, and interpretations of the past in first-person narration. However, when she touches upon particularly painful memories she switches from first-person to third.

The common thread that connects all of these occurrences is psychic pain that is presumably too intense to be experienced through the proximity of first-person narration. In these cases, this pain is immediately projected from the narrative "I" onto "she," a split off, unintegrated part of the narrator. More specifically, these narrative and psychic splits can be linked not just to painful events in general but to particular kinds of parental absences and failures. With regard to her father, the narrator is not able to express in first-person narration the fact that he did not ever recognize her as a subject or take any interest in her. What the narrator cannot communicate about her mother in first-person is her mother's object use of her; the narrator switches to "she" whenever Christa uses her as a means of reflecting a positive image of her own self. These injuries are closely related; together they constitute a critical rift in what Winnicott, Bollas, and other object-relations psychoanalysts posit necessitates a "good-enough" environmental provision: parental recognition and mirroring of the child's emerging selfhood. Although the narrator's parents fail in other ways that cause the narrator pain, it is only this primary failure of subject recognition that prompts such a specific and radical dissociative split in

the narrator's recounting of her past. Other parts of her painful history are explored and undone through different forms of distancing, most notably through the narrative fragmentation that constitutes the overarching shape of *Feather*.

The narrator's frequent practice of breaking off from a troubling recollection without further exploration or explanation creates the fragmented narrative style that structures *Feather*. When the narrator voices a painful memory, rather than examining her feelings about the event, she often moves abruptly to a different subject. Occasionally she inserts a literal space between the painful recollection and the new topic; other times she simply begins a new paragraph. When the narrator mentions her mother's distress at becoming pregnant with the narrator, the text both registers the narrator's psychic split from this fact and also embodies this split through narrative disjunction:

I don't like to remember what she told me when I was twenty: Becoming pregnant with me was the last straw.

She used to say, "If we'd had money everything would have been different." (54)

The narrator goes on to recall her mother's opinions about welfare without ever reflecting on her mother's distress upon learning she was pregnant with the narrator or the way in which this knowledge causes anguish in the narrator.

Instead of exploring her own pain, the narrator's avoidance of it becomes written into the structure of the text. Her pain not only fragments her stories into disparate shards but also gives rise to the emergence of "nooks and crannies" within the text in which disturbing realizations and unprocessed feelings are placed via parenthetical bracketing. This narrative device allows for a difficult memory to be articulated while still safely contained, untouched, and uninterrogated by that which surrounds it. In the narrator's

brief remarks about what was implicit within her mother's threats to her daughters that she would "leave" them, this practice of containment operates both narratively and metanarratively:

...when she'd "had it" with us, when she made it clear that we were more than any person could bear, with our noise and our mess and our laziness, she would threaten to leave us and go home. (I think I sensed something in those threats to go home that I'm now sure was there: the threat of suicide.) (54-5)

The menacing yet never explicit threat contained within Christa's repeated warnings is mirrored in the way in which the narrator revisits this memory. Parenthetically contained, the possibility of suicide is relayed, but like her mother's voiced threat, it remains unexplored. Also unelaborated is the pain of the narrator experiencing and re-experiencing this threat, first as a child and later as an adult recalling these frightening episodes. In the text, the narrator brackets these emotions. Nothing else is written of her mother's desire to take her own life nor anything at all of the narrator's own reaction to this threat of "leaving." Without any semblance of a transition, the narrator's memories abruptly break off and segue to a statement made by Nietzsche about "the Germans" that the narrator quotes and loosely connects to her mother's "dream of a grandiose destiny" (55). While providing a more complex lens through which to read her parents' lives, these kinds of shifts from the narrator's intimate memories of childhood to abstract philosophical speculations about her parents' cultural and historical moorings become one more means of distancing the self from experiencing the pain of the past.

When the narrator articulates her parents' inability to recognize and embrace her selfhood, she narratively divorces herself from the pain of this fact by employing various combinations of the above devices but most notably distances herself through a shift in narrative voice. Recollecting particular behaviors of her father that illustrate his

disengagement in the life of the family, the narrator remains in first-person and elaborates with anecdotes that narratively cohere. However, when fact approaches feeling and touches upon the absence of relationality between the narrator and her father, these realities are expressed via myriad methods of splitting:

After dinner, he stayed at the kitchen table, smoking and finishing his beer. He never joined the rest of us in the living room in front of the television...he hardly noticed if someone came into the kitchen for something. His inobservance was the family's biggest joke. My mother would give herself or one of us a new hairdo and say, "Now watch: Your father won't even notice," and she was right... (Television: the prime-time family shows. During the inevitable scenes when family love and loyalty were affirmed, the discomfort in the living room was palpable. I think we were all ashamed of how far below the ideal our family fell). Working and saving to send his children to college, he took no interest in their school life. (21-2)

Bracketing first appears when emotion is broached; recognizing the absence of love in her own family produces shame, and shame, along with bitterness and anger, are emotions that the narrator will not permit in her narration of the past. In this particular moment, shame nevertheless inadvertently breaks out, although not entirely. While articulated, it is also parenthetically contained without elaboration and not fully admitted. The narrator does not own whatever shame she herself feels but rather projects it outward, speculating that this is what she believes her family felt during these moments of communal television watching.

Narrative splitting becomes most pronounced when the narrator recounts her father's failure to see her. Not only does the narrator here switch to third-person to convey this lack of recognition, she further depersonalizes the felt rejection by relating it as an absence that characterized her father's relationship to *all* of his daughters, not as the non-recognizing gaze that passed blankly over *her*. Additionally, while all of the memories and anecdotes recounted in *Feather* suggest that the narrator's father was so

emotionally detached from the family that he “d(id) not know one daughter from another” (124), the narrator will not directly acknowledge that he took no interest in *her*—or even *them*. Instead, she locates her father’s disinterest towards her in an object outside of the self: he takes no interest in “their school life.”

The primary relational injury that Christa inflicts upon the narrator that similarly engenders the narrator’s shift in voice from first-person to third is Christa’s perception and interaction with her daughter as an object:

My mother thought of the house as hers, spoke of *her* curtains, *her* floors (often in warning: Don’t scuff up my floors!). The daughters were hers too. To each of them she gave a Nordic name, impossible for him to pronounce (“*What* does your father call you?” That question—an agony to me—rang through my childhood.) It was part of her abiding nostalgia that she wanted to raise her children as Germans. She sewed dirndls for them and even for their dolls. She braided their hair, then wound the braids tightly around their ears, like hair earmuffs, in the German style. (14-5)

With her father, the injury the narrator feels most deeply is his failure to see her; with her mother, the injury is more than simply this. While Christa likewise fails to recognize the narrator’s selfhood, unlike Chang, she still talks to the narrator and maintains a personal relationship with her. It is the tenor of this relationship that pains the narrator: Christa views her daughters and interacts with them as objects. This parental objectification of the child is an injury not unique to *Feather* but characteristic of the genre as a whole. Not unlike the matter-of-fact way Mrs. MacTeer merely “point(s) out” her daughters alongside of the clothes closet and the bathroom to Mr. Henry when he comes to live with them in *Bluest Eye*, in *Feather*, the narrator and her sisters also register as objects possessed by Christa alongside of the curtains and floors that constitute “her” house. Complementing her tidy, well-scrubbed, respectable home, Christa’s tidy, well-dressed, and carefully groomed daughters constitute one more way by which Christa constructs



her own identity. Christa's need for her children to positively reflect her own image echoes the reverse mirroring that also takes place between Flo and Rose in "Royal Beatings." However, in addition to the obedience and respect that Flo demands from Rose, Christa also requires her daughters to reflect her Germanness, an aspect of her identity that Christa wears with great pride. By sewing for her daughters dirndls and dressing them and braiding their hair "in the German style," Christa creates an image before her of what she most cherishes about herself. Her daughters in their German garb, clothes that additionally showcase her handiwork, reflect her best self and confer value upon it.

When returning to her mother's constant dressmaking and need to "costume" her daughters to reflect her own image in a later passage of *Feather* the narrator again splits into third-person. Here the narrator reveals the way in which she becomes an object through which Christa can establish a sense of superiority over her neighbors and thus affirm her own value: "Set on distinguishing *her* child from the 'icky little brats' of the projects, she dresses the girl like a dream of a little girl: white tights, short flared skirts with wide starched sashes" (124). Christa's use of the narrator as an object is underscored by the use of the possessive and the emphasis given to this descriptor via italics: she is "*her* child." Moreover, the narrator uses this typeset precisely in the same way she earlier underscores Christa's relation to other (inanimate) objects in their home, "*her* curtains, *her* floors."

While the distanced, observing purview of third-person narration allows the narrator the ability to revisit her mother's object use of her without re-experiencing the pain of this reality, the recollection stirs another memory that she cannot recount without

grief. The long ago query of perhaps a teacher or schoolmate asking the name her father calls her interrupts her telling of Christa's story. The question is "an agony" to the narrator, almost certainly because her father did not recognize her nor call her by name; she and her sisters were indistinguishable to him. It is thusly parenthetically bracketed, when the narrative jumps back to Christa's object use of her it is done via the distanciation afforded her by way of third-person narration.

This shift from first-person to third does not merely metaphorically represent both the narrative and psychic splitting engendered by critical breaches in parental care; the narrator's sudden disjunctive depictions of her self as "she" actually embodies the literal effect of the parent's failure to recognize the child's self and engage her as a subject. In these moments, narratively she becomes the object that she was to her parents. Fairbairn's work provides additional insight into these kinds of self-negating bequests that the first phase escape narrative enacts. Elaborating on the fundamental parental failure of not recognizing and supporting the child's idiomatic self, Fairbairn suggests that when a child does not feel loved as a person for her own sake, she comes to internalize the feeling that she has destroyed the mother's affection and that this must be because her own love is destructive and bad. As such, the child does not come to know the self as worthy of love. Fairbairn's theory allows one to understand the first phase narrative's undermining tendencies not merely as indicative of a distrust in the validity of one's own feelings, but as suggestive of internalized self-loathing that stems from understanding one's own feelings as capable of destroying the love of the (m)other. Through this lens, the self-objectification in *Feather* and the narratorial derision in

*Beggar Maid* can be seen as more than merely a means of undoing injury; they also can be understood as instruments employed to demean and diminish the self.<sup>61</sup>

Additionally, the internalization of one's own love as destructive as described by Fairbairn brings greater intelligibility to the protagonists' inability to achieve and sustain relationships of intimacy. The radical lack of relationality in the escape narrative takes center-stage in the following chapter. While in phase two of the escape narrative the protagonist moves towards the embrace of her own idiomatic self, what remains impossible is opening and sharing this self with an other. Here the desire for intimacy is undermined by a commanding need for autonomy and idiomatic integrity at all costs.

<sup>61</sup> Fairbairn's lens also sheds important light on the self-injury that is enacted by the protagonists in both of these texts (and other first phase narratives) that escape the scope of this exploration.

## CHAPTER 4

### RUNAWAY: ESCAPING "HOME"

*"...families were like a poison in your blood"*

--Alice Munro, "Runaway"

Not unlike the earlier narratives that fall within phase one of the escape trajectory, phase two texts are similarly constituted by trauma and structured by its effects. However, in the former, trauma engenders the psychic strategy of (de)negation; in second phase narratives, it enacts a radical split from home evidenced both in form and content. What further distinguishes this phase from its predecessor is the protagonist's development and embrace of an idiomatic self, that which was previously quashed in phase one. Yet it exists as an alienated subjectivity, one that is unable to experience itself as a self-in-relation or integrate the split-off past into its present. These narratives depict imaginative yet solitary lives that flourish within the confines of the protagonist's internality. The mind itself, indeed, the mind alone becomes the creative medium through which the cultivation of a self becomes possible. The mind also serves as the protagonists' dominant defense against re-experiencing pain and lack.

While phase one protagonists still convey their desire for needs and wants gone unmet, in phase two these longings are split off and no longer expressed. The development of the "mind-object," a psychological construct that stands in for the mother and allows the self to meet its own needs through cathecting the mind, supplants the feeling self. Whereas in *Bluest Eye* the younger narrating Claudia articulates her yearning that someone might ask her what she truly wants for Christmas, in phase two,

protagonists internalize unfulfilled desire. The mind-object serves as a mental defense that combats want produced by absence and unpredictability in caregiving. In its self-enclosed psychic sufficiency the mind-object displaces the other; mental and imaginative life becomes the safe, reliable alternative to interrelating (Bollas, "Mental" 105).

Winnicott, credited for recognition of this phenomenon as an early mental defense, traces its emergence to the baby's power to survive erratic or neglectful mothering by means of the mind. When a mother fails to provide for her child's needs or does so inconsistently, a child with a good enough mental apparatus will use his ability to think things out, "understand," and adapt to these realities. The child learns to compensate for the mother who is not there "by enclosing himself in a mental relationship with himself" and in doing so provides a self-made mirror that allows him to be held together in a kind of a mental embrace (Corrigan and Gordon xvii).

Phase one narratives may be understood as exploring the kind of emotional neglect and unpredictable caregiving that leads to the development of this kind of psychic response. In *Bluest Eye* when Mrs. MacTeer insults and humiliates Claudia for vomiting on her bed sheets and Claudia splits off from her body and wills herself to no longer get sick, the episode not only illumines the failure of a longed-for environmental provision of nurture but also underscores its long-term psychic ramifications, connecting erratic, nonnurturing mothering to the generation of a mind that understands detachment from the body and negation of its needs, feelings, and functions as an imperative. Here the text expresses both aspects of the split self as described by Ferenczi, "a suffering, brutally destroyed part and a part which knows everything but feels nothing" (qtd. in Corrigan and

Gordon 6).<sup>62</sup> In phase two, the knowing self has replaced the feeling one and often is already well established as the narrator/protagonist's primary means of negotiating her reality.

Realizing this omnipotent self-sufficiency requires the destruction of the mother and the repudiation of any links to "home." These acts are perhaps most explicit in the stories that make up Munro's *Runaway*, two of which are discussed below. The very title of the collection suggests none of the ambivalence towards home evidenced in phase one narratives; here home is a place that must be escaped. Moreover, running away becomes a principal means of destroying the mother in several of its stories. In others, Munro relies on metanarrative matricide: Robin is an orphan; Grace has never known her mother; Nancy's mother dies in childbirth; and Juliet's mother's "weak heart" causes an early death. In ridding the narrative of the mother, the text is purged of the critical, disparaging voice that in phase one undermines the protagonist's efforts to become a self. This radical split from the past and the development of the mind-object as a means of negotiating absent and/or unreliable caregiving thusly can be seen in one sense as generative, allowing for the growth of the idiomatic self that might otherwise be quashed. At the same time, the limitations of this psychic defense must be acknowledged: the mind-object exists as a split-off object that safeguards its individual integrity to such an extent that reciprocal intimacy is foreclosed.

<sup>62</sup> For a fuller discussion of this predicament, see Ferenczi's "Child-analysis in the Analysis of Adults" in Balint.

## “Passion”

Munro's story “Passion” celebrates this split from “home” while at the same time acknowledging the shadow side of a freedom built upon the experience of the self as fundamentally alone in the world. The narrative begins by introducing readers to the protagonist Grace who has returned to Little Sabot Lake, the place in which she many years earlier experienced a pivotal chapter in her young adulthood that enabled her break from “home.” Grace’s physical return soon gives way to a psychic one. The story breaks and takes readers back in time to experience this earlier chapter with the young Grace by way of third-person retrospective narration. As in *Beggar Maid*, the narration embodies essential characteristics of the protagonist’s psychic predicament. Whereas the psychic splits within Rose are evidenced in the antagonistic persona of the observing narrator who seeks to undermine the participating protagonist’s thoughts and actions, the older Grace’s self-acceptance is mirrored in a style of narration that brings readers close to the younger’s imaginative self without derision.

This unity between narrator and protagonist is perhaps most clearly expressed through the narrator’s seamless travel between second and third-person:

It had been the first house that Grace had ever seen built in this way—one story high, the main roof continuing without a break out over the verandah, on all sides. Later she had seen many like it, in Australia. A style that made you think of hot summers.

You used to be able to run from the verandah across the dusty end of the driveway, across a sandy trampled patch of weeds and wild strawberries... and then jump—no actually, wade—into the lake. Now you would hardly be able to see the lake, because of the substantial house... that had been built across that very route.

What was Grace really looking for when she had undertaken this expedition?

(161)

Such subtle shifts in narration—beginning with a detailing of facts about a young Grace’s past seemingly conveyed from an outside perspective, then moving inward to relay an older Grace’s associations and memories, and finally out again to an externally-focalized stance that questions the older Grace’s motives—illustrate a fluid boundary between narrator and protagonist suggestive of a shared identity. Yet distinguishing this kind of relationship from the frequent narrator/protagonist unities present in first phase narratives is the searching tone of the narrator and her empathic, explanatory role in the text. Unlike the narrator in *Beggar Maid*, the one in “Passion” does not undercut the protagonist, exhibit any sense of “knowing better” than her, or insert ironic distance between the two. Rather, the narration functions as an interpretative lens that seeks to illumine the critical chapter in Grace’s life in which selfhood is birthed, an achievement that is depicted as contingent upon a radical split from “home.”

In this story, and in particular, this edited version of it reworked for inclusion in *Runaway* as opposed to Munro’s earlier version of it published in *The New Yorker*, “home” is not just a place that must be escaped, but also a concept linked to assumptions of intimacy and pleasure that requires interrogation. I use quotation marks to set off “home” because of Munro’s careful and limited use of the term in contrast to the more frequently employed “house.”

Grace travels to Little Sabot Lake in order to revisit a house, not a home nor even the house in which she grew up; rather, Grace is in search of the Travers family’s summer house. In contrast to Grace’s lack of fit within her own family, who is described as “not given to conversation” and “bewildered” by Grace’s intellectual and aesthetic sensibility, Grace experiences a strong sense of belonging within the Travers family.



There she discovers a world that embodies her own inclinations and desires; with and through the Traverses Grace is ushered into new and exhilarating realms of literary discussion, intellectual debate, wordplay, and the art of storytelling. Moreover, through the accepting, affirming gaze of Mrs. Travers, Grace is recognized and embraced for who she is for the first time. Grace is so drawn to this newfound intimacy and warmth she experiences with the Traverses that she chooses to exchange her Saturday evenings off from her waitressing job for Sundays off so that she can spend a full day at the cabin with the family rather than have a “date night” with Mrs. and Mr. Travers’ son Maury who is courting her. For Grace, the Travers cabin embodies intimacy, acceptance, and pleasure, qualities that others might associate with the notion of “home.” However, having never encountered this kind of knowing embrace growing up, Grace’s present experiences of intimacy with the Travers family remain altogether disconnected from her past experiences of “home.” Thus, even decades later when drawn back to this special place, Grace never perceives of it or refers to it as a “home” of any kind.

The younger Grace not only refuses to employ the term “home” herself but also explicitly questions others’ easy use of it. The few instances in which the term appears within the text are notable for the ways in which they trouble positive associations of it. Grace’s immediate, reflexive decision to embark on an unknown journey with her fiancée’s brother Neil when presented with the opportunity to return “home” illustrates this kind of subtle interrogation that the text performs.

Soon after Neil administers Grace’s tetanus shot, Maury arrives at the hospital to retrieve Grace. Neil directs the nurse to tell Maury that they’d already gone and then turns to Grace to pose the following question: “You didn’t want to go home yet, did

you?" (182). While Grace's "no" may be understood as an explicit refusal of a safe, staid existence with Maury, it also signifies a more complicated repudiation. The repeated use of the word in this brief scene in light of its almost complete absence in the rest of the text suggests that Grace is not simply rejecting Maury but the construct and assumptions of "home" itself. The few other instances in which the word is employed lend further support to this idea of a farther-reaching rejection of "home."

When Maury conveys to Grace his vision of their future together, that which includes "their being married" and how and where they will live, the idea of "home" is emphasized by the use of italics: Maury speaks "with a severe pride" of "*our own home*" (172). Grace's response is one of detached curiosity; what seems to Maury as taken for granted for Grace is fantastical: "none of this seemed at all real to her" (172). Grace's alienated relationship to "home" is further underscored by two textual alterations Munro makes between the version of "Passion" that she publishes in *The New Yorker* and the one she later publishes in *Runaway*. In the first published version, in response to Maury's repeated requests, Grace finally consents "to take him home at Christmas to meet her family" (*New Yorker* 81). In the later version of the story, Munro has adjusted Grace's vow so that she "promised to have him visit at Christmas so that he could meet her family" (174). For Grace, in the revised version, there is no "home" to visit. Moreover, this deliberate decision to create distance between Grace and any early intimate experiences of "home" is furthered through the additional information Munro supplies about Grace's relation to her past.

In the early version, there is the suggestion of an absence of intimacy between Grace and her caregivers<sup>63</sup> through Grace's impersonal letters to them that reveal nothing of Grace's feelings and little about her relationship with Maury:

Maury kept asking her what she had told her aunt and uncle about him, when she was going to take him home to meet them. In fact, she had said nothing in her brief weekly letters, except to mention that she was "going out with a boy who works around here for the summer." She might have given the impression that he worked at the hotel. (*New Yorker* 81)

In the later version of the story, Munro goes further, providing readers access to Grace's specific musings about the notion of "home." Munro inserts the following passage between the first and second sentences in the above section:

Even his easy use of that word—*home*—seemed slightly off kilter to her, though surely it was one she herself had used. It seemed more fitting to say *my aunt and uncle's house*. (173)

"Home" remains an abstract concept to Grace, not an actual experience of intimacy. Thus, in a sense, "home" does not exist for Grace—neither at age twenty when Maury's casual reference to it seems both "off kilter" and "unreal" to her (172, 173), nor decades later when narrating the story and still using the term "house" rather than "home."

Apart from the above occurrences, the only other time the word is uttered in the story is by Mavis, Neal's disgruntled wife, when she removes herself from a post-dinner word game that Grace, along with the Traverses, takes particular pleasure in. After losing a dispute over a definition of a word, Mavis declares herself "outclassed" by the others, notes that "she'd had a lovely and instructive visit," but now she "must go home" (170). Home in this case is her parents' house, the Woods,' where she, Neil, and their children stay while visiting the lake. This "home" is not only tarnished by its association with the

<sup>63</sup> She is being raised by her great-aunt and uncle as her mother died she was three years old and her father moved away "where he had another family" (165).

surly Mavis, but also by everyone else's refusal to go near it. When it is discovered that there is no cranberry sauce for the Traverses' Thanksgiving dinner and Mrs. Travers suggests to her daughter to ask the Woodses down the road, Gretchen replies that she hasn't "got the nerve" (177). When the older Grace returns and sees this house before she discovers the Traverses' she describes it as having "a forlorn, a mistaken, look" and suspects that none of Travers family had ever set foot in it (160). In all instances, "home" is unreal or unpleasant, something to escape and avoid.

In addition, Grace's foot injury, that which causes her sharp, inexplicable pain, is both directly and indirectly connected to her various escapes from the aforementioned "homes" and houses. The need to attend to Grace's injury requires her to leave the Travers cabin. Moreover, the preventative shot administered to protect her from worse pain not only occurs away from home but also becomes the occasion for a more consequential flight, the journey with Neal that catalyzes Grace's later escapes from both her and Maury's future "home" and also her aunt and uncle's house. Additionally, Munro supplies a playful allusion that connects Grace's self-determined freedom with one more escape from yet another troubled "home." That which cuts Grace's foot are the construction materials of an abandoned miniature housing project, shells that Gretchen's young daughter Dana had collected to "build a house<sup>64</sup> for Ivan. Ivan her snail" (178). However, Ivan has "got away" (178). Slow as he may be, Ivan succeeds in his "getaway" from a "house" that was to be created for him, an escape that foreshadows Grace's own.

Yet before Grace is able to make this break, she exists in a state of psychic distress. The physical pain she experiences landing barefoot on the sharp edge not of snail Ivan's own shell but one that Dana collected for him becomes one more means of

<sup>64</sup> Once again, the dwelling is referred to not as a home but a house.

underscoring Grace's discomfort with the notion of "home." Grace's physical injury here stands in for her mental unease, the distress in both cases caused by the construction of a house/home for someone by another.<sup>65</sup> The remains of Dana's attempts to build a house for Ivan physically disable Grace not unlike Maury's intention to construct a home for Grace psychically pains her. Moreover, in each instance, Grace is unaware of the cause of this discomfort. When, like Ivan, she finally enacts her escape, she embraces the same kind of protective shell Ivan "naturally" wears, a hardened exterior that she can depend upon wherever she goes, a self-enclosed "house" built around one.

Grace's ability to become a self depends on this radical split from "home" and relationality. While Grace knows that Maury has constructed for himself an inaccurate

<sup>65</sup> Interestingly, it is the fate of Mrs. Travers to have had a house built for her as well, and, not insignificantly, by Mr. Travers. Moreover, it is also the fate of Mrs. Travers to suffer periodic bouts of psychological distress involving "her nerves," a condition requiring occasional hospitalization and medication in order to "get her stabilized" (175). The significance of these facts is highlighted by their placement in the text and that which follow each.

After the narration breaks from the older Grace's return to the Travers house to explore the younger Grace's experience of her summer there, this new section begins not with reference to Grace but rather to Mrs. Travers as a young woman. The very first sentence of this section informs readers of Mrs. Travers' relation to the house, "Mr. Travers had built the house—that is, he had it built, as a surprise wedding present for Mrs. Travers" (161). When the narration then shifts to Grace's perceptions of the Traverses when she meets them some thirty years later inhabiting this house together, Grace observes that it is Mr. Travers who speaks most appreciatively of the house itself. In contrast, Mrs. Travers is most animated and engaging when telling raucous and amusing stories about a very different "big old house broken up into apartments" in which she lived with a motley assortment of fellow tenants following the death of her first husband. Mrs. Travers' vitality and freedom represented by an old house split into single residences alludes to the splitting away from "home" that Grace will need to enact in order to achieve a similar sense of passion and agency in her own life.

This escape occurs soon after Grace learns of Mrs. Travers' recurrent hospitalizations. More specifically, Grace's final moments at the Travers house are spent with a thoroughly and disturbingly altered Mrs. Travers who has just been released from psychological treatment. Grace can hardly comprehend what Mrs. Travers is saying to her because of the changes Grace observes in her: "an increase in bulk, a stiffness in all her movements, a random and rather frantic air of benevolence, a weepy gladness leaking out of her eyes. And a faint crust showing at the corners of her mouth, like sugar" (181). This is the final image presented at the Travers house before Grace departs with Neil, never to return as a young woman. Grace's escape from this house is here conflated with her escape from Mrs. Travers' fate.

image of her that fulfils his romantic ideals, she is unable to disillusion him of this while she remains with him and only acquires this power having abandoned the relationship. After her escape, Grace boldly and unequivocally shatters Maury's fantasies, even while knowing that this will devastate him. When Maury writes her a letter desperate for assurance that her flight with Neil was all Neil's doing, Grace pens only five words in response: "*I did want to go.*" She was going to add *I'm sorry*, but stopped herself" (196). Grace here reveals an idiomatic integrity that sets her apart from Rose and further distinguishes the second phase narrative from the first. When Rose, who also finds herself engaged to a man who idealizes her rather than sees her, attempts a similar act, decisively telling Patrick that she cannot marry him, she undoes it only a few weeks later, begging his forgiveness. Grace's escape allows her to realize that marriage to Maury would have been "a treachery to herself" (190) and thus recognizes it as a decision that requires no apology. This self-awareness is presented as invaluable yet not without its price. The fact that an older Grace describes "this passage, this change in her life...as if a gate had clanged shut behind her" (182) underscores Grace's flight as a point of no return while also intimating a kind of relational closure that is illustrated in Grace's subsequent actions and reflections.

Grace's positive commitment to selfhood embodied in her response to Neil is quickly shadowed by mention of those who will be impacted by Grace's newfound freedom: "(Grace) knew that wouldn't see Maury. She did not have to think of him. Still less of Mavis" (182). Grace's reality becomes one in which "the rights of those left behind were smoothly cancelled" (182). She is easily able to purge Maury from her consciousness, given that he has never truly known her. Mrs. Travers, on the other hand,

who is depicted as singular in her understanding of Grace, is not so easily erased: “And though Maury and Mavis and the rest of the family were wiped from her mind, some scrap of Mrs. Travers did remain, hovering...” (183).

Yet the gifts Mrs. Travers has bestowed upon Grace during their months together are not enough to alter Grace’s understanding of herself as fundamentally alone in the world and her knowledge of life itself as devoid of meaning. Grace’s failure to know her self as a self-in-relation is evidenced when she is assuring Neil that she feels no need to try and convince him to stop drinking:

When she’d said that, she felt cold. She had thought she was serious, but now she saw that she’d been trying to impress him with these answers, trying to show herself as worldly as he was, and in the middle of that she had come on this rock-bottom truth. This lack of hope—genuine, reasonable, and everlasting. (192)

For Grace, there exists no foundation of relationality that might allow her to know life in less abysmal terms. At the park where they stop for Neil to sleep off some of the effects of his whisky consumption, Grace walks to the river and sees herself “at the edge of a flat dark body of water that stretched on and on. Cold, level water. Looking out at such dark, cold, level water, and knowing it was all there was” (193). Later, as “the cold of night settle(s) in” and the still intoxicated Neil is unable to be roused, Grace’s predicament underscores and confirms the truth of her existentialist position: everyone in the park has gone home, the night is growing dangerously cold, and Grace is in fact essentially alone.

This isolation is intensified by one more difficult recognition: Grace realizes that “passion,” that which she had hoped might offer refuge from the “cold, level water” cannot achieve this. Her flight with Neil disillusioned her of this fantasy as well as her earlier understanding of passion itself:

She'd thought it was touch. Mouths, tongues, skin, bodies, banging bone on bone. Inflammation. Passion. But that wasn't what had been meant for them at all. That was child's play, compared to how she knew him, how far she'd seen into him, now. (193)

The mutual recognition that Grace experiences with Neil reveals to her that "passion" involves intimate knowing of the other. Ironically, what Grace perceives in and through Neil is a reflection of her own utter aloneness in the world. For Grace and Neil, this is the intimacy or "passion" they experience together. And while the fact of holding this knowledge in the embrace of another constitutes an important moment for Grace of being known, the fact that this knowledge is shared cannot undo its content. By the end of the evening, Neil has absented himself from Grace, slipping into unconsciousness and leaving her alone at the park to find her own way "home."

Grace's ability to negotiate this predicament, both literally and metaphorically, is juxtaposed with Neil's inability to manage either. Later that evening, Neil takes his life. Yet rather than casting a shadow on Grace's resolute path towards selfhood, the tragedy becomes an occasion for furthering Grace's solitary journey away from "home;" it facilitates one more escape for Grace. Soon after Neil's death, Mr. Travers delivers to Grace a cheque for one thousand dollars, conveying he and Mrs. Travers' hope that Grace will "make good use of (it)" (196). It is a gift that economically frees Grace from having to return "home" to take on her uncle's chair-caning business. In the end, the Travers house falls from view and what is left is the gift of the Traverses and the "start in life" that it insures for Grace (196). Embodying their name, the Traverses allow Grace "to travel across or through" them to forge a future of her own (*OED*).



## “Tricks”

Unlike the way in which Neil reflects back to Grace confirmation of her own solitary existence in the world, in "Tricks," Robin's first experience of mutual recognition with an other allows her to embrace the possibility of lasting intimacy. It is only after she is rejected by Daniel's twin Alexander, whom she believes to be Daniel, that she fully retreats into the imaginative enclave of her own mind. Before this fateful misrecognition, Robin lives a kind of self-enclosed life engaged in her own idiomatic pleasures although not entirely cut off from the prospect of relationality. After the event, however, Robin splits off from her vulnerable feeling self, foreclosing the possibility of future intimacy. What results is not a radical transformation in behavior, but rather a dispositional change evidenced through both subtle and explicit shifts in narration. Structurally, the text mirrors Robin's interior splitting: at the point of "Daniel's" rejection of Robin it abruptly ends; when it begins again it is as *Part Two*, a separate section that depicts a very different Robin several decades after the devastating event.

*Part One* offers a sympathetic portrait of a vital young woman in less than ideal life circumstances who creatively uses the construct of the mind-object as a generative means of negotiating a difficult, often-dreary existence. At age twenty-six, Robin is living at home and working as a nurse in order to take care of her severely asthmatic older sister Joanne, who takes perverse pleasure in belittling Robin. For Robin, the mind-object acts as an imaginative refuge that she feeds through yearly trips to Stratford to enjoy performances of Shakespeare. *Part One* opens by giving readers a sense of the trials and insults that make up Robin's "home" life and the way in which her mind-object

insulates her from Joanne's meanness and regular ridicule. The first spoken line of the text is Robin's, filled with anticipatory pleasure about her impending trip to Stratford. The second is Joanne's, issuing a barb at Robin, heavy with "scorn" from Joanne's endless "fund of contempt" (237). Yet the existence and dynamism of Robin's inner world allows her a sense of "living outside Joanne's reach," and thus she experiences "only a slight sting" in response to her sister's taunts (237).

Robin's rich internality also provides a way of making meaning in the world in spite of the fact that she possesses no friends who understand her or share her interests. When a fellow nursing student expresses how bored she had been at a performance of *King Lear* that she attended with Robin, Robin says nothing but makes up her mind to return "and to come by herself" (238). It is during these subsequent solo trips to Stratford, split off from the outer world, "surrounded by strangers" (239) and fully immersed in the subjective domain of the mind-object that Robin feels most alive. Unlike in phase one narratives, the narrator does not critique Robin's solitary pleasures and psychic retreats; rather, the retrospective narration slips into Robin's interiority and gives readers a sense of the mind's power to vivify a potentially lonely, dismal existence:

(Robin) had yet to see a single person there that she knew, in the theater or out on the streets, and that suited her very well. . . . After the play she would walk downtown, along the river, and find some inexpensive place to eat—usually a sandwich, as she sat on a stool at the counter. And at twenty to eight she would catch the train home. That was all. Yet those few hours filled her with an assurance that the life she was going back to, which seemed so makeshift and unsatisfactory, was only temporary and could easily be put up with. And there was a radiance behind it, behind that life, behind everything, expressed by the sunlight seen through the train windows. The sunlight and long shadows on the summer fields, like the remains of the play in her head. (239)

While the narration is retrospective, its ability to slip into Robin's psychic reality and appreciatively relay Robin's innermost thoughts allows readers an intimacy both with

Robin and the generative aspects of her subjective self-contained world. Providing a lyrical language to Robin's interior space of aesthetic enjoyment, the narration embodies and celebrates the mind-object as Robin employs it.

While Robin has grown accustomed to this solitary way of being, her immediate openness to Daniel at first meeting suggests that Robin is not closed to emotion, the possibility of intimacy, or the life of the body. However, Robin's lack of ever having been recognized and embraced by an other prior to Daniel makes Daniel/Alexander's rejection particularly crushing, and in effect, life-changing. Whereas "a more confident, a more experienced, woman would have felt anger and walked away in a fine fury" (260), what is awakened in Robin is "shame, terrible shame" (260). She thus gives herself over to the pain of this rejection as a means of inoculating the self from the possibility of ever again experiencing such relational anguish:

It was better not to try to escape, better not to ignore this blow. If you did that for a moment, you had to put up with its hitting you again, a great crippling whack in the chest. (260)

The text splits off here, and when it resumes decades later as *Part Two* it is clear that Robin has maintained this belief and undergone a radical transformation as a result.

Not far into *Part Two*, the narrator explicitly references Robin's altered sensibility since her return from Stratford that day: "something—though not what she was expecting—*had* changed her life" (265). Moreover, almost the entirety of the narration in *Part Two* mirrors Robin's different way of being both by reflecting Robin's interior splits and by keeping readers emotionally distanced from Robin. The rift that has developed between her mind and her body is expressed in the very different ways in which Robin's physicality is depicted in parts one and two respectively. The narration in *Part One*

portrays a young woman still very much connected to her body; readers are afforded a view of Robin's attractiveness focalized through Robin's own perspective as she gazes at her self in the theatre mirror:

Her hair was dark, and fine, and though she visualized it puffed up like Jackie Kennedy's, and did it up in rollers at night, it had a tendency to go flat. Otherwise, she had been pleased with what she saw. She had greenish-gray eyes and black eyebrows and a skin that tanned whether she tried or not, and all this was set off well by her tight-waisted, full-skirted dress of avocado-green polished cotton, with the rows of little tucks around the hips...Admiring herself, turning and looking over her shoulder to catch sight of the V of the dress at the back—she believed she had a pretty back...(240)

Such bodily delight is absent in the description of Robin in *Part Two*. Moreover, the older Robin is reintroduced from a distanced perspective rather than through her own mind's eye:

When she steps off the elevator to visit the third and top floor of the hospital, she is wearing a long black coat, gray wool skirt, and a lilac-gray silk blouse. Her thick, straight, charcoal-gray hair is cut shoulder-length, and she has tiny diamonds in her ears. (261)

Unlike the earlier description in which the passage closes with Robin's pleased assessment of herself, this one gives no indication of Robin's own perception. Instead, the narrator supplies a parenthetical remark bestowing a generic, indirect appraisal of Robin's good looks: "(It is still noted, just as it used to be, that some of the best-looking, best-turned-out women in town are those who did not marry)" (261).

Although *Part Two* is narrated in present tense, that which might be used to foster intimacy with the protagonist, it is not employed to these ends. All information about Robin's life since the fateful rejection is relayed from a position outside of her. The distanced narration becomes another means of representing the way in which others are kept at a distance from Robin's interiority. Robin's life revolves around her present

career in psychiatric evaluation. The most satisfying relationships that she now enjoys are those with her patients, and these are characterized by incongruous power dynamics, with Robin's patients revealing a great deal of themselves and she offering very little of her own interiority in return. Moreover, the inappropriate sexual affairs that sometimes emerge from these relationships further signal a lack of partnership between the mind and the body. Robin occasionally engages in "sporadic and secret" sexual relations with certain patients after their release. These are married men described as having fallen in love with Robin during treatment. In contrast, Robin expresses no feeling towards the men aside from "goodwill" (266).

The only bit of excitement or interest Robin reveals with regard to these relationships is a fascination towards her patients' minds; during the time at which the story is set, Robin is enamored with the intriguing delusion of one particular patient, Mr. Wray, who believes that he has made important, unacknowledged contributions to the discovery of DNA. During and after their meetings, Robin marvels at Mr. Wray's lyrical descriptions of the biological processes of genetic splitting:

...she always loves the part of story where he describes how the spiral unzips and the two strands float apart...each strand setting out on its appointed journey to double itself according to its own instructions. (267)

On the surface, Mr. Wray's reference to genetic doubling functions as a means of foreshadowing Robin's subsequent discovery of "the trick that ha(d) been played" decades earlier in her mistaking Daniel's twin for Daniel. However, a closer examination of this brief interaction between Robin and Mr. Wray reveals a more subtle, complex allusion to the psychic transformation that occurs within Robin upon discovery of this "trick."

After Mr. Wray finishes his explanation, he details the ways in which he has been wronged in not receiving due credit for the discovery. On the day of Robin's discovery, he describes an important letter he believes to have been taken from him. Robin "wishes that he could stop (at his lyrical explanations of genetic splitting)," but at the same time, recognizes that "when he begins to root around in the byways of the injustice, to concentrate on something like the stolen letter, it means he's probably getting better" (266). The recognition contains a subtle irony. It seems to suggest that Mr. Wray's movement away from his imaginative inner life, that which permits him enjoyment of the belief that he is a brilliant but wronged scientist, and towards the outer world, a sphere in which he is an ordinary human being who in turn must relate to other ordinary and potentially dishonest human beings, represents psychological growth. In other words, Robin believes that a shift towards engagement with others, regardless of how flawed these interactions may be, signifies a reorientation towards health. Moreover, that this shift is characterized by newly emergent emotions of anger and frustration may also be suggestive of psychic health; that is, this development may be understood as a productive displacement of contented inner delusion with actual feeling.

Robin experiences a psychic process similar to that of Mr. Wray when she learns of Alexander's existence and is able to reinterpret the events of the past through a newly constructed set of facts. Like Mr. Wray, discovery of what she deems an unjust "trick" played upon her moves her from a state of solitary placidity into one of indignation:

Outrageous.

Brothers.

Twins.

Robin wants to set this piece of paper in front of someone, some authority.

This is ridiculous. This I do not accept. (267)

Robin's outrage signifies her reconnection to the feeling self earlier split off and abandoned. The narration of the text radically alters to reflect this change within her. No longer does it dispassionately relay facts about Robin's life; it brings the reader into direct contact with Robin's emotions as she experiences them.

The woman who is earlier described as having no regrets with regard to a sexual life that elicits feelings no stronger than "goodwill" becomes one who now experiences yearning when reflecting on the sabotage of a partnership before it ever had the chance to bloom:

It was all spoiled in one day, in a couple of minutes, not by fits and starts, struggles, hopes and losses, in the long-drawn-out way that such things are more often spoiled. And if it's true that things are usually spoiled, isn't the quick way the easier way to bear?

But you don't really take that view, not for yourself. Robin doesn't. Even now she can yearn for her chance. (268)

The passage not only illustrates Robin's reconnection to her split off feeling self by reference to both disappointment and desire but also suggests this through the reestablishment of intimacy between Robin and the narrator. From the moment of Robin's discovery, Robin's story ceases to be relayed from a perspective of narratorial distance, but rather, like in *Part One*, again becomes focalized through Robin. The fluid boundary between third and second-person above reflects the bridging of this earlier split. Whereas throughout most of *Part Two* readers are kept outside of Robin's thoughts and feelings, here we are once again given access, suggesting a weakening of the mind-object as an impenetrable fortress. In this way, the return to narration focalized through Robin may be understood as reflecting the reconciliation of Robin's interior splitting. The use of second-person also functions as a means of inviting readers into a closer, even empathic,

relationship with Robin. As such, the narration mirrors the enclosed mind-object's opening to the outer world.

The last line of the story perhaps most poignantly illustrates Robin's return to feeling and attendant draw towards intimacy. Yet, characteristic of the second phase narrative, this opening towards an other remains a yearning unable to be realized. In the midst of spinning various creative hypotheses about the events leading up to the fateful misrecognition and mulling over what and who is to blame, Robin pauses. The text ends with Robin's imaginative "explanations" displaced by desire for that which she has foresworn since the tragedy, a relational life: "She wished she could tell somebody. Him" (269).

### *Sula*

Sula's plight echoes that of Robin's in notable ways. Sula also lives a self-contained, autonomous life split off from her vulnerable feeling self, and like Robin, in the end, seeks reconciliation with this self too late. While for Robin her yearning is foiled by Daniel's earlier death, for Sula, it is her own death that forecloses the realization of intimacy. In the moments before her last breath, Sula anticipates the pain she imagines will accompany it—but pain does not come. Sula's bemused delight at this discovery causes her to psychically shift from the safe enclosure of the mind-object to the one friend with whom she once shared intimacies: "Well, I'll be damned," she thought, "it didn't even hurt. Wait'll I tell Nel" (149). This unfulfilled expression of desire felt by



Sula, the novel's hailed representation of solitary freedom, articulates the fundamental tension of the novel, the irreconcilability of the autonomous self and the relational one.

While the novel celebrates the unfettered selffulness that Sula embodies, it also connects the formation of this unattached, autonomous nature to relational absence and injury. By foregrounding the adverse conditions in which Sula's selfhood develops, the text presents Sula's self-sufficiency as a laudable achievement as well as a complicated psychological construct produced in response to a hostile environment. Sula becomes a self by means of psychic escape into the mind, that which becomes an object of intense attachment turned to for both security and gratification. It is here that Sula is protected from the community who deems her "evil" and labels her a "bitch," a "roach," and a "pariah" (112, 117, 122). Here also she is free to create a life untouched by Eva's convictions that her desire to "make (her)self" is "selfish" and that she "got no business floatin' around without no man" (92). The freedom Sula experiences in this interior space is unrivalled in the outer world, and in time, the mind-object becomes more than a temporary retreat but the reality of her existence. Sula comes to experience the world through her belief that "there was only her own mood and whim" and in response turns inward to "discover it," and live "out her days exploring her own thoughts and emotions, giving them full reign, feeling no obligation to please anybody unless their pleasure pleased her" (118, 121).

While the Bottom despises Sula for what they perceive as an expression of utter selfishness, the narration prevents readers from sharing this perspective by providing an historical context of early injury and an interpretative lens through which to understand its effects. Soon after Sula is introduced, we learn that she is the daughter of a "distant

mother” and an “incomprehensible father” and that because of these absences she turns to Nel to find “the intimacy (she is) looking for” (52). Two traumatic events in Sula’s childhood are offered as means of apprehending Sula’s inability to experience life as a self-in-relation. The first is the conversation Sula overhears her mother having with friends in which Hannah acknowledges that while she “love(s) Sula,” she “just don’t like her” (57). The second is the accidental death of a young boy for which Sula is responsible. The narrator uses these events to explain Sula’s autonomous, self-contained sensibility: “The first experience taught her there was no other that you could count on; the second that there was no self to count on either” (118-9). In one short sentence, the narrator simply and directly encapsulates the untrustworthy ground of being from which the mind-object grows. In contrast to the unreliability of others and even that of one’s own treacherous body whose sweaty palms might inadvertently release a small boy into the swallowing gulf of the river, the mind-object that Sula creates is “always available for mastery and control of internal objects so that dependence and the feelings it generates— anxiety, frustration, anger, and envy—can be obliterated” (Corrigan and Gordon 9).

Reading the final scene between Sula and Nel through the lens of this psychological construct allows one to recognize the irreconcilability between the women as effected in part by early trauma. This interpretative framework makes visible an otherwise imperceptible force field as it impinges upon the expression of vulnerability. Moreover, understanding Sula’s use of the mind-object as a substitute for maternal care offers new ways of interpreting the evocative imagery that colors the encounter. In the short chapter that portrays the failed connection between the two former friends and Sula’s subsequent death, one particular object, “the boarded-up window Eva had jumped

out of,” is mentioned more than any other, six times in total, and notably, almost always in relation to Sula’s gaze and her need to keep it in sight. One aspect of the object’s significance is its association with the destruction of two mothers in the text. Hannah’s conflagration is first observed through this window, a view that compels Eva to offer up her own body in attempt to save her daughter while Sula in the yard below simply watches her mother burn to death. In its reference to this tragic event, the window alludes to the intensity and commitment of this self-sacrificing love while simultaneously indicting the love for its inability to foster an intimacy that would engender reciprocity on the recipient’s part, in this case, Sula, the impassive viewer of her mother’s burning. The inadequacy of this love is further intimated by the window’s shape and its missing panes; the shattered window is suggestive of the broken mirror that Hannah was to her daughter in her inability to provide for Sula a reflection of her emerging idiomatic selfhood. Now made opaque by wood and steel, the “mirror” still offers no reflective possibilities, neither from the mothers destroyed by death and exile nor between the once intimate friends who earlier offered to one another at least some measure of the reflective embrace they sought in their mothers.

Further interpretive possibilities emerge when considering the boarded-up window as an embodiment of the mental fortress that Sula has created as a means of birthing a self. If allowed to function polysemously within the scene, the boarded-up window may be understood both as the broken mirror between mother and child and as a physical representation of the mind-object, the latter an effect of the former. When the window is read as standing in for the mind-object, Sula’s attachment to it and reluctance to move in any way that will obstruct her view of it become intelligible. In that Sula

experiences the mind-object as analogous with the whole of her selfhood, in fixing her gaze upon the window, Sula beholds her very self and does for it what her mother could not: she accepts and affirms its being. Sula's understanding and embrace of mind and self as one is made explicit in her response to Nel when Nel questions whether Sula's life of imaginative freedom amounts to anything tangible in the end: "...Girl, I got my mind. And what goes on in it. Which is to say, I got me" (141).

The verve that characterizes Sula's retorts to Nel's queries raze Nel's critiques of Sula. Even as her body fails her, Sula prevails as an indomitable force; it remains within her power to describe even her impending death in triumphant terms, "Me, I'm going down like one of those redwoods. I sure did live in this world" (143). When Nel touches upon the one weak link in Sula's psychic armor, the fact of Sula's loneliness, Sula deflates the critique while affirming the superiority of her choices: "...But my lonely is mine. Now your lonely is somebody else's. Made by somebody else and handed to you. Ain't that something? A secondhand lonely" (143). Not only does Sula compellingly defend her life of autonomous freedom as a vital, authentic way of being throughout Nel's interrogation, the text further buttresses this stance by positioning Sula as clear victor in the verbal sparring between the women. In this way, Sula's unfailing ability to eclipse every one of her interlocutor's charges with responses exhibiting both cleverness and depth of insight can be seen as one more way in which the novel itself portrays the superiority of Sula's way of being in relation to her detractors.

At the same time, both explicit and oblique references to the relational injuries and absences that constitute the foundation of Sula's imaginative freedom complicate this affirmation. When Nel specifically asks Sula why she slept with Nel's husband, Sula

refers not to bodily desire, but rather to an absence within, “Well, there was this space in front of me, behind me, in my head. Some space. And Jude filled it up. That’s all. He just filled up the space” (144). In spite of its generativity, the mind-object remains haunted by this enigmatic “space,” an absence described elsewhere as a “still silence between self and other” that a relation with oneself cannot fill (Shabad and Selinger 218). For Sula, not unlike her mother, sex with men indiscriminately chosen become involuted attempts to fill this still, empty space. When Nel asks if Sula loved Jude, Sula remains silent with her eyes fixed upon the boarded-up window, a response that suggests that sex with Jude was not about an other but about the singular relationship she possesses with her self.

It is only when the conversation moves to the intimacy that the two women earlier shared that Sula’s sharp retorts soften and her gaze shifts away from the window:

“I was good to you, Sula, why don’t that matter?  
...“It matters, Nel, but only to you. Not anybody else. Being good to somebody is just like being mean to somebody. Risky. You don’t get nothing for it.” (144-5)

Acknowledging the vulnerability involved in intimacy that for her has failed to provide a commensurate return for its extracted price, Sula turns to look at Nel but is unable to hold her gaze. Intimacy remains impossible for Sula, and she soon closes her eyes. When Nel leaves, Sula turns towards the boarded-up window and remains fixed in this self-enclosed position even when her pillow becomes soaked with sweat and she knows “turn(ing) her cheek to the cooler side of the pillow” would be “refreshing” (148):

If she turned her head, she would not be able to see the boarded-up window Eva jumped out of. And looking at those four wooden planks with the steel rod slanting across them was the only peace she had. The sealed window soothed her with its sturdy termination, its unassailable finality. (148)

For Sula, the window conjures a sense of that which is absolute, solid, and conclusive.

Here it represents a fortification against the unreliability of others and the failures of the

body, a wood and steel barrier that protects Sula from a fallible, capricious world. Now feeling finally “completely alone—where she had always wanted to be” (148) and at peace in this solitary space, Sula’s defenses drop and her unconscious reveals desire for the containment she has sought within the mind-object:

It would be here, only here, held by this blind window high above the elm tree, that she might draw her legs up to her chest, close her eyes, put her thumb in her mouth and float over and down the tunnels, just missing the dark walls, down, down until she met a rain scent and would know the water was near, and she would curl into its heavy softness and it would envelop her, carry her, and wash her tired flesh always. Always. (148-9)

Ironically and tragically, it is only in the space of her completely sealed off, boarded-up room that Sula experiences enough security that her unconscious longing for containment by an other is released into consciousness. Yet the circumstances of her return to the feeling self that she earlier disavowed does not negate the experience. What emerges within the isolated confines of this closed off space is the desire to be held, carried, and nurtured by the (m)other and for that softness and care to not give way but exist as something that can be relied upon—"always."

This unfulfilled yearning for intimacy that is given the last word in Sula’s life brings to the surface the unresolvable tension between autonomy and relationality that exists at the heart of the novel and prevents *Sula* from being read as an unequivocal celebration of untethered female freedom. That at the end of her life in a boarded-up room Sula rests her final thoughts upon Nel underscores the reality that while intimacy remains impossible for Sula, its desirability is never fully eradicated.

### *For Rouenna*

Intimacy also escapes the protagonist of *For Rouenna*, and like in *Sula*, the unconscious offers an explanatory lens for understanding this failure as engendered by earlier relational injury. Throughout the text, unconscious forces beckon the narrator/protagonist inward to face a painful past that has been repressed. Her response is to engage this history imaginatively rather than personally by way of an object outside of the self, Rouenna, a figure from the narrator's childhood. In the isolated safety and creative workings of the mind-object, the narrator writes Rouenna's life and in doing so fosters her own idiomatic selfhood as an artist. Yet at the same time, this psychic work is best understood as partial in it does not enable the narrator to fully engage and incorporate her *own* history into her present self.

The novel is structured upon two significant relational failures in the unnamed narrator's life, the recent breakup of her romantic relationship with G. and the end of an emerging friendship with Rouenna as a result of Rouenna's suicide. G. represents the new "home" that the narrator has somewhat tenuously established for herself as a writer within an upper class, bohemian circle of friends after escaping her childhood home in the Staten Island projects. Rouenna embodies the narrator's painful past to which the narrator reluctantly and circuitously returns through her literal and textual relationship with Rouenna. Rouenna, who now lives in Brooklyn, seeks out the Manhattan-dwelling narrator after stumbling upon her first book, an autobiographical piece of fiction about

her early life in the projects<sup>66</sup> and doggedly writes the narrator until she agrees to a lunch date.

They meet in Rouenna's apartment, a "house"<sup>67</sup> with an outside the narrator describes as "graceless" and "homely"<sup>68</sup> almost to the point of grimness" and an inside tidily filled with "stuffed furniture and bric-a-brac," "doilies and afghans and needlepoint," "a pair of dozing parakeets," decorative dishes filled with candy, and many magazines but no books (13). The narrator is overwhelmed, experiences an episode of vertigo and an immediate urge to flee the apartment. Yet she is not conscious of what causes this intense recoiling and "weak(ness) in the knees" (13). However, the fact that the apartment embodies a classed aesthetic that not only the narrator has intimately known having grown up in the Staten Island housing projects but also has implicitly rejected by means of subsequently developing a "fear of decoration" suggests the narrator's repulsion is engendered by more powerful forces than mere distaste for such graceless objects as Rouenna's "stack of plastic coasters" and her "giant kidney-shaped ashtray" (14). Moreover, it is not simply escape from Rouenna's apartment that the narrator desires, but rather, she longs to flee from "(Rouenna's) world" (13). Upon crossing its threshold, the narrator immediately distances herself from these surroundings

<sup>66</sup> The fluid boundary between memoir and fiction to which Nunez acknowledges when discussing *Feather* may be at play here as well, as the alluded to content of the narrator's first novel in *For Rouenna* appears to be analogous with what Nunez likewise explores in her first novel, *Feather on the Breath of God*.

<sup>67</sup> While not as explicitly deconstructed as it is in *Runaway*, home here is also a troubled concept. As Rouenna represents the narrator's past, it is significant that she does not live in a home but a "house."

<sup>68</sup> The use of this term may be a subtle allusion to the literal translation of "heimlich," that which foreshadows the arrival of the "uncanny," the return of the familiar or homey/homely.



by designating Rouenna's apartment as more than merely aesthetically disagreeable but a "world" unto itself.

The narrator's weak-kneed dizziness recurs throughout the novel, notably at times when the narrator inadvertently remembers an event from her past or finds herself in the strange amorphous space existing between the present moment and her return to a not-yet recovered memory. In Rouenna's apartment, the woozy feeling awakened by "the throbbing busyness of the place" subsides only as the narrator further distances herself from this reality by taking on a position of superiority, a kind of intellectual "sneering" at Rouenna's "world" (14). Yet this inward sneer is immediately undone by the narrator's emotional response of shame at this felt sentiment. This internal movement from psychic dislocation to dissociation to shame all within the first few moments of entering the apartment suggests a complicated relationship between the narrator and Rouenna's "world" and a stronger connection between the two than the narrator is willing to acknowledge.

Over the course of the afternoon, Rouenna intermittently awakens within the narrator painful memories of her own working class past that she is loath to explore. When Rouenna jocularly recalls some of the disciplinary tactics of their public school teachers that included the use of handcuffs, pointers, and yardsticks, the narrator finds herself inwardly growing increasingly troubled:

Handcuffs! Where were the social workers? Where were our parents? And though I laughed, I felt a familiar darkness come over me. Those were true stories; those teachers had really existed, blighting our childhoods and memories of childhood, I didn't like to think about them. I didn't like that nagging question about our parents...And this was the darkness that would come over me: an unhappiness that was at least partly self-pity. A fear, the awful fear that, back then and there, children's lives had been spoiled before they'd fairly begun. (19)

For the narrator, it is not just the content of the memories that produce anguish but more specifically the absence of parental protection that left the narrator vulnerable to others' abuses. To avoid confronting this painful absence, the narrator has taken to interpreting "the darkness that would come over (her)" when reflecting on the past as a kind of "self-pity" (19). By not recognizing her pain as legitimate sadness, the narrator is able to avoid acknowledging the failures in parental care that give rise to it.

Yet what the narrator cannot escape while with Rouenna is the sense of an "uncanny" "third presence...there, right in the room with us, some quivering invisible thing that passed over and around and between us" (20). It is not until the narrator is inscribing Rouenna's name in her book that "the whirring, circling, maddening thing, at last came to light" (20), the specific recollection that tangibly places Rouenna within the narrator's history. When this happens, the feeling of "acute, vertiginous strangeness" recurs (20), and this time the narrator does not wait out her spate of dizziness and felt need to leave Rouenna's "world;" she quickly and abruptly flees.

The persistent, hovering presence over, around and between the two women, here displaying its power to both literally and figuratively move the narrator, brings to the fore the central role the unconscious plays within the novel. Its complex operations are illuminated by the narrator's use of the term "uncanny" (*unheimlich*) to describe this presence, a choice that reveals its significance when read through the lens of Freud's etiological exploration of the term. Drawing upon the unusual semantics of "*heimlich*," a term that possesses dual meanings of both "known, familiar" and also "secret, concealed" that cause it to overlap with its opposite "*unheimlich*," Freud conceptualizes the uncanny as the revelation or exposure of that which has been private, concealed, or hidden, not

just from others but especially from the self.<sup>69</sup> For Freud, the uncanny is anything that taps earlier repressed experiences or psychic states; it is the recurrence of that which has been long “forgotten.” Freud discusses it as a kind of doppelganger to the self in that it is constituted by that which the ego deems unacceptable. At the same time, the double may be structured by “all the unfulfilled but possible futures to which we still like to cling in phantasy, all the strivings of the ego which adverse circumstances have crushed...” (“The Uncanny” 236). Rouenna serves as the narrator’s double in both senses. She represents the trauma, absences, and injuries from the narrator’s past that the narrator has sought to escape, that which elicits “the darkness that would come over (her)” (19). Additionally, the narrator experiences Rouenna’s pained, stifled existence as an embodiment of “all the strivings of the ego which adverse circumstances have crushed.” Rouenna’s troubled life and death confirm the narrator’s deep “awful fear that...children’s lives had been spoiled before they’d fairly begun” (19). In these ways, Rouenna becomes the catalyst and the means by which the narrator is able to explore the repressed traumas of “home” and the crushed strivings of younger selves, Rouenna’s standing in for her own.

The content of the “invisible winged thing” that comes “to light” (20) in Rouenna’s apartment and the way in which it is narrated lends further support to the proposition that Rouenna functions as this kind of alter-ego to the narrator. The memory consists of a disturbing incident that occurred on the “Big Playground” of the projects that the narrator remembers observing as a child. It is an event that the narrator’s family

<sup>69</sup> From the definition of *heimlich* that means “known, familiar, homey” and from its second meaning of “secret, unknown, concealed,” Freud theorizes *unheimlich* as constituted in opposition to both meanings, both “unknown, unfamiliar, eerie and strange” and also “revealed, uncovered, the hidden exposed.” As such, it stands in for “the return of the repressed.”

insists that she did not experience firsthand but rather was told about it, and yet it is “something (she) persisted for years in believing (she) had witnessed” (21). Even now in her recollection of the scene, the narrator does not fully accept that she was not present and remains perplexed as how to “explain the fact that I remember everything, and so minutely” (21). As she recounts the terrible story of Rouenna’s father chasing, threatening, and thrashing his naked young daughter round and round the playground, the narration abruptly changes. All markers of the narrator’s present reality disappear, and readers are transported back to that earlier scene, dropped within it and experience it as if it were transpiring in real time.

The narrative shifts that occur in the depiction of this violent scene mirror those that occur in *Beggar Maid* when the narrator begins to describe Rose’s “Royal Beating.” Not only do both narrators immediately switch from past to present tense when describing these traumatic events, both episodes may be accurately described as narrated in the “dramatic Present” as defined in the previous chapter, that is when “the speaker...forgets all about time and recalls what he is recounting as vividly as if it were now present before his eyes” (Jespersen 238, 239).

The way in which traditional sentence structure comes apart in the narrator’s recollection of the incident also corresponds to the narration of the beating in *Beggar Maid*; here too the memory returns in pulses, fragments, and exclamations. The chase, the curses, and the blows likewise exist outside the organization of paragraphs:

A scream cuts through the noise—a high scream like a bright red Frisbee rides the hot dense air—and the playground goes still. Now in the stillness two distinct sounds can be heard. One high, one deep; screaming, shouting; a girl, a man. The door of one of the apartment buildings opens, and the girl tears out. Screaming, naked. Behind her, almost upon her, comes her half-naked father...cracking the belt on the air... “*Cunt! You goddamn cunt, I’ll kill you, you little*

*cunt!” ...Crack! ...What a sprinter she is, how she veers on a dime, all bright pink fleetness, like a skinned rabbit. Round the seesaws and back the way she came, fists clenched, elbows and knees pumping impossibly fast and she is still screaming she never stops screaming never stops running streaking past all those astonished eyes dashing back through the door—  
Cunt! (22)*

Placed directly alongside of the narrator’s description of Rose’s beating, stylistic and linguistic similarities also become apparent:

At the first, or maybe the second, crack of pain, she draws back. She will not accept it...she runs, she screams, she implores. Her father is after her, cracking the belt at her when he can, then abandoning it and using his hands. Bang over the ear, then bang over the other ear. Back and forth, her head ringing. Bang in the face. Up against the wall and bang in the face again...She is incoherent, insane, shrieking. (*Beggar Maid* 19)

The two passages juxtaposed reveal almost identical linguistic choices in the “running” and “screaming” of the victim and the father’s “cracking the belt.” In both cases, the narrator’s use of the “dramatic Present” immediately shifts back to its earlier form as soon as the violent episode ends. Moreover, both narrators appear to be describing an event that is happening to someone else. These striking individual similarities combine to form two portraits of a beating so alike in style, form, and content that one passage may be used to explore and explain aspects of the other.

In *Beggar Maid* there is enough narrative evidence, including the narrator’s later seemingly inadvertent, anomalous use of a first-person pronoun, to make a strong case that the narrator is in fact an older version of Rose. Notably, the narrator in *Rouenna* makes a similar “slip” only moments after recalling this memory, suggesting that here too the narrator may be describing a beating in which she is the victim. The telling “slip” occurs after the narration shifts from the scene at the Big Playground back to the narrator’s present reality of riding the subway home from Rouenna’s apartment. The

narrator is no longer fully immersed within the “dramatic Present” of the past, yet psychically she has not completely left the scene. Fragments of the incident continue to linger within the narrator’s mind and intertwine with something she has read about a different scream connected to yet another troubled childhood home:

...out of this dark stillness came words I had read—something about a scream hanging over a village, the poet’s childhood home. *Its pitch would be the pitch of my village.* And I thought of my scream—I mean Roro’s scream, hanging in the blue sky over the project, there still and forever, hanging over my—over our—childhood...” (23)

While the use of a first person pronoun in *Beggar Maid* seems unintentional, here it is purposeful; the narrator allows readers to see her “slip” that first identifies the scream not as Rouenna’s but as her own. This intentional use of “my” presents questions as to how to understand the remembered beating. Is the little girl who was chased around the playground by her belt-cracking father not Rouenna but in fact the narrator? Does this possibility bring intelligibility to the narrator’s vivid recall of an event that her family insists she never witnessed? The narrator claims the story “got mixed up with other stories that had violence and nakedness in them” (23); could the playground “memory” be a surfacing of one of these traumatic events experienced by the narrator that has been subsequently projected onto Rouenna?

While the text never definitively answers these questions, exploring the remembered incident through the lens of trauma and through the depiction of the beating in *Beggar Maid* offers interpretative clues. That the memory has been repressed, surfaces through an encounter with the “uncanny,” and that the memory’s recollection produces dizziness and the desire to escape suggest that the event is both actual and traumatic, regardless of whether it was Rouenna or the narrator who suffered this particular beating

or if the memory stands in for a different traumatic event. The way in which the episode is narrated, split from the narrator's present reality and relayed as if by an "observer of that which is taking place" is suggestive of the kind of structural dissociation trauma often engenders.<sup>70</sup> That the narrative disjunctions and linguistic choices so closely mirror those in *Beggar Maid* in which the narrator is in fact the victim although she frames the scene as an observer further buttresses this reading.

This entanglement of identities that refuses disaggregation drives the narrator to realize one of the novel's central aims, that is the creative fashioning of Rouenna's life. This metanarrative project accomplished within *For Rouenna* as well as the whole of the novel itself is made possible and vital by the ambiguous, untidy nature of the narrator's relation to the past as it is represented by Rouenna. At the same time, the narrator's unwillingness to explore and unravel the tangling of their histories and acknowledge her own scream as separate from Rouenna's forecloses psychic integration and recuperation of her past. The juxtaposition of recognition and misrecognition as each is alternately framed through prisms of light and swaths of darkness in the scene in which the narrator remembers and reflects upon the beating offers interpretative clues as to how to understand both the generative and disabling aspects of the narrator's conflation of identities.

During the moments in which the narrator psychically re-experiences the playground scene, the power in the subway car dies. When her mind shifts from the long-ago beating to her present reality, the narrator discovers that she is "stuck between stations...waiting, helpless in the dark" (23). The darkness in which the narrator now finds herself can be understood as representing the unconscious, the depths that must be

<sup>70</sup> See note 40 for full details of citation.

plumbed to reach illumination, that which is suggested by the memory itself. The revisited scene, as bleak as it is, nevertheless is associated with light, both in terms of the actual sun that “blaz(ed)” that day and in the event’s dazzling clarity in the narrator’s mind’s eye. The narrator’s penetrating purview and her certainty in her recall of even the smallest of details portray a sense of knowing assurance that is absent in the narrator’s negotiations within her everyday “lit” world.

It is when the narrator leaves the immediacy of the memory and becomes cognizant of her present reality on the train car that her lucid vision is replaced by a muddled, inaccurate apprehension of her surroundings. She mistakes the passenger sitting opposite her to be a man, only to later realize that it is “a woman trying to look like a man” (24). Upon the heels of this misrecognition comes another. Exiting the train, the narrator believes she sees G. “hurrying along the platform,” but “it was not G.—G. was not even in town that day” (24). These instances of mistaken identity occurring in quick succession immediately following the narrator’s unclouded recall of a memory that supposedly she never experienced suggest the unconscious as a privileged domain of illumination and clarity in relation to the flawed vision available through ordinary conscious perception.

For the narrator, ambiguity and confusion arise in the space between past and present when she begins to reflect on the memory itself and inadvertently identifies the scream as her own. Rather than explore this notable “slip,” the narrator immediately attempts to clear up the confusion by attributing the scream to Rouenna. This instant response of projecting a painful emotion and event onto another prevents her from remaining in this potentially transformative liminal space. The ways in which the narrator



seeks to escape the various representations of “darkness” in this scene suggest her inability to engage the psychic work of “doing history,” the recuperative process that allows one to accept and integrate the past into the self, that which will be discussed in the following chapter.

The narrator not only moves swiftly away from the confusion around the identity of the screamer but also quickly shifts her attention from the distant past to her present reality. Her mind skips over decades to rest upon the very recent memory of another scream, one that she can definitively attribute to Rouenna. That is the disturbing gesture of a silent scream Rouenna performed at lunch when speaking about her time in Vietnam:

...as the lights flickered and the train hummed to life, I remembered the odd thing Rouenna had done, at the table, clutching her head between her hands and opening her mouth so wide— (24)

The narrator’s transition through different psychic spaces is here represented through her changing physical environment. In contrast to “the dark stillness” out of which comes both the remembered words of the poet and her own scream, the flickering of lights signals movement into another sphere of reflection that exists between the painful depths of the narrator’s previously repressed past and the conscious realm. The narrator does not completely abandon her engagement with the past but rather shifts her focus from herself to Rouenna. This allows the narrator to move from the “utter darkness that would come over (her)” when reflecting on her own history into a psychic space that “flickers,” that is one that is both emotionally bearable and also idiomatically generative. In the flickering space that exists between her own piercing scream and Rouenna’s silent one, the narrator begins an imaginative journey between past and present that will allow her to eventually write Rouenna’s life.

The writing itself begins as a means of coping with the intense pain and anxiety that Rouenna's suicide engenders in the narrator. Although the narrator's short relationship with Rouenna is best characterized as one of extreme ambivalence on the narrator's part, their periodic meetings persistently unsettling and depressing the narrator, Rouenna's death nevertheless produces within the narrator a debilitating emotional response:

...now I had trouble. Trouble working. Trouble not working. Trouble breathing in and out. News of her death broke all peace of mind, brought on headaches and insomnia. And all the while that feeling of urgency growing, intensifying, cutting off oxygen, pressing on my nerves. Pain. (40)

The narrator grapples with this escalating pain by traveling inward, breaking off from her community of friends and beginning to write. Abandoning her earlier plan to commute weekly to the small New England college where she is soon to be temporarily teaching, the narrator relocates to a sparsely furnished apartment in Massachusetts and becomes "as solitary as (she) has ever been" (38). For the narrator, solitude is the one space in which idiomatic selfhood may be experienced. Although she is writing Rouenna's life, the narrator senses that it is not Rouenna who is "being brought back to life by this investigation" but rather her own self (44). *Part Two* of the novel, Rouenna's story as written by the narrator, is a complicated expression of this solitary artistic self that knows itself and comes to life outside of relationality. As a separate narrative split off from the rest of the novel, the section may be understood as the embodiment of the narrator's mind-object as it exists in its most generative form, an imaginative exploration of past pain fictionalized through the story of another.

Narratively, *Part Two* is radically different from that which proceeds and follows it. While the first and last sections of the novel contain stories about Rouenna, even

stories Rouenna relays in her own voice, they are composed through the perspective of the narrator. *Part Two*, on the other hand, is wholly focalized through Rouenna. The narrator is literally absent from this section. However, in the ways in which Rouenna's dispositional traits and strategies of negotiating past pain resemble the narrator's, the narrator can be understood as still psychically present within the text. The narrator's "absent presence" is also felt in *Part Two*'s exploration of earlier events that both women experienced, such as the incident that opens the section, that of a little girl being shamed by her teacher. As all the events in *Part Two* are about Rouenna, the humiliated child is naturally Rouenna. Yet, provided in *Part One* with an historical backdrop that contains glimpses of similar shaming incidents that the narrator likewise experienced at school, one is able to recognize in the crushing of Rouenna's young self something of the narrator's experiences.

The school event that "Rouenna" recalls at the beginning of *Part Two* is of being humiliated by her teacher for telling the class that her depressed, despondent mother suffers from sleeping sickness. Like the narrator, Rouenna does all she can to quash the return of these memories but often fails:

Hard times to live through...hard to look back on as well. As a grown woman, Roro would avoid dwelling on her childhood. When the memories came anyway, when—just as she was trying to fall asleep, say—they came rushing at her...and would not be chased away, she was surprised at the mixture of feelings they brought, the tenderness and the shame. (104)

Just as the narrator's sleep is encroached upon by past injuries, so too is her doppelgänger's. Yet unlike the similar situation that the narrator experiences with her own nighttime demons in *Part One*, here the narrator does for Rouenna what she cannot for herself. While acknowledging Rouenna's difficulty in looking back, in *Part Two* the

text courageously undertakes and realizes this very act, both exploring and expressing that which Rouenna remembers and feels. The text probes the pain that inhibits sleep, pursues the connections between her troubled home life and behavior at school, and articulates the emotions that these memories produce. Whereas in *Part One* when remembering a painful incident at school, the narrator avoids feeling her own anguish by focusing exclusively on the vileness of her abuser, “Old Witch Hazel. Good Catholic. Cunt. If the hell that her kind invented exists, that is where she must be” (25), in *Part Two*, through the persona of Rouenna the narrator explores both “the tenderness and the shame” (104) that are engendered in Rouenna when revisiting these memories. Focalizing the past through Rouenna provides for the narrator a “separate” fictionalized vehicle for grappling with earlier trauma. Through Rouenna’s purview and through a story that is not the narrator’s own, the narrator is able to return to and explore “Rouenna’s” mother’s sobs that were “so convulsed that they (brought) up vomit” and her daughter’s painful awareness that “some part of her (mother), maybe even the best part, was withering away” (104). Such are the kinds of difficult experiences and feelings about which the narrator remains altogether silent in relation to her own past. Through the medium of fiction that may be analogous to the space between the narrator’s depictions of Rouenna’s suffering and her own unexpressed agonies, the narrator unearths and grapples with past trauma and its ramifications, that which both she and Rouenna attempt to suppress in their daily conscious thoughts and activities. In this way, what is impossible in life for both women becomes possible in art through Rouenna.

Beginning Rouenna’s story in childhood not only allows the narrator to explore painful memories that as adults she and Rouenna deliberately avoid but also provides

readers with a deeper understanding of that which engenders the kind of sensibility that she and Rouenna share, one that is unable to express vulnerability and mourn its own injuries, and relatedly, unable to open itself to another. Just as the narrator considers her own darkening sorrow that emerges when she thinks about the past to be “self-pity,” Rouenna likewise disparages any kind of expression of grief for her self. *Part Two*’s examination of the emotionally erratic and negligent parenting Rouenna experiences in childhood in relation to the splitting off of her feeling self allows readers to understand invulnerability and self-sufficiency as necessary psychological survival strategies. That Rouenna’s expression of her own feelings as a child was the occasion for a slap or a smack (100,101) brings intelligibility to her emotional closure as an adult expressed in her oft-repeated catchphrase, “nobody likes a sensitive plant” (117,133) and her resistance to discussing painful past experiences beyond a positive affirmation of her ability to endure: “I made it. I got through. I survived” (215).

Rouenna’s relationship to her own pain is depicted as one of refusal already at the tender age of ten. Beaten, neglected, and forced to take care of housekeeping and her depressed mother, Rouenna combats feelings that might lead to her own depression by comparing her burden to heavier ones. Looking around at the other “Cinderellas” of the projects “who had to do their mothers’ nails and roll their hair and squeeze their blackheads,” Rouenna decides “she could have had it worse” (101, 102). In this environment, mourning one’s own injuries is seen only as an unproductive manifestation of “self-pity” (19), a self-indulgence that Rouenna as an adult proudly declares she’s “got no use for” (74). However, what the narrator illustrates in her imaginative creation and elaboration of Rouenna’s painful past in *Part Two* is that such psychic exploration is not

indulgent but an integral part of knowing, accepting, and embracing the whole of Rouenna. This exploration also gestures towards the kind of recuperation that is possible when one is able to accomplish this work within the self. The project of writing Rouenna's life, contrary to the narrator's claim, does in fact "bring (Rouenna)...to life" (43) by way of providing for Rouenna a fuller and richer expression of her self than she lives in real life in *Part One* and *Three* as a emotionally closed-off woman unable to experience and express a full range of emotion because of her failure to accept and mourn a painful past and crushed self. Moreover, the narrator, for whom the above description likewise applies, albeit to a lesser degree, also experiences a fuller and richer life imaginatively through her creation and elaboration of Rouenna's life. The narrator reflects upon Rouenna's past in ways that facilitate new perspectives and understandings of Rouenna and her life. Yet this remains an act that the narrator cannot do for herself. However, by doing it for and through another, she animates her own idiomatic artistic self, a feat that is celebrated by the text, but not unequivocally so.

The novel's ending in which the narrator moves from isolation to relationality and quickly back to a troubling ambivalent relationship with another person from her past suggests the haunting of unprocessed trauma as an inhibiting factor in her ability to enjoy and sustain intimate relations of reciprocity. Once the narrator completes her book, she returns to the city and to the friends she has not seen for many months. Her reentry into and exit from the relational world is represented through her attendance at and departure from a lavish wedding in the Hamptons. The wedding gala not only represents community but also abundance, joy, and beauty. It is an embodiment of G.'s world, one that the narrator juxtaposes with the grim homeliness of Rouenna's:

Such an atmosphere of elegance and gaiety, it makes my head spin. An mansion of incredible grace, designed by the famous architect who happens also to be the one responsible for introducing bride and groom...masses of flowers and flowerlike women and men as ravishing as women...we are far away from the world in which I have been immersed. Not a tartan tux, not a fat person, not a Vietnam vet to be seen. There is grilled lobster...peaches in champagne...a pool...the sea...a radiant blue sky perfectly matching the blue silk of the bridesmaids' dresses. (226)

The narrator is “thrilled to be a part of this celebration” (226). When G. greets her by welcoming her “back to the land of the living,” she “want(s) to tell him how right he is,” that she has “spent too long with the dead, too long alone and unhappy” and of her joy at being “here among the living, the beautiful living” (226). However, when her friends decide to continue the celebration at a club, the narrator departs in spite of her ardently expressed desire to remain with them, “I want to go along, I really do. I have not had such a good time in ages. But I have to get up early the next day, so I say good-bye and go home alone” (227). That which encroaches upon and ultimately triumphs over the intimacy of friendship is the beckoning call from a different dark corner of her childhood “home,” the prison that houses her high school boyfriend, Luther. Luther, described by the narrator as another “ghost from (her) past” (4) arrives like Rouenna in the form of a letter at the beginning of the novel and also evokes within the narrator strong feelings of ambivalence. In spite of her conflicted emotions, the narrator periodically endures a ten-hour roundtrip heinous bus ride to visit him, something that early in *Part Three* she swears she will “never, ever” do again (198). Yet at the novel’s end, and, notably, in the midst of her pleasure within “the land of the living” (226), the narrator is drawn back in spite of herself.

The novel concludes with the narrator preparing for her trip to the prison. She has already begun thinking of the story she will write about Luther, writing that doubtless

will become yet another vital expression of her own selfhood. Yet the power of the narrator's ghost to draw her out of the "world of the living" (226) and back into the darkness she seeks to escape complicates and ultimately disallows an unequivocal affirmation of this creative yet solitary subjectivity. The narrator's conflicted return "home" at the novel's end intimates that even the most generative aspects of the mind-object still remain subject to the hauntings of trauma, hauntings that inhibit the possibility of enjoying a self-in-relation known with and "among the living, the beautiful living" (226).

This tension between the celebration of the idiomatic self and the longing for intimacy remains unresolved in all second phase escape narratives. Yet the psychically healing work enacted within this phase cannot be discounted. Not only are these texts liberated from the self-splitting and self-negation that define first phase narratives, they also fully embrace and elaborate the subjective self that so often has only been afforded recognition by the protagonist herself. In that it is the development of the mind-object that facilitates this achievement, I suggest that this psychic defense that has been largely conceived as pathological be reconsidered as recuperative. Through the lens of the working class escape narrative's diachronic trajectory towards recovery from trauma, the mind-object as enacted within second phase texts can be understood as representing one essential stage in the journey. In Morrison and Munro's respective oeuvres, the self-enclosed second phase text is the necessary predecessor of later narratives that embody reconciliation between past and present and the integration of what was previously disavowed.



In the ways in which *For Rouenna* explores the unconscious pull towards buried history in service to the creation of new understandings of past and present, the text heralds the recuperative psychic and narrative work that is yet to come. The third phase texts explored in the following chapter pick up where *For Rouenna* leaves off, achieving that which Nunez's narrator cannot do for herself. Whereas Nunez's narrator vicariously revisits "home" by reworking the past of another, the respective narrator/protagonists of the third phase narratives return to their own pasts to remember and recuperate the painful histories and traumatized selves that were earlier split off.

## CHAPTER 5

### TRANSFORMING THE PAST INTO HISTORY

*Tell all the Truth but tell it slant—*

*Success in Circuit lies*

--Emily Dickinson

In phase three of the working class escape narrative, the journey back “home” does not bring about the intimate reunion and reconciliation for which phase one protagonists hold out hope in spite of repeated rejection. Familial acceptance and embrace remain impossible, and third phase protagonists finally come to recognize, mourn, and creatively negotiate these losses. The kind of reconciliation with the past achieved in these texts is made intelligible through a psychic and symbolic process that Christopher Bollas terms “doing history” and describes as an approach to the past that allows the self to travel backward in time to recover and incorporate prior selves, objects, and events into a transformed way of seeing and being in the world. Through these psychic journeys, that which has been lost becomes available for the creative construction of the self’s future, one no longer circumscribed by trauma.

I draw on the work of Bollas for various reasons, one of which is that his theory is in part drawn from his work with patients who largely have suffered not catastrophic trauma, but rather the kind of “ordinary” relational breakdowns in caregiving that are analogous to the forms of injury suffered within the working class escape narrative. This is in contrast to the work of trauma studies that has developed historically from an

exceptional or catastrophic understanding of trauma. Relatedly, the literature that has been produced within this field tends towards the theoretical over the reparative. LaCapra describes his interest in the "acting out" and "working through" of trauma as motivated by his desire to "develop the concepts in a manner that engages significant historical problems" and explicitly expresses a "disavow(al) of...therapeutic conceptions of psychoanalysis" (Goldberg interview). In contrast, Bollas focuses on the intimate, interpersonal dimensions of psychic processes. Moreover, like Winnicott, there exists a strong creative component to Bollas' understanding of intrapsychic and intersubjective life that remains present and vital in his work on trauma.<sup>71</sup> This imaginative aspect is essential for engaging trauma and recovery in relation to the function the escape narrative performs as an art form as well as the creative processes engaged by its protagonists. Finally, I suspect Bollas's work both as a theorist and a practicing psychoanalyst allows him a different kind of access to the processes of trauma and recovery than available to theorists who are not engaged in clinical work. I suggest the insights produced by this dialectic open a more complex and dynamic understanding of psychic recuperation.

Bollas establishes a clear differentiation between the psychic work of "doing history" from a static notion of one's "past," defining the latter as constituted by mere "facts," things done and things that have been done to the self. Included in the "facts" of the "past" is trauma, that which creates a kind of caesurae within the self, suspending one's ability to emotionally and symbolically process and elaborate it. When returning to these facts, the self is often arrested by the unprocessed effects of the event and thus responds through negative hallucinations, the active erasure of the felt experience. This

<sup>71</sup> This is further evidenced in the central role Bollas ascribes to the imagination in distinguishing between trauma and his conception of "genera" explored in *Being a Character*.

psychic response produces a gap in reality or a sense of unreality, effects that are evident in the diminishment and undoing of trauma in first phase narratives.

In contrast, third phase narratives that “do history” approach trauma not directly via the traumatic incident itself, but rather at a “slant” through the exploration of screen memories. These are condensations of psychically intense experiences housed within ordinary objects or incidents; while often constituted by displaced desire and trauma, the memories exist in a “screened” form bearable to the psyche. The recollection of these kinds of seemingly insignificant episodes of life evokes more than the event or object itself, it taps the self-state that existed at the time.

Through these explorations, phase three narratives mine unconscious associations that allow the self access to what had been previously unavailable or partially erased by trauma. Recollecting and re-seeing psychically rich yet otherwise ordinary events de-traumatizes the subject and allows her to create new meanings that did not exist before and could not have existed had past events not been reconfigured in a newly constructed psychic space. *Nachtraglichkeit*, the Freudian model upon which Bollas builds his concept, further illumines the temporal aspects of “doing history.” Within the structure of *Nachtraglichkeit*, time moves in two directions such that the content and meaning of a past event is projected onto the present while the subject’s present enlarged understanding is cast back upon the past. The dialectic produces new meanings, perspectives, and a transformed relationship between past and present. In *Love* and *The View from Castle Rock*, this dynamic engagement with the past occurs narratively and metanarratively; one can understand *Castle Rock*’s refashioning of “facts” into fiction

and *Love*'s transformation of animosity into intimacy as aesthetic and relational manifestations of this dialectical process.

### ***The View from Castle Rock***

In the collection *The View from Castle Rock*, Munro returns to previously explored themes and material but with an altered approach that yields narrative and psychic effects unique to this collection. Guided by a commitment to understanding the past rather than merely fictionalizing it, Munro creates a text more autobiographical than any preceding it. *Castle Rock* is divided into two parts, *No Advantages*, stories exploring several generations of Munro's father's side of the family, and *Home*, first-person narratives about Munro herself. Earlier versions of some of the stories in *Home* were published individually but never collected. In the *Foreword* to *Castle Rock*, Munro discusses what kept her from including these pieces in any of her previous collections:

...they didn't belong. They were not memoirs but they were closer to my own life than the other stories I had written, even in the first person. In other first person stories I had drawn on personal material, but then I did anything I wanted to with this material. Because the chief thing I was doing was making a story. (*Foreword*)

In the stories collected for *Castle Rock*, Munro relays that she does "something closer to what a memoir does:" she explores a life, "my own life, but not in an austere or rigorously factual way" (*Foreword*). Her deviations from fact occur not in fictionalizations of the self but rather in imaginative play with "the figures *around* this self (that take) on their own life and color and (do) things they had not done in reality" (*Foreword*; emphasis added). Munro's commitment to "pay more attention to the truth of a life than fiction usually does" becomes the starting point for the creation of a different

kind of escape narrative, one able to revisit past injuries earlier split off or undone. What results is the transformation of a painful past into a different tapestry, that which is ultimately manifested in the realization of a self and its art without guilt and shame. Examining two of the stories within the *Home* section of *Castle Rock* in relation to first phase narratives that explore similar material provides a lens for understanding this more recent work as notably different, achieving reconciliation between past and present that escapes Munro's earlier fiction.

### **“Fathers”**

The second section of *Castle Rock, Home* contains notable resonances with *The Beggar Maid*; juxtaposed, the two shed important light on the recuperative work that characterizes third phase texts. Both *Beggar Maid* and the second section of *Castle Rock* trace one character's psychic and narrative journey for several decades over the course of multiple stories.<sup>72</sup> The two collections reveal a similarly troubled relational dynamic between the protagonist and her working class family and community that initially propels her escape from home and later engenders her return. “Fathers” and “Royal Beatings,” the opening stories of the *Home* section in *Castle Rock* and *Beggar Maid* respectively, examine various aspects of the growing strain between a clever and imaginative protagonist and her disapproving parents. In both stories, the tension is produced by the protagonist's expression of an emerging idiomatic self that is interpreted as “smart” (not in a good way), willful, and resistant to the expectations of pragmatism,

<sup>72</sup> *Castle Rock* contains an additional concluding story that takes place after middle age and explores an event that occurs when the narrator is in her sixties.

unquestioning obedience, and selflessness that are upheld as markers of appropriate femininity within her classed community. Both texts also explore the similar means by which the “smart” self must be annihilated as well as the attendant shame produced by the knowledge that one’s emerging selfhood is unacceptable to one’s family.

The critical difference between the two stories (and collections) presents itself in the telling, exploration, and understanding of this past. “Royal Beatings” establishes the beating itself as the chief dramatic event around which the story is fashioned in contrast to the approach “by slant” taken in “Fathers.” As suggested by the title, “Fathers” is not principally a story about the beatings the protagonist suffers, nor even centered on the individual relationship between the protagonist and her own father. While it eventually arrives at these beatings to examine the complicated dynamic that earlier engendered them, the story does so indirectly by way of the older narrator’s explorations of her girlhood friendships with Dahlia Newcombe and Frances Wainwright.

The text opens with the narrator’s recollection of Dahlia’s father Bunt, an altogether ordinary fixture in her working class community, remarkable only in the way in which his brutish disposition and violent tendencies served as a wellspring of town amusement and gossip. It is through her walks to high school with Dahlia that the narrator learns directly of Bunt’s beatings of Dahlia and also of Dahlia’s intense hatred for her father and desire to kill him. In this opening section, the narrator ponders both Dahlia’s situation and the ways in which her younger self reacted to it. The narrator’s relationship with her own father goes almost entirely unremarked upon with the exception of an odd unexplored memory that surfaces while recounting the dilemma she earlier felt when considering whether she would betray Dahlia if Dahlia killed Bunt.

Although she knows that she “would not intend to,” the narrator imagines being tortured for the information and realizes that in such a case, she might (181). The recollection gives rise to a daydream she often entertained during the war, one in which she would consider if similarly tortured whether she would betray her father, who, in her fantasy would be “hiding with the Resistance” (181). The question is left unanswered, and the narrator returns to her reflections about the Newcombes.

Not long after, the text breaks, and the narrator slips back in time four or five years earlier than she was when she knew Dahlia to introduce a very different loving and affectionate family from the narrator's past, the Wainwrights. Not unlike her relationship with the Newcombes, her intimacy with the Wainwrights was similarly initiated through walks to school with their daughter and is likewise explored through these memories and their associations. Recalling her walks with Frances engenders an extended meditation on a going away party Mr. and Mrs. Wainwright orchestrated for their daughter when they decided to move. The narrator details the party as it was experienced by her younger self as an extraordinary event, yet at the same time strangely tainted by strong feelings of discomfort at the affection and intimacy expressed within the Wainwright family and to some measure also extended towards her.

What I have here encapsulated in roughly a page of text constitutes the majority of "Fathers." Yet the most transformative aspects of this work occur not within these elaborated recollections of the narrator's friendships with Dahlia and Frances, but rather in what follows them, depicted in the story's final four and half pages. This last section of "Fathers" is broken into three segments, two that explore the narrator's very different emotional responses to these early relationships, returns that become means of recovering



self-states previously lost to trauma, and a final one embodying the creation of something new, a representation of an altered relationship with the facts of the past.

In the first of these sections, the narrator returns not to the Wainwright party itself but rather to her reaction to it afterwards: “I did not tell about any of this at home, though the food and the ornaments and the fire were so interesting” (192). Her earlier decision not to share any part of the experience with her family now spawns questions about what prompted this complete concealment. The narrator remembers feeling uneasy by the attention Mr. Wainwright afforded her and Frances, first setting for them their own special table and then playfully engaging them as their personal waiter, taking their order and presenting to the “lovely young ladies” lemonade described as “champagne” (189). Exploring her young self's discomfort in response both to this warm, attentive treatment and also to the physical affection expressed between Mr. and Mrs. Wainwright gives rise to the narrator's realization that she then had no language for what she experienced, an absence that disabled her from processing this seemingly inappropriate behavior and from communicating what she had witnessed: “the other things I could not describe and that made me feel off-balance, slightly sick, so that somehow I did not like to mention any of it” (192). Further reflection on the “creepy menac(ing)” feeling produced at the party elicits more questions and engenders other discoveries: “What was this menace? Was it just that of love, or of lovingness? If that was what it was, then you would have to say that I had made its acquaintance too late” (192, 193). Revisiting and interrogating her earlier experienced internal turmoil facilitates the narrator's present recognition of the absence of a warmth and intimacy in her own home.

The story breaks and the narrator begins the following section by contrasting her adolescent self's response to Dahlia's predicament with that of her preadolescent self's reaction to the Wainwright party. The opening line, "I did tell about Dahlia" (193), alludes to the beginning of the previous section, "I did not tell about any of this at home. . ." (192), creating a juxtaposition between the narrator's young self's refusal to speak of the intimacy she experienced in the Wainwright home and her slightly older self's willingness to transform the Newcombe family abuses into colorful and amusing stories. Contemplating these different responses to her experiences with the two families becomes a nonthreatening means through which the narrator acquires access to painful and traumatic aspects of her past.

Remembering "tell(ing) about Dahlia" leads the narrator to ponder what prompted her dramatically rendered stories to her family about "Dahlia's creeping around in the sumacs spying on her father, about her hatred of him and her mention of murder" (194). She considers the way in which these depictions of Dahlia's predicament afforded her the celebrated role of "the entertainer around home" (193), an altogether reasonable explanation but one that does not fully satisfy the narrator's inquiry. Continuing to probe her teenaged self's behavior, she comes to recognize within it a means of distancing herself from the injuries that she, like Dahlia, also suffered. Through this realization, her earlier sensationalizing of Dahlia's reality takes on new meaning. The narrator re-sees these performances as having allowed her adolescent self to perceive her own situation as completely different from Dahlia's: ". . . when I was telling (Dahlia's) story to my family, I never once thought to compare my situation with hers. Of course not" (195).

While this kind of dissociation also occurs in “Royal Beatings” through the juxtaposition of Rose’s situation with the monstrous abuses Becky Tyde suffers, in the earlier story it is the older narrator who constructs these oppositions so that the beatings that Rose experiences are normalized. In “Fathers,” the older narrating self both recognizes her younger self’s deployment of this very strategy of distancing and at the same time turns a critical lens upon it to deconstruct it. Recollecting the intensity of her own response to the beatings she suffered, the narrator no longer conceives of Dahlia’s murderous fantasies as discrete from her own reality. The earlier distance psychically constructed between Dahlia and the narrator is here bridged via the narrator’s understanding of a different psychic defense, that of transference. While Dahlia’s aggression was straightforwardly directed at her father, the narrator comprehends her own as transformed into a less threatening, more socially acceptable form, an internalization of anger resulting in a kind of self-negation, “. . . I had screamed out not that I wanted to kill him, but that I wanted to die” (194).

The realization allows the narrator to return to the actual beatings she earlier experienced and explore them as the traumatic incidents that they were to her at the time:

When my father began to remove his belt—that was what he beat me with—I would begin to scream *No, No*, and plead my case incoherently, in a way that seemed to make him despise me. And indeed my behavior then would arouse contempt. . . (194-195)

Unlike the narrator’s description of Rose’s behavior in “Royal Beatings” in which Rose is depicted as “play(ing)” the “victim” with “self-indulgence” in efforts to “arouse” her father’s “sickened contempt” (*Beggar Maid* 19), here the narrator remembers her anguish as real and as giving rise to her father’s actual contempt. Facing this disturbing reality

prompts her revisitation of other details of the beatings in efforts to make sense of her father's disgust and violence towards her:

I was being punished at those times for some falling-out with my mother, some back talk or smart talk or intransigence. She would fetch my father from his outside work to deal with me, and I would await his arrival, first in balked fury, and then in a sickening despair. I felt as if it must be my very self that they were after, and in a way I think it was. (*Castle Rock* 194)

What begins as a recollection of her own infractions gives rise to the painful emotions that anticipation of the impending beating earlier produced. While in "Royal Beatings" it is the protagonist's anger, defiance, and theatrics that take center stage, in "Fathers" the narrator revisits the despondence and agony that follow "balked fury." Here also the narrator recognizes that the beatings were provoked by something more than mere "back talk or smart talk." What is only suggested in *Beggar Maid* is made explicit in *Castle Rock*: the narrator's parents believe that there exists a part of her idiomatic "self that had to be beaten out of (her)" (*Castle Rock* 194).

The significance of this revelation is underscored in the final clause of the following sentence, "I felt as if it must be my very self that they were after, *and in a way I think it was*" (194; emphasis added). In an earlier version of "Fathers" published in *The New Yorker* some years prior to its being revised and included in *Castle Rock*, this retrospective assertion is absent ("Fathers," *New Yorker* 71). Only in Munro's revision does the older narrator stop to consider, and moreover, directly comment on her younger self's speculation. In doing so, the assessment gains credibility. It is not just the traumatized preadolescent who suspects that her parents were after her "very self;" her reflective older self confirms this conjecture.

With this knowledge, the narrator recognizes the event as more than traumatic but also unmerited, a realization that initiates a release from self-condemnation and shame. The narrator reappraises the derision she earlier felt towards her younger self for lacking “a self-respecting nature” when remembering her cowed, anguished response to her father’s thrashings (195).<sup>73</sup> Now realizing that there *is* something warped about a father’s attempt to annihilate an idiomatic aspect of his daughter’s emerging selfhood through beatings, the narrator understands her earlier cries as warranted: “How could I not find myself howling at such perversion in nature?” (195). Her recognition of the injustice in what she suffered enables the narrator to finally absolve herself from having earlier expressed her vulnerability; her younger self’s cringing no longer induces her older self’s shame.

While some of the narrator’s psychic travels engender such radical transformations of seeing and being, not all of the memories she recalls lead to discovery, a fact that evidences the complexity and unfinished nature of “doing history.”<sup>74</sup> However, through a psychoanalytic lens informed by the associative logic of the text, readers themselves may engage what remains unexplored in the story, for instance, the narrator’s seemingly strange daydreams about choosing to undergo torture as a means of protecting her father from being imprisoned. The memory occurs at a significant moment in the narrative, that is, immediately following the narrator’s recollection of Dahlia’s candidly expressed desire to murder her own father. While the narrator’s younger self registers

<sup>73</sup> The narrator’s acceptance and compassion for her vulnerable younger self further differentiates this relationship from the one between the older narrator and Rose in “Royal Beatings.” In the early work, when Rose draws back and runs from her father’s cracking belt, the narrator interrupts to issue a denigrating assessment of this split off self, “not an ounce of courage or of stoicism in her, it would seem” (*Beggar Maid* 19).

<sup>74</sup> Caruth might interpret this as part of the “unnarratizability” of trauma; LaCapra, as evidence of the way in which “working through” of trauma resists closure.

shock at this bold exclamation, the fact that this memory directly segues into another in which her older self recalls daydreaming about potentially “betray(ing)” her own father when the pain being inflicted upon her becomes too much to bear is suggestive of an associative veiled (and perhaps still unconscious) wish-fulfillment fantasy.<sup>75</sup> Yet even unpacked, such veiled memories can be understood as playing a role in powering the transformative work that “Fathers” ultimately performs.

Near the story’s end, the narrator acknowledges the dominant perspective of those who both inflicted and shrugged off the injuries they administered: “and as the saying goes, about this matter of what molds or warps us, if it’s not one thing it will be another. At least that was a saying of my elders in those days” (196). In both versions of “Fathers” this unsatisfying adage is not afforded the last word but rather is directly followed by the narrator’s own incisive commentary on the maxim: “Mysterious, uncomfortable, unaccusing” (196). Munro’s earlier version of the story ends here with the narrator’s acknowledgement of the inadequacy of her elders’ resigned acceptance of the inevitability of childhood trauma. However, her revision in *Castle Rock* offers a different conclusion, a return to Bunt Newcombe, more specifically, a return by means of an obituary notice announcing his accidental death via electrocution.<sup>76</sup> The full significance of this ending is illumined by the fact that Bunt's particular demise is fictional, not actual, that which can be inferred by Munro's remarks about how the figures from her past in

<sup>75</sup> In her analysis of Munro's version of "Fathers" earlier published in *The New Yorker*, Mary Conde likewise notes the possibility that the narrator's childhood daydream about betraying her father may represent an implicit fantasy.

<sup>76</sup> While it includes notice of Bunt's death, the earlier version places the obituary at the story's beginning before the reader has any knowledge of who Bunt is and his significance in relation to the beatings experienced both by Dahlia and the narrator. Munro's restructured later version in which the reader learns of Bunt's electrocution immediately after the narrator's presentation of her elders' impassivity towards childhood suffering links the two events in such a way that suggests the enactment of a retributive justice that is absent in the earlier version.

these stories do “things they had not done in reality,” noting in particular a man who “got himself electrocuted” as an example. The creative killing off of Bunt underscores the recuperative nature of “Fathers,” as through this writerly act Munro creates a kind of imaginative resolution to earlier injuries that have no other tenable means of rectification. By way of the narrator’s retrospective realization of a kinship with Dahlia, she is able to experience a kind of vicarious killing of the father, and in so doing, to enact a form of creative justice.

Moreover, the return to Bunt and Dahlia at the end of “Fathers” serves as a narrative structure that allows the story to transcend the mere facts of the past and become a means of “doing history.” Unlike her earlier version, the story no longer closes with an unanswered lament for the injuries the narrator suffered as a child but is transformed into a fictionalized creation that contains the narrator’s real story within the framework of an imaginative one. This new relationship between imagination and past trauma even further distinguishes it from “Royal Beatings,” as here imagination is no longer consigned to the work of undoing previous injuries but rather serves in the creation of art that can both contain and transform them.

### **“Home” (1973 and 2006)**

While the work of “doing history” that occurs in “Fathers” is clearly manifested through Munro’s creative reweaving of old injuries into a different imaginative tapestry, a close examination of “Home” (2006) in relation to its earlier version reveals a different yet related dimension of this psychic and narrative process. Here Munro's transformed

relationship with the past is made explicit by a comparison of how the narrator's relationship to truth-telling radically shifts between versions and evidenced in how she is able to "use" aspects of her history without being plagued by guilt and shame or a felt obligation to not give offence.

While Munro's early version of "Home" attempts to truthfully explore painful parts of the narrator's past, this work is undone by the narrator's justifications, concessions, and explanations that immediately follow any depiction of unpleasant or potentially offensive aspects of "home." Second-guessing her narrative decisions even as she makes them, the narrator undermines her idiomatic self as a writer. In these acts, the story reflects the narrator's inability to come to terms with the incorporation of fact into fiction; both implicitly and explicitly she indicts herself for aesthetically manipulating reality for the purpose of "creating effects" ("Home" 1973:153). Whereas this version is defined by these writerly anxieties, "Home" in its later form is entirely free of them. This stark difference illustrates another radical shift between the two texts, the move from rejection to acceptance of her previously hidden and shamed writerly self. In *Castle Rock*, this is realized in the narrator's embrace of her identity as an artist, that which allows her the freedom to create stories out of fragments of a past that include injury without feeling that she or the work itself is shameful or dishonorable. "Home" (2006) emerges as a hard-won refutation of familial disparagement towards the narrator's different sensibility and its imaginative expression.

Yet while radically altered in terms of narration, the 2006 version of "Home" remains remarkably similar to its predecessor with regard to content.<sup>77</sup> In both, the first-

<sup>77</sup> Valdes documents a correspondence between the details of the story and the incident that inspired it:



person narrator, a middle-aged writer, travels some two hundred miles from her present home in the city to the rural working class town in which she grew up to visit her father and stepmother Irlma. What begins as an ordinary weekend visit extends into a longer, troubling one when the narrator's father's recurring "gut pain" results in his hospitalization. When the narrator begins to feel panicky and anxiously disconnected from her writerly life, a relative of Irlma's arrives and encourages the narrator to return to the city, assuring her that she will keep the narrator informed of any changes in her father's situation. While these principal facts remain the same within both versions of the story, the narration is altered to such a degree in the latter that the two stories are classified as belonging to different fictional subgenres: the version in *Castle Rock* falls squarely within the sphere of autobiographical fiction whereas critics have described the 1973 version as metafiction.<sup>78</sup>

While initially appearing straightforwardly composed as a series of diary entries, the early version of "Home" is quickly complicated by large sections of italicized passages that consist of the narrator's self-reproving editorial remarks commenting on her perceived failures in "honorably" recounting the visit. By way of these censorious appraisals that often deconstruct that which the narrator has previously written, the text

On Oct 8, 1973, Munro visited her father and his second wife, Mary Etta Charters Laidlaw, in Lower Town, where the couple raised turkeys and sheep. Robert was suffering from heart trouble at the time and Munro did have to take him to the hospital, following the streets she names in the story. (89)

Moreover, Valdes asserts that Munro chose not to include "Home" in *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You*, the collection that at the time was in manuscript form, because of its close proximity to fact.

<sup>78</sup> Stanley Fogel's brief definition of metafiction as a scrutiny of "all facets of the literary construct—language, the conventions of plot and character, the relation of the artist to his art and to his reader" offers a keen encapsulation of how the early version of "Home" fits within this categorization (328 n3).

enters the realm of metafiction. As such, the story becomes less about the protagonist's visit home and more about her inner conflict as to how to narrate painful and sometimes ugly realities without causing pain to those about whom she is writing. While composed by a shamed split self, the self is not narratively split in the way that Munroian characters generally fracture into a participating protagonist and an observing narrator; here the self splits into an author of fiction and a self-critical editor.<sup>79</sup> In contrast, the later version abandons the diary conceit altogether and replaces the split self with a single integrated narrator.

What in part produces the split within the narrator in the early version is her fear of disloyalty, that of being "*treacherous*" towards those she has left behind (1973:142). Although her writerly impulse is to honestly depict the part of "home" "*that is not lovable, not delightful*" (142), her anxiety and guilt disable her. The narrator describes her attitude towards her family and community as "*complicated and unresolved*" (142); she is divided between a desire to write in a way that "*compel(s) for them...respect*" (142) and to be both "*honest*" and "*accurate*" in her representation of "home" (149, 152). This division is perhaps most clearly observable in the narrator's conflicted portrayal of her stepmother Irlma, a toughened yet cheery working class woman with rough speech that grates upon the narrator's sensibility and parochial beliefs that the narrator finds troubling. Her desire to depict Irlma truthfully is routinely undermined by her felt obligation to "*be well-disposed*" towards her and to provide Irlma with a "*kindness*" that the narrator unconvincingly states "*is due*" her (149, 150). In contrast, in the later version, the narrator neither expresses nor evidences any such compunction in relation to Irlma. Examining

<sup>79</sup> I am grateful to Carrington for her terminology in describing this slightly different kind of narrative splitting.

the ways in which the two versions slightly yet significantly vary in their depictions of Irlma reveals a notable shift in the narrator's relationship towards the practice of truth-telling in fiction.

In the early version of "Home," the narrator creates distinctions between Irlma and other working class individuals within the community in terms of classed speech patterns, attitudes, and behaviors as a means of distancing Irlma from that which the narrator finds most objectionable, a practice that is abandoned in the later version. In both versions, Harry, an old family friend, stops by to regale the family with stories about Joe and Peggy, a local couple whose drinking and fighting serve as regular fodder for amused gossip within the community. In the 1973 version, Irlma's first insertion into the conversation contains no syntactical errors, revealing its classed character only by the use of "that" as a modifier: "did he ever marry that Peggy?" (138). In the later version, Irlma's speech takes a notable ungrammatical turn: "Joe still got that Peggy-woman living with him? (193). When the narrator can't recall the individuals in Harry's tales, in the early story it is only Harry who rebukes her with the colloquial expression, "Don't you mind Peggy Goring?" (138). In the later version, Irlma reiterates the reprimand sharply after more background information on Peggy and Joe has been provided: "You mind them now?" (294). Moreover, the admonition is followed by the narrator's explanation as to why her failure of memory inspires rebuke: "Forgetting local names and facts can be seen as deliberate, unmannerly" (294). Here the narrator portrays Irlma not only employing the same classed speech patterns as the rest of the community, but also given to the same judgments and reproaches, including deeming the narrator rude for a lapse in memory. Additionally, in the early version, the narrator provides Irlma with a

degree of culinary cache by mention of her “home-made spice cake,” a small but notable difference between the versions in light of an increasing embrace of processed convenience foods within working class communities and a related disdain most characteristic of an upper class sensibility (137). In contrast, in the later version, Irlma admits to a reliance on these very products in a kind of classed idiosyncratic language that is never uttered by the Irlma in the early version: “The cake’s even a mix, I’m shamed to tell you. Next thing you know it’ll be boughten” (292).

Freed from the need to compel respect for Irlma, the 2006 version includes her prejudices as well. In the 1973 version, it is only Harry who claims that Peggy stays with the physically abusive Joe because of “her being part Indian. Say the Indians thump their women every once in a while, makes them love em better” (139). In Munro’s later version when the narrator expresses her objections to Harry’s sentiments, Irlma defends his statement, “what people say about the Indians has a lot of truth to it, never mind” (295).

In the story's early form, Irlma is never depicted as voicing these kinds of racist remarks. Moreover, whenever Irlma’s speech, sensibility, or behavior inches towards what a differently classed reader might potentially deem as objectionable, the narrator attempts to validate or defend it. In both versions of “Home,” Irlma objects to reading, a practice inextricably yoked to the narrator's identity as a writer. Nevertheless, the narrator in the early version attempts to justify Irlma’s preference for playing cards and even seeks to elevate this preference over her own predilection for reading:

Irlma doesn’t care for the sight of people reading because it is not sociable, and at the end of it what is accomplished? She thinks people are better off playing cards and having projects. I would not be surprised if she is right. (137)

In the later version, freed from the need to shore up Irlma's beliefs, Munro cuts the final sentence.

In both versions, when Irlma relays to the narrator that the narrator's father told Irlma how he wished he had been with her from the beginning and that he preferred her to the narrator's mother (1973:150; 2006:310), the narrator is piqued and feels it is not appropriate for Irlma to share this with her. However, in the 1973 story, even before the narrator expresses her displeasure at Irlma's disclosure, she takes pains to affirm Irlma via a parenthetical insertion: "*(...in some unquestionable way Irlma is a better wife)*" (150). In the later version, there is no such attempt to counterbalance Irlma's flaws and foibles with praise; the remark is purged from the text.

In spite of the 1973 version's concerted efforts to smooth Irlma's rough edges, the narrator nevertheless remains plagued by guilt, that which is articulated by her editing self in large swathes of metafictional commentary:

*Irlma. I feel guilty about her, about what I'm doing to her. Is this vengeful reporting, in spite of accuracy? Do I make it clear...that she always covers up her fright, her shyness, even, with her voice, with bragging and joking? (149)*

These self-conscious insertions become a means by which the narrator offers recompense for her exposure of the "*not lovable*" parts of "home." They also allow her the opportunity to provide information that does not otherwise fit within the story, especially that which might allow Irlma to be seen in a more favorable light. This is perhaps most clearly evidenced in the early text's discussion of Irlma's response to her husband's hospitalization. In both stories, after the narrator's father is admitted to the hospital, Irlma expresses no explicit concern for her husband's health but rather is consumed by her dog's present predicament, a bout of constipation brought on by his consumption of

turkey quills. In the 2006 story, the narrator simply relays Irlma's painstakingly detailed descriptions of the dog's labored bowels without commenting on Irlma's silence regarding her husband's illness, a decision that leaves readers to interpret this as they will. In the early version, however, the narrator does not allow readers this interpretative leeway; after recounting Irlma's preoccupation with the dog's unhappy state, the narrator provides metafictional commentary intended to explain Irlma so as to prevent readers from judging her callous:

*Do I make it clear...that her concern with Charlie's (the dog) case does not shut out concern for my father's, but simply shows how she must always deal with what is close at hand? Here is a woman, I ought to tell you, a woman I would depend on to make things grow, to tend and nourish plants and people and animals under almost any circumstances. Here is a woman who has seen bad times, work and poverty, many deaths, whose recital of the details of deaths by dropsy and drowning, freezing and bloody accidents, is comic and grotesque, but a means of protection, not unlike the means I am trying for now. More kindness is due this woman than she is getting. I cannot help it. (1973:149)*

In describing Irlma's life as one lived in close proximity to necessity, the narrator aims to make intelligible to her audience a classed sensibility attuned to exigency. The narrator's analysis is discerning yet unmistakably performed as a means of expiating guilt.

Attempting to alleviate her sense of culpability, she provides justifications for Irlma's behavior and praise of Irlma's abilities "to make things grow," and "to tend and nourish plants..." (149). Yet the narrator knows that her efforts fall short, as she is unable to honestly produce the kindness that she claims "is due this woman" (149), and, moreover, "(she) cannot help it" (149).

In the later version, the narrator's liberation from compunction and guilt allows the narrative the freedom to become a different story. The early version may be characterized as a depiction of an artist's interior struggle as to how to inhabit her

idiomatic self in relation to a “home” that does not accept it. The later version’s ability to morph into something completely other lies in part in the narrator’s rejection of a classed habitus that “*tell(s) (her) that it is always better to dig potatoes, and feed sheep*” (1973:152), a repudiation that the earlier narrator is not able to manage.<sup>80</sup> The persistent embodied presence of the past within the 1973 narrator not only keeps her from recognizing the worth and value of her own imaginative self but also prevents her from giving herself over to the demands of her vocation, that which include both truth-telling and the art of creating “effects.”

No longer driven by “the hard voice of (the narrator’s) upbringing” (1973:152), the later version is free of the metafictional justifications and critiques that characterize the early version. The absence of editorial insertion creates a sense of immediacy that is further enhanced by Munro’s use of present tense narration. While both versions are narrated in present tense, the 1973 version’s self-conscious analysis of how the story is being told as it is being told shifts both narrator and reader in and out of the actual visit the narrator is describing. In the later version, the narrator remains entirely present at “home” throughout the text as if she is in the very moment she is narrating, never slipping outside of the story or the self to comment retrospectively on either. Even when readers are made aware that the visit transpired some time earlier, the narrator stays within the present to inform us of this fact, referring to the self who is actually composing the story in future tense: “When I think about all this later, I will recognize that the very corner of the stable where I was standing...” (315).

The use of present tense and a single integrated narrator is notable, as Munro tends to employ past tense and to shift between a narrating and participating self,

<sup>80</sup> Even mention of this possible sentiment is likewise purged from the later version.

allowing the former to provide retrospective insight about the latter. Here the two selves are combined; the older narrator writes the story as if she were inhabiting the self that she was at the time of the visit. The choice is suggestive of a slightly different kind of psychic and narrative return, one that allows for understanding and elaboration of unprocessed aspects of earlier events not through retrospective recollection as seen in "Fathers," but rather through the narrative reanimation of a past self. The transformative effects of this kind of sustained present tense engagement with the past are evidenced in the psychically rich new material that is produced and explored by the narrator in the revised version of "Home." Absent from the early version, these memories, observations, and analysis reveal a narrator more reflective and insightful than her predecessor.

Rather than engaging in self-reproach for her impulse towards flight that surfaces during the visit, the later narrator seeks to understand the cause of her agitation. Reflecting on her anxiety, the narrator recognizes the power "home" still exerts, even now effecting in her a diminished sense of agency: "...now that I have stayed on into the next week something about my life seems to have slipped out of control. I don't feel so sure that it is just a visit. The buses that run place to place no longer seem so surely to connect with me" (311). The narrator's exploration allows her to understand and elaborate her present predicament through the lens of an imagined one, yet no less real to her: "Time and place can close in on me, it can so easily seem as if I had never got away, that I have stayed here my whole life. As if my life as an adult was some kind of dream that never took hold of me" (312). The narrator's candid allusion to her fear of having "never got(ten) away" suggests a recognition of "getting away" from "home" as necessary, not guilt-inducing, but that which has been essential in creating a life that is



neither “some kind of dream” nor something that has “slipped out of (her own) control.”

Her acceptance of this reality paves the way for a deeper apprehension of her present sense of displacement:

I see myself not like Harry and Irlma, who have to some extent flourished in this life, or like my father, who has trimmed himself to it, but more like one of those misfits, captives—nearly useless, celibate, rusting—who should have left but didn't, couldn't, and are now unfit for any place...I can see myself as a middle-aged daughter who did her duty, stayed at home, thinking that someday her chance would come, until she woke up and knew it wouldn't. (312)

Part of what makes this exploration so poignant is the narrator's recognition of her estrangement from “home” as immutable fact, not something that might be otherwise should she attempt to make her self or her writing more palatable in relation to “home” and its constructs. Whereas the narrator in the earlier version struggles against this reality, here the narrator accepts it.

This very different relationship to “home” is especially pronounced when comparing the endings of the two versions. As briefly noted above, in both, a relative of Irlma's arrives while the narrator is feeding her father and Irlma's sheep. The woman volunteers to look in on the narrator's father and help with the chores so that the narrator need not stay on indefinitely: “‘You must be wanting to get back to your own life,’ she says, as if that was the most natural thing in the world and exactly what she would be wanting herself in my place” (313). In the late version, freedom is offered through these words; it is a gift that the relative Connie bestows and the narrator accepts with gratitude and relief. In contrast, in the early version the offer is never directly expressed, and when recalled, it is deconstructed. Rather than being depicted as a gift, it becomes the source of writerly anxiety: the narrator feels uneasy by the comparison she is creating between this “generous” relative who will stay and offer care to her family and herself who will go

away and write a story. Her editing self bristles at this potential ending, eventually rejecting it as being “too easy” and perhaps even dishonest in the “effects” it produces: “...it makes me seem to condemn myself more than I really do” (152).

In the revised version, rather than worrying about her audience’s response to the scene, the narrator ponders the conversation’s affective impact on herself and follows the evocations that these musings engender. What arises is a recollection of a different conversation the narrator earlier had with her father, a memory notably absent from the 1973 version:

I remember something my father once said to me. *She restored my faith in women.* Faith in women’s instinct, their natural instinct, something warm and active and straightforward. Something not mine, I had thought, bristling. But now talking to Connie I could see more of what was meant. Though it wasn’t Connie he’d been talking about. It was Irlma. (314)

The narrator’s reflections on this associative memory in relation to her interaction with Connie leads to a deeper understanding of one dimension of the difference that separates the narrator from her family. Exploring the intersections between these recollections, she is able to newly apprehend that which her father prizes in women, something pragmatic and instinctive and, indeed, lacking in herself.

The above passage is also notable for the parallels that it illumines between the father/daughter dynamic in this text and that which is depicted in *Beggar Maid*. It is difficult to read the narrator’s representation of her father here and not think of Rose’s father who extols the same pragmatic traits likewise embodied in his second wife while casting a disparaging glance on his imaginative daughter to communicate the fact that she is not developing into “the right kind of woman” (48). The likeness is striking, yet the significance of the comparison lies in how differently each protagonist negotiates this

reality. In both instances, the protagonist's reflection on this negative assessment propels her eventual departure. However, what is signified in each of these exits is quite different. While Rose will flee from home as a means of escaping the shamed self she sees reflected in her father's disapproving gaze, in "Home" the narrator leaves in order to embrace this earlier shamed self; her act is an affirmation of her own idiomatic gifts in spite of her family's inability to recognize them. Confronting her longstanding failure to earn her father's esteem is not without pain, yet unlike Rose who splits from her father's derisive regard, here the narrator seeks to understand it.

Recognizing praiseworthy qualities in Connie that she herself does not possess, the narrator comes to terms with her father's negative appraisal of her selfhood. Connie's different yet valuable sensibility becomes a kind of reflective lens for the narrator through which she newly perceives her own different and invaluable sensibility and embraces the unique gift she does possess, her writing, that which the self-abasing narrator in the early version of "Home" distrusts and disparages. Here the narrator's art itself constituted by her psychic travels and creative reconstructions becomes the medium through which she is able to recover and revalue what was earlier split off and devalued. What remains impossible in life becomes possible through art: returning home psychically and imaginatively allows the narrator to re-see the past through the present and elaborate an unshamed creative self through the process. Finally, in the "Home" of *Castle Rock*, the narrator no longer "bridles" against earlier injuries nor seeks to undo them, but rather, accepting the offer of Connie, she "get(s) back to (her) own life," escaping home so as to imaginatively return.

## *Love*

Unlike in *Castle Rock* where reconciliation with the past occurs through individual psychic travel and artistic production, in *Love* the process of “doing history” transpires relationally in the mirroring gaze of an other. *Love*’s protagonists, Christine and Heed, recover their lost selves by revisiting childhood memories together, that which allows them to recuperate their deep love for one another earlier aborted by injury and trauma. While many critics attribute the demise of the young girls’ friendship and the emotional injury that both Heed and Christine suffer to Cosey’s marriage to the eleven-year-old Heed, the psychic journey upon which the two old women embark in the novel’s final chapter reveals familial injuries bearing just as devastating effects as those produced by Cosey’s claim upon Heed.<sup>81</sup> While aspects of maternal failure are glossed intermittently throughout the novel, they remain unelaborated and unmourned until the novel’s end. For the first eight chapters, Cosey is the satellite around which the central characters orbit. This focus is evidenced by chapter title, “Benefactor,” “Stranger,” “Friend,” “Father,” etc., each indicating the way in which the chapter’s narrating character perceives this commanding figure, still larger than life though dead for some years. The final chapter, however, marks a radical shift from the patriarchal authority,

<sup>81</sup> Few have chosen to focus or elaborate on the various ways in which inadequate parenting impact the development of and relationship between Christine and Heed although Morrison herself underscores the importance of this issue in her Foreword to *Love*, where she states that “among the things Christine, Heed, and Junior have already lost, besides their innocence and their faith, are a father and a mother, or, to be more precise, fathering and mothering” (xii). Some exceptions include Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber and Doreatha Drummond Mbalia. Mbalia explores maternal failure in this text as well as in other Morrison novels and understands *Love*, *Jazz* and *Paradise* as a part of a trilogy that can be characterized by “little, poor, or no parenting” (213).

heteronormativity,<sup>82</sup> and trauma that Cosey represents; it introduces an alternate sphere of relationality and love that is both literally and metaphorically embodied in the ghost of L, another haunting presence that until this chapter remains veiled and enigmatic. This new dispensation is signaled by a series of narrative acts often both playful and plural in nature; the first of which is evidenced in the chapter's title, "Phantom."

Given the way in which all previous chapter titles reference Cosey, this one likewise seems yet another allusion to him. At first glance, "Phantom" may be understood to indicate how Cosey is known to Junior, the fatherless and unmothered young woman who takes refuge in the Cosey mansion and comes to enjoy a kind of fatherly protective care through her communion with Cosey's ghost. However, subtle clues that Cosey is not the "phantom" referenced in the chapter title are supplied in the penultimate chapter "Father" where it is revealed that Cosey's spirit is losing potency; in the various places where Junior has previously relished Cosey's presence, she now unsuccessfully struggles to locate his specter. Most notably, in the Cosey hotel, the setting where the transformative work between Heed and Christine will later occur, Cosey is altogether absent. Moreover, his "phantom" presence has been replaced by another. Wafting through the abandoned hotel is the unmistakable aroma of cinnamon and baking bread, an allusion to the earlier nourishing work of L, the former cook and

<sup>82</sup> See Wyatt's article for a fuller discussion of the various ways in terms of structure, content, and allusions in which heterosexuality and patriarchal norms are erected and supported in the novel's first eight chapters.

baker of the Cosey hotel.<sup>83</sup> This backdrop offers the observant reader a different way of understanding “Phantom” when arriving at this crossroads.

Once inside “Phantom,” there is no mistaking its difference from all that has preceded it. Narratively, it explodes conventional representations of time, place, and person. Polyphony overtakes the monophonic narrative style of the previous chapters. Breaking the earlier established pattern of focalization through a single character, “Phantom” is relayed without a discernable narrator or unifying point of view. Readers are presented a *mélange* of observations and memories issuing from the depths of Christine and Heed’s interiorities and from outside of them. An unidentified voice explicitly signals the destruction of a reality constituted by recognizable time and space: “The future is disintegrated along with the past. The landscape beyond this room is without color” (184).<sup>84</sup> Inside/outside and past/present boundaries no longer hold. Readers encounter this otherworldly realm from multiple angles and through limited and omniscient perspectives.

The borders between body and psyche are also blurred. Christine and Heed enter this realm of psychic healing through bodily failure, Heed’s falling through the rotted floorboards of the attic and Christine suffering the early symptoms of a heart attack. These experiences of radical physical vulnerability unlock memories of earlier experienced emotional vulnerability. Tending to present bodily pain becomes intertwined with the process of engaging past psychic pain. Christine’s provision of medicine and

<sup>83</sup> Drawing Mbiti’s research on African religions, Wyatt suggests a link between the aroma of L’s bread baking and the African tradition of the familial dead returning to break bread with their family members and to act as guardians of family ethics and affairs.

<sup>84</sup> Wyatt likewise refers to this unidentified voice as signaling “an abrogation of chronological time” (197).

quilts does more than bring the shivering Heed to a state of momentary palliation; the act also transcends time, offering something of the nurture and care that Heed never knew as a child. In response, Heed's first words to Christine refer not to her present predicament but rather to this much earlier emotional absence; in this way, their conversation begins "out of time."

Their interaction is rendered without any narratorial mediation; quotation marks and speech tags (Christine said; Heed said) are altogether absent, an act that undoes distinctions between self and other both narratively and metanarratively.<sup>85</sup> The destruction of differentiating narrative borders around Christine and Heed's speech blurs the boundaries not only between the two women but also between reader and character. For the reader, the effect is direct, immediate access to Heed and Christine's conversation. Only the women's speech is relayed; thus, language presents itself to the reader very much as it is described as being experienced between the women, "sudden, raw, stripped to its underwear" (184). Within the text, the loss of speech tags prevents easy differentiation between the women's voices; both the act and its effects register the dissolution of the discrete oppositional identities that for years Christine and Heed have been constructing against one other.

While this form of narration creates textual ambiguity and indeed leaves some questions unanswered, "Phantom" also provides a significant degree of clarity to aspects of the narrative drama that heretofore have been only partially understood. Filling narrative gaps with previously missing information, the chapter creates a new lens for

<sup>85</sup> While Wyatt also discusses the withdrawal of narrating agency as signifying entry into "a new narrative space," she focuses not on the boundaries and borders broken between the women and between characters and reader but rather upon the dissolution of "the patriarchal imaginary" that has held the women captive for most of their lives.

reading what has come before and that which is now occurring. Notably, the appellation by which L has been known most of her life is finally revealed to stand for Love (199).<sup>86</sup> Through this disclosure, the qualities associated with L—truth-telling, caregiving, sensitivity, kindness, and non-instrumentality—can be understood as more than mere traits of an individual but also as definitive of love itself. Modeled through L, love becomes the framework and context through which reconciliation and recuperation is enacted. L’s prior history as substitute mother for both otherwise unmothered girls and her reemergence as an otherworldly presence redolent of cinnamon bread offer the women a way into a once known but now distant reality. In this realm constituted by Love’s past and present, the old women examine and mourn the ramifications of earlier failures of love and reclaim the selves that were consequently lost to them.<sup>87</sup>

What becomes possible within this alternate sphere is the realization of a self-in-relation, an achievement that escapes all other texts examined in this study. While all of the escape narratives suggest a connection between impingements in caregiving and the

<sup>86</sup> Janine Wardi also reads L as “the embodiment of love in the text” (206). Most critics understand L, her shortened tag and her person, in a similar fashion; the odd exception is Doreatha Drummond Mbalia’s interpretation of L as “Lord” (213). Others, while acknowledging love as one referent to the signification of “L”, point towards other meanings as well. Megan Sweeney considers the possibility that “L” may in fact signify more than one thing: “indeed, if ‘L’ may stand for Love, the novel suggests that it may also stand for Law” (461). Sweeney reads the novel as a challenge to the prevailing economics of justice, more specifically to the logic of commensurability, particularly through the character of L in her embrace of “the rogue forms that justice might take” (463). Rebecca Hope Ferguson interestingly asserts “it is possible also that a pun on L, to signify the French “elle” (“she”), forms part of the resonance of the abbreviated name, signifying female power” (248).

For a reading that focuses on the multiplicity of L’s meaning and roles within the text see Wen-ching Ho. Ho argues for reading L not only as “the very embodiment of love” but also as the narrative conduit of the novel, “a vital component of its plot development, narrative structure and perspective” (654).

<sup>87</sup> Mar Gallego also reads L as performing the role of substitute mother within the novel. Anissa Janine Wardi reads L’s status as cook as signifying nurturance and notes that throughout Morrison’s work “hands that cook and offer food to family and community are depicted as healing figures” (206).



foreclosure of a relational self, only *Love* explores both maternal failure and the process through which these early injuries may in fact be repaired by the work of an other. In particular, the novel exposes two critical components of “good enough” parenting that May and Mrs. Johnson have failed to provide their daughters while at the same time participates in the process of repair through the framework of Love, that is, both through the phantom of L, the substitute mother and embodiment of an alternate way of being, and also by way of Heed and Christine’s reparative acts that supply for the other what was not afforded by her mother.

Psychoanalysis provides a language for elaborating these early losses. Through Winnicott and Bollas’ work on what constitutes “good enough” parenting, May and Mrs. Johnson can be understood as having failed their daughters both as transformational objects and also in helping them negotiate what Winnicott terms the “transitional space.” As discussed in Chapter Three, acting as a transformational object requires the mother’s close adaption of her self and environment in response to her infant’s emerging needs, desires, and gestures such that the infant comes to feel a kind of omnipotence and power in relation to his world; this is what provides him a foundation for existence as a self. The “transitional space” is defined by Winnicott as a third realm of play and creativity that allows one to bridge the gap between objective reality and the subjective self in ways that create meaning in one’s life.

Bollas suggests that those whose mothers have failed them as transformational objects grow to be adults that exist within a state of suspension from life, emptied of desire. The effects of this loss in Heed and Christine are manifested in both women’s withdrawal from life, the former not leaving her bedroom for decades, the latter

acknowledging the fact that she had always “been simply an engine adjusting to whatever gear the driver chose” (100). Yet *Love* illustrates, as psychoanalysis posits, that these effects are not irreversible. New ways of being that include the possibility of agency and relationality are achievable but only through the destruction of earlier established constellations of dysfunctional relating; healing requires recognition of what has been lost, disillusion, and separation from the mother.<sup>88</sup> This recuperative process begins in the very first words uttered between Christine and Heed at the hotel:

You know May wasn't much of a mother to me.  
At least she didn't sell you. (184)

After no real conversation for decades, what is expressed by each before all else is the recognition of maternal failure. Through this disclosure Christine and Heed's vulnerable unmothered lost selves are articulated into being.

Following the associative pathways that these admissions open, Christine and Heed return to other unexplored selves. One such self takes form in Heed's reflections on Christine's earlier political activism: “I called you a fool, but I was jealous too” (185). These confessions and the raw and uncensored questions that follow illustrate the unflinching honesty required in the relational process of “doing history.” Here Christine and Heed engage the “knowing” dimension of love that their mothers were not able to provide, that which allows for the realization and expression of each subject's full selfhood and makes possible an intimacy rooted in subject/subject relationality. This part of love depends upon each risking what they think they know or want to believe about the other for the truth, as painful as it may be.<sup>89</sup> Thus Heed will ask Christine, “was you ever

<sup>88</sup> See Bollas's *The Shadow of the Object* for the a fuller discussion of these processes.

<sup>89</sup> Wyatt likewise emphasizes the importance of this “truth telling” in engendering the healing and relational recuperation that transpires between the two women.

a whore?” (186). And Christine will not only straightforwardly answer Heed but will also in the questions that she poses to her friend confront the past event she finds most repugnant, Heed’s marriage to Cosey: “Was he good to you, Heed? I mean really good?” (186). This open and unafraid dialogue taps other buried selves; articulating them disabuses each of longstanding misconceptions of the other. When Heed answers Christine’s queries as to whether Cosey was good to her by recollecting the child bride who thought “a box of candied popcorn was good treatment” (186) Christine is no longer able to judge Heed culpable for marrying Cosey.

Through the process of revisiting prior events and selves, the friends vivify and transform the play space that they as children earlier created. Psychically they re-inhabit their childhood fort and return to the games they played; they resuscitate their secret language and most private code, the phrase “hey, Celestial” which was uttered in acknowledgement of “a particularly bold, smart, risky thing” (188). As eleven-year-olds, their play hovered at the boundaries of the “transitional space” because of their inability to comprehend the outer world’s relation to their inner created worlds. That which might have allowed them access to this third intermediary space bridging the gap between objective reality and the subjective self, the mother’s participation in her child’s creative play, was for both unavailable. Now equipped with the analytic abilities and knowledge to make sense of the systems of oppression in which they were earlier caught, the women give themselves over to the playful push and pull of the real and the imaginary upon one another and recover the meaning-making space earlier foreclosed.

Understanding Heed and Christine's return to their childhood play space through the temporal structure of *Nachtraglichkeit* sheds additional light on what is transpiring between the women. Through this schema, time moves simultaneously in opposing directions such that meaning is created both by way of projection of the past onto the present and also through one's present expanded comprehension of past events.<sup>90</sup> The latter is clearly illustrated through Heed and Christine's utilization of their enlarged perspectives to make sense of a past that was earlier only partially apprehended. The projection of the past onto the present, counterintuitive to the mind's way of perceiving time, may be less immediately intelligible. Yet the strange movement is indeed realized here in the way in which the content of Christine and Heed's girlhood friendship, that is, their special language, games, codes, and values, manifests itself in the now old women's interactions. This temporal dialectic supplies the present with a girlhood discourse rooted in mutuality and love while at the same time imbues the playful language of their resurrected eleven-year-old selves with new meanings.<sup>91</sup> In these ways, the "transitional space" that the women inhabit can be understood as produced both in the play between the subjective and the objective and through the simultaneous movement from past to present and present to past.

<sup>90</sup> Whereas Bollas tends to focus his discussion of *Nachtraglichkeit* in terms of how the past becomes available to the continuing process of "revision" through contemporary perspectives, Wyatt helpfully highlights its two-way temporal movement and offers keen insights as to the various ways it is enacted within the novel. Not only does Wyatt offer an explication of *Nachtraglichkeit* as it relates to the transformational process in which Heed and Christine are engaged but also uses it as a lens for understanding *Love*'s narrative effects on its readers.

<sup>91</sup> I am indebted to Wyatt for her keen appreciation of the women's childhood created language for the ways in which it unlocks for them "a world of meanings that enables them to value their love for each other" as well as how it for readers "conveys the quality and texture of their intimacy and makes us aware of the magnitude of their early loss" (197). I also credit her for her coining of Heed and Christine's linguistic play and codes as "the discourse of their girlhood" which I have borrowed.

Reengaging actual objects from the past within the present becomes another means of recovery and recuperation within this meaning making space. When Christine discovers her old set of jacks and realizes too many are missing for play, she removes from her fingers Cosey's diamond rings, that which were once the source of violent contention between her and Heed. Through this act, objects of animosity and putative value are transformed into those that further the intimacy growing between the women. The game also engenders further discussion of maternal failure:

Hating you was the only thing my mother liked about me.  
I heard it was two hundred dollars he gave my daddy, and a pocketbook for mama.  
(193)<sup>92</sup>

Confronting these injuries, Heed and Christine continue the necessary work of separation and disillusion from the mother. While the exchange can be understood as an extension and elaboration of that which began in their first words to one another, the context that gives rise to it is notably different. I suggest that in both instances the particular context through which injury is communicated is intimately related to the specific nature of the loss suffered.

The first time maternal failure is articulated occurs in the context of nurture, in Christine's ministrations to Heed's injuries; the second time, it is voiced during play. The way in which these unique contexts of nurture and play immediately engender the women's recall and elaboration of maternal absence seems to intimate a link between what the women are presently recuperating through one another and that which their mothers could not provide. Moreover, the connection between the recuperative act and the women's recollection of maternal injury underscores the way in which the process of

<sup>92</sup> Heed's remark alludes to what fifty-two year-old Cosey "gave" her parents to persuade them to allow him to take Heed in marriage at age eleven.

healing and relationality is contingent upon confrontation and acknowledgement of past pain.

Recognition of childhood abandonment and trauma allows the women to re-see what they previously understood as their own betrayals to one another. In recalling being pressed by her mother to hate Heed because Heed's new role as Cosey's wife threatened May's status, Christine realizes her earlier meanness towards her best friend as having arisen out of a deep need for her mother's love. Finally confronting the effects of this absence, she is able to understand and forgive her twelve-year-old self (184, 193). When Heed struggles to make sense of her prior self's unbending allegiance to Cosey rather than to her one and only friend, Christine offers vindication, framing Heed's plight in terms of a young child's desire for what was missing from the start, a loving and secure home: "(You were) a little girl. Trying to find a place when the streets don't go there" (189).

Through these means, the women recover and embrace their young selves. Yet what has been lost still must be fully felt and mourned before the past can be transformed into a present that is open and alive to the continuous play of the imaginary and the symbolic (Bollas, *Cracking* 143). In their final conversation at the hotel, Christine and Heed enter this sphere of grief and rebirth via a return to their favorite childhood picnicking spot. L's thoughtfully prepared lunches of ham sandwiches, Baby Ruths, and lemonade are conjured, sand and stars evoked, and the fireflies that earlier delighted the girls summoned. The picnic is more than recollection; between the two, it is the past rewoven and experienced through present understandings of love and loss. Thus, Heed and Christine's return to Celestial Palace is bittersweet:

You're crying.  
So are you....  
He took all my childhood away from me, girl.  
He took all of you away from me. (194)

Unprocessed as well as misunderstood pieces of the past are finally apprehended, expressed, and lamented. Moreover, re-experiencing these lost selves through the sympathetic gaze of an other who reflects and accepts the whole of the self creates more than individual transformed ways of seeing and being, it also fashions between the two an interwoven tapestry of recognition, reconciliation, and, ultimately, love. That which was first suggested by the aroma of cinnamon bread and gradually manifested in Christine and Heed's growing intimacy is in the end literally articulated by Christine as a final, tender declaration to her best friend. The gift to Heed is twofold. Heed has not heard "love" spoken to her since 1947, and after Cosey's death in 1971, had believed "that she would never hear the word again" (130). The bestowal restores to Heed what for decades was lost to her and makes possible a different future than that which the death of her best friend might otherwise suggest. Love opens a world that allows Christine to continue to exist in relation to Heed as revenant.<sup>93</sup>

That it is Christine who dies in the hotel and becomes for Heed an otherworldly presence of love and companionship that she has been missing for the entirety of her adult life is a position that critics have not yet taken. Most posit that it is Heed who dies from the injuries she sustains in her fall; the remainder read the text as too intentionally

<sup>93</sup> While Wyatt and I both use the structure of *Nachtraglichkeit* to read the complex temporality of Heed and Christine's interaction at the hotel and to explicate the transformative meaning-making transpiring between them in similar ways, here, at the moment of death we part ways. Wyatt argues that all possibility of new life ends for the women:

There *is* no future. What should be a new beginning is truncated to the few minutes before Heed dies (sic): (Re)birth and death collapse into each other, obliterating the temporal spread between. It is too late. (197)

ambiguous to identify whom death has taken. That the narration deliberately withholds distinguishing markers between the two women throughout “Phantom” and especially after the death of the one is indisputable. Yet I suggest that one particular effect created by this narrative act is an invitation to the reader to struggle to unpack and express that which remains enigmatic and unarticulated in the text.

After Christine’s declaration of love to Heed, the narration takes on another layer of ambiguity by eliminating the use of Christine and Heed’s names altogether. Additionally, in the dialogue that continues, the content expressed provides no clues as to which woman is speaking as spirit and which in corporeal form. The effect is one more boundary blurred, that between body and spirit. At the same time, there remains a continuity between the women’s relationship before and after the death of the one. That the two’s conversation is uninterrupted and narrated in the same fashion that it was before the one’s death, without speech tags, quotation marks, or any obvious features that would differentiate the voices, suggests that the women’s imaginative, relational journey commenced in life continues beyond it, seemingly in unbroken form.

Yet these are effects centered on the characters within the text, and I am also suggesting that the deliberate narrative ambiguity employed here aims to produce ripples outside of the novel. I see Morrison’s creation of textual ambiguity as analogous to L’s act of forgery in the related ways in which each facilitates new life for the novel’s characters. L’s act, revealed at the end of “Phantom,” can be encapsulated as follows. In 1971, L discovers that Cosey has willed almost the entirety of his estate not to his wife and family but to his lover. By destroying the will and creating a new one that bequeaths Cosey’s holdings to an intentionally unidentifiable recipient, “my sweet Cosey child,” L



creates the conditions that supply Heed and Christine with “a reason to stay connected” (201). Because of the ambiguous designation of the beneficiary, it remains impossible for either to definitively prove herself to be the rightful heir. The confusion brings Christine back home to engage in a battle that eventuates in the two women taking residence within separate quarters of the Cosey mansion.

I wonder if a parallel might be drawn that connects this act to what Morrison herself may be performing by obscuring the identities of Christine and Heed at the end of the novel. In so doing, she prevents either woman from being positively identified as having died. Consequently, neither woman is definitively carried off to the morgue. Not unlike L’s bequeath that literally keeps both women present in the house fighting over who is in fact “my sweet Cosey child,” Morrison’s narrative act achieves a similar end metatextually: each woman remains present and alive within the same house by critics who argue that it is the other who has died.

If intended, the strategy has until now failed, as all critics who positively name the woman who dies name Heed. However, in advancing a different interpretation that illumines details suggesting that it is Christine who dies, I offer a reading that reanimates the one presumed dead, and in so doing, perhaps play a part in realizing Morrison’s larger life-giving scheme. Christine is described as suffering from numerous recognizable symptoms of a heart attack throughout the evening.<sup>94</sup> In light of these symptoms, the fact

<sup>94</sup> Passages that suggest the symptoms of Christine’s heart attack include the following: “...Christine began to perspire...the wave of heat receded...but returned quickly and left her trembling” (132); “The crash of the sea is sounding in Christine’s ears. She is not close enough to the shore to hear it, so this must be heightened blood pressure. Next will come the dizziness and zigzags of light before her eyes. She should rest a moment, but Heed is not resting” (169); “A thorn of pain scratches Christine’s shoulder as she climbs the steps” (170); “Christine enters the room and stands still. For breath ease?” (176); “...Christine, whose blood roar is louder than the cracking (of the floorboards)...” (177); “Christine wipes perspiration from her face and neck with

that Romen has to carry both women (197) down the attic stairs and out of the hotel the next morning suggests the attack as fatal. If the attack had not taken Christine's life, it would stand to reason that Romen would have only needed to carry out of the hotel Heed, the one whose two broken ankles would have necessitated such help.

Additionally, I would suggest that there is something poetically satisfying to the way in which events coalesce in the novel's ending when reading with the understanding that it is Christine who has died. Christine's declaration of love to her closest friend who has not experienced this reality for over fifty years becomes all the more meaningful when considering these the last words she speaks to Heed while alive. Through this lens, the avowal can be understood as restorative, transforming Heed's crippled loveless existence, that which has been manifested throughout the novel by way of her withering, atrophying body, and enabling her survival in spite of her fall. Proceeding from this reading, I maintain that it is Heed who returns home and continues the creative work of "doing history" within the relational reality she and Christine have jointly constructed.

Upon arrival, Heed orders the duplicitous Junior into the locked quarters Christine had previously inhabited precisely for the protection the lock offered her from Heed during their warring years. Yet notably, these locked rooms are no longer alluded to as Christine's, but rather the domain of the one who dwelled there before her, L. Not only does this altered perception signify the destruction of the past as battleground, it also

the fabric...and seats herself with difficulty at (Heed's) side" (186); "Quickly Christine scoops four (jacks), then groans. The thorn in her shoulder is traveling down her arm" (193). Nevertheless, those who understand the ending as suggesting that it is Heed, not Christine, who has died include Anissa Janine Wardi, Doreatha Drummond Mbalia, Mar Gallego, K. Zauditu-Selassie, Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber, Megan Sweeney, Jean Wyatt, Mariangela Palladino, Wen-ching Ho, and Suzana Vega-Gonzalas. I have yet to encounter any critic who posits that it is Christine who has died.

reintroduces into the home Love, who has been absent for decades. Through this presence and the alternate sphere of being that L represents, Heed negotiates between the imaginative and the real as well as between past and present. Nowhere is this more evident than in the final conversation between the women that occurs in L's quarters after Romen has taken the lifeless body of Christine to the mortuary. Although bodily absent, Christine remains real to Heed. Maintaining intimacy with Christine through their girlhood discourse, Heed asks her not about the current dilemma that *she* now faces with regard to the locked up Junior, but rather the one that Heed understands that *they* will negotiate together:

Should we let her go, little rudderless, homeless thing?  
We could let her stay, under certain circumstances.  
What difference would it make?  
To me? None. Do you want her around?  
What for? I got you.  
She knows how to make trouble.  
So do we.  
Hey, Celestial. (198)

Even after Christine's death the creative and relational possibilities of "doing history" continue. Both women are given new life through one another: Christine as a revenant taken residence within Heed and Heed through Christine's love and the relationship she sustains with her one true friend. Through Christine's use of their most private childhood code, the last phrase uttered between the two, the novel closes with an intimate affirmation of the "bold, smart, risky" way of being made possible through love.

Through imaginative intimacy and the various other ways *Love* and *Castle Rock* embody the work of "doing history," the two narratives shed important light on the processes of recuperation from trauma. Together the texts elaborate several requisite components of psychic recovery: an approach to trauma by slant; an emotional return to

one's pain accompanied by an acknowledgment of both the perpetrator's responsibility and one's own innocence; and a kind of truth-telling that owns the severity of the wound yet is not bound to any single, literal, or fixed means of expressing it. The differences manifested in Munro and Morrison's texts illustrate the possibility of more than one means of engaging this recuperative work. For Munro, the working through of trauma is a wholly imaginative endeavor, one that is birthed in the subjective, inner world and realized in art. It is in these realms that the narrator moves through the processes of confronting past injury and narratively transforming it. By contrast, Morrison explores an approach that underscores the intersubjective and bodily aspects of the journey. Her characters circuitously advance towards psychic recuperation by way of relational intimacy and the use of symbolic and physical objects. A set of jacks as well as the recovery of a secret childhood language provide some of the raw materials that facilitate the work of "doing history." Christine's loving care of Heed and their joint entry into the "transitional space" of play between objective and subjective reality suggest the possibilities of healing in and through relationship with an other.

Yet while these two authors illumine different aspects of recuperative work and suggest various means by which healing may be enacted, there exists one shared dimension between the two that I argue is central to a fuller and more complex understanding of recovery from trauma. That is imagination. Whether articulated in the creative retributive justice of "Fathers" to realize what in reality remains impossible, or expressed in Heed and Christine's return to their treasured childhood space of play to rekindle love otherwise unrecoverable, both authors reveal imagination as playing an integral role in facilitating the psyche's recuperation from trauma. It is imagination that

enables the third phase protagonist to return "home," incorporate what had been previously split off, and create a different, livable ending to one's story. And yet in trauma studies this playful, creative dimension of healing remains woefully underexplored. In the concluding chapter, I explore the kinds of interventions this study makes not only in trauma studies but also in literary theory and sociology in relation to the various ways imagination functions in and through the working class escape narrative.

## CONCLUSION

*"Your childhood could not have been that bad. You were fed and clothed. You did not have to do without--that's more than a lot of folks have and I just can't stand the way y'all go on." The hurt in her voice saddens me. I have always wanted to protect Mama from hurt, to ease her burdens. Now I am part of what troubles. Confronting me, she says accusingly, "...you talk too much about the past..." And I do talk. Worse, I write about it.*

--bell hooks, "Keeping Close to Home: Class and Education"

While acutely aware of the interpersonal anguish produced by honest exploration of working class relational injury, bell hooks remains unswerving in her commitment to illuminating painful relational dynamics embedded within the working class family that have for too long remained unspoken, undertheorized, and misrecognized. Like the working class escape narrative has revealed, so too has hooks' own psychic journey born out the necessity of confronting past pain in order to facilitate the work of psychic healing. Yet hooks is an exception; this kind of risky, intimate investigation of intersubjective classed injury is rarely attempted--inside or outside of the academy. The psyche's tenaciously expressed need to disavow these interpersonal injuries is one reason for the lacuna in scholarship; hooks' mother's pained response to her daughter's work reveals another. There exist unsparing ramifications to the candid exploration of these forms of trauma: people are hurt in the process.

Sociologists who publish findings depicting painful intersubjective dynamics within working class families likewise face this seemingly inevitable consequence. When Lareau initiated a longitudinal follow-up with the families she studied ten years earlier, she discovered that many of her subjects were deeply distressed by her published portrayals of them. Working class father Mr. Yanelli accused Lareau of "slurring" their family, "You made us look like poor white trash" (323). Eighteen-year-old working class

Wendy took issue with the ways in which Lareau's reports of particular interactions between Wendy's eight-year-old self and her parents seemed to suggest that the latter did not truly see and intimately engage the little girl longing for recognition. Reading specific passages aloud to Lareau, Wendy vehemently expresses her objections, "So you're basically saying, I'm standing there and they're going like, "Yeah, OK. Sure, yeah," and watching TV. And basically ignoring what I'm saying" (320). Wendy interprets Lareau's observations of her parents' behavior as evidence of less than adequate emotional caregiving, and this she cannot and will not accept.

That one's findings may engender this kind of pain, bitterness, and repudiation is not the only potential negative outcome faced by researchers studying injurious classed realities. Sociologists also must confront the troubling possibility that one's work may inflict lasting damage on whole groups of people. In her introductory remarks to *Unequal Childhoods*, Lareau expressly discusses this challenge, the response of some of her early readers who encouraged her "*not to report* results that might be used to reinforce negative images (of already marginalized groups)" (11), and her ultimate decision to nevertheless publish her findings:

It is in fact possible that the results of this study could be distorted or used to promote political positions that I find repugnant. But squelching results due to fears about how they could be interpreted (particularly worries that the examples could reinforce "deficit" theories of social life) seems wrong. Thus, although urged to do so, I have not omitted data on this criterion. (11)

However, while Lareau decides against the omission of data that might register as objectionable to her readers, she does everything she can to lessen its potential offence. For example, when Lareau writes about the beatings performed by working class parents to enforce their children's obedience and respect, she makes sure to inform her middle

and upper class readers that any discomfort that they might feel towards these and other working class parenting practices is the result of “their own cultural beliefs (that they have projected) on the material,” and additionally warns them that “this pattern of projection makes it difficult to ‘see’ alternative conceptions of child rearing as legitimate” (11).

Fiction, I argue, offers a unique means of escaping the above predicaments and the accommodations that inevitably result. Because fiction exists in the realm of the imaginative it possesses the ability to engage in truth telling while circumventing the problem of injuring actual individuals. Relatedly, fiction need not qualify or mitigate what potentially may be interpreted as offensive. The novelist possesses the freedom to create working class mothers who sometimes deeply wound their daughters, and moreover, she is not bound to tell her readers how they should or should not understand these injuries. An artist may create a mother who "royally beats" her daughter for expressing her idiomatic self without fearing her portrait might "reinforce 'deficit' theories of social life," or moreover, "slur" any actual person. The medium of fiction allows the writer to express otherwise unspeakable things, things that may be understood as subjectively "true" while simultaneously escaping the judgment that might well result from articulating a similar sentiment in objective terms or in relation to a literal event.

Moreover, through fiction one is able to create a historical, cultural, and imaginative context (like the maternal bequest of relational failure through three generations of women in *Sula*) that provides a nuanced, complex lens for understanding otherwise indecipherable intersubjective injury. Additionally, the medium permits the possibility of "playing" with reality in ways that present new lenses for conceiving and



engaging it. What objectively would be considered a fantastical situation may elicit evocative questions unfathomable outside of the narrative's imaginative construct. For instance, *Sula's* depiction of the metamorphosis of three little boys into one indistinguishable "Dewey" following Eva's christenings and refusal to acknowledge each boy's selfhood might cause a reader to perceive idiomatic recognition failure through a new lens and ask different kinds of questions of it.

By way of the imaginative possibilities that reside in fiction, the subgenre of the working class escape narrative offers a unique medium to meaningfully engage painful intersubjective classed dynamics within the family. At the same time, escape narratives, as written by individuals wounded by these psychological realities, demonstrate that limitless imaginative freedom may not be realizable. First phase escape narratives illustrate that writers still bound by psychic trauma explain and undo injury in ways that mirror the very techniques Lareau employs to diminish some of the more troubling dimensions of her findings. Although Lareau's language possesses none of the lyricism expressed in the adult narrator's reflections on her childhood thrashings in *The Bluest Eye*, sociologist and novel alike avoid language that would give evidence of the violence and humiliation that inheres within these acts: Lareau carefully chooses the word "disciplining" when referencing beatings while the narrator focuses on the "delicate, showy hopefulness" of the instrument used to inflict pain.

Yet the writer's ability to create beauty out of suffering does more than demonstrate the need for the interpretative framework I've created for reading these texts; it also suggests the critical role that imagination plays in the negotiation of trauma. It is the different dimensions of imagination involved in each phase of the escape narrative

that I want to underscore in closing, as what they reveal about both recuperation from trauma and also working class subjectivity has critical implications within literary theory, cultural studies, and trauma theory. The subgenre of the working class escape narrative not only offers a representation of the psyche's movement through trauma towards recovery, but also may also serve as the means of this healing. In other words, the escape narrative itself may be understood as a vehicle through which psychic recuperation takes place.

While functioning in its least reparative capacity in first phase texts, imagination nevertheless serves a psychologically critical protective role: it allows the narrator the ability to escape emotional pain she lacks the capacity to psychically bear. Conjuring a love so potent that she can "smell it--taste it...everywhere in that house" and revisioning her experiences of trauma through this love, *Bluest Eye* narrator Claudia is able to transform her humiliations into a kind of "fructifying pain." In *Beggar Maid*, narrator Rose's "packaging" of earlier experienced indignities as entertaining stories likewise allows her to rework painful internal experiences into things that can be lived with. Psychoanalyst Velleda Ceccoli identifies this psychic mechanism as a form of dissociation that "retains the ability to create and is generative rather than disruptive" ("On Imagination"). Unlike the way in which trauma theorists often discuss unresolved injury as the acting out of the repetition compulsion, in first phase narratives, narrators employ imagination in ways that suggest active involvement in the animation of their internal worlds.

Trauma's visibility within the escape narrative offers another potential intervention in trauma theory. While a dominant strain within trauma studies understands

trauma as enigmatic and inaccessible to representation, the escape narrative offers a different perspective.<sup>95</sup> Trauma as it is rendered and worked through imaginatively within this subgenre does more than reveal the occlusions and absences created by trauma, it also presents readers with split derisive narrative personas, the nostalgic presentation of pain and loss, and the framing of injury through the putative greater trauma of the other. In these ways and others, the escape narrative provides increased access to trauma's workings and functions. The fact that the narrator of *A Feather on the Breath of God* is unable to recount memories associated with her parents' failure to recognize her as a subject without splitting into third-person narration is a profound and distressing discovery that sheds important light on trauma, specifically on the psychological impacts of recognition failure.

Having earlier framed the work of the second phase escape narrative diachronically, as one step closer to the integration accomplished in phase three texts, in closing I also want to suggest the creation of the mind object as an independent imaginative means of negotiating trauma, recuperative in its own right. It is no small feat to arrive at a form of psychic integrity that allows one to internally embrace what has been scorned and shamed by those depended upon for love and care. In his theorization of the unreflected child who comes to replace intersubjective play unavailable with the mother with intrasubjective dialogues, Bollas aptly captures the imaginative generativity that characterizes second phase protagonists: such individuals "develop an introspective capacity, and life for them will be meaningful even if incomplete" (*Shadow* 143). In *For Rouenna*, it is this rich reflective capacity creatively tapped through the process of

<sup>95</sup> This is not to refute the validity of this theory (as dimensions of trauma's unnarratizability are illustrated in first phase and even some third phase texts); rather, it is to suggest that Caruth, a leading proponent of this view, may overemphasize this aspect of trauma.

writing Rouenna's story that allows the narrator to move from paralysis and pain into the "world of the living." This novel in particular underscores what the whole of my project suggests: artistic production--specifically imaginative narrative creation--may function as a vital and transformative means of negotiating trauma.

Ceccoli's elaboration of imagination's power "to make things right" ("On Imagination") sheds important light on the dimension of reparative play third phase narratives enact. Imagination here is about restoring personal order: taking the traumatic facts of one's life and their psychic residue and making sense of these realities anew, a process that allows one to envision a livable future different from one's past and present. Requiring the formation and utilization of internal images and sensations not perceived through the senses, this imaginative labor is contingent upon one's ability to play on multiple levels ("On Imagination"). The aroma of cinnamon bread "smelled" by Heed in Cosey's abandoned hotel in the scene preceding Heed and Christine's reconciliation in *Love* comes to mind, providing further evidence of the novel's extraordinary capacity to shed light on the processes of trauma and recuperation in complex ways that are unique to this imaginative medium.

Munro's ending to "Fathers" keenly captures imagination's essential role in "making things right" by way of enacting creative justice upon the perpetrators of earlier injury gone unpunished; the ability of the narrator of "Home" to reconceive and "use" the facts of her past to create art illustrates another way in which play is essential in this work. Munro's third phase texts, in contrast to Morrison's, embody recuperation via the solitary play of the artist. In Heed and Christine's return to the games, language, and location of their childhood play, and in Heed's keeping Christine imaginatively alive after her literal

death, Morrison's *Love* captures relational play as another form of access to recovery from trauma.

Yet the actual death of Christine at the end of Morrison's third phase text harkens back to the problem that has haunted this project from the start, that is the inability of the working class self to sustain intimacy with an other. The whole of the subgenre seems to intimate the inevitable outcome of cumulative trauma is the reproduction of a working class autonomous subjectivity that refuses relationality. While Steedman and Abel have theorized this way of being as structured by absence, injury, and the imperative to "get on" at all costs, for daughters who escape "home" to recover the unrecognized self, the disavowal of intimacy is differently inflected.

Alice Miller writes that those who have risked the loss of love to recover one's lost idiomatic self "will not be willing to relinquish it again for any price in the world" (*Good* 85). For such daughters, the prize of selfhood comes at the price of intimacy. Yet in and through art, this loss is in a sense recoverable. Heed's continuing conversations with the spirit of her dead friend and the narrator's imaginative returns "home" in *Castle Rock* offer a means of bridging the split between the self and the (m)other. What is foreclosed in life is opened in the imaginative space the escape narrative creates. Here reconciliation between autonomy and intimacy is finally realizable.

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