RECONFIGURING UNTIDINESS: THE ETHICS OF REMEMBERING HISTORY IN NOVELS BY VIRGINIA WOOLF, D. M. THOMAS, AND IAN MCEWAN

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines representations of ideas about untidiness in modern and contemporary British novels. Reading works by Virginia Woolf, D. M. Thomas, and Ian McEwan as memory texts that engage historical atrocities, I investigate the ways in which the attention to small-scale violence of the everyday as manifested in the novels' conceptualizations of the untidy is entwined with their articulation of violence perpetrated on a massive scale, the wars and the Holocaust. As both a thematic and a formal concern, the trope of the untidy illuminates paradigms established on exclusion, acts of boundary-setting that obliterate the face of the Other even as it puts into play literary elements that dispel such brutalizing operations. I make the case that the reconfiguration of untidiness as a form of relinquishing the self's autonomy to relate to the Other is integral to how the novels explore the ethics of remembering history.

This dissertation rethinks Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* as a historical novel that intervenes in the author's contemporary discourse about remembering the recent past of the Great War. Disrupting dominant culture's homogenizing affective economy, the novel's thematization of untidiness through two women's love figures a nonappropriative mode of relating to the Other that transfers onto the novel's metacritical ruminations upon engaging a violent past in ways that preserve the unassimilability of the subject matter. Blatantly plunging into the matter of women's untidy sexuality, Thomas's *The White Hotel* puts under critical scrutiny culture's dealing with the uncontrollable aspects of human existence to broach the barbarity of the Babi-Yar massacre. My discussion highlights the ways in which the excesses of sexuality and textuality are mutually constitutive in the novel's configuration of a dialogic space in search of

idioms to bear witness to the disempowered victims. Interpreting the subject of atonement in Ian McEwan's *Atonement* as encompassing the private enterprise of Briony Tallis and the novel's task of ethically remembering atrocities of the Second World War, I discuss the metafictional elements of the novel that break through the tidy narrative to elicit readers to partake in its concrete moments of deliberation upon past violence.

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Contributors

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

> Memory's truth, because memory has its own special kind. It selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies and vilifies also; but in the end, it creates its own reality, its heterogeneous but usually coherent version of events; and no sane human being ever trusts someone else's version more than his own.
>
> – Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (1981)

> Each journey conceals another journey within its lines: the path not taken and the forgotten angle. These are the journeys I wish to record.
>
> -- Jeannette Winterson, *Sexing the Cherry* (1989)

These passages from the novels by Rushdie and Winterson address a widely acknowledged assumption about postmodern historical fiction: the past that it recounts is a narrativized construct rendered by a narrator with a limited range of perspective. Significantly, the passages also broach the awareness the narrators evince about what comes to be left out in their accounts, termed "someone else's version" in Rushdie's novel and an "another journey" in Winterson's. This somewhat less emphasized feature of postmodern historical fictions—the alterity that they bear witness to within their limited narratives—is what this dissertation attends to, considering it as an enabling dimension pivotal to the novels' thinking about the ethics of remembering history.

This dissertation studies the subject of remembering mass violence as engaged in the British historical novels of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Temporally, the

resurgence of the historical novel in Britain from the last decades of the twentieth century is concurrent with the emergence of discourses that have articulated and fostered a complex self-consciousness about historiography and about the ideological molding of the narrator in historical narratives.[1] How have these discourses and the fictional narratives that engage the historical past informed each other? How are these discourses useful in contextualizing the pronounced changes within the historical novel in its content and narrative form? What new modes and dimensions of relating to the past have these fictional discourses opened up? How do we account for the ongoing appeal of these narratives both for scholarly consideration and for the lay reader? What is the particularly British relevance of the renewed interest in historical novels for the writer as well as for the reader?

I would like to bring up the element of self-reflexivity in postmodern historical novels as an entry to thinking about these questions before making a more specific articulation of my project. Self-reflexivity, the act or mode by which the narrative calls attention to the contrived nature of its utterance, is a noted feature in many contemporary historical novels.[2] This element reflects a significant aspect of the genre's altered understanding of itself that sets it apart from its classic forbears.[3] Rather than presume to present an all-encompassing portrait of a given point in history, a self-reflexive historical fiction repeatedly reaffirms its status or role as proffering a *way of viewing* the past: in this sense, it would not be wide of the mark to say that the textual process theorizes an approach to the past. These novels, in other words, understand themselves as partaking in a process, as engaging in a multi-voiced discourse about how to remember the past.

In *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, Hutcheon tellingly correlates this feature to the way in which the historical novel opens the past "up to the present . . . [and] prevent[s] it from being conclusive and teleological" (110). The past, far from being autonomous and closed off, is conceived as being opened up to interpretations and as intervening in the present. Bespeaking a space of alterity to interrogate its representation—its "version" (Rushdie) and its "journey" (Winterson)—of the past, self-reflexive postmodern historical novels posit the reader not merely as a passive receiving end but as integral to the textual processes of deliberating on the past. Self-reflexivity thus transforms the relation to the past—both the text's and the reader's—into a self-consciously contemplative and conversational process.

The historical novels that the following chapters examine are punctuated by this feature—the consistent awareness of their narratives as exploring a way of remembering history. Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), D. M. Thomas's *The White Hotel* (1981), and Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001) respectively look back to the Great War, the Babi Yar massacre, and the Second World War. Woolf's novel has some obvious disparities from the other two novels. For one thing, it remembers a recent event of which Woolf had a direct experience, in contrast to novels by Thomas and McEwan that engage events from which they are generations removed. The temporal divide is another difference: whereas Woolf's text is commonly classified as a high modernist novel of the early twentieth century, the others are recognized as postmodern fictions that date from the late twentieth century. My discussion will demonstrate, however, that Woolf's novel may be cogently juxtaposed with novels by Thomas and McEwan, in that it thematizes

the ethics of remembering history by working with metafictional elements that call attention to the narrative as a process and an intervention rather than as a self-enclosed text. As I suggest in my first full chapter, Woolf's theory of life as most forcefully presented in *Mrs Dalloway* anticipates and resonates with a postmodern aesthetics that conceives fiction as a dialogic space of irregularities and of the incommensurable. This affirmation of the alterity and plurality that make up a literary space is vital to the narrative form of novels by Thomas and McEwan, as they, too, go in search of an apposite mode of remembering history.

My selection of the three writers—white, upper middle class, and intellectually trained in the English classics and history—pertains to the specifically British relevance of my subject. The penchant of these novels to insist upon the narrative as a process and as opening itself out beyond the aesthetic limits of the text gains in import when seen in the context of Britain's long-standing association with conservatism and an "island mentality" (Nicol 105).[4] The specificity of this national identity also crucially relates to my focus on the term "untidy" as a conceptual thread that connects the thematic and formal concerns of the novels by Woolf, Thomas and McEwan. Among a group of semantically proximal terms, "untidiness" stands out in the way it invokes its antonymic form—"tidiness"— as a standard from which it is derived.[5] In contrast to terms like dirtiness or messiness, untidiness bears within its form the fantasy or the possibility of achieving tidiness once again; and as distinct from "uncleanness," untidiness relates itself to ideas of wholeness and integrity in addition to its associations with orderliness. If we subscribe to the proposition that the terms we use to judge objects and people

betray our everyday practices and the assumptions that often go without saying, it would not be far-fetched to contend that the noted uses of the word "untidy" in place of other proximal terms in British novels illuminates an episteme, a system of understanding that is specific to the British culture.[6] Put simply, the study of the term untidy may be useful in revealing significant aspects of Britain's relations to the ideas of solidarity and homogeneity.

Based on the premise that the term "untidy" has closely to do with how novels by Woolf, Thomas, and McEwan explore the subject of remembering history in a specifically British context, this dissertation examines the uses of this term in these novels, considering the ways these uses inform the texts' speculations about the mode of relating to the past. I make the case that these novels remember history-making events by way of looking at the small-scale moments in which female characters are judged for their untidiness and are, in turn, placed at risk, processes which align with the mechanisms of violence that pave the way for mass-scale atrocities. By means of these close-ups, the novels reflect upon the workings of discourse that endanger lives, totalizing operations that resonate with the massive deaths occurring during the wars and at the Babi Yar ravine. Significantly, the socio-historical evolution of terms contiguous to "untidiness," a discussion to which I return later in this chapter, reveals that the conceptualizations that underlie these words are largely based on paradigms established on exclusions, acts of boundary-setting that obliterate the face of the Other.

It is not unusual to see the adjective "untidy" used to describe women in British historical novels of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in relation to the matters of

sexuality and gender. For instance, untidiness is associated with the uncontrollable aspects of sexuality or the effects of excessive libido. "Man," an unnamed Englishman in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), heeds his Creole wife's untidiness (Rhys 76) and hates it for what he regards it to be—an exorbitant sexual desire alien to the prescribed Western notion of women's modesty. Whether uttered by a man or a woman, the term names women's libidinousness so as to tame it—to make sense of it and/or make it manageable in terms of society's standards of women's normative behavior; and even when it does not connote the sense of being "excessive," untidiness in women is correlated to libido that heralds harmful consequences. Women are likewise noticed for untidiness when their demeanor does not conform to Victorian ideals of femininity and domesticity. Standing for "beauty in an older, Victorian tradition" (Ishiguro *Orphans* 58), the protagonist's mother in Kazuo Ishiguro's *When We Were Orphans* (2000), for example, is insistent on "tidying," putting things in order in the household as well as in dealing with matters of moral wrongdoing. In this instance, (un)tidiness is considered not only against the social norms of decorum but also in light of its (im)morality. Women blamed for untidiness easily find themselves subject to structural violence—out of place, not understood and even socially ostracized. Revealing an array of oppressive assumptions about women's gender and sexuality, literary representations of untidiness in fiction attest to how society treats those who do not comply with its dominant ideology.

My discussion of the representations of ideas about untidiness in novels by Woolf, Thomas and McEwan set during the interwar years is indissociable from early

twentieth-century discourses about women's sexuality and gender, as well as from women's "tenuous emplacement" (Gikandi 121) within British culture at its height of imperialism. Scholarship on British women during the interwar years provides an illuminating backdrop against which to understand literary representations of women's untidiness. The interwar years occupy a liminal space in the sense that despite having experienced the Great War, which marked a watershed in the history of humanity, Britain maintained the status of the British Empire, largely retaining the traditional values which had defined national identity for the empire. Thus, while various studies have examined the ways in which the Great War served as a "conduit for women's political, social and economic advancement" (Dombrowski 23) leading to women's vote and to women's new public roles and political consciousness, as various studies have shown, the servitude to established ways of seeing prevailed mainly with respect to expectations about women:[7] this period saw the solidification of the Victorian ideology of sexuality as well as of women's traditional roles as caregivers and cooks in the domestic sphere. Susan R. Grayzel's study, for example, shows that this is the case. Citing Mary Scharlieb's observation that the surge of patriotic feelings in the initial months of World War I also resulted in "a dangerous heightening of sexual passion" (qtd. in Grayzel 72), Grayzel examines how the manner in which the problem of women's sexuality was publicly broached—i.e. in the context of discourse about "prostitution, venereal disease, and the perceived decline in moral standards and behavior" (73)—cemented the sense that women's sexual behavior was a "moral" problem and a potential threat to the nation as "a type of internal enemy" (73).[8] Debates

about female sexual morality, in other words, were ways to address anxiety about social disorder, an ambience that was conducive to the oppression of women's sexuality.

Simon Gikandi's study adds another layer to the understanding of women during this period. In *Maps of Englishness*, Gikandi notes how colonial subjects increasingly became ingredients in the English identity at the height of the British Empire, posing a threat to the nation; thus, invocations of colonial alterity served as arenas to express anxiety about Englishness. According to Gikandi, women, however, had a different relationship with respect to "Englishness":

> . . . [E]xisting both inside and outside Englishness, [women were] committed to the ideals of the dominant culture but also aware of their tenuous emplacement in it . . . Women were ideally placed to understand the ways in which alterity was constitutive of identity, of how the narrative of order and civility was predicated on the disorder and excess excluded from the big houses of Englishness. (121)

Gikandi attends to the fact that women occupied an ambiguous space relative to the mainstream discourse about colonial alterity. By virtue of their precarious position within the dominant culture, women were not only more susceptible to oppression but also more likely to be questioning of the nation's homogenizing narratives.[9]

Thinking about women's sexuality in the specific context of the interwar years is thus bound up with the problems of alterity and solidarity in the face of Britain's shifting relations with the rest of the world. How do untidy women in novels negotiate their precarious positions relative to the dominant culture that oppresses alterity and aspires to achieve homogeneity? While my engagement with representations of ideas about

untidiness partly concerns uncovering systemic violence, I pay commensurate attention to the ways in which the textual processes redeem moments of untidiness as un-tidying, anti-systemic moments that estrange normative categories, betraying the novels' impulse to speculate beyond systems of totalization that they set out to critique. What is at stake in dispelling such operations? Can we posit a space in these novels distinct from the structures that have produced the experiences of violence?

Answering this last question in the affirmative, I make the case that thinking about the ethics of remembering history in novels by Woolf, Thomas, and McEwan goes in tandem with the ways that these texts theorize the self's ethical relation to the Other. Figuring a porosity, this life-affirming relationship is written into the *poeisis* of the novels that relate to the past as having a vital relationship with the present in search of making a more livable world. The textual untidiness of these novels, working against boundary-setting, posits the reader as an alterity integral to their processes of deliberating violence. I examine how these texts configure or invite readers to partake in the volitional act of forgoing their autonomy and to exercise their ethical agency in playing their parts in the untidy dialogue about the past.

Imagined Histories and Ethical Remembering

Why, then, remember the violence of the war? What is the import of remembering the past, especially if it is a past that is not directly experienced? While the Great War in *Mrs Dalloway* comes from Woolf's firsthand experience of the event, Thomas and McEwan depict an imagined history of the Second World War in their

novels. How does writing from secondhand knowledge factor into the ways these novels intervene in the discourse about remembering historical violence? What does it mean for contemporary readers—generations removed from these historical events—to partake in the textual processes that deliberate on the ethics of remembering past atrocities?

Scholarship on memory and history in fiction reveals the ways in which remembering continued to be a fraught topic throughout the twentieth century. In the early twentieth century, modernism's project to "make it new" was coterminous with "ceaselessly looking backward to cultural and personal memory as the material of its poetic and fictional inscriptions" (McIntire *Modernism* 170).[10] Theorists and scholars have variously pointed out the increasingly private nature of remembrance in the context of the dissociation between history and real memory.[11]

Literature after the Holocaust comes face to face with silence and unspeakability that surrounds the event. In *Heidegger and "the jews,"* Jean-François Lyotard calls attention to the sustained and systematic efforts to negate the Holocaust massacre. The annihilation of evidence, which began with the SS removing all physical traces of the genocide, continued after Auschwitz in the form of inscribing the event in such a way that would make effacement possible. Lyotard argues for combating this "'politics' of absolute forgetting, forgotten" (*Heidegger* 25) by seeking ways to bear witness to the event in writing. Paul Ricoeur likewise declares it a "*moral duty*" (290; emphasis in the original text) to remember the genocide.

The issue of remembering thus takes on an ethical turn: both Lyotard and Ricoeur call for representation that does not exhaust the meaning of the historical enormity. Ricoeur, for instance, critiques interpretive practices that end up leveling off the event in their claims to give a comprehensive explanation of it (291). Both theorists underscore the problematic of remembering a traumatic past in literature and the arts as bearing on the public's historical consciousness. Not limited to the discussion of Holocaust literature, their theses lend themselves to the ethics of representing violent history in fiction that does not reason out its dimension of horror.

In contrast to such a voicing of the moral imperative to preserve the remainder of the past in literature, Walter Benn Michaels fervently opposes the idea of imagined history. Firmly differentiating one's knowledge of history and one's experience of it (3), Michaels goes so far as to dismiss altogether any imagined engagement with history in literature: the novelist should not tamper with a past of which he has no direct experience. Michaels maintains that there can be no defensible motive in imaginatively engaging history, and that doing so would result in the public's diminished interest in history. While Michaels's polemic is a wholesale rejection that unfairly negates the potential ethical import of such literary endeavors, it illuminates a legitimate wariness against an appropriative stance to the events of the past. The merit of his argument, in other words, is in shedding light on the need to examine the grounding motive in relating to historical violence beyond one's firsthand experience.

Leo Bersani also broaches the problem of the mode of art in relating to the traumatic past. In *The Culture of Redemption*, Bersani writes that "the catastrophes of

history matter much less if they are somehow compensated for in art, and art itself gets reduced to a kind of superior patching function" (1). The assumption of art's reparative, ameliorative function in culture, Bersani suggests, is inseparable from "a devaluation of historical experience" (1)—the forgiving or making light of what has generated the need for repair in the first place. Bersani's comment throws into relief the problem of art's engagement with catastrophic historical experiences as it relates to the culture at large: how does art's mediation of a traumatic past impinge on the culture's responses to events?

While these theorists differ in their approaches to the matter of representing historical trauma and violence in art, they commonly evince a heightened awareness about the role of art as impacting the public's relation to history, an awareness that can also be found in contemporary English writers. Kazuo Ishiguro and Ian McEwan, many of whose works look back to "their fathers' war" (Byatt 12), believe in the role of art as having profound effects on the public's historical consciousness and sensibility, especially with respect to the problem of alterity. When asked in an interview about why most of his novels are set during the global atrocities of generations past, Kazuo Ishiguro answered that he feared that his generation was "in danger of becoming slightly complacent about certain things" and that he wanted to imagine, "from a position of some comfort and safety" ("Fugitive"), how he would have acted had he been born earlier. For Ishiguro, literature has crucially to do with breaking away from an "inward-looking society" and looking beyond ("Fugitive"). For McEwan, an understanding of the consequences and the emotional depth of a historical event is what separates fiction

written in retrospect from participatory fiction that writes about an event as it is unfolding ("Life"). Even as he circumscribes the scope of fiction that writes about a long finished event as containing as far as a mind can hold, McEwan asserts the affirmatory role that the retrospective stance lends, particularly in broadening the reader's imaginative capacity in relating to the Other. In an article published only days after the September 11 terrorist attacks, McEwan writes:

> If the hijackers had been able to imagine themselves into the thoughts and feelings of the passengers, they would have been unable to proceed. It is hard to be cruel once you permit yourself to enter the mind of your victim. Imagining what it is like to be someone other than yourself is at the core of our humanity. It is the essence of compassion, and it is the beginning of morality. ("Love")

While McEwan's view that draws links between one's imagination and the forces of terror has been critiqued as being idealistic, it evinces the writer's concern to reflect upon the social responsibilities and possibilities of fiction to respond to real events of violence.

Andreas Huyssen's trope of the palimpsest in *Present Pasts* is illuminating with respect to the debates about the justifiability of imaginatively engaging past violence. Huyssen's trope embraces multifarious ways of reading history that can be woven into the shaping of collective imaginaries (7). Commenting on the surfeit of memory in the ever-burgeoning media culture, Andres Huyssen affirms the possibilities opened up by various forms of culture in relating to the past. Huyssen maintains that rather than prioritizing one form of culture over another, it gains more to view them in light of how

they dynamize enabling public debates about the past in a way that promotes democratic culture. Attention is paid not so much to the "truthful" account of the past as to how cultural forms of memory mobilize history in an ongoing relationship with the present. On this view, literature can perform a role analogous to protests in the social sphere to keep the public eye open to injustices perpetrated.

Untidy Women, Untidy Texts

Feminist literary criticism from the late twentieth century has crucially attended to the domestic space as a site of reform in the matter of gender as well as of the arts. In *Bloomsbury Rooms*, Christopher Reed points out that mainstream modernism, in upholding the heroic ideal, has suppressed domesticity. Reed examines how the Bloomsbury Group "made the conditions of domesticity its standard for modernity, projecting the values of home life outward into the public realm in both its aesthetic and socio-political initiatives" (5). Contrary to the definition of domesticity in the heroic paradigm—a "home to return to"—Bloomsbury's domestic aesthetic conceived the home as a site in which to propose new ways of life, matched with the growing emphasis on individual experience apart from homogenizing culture. Claiming that "no social institution is more closely tied to the construction and reproduction of gender and sexual identity than the home" (Rosner 14), Victoria Rosner similarly attends to the domestic space as the site in which the renegotiation or the stabilizing of gender roles takes place. Vanessa Bell's creation of a nursery room at her home, reflective of prioritizing "self-expression among all family members" over "the needs of the male breadwinner" (18),

exemplifies the rethinking of the household hierarchy. Rosner's book, which thus looks at the materiality of interior spaces, revises the long-standing prejudice of modern art as "a heroic odyssey on the high seas of consciousness" (4). The studies of Reed and Rosner, calling attention to the ways in which the everyday is infused with the political, configure space as representing larger structures of oppression.

The home as a gendered and everyday space is likewise addressed in Laurie Langbauer's work *Novels of Everyday Life* which examines the politics of narrative form in series fiction. Langbauer observes that although immensely popular, the novels of Oliphant and Yonge were nonetheless persistently considered minor because these women writers took as the subject of their fiction "the banalities of everyday life" (49). While this reflects the trivial valence attached to domesticity, Langbauer recounts her own mother's struggles in the 1950s and 1960s to live up to the cultural norm of "the hushed and shining home to which the husband returned . . . [and which] erased the signs of his wife's daily labor" (4). Langbauer likens this normalization, which suppresses untidiness embedded in the everyday, to the penchant in mainstream literature for "the transcendent" and "supposedly immutable truths" (52) that trivialize series fiction—the genre of the everyday--that do not settle in on closure. Reed, Rosner, and Langbauer commonly postulate domesticity as a site for revising long-standing views about gender and the arts. With a problematizing force, this gendered space perseveres in opposition without becoming normative (13).

In "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," Joan W. Scott significantly attends to the viability of gender as an analytical category to disclose and

disable totalizing worldviews that justify oppression. Scott points out the persistent instability of gender when she states that "repressed desires . . . are constantly a threat to the stability of gender identification, denying its unity, subverting its need for security" ("Gender" 1063). Thinking with the issue of gender, then, is to interrogate and aim at something other than strict lines of structure.

In the novels that this dissertation examines, the term "untidy" is gendered, whether used to describe women's sexuality or demeanor. Interestingly, a historical study of terms and concepts contiguous to untidiness reveals how culture treats those outside the dominant group. Taking an anthropological approach to "dirt" before its more modern associations with hygiene and pathogenicity, Mary Douglas discerns in the European ideas of dirt "a kind of omnibus compendium which includes all the rejected elements of ordered systems" (35). Focusing on its old definition as "matter out of place" (35), Douglas emphasizes how dirt occurs within "a systematic ordering of ideas" (41) that eliminates inappropriate elements. The trope of dirt, in other words, has closely to do with what culture wants to annul or dispense with so as to solidify the order of a given system. In *Concepts of Cleanliness*, Georges Vigarello examines the historical process by which "uncleanliness" became a differential marker of the lower class, establishing the rationale for their regulation in the name of social order. Vigarello traces how cleanliness came to be considered a token of morality while uncleanliness was deemed to purvey vice (194). Significantly, such an association emerged with the advent of new industrial cities with the agglomeration of the urban poor in rags and in

vermin categorized as "a new type of savage, who must be contained and mastered" (194).

The tropes of dirt and uncleanliness were significantly employed to solidify gender hierarchy. In *Domesticity and Dirt*, Phyllis Palmer examines how "sex, dirt, housework, and badness in women are linked in Western consciousness" (138). Dirt, both in the literal sense as "soil" (139) and in the figurative sense as "moral inferiority" (144), was relegated to the lower class women to sustain the ideology of the pristine domesticity. From the nineteenth century in Britain, the middle-class woman needed domestic servants to do dirty physical labor in her stead, for "to be pure and genteel. . . required not soiling her hands" (139); these servants easily became sexual outlets for the male patriarch who "denied the sexual prowess of their female peers and partners—the 'respectable' white women who became their wives" (144). The idea of dirt, in other words, became a tool of domination, exploited to deny the sexual agency of women of both classes. It is interesting to see that by the late nineteenth century, the term "tidiness" connotes virtues that are socially desirable in women, separated from the physical self. Hariette Brooke Davis defines the perfect woman as the woman of tidiness: a woman "well-bred, well-educated, well-dressed" (498). Tidiness becomes the norm to demarcate propriety of women's social bearings, begging the question of what "untidiness" would look like. In the contemporary setting, tidiness/untidiness yet remains primarily a "female" thing. Marie Kondo's *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*, an internationally renowned bestseller, identifies the typical reader and client of the tidy manifesto as female. Esteeming and encouraging high standards of

neatness in the household, the book's immense success and global appeal reflects a culture that normalizes tidiness.

An overview of these works makes apparent that the concepts proximal to untidiness occur where "lines of structure . . . are clearly defined" (Douglas 113). Dirt, uncleanliness, and untidiness are other to a system or a standard that is to be sustained. Douglas further explains in *Purity and Danger* that after the stage of posing danger to order, a process of "pulverizing, dissolving and rotting" (160) awaits dirt which eventually loses its identity. Dirt thus passes from identity to nonidentity. This life process of dirt provokes questions about what happens to the female characters in fiction recognized for their untidiness. Crucially, in the novels that this dissertation examines, the women labeled untidy displace the mechanism of violence responsible for their oppression by refusing to play along with—and by even atoning for—the logic of injustices accountable for their suffering. For these characters, these anti-systemic moments are made possible by virtue of an expanded understanding of the self as implicated in the lives of others in a wider field of violence. The understanding of the self that brings otherness to bear on itself nullifies the hierarchical split between subject and object that underlies structural oppression. As I discuss in my chapters, the characters' untidiness in these novels figures a porousness that estranges systems or structures of judgment toward the self's ethical orientation in the world.

The novels' antisystemic moments that dislodge the "ordering of ideas" (Douglas 41) tied to structural oppression are found not only in the characterization of untidy women but also in the ways the novels enact and configure textual untidiness. The

novels that this dissertation examines neither tend toward the aim of closure nor claim themselves to be self-contained with a message to be discovered. The metafictionality of these novels that self-consciously alludes to the novels' textuality is a testimony to the alterity that they acknowledge as being constitutive of themselves. The making of their stories, in other words, goes side by side with this recognition of otherness. Derrida's calling into question borders ascribed to texts likewise voices this presence of alterity:

> . . . a "text" . . . is henceforth no longer a finished corpus of writing, some content enclosed in a book or its margins, but a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself. ("Living" 81)

Derrida's theorization of the text resonates with the generic capacity of the novel that Bakhtin expounds on in "Epic and Novel": the novel aspires to abundance and variety in place of exclusion and boundary setting. Bakhtin spells out the novel's concern to "speculat[e] in what is unknown" (32). In contrast to closed forms like the epic, the novel is characterized by its living contact with the perpetual present and retains a surplus that exceeds its aesthetic limits. The novel is a form that *embodies* a "life process that is imperishable and forever renewing itself" (36). The capacity of the novel to generate spaces that cannot be confined to the materials that give the novel its form is important to my thinking about what it means for the readers to engage history by way of fictional narratives.

Interestingly, Gayatri Spivak uses the French term "*impropre*"—translated to "unclean"—to denote this excess of textuality. In her reading of Marx's analysis of property, Spivak maintains that despite Marx's critique of his own work as being

reductionist in the sense that it "abstract[s] out individual heterogeneity into a quantitative measure of homogeneous labour so that calculation may be possible" (Spivak "Speculations" 51), his text is "*impropre*" to itself, untotalizable, "articulat[ing] more than its verbal textuality" (30). Judith Butler uses the term "clutter"—again, invoking uncleanliness—to designate the disorientation of "I" in the process of addressing another person in speech. For Butler, this cluttering inheres in the self's relation to the Other from birth: by virtue of our bodily life, sexual life, we are transported beyond ourselves to others, which Butler terms the "*mod[e] of being dispossessed*" (*Undoing* 19; emphasis in the original text). Butler explains that even though one likes to claim one's autonomy, our thus being given over makes us vulnerable. Butler, however, argues against foreclosing this vulnerability: on the contrary, she underscores "the value of being beside oneself, of being a porous boundary, given over to others" for "the struggles for a less oppressive social world" (*Undoing* 25). Thus, this disorientation of the self ironically theorizes an ethical orientation to the world. Butler's concept of "cluttering" is useful to think about the untidiness of the text, as a "*mode of being dispossessed*" (*Undoing* 19), to configure a literary space susceptible to otherness.

Rather than delimiting and setting boundaries, then, untidiness (and the terms proximal to it) figures an embrace that is made ethical, as Butler suggests, in the volitional act to be a "porous boundary, given over to others" (*Undoing* 25). Countering the rhetoric of mastery, untidiness renders a language of sensibility that renounces the self's autonomy. As such, untidiness is bound up with the mode of relating to alterity.

In the following chapters, I bring into conversation ethical theories of the novel to inquire into the ways in which novels of Woolf, Thomas, and McEwan enact this reconfigured sense of untidiness in their narrative form that elicits the reader's ethical agency in partaking in the novels' untidy dialogue about historical violence.

The Chapters

Engaging the past of the World Wars, the novels that this dissertation examines investigate the ethics of remembering history by way of looking at the problem of women's sexuality and gender, specifically through the oppression of women noted for "untidiness." This study reveals that the structural violence that these women experience on account of their untidiness fundamentally boils down to the problem of the self's relation to the Other. The novels' refusal to play along with the systems of totalization that claim mastery over the Other is given expression in the ways the narratives tend toward "demastering" (Derrida "Force" 188): first, through exploring a mode of relating to alterity that forgoes the self's autonomy in place of the logic of dominion and exclusion that undergirds mass violence; second, by the making of a dialogic space in which the historical past remains inexhaustible by the subject that engages it.

In the first full chapter, I examine the ways in which *Mrs Dalloway* intervenes in Virginia Woolf's contemporary discourse about remembering the recent past of the Great War. The novel self-consciously sets itself apart from the prevailing memorial practices that heroize the dead or abstract wartime losses, the underlying logic of which repeats the violence of the war and the Empire that reduces the Other to an assimilable

object. Proposing that there is a correlation between such practices and the mainstream gender ideology that condemns Sally Seton's untidiness, I make the case that the narrative counteracts the dominant culture's homogenizing economy by its *poeisi*s that puts into play life's unboundedness. Characterized by a porousness that figures a state of being-with rather than a hierarchical split between subject and object, Sally's relationship with Clarissa Dalloway instantiates the self's orientation in the world that renounces the self's autonomy. I further discuss how this theorization of the self and the other is written into the novel's representation of an untidy city that does not close off incompatible impulses, performing a metacritical rumination upon engaging history in ways that preserve the unassimilability of its subject matter. Lastly, I look at Clarissa's undertaking in the final pages that submits to the alterity of Septimus Warren Smith in relation to the reader's ethical agency in partaking in the novel's untidy dialogue about the War.

Reading *The White Hotel* as a novel that calls for commemorating the Holocaust, the second full chapter considers D. M. Thomas's text in light of Lyotard's theory of the "differend" that bespeaks the imperative to find idioms to bear witness to the disempowered victims. Blatantly plunging into the matter of women's untidy sexuality, the novel puts under scrutiny the master-narrative of Freud's psychosexual theory as the culture's dealing with "the irrational and libidinous" (114)—the uncontrollable aspects of existence—to broach the barbarity of genocide. Tracing the paths of Lisa Erdman, whose psychosomatic symptoms turn out to be prescient of and related to her death in the Babi Yar massacre, the narrative displaces the operation of centralizing forces that

endanger lives in the everyday by its anti-systemic moments that change the terms with which to deliberate upon the problem of violence. The novel rethinks the rhetoric of blame in the process by which Lisa, herself a victim of oppression, makes herself susceptible to the suffering of others by atoning for wrongdoing based on an enlarged conception of the self as implicated in the lives of others in a wider field of violence. The narrative also enacts the enabling dimension of untidiness not only in its ways of diversifying discourse about the female body and violence but also by bringing its textual and thematic concerns to bear upon the exploration of the ongoing problem of what makes for a livable world.

My last full chapter on Ian McEwan's *Atonement* studies the subject of atonement as encompassing both the private enterprise of Briony Tallis as her volitional endeavor to make amends for her past wrongdoing and the novel's exploration of the ethics of remembering the atrocity of the War. Informed by Georges Bataille's idea that erotic relationships put us "in the presence of realities that are not only the most obscure, but also the most familiar" (*Visions* 249), I examine how the novel places Cecilia Tallis's untidiness on dual planes, as both being subject to dominant discourse about women's gender and sexuality and also being refractory to it, and how this relates to the novel's configuration of a literary space not governed by a unified subjectivity. This chapter pays close attention to the upfront metafictional elements of the novel which break through the seams of a tidy narrative to elicit readers in its concrete moments of deliberation upon its task of atonement. The novel plays out the interrelatedness of the

private and the public, intricately weaving the matter of past violence into the reader's concerns of the present.

Looking back to history-making events, novels by Woolf, Thomas, and McEwan that I consider in this work intervene in the discourse of remembering the terrible atrocities of the past. In their deliberations on finding a mode of relating to historical trauma that does not level off its meaning, the novels seek to bring the past into an enabling conversation with the present. Refusing to abstract the violence of the world wars and the holocaust as things of the past, the narratives work toward a literary space that enlivens the history-making events in the here and now. My study of the "untidy" demonstrates the twofold ways that these narratives open up the past to a dialogue: first, it speculates upon how the small-scale violence of the everyday in which female characters are blamed for untidiness not only gestures toward mass-scale political violence but also speaks across time and space to the concerns of the reader; second, the untidy aesthetic, written into narrative form, elicits the readers to break away from the complacencies of thinking to affectively engage the textual processes in search of a more livable world. The ways in which these novels by Woolf, Thomas, and McEwan theorize the breaking down of the self's integrity to meet another world shed a new light on the resurgence of the historical novel as a form particularly suited to redefine the nation's relations to the past as well as to the rest of the world.

CHAPTER II

UNTIDINESS AS VIBRANT TRASH:

VIRGINIA WOOLF'S AESTHETICS OF LIFE IN *MRS DALLOWAY*

In *The English Historical Novel*, Avrom Fleishman cites the placement of the novel's setting at least "two generations" at a remove from the author's own time (3) as one of the standard criteria for determining that a novel is a historical novel. In this definition, the novelist's temporal distance from the period about which he writes is regarded as being integral to what makes the reconstruction of the past a valid one. On this view, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), published six years after the Great War, may not be considered a historical novel. Nonetheless, the novel crucially broaches the problematics of how the historical event should be written and remembered.[12] As both citizen and writer, Woolf closely observed the ways in which the war was turned into public culture which would impinge upon how it is remembered in history. Conceived upon the sentiment that "[her] generation is daily scourged by the bloody war," as Woolf wrote in her diary just a few years after the Armistice, *Mrs Dalloway* counteracts the "official response" after the war which was a willful forgetting of it, put into effect by state-sponsored efforts to "memorializ[e] it, turning it into a glorious sacrifice while consigning its victims to an afterlife where they [were] better off" (Finney "Mrs Dalloway" 129).

Studies of the social backdrop against which *Mrs Dalloway* was written reveal that the novel is responding to the state constructions of public discourse about the War

that sought to keep the civilian populace oblivious to and unquestioning of the reality and implications of the event. In *Virginia Woolf and the Great War*, Karen Levenback attends to Woolf's dispute with the poetry of combatant-poets Siegfried Sassoon and Rupert Brooke which, Woolf believed, promoted belief in a myth of war (25) and maintained "an illusion of immunity" upon which civilian reality increasingly based itself. In *Modernism, Media, and Propaganda*, Mark Wollaeger points out that *Mrs Dalloway* is Woolf's critique of her contemporaries' "cultural reticence" (72) about the reality of the war. Wollaeger's book specifically looks at modernist texts (including Woolf's) within the context of a proliferation of manipulated discourses set off by the British Propaganda machine.[13] Noting the potency of the language of propaganda for the populace with "psyches hungry for belief" (*xii*) in the newly media-saturated environment, Wollaeger points out that modernist writers had to work around the deceptive terrains to find their bearings in the face of massive transformations in the "attitudes toward truth, factuality, and rhetoric" (13).

Given Woolf's defense that her strongest sociopolitical contribution is through writing (Moran 168-9) and her declaration that "we can fight with the mind" ("Thoughts" 168), it is plausible to surmise her belief in the power of rhetoric and her unease about the idea of an "unthinking" mass posited in both the idealized accounts of the war and in its propagandistic simplifications.[14] In Wollaeger's study, the distinction of modernist fiction from the state-sponsored manipulative texts rests precisely upon the "rhetorical literacy" (265)—the intellectual endeavors—that the former demands of the reader; yet his argument that propaganda and modernist art in the twentieth century

emerged as "interrelated languages" (*xiii*) also illuminates the extent to which art and the discourses of political persuasion may be close to each other. In fact, Woolf's pronounced wariness about propagandism and didacticism in her fiction ironically confirms this very closeness.[15] In part, such closeness can be considered in light of the meaning of the word propaganda as "persuasive information" before it came to attain its sinister connotation of "mass manipulation." Can we safely rest assured that novelistic discourse is not informed by the intent to "persuade" the reader? How is it different from the language of propaganda "carefully engineered . . . to trigger specific emotional responses" (Wollaeger 265)?

One of the merits in Wollaeger's book is in the ways it complicates the distinction between propaganda and art, represented in his observation that "[i]f any animating belief or rhetorical design is tantamount to propaganda, then all art *is* propaganda" (*xii*). In the claim that her generation is "daily scourged" by the "bloody war," Woolf intimates that the hurt of the War needs to be divulged and kept open, in contrast to the nationally directed discourses that valorize the wartime dead all the while repressing the traumatic effects of the War. If the discourse of *Mrs Dalloway*, in such a way, seeks to detract the public opinion from the dominant discourse in defense of war and militarism, what sets it apart from the coercive language of propaganda to which Woolf voices aversion? Against the dominant culture's insistence that the War be remembered in ways that justify the event, *Mrs Dalloway* calls for a vigilant reappraisal of the values that have produced the War by stubbornly keeping in sight the "scourge" of

the "bloody war" that would not go away. In such articulation, the novel shares the rhetorical features of propaganda as political persuasion.

Yet if the novel, as a response to a contemporary sociopolitical issue, sets off with an urgency that is specific to its social context, its discourse diverges from "propaganda's thrift" (Wollaeger 265) in that it is irreducible to the immediate construction of readers' political positions about the event as intended by its writer. Melba Cuddy-Keane makes a pertinent point when she comments that while Woolf's writing "cannot escape being propaganda" in the sense that it aims to stimulate, albeit in a less manipulative way, "greater awareness of social responsibilities" (244) in the readers, its rhetorical moves that inspire readers "to think, to question, *and to answer back*" in effect alter "propaganda's domineering, coercive effects" (244). To be sure, *Mrs Dalloway* posits a critical readership that is distinct from a passive one indiscriminately receptive to incitement;[16] and while the intellectual speculation that the text solicits may make the novel seem close to being elitist, the ways in which the textual processes and the readers' affective engagement are mutually constitutive in the novel's social vision make it worthwhile to reconsider such an accusation of elitism. For its rhetorical efficacy, the text depends on the reader to be feeling *with* the sense of loss that informs the lives and the narrative of *Mrs Dalloway*. Rather than set off with decided statements about its thematic concerns, the novel invites readers to partake in the process of relating to the disquieting consequences of the War. In this sense, *Mrs Dalloway* is a novel as intensely concerned with, in the words of Pamela Caughie, "how a reader

responds to and shapes a text" (12) as it is with the assessment of values that have been responsible for mass violence.

In thinking about the novel's intervention in the discourse of remembering the War, therefore, this chapter seeks to examine the ways in which *Mrs Dalloway* invites readers not only to critically consider practices and habits of thought that further violence but also to engage the text and the past at a deeper level by interrogating how they relate to the concerns broached in the novel. I make the case that the novel is concerned as much with addressing the reader's mode of engaging the text as it is with its utterance of violence. In fact, the two are symbiotic in the novel's envisioning of change. Woolf's pronounced intent in writing the novel to "give life and death, sanity and insanity . . . to criticise the social system and to show it at work at its most intense" (*Writer's Diary 56*) confirms this relation. As a novel that looks back to the Great War, *Mrs Dalloway* associates its critical scrutiny of the workings of the social system that justify violence with ruminations about matters universal to human existence--life and death, sanity and insanity. What do we speculate about life that obliges us to morally commit to the novel's social critique? How do we relate to death in reading a novel that thinks about deaths that matter? My chapter begins with these questions to examine how the novel partakes in the discourse of remembering the Great War that was in formation during the time the novel was written but that also pertains across time to our thinking of violence in the here and now.

Untidiness, both as a term and a concept, is crucial to my discussion of how the novel performs its social critique in terms of the story world of the text and solicits an

affective engagement on the part of the reader that would speak to their relation to the world they inhabit. In the novel, the term "untidy" appears once to condemn what culture labels as slovenly demeanor. Yet the moment in which untidiness is noted reveals an array of cultural assumptions that delimit an individual's bearings; refusing to settle with this cultural meaning, the novel speculates on the social implications of untidiness as not heeding what culture defines as meriting attention. My study of untidiness, then, encompasses its meaning in the cultural signifying system that seeks to stabilize—claim mastery over—the individual under its consensual sign and its sense reconfigured, through textual processes, as the penchant to defamiliarize and dispel such operations. The second meaning is bound up with the novel's rethinking of the self's relation to the world. What would be the self's relation to the world that promotes life, ethical living? I make the case that in its reconfigured sense as a form of relinquishing the self's autonomy to bear alterity within the self, the concept of untidiness aligns with the reader's willing encounter with the alterity of the text.

As a key term in my study, untidiness thus enables me to illuminate the conjunction between two textual concerns that previous studies have treated separately: the novel's critique of the social system by way of its representations in the story world of the text and the reader's process of committing to the alterity of the text. I examine, for instance, the ways in which the novel's figuring of a life-affirming relationship between the self and the Other aligns with the reader's ethical relation to the events with which the novel engages. In my study of the novel's intervention in the discourse about the Great War, I ultimately seek to elucidate how the novel's theorizing a mode of

relating to the alterity of the text makes possible a dialogic space in which an atrocity of the past is reenlivened for the ethical concerns of the here and now.

The novel's placing of death at the center of its deepest ruminations crucially bears on this concern to gestate a mode of relating to the text and to the event of the War. Clearly, death incurred by war is a crucial theme in the novel, constantly reminding readers of the "scourge" of the "bloody war." The main thread of *Mrs Dalloway* revolves around Clarissa Dalloway's day as she prepares for a party that would take place later that evening, culminating in the suicide of the shell-shocked war veteran Septimus Warren Smith. The implications of his imminent death are dispersed throughout the narrative before its actual happening—in Septimus's hallucinations and talk of suicide, in his wife Rezia's angst about his madness, and, albeit in a less direct way, in the methodical strokes of Big Ben which are aligned with "tol[l] for death" (65), and in the recurrent thoughts of people about loss. Death pervades the novel even in its intense moments that cherish life: Clarissa's elated celebration of "life; London; this moment of June" (5) is immediately followed by the mourning of Mrs Foxcroft and Lady Bexborough for the deaths of their beloveds during the war; the news of Septimus's death cuts across Clarissa's party, her "offering" (159) for life, so that she thinks, "Oh! . . . in the middle of my party, here's death" (240).

Yet in a more profound way, the novel looks upon death as an irrevocable fact of human existence that is turned back onto the reader. It calls for the reader's *affective* engagement with death as one's own, contrary to the impulse to subsume death under the order of the living or abstract it as being irrelevant to the living. In its depiction of

memorializing practices, for instance, *Mrs Dalloway* intimates that the manner in which the wartime dead are depersonalized—heroized or repressed—repeats the violence of the War and the Empire in its way of naturalizing deaths. The novel induces readers to engage death not so much as a final moment of ceasing to be but as a ubiquitous, unalterable fact that impinges on their everyday existence: death is constantly broached as the sustained breaking down of the self's autonomy. As it turns out, the novel's affect of mourning pertains not only to the deaths by means of war but also to Clarissa's encounter with an inexorable alterity in life crucially associated with aging: her hair significantly greyed after illness, her compromises of the ambitions of youth to conventionality, and an agonizing understanding of the fallibility inherent to being. The novel intimates that what Clarissa terms "this having done with the *triumphs* of youth" (243; emphasis added) has something to do with her capacity to relate to the death of Septimus, a complete stranger to her. This sensibility of breakdown and loss, in other words, is what enables Clarissa to relate to the Other in an ethical way. Clarissa comes to feel with the despair that prompts Septimus out of the window; the novel insists that Clarissa's submission to the alterity of Septimus deeply bears on the anti-triumphalist stance that her sensibility of loss entails.

In "By Force of Mourning," Jacques Derrida elucidates the point that one cannot engage death without letting go of a part of oneself—without facing one's own death.[17] Derrida takes issue with mourning as expounded in psychoanalysis in that it posits the objectification of the lost other. Summing up the image that marks mourning in psychoanalysis as "that of an interiorization (an idealizing incorporation, introjection,

consumption of the other […])" (187), Derrida proposes that such an interiorization is not and must not be possible, for the being-in-us that comes with mourning exists only as images (188); by death the lost other's infinite alterity is confirmed—they are "completely other, infinitely other" (189). Despite this alterity, the force of the image through which the dead exists gains in import for the fact that the image "sees more than it is seen" and "looks at *us*" (188; emphasis added). In other words, while the dead resist being assimilated ("interiorized") in terms of the living, the force of its image is such that the gaze is turned upon the one who mourns the dead. Derrida writes:

> However narcissistic it may be, our subjective speculation can no longer seize and appropriate this gaze before which we appear at the moment when, bearing it in us, bearing it along with every movement of our bearing or comportment, we can get over our mourning *of him* only by getting over *our* mourning, by getting over, by ourselves, the mourning of ourselves, I mean the mourning of our autonomy, of everything that would make us the measure of ourselves. (189)

Derrida explains that the mourner can survive the mourning of the other only by mourning the self's "autonomy," by which he means "everything that make *us* the measure of ourselves" (189; emphasis added). The mourning of the Other transpires even as the mourner gazes at his own mortality: Derrida writes, "One cannot hold a discourse *on* the 'work of mourning' without taking part in it, without announcing or partaking in death, and first of all in one's own death" (172). Thus, in Derrida's explication, the task of mourning—which is in nature "interminable" (187)—is inseparable from a mode of being marked by the fracturing of a bounded self.

Yet just as Derrida construes this mourning to be the basis for "hospitality, love, or friendship" (188) because it forgoes self-centeredness, *Mrs Dalloway* weaves its thinking about death in its aesthetics of life. Mourning, in the sense that Derrida speculates it, resonates with the concept of untidiness in the way that it is a form of bearing otherness as constitutive to the self without seeking to assimilate the other. Paradoxically, untidiness in *Mrs Dalloway* is based upon an intense affirmation of life, "life, with its varieties, its irreticences" (66), put into full play in the novel. The unboundedness of life, manifested in the novel's depiction of things in motion and also informing its untidy narrative mode that continually destabilizes the rigidity of perspective, harbors a social vision of change. Putting under critical scrutiny homogenizing practices and habits of thoughts that deter life, the novel intimates the closeness of their operations to the destructive tendencies responsible for the massive deaths during the War. The narrative espouses, in place of certainty, a positive ethical import in life's unboundedness which continually elicits the apprehension of alterity and "demastering" (Derrida "Force" 188) associated with death as an ineluctable constant of life: the mode of being that takes in alterity as integral to itself makes for a life-affirming relation with the self as well as the Other. The novel's query into the problem of death is thus also thinking about what makes a livable life.

I begin my discussion by examining the textual moment in which the term untidy is brought up. In the novel, untidiness is noted to be a defining attribute of Sally Seton, Clarissa's love during her cherished summer at Bourton more than thirty years past. When Sally is marked as untidy by a male character, the word is used in a deprecatory

sense as indecently breaching a cultural norm. Yet the narrative places more emphasis on the ways in which this cultural usage of the term to demarcate the boundaries of propriety and normalcy instantiates the workings of a totalizing discourse rooted in the logic of dominion and exclusion that debilitate life. Illuminating the violence embedded in long-standing practices that unjustly constrain conduct and thinking, the narrative proffers an alternative view of Sally's untidiness. The novel's consideration of Sally's untidiness in a different light is given expression, among other things, in her relation with Clarissa, a fulfilling epiphanic encounter against which Clarissa's other interpersonal relationships—including her married life with Richard Dalloway—would prove lacking. Untidiness, which continually brings alterity to bear upon itself at the risk of forgoing wholeness, significantly informs the novel's representation of London. In this chapter, the untidy city in *Mrs Dalloway* is conceived as the novel's metacritical rumination upon the subject of writing about the past in a way that contests a totalizing—tidy—discourse and aspires to a dialogic space in which the past remains unassimilable to the subject that engages it. I examine how this insistence on preserving the element of uncertainty is consonant with the novel's thinking about the self's ethical orientation to the world.

In the last section of this chapter, I further look at how untidiness, beyond its significance in the story world of the text, pertains to the reader's relation to the text as the self's encounter with alterity. This section pays special attention to the process in which Clarissa, as an act of free will, submits to the alterity of Septimus as she engages his death. I reconsider the critical dismissal of Clarissa's party as an upper-class

indulgence by both agreeing and disagreeing with it, ultimately to affirm its import as taking a risk, to open up the space for an effort of other-centeredness. On this view, it is hardly surprising that Clarissa's encounter with Septimus—as well as the re-enlivening of an intense life of the mind—transpires in her party. Placing Clarissa's undertaking in the final pages of the novel side by side with Dorothy Hale's exposition of the readerly self in contemporary ethical theories of the novel, I study the novel's textual untidiness as making possible the reader's ethical agency in partaking in the novel's dialogue about the War. Crucial to my discussion are the ways in which this agency is bound up with the forgoing of the self's integrity, instantiated in Clarissa's sustained encounter with loss which the text significantly links to aging. I emphasize the ways in which the novel theorizes, through such processes, the self's ethical relation to the Other. In place of a direct articulation of the theme of remembering war, *Mrs Dalloway* thus invites readers to deliberate on how the mode of relating to alterity crucially bears on the ways we think about and remember historical trauma.

The Sexual as the Social: The Interlacing of Two Women's Love and the Self's Ethical Orientation to the World

> She could see what she lacked. It was not beauty; it was not mind. It was something central which permeated; something warm which broke up surfaces and rippled the cold contact of man and woman, or of women together. (40)

Left in solitude and hush after her lively stroll in the streets of London, Clarissa is hemmed in to a heightened awareness of her "lack." The surrounding context of this

passage indicates that the "something central which permeated," which Clarissa feels to be lacking in her life, is a deeply fulfilling intimacy that she experienced in the past. The intensity of its ecstatic moment—described subsequently as a "revelation" and an "illumination" (41)—can be met with only in Clarissa's memory and contrasts with the narrowness of the bed to which she is confined in the present. This private life, albeit hidden from view and cloaked in Clarissa's social presentation of herself as "pointed; dart-like; definite" (47), is what she places at the hub of life. For all her joyous reveling in the bustle of the streets and her extraordinary capacity to appreciate, even in the midst of mundane existence, the "secret deposit of exquisite moments" (37), Clarissa cannot help but come face to face with "an emptiness about the heart of life" (39). In the novel, Clarissa's teenage relation with Sally is represented as an event of epiphanic exuberance that permanently altered Clarissa's worldview and against which her present self would feel "shriveled, aged, breastless" (39).

The text's emphasis on the significance of this event in Clarissa's life has triggered various critical interpretations of Clarissa's relation to her friend Sally. Sally figures prominently in Clarissa's remembrance of the summer at Bourton more than thirty years past—a past which Clarissa repeatedly returns to in the novel, so that at the end of the day she reflects, "all day she had been thinking of Bourton" (241). Her teenage relation with Sally, which Clarissa likens to Othello's love for Desdemona, is recounted with an intensity that has lost its relevance in Clarissa's life at the present. Sally's kiss on her lips is cherished as "the most exquisite moment of her whole life"—a moment in which "[t]he whole world might have turned upside down" (45). Clarissa's

account of "yielding to the charm of a woman" (40), alluding to her relation with Sally in all likelihood, is elaborated in an eroticized language that summons the ardor of orgasmic raptures. Not a few critics have construed this "falling in love with women" (41) in terms of lesbian love, with compelling explanations of its implications. Critics like Diane Swanson and Patricia Cramer respectively declare that Clarissa is a closeted married lesbian; as I will examine more in my discussion, both critics argue that the novel's characterization of her relation to Sally serves as a critique of social conditions that condone the perpetration of men's sexual violence against and subordination of women, especially in the institution of marriage. Taking a cue from these critics' linking of the problem of female sexuality to men's habits of domination that also impinge on other social relations, I seek to examine how the novel's depiction of the two women's love brings to light uncharted possibilities of a mutually empowering relationship that is denied by gender norms rooted in patriarchy, and how this depiction bears on the novel's rethinking of the self's ethical relation to itself and the Other.

My focus in engaging these women's love, thus, is not so much to delve into the subject of homoeroticism as to think about the novel's imagining of a life-affirming relation between the self and the Other that speaks to the issues of social justice and violence. To begin with, I attend to Sally's "untidiness" as the meeting point between the two women. My discussion will show the ways in which Sally's untidiness is the site at which prevailing gender norms that constrain women's sexuality are both uncovered and interrogated; going beyond a social critique of such practices, the novel's representation of Sally's untidiness theorizes a mode of being that keeps open the space

for otherness and that relates to otherness without assuming an epistemological privilege on the part of the self. Sally's untidiness, which diversifies the discourse on female sexuality, also becomes an occasion to deliberate on the view of what it means to be human.

As noted earlier, Sally takes center in Clarissa's cherished memories of her eighteen-year-old life at Bourton. After recounting details manifesting Sally's idiosyncrasies, Clarissa remembers a particular moment:

> Then she forgot her sponge, and ran along the passage naked. That grim old housemaid, Ellen Atkins, went about grumbling—'Suppose any of the gentlemen had seen?' Indeed she did shock people. She was untidy, Papa said. (43)

Rather than be regarded as mere careless demeanor, Sally's untidiness, noted in this incident in her act of running along the passage naked, is observed in light of her gender, doubly so from the male perspective: first by the housemaid, as a spokesperson for the "gentlemen," rebuking it as a breach of respectable female conduct; second, by Clarissa's father who associates Sally's untidiness with an aberrancy that "did shock people." Sally's untidiness, categorically labelled inappropriate, is also an expression of her disregard for gender norms. In another context, Clarissa takes as an intolerable offense Sally's uninhibited articulation of consent to women's pregnancy outside marriage, so that turning "bright pink," Clarissa declares she should "never be able to speak to her again" (77). As such, Sally's blatant unconcern for respectability and gender norms is met with disapprobation, highlighting the rigidity of convention that defines proper behavior of women.

At the same time, the ease with which the ideal of femininity is violated as in the moment of Sally's untidiness also betrays the arbitrary nature of such ideal. Indeed, Sally's untidiness is a testimony to the self in excess of normative judgment: Clarissa's father cannot help find her likable despite her being "completely reckless" and "absurd" (44); "the wild, the daring, the romantic Sally" wins the favor of Peter Walsh, Clarissa's old time friend from Bourton, who considers Sally "probably the best . . .[who] tried to get hold of things by the right end anyhow" (94); the quality of "abandonment" in Sally, "as if she could say anything, do anything" (42), so fascinates Clarissa that for all her own "worldliness" (98), Clarissa is compelled to recast her life and see "how sheltered" it was (42). In other words, compared against the brevity with which it is deprecated in light of the social standards of decency, Sally's untidiness is represented endearingly at various moments, opening up room to see and appreciate the multifariousness of being that cannot be contained in totalizing discourse.

Upon a closer look, Sally's untidiness is intertwined with the distance that she sets from convention, rooted in her discernment of structural injustices with which she does not hesitate to be openly at variance. By social class she hardly belongs to Clarissa's society at Bourton: "that ragamuffin Sally without a penny to her name, and a father or a mother gambling at Monte Carlo" (96), whose parents did not get on, had to pawn a brooch to come to Bourton (42). The manner in which she forces her stay at Bourton upset Aunt Helena to "such an extent that she never forgave her" (42). Yet not only does Sally make herself a conspicuous presence in that society, but she is daring enough to turn its values upon their heads. Her act of articulating sociopolitical issues,

for one thing, goes against the "male vocal domination of public spaces" (Snaith 22), an issue that Woolf engages variously in her *oeuvre*. In her book *Virginia Woolf: Public and Private Negotiations*, Anna Snaith observes the traditional public hostility toward women speaking out. Examining the "systematic exclusion" of Western women from the public sphere (8) dating back to classical Greece, which dichotomized the private household (*oikia*) and the *polis* that was the "higher realm of speech and action" (6), Snaith points out that the rigid association of women with their maternal role in the household precluded their voices from being heard. Women continued to suffer patriarchal oppression, as the public sphere, "the place of naming" (8), was dominated by males and thence *their* definition of the values of both the private and the public sphere. Snaith further notes that the denial of women's voices continued through seventeenth- and eighteenth-century liberalism which, linking women's public presence with "[b]iological and moral degeneracy" (8), banished their voices which the dominant culture claimed were "necessarily that of privatized, irrational desire" (9). Patricia Moran notes that the imposition of an immoral dimension to women speaking can be found in Woolf's polemical writings, which address the long-established correlation between "naming of silence" and "female chastity" originating in Saint Paul: "to speak publicly, to write, is akin to violating female purity, a violation that . . . causes intense anguish and textual distortions" (172). Sally's untidiness, her not giving the "proper" measure of attention to social decorum, contests the rigidity of convention that operates upon exclusion.

Yet a greater stake in Sally's penchant for nonconformity is highlighted in the event of Hugh Whitbread's kiss of Sally. Clarissa's old friend and a snob who holds a post at Court, Hugh forces a kiss on Sally as a punishment for championing women's right to vote. While no one else in the scene understands her rage, Sally is straightforward in spelling out the full implications of the "kiss."

> Sally suddenly lost her temper, flared up, and told Hugh that he represented all that was most detestable in British middle-class life. She told him that she considered him responsible for the state of 'those poor girls in Piccadilly'. . . 'He's read nothing, thought nothing, felt nothing,' [Peter] could hear her saying in that very emphatic voice which carried so much farther than she knew. (95)

While the incident of the kiss is received as an insult for the more obvious reason that Hugh, marked by his blind and extreme allegiance to tradition, asserts the alleged male superiority over women, Sally's response is striking in that she yokes two seemingly unrelated kinds of persons—Hugh Whitbread, "the perfect gentleman" (95), and the poor girls in Piccadilly.[18] For Sally, his act of silencing her is indicative of an apathy that amounts to a social evil. The unthinking orthodoxy is what she finds most abominable about Hugh: "'He's read nothing, thought nothing, felt nothing'" (95). Contrary to the attempts of Hugh (and of Peter from whose perspective this incident is recounted) to make light of the event, Sally draws on the correlation between what may seem to be a private, innocuous moment to the larger issue of the self's connectivity to the lives of others. In drawing such correlation, Sally shows an understanding of an expansive view of the self that takes alterity to bear upon itself. Her sensibility of the interrelatedness of

lives enables Sally to perceive the extent to which the ideology that underlies Hugh's unthinking assault endangers lives—lives outside the comfort of "British middle-class" society. Sally's yoking of Hugh with the poor girls is taking into account alterity as being integral to one's relation to the world. What seems to originate in mere dissident thinking, therefore, manifests a way of being in the world in which the self is aware of its implicatedness in the lives of others, an awareness that Sally prioritizes over socially imposed categories that divide people—the middle-class gentleman and the lower-class girls that sell their favors to men.

Sally's penchant for problematizing the given is epitomized in her relation with Clarissa which, as noted by many critics, is saturated with sexuality. Given that Woolf wrote at a time in which the belief in "inborn female sexual passivity" was so prevalent that women were pathologized for any expression of sexual desire (Cramer 187) and when legal, medical and popular views of homosexuality were intensely hostile, such indirection of language may have been a reasonable route through which Woolf would freely give expression to, rather than abstract or gloss over, the intensity of women's erotic emotion.[19] The representation of sexual contact—"warm," "spread[ing]," "expan[ding]," "swe[elling]," "gush[ing] and pour[ing]" and temporarily filling up the "cracks and sores" (41)—is, as Cramer aptly puts it, "poetic but not disembodied" (187). Locating Woolf's *oeuvre* in the era of "unprecedented popular, literary and scientific preoccupation with sexuality" (180), Cramer attends to the centrality of sexuality in Woolf's literary experimentations and the ways in which Woolf's support of women's sexual liberation, as a critique of men's sexual violence upon women, can be also

understood as being part of her wider commitment to social justice (184).[20] Claiming that *Mrs Dalloway* is a "coming-out narrative" inspired by Woolf's own romantic relationship with Vita Sackville-West (185), Cramer sees the novel within the "lesbian" framework but also significantly as having been shaped in consonance with Woolf's "liberationist and egalitarian ideals" (184). On a similar note Diana L. Swanson attends to the lesbian desire in the novel as insinuating its thread in the common life of London predominantly defined by "heteronormativity and male dominance of the institution of marriage" (183). She thus reads Clarissa's love for Sally as belonging to the "unnamed, often silenced, and largely invisible" desires that are "not officially accepted or commonly assumed" (183) but nonetheless made palpable in Woolf's narrative fabric. Common to the accounts of Cramer and Swanson is the emphasis on oppressive gender ideology as the background against which literary representation of lesbian desires have emerged.

Although their readings aptly point out the nexus between the novel's representations of female sexuality and the wide-ranging social conditions that perpetrate oppression, Cramer and Swanson limit their discussions to how these conditions impinge on the individual. Therefore, they miss out on deliberating the deeper stakes in the text's explorations of sexual life. By way of depicting the happiness of the two women as individuals, the novel links the conditions for sexual intimacy to the problem of what makes for a mutually empowering relation between the self and the Other. The novel's approach to the problem of female sexuality, in other words,

illuminates the ways in which the whole issue of sexuality is bound up with the self's life-affirming relation to the Other.

Clarissa characteristically recounts her eye-opening encounter with Sally that would impact her life:

> Sally it was who made her feel, for the first time, how sheltered the life at Bourton was. She knew nothing about sex—nothing about social problems. She had once seen an old man who had dropped dead in a field—she had seen cows just after their calves were born. (42-3)

The passage tells us that her relation with Sally led Clarissa to recast her life in a new light, which also closely has to do with her awakening to sex and social problems. What is curious is the juxtaposition—twice—of sex and social problems, with parallelism in the phrase and sentence structure, indicating that sex and social problems are somehow not distinct from each other. What has the sexual reproduction of cows have to do with an old man helplessly dying in a field? With the repeated insertion of dashes, the text insinuates that what is deemed private—sex—is not unrelated to a social problem broached in the public sphere. Put differently, ignorance about sex somehow goes together with ignorance about social problems.

The novel, to be sure, presents private interpersonal relationships like one's sexual life to gesture toward the social, suggesting that both revolve around the problem of what it means to be human. This is made poignant in Clarissa's ruminations in her solitary moment in the attic:

> Narrower and narrower would her bed be. The candle was half burnt down and she had read deep in Baron Marbot's *Memoirs*. She had read late at night of the retreat from Moscow. For the House sat so long that Richard insisted, after her illness, that she must sleep undisturbed. And she really preferred to read of the retreat from Moscow. He knew it. So the room was an attic; the bed narrow; and lying there reading, for she slept badly, she could not dispel a virginity preserved through childbirth which clung to her like a sheet. Lovely in girlhood, suddenly there came a moment—for example on the river beneath the woods at Clieveden—when, through some contraction of this cold spirit, she had failed him. And then at Constantinople, and again and again. (40)

Clarissa's relationship with Richard Dalloway, her husband and a politician, is bitterly asexual to the extent that Clarissa "could not dispel [her] virginity." The way the text traces her emotions is infused with pathos. We learn that Richard advised Clarissa to sleep alone in the attic, concerned that he should disturb her sleep; yet his well-intentioned prescription, in consonance with his practical-mindedness, is also spelled out with an imperative that imposes decisions upon Clarissa, as implied in the words "insisted" and "must".[21] While Clarissa adds that she "*really* preferred to read . . . [and that] he *knew* it" (40; emphasis added), apparently vindicating the soundness of his judgment, the unnaturalness of such an addition betrays Clarissa essaying to convince herself against her will. What follows from this reaffirms Clarissa thinking of her sexual life in terms of a deeply ingrained male-centered discourse about sex. She thinks about how "*she* had failed him . . . again and again" as a woman, *giving* him what he wanted

(40; emphasis added). Despite this self-blame, Clarissa sees her present sexual life for what it is—a "lack" epitomized in the narrowness of her bed and Baron ("barren") Marbot and the candle half-burnt, her repressed life—a recognition made possible by its contrast against her fulfilling relationship with Sally.

What immediately comes after this--the effusiveness of Clarissa's orgasmic raptures in her fulfilling moment with Sally—marks a contrast to the coldness and contraction that characterizes Clarissa's sexual life in her marriage. The plenitude of sensual flows, pitted against the loneliness of her present life, is presented in an eroticized image. "Something central which *permeated*" (40; emphasis added) which Clarissa recounts as breaking down boundaries between persons is conceptualized as a spreading over a space, as distinct from compartmentalization of center point and margin. In other words, the porousness figures a state of being-with rather than a hierarchical split between subject and object. Clarissa's love for Sally, as Clarissa recounts it, renounces the illusion of an autonomous subject against which the Other is reduced to an object: it is characterized by a disinterestedness (43) and "sprang from a sense of being in league *together*" (44; emphasis added). The relationship is characterized by a symbiosis, unique and private to the lovers and not deferring to social judgment.

As examined, Sally's untidiness informs the sphere of intimacy: the sexual is engaged as a way to broach the social, an entry to think about an ethical mode of being in the World. Lovers in unison, "in league together," embody an expansive view of the self which embraces alterity with disinterestedness, perpetually forgoing the self's claim

for the mastery of the Other. The fulfilling encounter infuses the element of uncertainty constitutive to it a positive ethical import.

Belonging to a distinct and brief chapter in her life in which she articulated and dreamt of social reform, Clarissa's relation with Sally has been considered by critics mostly as a short-lived "iconoclasm" of youth and a "prewar idyll." More recent criticism that emphasizes the social implications of the homoerotic element of their relationship still falls short of how this encounter relates to the novel's bigger theme of the War. The untidiness that Clarissa discerns and admires in Sally and that becomes the contact point between the two women, however, is organically connected to the social vision of the novel that imagines an ethical mode of relating to the past of the War that dislodges the cycle of violence.

An Untidy City and the Writing of History

Sally's untidiness, an expression of her quality that Clarissa names an "abandonment" (42), is not giving the right measure of attention to what culture authorizes as meriting attention. Yet just as Sally's moment of untidiness estranges normative categories for judging people, the city of London in *Mrs Dalloway* is marked by aberrations and evanescence that frustrate the impulse for homogeneity. In this sense, London emblematizes the novel's reconfigured sense of untidiness: it perpetually brings alterity to bear upon itself. Despite the centripetal pull of its various markers, the city of London in the novel insistently pluralizes its meaning.[22] The novel's London is suffused with ceaseless transitions between subjectivities and is composed of metropolitan masses

that are not "any sort of collective" but an "amorphous crowd of passers-by, the people in the street" (Benjamin "Baudelaire" 165)— simply recognized as being there, rather than as a group under a consensual sign.

Why such an untidy city, and why such emphasis on its seams? In what follows, I examine the ways in which the writing of London is also the novel's thinking of how the Great War would be engaged. Critics have variously attended to Woolf's abiding concern with the writing of history in her literary career. Julia Briggs writes of Woolf's well-known "impatience with a particular kind of history, history as the 'lives of great men,' of heroes and hero-worship" and elaborates on how this impatience finds expressions in Woolf's writing as "part of an imaginary quarrel that she had with her father about the *Dictionary of National Geography*, with its emphasis on the lives of men of action, and its indifference to the lives of the obscure and of women [which was] part of a larger argument on behalf of social rather than political history" (76). While Briggs's contention aptly acknowledges Woolf's interest in what has unjustly been relegated to the margins in historical accounts, my focus is not so much upon how this interest impacts the thematic concerns of her fiction as upon how Woolf's text deliberates on the mode of engaging the historical past. More specifically, I look at the novel's exploration of a dialogic space in which the Great War always falls short of settling as an event that is self-evident. These discussions will shed light on the ways in which Woolf's writing of the untidy city can be read as a rhetorical intervention that seeks to alter the terms and conditions of the discourse of remembering the War. I give special attention to the text's configuration of life—life infused in the untidy city—as

informing its metacritical ruminations on the mode of engaging history. Such textual processes can be seen as the effort, in the words of Melba Cuddy-Keane, "to incorporate the dynamics and the values of literary language into the discourse of the public sphere" (246).[23]

In the novel, the messiness of the shell-shocked Septimus Smith's reality is unrelentingly brought to bear upon the makeup of postwar Britain notwithstanding the establishment arrayed to keep such disturbing remnants of the War out of sight. Septimus's mute suffering is made most palpable by the narrative representations of his recurrent hallucinations: his dead comrade Evans repeatedly appears in the city and converses with him, conflating spatio-temporal boundaries; Septimus is surrounded by imagery of violence—flames—constantly summoning the event of the War. Septimus is, in the words of Sara Cole, "a repository for the war's violent residue, far from dissipated five years after the armistice" (247); he acts as "a fundamental disruption of his home culture" (247) in his radical incompatibility with civilian life and for representing the actualities and consequences of the War that the state wants to deny. His aberrant presence in the urban space is in conflict with the centralizing forces represented by Sir William and Dr Holmes who are entitled to treat—manage—Septimus, a theme I return to later.

No doubt Septimus and the threat of war's violence that he represents were crucial to Woolf's design of the postwar city. As critics have variously noted, the novel's elegiac dimension has in large part to do with Septimus's presence in the city. Pointing out that the "evocation of elegy" is integral to the form and concerns of *Mrs*

Dalloway (152), Daniel Bedggood alludes to the novel's intimations of the war—mass death and insanity—as its "primary feature of elegy" (157). Jane Goldman more specifically names the novel's charting of the "urban wanderings" of Septimus as being central to its elegiac mood (51). Septimus's insanity and death conspicuously cut across the fluctuations of London.

Yet the untidiness of the city also makes apparent that the narrative's aim may be somewhat different than recuperating the hidden reality of the War. It is not difficult, indeed, to discern a certain resistance to stabilizing the city as one thing or another. Within a single paragraph, for instance, the narrative makes a swift movement from Clarissa's exaltation of the summer day, to the bereaved Mrs Foxcroft and Lady Bexborough mourning the deaths of their sons (5), to the sounds of ponies and cricket bats and laughing girls, to shop-keepers ready to lure consumers with paste and diamonds and brooches, to ducks and birds and the Government buildings (6). If the novel takes care not to lose sight of the reality of the war's violence to which Septimus's presence calls attention, it too, does not "allo[w] violence to absorb, in the total attention violence demands, the partial attention that resists it" (Walkowitz 101). What stands out are the disparate impulses that do not close in upon a fixed meaning of the city.

The ways in which identical things are registered and comprehended differently by the subjects experiencing them likewise add to the untidiness of the city. One such example is the novel's memorable skywriting scene which instantly captivates the city dwellers as an airplane writes letters upon the sky:

> The sound of an aeroplane bored ominously into the ears of the crowd. There it was coming over the trees, letting out white smoke from behind, which curled and twisted, actually writing something! Making letters in the sky! Everyone looked up . . . But what letters? A C was it? An E, then an L? Only for a moment did they lie still; then they moved and melted and were rubbed out up in the sky, and the aeroplane shot further away and again, in a fresh space of sky, began writing a K, and E, a Y perhaps? (25)

While the aim of this advertising method is to impress people with a trademark or a slogan, Michael North notes that such method equally targeted the "simultaneity" of experience in the crowd by making "the whole process of reception self-consciously social" (83). North further writes that in Woolf's account, however, this novel outdoor advertising method with which she was fascinated is turned into a testimony of "the ineluctable subjectivity and idiosyncrasy of the individual, for whom even the most public language can have a purely personal significance" (83).[24] Indeed, the text's meticulous inscription of the responses of the crowd—of Mrs Coates, of Mrs Bletchley, of Mr Bowley, of the nursemaid, of Rezia, of Septimus—to this moment as being drastically distinct from one another affirms North's point. Cole crucially points out the plural meaning that the airplane signifies in the city. On the one hand, it attests to the extent to which the "life of violence has been absorbed into the civilian sphere," for the airplane—"bor[ing] *ominously* into the ears of the crowd" (Woolf 25; emphasis added)—by then established itself "as a major technological legacy of the war" (250). On the other hand, as instantiated in its astounding use for advertisement purposes, the

airplane is reflective of a commercial London. The city's commercial growth, represented in the novel's depiction of people's marvels in objects and spontaneous shopping sprees, is one that bases itself on the "whole enormous infrastructure of war" (250).

The untidiness of the city, however, finds its most elaborated expression in the novel's articulation of life. Imperatively, Clarissa's most exalted celebration of life takes place in the city. In the novel, life is conceived in its simplest sense as "the condition or attribute of living or being alive" ("Life, n.1") as it insinuates its presence in the opening pages of the narrative in the animate things—the lark, the fresh air in early morning, the flowers, the trees, and even the hush before Big Ben strikes—without giving its name. Clarissa's fondness for life is forthright: she ponders, "Heaven only knows why one loves [life] so" and that even the "veriest frumps, the most dejected of miseries sitting on doorsteps (drink their downfall) do the same" (4). In this scene, Clarissa revels in the sheer liveliness of life, life as it comes to her in the multifarious forms of movement. The narrative records life in its various sensory images--"[i]n people's eyes, in the swing, tramp, and trudge; in the bellow and the uproar; the carriages, motor cars, omnibuses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging; brass bands; barrel organs; in the triumph and the jingle and the strange high singing of some aeroplane overhead" (5).

But the word life, put side by side with the name Virginia Woolf, also brings to mind the well-known passage in the author's essay "Modern Fiction" (1919):

> Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible? (8)

Woolf begins by declaring what life is not, and when she attempts to tell us what it is, she can only adumbrate the idea of it by underlining its evasive and aberrant nature—i.e. "this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit" (8). Life is not, she seeks to confirm, what convention has us believe it to be, ideas which are largely attributable to the writing practices of influential male writers of Woolf's time such as John Galsworthy, H. G. Wells and Arnold Bennett. Woolf names these writers materialists for their adherence to "the alien and external" (8) at the expense of the spiritual: in writing, these writers are constrained "not by [their] own free will but by some powerful and unscrupulous tyrant" who dictates the representation of life "to the last button of [the figures'] coats in the fashion of the hour" (8). In Woolf's view, the literary practices of the materialists are at variance with life, which is in essence evanescent and elusive.

The uncircumscrible nature of life in "Modern Fiction" is thus in keeping with the idea of life in motion and shifts as given expression in the city of *Mrs Dalloway*. What Woolf's essay adds, however, significantly advances our understanding about how such a figuration of life bears on the novel's criticism of the forceful workings of the social system. No doubt Woolf had in mind the political climate of her time when she uses the language of power relations—e.g. "tyrant"--in "Modern Fiction" to allude to

conventions that deter life.[25] Written a year after the end of the Great War and when the British Empire attained its greatest territorial extent, the essay has at its backdrop the experience of global events that would have given Woolf sufficient reason to deliberate on the issues of domination and power in altogether new ways and proportions. In fiction, the habit of domination would manifest itself in the ways in which art would instill a particular view upon readers, which Michael H. Whitworth equates with unilinear, "instrumental reason" and the refusal to acknowledge any "life independent of the material world to which [novels] refer" (110).

As suggested in the connotations of "tyrant," Woolf wages war against writing dictated by homogenizing, coercive operations that impress a particular view upon the reader—a practice which resonates with the social system at work "at its most intense," a centralizing impulse that the novel puts under critical scrutiny. In the novel, the workings of this tyrant find their equivalent in the practice of Sir William, a prominent physician, "a man absolutely at the head of his profession" upon whose mercy people in the "uttermost depths of misery" and "on the verge of insanity" (239) are thrown; he is authorized to make judgments about what needs to be done with the "unsocial impulses" (133), having as his support the police and the society. In other words, Sir William's treatment stands for the dominant culture's dealings with the remnants and reality of the Great War that naturalize its imposition of will upon its object. Hearing Sir William impart the news of Septimus's suicide to Richard Dalloway, Clarissa thinks:

> Or there were the poets and thinkers. Suppose [Septimus] had had that passion, and had gone to Sir William Bradshaw, a great doctor, yet to her obscurely evil,

> without sex or lust, extremely polite to women, but capable of some indescribable outrage—forcing your soul, that was it—if this young man had gone to him, and Sir William had *impressed* him, like that, with his power, might he not then have said (indeed she felt it now), *Life is made intolerable*; they make life intolerable, men like that? (242; emphases added)

At the heart of the "indescribable outrage" that Clarissa discerns in Sir William is his "forcing [one's] soul," "impressing" it to the extent that life would be made "intolerable." An unidentified narrator has earlier noted that this very logic that presides over Sir William's practice in "seeing [one] unhappy" (239) is accountable for a prosperous England which "secluded her lunatics, forbade childbirth, penalized despair, made it impossible for the unfit to propagate their views until they, too, shared his sense of proportion" (129). Through the two related albeit distinct moments in the text, the novel brings to light the form of subjection, as the mode of dealing with the Other, that cuts across the micro and macro levels of experience. Septimus's obtrusive death, an uncompromising defiance against receiving "the impress of Sir William's will" (133), counteracts the logic of "dominion" and "power" (131) upon which that will operates, debilitating life just as the habits of domination incurred deaths in the War.[26]

In a compelling analysis that compares Septimus's "deflation" against Sir William's "euphemism," Rebecca Walkowitz observes two distinct impulses presiding over the two contrary practices: the former's deflation, which names war a "little shindy of schoolboys with gunpowder," causes discomfort by its sarcasm and its refusal of mythification, exposing "the fatuous spectacle that 'war' covers up" (95); the latter's

euphemism—exercised when Sir William replaces the word "madness" with "not having a sense of proportion"—targets itself at erasing the disturbing element and works by making the replacement invisible (95). As befits his reductive method which operates on "mythification," Sir William reduces, quite sensibly, Septimus's suicide as "the deferred effects of shell-shock" and rounds it up by the statement that "[t]here must be some provision in the Bill" (240). Alex Zwerdling notes that Sir William's words represent the governing-class mentality which "translate[s] individual human beings into manageable social categories" (152): depersonalization, divesting the messy unethical content, makes the process of subjection easier.

In contrast to the coercive rhetoric that homogenizes by "mythification," the discomfort that Septimus provokes is cut loose and permeates the cityscape in the novel without being accounted for. Significantly, the strangeness of Septimus's presence is foremost noticed by Maisie Johnson, a newcomer to London, as the sight of him "g[ives] her quite a turn" (33); her look at "the man looking queer" (33) is then extended to the queerness of the whole scene of London—"all these people, . . . the stone basins, the prim flowers, the old men and women, invalids most of them in Bath chairs" (33-4)--so that Maisie feels urged to yell out "Horror! Horror!" (34) and cries to herself, "why hadn't she stayed at home" (34). The newcomer's perspective defamiliarizes the city in a way that marks a contrast to to the familiar Englishness that Peter Walsh, an expatriate colonial administrator in India just returned to London after five years, associates with the city and in which he finds solace: "A splendid achievement in its own way, after all, London; the season; civilization" (71). The London that the novel depicts thus

destabilizes the perspective from which it is engaged. Right before this scene, Rezia repeatedly implores Septimus to "look"—a word that begins six consecutive paragraphs--out of the intent to have him "notice *real* things" (32; emphasis added) as advised by Dr Holmes, but an urge which only summons to Septimus "that eternal suffering, that eternal loneliness" (32). These incompatible points of view are not closed off in Woolf's untidy space of the city.

Not surprisingly, the city's deviation from monologic discourse has often been considered side by side with the novel's explorations of intersubjective encounters or the self's multiple ways of relating to the world. A number of critics have attended to the novel's characteristic use of free indirect discourse, a slipping in and out of characters' consciousnesses through a third-person narration.[27] In particular, the problem of social relations, boiled down to the self's relation to the other, has been regarded as being embedded in the representation of the city. Snaith, for instance, attends to the ways in which the use of free indirect discourse negotiates public and private spaces and bespeaks a "resistance to stasis and definition" (87) in its way of traversing various points of view.[28] For Laura Marcus, the transitions from one consciousness to another aim at "the representation of the intersubjective" (28) which mirrors human relationships in the modern metropolis and the multiplicity of identities it generates. Snaith lauds the dismantling of the hierarchization of spaces implied in the method's embrace of varied voices, woven into the movements of the city; Marcus stresses the unboundedness of being brought into relief as the self constitutes a new relation to itself as it registers the shifts in the urban space. These readings highlight how the animation and evanescence

that mark the untidy city writes itself into the ways the self would relate to itself and the world.

In documenting queer lives in London in the first half of the twentieth century, Matt Houlbrook espouses the spatialization of history as being apposite to embrace the variegated nature of his subject matter. In his book, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures of the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957*, Houlbrook equally stresses his wariness about essentializing and universalizing accounts of London that reduce it to "a passive backdrop against which social and cultural processes are enacted" (4); he takes issue with overly simplified correlations drawn between urbanization and liberation, or city as a queer space (5). Proposing that "the modern metropolis is an *organic* and fluid entity that changes over time" (8; emphasis added), Houlbrook looks at how competing views of masculinity and sexuality have formed a queer urban culture which in turn has shaped the sexual practices of metropolitan subjects. Through his study, Houlbrook concludes that queerness associated with urban culture is never self-evident and cannot be stabilized; if anything, queerness points to how the city "was created and inhabited by men who were irreducibly different from each other," finally making it impossible to "discern a unitary and stable community in this world" (266).[29] Houlbrook's conclusion demonstrates how an account of history is bound up with the mode of engaging its subject matter. It affirms a non-appropriative stance in writing history, one that does not obscure the disparities that make up a space. In refusing to disband irregularities—the menacing aspects of the city, for instance, cannot cover up its popularly held significance as promising "pleasures"—Houlbrook's account not only defends the

"spatial turn" in recent historical studies as apposite for inscribing "the persistent differences and tensions" across space (6) but also theorizes history as movement, consistently destabilizing in nature.

In the final pages of *Mrs Dalloway*, Clarissa vicariously lives the moment of Septimus hurling himself out of the window. In defiance of Sir William's prescription of a rest cure—the culture's will to banish him from sight—Septimus enacts a spectacle by making himself a protruding throwaway in the city of London: "Up he had flashed the ground; through him, blundering, bruising, went the rusty spikes" (241). In its embrace of Septimus's mangled body, the untidy city becomes a testimony that the war cannot be summed up and let pass. The novel does not relate how his body, shattered and lying on ground, is cleared away. It seems somehow to hang about in the manner that, as related by Patricia Yaeger, the girls' mutilated bodies hover in the air in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*. In "Trash as Archive, Trash as Enlightenment," Yaeger attends to the particular moment in Morrison's novel in which Guitar gazes at the scraps of clothes in the air—evoking girls' blown up bodies during the bombing of 16th street Baptist Church—that "did not fly . . . [but] hung in the air quietly" (Morrison qtd. in 105). Debris is positioned, in this scene, as "a painful source of vision" even as that vision "suggests an economy so violent that it cannot be covered with art" (105). Debris, the "once-beautiful selves" not settling on earth but hanging about in the air, remains as lives that "cannot be encrypted or made epistemological" (106). Drawing upon the material presence of Septimus's torn up body in the cityscape of London without giving the body a fixed meaning, the novel presents his death in a way that

reverberates with the novel's configuration of a city that resists being stabilized but is constantly infused with life, marked by movement and motion. Septimus's death becomes a generative site, calling for responses, yet never settling into a self-evident, readily recognizable narrative.

By placing "life" at the core of an untidy London, *Mrs Dalloway* explores a mode of engaging the past that departs from a teleological or determinist trajectory. The insistence on leaving uncertainties unsettled not only informs Woolf's writing of the city and the War but is also a call for an expansive dialogic space that aspires to change independent of the materials that make up the text. Woolf's elaboration of life as a distinctive feature of the city calls to mind Walter Benjamin's use of *Erlebnis* (experience) in "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" to articulate how the element of shock—a quintessential feature of urban life—radically alters the nature of experience in modern life. Benjamin writes:

> The greater the share of the shock factor in particular impressions, the more constantly consciousness has to be alert as a screen against stimuli; the more efficiently it does so, the less do these impressions enter experience (*Erfarung*), tending to remain in the sphere of a certain hour in one's life (*Erlebnis*). ("Baudelaire" 163)

Benjamin's *Erlebnis*, in Leo Bersani's explanation, is "a 'passing moment' isolated from the past" (50): impressions are kept from being "fully integrated into their history" (49). Woolf's depiction of the untidy city configures the postwar self in isolation from tradition, established ways of knowing. Far from triumphant, this mode of destitution,

however, makes possible a registry of atoms as they fall, "however disconnected and incoherent in appearance" (Woolf "Modern" 9). Departing from totalizing and hierarchized systems of thinking, it is open to new planes of engaging. By virtue of movement which inheres in life, it harbors what is not here and arrived but hoped for.

Clarissa's Party and the Ethics of Reading

In the closing scene of *Mrs Dalloway*, Clarissa Dalloway reappears before Peter Walsh in her party after a brief retreat into solitude upon the news of Septimus Warren Smith's death. The third-person narrator relates this moment of Peter's encounter with Clarissa as "terror," "ecstasy," and "extraordinary excitement" (255)—a moment of intense feeling—which is consonant with Sally Seton's last words in the novel framed in a rhetorical question, "what does the brain matter . . . compared with the heart?" (255). The novel does not disclose Clarissa's thoughts in this final scene, but the reader can surmise that Clarissa's party, which enlivens for the three friends their passionate lives of the past of more than thirty years before, will come to an end and that they will resume the ongoing course of everyday life.

The novel thus closes in the middle of the party just as it begins *in medias res*, Clarissa setting out to the street to buy flowers for her party. Without a definitive closure, the ending is in keeping with the novel's ambience of motion. This very openness resonates with the state of uncertainty at which the novel leaves the readers: How do we construe Clarissa's party in view of what the novel has broached about the remnants of the War? What is the import of this momentary resurgence of the friends'

passionate lives at Bourton emphasized throughout the final pages? Is it an indulgent memory of their younger, iconoclastic selves, a past for which they yearn but to which they cannot return? This question is significant for two reasons: first, this return to the past in Clarissa's party is a heightened extension of what has been going on in the minds of Peter and Clarissa throughout the day; second, by placing the friends' reminiscences of youth right in the context of Clarissa's momentary seclusion to ruminate on Septimus's death, the novel intimates that there is a connection between the two. Based on the premise that the rejuvenation of the past selves of Clarissa, Sally, and Peter is intimately related to Clarissa's encounter with the alterity of Septimus, this connection bespeaks the ways the novel engages the War.

Literary criticism of *Mrs Dalloway* to date has not adequately construed the relation between the characters' preoccupation with their younger selves and the novel's social vision, and this has closely to do with the positing of a rupture of the past from the novel's present. For Kate Flint, the characters' retrospection of the early 1890s is infused with their nostalgia for "a better version of themselves, full of possibilities" (48), a sentiment to which Woolf was allegedly sympathetic; and if the past saturates the present, it only accentuates the longing for what is discontinuous with the present. Clearly, textual evidence more or less corroborates the differences between the past and the present. For all his socialist leanings in the past, Peter had "got himself to a mess at his age" (205) and thinks of fawning over Hugh, the obsequious snob, to help him get a post in the government; the romantic, reckless Sally, who shared with Clarissa the ideas of William Morris and who spoke against marriage and private property, has married an

immensely rich self-made industrialist and has five children: her past "lustre has left her" (225). Married to Richard Dalloway, who is a Member of a Parliament, Clarissa has long habituated herself to pull herself to "a meeting-point . . . never showing a sign of all the other sides of her—faults, jealousies, vanities, suspicions" (48), contrary to her prioritization of feeling in youth to the extent that she willed, in her ecstatic love to Sally and in the manner of Othello, "if it were now to die 'twere now to be most happy" (44).

Yet despite their apparent surrender to conventionality, the novel leaves room to draw a meaningful relation between these characters' past and the present, especially in terms of the propensity to feel deeply. Their life of the mind, indeed, finds its lingering trace in their present. The narrative repeatedly attends to Peter's susceptibility—"not weeping at the right time, or laughing either" (198). Mortified at having wept before Clarissa earlier that day, Peter blames this susceptibility for his "undoing" (198), but in the final pages, he lends himself over to the fullness of emotion that Clarissa's presence brings forth. Sally's sustained despair at human relationships has led her to have an anti-heroic view of life, one that likens human existence to a prisoner "scratch[ing] on the wall of his cell" (252). Against sheer helplessness, however, Sally finds meaning in one's "scratching" on the wall; and she ruminates that she "owe[s] Clarissa an enormous amount" (247) for the exuberance revitalized in her mind during her party. In Septimus's death, Clarissa's composure gives way as she comes face to face with what has long faded in her own life and acknowledges a profound sense of a lack—a lack of what makes life meaningful—voluntarily and involuntarily disguised in her everyday life. Although distinct from one another, these moments of strong feeling crucially

disrupt, in the words of Wollaeger, the "restrictive affective economy" (72) which dominant discourse seeks to enforce. The novel's inscription of these moments is consonant with the textual processes that invite readers to an *affective* engagement with the text for the making of its social vision.

In a seminal analysis of the novel, Alex Zwerdling similarly attends to this life of the mind as unsettling the stasis represented by the governing-class. It is her willing submission to the intense emotion Septimus's death calls forth that separates Clarissa, "who has surrendered to the force of conventional life" (160), from the rest of her class; and this submission makes possible Clarissa's moral imagination to relate to the alien and disturbing presences represented by Septimus, which the dominant culture conspires to deny. Although he qualifies the import of Clarissa's momentary connection with Septimus, Zwerdling places due emphasis on Clarissa's "responsiveness" as what sets her apart from the impassivity and inertia of the ruling class. Zwerdling suggests that the novel thematizes an impulse for change as a way of dealing with the deep scars of history by such a moment that recuperates the long "buried life of feeling" (164) and by calling attention to the debilitating price paid for oppressive denial. Zwerdling's nuanced reading aptly discerns what is lost in critical interpretations that unjustifiably gloss over the complexity of Clarissa's characterization. Karen DeMeester, for instance, reads plot movement as the basis of her conclusion that the novel fails to meaningfully intervene in postwar Britain, particularly the problem of war trauma. For DeMeester, Clarissa's sheer act of returning to the party after her solitary encounter with Septimus's death signals her recommitment to "a life, like Bradshaw's, devoted to perpetuating the

status quo" (210). By this return, DeMeester argues, the novel lets pass the opportunity for social change that Septimus, a martyr, opens up by his death.

DeMeester's reading crucially brings up the problem of our assumptions about a literary text as it relates to the real world. DeMeester seems to imply that in order to be an effective social intervention, the novel should *model* change in the particulars of its plot movement. This is all the more apparent in her high esteem of the testimony narratives of war veteran artists of the 1930s that detail a recovery from the trauma of the war in their ways of "restor[ing] order to the fragmented consciousness of the postwar world" and "rebuilding of identity" (214) within the writers' concrete depictions of experience. While her appraisal of testimony narratives demands a separate study, it seems plausible to infer that her reading is rooted upon the assumption that the social message of the novel exists to be discovered in the self-contained story world of the text. In what follows, I suggest that the social import of the novel emerges from the relational process between the text and the reader. In consonance with the novel's narrative mode of representing an untidy city that defies fixation and assimilation, I posit an untidy text that, far from being autonomous, makes possible a dialogic space open to various voices. By its very narrative mode, then, the text enacts a critique of a monologic discourse about the War.

Influential critics of Woolf's fiction have repeatedly affirmed textual untidiness in Woolf's fiction. In *Virginia Woolf and Postmodernism*, Pamela Caughie suggests that Woolf's *oeuvre* reveals the emphasis on the rhetoricity of literature: rather than positing that meaning resides in the text in a ready-made form for the reader to uncover, Woolf's

fiction "draws forth the reader's active involvement in [its] production" and "forces [the reader] to consider how meanings are possible, how they are produced" (12). For Caughie, *Mrs Dalloway* does not "unite us in some absolute *beyond* the moment but immerses us *in* the moment" (75). More recent studies on Woolf's fiction corroborate this view of reader as participating in the textual process. Rebecca Walkowitz observes how the making of "a more expansive, more entangled conception of war" (84) in *Mrs Dalloway* hinges on a particular kind of reflection—"independent, critical thinking" (82)—that the narrative elicits from the reader. The novel's evasive narrative mode, which may seem "less effective, perhaps, but from [Woolf's] perspective also less complacent" (82) prompts the reader to engage unfamiliar ways of thinking, which ultimately expands their views and fosters international sympathy. Melba Cuddy-Keane elaborates on how Woolf's writing introduces a "new flexibility of thought" with the view of diversifying public discourse. Through her employment of elements such as fantasy, irony, and whimsy—countering the qualities of straightforward, instrumental prose—Woolf modeled a discourse that is communal and dialogic, stimulating readers to "reach beyond [their] formed opinions" (243). In Tammy Clewell's study, this diversifying of reader's response comes in the form of an ongoing process of mourning found in Woolf's works such as *Jacob's Room* and *To the Lighthouse* which Clewell reads as a "rebellion against the aim of closure" (173). In "Consolation Refused: Virginia Woolf, The Great War, and Modernist Mourning," Clewell reads the novels' insistence on ceaseless mourning as gender reform, countering the schemes of mastery underlying the patriarchal tradition of memorializing practices. Far from aiming at

consolation, these novels get the readers involved in the process of thinking about violence. All of these studies underscore the role of the reader as constitutive of the meaning of the novel.

I look at this role of the reader in terms of his or her feeling with the sense of loss that pervades *Mrs Dalloway*. More specifically, I argue that the reader's state of destitution concomitant to her volitional relinquishment of naturalized systems of understanding is proposed as an apposite mode for engaging the alterity of the text and trauma of the past that it represents. The novel thematizes the breaking down of self through the process by which Clarissa submits to the alterity of Septimus. The moment in which Clarissa discerns her lack as being related to his despair and his suicide as her own failure is the novel's meticulous manifestation of a mode of being that bears alterity within itself. While this moment epitomizes the novel's sustained concern to gestate an ethical mode of relating to Otherness, its meaning can be construed in tandem with the middle-aged characters' resurgence of the life of the mind that unsettles the "restrictive affective economy" (Wollaeger 72) of the upper-class culture that have repressed the eruption of intense emotion. This moment is also an amplification of the repeated apprehension of an inexorable Otherness in Clarissa's life. The narrative relates the relentless process of aging in various instances, as in its conspicuous allusion to Clarissa's hair significantly whitened after a heart illness; Peter recounts Clarissa witnessing her sister Sylvia's sudden death by the accident of being hit by a falling tree, and connects this to her view of human existence as being at the mercy of unpredictable, spiteful Gods, Gods "who never lost a chance of hurting, thwarting and spoiling human

lives" (101); and she suffers a scathing self-consciousness about her own shortcomings exposed before others even as she is aware that she cannot drastically change. The novel, nonetheless, makes this anti-triumphalism meaningful by drawing it to bear on a more expansive view of the self. In the midst of her ruminations upon Septimus's death, Clarissa thinks with relief that "no pleasure could equal . . . this having done with the triumphs of youth" (243). Indeed, this process of shedding the self is at the heart of Clarissa's relation with the Other so that her youth, which marks an inaugural awakening of the self's ethical bearings in the world, cannot simply be summed up as a "better version" of Clarissa. The novel intervenes in the discourse about remembering the War in its theorizing of a mode of being that relates to alterity in a nonappropriative way. I argue that this mode of being, epitomized in the ways Clarissa creates conditions for alterity by staging her party and submits to the radical alterity of Septimus, is explored as the reader's ethical relation to the text and the event of the War. Through such exploration, the novel seeks to complicate and expand the meaning of the War to bear on the reader in the here and now.

Mainly tracing the consciousness of characters as they spend a day of June in 1923, *Mrs Dalloway* is essentially plotless. The reader anticipates, however, a party which is to take place in the evening; the party serves as a loose structural principle of the novel. As befits such a role in the novel, the party's thematic significance has been noted by various critics. Her party has proved pivotal in judging Clarissa a class-bound character. Clarissa's circle of intimates more or less confirm this view. While the practical-minded husband Richard demurs about her party, thinking that its excitement

would be detrimental to her weak heart, Sally objects to her being a hostess, deeming that such practice would only "encourage her worldliness" (98); reminded of Clarissa getting ready for her party among scissors and silks, Peter likewise reflects upon her being "worldly," "car[ing] too much for rank and society and getting on in the world" (99), an opinion which even Clarissa admits to. As it turns out, Clarissa's party makes visible the class differences between Clarissa, the hostess, and the working-class labor that goes into the party. Behind the scene of the party and guests, there is a great bustle tidying places and preparing food which the narrative puts on view such as the work of Lucy, Mrs Walker, Mrs Parkinson, Mrs Barnet, and Mr Wilkins for whom "one Prime Minister more or less [would not make] a scrap of difference" (216).[30] Based on such a gulf between the master and servants, Zwerdling notes the extent to which Clarissa's party is "strictly class-demarcated" (151).

Yet the narrative imperatively leaves room to think of Clarissa's party as other than a mere upper-class luxury. For one thing, Clarissa repeatedly goes through the reasons for giving a party, making her party a matter of weighty speculation. She places herself before the question—"what's the sense of your parties?"—to which she inwardly replies that they are "an offering" to life (159), for "[w]hat she liked was simply life" (158). This ardor for life seems surprising given Clarissa's abiding skepticism, which Peter imaginatively frames in her utterance that "we are a doomed race, chained to a sinking ship" (101); yet it is this self-same pessimism that convinces Clarissa of the imperative to "do [her] part," which is to "mitigate the sufferings of our fellow-prisoners . . . decorate the dungeon with flowers and air-cushions" (101). Clarissa's party-giving

is, indeed, an effort to stand up to acute negativity. This attribute of Clarissa reverberates in the scene of the party when she becomes agonizingly vulnerable to Peter's criticism:

> Why, after all, did she do these things? Why seek pinnacles and stand drenched in fire? Might it consume her anyhow! Burn her to cinders! Better anything, better brandish one's torch and hurl it to earth than taper and dwindle away like some Ellie Henderson! It was extraordinary how Peter put her into these states just by coming and standing in a corner. He made her see herself; exaggerate. It was idiotic. But why did he come, then, merely to criticize? Why always take, never give? Why not risk one's little point of view? . . . Life was that—humiliation, renunciation. (220)

For Clarissa, the party is a resistance against stagnation and passivity, an act of "giving" on her part. It is an attempt "to combine, to create" (159) by bringing together the presences dispersed but whose sense of existence Clarissa feels "quite continuously" (159), so that the party becomes a visual manifestation of the Others that make up one's life. As a brandishing and hurling, the party dispels Clarissa's ordinary relation to the outside world: breaking away from her habit of "see[ing] things through [Richard's] eyes" with "twice his wits" (100), Clarissa situates herself as an agent of action. This stepping down from her everyday pedestal, however, is far from triumphant. On the contrary, she is at her most vulnerable; the party is experienced as "humiliation, renunciation," a scathing of her ego. Clarissa's continued ruminations on her party being "too much of an effort" (223) reinforce the sense that her party is not mere

indulgence. By virtue of it, an arrestation is brought about, a staging of things and selves not governed by the logic that presides the actions of the everyday. It makes it possible "to say things you couldn't say anyhow else . . . [going] much deeper" (224). Resonating with Sally's untidiness, Clarissa's party thus produces alterity; as an "offering" to life, it mobilizes life's inherent unboundedness.

It cannot be denied, of course, that Clarissa's party is lavish from the perspective of utility or morality. In fact, she admits to the impossibility of "imagin[ing] Peter or Richard taking the trouble to give a party for no reason whatsoever" (159). In Georges Bataille's theory of consumption, luxury counts as a mode of "unproductive expenditure" along with sexual indulgence, gambling, drunkenness, waste—i.e., features that do not, on the whole, have an end beyond themselves. The forgoing features are generally suppressed in modern bourgeois practices; by contrast, the values of "sobriety, hygiene, duty, useful activity" (*Bataille* 23) have come to define bourgeois moral economy. Bataille, however, emphasizes the ways in which human activity cannot be reduced to utility or production: "A pint of beer after work may be explained as mere thirst, but the savouring of it remains a small token of useless, sovereign enjoyment, a moment *outside the bounds of a regulated existence*" (*Bataille* 23; emphasis added). In other words, it is by virtue of luxury and prodigality that one comes to an awareness of a space integral to our being that is other to the normative boundaries of everyday existence.

It comes as no surprise that Clarissa's moment of connecting to Septimus's death comes about during her party when she becomes most susceptible to Otherness. Clarissa

retreats into solitude, removed from the "party's splendor" (241). Thinking about Septimus's death, Clarissa vicariously experiences the materiality of his body thrown out of the window and hitting the ground. His being a complete stranger to her—she knows nothing other than what she overhears from Sir William, that his suicide has to do with "the deferred effects of shell-shock" (240)—Clarissa wonders what motive could impel one to fling life away. Her ruminations lead her to thinking about the question of living and death universal to human existence:

> They (all day she had been thinking of Bourton, of Peter, of Sally), they would grow old. A thing there was that mattered; a thing, wreathed about with chatter, defaced, obscured in her own life, let drop every day in corruption, lies, chatter. This he had preserved. Death was defiance. Death was an attempt to communicate, people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them. (242)

Seeing Septimus simply as another human being defined by mortality and confronted with problems that make life intolerable—the continual "wreath[ing] about," "defac[ing]," "obscure[ing]," "corrupt[ing]" of the thing that "mattered"—Clarissa discerns Septimus's despair, which in turn speaks to her own loss. The pangs at "the impossibility of reaching the centre" (242), blunted in everyday life, come alive to her. Rather than shirk away from the feeling of hurt, Clarissa commits to this moment of alterity to think about what is at the heart of the malaise, which brings her to thoughts about Sir William.[31] In attending to the affect of discomfort as a legitimate occasion to question the complacencies of her thinking and way of life, the thoughts of Clarissa

resonate with the novel's criticism of the workings of the social system strenuously keeping at bay "the unfit" (129) and "unsocial impulses" (131) at the expense of a livable life. Yet not stopping there, the narrative shows how Clarissa goes beyond such understanding to reflect upon herself:

> Somehow it was her disaster—her disgrace. It was her punishment to see sink and disappear here a man, there a woman, in this profound darkness, and she forced to stand here in her evening dress. She had schemed; she had pilfered. She was never wholly admirable. She had wanted success, Lady Bexborough and the rest of it. And once she had walked on the terrace at Bourton. (243)

Clarissa does not assume an objectifying stance with regard to Septimus; she simply sees his unhappiness as "her disaster" "her disgrace." As in a looking glass, Clarissa takes Septimus's death—and the deaths of the countless who have been relegated to the margins—to reflect back upon herself. She sees herself in her evening dress; she sees how she had "schemed" and "pilfered," complicitous with the dominant culture that have managed and banished the likes of Septimus Warren Smith out of sight. In turn, she lets the atoning reflection break down the sense of her wholeness. In her recomposed self, Clarissa comes face to face with her egotistical self behind her social life that has impinged on other lives and places it side by side with her epiphany in Bourton, her love with Sally which led her to desire the intensity of a fulfilling relation both to herself and to the Other. While she relates to Septimus's despair, Clarissa, to the end, refuses to project an all-encompassing—colonizing—sympathy on him, a stance which posits an epistemological certainty: as the narrator marks, "[Clarissa] did not pity [Septimus]"

(242). Rather, emphasis is placed on the way in which she is recomposed in this transaction, having made herself susceptible to the scathing encounter with the Other.

Overturning the seer-the seen (subject-object) dichotomy, this moment in which Clarissa institutes the Other to be the measure of herself aligns with the relationship between the reader and the text as written by Derrida:

> It was, in the end, the experience of this time of reading that I discovered . . . I was thus read, I said to myself, and staged by what I read; I found myself caught up in the time of [Marin's] time, inscribed, situated by this other present that was still his this summer. And my sadness, while trying to distinguish itself from his, could never really dissociate itself from it. (Derrida "Force" 189)

The reader, who has chosen to submit to alterity of the text, cannot be dissociated from what he or she has engaged. While the narrative comes to a close without revealing Clarissa's mind after this incident, there is an ethical import in the process by which Clarissa, as an act of free will, undergoes the experience of her world disintegrating at her feet.

Clarissa's moment of voluntary submission to the alterity of Septimus resonates with the engaged novel reader as conceptualized in the new ethical theories of the novel. In "Fiction as Restriction: Self-Binding in New Ethical Theories of the Novel," Dorothy Hale examines how the idea of the novel as "the genre of alterity and social diversity" (190) has been rethought after post-structuralism. What distinguishes the contemporary ethical theories from the old is the positing of the reading subject who engages in self-restriction—projection of oneself as being bound to the Other—by his or her own will,

which in turn "enables the apprehension of alterity" (189); and the process retains "the self-consciously unverifiable status of the alterity that the ethical subject seeks to produce" (190). What makes self-restriction ethical is the exercise of one's agency that goes into that choice: as Hale writes, "the novel demands of each reader a decision about her own relation to the imaginative experience offered by the novels" (189). Furthermore, the alterity produced by means of self-restriction remains unknown and uncertain; it is unassimilable to the self relating to it. Hale intimates the wider reaching consequences of this process when she notes that the alterity emotionally experienced by the reader can lead to the "recognition of alterity . . . outside of novels" and serve as "a positive basis of community and political reform" (190). Just as Clarissa's party is staging of an alterity that makes possible her subordination to Septimus's otherness, *Mrs Dalloway* serves as an untidy textual space that, with the literary elements specific to its discourse, invites and invigorates readers to engage affectively with the text and to commit to the act of renouncing their formed opinions; by such processes, the novel aims at a more expansive self that takes alterity to bear upon itself, a self committed to the making of a more livable world by its ethical mode of relating to otherness in the thoughts and practices in everyday life.

Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* intervenes in the discourse of its recent past, the War. Its temporal closeness to the event implies Woolf's concern to address how the event would be written and remembered. Positing a critical readership distinct from the "unthinking" masses assumed by the propaganda machine, Woolf makes the novel a dialogic space of varied voices. In place of a direct statement about the War, the novel

invites the readers to an affective engagement with the text and its representation of the event. This affective engagement is intimately connected to the novel's thinking of a mode of being that relates to otherness in a nonappropriative way. In the novel, this ethical mode of relating to otherness is gestated primarily in Sally's untidiness, which figures an expansive view of self which takes alterity to be constitutive of itself. Dismantling coercive, homogenizing habits of thought that the novel aligns with the violence of the War and the Empire, this untidiness informs Woolf's representation of the city, which is also an exploration of the writing of history that addresses and undercuts art's "constant vulnerability to recuperation" (Yaeger 114) à la Frederic Jameson. Finally, the untidiness characterizes the textual space which makes possible a relational transaction between the text and the reader—the *willing* reader—to envision the making of a more livable world in respect to both the self and the Other.

CHAPTER III

TOWARD AN ETHICS OF UNTIDINESS: COMMEMORATING THE HOLOCAUST IN D. M. THOMAS'S THE *WHITE HOTEL*

In her book *At the Violet Hour: Modernism and Violence in England and Ireland*, Sarah Cole defines violence as "almost axiomatically, a site of excess . . . to experience [it] in any register is to reckon with overflow—of pain, of bodily suffering, of helplessness, of sadism, of silence" (12). According to Cole, this excess became a provocation, a call for literary innovation in modernism. Visibility that characterized the violence of the early twentieth century is partly responsible for the endeavors of modernist literature to formalize violence—to take it as a crucial aesthetic concern.

The challenge posed to literary representation after the Holocaust massacres reflects a very different phenomenon. In place of visible explosions, one encounters an overflow of silence. Speaking of the Shoah, Jean-François Lyotard relates that the SS did "everything possible to remove all traces of extermination . . . [as] it had to be a perfect crime, one would plead not guilty, certain of the lack of proofs" (*Heidegger* 25). Such an insistence on complete annihilation, which Lyotard names "a 'politics' of absolute forgetting, forgotten" (25), continued after "Auschwitz." Lyotard points out that representing the crime is an efficacious means of this politics for the reason that representation involves inscribing the event. Only when an event is inscribed can it be forgotten, for inscription makes effacement possible; yet when the event is not inscribed "through lack of inscribable surface, of duration and place for the inscription to be

situated," it cannot be forgotten and remains as an "affection" that defies description (26). Lyotard does not negate the rationale for representation. On the contrary, he insists that "[o]ne *must*, certainly inscribe in words" but also that the inscription be done not "in view of saving the memory . . . [but] to try to preserve the remainder, the unforgettable forgotten, in writing" (26). In literary representation, the trace of the event should persist when writers represent the Holocaust in their works.

In *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, Lyotard elaborates on the ethical imperative to represent the Holocaust. In this book, Auschwitz is cited as an instance of the differend which is a concept used to address injustices that transpire in the context of language.[32] The differend denotes a radical dispute in which there is an absence of a common rule of judgment that can be applied to both parties in conflict, the result being that the wrong of the victim is not and cannot be presented (*Differend* 9). The silence that surrounds the Shoah is indicative of such a disempowerment of the victim, and intimates that "something 'asks' to be put into phrases, and suffers from the wrong of not being able to put into phrases right away" (13). Since the conditions of language make for injustices, Lyotard highlights the stake in literature, philosophy, and politics "to bear witness to differends by finding idioms for them" (13). New rules for forming and linking phrases are necessary to prevent the differend from remaining silenced. The call for language, however, is always upon the recognition that "what remains to be phrased exceeds what [one] can presently phrase" (13). In the realm of art, the emphasis on such recognition suggests that the possibility to institute new idioms to communicate the differends must remain open.[33]

Paul Ricoeur similarly argues for preserving the memory of the Holocaust in a way that does not exhaust its meaning. Alluding to the repeated protestation of Elie Wiesel, a Holocaust survivor and writer, that "the most elementary compensation that we may offer [the victims] is to give them a voice, the voice that was denied to them" (290), Ricoeur declares remembering to be a "*moral duty*" (290; emphasis in the original text). In Ricoeur's view, memory and narration are indispensable for both rescuing the horrible from forgetfulness and preventing the justification of suffering. As regards the latter, Ricoeur significantly alludes to the regressive stance underlying the theory of retribution that can be found in mythical religion and in some instances within biblical faith that interpret suffering as punishment.[34] Speaking against such a regressive stance, Ricoeur attends to "a forward-oriented instruction, an ethical call addressed to the action to be done tomorrow or right now" (291) in Torah. Ricoeur explains how the disparity in theological interpretation relates to the discussion of our duty to remember the victims:

> When the complaint of the innocent victims is no longer covered by justificatory arguments, this naked complaint is brought back to the stage of sheer outcry . . . Whereas the theory of retribution makes victims and murderers equally guilty, the lamentation reveals the murderers as murderers and the victims as victims. Then we may remember the victims for what they are: namely, the bearers of a lamentation that no explanation is able to mitigate. (291)

Whereas "justificatory arguments" that claim to give full explanation of the event level it off and obscure the wrong inflicted upon the victims, the restitution of the victim's voice

through memory and narratives would keep inexhaustible the monstrous dimension of the event.

If Lyotard and Ricoeur both actively affirm the task of preserving the trace of the horrible event, David Rieff's protestation in *Against Remembrance* bespeaks an antithetical view of remembering past wrongdoings. Having experienced the 1,395 day siege of Sarajevo as a journalist in Bosnia, Rieff acknowledges that we should not forget the past of horrible atrocities like the Holocaust; yet he contends that the world would fare better *without* postulating historical remembrance as a moral imperative. Rieff points out how such an imperative has often been twisted to fit political agendas, leading to cycles of retribution; more often than not, the imperative to remember incited a collective national memory that proved to be "actively dangerous" (45), as exemplified by the collective memory of the Serb defeat at Kosovo Polje in 1389 which led to genocide. Rieff fervently argues against remembrance on the grounds that, contrary to our belief, remembering violent history is not conducive to preventing its repetition. Such an argument also sheds light on the limits of our remembrance, namely that our memory is far from an all-encompassing account of the past.

The issue of remembering—and reconstructing—a violent history has thus been fraught with aesthetic and political concerns. The debate surrounding it foregrounds the plight faced by authors who take up the task of literary representation. If we agree that violence, even in all its unrepresentability, needs to be remembered, what is a "proper" way of remembering the barbarities of the past? How does one write about the past while preserving the remainder of the event and without exhausting the event of its

meaning? How does one write about the past in a way that does not erase its horrible dimension? How does one keep alive the scandalousness of an event in writing without endorsing, in one way or another, the structures that have made the violence possible in the first place? How does a literary representation of mass-scale atrocities reactivate in readers the consciousness of the event even as it forestalls perpetuating violence—for example, vengeance—and, by extension, makes it possible to imagine fundamental change?

As a work that commemorates the history of the Babi Yar massacre, D.M. Thomas's *The White Hotel* (1981) is intensely concerned with how we engage with the great violence of the past. Written in various and distinctive literary styles and narrative modes, the prologue and the ensuing six chapters that structure the novel are loosely tied by the experience of the half-Jewish Viennese opera singer, Lisa Erdman, in the interwar years leading to the Babi-Yar massacre. In the novel, Lisa's life is traced with such richness as can be matched with what the author appraises of Sigmund Freud's work—"the great and beautiful modern myth of psychoanalysis" in which one finds "a poetic, dramatic expression of a hidden truth" (*vii*). After Lisa's life helplessly expires in the manner of the other Jews who are "buried, burned, drowned, and reburied under concrete and steel" (253) in the ravine of Babi Yar, an unidentified narrator brings the reader's attention to the numberless and silenced dead whose "lives were as rich and complex as Lisa Erdman-Berenstein's" (250). The focal point of the novel, thus, shifts from the close-up of Lisa's experiences to a wide-ranging view of the lives whose stories have yet to be told. This moment, calling attention to the human faces of those lying as

heaps of corpses, vindicates the need to remember the event of the massacre and its victims.

In its lucid call to remember the Babi Yar massacre, D.M.Thomas's novel is an apposite site in which to investigate the foregoing issues about representing a traumatic historical event. *The White Hotel*, which on the one hand induces the readers to make a moral investment in the life of the imaginary character Lisa Erdman and on the other hand provides a documentary like depiction of the mass killings, serves to address the two main imperatives of representation propounded by Lyotard and Ricoeur—namely that representation should preserve the trace of the event and also keep alive the dimension of horror. In its sustained attention to an imaginary woman's life, the novel impresses upon the readers the profound irreducibility of human existence that marks a pointed contrast to the view of humans that underlies the Nazis' perpetration of violence; and after inducing readers to an affective engagement with Lisa's life, emphasis is placed on the fact that the untold stories of all the dead are "as rich and complex as Lisa Erdman-Berenstein's," so that "[i]f a Sigmund Freud had been listening and taking notes from the time of Adam, he would still not fully have explored even a single group, even a single person" (250). The comment brings to light the ultimate solemnity and uniqueness of an individual's life that cannot be swept away—"the remainder, the unforgettable forgotten" (Lyotard *Heidegger* 26).

The novel, on the other hand, also gives a jarring documentary account of the Babi Yar massacre that anonymizes and annihilates numberless individuals. A great part of the fifth chapter "The Sleeping Carriage" incorporates Anatoli Kuznetsov's *Babi Yar:*

A Document in the Form of a Novel which itself draws on the eyewitness testimony of Dina Pronicheva's experience of surviving the mass killings. Here the narrative strives for stark realism in its shift to "a recording camera" that indifferently records individuals reduced to piles of corpses in historical time. To be sure, Thomas's borrowing of Kuznetsov's work has been discussed to a great extent in the plagiarism debate;[35] yet his reliance on the "factualness" of Kuznetsov's account can also be viewed as an attempt to convey the horrible dimension of the event by bringing the event back "to the stage of sheer outcry" (291), in the words of Ricoeur.[36] As Thomas explains it, the adaptation of *Babi Yar* is also to the effect of a purposeful rupture in the novel in which the focus shifts from the individual to the anonymous victim, from "individual self-expression . . . to common fate," and "[f]rom the infinintely varied world of narrative fiction . . . to a world in which fiction is not only severely constrained but irrelevant" (*Times* 383).

To Hana Wirth-Nesher, the purposeful rupture between the two distinctive modes of representation evidences, much to the author's merit, Thomas's awareness of "the moral imperative to seek such a boundary" (25). Wirth-Nesher sees the consciousness with which the boundary is set as the grounds for vitiating the plagiarism argument. However, Thomas's conscious use of the the two seemingly incompatible ways of engaging reality—the affective investment in the imagined victim and the recording of the "factual"—more significantly deserves critical attention in relation to the novel's politics of remembering. Dipesh Chakrabarty's reading of Tagore's employment of "two radically contradictory modes of vision" (179) in his nationalist poetry sheds light on the ways in which the aesthetic moment in art has the potential to resist the

assumption that the political is solely aligned with realism and the prosaic. The political needs to be located in historical time and at the same time see beyond it—in Tagore's phrase, to "pierc[e] the veil of the real" (qtd. in Chakrabarty 172) which enables "displacing one frame of the real by another" (173). Positing the two modes of perception simultaneously at work intimates that "'imagination' can be both a subject-centered and a subjectless practice" (178). The inherent plurality of "imagination," in turn, "makes it impossible to see the political as something that constitutes a 'one' or a whole" (178). Chakrabarty's exegesis underscores the role of art to look beyond even as it engages the extant structure, pluralizing what constitutes the political. Not only is a critical commentary made on the historical barbarity, but there is also an impulse to conceive ways to recognize and redeem the value of what has been lost as a way to counteract the forces that have made the violence possible in the first place—which comprises a "restorative effort" (95), in the words of Dominick LaCapra. To LaCapra, going beyond the prosaic in art would mean envisioning ways to "assist in the effort to restore to victims . . . the dignity perpetrators took from them—a restorative effort in which historical discourse is itself engaged to some extent in processes of mourning and attempts at proper burial (important forms of working through the past)" (LaCapra 95). LaCapra calls for restorative effort in the context of voicing wariness of the overemphasis on "excess" in Holocaust discourse which, in his view, may foreclose the possibility of an "ethically responsible agency" (93). Imagining beyond the confines of given reality would be an ethical response to address the reality in a way conducive to forestalling violence.

In *The White Hotel*, the value of human existence as opposed to its extreme reification in the event of the Holocaust is espoused in the novel's engagement with the problem of Lisa's sexuality. From the outset, the novel is explicit in its concern to explore the subject of women's sexuality. The first two chapters of the novel are two documents of erotic fantasy composed by Lisa, based upon which the novel's Freud seeks to identify the source of Lisa's hysterical symptoms. The process by which Freud labels Lisa's elaborations of the libido as "untidy" and contains her writings within his theoretical framework instantiates the workings of hegemonic discourse that explain away the complexity of the individual in favor of sustaining the culture's ideal of seamless totality. The characteristic use of the term "untidy" by the novel's Freud resonates with the dominant ideology that pathologizes women's sexuality that stands outside the society's fantasy of wholeness and mastery. The negative connotation of the term is implied when the novel's Freud, with a notable tone of "rebuke" (114), requests that Lisa rearticulate the untidy content of her writing "in a restrained and sober manner" (114): untidiness is not taken for what it is, but rather calls for legitimation and control. Freud's use of the term untidy to describe Lisa's sexuality also calls to mind a semantically contiguous term, "dirty." The novel shows several instances in which the latter word is used. After being called a "dirty" Jewess by the sailors who sexually assault her, Lisa secretly enjoys the "dirty" word for sex in her private moments which evidences her internalization of the prevailing discourse on women's sexuality. Women's sexuality is thus repeatedly associated with words denoting the state of being unclean; the antonymic form of the word "untidiness," on the other hand, calls forth

"tidiness" as the standard to be met. Likewise, Lisa's untidy writing—her sexuality--is readily considered to be in need of sanitization, and Freud's treatment of Lisa epitomizes the culture's practice to "tidy" Lisa's sexuality at the expense of engaging the variegated aspects of her being and the significant moral stakes that her untidiness opens up. Freud's overreliance on the imperatives of his theory to construe Lisa's sexuality not only signals the overdetermined failure of his getting at the heart of her misery but also instantiates the very structural violence that has been the cause of her experience of suffering as a female.

One may question why there is so much emphasis on Lisa's sexuality. While the novel's Freud calls attention to the vulgarity and scandalousness of Lisa's erotic fantasy, sexuality is more or less an ordinary, tangible reality of the everyday for Lisa; and its direct effect upon the body also makes it a presence that is impossible to neglect. Bringing the problem of sexuality to the forefront can be seen as the novel's impulse to make political a problem that has been considered as being limited to the individual but which, in fact, has significantly impinged on countless lives; and by revealing Lisa's hysteria to originate not only in her experience as a woman living out structural injustices in her time but also in her prescient sense of the imminent Babi-Yar massacre, the novel suggests how the two instances of violence may be interconnected. The novel's approach to the historical atrocity of the Holocaust by way of looking at the minutiae of Lisa's "untidy" sexuality as manifested in everyday life forestalls abstracting the historical event and induces readers to view their own everyday practices and habits of thought in light of their implications in the wider field of violence.

If the novel delineates the process in which an individual's life is made unbearable and even annihilated on account of structural violence and the forces of history, it also suggests that an individual's life cannot be exhausted of its meaning. The novel shows how the problem of Lisa's sexuality cannot be summed up in the way the novel's Freud names Lisa's erotic fantasy as untidy. The variegated ways in which Lisa engages her sexuality are consonant with the novel's impulse to reach what lies beyond the socially defined subject. In this sense, Lisa's story opens, in the words of Slavoj Žižek, "the gap of what is 'in the subject more than the subject'. . . which resists interpellation—subordination of the subject, its inclusion in the symbolic network" (qtd. in Vine 209). Linda Hutcheon makes a related observation when she takes note of the novel's use of multiple points of view and narrative modes that destabilize Lisa's character. For Hutcheon, the novel's narrative technique "profoundly disturbs and disperses the notion of the individual, coherent subject and its relation to history, to social formation, and even to its own unconscious" (166). In his discussion of committed literature, Theodor Adorno politicizes such a dismantling of the subject in art by maintaining that it "deals with an extremely concrete historical state of affairs" (254). For Adorno, the most abstract art as we see in the *oeuvre* of Samuel Beckett better serves a critical function to the state of affairs than does art with overt social ends and which emphasizes topic and subject at the expense of aesthetic form and style. In Adorno's view, when political agenda overrides the autonomy of art in literature, art becomes liable to an assimilation to the empirical reality against which it protests. The very

elusiveness of Lisa's sexuality achieved by the novel's formal techniques, then, can be viewed as resisting the culture that seeks to homogenize women's sexuality.

The modes of representation in the novel thus serve to highlight an apparent untidiness in Lisa, but that untidiness does not denote being in need of control and sanitation. Lisa's untidiness diffuses a spectrum of the various aspects of Lisa's sexuality, the essence of which cannot be settled. Such a dispersion, actively brought out in Lisa's life after the phase of Freud's treatment, signals Lisa's refusal to allow the constraints of totalizing discourse to define her path in life. As is made apparent in the later chapters, for Lisa, the problem of sexuality is deeply relevant not only to her space of intimacy but to other areas of life—her stance on Jewishness, her thoughts about institutions, and her relation to others/otherness.

The ways in which the relation to her sexuality deeply bears on Lisa's thinking and practices in other areas of her life resonate with Joan W. Scott's discussion of how gender functions as a generative category that impinges on various social relations. In "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," Scott notes how gender, long conceived merely in terms of the relation between the sexes, was excluded from the debates on the issues of politics and power; the effect was to "endorse a certain functionalist view ultimately rooted in biology and to perpetuate the idea of separate spheres (sex or politics, family or nation, women or men) in the writing of history" (1057). Scott calls for the need to deconstruct the view of "man" and "woman" as fixed categories by "analyzing in context the way any binary opposition operates, reversing and displacing its hierarchical construction" (1066). Scott highlights the compatibility

of gender as a site to examine the process by which the illusion of coherence and consensus is wrought at the expense of ambiguities and opposite elements. In her discussion of gender identification, she writes:

> Repressed desires are present in the unconscious and are constantly a threat to the stability of gender identification, denying its unity, subverting its need for security . . . Conflict always exists, then, between the subject's need for the appearance of wholeness and the imprecision of terminology, its relative meaning, its dependence on repression. (1063-4)

By theorizing the practices of deconstructing contrived hierarchies and bringing out into the open the presence of repressed elements, gender attains the status of an analytic category to address and change problems that pertain not only to family and household but also to other social systems and political processes.

Akin to the role of "repressed desires" (1063) that disrupt the unity posited in gender identification in Scott's study, the untidiness of Lisa's sexuality disturbs the attempts to stabilize Lisa in the manner conducted by the novel's Freud. The untidiness of Lisa in the everyday that she lives out as a female and a Jew—the protean and fluctuating nature of her experience—contests structures that naturalize the reification of the individual. The problematizing role of the "everyday" as conceptualized by Gayatri Spivak is pertinent to the present discussion. Spivak contends that what lies "dormant and the uncritical in the everyday" ("Making" 782) serves to trouble the illusion of consensus wrought by the dominant powers in seeking to present themselves as coherent and unified. In The *White Hotel*, the everyday that illuminates aspects of Lisa's

sexuality that cannot be contained in a normalizing economy defies the logic undergirding totalizing ideology that sets up exclusionary borders against those othered by dominant discourse. The novel sheds light on the ways in which such exclusionary practices impinge on the possibility of living in harmony with oneself and with others, manifested in its depiction of Lisa's self-alienation and culture's brutal tendencies that underlie mass-scale atrocities.

Based on the assumption that the readers' response to the Holocaust significantly hinges on the novel's intimate portrayal of Lisa Erdman, this chapter pays close attention to the ways that *The White Hotel* invites readers to an affective and moral investment to the life of the female protagonist. In intricately tracing the untidy sexual life of Lisa in her everyday, the novel redeems her from the status of an objectified analysand who is subject to the imperatives of male-oriented discourse about women's sexuality, textual processes which align with the novel's *poeisis* that seeks to retain the trace of the disempowered victim. In other words, the novel intensely looks at the matter of gender and sexuality to delve into the habits of mastery and violence which it discerns at the heart of atrocities against the Other. Contra the operations of totalizing discourse, as represented by the treatment of the novel's Freud, to contain and make sense of the untidiness of Lisa's text and sexuality, the novel brings to light the variegated aspects of Lisa's personhood that cannot be reduced to a homogenized economy.

Not stopping at disclosing and condemning the structure in which violence is perpetrated, the novel portrays the process in which Lisa, arriving at a broadened conception of the self, dismantles the logic buttressing her victimhood. In relating to the

Other, Lisa alters the terms of thinking about moral wrongdoing when she makes herself susceptible to the suffering of others by relinquishing autonomy and atoning for violence. The novel's concern to reach outside the confines of the text to deliberate what makes for a moral response to a horrible past is elaborately explored in the way that Lisa practices such an ethics of untidiness. Thus, even though she is numbered among the silenced victims buried in the ravine, the novel ends with an affirmatory note in the last chapter, "The Camp," that imagines a world in which the ideal of seamless tidiness falters in favor of untidiness—brokenness and incompleteness—pointing to the possibilities of living in harmony with otherness.

Lisa's Documents and Sigmund Freud's "Frau Anna G."

Whether repelled or fascinated, readers of *The White Hotel* have attended to the profusion of sex scenes in "Don Giovanni" and "The Gastein Journal." The two documents, the first a poem and then the prose version of it, give graphic descriptions of sex abounding in the fictitious white hotel which include various types of lovemaking such as sex *à trois* and *a tergo*. The two chapters are preceded by a Prologue consisting of letter correspondence among members of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic circle. In one letter, the novel's Freud introduces Lisa's documents as "the expansion of her phantasy" (11) characterized by "gross expressions which her illness has dredged up from [a] normally shy and prudish girl" (10). Readers come to anticipate obscene sexual acts "given birth" (9) to by a female patient suffering from illness. As it turns out, carefree and boundless sexual gratification in the imaginary white hotel setting seems to

match the description of the place as "Eden before the Fall" (10) by Sachs, Freud's correspondent and fellow psychoanalyst. While differing in their focuses on what they notice about Lisa's texts, the two analysts agree upon the documents as being expressions of uninhibited sexual libido.[37]

While critics like Mary Robertson view Lisa's writings in a positive light, pointing out "what a healthy gesture it was for a woman of her time to write frankly and spontaneously about sexual desire" (469), the licentious scenes have been by and large appraised as "pornographic" by readers. According to Ronald Granofsky, for more than a decade since its publication, the reception of the novel was marked by a consensus about the book's pornographic character (45). In such criticism, "pornographic" denotes that "the object of desire is portrayed not as a co-equal in the production of mutual pleasure but as an empty and passive receiver of the forces of passion" (Granofsky 45). The argument for the book's pornographic character gained support especially because Lisa eventually becomes a victim of sexual assault at Babi Yar, as an SS officer cracks her genitals with a bayonet; the implications of the novel's earlier sex scenes come under critical scrutiny in light of this later event. Denigrating the novel as an example of literary pornography, Susanne Kappeler emphasizes that the novel, in the final analysis, delineates Lisa as a passive receiver of sexual violence. Alan Hollinghurst makes a case that the novel's careful deployment of pornography is vitiated by the rape scene, and the novel ends with "Thomas's creation of a female fantasy in which women see themselves as victims and/or sexual objects" (14).

What readers have further tried to explicate, beyond the blatantly sexual nature of Lisa's writings, is the juxtaposition of the erotic scenes with catastrophic events—deaths by flood, fire falling, and avalanche—in her fantasy, later found to be prescient visions of the Babi Yar massacre. In fact, the very idea of aligning sexual acts with adumbrations of the Holocaust has caused uneasiness among readers. In *Imagining Hitler*, Alvin Rosenfeld includes *The White Hotel* in his condemnation of Holocaust fiction and film since the 1970s for their ways of integrating erotic, comic and aesthetic themes which, in his view, downplay the historical and ethical significance of the Holocaust. Addressing such controversy, Granofsky contends that there is a compelling rationale for connecting the erotic scenes in *The White Hotel* to the novel's scathing statement on the Holocaust. In Granofsky's view, the representations of sex bear on "fictionaliz[ing] the pornographic construction of Nazi racial policy, to portray the process by which human subjects are transformed into objects ripe for extermination" (54-55). While Granofsky accedes to the novel's pornographic character, he suggests that it is not how Lisa is delineated but the Nazi ideology that accounts for it. Pivotal to Granofsky's argument is how the novel builds up Lisa's female selfhood. Contrary to critics like Kappeler who maintain that Lisa is portrayed merely as a woman "letting others do things to her" (89), Granofsky argues that the ways in which Lisa's life is granted complexity and human qualities like love and nourishment evidence the novel's affirmation of her will and agency. The multi-voiced structure of the novel, furthermore, "denies the kind of reification of the individual essential both to pornographic depiction and genocide" (53). On this view, Granofsky notes that Lisa's "individual tragedy is

made the more poignant for the very strength of the subjectivity that is violated" (53) in the Babi Yar massacre. Granofsky interprets the bayonet rape as the instance in which Lisa is scapegoated by the "pornographic" ideology in Nazism. Granofsky construes the victimhood of Lisa solely in terms of the Nazis' projection of their self-hatred on a Jew.

By emphasizing how the value of an individual's life is buttressed as a pointed critique against the larger "pornographic" forces of history, Granofsky effectively rebuts the charges by some critics that the novel practices "deeper pornography" by using "sensational" facts merely for aesthetic ends. Also significant is Granofsky's observation of the ways in which racist and misogynist violence come together in the pornographic mind underlying Nazism. In the words of Susan Griffin, for the Nazis and their collaborators, race and sexuality evoke their "horror of nature's power to generate life" (qtd. in Granofsky 52), which becomes the reason for the Nazis to perpetrate violence. Belonging to the realm of nature and posing a challenge to the human claims for mastery, race and sexuality are disturbing to the Nazis because they are outside human control. Although compelling, Granofsky's discussion of violence is limited to what transpires in the massacre; thus, he does not explain how Lisa's life is saturated with violence from a much earlier phase. As a corollary, in Granofsky's reading Lisa's hysterical pain finds meaning only as the precognitive awareness of the Holocaust and not as a manifestation of the suffering she faces in everyday life on account of structural violence. Granofsky's argument significantly narrows the import of the sexual theme in the novel; in his account, the sexual theme is reductively subsumed under the discussion of how culture represents its fear of nature. As a result, the intricacies of one's

experiences regarding sexual life that are given expression in Lisa's erotic fantasy are duly emphasized. While he aptly attends to the redeeming qualities that are granted Lisa in the later course of her life as counteracting objectification of the individual, Granofsky also fails to see how such changes in Lisa's life emerge in the process of her grappling with the problem of her sexuality.

Upon a closer look, one cannot but notice the explicitness with which the problem of sexuality is given prominence in *The White Hotel*. Readers are presented with the sexual fantasy of a woman in the first two chapters of the novel, and that fantasy is explicated by no other analyst but Freud with his psychosexual theory; the later chapters, too, build upon the dynamics between Lisa's sexuality and personhood. In fact, one sees a movement in the novel whereby other structural violence is approached by way of the novel's exploration of the problem of Lisa's sexuality. The critical tendency has been to call attention to the sheer scandalousness of the novel's sexual theme or to treat the problem of Lisa's sexuality as being subsidiary to the topic of the Holocaust. However, this chapter makes a case that the author's choice to delineate the intimate sphere of one's life as being intertwined with the greater forces of history offsets the pitfalls of abstracting the historical event, to make it seem detached from the minutiae of everyday life. An important discussion that this chapter broaches is the ways in which Lisa's ethical practice in addressing a public issue of violence stems from her own lived experience of suffering in the everyday as a female and a Jew.

But why? Why the problem of a woman's sexuality as a way to broach barbaric wrongdoing? For Lisa, sexuality is unignorable in day-to-day existence. Potentially

uncontrollable and spontaneous, it is a reminder of Lisa's reality of living in the body; and this reality universal to human experience dissuades one from thinking that the difficult issues it involves are merely peculiar to Lisa. The commonality of sexuality, however, masks its vulnerable nature as what can easily place an individual at risk. By showing how the cultural norms of sexuality infiltrate everyday thinking and are held significantly accountable for Lisa's suffering, the novel extends its exploration of her sexuality to tracing the mechanism of violence that naturalizes dominant ideology and imperils individuals that stand outside of the society's fantasy of wholeness. In this sense, bringing the problem of Lisa's sexuality to the forefront as a subject in its own right can be seen as a way to counteract "the attempt by dominant patriarchal cultures to make [women's] sufferings seem marginal to the history of the human race, to make their historically and materially particular fates seem unrepresentative of the wider culture's depraved condition" (Robertson 465). In other words, it seeks to make political a problem that has often been overlooked as being specific to the individual, and in the process illuminates a pattern of oppression that can be found across different instances of violence.

In the imaginary Freud's case study of Lisa's hysteria which comprises the third chapter entitled "Frau Anna G.," one encounters the workings of the hegemonic discourse whereby Lisa's sexuality is sweepingly tidied up.[38] Lisa's erotic fantasy as a text is literalized in her writings in "Don Giovanni" and "The Gastein Journal." As an analyst endowed with the interpretive authority of Lisa's texts of sexual imaginings, the novel's Freud casts the two documents in light of his theory of psychosexual

development posited as being universal to human experience. Diagnosing that the "untidiness" of Lisa's texts is a symptom of her illness, the novel's Freud seeks to give a tidy explanation to the overflow of "irrational and libidinous" (114) thoughts given expression in them as a crucial part of her treatment. He decides that Lisa's hallucinations and pain in the breast and pelvic region are pathological symptoms incurred by past experiences which are in need of a "scientific" explanation.

From the outset of his "treatment" of Lisa, the novel's Freud emphasizes the utter scandalousness of her writings, especially in light of social morality. Appalled by the gaudiness of the verse which Lisa wrote on the score of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* at his casual request to write about her trip to Gastein, Freud opines that "[h]ad Frau Anna's version of Mozart been sung in any of our opera houses . . . the house manager would have been persecuted for the abuse of public morals; for it was pornographic and nonsensical" (113). When Freud subsequently asks his patient for a more sobered annotation of the poem, what he gets in response, "The Gastein Journal," is no less diluted of its scandalousness. The psychoanalyst elaborates on his consternation:

> I saw that, instead of writing an interpretation, as I had asked, she had chosen to expand her original phantasy, embroidering every other word, so that I seemed to gain nothing except the herculean task of reading a document of great length and untidiness . . . [H]ere was still an erogenous flood, an inundation of the irrational and libidinous. (114)

As it turns out, Lisa's second document by no means answers Freud's hopes for a more restrained explanation of the erotic fantasy dispersed in the first document. For the

novel's Freud, the insistent untidiness of Lisa's document and its overflow of the libido stand for her sexuality that both eludes and defies the confines of sexual propriety, providing a rationale for his psychosexual theory. As "a man of science" (111), he takes apart Anna's document through the lens of his theory about a child's first years that he spells out to be universal to human experience (116). The novel's Freud correlates the erotic drive, given free play in the white hotel, to Anna's desire to be one with her mother once again, and reads the catastrophic events in her fantasy as standing for the doomed nature of such pleasure. Upon a close analysis, the novel's Freud comments that Anna's writings lend support to his theory which is elucidated in his essay "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," namely that "an extreme of libidinous phantasy [is] combined with an extreme of morbidity" (8): the conservatism of human instincts is such that all living things "mour[n] for the "inorganic state" (129) from which they have emerged. Anna's hysteria, far from being peculiar to her, is thus interpreted as an amplification of "a *universal* struggle between the life instinct and the death instinct" (129). Giving commonplace examples in which the two contradictory impulses are simultaneously at work—how it is so often the case that the moment of climax, for instance, also signals a downfall—the novel's Freud ascertains the universality of the seemingly incompatible impulses that pervade Lisa's fantasy and qualifies his former view that she is "a woman separated from the rest of us by her illness" (128).

Freud's explication, however, is far from settling Lisa's case, evidenced in the fact that it does not resolve the psychosomatic symptoms that have caused Lisa to come for treatment. Yet such a shortcoming is doomed given Freud's overreliance on the

imperatives of his theory to make sense of the untidiness of Lisa's sexuality, which forestalls his getting at the heart of Lisa's misery. Thus, even when Lisa adds details about her past life that might alter his analysis—such as her childhood experience of witnessing her mother commit incest with Uncle Franz, the husband of her twin sister, or feeling lonely at the news of the pregnancy of Madame R., her close acquaintance--these added details, again, are recast in terms of Freud's psychosexual theory. Freud explains that her mother's incest and death proved felicitous to the four or five-year-old Lisa who, like "every little girl" who has reached the Oedipal stage, harbored the desire to "bear a child to her father" (138); and Lisa's somatic symptoms have been caused by her troubled conscience by the ensuing events—her father's harshness to her and the realization of her mother's badness (139)—that have come to be buried in her unconscious. Freud further comments that Lisa's hysteria is originated in the "hatred of her distorted femininity" (140). He notes that although Lisa is loath to acknowledge it, he is convinced of the "homosexual component" (141) in her relationship with Madame R. When Lisa voices disagreement with his remark about her unacknowledged lesbianism, Freud appeals to her sense of morality, emphasizing that her illness is the very "evidence of her moral character" (135) which cannot tolerate such a transgression. In sum, Freud is far from retracting his view but seeks to convince Lisa of the validity of his interpretation.

It may seem plausible to attribute Freud's misjudgment to Lisa's omission of crucial details during her therapy, such as her anxiety about her Jewish identity. However, despite the multiple instances of anti-Semitism dispersed in Lisa's writings,

not for once are they noted by Freud; and even if Lisa straightforwardly addressed her anxiety about Jewishness—the awareness of which was only latent at the time of treatment—it is highly plausible that given Freud's predetermined analytical lens and his emphasis on the "universal" nature of human experience, he would not have taken into meaningful consideration factors specific to nationality, race, or gender. Such a characterization of Freud in the novel matches the historical Freud in whom Wirth-Nesher discerns the "desire to transcend the boundaries dividing mankind . . .[and] the preoccupation with the self apart from collective identity" (25).[39]

As it turns out, not only is the conclusion proffered by Freud about Lisa's case revealed to be erroneous by later events, but more crucially, Lisa is alienated in the discourse where her pleasures, imagination, wit, impulses, suffering, and unaccountable prescience that pertains to her hysteria are sweepingly tidied up in terms of the theory of Freud. The analysis by the novel's Freud also proves to be misleading in that it turns away from significant moral stakes broached in Lisa's untidy narrative, issues that bear on structural violence later epitomized in the brutality of the Babi-Yar massacre.

The untidiness of Lisa's sexuality partly stems from the fact that her sexual self is often at strife with the internalized norms of propriety. This strife, as will be examined in a later discussion, shows that Lisa's suffering as an individual occasioned by the domestic discourse on women's sexuality is also intricately intertwined with the conception of her Jewishness. Yet Lisa's untidiness, to a significant extent, also originates in her prescience of the Babi-Yar massacre, an event that exceeds her cognizance or experience. Her suffering as a private individual and her suffering on

account of the future public event are brought together in her bodily symptoms as interrelated forms of violence inflicted against the Other. The problem of Lisa's sexuality, as approached in both her texts and in the later course of her life, represents an individual's existence as a convergence between the private and the public as well as as the site of incommensurable impulses that cannot be totalized. In this sense, the very untidiness that characterizes Lisa's sexuality is integral to the way the novel calls attention to the profound irreducibility of human existence. The novel's emphasis on the aspects of an individual refractory to social categories bespeaks the imperative to see human subjects for what they are as opposed to ideologies that obliterate the human face.

Although the later chapters in the novel meticulously delineate the movement by which Lisa comes to an awareness of her selfhood as separate from the socially defined individual that caused her much misery, the novel imperatively sheds light on the devastating effects of structural violence. When Lisa writes to Freud eleven years after the treatment, she includes omitted details of an incident that she comes to think of as crucial. Lisa recounts that her initial firsthand sexual encounter was an assault by sailors, the experience of which doubly wrecked her sphere of intimacy. This moment—"[her] baptism on the ship" (187)--in her adolescence had a defining impact on her juvenile conceptions about sexuality and the sense of her Jewishness. The sailors, whose merchant ship carried grains for Lisa's father, recognized her, foremost, as the daughter of the *Jew*: not only did they revile her verbally by calling her a "dirty Jewess" but forced her to commit acts of oral sex with them which they claimed to be "all [she] was good for" (188).

To the young Lisa, this event of sexual initiation became the basis of her self-abasement: she feels shame about her Jewishness and her female body which is reduced to a dishonorable, "dirty" object at the disposal of men. Far from having the means to deflect this wrongdoing, Lisa internalizes degradation at the expense of a healthy sense of self with respect to both her Jewishness and sexuality. To her horror, Lisa feels strangely aroused as she repeats to herself "the words [the sailors] had used, re-enacting in [her] imagination what they had forced [her] to do" (188). Subsequent events in her life further disclose how the experience of the sexual assault structured Lisa's budding conception of her sexuality and Jewishness. After the traumatic shipboard episode, early experiences of sex are for Lisa embattled scenes with hallucinations that conjure up, at the same time, fears about her Jewish identity. On the one hand is her desire for intimacy; thus, her sex with Alexei, her first love, is described by Lisa as "the joy of being completely at one with the man whom I loved" (186). Yet Lisa simultaneously hallucinates about fire, and describes her experience as her having "'fallen'" (101)—a term compatible with Freud's description of it as her "youthful *sin*" (emphasis added 102).[40] Lisa's first marriage is an amplified version of such fears—"a complete disaster" in which every instance of sex accompanied with it hallucinations that "during this period pressed upon her constantly" (123). Her mind has become so conditioned to self-hatred and to fears of anti-Semitism that she understands her husband's words "I love you" as 'I hate you'" (190). Whether thinking in terms of sexual purity outside of marital relationship, or in being reminded of her Jewish identity with a sense of revulsion, Lisa's sphere of intimacy is deeply marred by the social definition of herself

as a female and a Jew. The connection that Lisa draws between the experience of the sexual assault and her sexual life suggests how this trauma would have been constitutive of the profusion of deaths and "irrational" instincts in her fictionalized white hotel.

Although the intensity of Lisa's self-hatred in light of such social judgment mitigates with years, moments of self-censorship about her sexuality recur in the later stages of her life. The question "Am I too sexual?" frequents both her writings and her conversation with Freud; troubled by "sexual hungers" (173) during sustained celibacy, she feels obliged to deny them, thinking "it was much more peaceful to be pure [. . .] not to say, neuter" (174); counting the number of men she slept with, she denounces herself for being so "promiscuous," readily categorizing herself among women of "who [sell] their favors" (174). Just as the novel's Freud feels inclined to give coherence to the "untidiness" of Lisa's text with his theory, Lisa repeatedly casts her sexuality in light of standards of social morality which often leads to a negative labelling of herself.

Lisa thus becomes unwittingly complicitous with the binary and hierarchical thinking that buttresses the cultural view of untidiness when she uses that social judgment against herself. While she finds herself unsatisfied with the tidy explanation that the novel's Freud gives about her hysterical symptoms, she constantly places herself under the frame of social judgment of women's sexuality. At the same time, however, the insistent untidiness that informs Lisa's writing as well as the "irrational" impulses that repeatedly make their presence felt in her everyday suggests the impossibility of settling with an explanation for her sexuality. As the product of "an inflated imagination that *knew no bounds*" (114; emphasis added), Lisa's writing is untidy in the sense that it

uncouples the symmetrical relationship whereby one signifier unequivocally corresponds to a signified. A metacritical moment appears in "The Gastein Journal" when the lodgers in the white hotel ludicrously attempt to give rational explanations to various odd phenomena:

> A Lutheran pastor said hesitantly that he had seen a breast flying through the yew trees when he had strolled up to the church one evening before dinner. "I thought at first it was a bat," he said, "but the nipple was clearly visible" . . . A heavily busted woman with greying hair said that she had recently had a breast removed because of a growth. Major Lionheart thanked her for her frankness, and there was a low murmur of sympathy. Vogel, looking distinctly yellow, said he *thought* he had seen a petrified embryo floating in the lake shallows, but it could just as easily have been a piece of fossilized tree. His sister, beginning to weep, confessed to an abortion, ten years ago. (56-7)

To the male lodgers' account of witnessing oddities, women lodgers repentantly respond with confessions about the past. The facetiousness of the scene is calculated: "a breast flying through the yew trees" might also have been an ordinary bat flying; what Vogel "*thought*" (emphasis in the original text) was a petrified embryo "could just as easily have been a piece of fossilized tree." The ways in which the female lodgers' "out" intimate facts about their body and place them at men's disposal—their judgment—are reminiscent of Lisa's treatment. The farce of the scene, revealing the symbolic attachments as contrived and narrow, curiously resonates with the failure in Freud's interpretation.

Thus, "Frau Anna G.," the third chapter that gives Freud's account of Lisa's case, appeals to the readers' desire to make sense of "inexplicable occurrences" (58) in the fashion of the lodgers only to reveal the desire to be misplaced. Freud's effort to contain Lisa's unruly instinct—to "glimpse a *meaning* behind the garish mask" (115; emphasis added)—through the imperatives of his discourse turns out to be a misguided enterprise. As Lisa confesses later, the point of departure for writing out her fantasy was to be "honest to [her] complicated feelings about sex" (183), a desire to see her sexuality for what it is. While Freud's treatment exposes the attempts to assimilate the unassimilable at the expense of an "honest" response, Lisa's refusal to be defined by the structural violence finds expression in the moments in which she is willfully untidy, in her choice to actively summon a space unviolated by the culture's assimilation.

Reconfiguring Untidiness: Contesting the Principle of Thrift

After reading the first few pages of Chapter 4, "The Health Resort," readers come to match Frau Elisabeth Erdman's person with "Anna" in the previous chapter "Frau Anna G." The disclosure of the actual name of Freud's patient Anna for the first time in the novel, along with the chapter's omniscient third-person narrative point of view, indicates a shift in the perspective from which Lisa will be viewed. As it turns out, apart from the fact that she is still subject to occasional breathlessness and pain in the breast and the pelvic region, Lisa is portrayed more or less as an ordinary, unremarkable woman living in Europe in the interwar years rather than as someone primarily recognized for, in the words of the novel's Freud, "irrational and libidinous" (114) and pathological conditions. Starting from nine years after Freud's treatment, the

chapter about Lisa's middle-aged life from 1929 to 1936 covers her resumption of her career as an opera singer and her love relationship with Victor Berenstein, a Russian Jew. Included in this chapter, too, is her correspondence with the novel's Freud who asks for her permission to publish "Don Giovanni" and "The Gastein Journal." In this chapter we see that although Lisa has consistently refused to subscribe to Freud's interpretations of her symptoms, the process of treatment provided Lisa the occasion to look deeply into her own condition. As a result, Lisa feels indebted to Freud for the newly gained perspective about her life which in effect has made life more bearable for her. The chapter ends with bright prospects as Lisa begins a happy family life in Kiev with Victor and her stepson Kolya.

Perhaps due to its comparatively banal portrait of a woman in everyday life, "The Health Resort" has received less critical attention than the other chapters which triggered controversy for their representations of sex, the Holocaust, and the afterlife. The chapter has been mostly discussed in terms of its redeeming characterization of Lisa. Being granted compensatory qualities like love and nourishment, Lisa is shown to have developed "a well-defined sense of self" (Granofsky 51); in explicitly voicing her divergence from Freud's interpretations, Lisa becomes the mouthpiece for the novel's critique of "modes of reason . . . that actively depend on a system of hierarchical binary oppositions by which Western white man inevitably dominates" (Michael 73); on a similar note, what stands out here is "Thomas's effort to portray [Lisa] as a powerful agent who continually transgresses the absolute dichotomies of 'male' thinking" (Robertson 468).

In this phase, indeed, we see that Lisa has gained a significant measure of independence from the constraints of prevailing ideologies that caused an internalized stigmatization of herself in her younger years. Her loving relationship with Victor Berenstein epitomizes the extent to which she is liberated from the sense of self-abasement occasioned by gender norms and anti-Semitism. In reply to the proposal of marriage by Victor, Lisa writes like "a lovesick girl of the 1820s, foolishly and recklessly laying bare her heart to a loveless cynic" (207). In this passionate composition in the style of Tatiana's letter to Onegin as befits their profession as opera singers, nothing comes between Victor and Lisa outside the commonplace feeling of inadequacy that the lovesick feels toward their loved one.

> That night you kissed me—then, I knew you
> Might make the frozen torrent flow.
> Who are you? Angel of salvation,
> Or an insidious temptation?
> And who am I? A still naïve
> Young girl in wrinkled flesh: you, only,
> In marrying, might have cause to grieve. (206)

While Lisa thus gives expression to the fulfilling passions of love, she also voices timidity about her age, a recurring topic in the chapter that reflects the society's view on middle-aged women. Neither her "untidiness" nor her Jewishness, apparently, gets in the way of thinking about their relationship. In contrast to her former estrangement from her father on account of his Jewishness, she is not hesitant to marry a Jewish man, which

signals a change in her view about Jewish identity. Lisa takes her passion for a man—which makes her breast "all on fire and [unable to] rest" (205)—on its own terms. In her choices in life we see that Lisa refuses to follow the dictates of dominant ideologies. By tracing the path in which Lisa diverges from the mainstream discourse on sexuality and Jewishness, the novel defies the view that posits the individual as a unified subject.

Why the insertion of such a redeeming phase, especially if Lisa will mercilessly end up in the ravine of Babi Yar in the next chapter? Is it the novel's humanism, to sympathetically compensate for the previous or imminent suffering of our protagonist, to resist her utter victimization to structural violence? While he applauds the "sympathetic realism" that characterizes the later chapters such as "The Health Resort," Alan Hollinghurst maintains that the achievement is undermined on account of Thomas's overreliance on the prearranged dichotomy of the Eros/Thanatos as the structure of the novel:

> The bold Eros/Thanatos diagram Thomas is intent on constructing is achieved at the expense of the sympathetic realism of the later parts of the novel, and the details of Lisa's end conform to a literary and superimposed theme. Thomas tries to justify this by giving her powers of precognition, so that the catastrophe will seem a predictable fulfilment of Lisa's fantasies of penetration and of being buried alive—when, in fact, it has nothing to do with them. (14)

In Hollinghurst's view, Thomas is so intent on building up the novel's bifurcated structure of Eros and Thanatos—Lisa's erotic fantasies and the deaths in the Holocaust—that the sympathetic realism in the later chapters seems to be out of place.

Lisa's precognitive powers are perfunctory, a contrived medium to connect the details of her life during this phase to the pre-established dichotomous design. What is implied in Hollinghurst's reading is that the sympathetic realism of the novel that we see in "The Health Resort" is not effectively drawn to significantly bear on either Lisa's erotic fantasy or the event of the massacre which make up the bipartite structure.

Hollinghurst's reading resonates with the prevailing tendency to read the delineation of Lisa in "The Health Resort" either in relation to the discourse on sexuality and gender (Michael and Robertson) or as a critique of the Nazi ideology that annihilates the humanity of the victims (Granofsky). Yet as the following discussion examines, "The Health Resort" illuminates how the building up of the two significant themes in the novel—the subject of Lisa's sexuality and the historical event of the massacre—are interdependent and how the interrelatedness is wrought by the redeeming characterization of Lisa. The revelations made by Lisa as she looks back upon her past treatment in this chapter brazenly debunk the framing of Lisa's untidy texts by the novel's Freud. Lisa's belated confessions about the intent and circumstances of composing the texts, as well as the engaged manner with which she relates to the problem of her "untidy" sexuality, nullify the imperative for a tidy explanation that governs Freud's case study in the previous chapter. Contrary to Freud's intent to settle on an interpretation, the motive for Lisa in writing her texts was to be "honest to [her] complicated feelings about sex" (183); as a result, Lisa's texts are marked by the desire to diversify meaning, to recast "naturalized" associations between things and what they signify. Such a drive for diversification is Lisa's refusal to be implicated in the domestic

discourse about women's bodies and serves as a critique on the worldview that homogenizes and objectifies the human. "The Health Resort" reveals that far from seeking to "undo" Lisa's untidiness, the novel foregrounds the ethical implications of putting into play her untidiness, and such a process opens up for Lisa the occasion to ruminate on the moral dimension of her experience and view herself in a wider web of relations.

A detail in the chapter that received much critical attention is when Lisa discloses in a letter to Freud the fact that contrary to his belief that "Don Giovanni" was written at his request, she actually wrote it much earlier in Gastein when she "phantasized most dreadfully about [a] young waiter" (183). In other words, the writing was designed to set loose a strong physical desire that would not be checked but with which she was willing to engage. The composition of "Don Giovanni," from the outset, was singly motivated by herself. Interestingly, Lisa tells Freud that the verse was not her first writing, but that she had before written "terribly bad poems and a private diary" (189). Contrary to Freud's former explanation that the licentiousness of "Don Giovanni" and "The Gastein Journal" was due to an illness of a "normally shy and prudish girl" (10), we see that Lisa had a habit of writing from much earlier on, not merely as a miserable, suffering woman but also with a mixture of pleasure and curiosity. We also find that these writings were not without readers. Lisa purposefully set it up so that her Aunt Magda would read "Don Giovanni," and is thrilled to anticipate her Aunt's response as she would come to recognize her niece by means of what is revealed. When Lisa catches her Japanese chambermaid reading her diary, it leads to "[their] lying on the bed

together, kissing" (189), after their initial mutual embarrassment. In these instances, Lisa is exhilarated by small experiments with her sexuality. She is not hesitant to extend such ventures to a male readership, as she specifically mentions to Freud that at his suggestion to write something, she "thought [she'd] try [him] with the verses" (183) which leads to her copy of them in her score of *Don Giovanni*. Willfully "terribly bad" (189), Lisa's writings undercut the seriousness of art—written "craz[ily]" (183) in the score of an opera—and lack a sense of closure.

It would be misleading, however, to overemphasize the liberating aspect of Lisa's untidy writings. The young woman in "The Gastein Journal," purportedly a version of Lisa, admits:

> She admitted to thinking about [sex] almost all the time. She even enjoyed, in her heart, the *dirty* word for it . . . And other words she was ashamed even to know. She rejoiced in them because they were so dirty. She had never told anyone else about this wickedness of hers. (82-3; emphasis added)

The young woman conceives of sex as "dirty" and secretly indulges in the dirtiness. The use of the word "dirty" to designate sex brings to mind the earlier incident in Lisa's life in which she was named a "dirty Jewess" (188) by the sailors and was sexually assaulted. As examined earlier, the traumatic event had a negative impact on Lisa's conceptions of herself as a woman and a Jew which led to self-hatred. The word "dirty" and the woman's "rejoicing" in it in the cited passage echo a previously addressed scene in which Lisa, much to her horror, finds herself aroused as she privately reenacts the moment of revilement and assault. The indulgence in the "dirty" word for sex attests to

the fact that Lisa's sexuality cannot stand fully outside of the male-oriented discourse that sexually objectifies the female body. As I discuss in the next paragraph, the association of dirtiness to female sexuality has historically been the playing out of patriarchal culture seeking to legitimate its control over women. The untidiness of Lisa's texts not only bears witness to the uncontainable libido but also the variegated nature of her sexual life that cannot be summed up as a symptom either of "liberation" or of "anxiety."

Yet if the untidiness of Lisa's texts and sexuality significantly emblematizes the untotalizable aspect of an individual's life, Lisa also sets in play untidiness in her text at a conscious level. One way that she performs this is to dissociate the flows from women's body from their cultural signifieds. The negative meaning attached to women's bodily flows reflects a long-standing belief in Western societies. Phyllis Palmer notes that the reason that "the designation *dirty* was regularly applied to women" (140) from the late eighteenth century is partly attributable to women's body being subject to these uncontrollable "flows":

> For women, also, the physical self always made persistent and shaming demands. Women inhabited less easily regulated bodies than men, bodies that it seemed less possible to deny and to transcend. Women from the age of about fifteen to about fifty reliably appeared unclean in menstruation . . . Psychoanalyst Clara Thompson reported that some female patients in the 1940s felt menstruation a sign of incompetence because it was a body product that, unlike feces and urine,

could not be controlled by a sphincter and, therefore, represented a moral failure. (143)

The menstrual taboo in the west—conduct norms that insist women's menstruation be hidden—and religious views of menstruation as ritually unclean both testify to such an association of women's natural bodily flows with being dirty and, by extension, a moral inferiority. Palmer points out that contrary to the belief in our culture that "attitudes toward dirt and hygiene result from the logical unfolding of precise scientific knowledge about cleanliness and health," the concept of "dirty" is historically inseparable from "changes in family life, in cultural representations of bodies and regulations of sex, and in organization of work" (139). Palmer's study foregrounds how our conceptions about dirtiness to a great extent play out mainstream ideology about family, gender, and work. The fact of women being subject to these uncontrollable, "dirty" flows served as justification of their being in need of patriarchal regulation.

In Lisa's documents, scenes of breasts overflowing with milk and of menstrual blood—uncontrollable, spontaneous flows—abound. Divorced from the limited meaning of maternal nurturance of her baby, the milk from the woman's breasts, marked by overabundance, is sucked pleasurably by multiple unrelated residents in the white hotel, and becomes emblematic of uninhibited gratification in the sharing of women's bodies. Menstrual bleeding during sexual intercourse is not met with reservations: in response to the young woman's hesitation that the man will be "covered in blood," he insists, "I *want* your blood" (46; emphasis added). One may be inclined to relate such revisions of socially marked signs of women's bodily fluids to the alleged

"otherworldliness" of the white hotel. However, acts abound in the white hotel that undermine the idea of its being removed from real world affairs. Not only is there, for instance, uneasy talk about "violence and terrorism" (85) occasioned by "injustice in the world" (84) but there is also unpretentious, selfish relief among the lodgers that the unfortunate mishaps—deaths by fire, flood, and avalanche—did not befall them. Far from being an "Eden before the Fall" (10) as suggested by Sachs, the fictionalized white hotel has many resemblances to the world that Lisa inhabits. Rather than being a case of sheer accident, the broken cable that causes many deaths turns out to be a tragedy incurred by an unidentified person with a malicious intent; racist slandering is frequent among the residents of the white hotel. Such violence inflicted against the Other resembles Lisa's traumatic sexual assault and her subsequent misery. Thus, Lisa's fictionalized white hotel does not figure transcendence, but an imaginative possibility in which oppressive associations may be undermined at the very site saturated with violence.

Not only does Lisa act upon the impulse to test and overturn the framings of male-oriented discourse about women's sexuality, but she also gives full play to the untidiness of her texts by opening them to interpretations. Lisa refuses to claim authorship of her writings in the sense of possessing any superior authority over its meaning. When asked by Freud, eleven years after the treatment, if he could publish her writings, her response is in keeping with the distance she previously set from her own composition. Feeling somewhat shy about having composed the documents, she writes: "But I suppose they have to be included to make sense of the case study? Such obscene

ramblings—how could I have written them?" (182-3). Affirming the text's independence from its author, Lisa places it at the disposal of the receiver and thereby negates the status of an author as the origin of meaning. Her treatment of it shifts the focus from the content of the text to its mode of circulation—its being placed in different contexts. In this, Lisa contests the "ideological" figure of the author expounded by Michel Foucault. Foucault states in "What is an Author?" that the author in the Western culture is "a certain functional principle by which . . . one limits, excludes, and chooses . . . in short, by which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction" (221). According to Foucault, the author as a functional principle is ideological, reflective of "the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning" (222). The constraining role of the author, "characteristic of our era of industrial and bourgeois society, of individualism and private property" (222), is cancerous for its foundation on the principle of thrift. In other words, the very assumption that a text's meaning originates in the author is founded on the principle of thrift that counters the proliferation of meaning; and in explaining that such a principle is reflective of a society marked by individualism and private property, Foucault underscores the interrelatedness of the view of authorship and ideology. The fear of "the proliferation of meaning" (222) can be otherwise viewed as the will to insist on fixities of meaning. In this sense, the untidiness of Lisa's texts—in the sense both that they embody the uncontainable and that Lisa does not claim their authorship—counters the principle of thrift as expounded by Foucault. Lisa lets her text be free of the

writer. Rather than interceding, she lets her texts run their own course. In so doing, she diversifies meaning, acting contrariwise to the principle of thrift.

Lisa's stance towards her writing also bears on how she relates to Freud's case study as a reader. This is most apparent in the ways she engages with her childhood memory of her mother's affair with her brother-in-law. The novel's Freud concludes that Lisa's illness is caused by her mother's death in "dreadfully immoral circumstances" (191) and the intolerable knowledge of the "bisexual component in [Lisa's] make-up" (192). Tactfully, but with frankness, Lisa imparts her own opinion about his interpretations. She brushes off Freud's suggestion that links her mother's unlawful affair to her misery, responding, "[i]s there any family without a skeleton in the cupboard?" (191). As to her alleged homosexuality, she replies that her life has only been "more bearable by reason of [her] closeness to women" which was "nothing specifically sexual" (192). Neither could be the cause of her severe chronic pain. Not stopping there, Lisa makes this an occasion to ruminate on the more far-reaching implications of the event, and thus opens up new planes of thinking:

> What torments me is whether life is good or evil . . . I think the idea of the incest troubles me far more profoundly as a symbol than as a real event. Good and evil coupling, to make the world. (192)

Disavowing Freud's view of the lasting impact of her childhood trauma, Lisa contemplates the event of her mother's incest as a symbol. Delving into the moral nature of the event with the query of "whether life is good or evil," she deviates from the narrowly defined sense of the "moral." Whereas the novel's Freud relies on a code of

morals "grounded in a standard of normalcy that is male-centered and privileges heterosexuality" (Michael 68), Lisa thinks of the moral in terms of its implications in the wider context, "the world," how it impinges on other lives. In other words, her ruminations do not settle in on a closure but become the occasion to put herself in a larger web of relations. Such differences are significantly attributable to Lisa's investment in "what was happening to [her] then, and what might happen in the future" (191)—in other words, what is in formation and yet to come. Her concern for what is not yet is relatable to the fact that her pain is not a finished thing of the past, but an ongoing present.

In "The Health Resort," the moments in which Lisa sets herself apart from the imperatives of Freud's narrative of psychoanalysis disclose her stance towards her own writings and as a reader. Contrary to Freud's method of analysis which seeks to totalize various aspects of Lisa's sexuality, Lisa's impulse is to let the untidiness of her texts operate to the purpose and effect of diversifying meaning. Despite its shortcomings, however, Freud's treatment—because of its intensity in exploring the inner life of Lisa as an individual—is seen to have provided a crucial occasion for Lisa to deeply engage her life, which led her to approach the cause of her misery in the wider field of violence. In the process, Lisa understands that the complementary nature of good and evil in the world is at the heart of her misery. She reaches beyond the confines of her self and experience to think about the question of what makes life more bearable, what makes for an ethical practice of living in this world where people unwittingly harbor habits of thought and are driven to act in ways conducive to breeding destructive tendencies.

"The Camp" and the Ethics of Untidiness

One of the significant issues that *The White Hotel* places at its heart is the problem of a moral life. The novel calls for remembering the victims of the Babi-Yar massacre, and the protagonist's ruminations on human suffering boil down to whether life is good or evil. Given the intensity with which the novel probes such themes, it is not surprising that critics of the novel have variously approached the subject of ethics. A significant number of critics, the partakers in the plagiarism debate not excepted, have questioned whether the novel's aesthetic rendering of such a moral enormity as the Holocaust is justifiable; others have appraised the moral appropriateness of juxtaposing a massive historical atrocity and an imaginary character's desire; still others have discussed the topic in terms of the moral effect the novel achieves in the real context that readers inhabit. Of the last group of critics, Amy Elias turns critical attention to the ways in which *The White Hotel* encourages ethical action from readers. In her book *Sublime Desire: History and Post-1960s fiction*, Elias considers the ethics of Thomas's novel in light of its "assertion of History's essential unknowability"—an unknowability which makes for an "*obsess*[ion] with history, even to the point of denying defensible interpretations of past events in favor of perpetual reinterpretation and re-presentation in the interest of ethical action" (69). Contra capitalism's denial and exploitation of history, the obsession with an unknowable History poses a challenge to respond to it, "to *act* in the face of this sublimity" (69; emphasis added). In other words, Elias proposes that the novel's presentation of History as unknowable in effect calls for a perpetual engagement with History, which in turn serves to promote ethical action.

Elias's argument that the novel complicates the reader's response to history and seeks to reach beyond its fictionalized world to a challenge to the readers for an "ethical action" highly resonates with the novel's forthright concern to deliberate ways not to explain away the Nazi atrocities and to think about what makes for an ethical response that would displace the logic by which violence is perpetuated. The novel's exploration of what incurs and comprises a moral response is most apparent in its treatment of the case of Peter Kürten, a German serial killer. Like the novel's Freud, Kürten is a historical person who briefly appears in the novel and imaginatively engaged. In encountering Kürten's case, Lisa practices an ethics of untidiness: rather than rely on prevailing discourse to construe and contain his crime, Lisa diversifies the response to the enormity by deliberating about the structure in which violence is called into being. The somatic pain that Lisa has been subject to in the oppression of living as a female and Jew recurs when she encounters Kürten's case, intimating that the two instances of violence are cognate; and because the same bodily symptom occurs and is finally explained in the actual event of the Nazi atrocities, the three instances of violence are suggested to be interrelated. Lisa's refusal to construe Kürten's case simply in terms of perpetrator/victim dichotomy contests fixities of exclusionary thinking against the Other which underlie the three instances of violence. Although Lisa—and countless Jews—become victims of the Babi-Yar massacre shortly after, the novel's social vision of unsettling the logic of violence is actively explored and developed in the final chapter of the novel entitled "The Camp" which proposes an alternative mode of living with the Other.

As examined earlier, the process by which Lisa comes to set herself apart from male modes of discourse has been a great source of the novel's appeal. The contestatory nature of Lisa's paths in life, however, has led to readings that heroize or essentialize her experience. A case in point is the reading of Lisa's prophetic powers. Because Lisa's hysterical symptoms turn out to be prescient of the Holocaust, they have been expounded as standing for knowledge that is historically relevant. Robertson holds Lisa's femaleness to be central to her discourse, and lauds the novel's delineation of a woman's discourse to be potentially effective "in the real terms of history" (465): her prophecy through bodily symptoms, materialized in the genocide of the Holocaust, is more politically realistic than "the theories of Freud or any other political or moral metalanguage that could not foresee the coming of racist fascism" (465). Robertson, however, laments that in the final analysis, Lisa's potential powers to "redeem history's horrors" are not realized and cast in "stereotypically mythic terms" (465). She specifically mentions the way in which the novel's realism is vitiated in the poetic structure of "The Camp," the final chapter of the novel. Here the reader sees a renewal; yet the nature of the renewal is aesthetic, and it transpires in a world of myth and poetry, subject to the teleology devised by the "male" author" (473) that is D. M. Thomas. Michael similarly notes that the critical potential of Lisa's knowledge which "lie[s] outside rationalistic frameworks . . . [and] defies not only the logic of linear cause and effect but also the classic oppositions between mind and body" (70-71) that undergird instrumental reason fails to come to fruition when in "The Camp," the attention is shifted

"away from the material and toward the realm of abstract ideas, of discourse, presented by an authoritative voice" (77).

Questionable in the accounts of Robertson and Michael is the essentialization of femaleness in the one, and of the material in the other. While their readings of "The Camp" require a separate study, their view that Lisa possesses knowledge which, if recognized and understood accurately, has powers to redeem historical brutalities needs further examination. What constitutes this knowledge? What is the nature of this knowledge? In the discussions of Robertson and Michael, Lisa's knowledge is construed as existing independent of the particularity of her experience but as having some intrinsic relation to her "femaleness" or "the material." Because such a knowledge finds expression in Lisa's somatic symptoms and in her hallucinatory visions of the actual event of the Babi Yar massacre, it is equated with her prescience. Yet can one claim that Lisa "possesses" knowledge?

Significantly, the pervasive suggestions of the Babi Yar massacre—the landslides, buried corpses, shootings—in Lisa's erotic fantasy are not for once linked in her mind to the actual event: it is only upon retrospect that their meaning is revealed. Similarly, Lisa does not relate her somatic pains, which turn out to be the premonitory symptoms of her later sexual assault by SS, to her Jewish identity. She "cannot explain [her] pains," although she believes that "they're organic, in some peculiar way" (191). In sum, Lisa's relation to her "knowledge" is left dubious. Although Lisa is likened to Cassandra, the mythic prophetess whose prophecy would not be heard, the "truth" about the future—in the instance of the Babi Yar atrocity—is not within Lisa's grasp. Her

bodily symptoms and hallucinations put her in a state in which, as the novel's Freud points out, "she both kn[ew] and did not know" (99). In one sense, she "knew," in the particularity of her experience of living as a half-Jewish woman in anti-Semitic Europe in the early twentieth century; there is an interrelatedness of her hysteria to her early racist assault by the sailors, which would be woven into the fabric of the future event of the Holocaust genocide. Yet Lisa also "did not know," as evidenced in the belatedness of understanding that the catastrophes in her fictionalized white hotel should be foretelling an event which would be actualized in real historical time. In any event, Lisa cannot be said to have mastery of the knowledge she embodies—an assumption held by Robertson and Michael.

In fact, Lisa evinces distrust of the penchant for prioritizing a particular form of thought or an aspect of experience, an impulse that underlies the accounts of Robertson and Michael. Both Robertson and Michael underscore the overturning of male-oriented and rationalistic framework in Lisa's knowledge only to glorify femaleness and the material. Lisa, on the contrary, refuses to rely on unifying categories and voices skepticism toward the assumption that affirms an all-encompassing view. At the mass at the Cathedral in Kiev, she feels oppressed by the grandeur of the building and the institution:

> It was too institutional. She much preferred being in a minority, on the outskirts . . . Even in Vienna there were too many Catholics; but even so, the Church was not so relentlessly present as it was here. She could not believe in anything so universally acceptable and so infallibly certain. (165)

The main reason that Lisa finds the Church oppressive is on account of its institutional nature which holds its doctrine "universally acceptable" and "infallibly certain." Lisa perceives violence embedded in the logic that holds a particular belief or stance as being universal, a logic which aligns with practices and worldviews that set up exclusionary borders. Having experienced structural oppression for being a woman and a Jew, Lisa evinces sensitivity to lives that may become unbearable by virtue of being subject to totalizing views that are unquestioningly and widely acknowledged.

What is also worthy of note in the above passage is Lisa's preference to associate herself with the lives "in the minority," a preference that would relate to her ethical practice. Despite having suffered structural injustices, Lisa does not strive to be removed from lives potentially imperiled by their marginality. In fact, Lisa makes herself all the more responsive to the pain of others. Given that Lisa's hysteria is neither an abstraction nor mere prophesying of the Holocaust but has origins in her living out the structural injustices against a "Jewess," it would be plausible to see that her own experiences make her susceptible to the suffering of others, which put her in a state of "inevitable interdependency" as explained by Judith Butler:

> To be injured means that one has the chance to reflect upon injury, to find out the mechanisms of its distribution, to find out who else suffers from permeable borders, unexpected violence, dispossession, and fear, and in what ways. (*Precarious xii*)

According to Butler, the experience of being injured can be the occasion to forego self-sufficiency and place the self in the larger context, knowing "there are others out there

on whom my life depends, people I do not know and may never know" (*Precarious xii*). Butler's quote which sees one's life as being closely bound with the lives of others echoes Lisa's sense of being indebted to the lives of others. Lisa's repeated statement in the novel, namely that "I have always found it difficult to enjoy myself properly, knowing there were people suffering 'just the other side of the hill'" (191), accounts for her inability to be self-complacent even when her own life has come to find happiness with Victor Berenstein. The quotes by Butler and from Thomas's novel both posit that the self is not autonomous. The view of the self as being inseparable from the other deeply bears on Lisa's view of life in which good and evil are complementary: "Good and evil coupling, to make the world" (192), Lisa ruminates, as the source of torment for her in life. In other words, Lisa considers the self in a wider web of relations, in a structure in which one person's happiness can entail the misery of another.

The ways in which for Lisa, not knowledge but her sensibility of the suffering of others initiates ethical practice resonate with the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas that conceptualizes the ethical subject in terms of "sensibility rather than cognition" (Eagleton 224). Sensibility in the sense expounded by Levinas is "an infinite openness to an 'outside'" (224), which counters the aggrandizement of the self. For Levinas, to be a subject is "to be subjected . . . exposed to the bruising demand of the Other" (223), and "[t]he very act that constitutes me as a subject also places me at a distance from my own being" (228). My being made a subject, in other words, transpires at the call of the Other, which divorces me from "my settled location within the symbolic order, breaking violently in on the narcissistic totality of my world" (226). Similarly, for Lisa, ethical

practice involves having the presence of the afflicted other disrupt her self-complacency and reduce her to a state of destitution. Lisa's act of forgoing the sense of her wholeness to be given over to alterity is deeply untidy.

In encountering the case of the mass murderer Peter Kürten, Lisa practices an ethics of untidiness which is consonant with "an ethics of breakdown and vulnerability" conceptualized by Levinas (Eagleton 224). Here her autonomous self falters and Lisa is placed on a plane of uncertainty. Lisa's response to the debates about the capital punishment of Kürten discloses her wilful vulnerability:

> An event from a long way away, which had nothing to do with her personally, tormented her worse than grief. A man who had committed many murders was tried and condemned to death in Dusseldorf . . . With varying degrees of seriousness and sensationalism the Austrian newspapers were joining in the heated debate about capital punishment. It was a subject, of course, about which everyone felt passionately and self-righteously. (177)

Despite her having no relation to Kürten's case on a personal level, Lisa suffers on account of it for weeks, both involuntarily and voluntarily. Her prolonged somatic pain after hearing of the case, evoking her earlier attacks of hysteria, is involuntary, although its likeness to her past illness is highly suggestive of the interrelatedness of Kürten's case and Lisa's own experience of oppression. Yet Lisa also voluntarily suffers when she essays not to explain the case away according to pre-established code of morals. As opposed to the readiness and certainty with which people voice their judgment about the case which narrows down to the debate on capital punishment, Lisa has reservations

about making a decision about blame. In the withholding of judgment, Lisa separates the case from commonsensical morality, her "instinctive conviction that it was abhorrent to take human life" (177). On the contrary, holding the case at a state of uncertainty, Lisa lends room for difficult moral issues to open up.

Rather than view Kürten's crime as a single, isolated event, Lisa thinks about the structure in which wrongdoing is perpetrated. Lisa thinks with sorrow about Kürten's childhood; his "schooling had been in the arts of torturing and masturbating animals" (177) in a dreadfully poor and filthy environment. Lisa willingly places herself on an unfamiliar terrain of this life of the Other when she relates to the horrific details about Kürten's longing for blood:

> He killed because he needed to drink blood. One night he had been in such a torture of frustration, not finding a victim, that he had cut off the head of a sleeping swan on the lake and drank its blood. He was reported as expressing the hope that when the guillotine struck he would remain alive long enough to hear his own blood gush out. (178)

The image of the swan and Kürten's thirst for blood haunt Lisa for weeks, but the horror does not originate in her judgment of his irrational desire as being indicative of his moral depravity. Lisa reads in his sheer lust for blood—which does not differentiate whether the blood be of his victim or of himself— Kürten's desperation of bearing the unbearableness of living. "The face of a small boy, lying on a mattress in a room with eleven other people" (179), constantly conjured side by side with Kürten's public image as "the Monster" (178), agonizes Lisa as she thinks about the implications of the

juxtaposition.[41] The attention that Lisa calls about Kürten's childhood discloses the injustices in this world that impinge on the lives of countless individuals in the society—an inseparability that Lisa is seen to be cognizant of when the luxuries of living in her second marriage are accompanied by an "uneasy awareness of being privileged" (208). Based on the idea of lives as being interdependent, Lisa diverges from construing the wrongdoing as an isolated event but sees it as arising from the very structure in which one's happiness is so often the condition of another person's misery, so that "the very thought that *someone* had had to be Maria Hahn [one of the victims of his killings] and Peter Kürten made it impossible to feel any happiness in being Lisa Erdman" (178). In thus situating Kürten's crime in a wider web of social relations, in the structure in which good and evil must be complementary, Lisa finds herself unable to indulge in the complacency of making moral judgments, a contrast to many who immediately feel "self-righteously" (177) about Kürten's case. Apparently, Lisa does not view Kürten's case from the stance of *doxa* or from an epistemological or moral privilege.

In engaging the case, Lisa significantly changes the terms of conversation with which to think about wrongdoing. In contrast to the seamless assurances of many who reacted "fiercely and 'morally' that the mass murderer, Kürten, should be put down like a dog with rabies" (177), she shifts the focus from the debate about capital punishment to the field of ever-present injustices, to the fact that "somewhere—at that very moment—someone was inflicting the worst possible horror on another human being" (179); the horror is not a thing of the past, a recognition which is at the heart of Lisa's distress and which would actualize in the Babi Yar massacre. In specifically taking note

of the fact that "while the murderer had been on the loose nearly a million men had been reported to the police as the Monster" (178) and Kürten not among them, Lisa broaches the pervasiveness of brutal tendencies fostered by culture, lying dormant in seemingly ordinary lives and threatening to erupt. Thus, Lisa diverts attention from the person to a culture's depraved condition for which she calls for mourning and change.

Lisa also strongly feels that there is room to question the idea of compensating for ill deeds as given expression in people's enraged call for capital punishment, for the reason that it can potentially reason out the event according to the logic of reparation in its most simplified form. Such an interrogation closely corresponds to Jacques Derrida's contestation of the abuse of "forgiveness" in geopolitical scenes of reparation for cruel and massive crimes—"useful mystification"—under the name of "responsible transaction" (*Cosmopolitanism* 56). While such an idea of forgiveness relies on a conditional logic which demands apology or penitence from the guilty party, Derrida calls attention to the "secret" retained in the experience of genuine forgiveness, the "alterity, non-identification, even incomprehension" (49) which exceed and must remain intact to law, politics and morals; for genuine forgiving, as "a madness of the impossible" (45), is unconditional, foreclosing the necessity of acknowledging fault. Thus, while conditional forgiveness, as a complement to its unconditional counterpart, is necessary for forgiveness to become "effective, concrete, historic" (45), the "secret" in the experience of genuine forgiveness has to be acknowledged to ensure that forgiving remains open, never final and sealed off. In the novel, while Lisa does not intervene in the matter of reparative measures in the juridico-political realm, what she broaches is

that which remains "secret" to such decisions, as bearing on countless lives and lives to come, for the crime "was not [a thing of] the past—the present" (179). In refusing to walk away from the case by making Kürten "the Monster" (178), Lisa opens room for thinking about how structural injustices, breeding cruel instincts, can be averted as a precondition for living in peace with otherness.

Ultimately, the problem of ethical practice in living that the novel engages does not stop at discerning and disparaging the structure in which violence is perpetrated, but is actively explored in the imaginative vision of what it means to live in peace with otherness in "The Camp," the concluding chapter of the novel. This chapter, coming after the novel's representation of Babi-Yar massacre, portrays characters in their afterlife, in a transit camp, a temporary sojourn from which they will be "sent on further" (258). Because this chapter comes right after "The Sleeping Carriage," many readers have interpreted it, whether with an approving or a disapproving note, as providing a consolatory vision after the terrors of Nazi atrocity that they have just encountered in the previous chapter. However, as can be seen in the commentaries on it as, for instance, "an outrageous pietism" (Cowart 225) and "religious transcendence" with merely aesthetic consolations (Robertson 471), attempts to read its historical relevance have been significantly lacking. A closer look at the chapter, however, reveals ways in which "The Camp" is more than an other-worldly wish-fulfillment; in fact, it is internally consistent with the social vision of the novel that investigates the possibility of achieving harmony among individuals differentiated by social categories.

As craftily made manifest in representation, "The Camp" is not a purely spiritual realm that erases human sorrows and the material reality of the body. The chapter begins as our protagonist, whose prolonged burden of the problem of human suffering wound up in an abrupt and unspeakable death in the ravine of Babi Yar, has just arrived from previous life with the scars from the massacre fresh in her body. Here Lisa meets her stepson Kolya and is saddened to "prepare the way for him to return to the woman who had given him birth" (265), for she feels herself to be his rightful mother. Lisa recognizes Sigmund Freud by his "heavily bandaged jaw" (260), an illness she sympathizes with as she did in the previous life. The serial killer Kürten is seen playing with children but only in the presence of "armed guards watch[ing] him closely" (263). Lisa's mother feels compelled to give her daughter, for whom she bore guilty feelings all along, heartfelt confessions about her extramarital affairs. All in all, "The Camp" does not figure transcendence, a realm exclusive of human weaknesses and sorrows.

Despite such continuities with the previous life, however, a marked difference in the new land is the absence of strife. Not differentiated in terms of identity categories such as nationalities and race, all the inhabitants are grouped as "immigrants" (261), and "the laws of the new land discouraged formal ties" (264). While there are intimations of sorrows—there are many widows and widowers and orphans—there is a communal bearing of the burden. As an inverse to the selfish couples in Lisa's imaginary white hotel, "married couples did not stick selfishly together but made sure the many widows and widowers were brought into the fun" (261); Lisa and her mother gladly make themselves useful (269) by breastfeeding the orphans. In these scenes of other-

centeredness, there is no negation of suffering but an envisioning of how one might suffer better on account of others sharing the lack. Richard Cross's view that "'The Camp' seeks to resolve Lisa's quandary about whether this world might be nothing more than the product of 'good and evil coupling'" (43) is pertinent. Getting at the heart of the suffering that governed previous life, "The Camp" undermines the complementarity of good and evil, that one's happiness necessarily tolls the misery of another. When Lisa affirms hope of salvation on the basis of "love in the heart" and "tenderness" (271), these terms do not designate a sanctified state in a spiritual realm. Rather, they imagine an embrace of being, in all its pain, weaknesses and failings, as a condition to counteract thoughts and practices that breed hatred and pave way for destructive tendencies. For Lisa, this love began its course in her "previous" life when she came to look back upon her life with avowal and without resentment even through the time of trauma and shame in her childhood. During her trip to her home city Odessa in her second marriage, Lisa arrives at a moment of epiphany.

> She had the feeling that she was no more than a spectre . . . She was cut off from the past and therefore did not live in the present. But suddenly, as she stood close against a pine tree and breathed in its sharp, bitter scent, a clear space opened to her childhood, as though a wind had sprung up from the sea, clearing a mist. It was not a memory from the past but the past itself, as alive, as real; and she knew that she and the child of forty years ago were the same person . . . [I]mmediately came another insight, bringing almost unbearable joy. For as she

looked back through the clear space to her childhood, there was no blank wall, only an endless extent, like an avenue, in which she was still herself. (213-4)

In this eye-opening moment, Lisa comes to resignify her past by taking it on its own terms, not as a memory but as "the past itself, as alive, as real" (213). Briefly before this incident, her visit to the city Odessa brought back such memories of her childhood as made her hesitant to "mak[e] herself known" (213) to an old acquaintance; her past, inflected by her mother's incest and her sexual assault, was what she felt obliged to turn away from. Upon this revelation, however, Lisa is made whole—she is not a mere "spectre"—as she arrives at an unconditional embrace of the self; it is no longer necessary for her to *other* the past of suffering. The reconciliation with those painful and seemingly incompatible aspects of her being—formerly deprecatingly labelled "untidy"—that have led to her present brings Lisa "unbearable joy," a joy that is not restricted to her ceasing to be in strife with herself but that enables Lisa to relate to others in an empowering state of impoverishment, in a nonjudgmental way.

As prefiguring a world without strife in "The Camp," Lisa's moment of revelation relates an individual's—and the society's—wellbeing to violence embedded in totalizing ideologies and categories. By its investment to the problem of how things came to be what they are, the novel denaturalizes unexamined beliefs and judgments. In his reading on "The Camp," Cates Baldridge similarly attends to Thomas's representation of the afterlife as fostering the impulse for life by dissociating cultural signifiers from signifieds that tend toward man's destructive tendencies. Baldridge sees the chapter as "an attempt to imaginatively incarnate the kind of non-repressive society"

(173) conceived by neo-Freudians. Attributing aggressive acts to repressed sexuality that reduces "Eros to procreative-monogamic sexuality" (177), and historicizing such repression as the product of "capitalism's Will-to-Production [which] attains evermore pervasive and merciless forms" (187), Baldridge contends that "The Camp" imagines "de-stigmatizing and 'mainstreaming' of pleasures" (187) as life-affirming processes antithetical to the death-spiral in the previous chapters. Baldridge's reading sheds light on the possibilities of identifying the root of malaise as an entry into making a more livable world.

Seeing that our protagonist abruptly and helplessly meets her death in the most ravaging scene of the Holocaust after the novel's espousal of the profound and the irreducible in the individual, it may seem that there is little room to argue that justice is actively vindicated in *The White Hotel*. A significant amount of criticism on the novel, indeed, places emphasis on the ultimate victimization of Lisa. On this view, it would be hard to relate to the argument that the novel is also about Lisa's atonement for violence and injustices accountable for suffering. In the its delineation of Lisa's ethics of untidiness in which she forgoes the autonomy of self to willingly make herself vulnerable to the suffering of others, the novel invites readers to view the self in a larger web of relations, to practice sharing the burden in spite of—and by virtue of—one's lack and weaknesses. One of the ways the novel commemorates the Holocaust can be seen in such an invitation to commit to making a more livable world.

D.M.Thomas's *The White Hotel* is a call to remember the horrible atrocity of the Holocaust. In its distinctively intimate portrayal of Lisa Erdman, the protagonist who is

also among the multitude of victims of the Babi Yar massacre, the novel invites readers to an affective investment in her life. Yet as much as it commemorates the event as a barbarity of the past, the novel also insists that the violence has bearings on the present and the time to come. For this reason, it puts to the forefront the politics of remembering as a crucial subject matter: how can we remember the event in such a way that turns away from further perpetration of violence?

As a Jewish woman in an anti-Semitic Europe in the interwar years, Lisa lives out structural injustices of gender and race ideology. Lisa's suffering, given expression in her hysteria, is both personal and a proleptic pointing toward the future event of the massacre. Readers have lauded how Lisa, coming to see gender and race oppression in a larger field of violence, gains distance from mainstream ideology that occasioned her self-alienation and self-hatred. Such a life path of Lisa's has been considered as commenting on the structural violence and ideology breeding destructive tendencies. The novel, however, does not stop there. By disclosing how Lisa turns her own experience of suffering to make herself susceptible to, rather than immune from, the affliction of others, it opens up a meaningful conversation about what it means to engage with moral wrongdoing in a way that does not repeat the habits of thought and action buttressing it and makes it possible to imagine living in peace with otherness. In its elaboration of the process in which Lisa practices an ethics of untidiness, the novel reaches beyond the confines of the text to the readers to impress upon them the imperative and possibility of altering the terms of thinking about a horrible past that would affirm the making of a more livable world in the here and now that they inhabit.

CHAPTER IV

ATONEMENT AND ATTUNEMENT: UNTIDINESS AND THE MEETING OF TWO WORLDS IN IAN MCEWAN'S *ATONEMENT*

Taking note of the outpouring of contemporary English novels set in times of political violence and war, Maria Margaronis suggests that writers who write about public events which they did not experience find themselves placed between two strong currents: the first is a heightened sense during and after the modernist movement that "all experience is subjective and every narrative necessarily partial," and the second is the idea that the most atrocious historical crimes in the past century are "literally unspeakable . . . and that only those who lived through them . . . have a right to break the silence" (139). These writers, in other words, face an increased consciousness about the constructed nature of fictional discourse on the one hand and an ethical concern about fictionalizing historical trauma on the other. According to Margaronis, "new hybrid forms" (140) in postmodern literature such as experimentation with genres of fiction, the blurring of boundaries between reality and representation, and an explicit use of metafictional techniques have emerged in response to a newly accentuated thinking about literary narratives as *medium* of representation and to the controversies surrounding the ethicality of imaginatively engaging massive atrocities of the past.

To be sure, the profusion of novels set during the two World Wars written by writers born after 1945 is surprising given the intensity of the debate on the problem of representing the worst crimes of the twentieth century. One is reminded of the famous

dictum by Theodor Adorno that "there can be no poetry after Auschwitz."[42] As examined in my previous chapter, both D.M.Thomas's insertion of eye-witness testimony about the Babi Yar massacre into his novel *The White Hotel* (1981) for fear of misrepresenting an unimaginable horror and the subsequent plagiarism charges against him attest to the vexed problematics of the aesthetic rendering of "unspeakable" atrocities. The use of recognizable historical individuals in fiction, such as the appearance of the English poet and soldier Siegfried Sassoon in Pat Barker's *Regeneration*, which explores the treatment of shell-shocked British army officers during World War One, is still another example that reveals the difficult issue of authenticity faced by writers engaging a traumatic past beyond their first-hand experience. How can we account for the enthusiasm of writers to aesthetically engage the brutality experienced by earlier generations, despite their apparent vulnerability to criticism for the very reason of their temporal distance relative to these past events? This penchant in writers has sometimes been explained as being reflective of the culture's "enormous appetite for imagined violence and extreme emotions" (Margaronis 138). If so, what is the nature of this appetite? Why might culture crave this vicarious intensity? What is assumed about the relationship between the text and the reader in this explanation? Is there another way to construe the task and import of writers engaging massive violence that they have never directly experienced?

Walter Benn Michaels's acerbic attack on the claims of deconstruction to make the historical past "a source of identitarian sustenance" (12) for the later generations addresses significant aspects of these issues. In "You Who Never Was There: Slavery

and the New Historicism, Deconstruction and the Holocaust," Michaels emphasizes the firm distinction between learning and remembering: "We learn about other people's history; we remember our own" (3). Michaels condemns the ways history is collapsed into the idea of memory in works of fiction and literary criticism alike. In his reading of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, for instance, Michaels undermines the novel's proposition that links the remembrance of the imagined, "disremembered" past of American slavery to one's "ground of identity" (7) and insists on differentiating one's knowledge of the past and one's experience of it: how can one's identity be based on something so arbitrary as memory such that "when it is not remembered, [it is] *forgotten*" (7)?

Michaels similarly voices discontent apropos of the trauma theorist Shoshona Felman's influential work of literary criticism on testimony, specifically with regard to her postulation that those who never directly experienced the historical trauma of the earlier generations can be imagined to inherit their traumatic memories. In Felman's view, the tragedy of the Holocaust can be transmitted via literary and theoretical texts that "enact" its horror as a "speech act" without seeking to make sense of it (8). Felman insists that the performative function of testimony enables the reader to become a witness to the event being recounted by dealing with the experience of horror itself and not the representation or report of it. In other words, these texts become an experiential medium of the Holocaust. Yet such an attempt to ensure that the Holocaust is remembered, Michaels fervently contends, not only maintains but also brings about a change in Jewish identity (12); for it becomes possible to (re)define the Jew as "someone who, having experienced the Holocaust can—even if he or she was never there—

acknowledge it as part of his or her history" (13). In order to accentuate the dangers of conflating the past as actually experienced and the culture which engages it after the event, Michaels highlights the fundamental difference between cultural genocide and physical genocide: the first is less bad than the second because "the people ('*the genos*') may still be revived" even though the group dies (15 n.7).

In point of fact, Michaels suggests that the claims to relive the suffering of the past through imagination are ethically suspect, especially considering the relative comfort in which the later generations who did not need to experience such violence live. In Michaels's view, the distinction between the actual experience of the event and knowledge of the event is crucial because any *real* sense of urgency in the study of history is dependent on one's claim to possess history—to have lived through it (15 n.5). In other words, "inheriting" tragedy in its true sense signifies "possessing" it, which involves much more than living with the consequences of the tragedy. Michaels concludes that since no one can either inherit tragedy in this sense or possess history, "there can be no real urgency to the study of history and no coherent motive beyond curiosity" (15 n.5).

Michaels's contention aptly calls attention to the problem of ethicality in engaging a traumatic past beyond one's experience, in terms of both the writer's aesthetic rendering of it and the reader's access to it in the act of reading. What remains to be explained in his argument is what constitutes "real urgency" in the study of history and whether this can be unequivocally opposed to "curiosity." Can the engagement with past atrocities in fiction be assessed in terms of the dichotomy proffered by Michaels?

Or are these the only useful terms with which to assess these fictional narratives? Toni Morrison's discussion of her practice of novel writing in the essay entitled "The Site of Memory" suggests how the motives of curiosity and of urgency may not be mutually exclusive. In the essay, Morrison situates her fiction within the literary heritage of American slave narratives and identifies her feat foremost as "fill[ing] in the blanks that the slave narratives left" (94). In trying to "sound as 'objective' as possible" (91) the writers did not write about their interior lives; Morrison interprets this omission as their exclusion "from being owners of their discourse" (91). Morrison not only indicates the irony in the category of "objectivity" in appraising accounts of the past, but also vindicates imagination as a legitimate passageway to reconstruct that which remains hidden. Curiosity about "a picture of a woman and the way in which [she] heard her name pronounced" (96) initiates her novel *Sula*; yet the imaginative dwelling on the life of the woman cannot be dissociated from the sense of urgency felt by Morrison situated in a particular place and time. She writes:

> For me—a writer in the last quarter of the twentieth century, not much more than a hundred years after Emancipation, a writer who is black and a woman—the exercise is very different. My job becomes how to rip that veil drawn over "proceedings too terrible to relate." The exercise is also critical for any person who is black, or who belongs to any marginalized category, for historically, we were seldom invited to participate in the discourse even when we were its topic. (91)

The urgency of Morrison's writing, so to speak, stems from the motive to redress the long-standing problem of blacks being excluded in their discourse which continues up to the time in which she writes, more than a century after Emancipation. Such a willful inheritance of tragedy contains a more active dimension than that which, in Michaels's view, is available for someone who "never was there," which is, having no alternative but to "liv[e] with [the] consequences [of past events]" (15 n.5). Furthermore, Morrison extends the implications of the urgency of her writing to embrace those "who belon[g] to any marginalized category" (91). Her fiction would be a generative space in which those outside the dominant group, through reading, would critically address their own experiences of being denied voice and imagine alternatives to the existing order of things.

Far from outlining an egotistical move to claim others' painful experiences as one's own, then, Morrison's account thinks through the purposes of writing historical fiction. For Morrison, the journey to the past brings the past into conversation with the present with a view to addressing repeated patterns of oppression. In contrast to Michaels's suggestion to let alone the past in its pastness, Morrison bespeaks the possibilities of change envisioned in such a dialogue. Their contrasting stances toward dealing with the past resonates with Walter Benjamin's discussion of the method of historicism as pitted against the method of historical materialism. In "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Benjamin discerns discrete impulses in these two approaches to history: the impetus to naturalize the status quo in the one and the drive for change in the other. In historicism, historical events are presented only in relation to themselves, the

result of which is an empathy with the victor that "invariably benefits the rulers" (256). Historicism, taking the victor's account as the history of the era, glosses over the horror and violence—the pain and suffering of the anonymous—in the making of cultural treasures, the relic of the past glory; the approach taken by historical materialism, on the other hand, is elucidated by Benjamin as follows:

> To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was' (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger. Historical materialism wishes to retain that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to man singled out by history at a moment of danger. The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers. The same threat hangs over both: that of becoming a tool of the ruling classes. In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it. ("Theses" 255)

In historical materialism, moments become historical not by the successive stringing of events but by events "singled out by history at a moment of danger." To think historically, for Benjamin, means to grasp "the constellation which [one's] own era has formed with a definite earlier one" (263) to counter the conformist course of history. Connections drawn between distinct moments in time are not based on the rules of causality but transpire in the present in which the image of the past is revealed. The present, in other words, initiates the thinking to imagine things otherwise than the way things have been and the way things are.

Resonating with Benjamin's "moment of danger" (255), Morrison's temporal positioning of the here and now relative to the Emancipation gains in relevance owing to the perceived sense of repeated oppression that cuts across time. Underlying the search of the past, thus, is the pressing concern of the present, as distinct from the complacent standpoint that Michaels posits. A significant offshoot of Michaels's polemic as regards such endeavors to draw connections between oppressions across time, however, may be the question of whether a past event can be metaphorized to address different moments in history. Andreas Huyssen points out a related concern about relativizing the Holocaust "when it attaches itself like a floating signifier to historically very different situations" (99). Marking the Holocaust's noted meaning and place in history, however, Huyssen provides various historical cases in which the public reckonings of the Holocaust have been constructive in "enabling a strong memory discourse and bringing a traumatic past to light" (99).

In the same book, *Present Pasts*, Huyssen also makes a pointed argument which can be put in conversation with Michaels's acerbic attack on the idea of fictionalizing a traumatic historical event. Huyssen comments that "[t]o insist on a radical separation between 'real' and virtual memory strikes [him] as quixotic, if only because anything remembered—whether by lived or by imagined memory—is itself virtual" (29). Alluding to the surfeit of memory practices worldwide from the late twentieth century, Huyssen prioritizes the concern to find ways to enliven the enabling and generative dimension of remembering over the insistence upon "any orthodoxy of *correct* representation" (19; emphasis added). While thus arguing for an openness to different

possibilities of representing the past, Huyssen also stresses the need for a discriminatory, "productive remembering" put to the service of promoting "processes of democratization and struggles for human rights, to expanding and strengthening the public spheres of civil society" (27). Huyssen's argument is a commentary on the detrimental consequences of an undue and exclusive emphasis in contemporary culture on the traumatic dimension of life. Such phenomena, impacted by the experience of genocide and mass destruction in the twentieth century, have led to the denial of the capacity of human agency and meaningful social action to break out of compulsive repetition. Thus, in Huyssen's view, the more crucial question we should ask would be how to remember—to represent—the past without being locked back into the violence that was perpetrated.

Resonating with Huyssen's point about the constitutive gap between the past and the present such that "every act of memory carries with it a dimension of betrayal, forgetting, and absence" (4), Richard Kearney gives a philosophical overview of the relationship between reality and representation. In *The Wake of Imagination*, Kearney notes that the history of Western metaphysics, largely influenced by Platonism and its idea of a "transcendental origin of meaning" (284), privileged being present (*logos*) over representation (*mimesis*); as a corollary, literature (the imaginary) was considered inferior to truth (the real). Following Jacques Derrida's observation that Platonism in effect deconstructed the logocentric model of mimesis when it affirmed the reliance on duplication to "intuit meaning as an enduring essence" (283), however, Kearney suggests that the foundation on which the hierarchized opposition between the imaginary

and the real had been established is indefensible. Given the dominance of the epistemological discourse of constructivism—the view "[t]hat the past is not recorded but constructed through processes of narration and social mediation" (Fuchs 235)—from the late twentieth century, it seems more relevant to investigate the meaning and possibilities of fictional narratives in their engagements with the past rather than take a stand on a particular mode of representation as a more truthful access to reality, because insisting on the correctness of representation would amount to closing off the generative dimension of fictional narratives in their explorations of diversifying the approaches to reality. [43]

Reading Ian McEwan's novel *Atonement* (2001) as a memory text that takes the return to the past as its main concern as well as a work of metafiction that foregrounds the dynamics between the text and the world, this chapter seeks to illuminate fruitful discussions opened up by examining the crossroads where these two aspects of the novel meet. The novel revisits a particular day in 1935 (Part One) and the Second World War (Parts Two and Three) in which Briony is the central character. After revealing at the end of Part Three that she is also the author of the novel, Briony explains to the readers that the novel before the readers is only one of the multiple versions she wrote in the course of more than five decades to describe the crime of perjury she committed as a child. The express purpose of the sustained and beleaguered task of writing, Briony adds, is to atone for the past crime by uncovering the truth of her—as well as Marshall's and Lola's— partaking in a wrongdoing that proved consequential to the mishap of Robbie and Cecilia. The explicitness with which Briony enunciates the purpose of

writing underscores the interrelatedness of revisiting the past and making amends. Yet the consequence of the task—to achieve atonement through writing about the past—is stubbornly left open-ended. The publication of Briony's novel is suggested to be highly implausible, forestalling the hopes for its having practical effect on the case. In terms of art, too, Briony casts doubt on the idea that an author, the one with the absolute power to bestow "the limits and terms" (351) of imagination, can posit a being outside of art with whom or with which to reconcile. Yet despite the undertones of skepticism, Briony acknowledges the status of her writing as an "attempt" (351) even as she leaves ambiguous what the attempt communicates.

The central subject of atonement thus left unsettled and unsettling, the reader is faced with unresolved questions about the theme of atonement. How do we construe Briony's proposition to make amends for a past wrongdoing through writing fiction? Why such an emphasis on the preoccupation with giving an account of the past and on the multiplicity of endeavors to do it? What impels Briony to not let go of the task? Is it ever possible to ensure that atonement has been made? How does Briony's self-reflexivity inflect our understanding of her enterprise? While atonement, at first glance, seems specific to Briony's case, the novel pronouncedly intimates Briony's crime as being something larger than itself. Briony's reconstruction of the past crucially attaches her crime to the ideology of her social class and thematically juxtaposes her wrongdoing with World War Two. What does *Atonement*, as McEwan's creation, seek to atone for?

In my discussion of the novel, I think about how Briony's remembrance of the past as an atoning subject connects with the novel's broaching of the gendered theme of

tidiness and untidiness. A survey of criticism on the novel reveals the prevailing tendency to restrict atonement as being Briony's private enterprise. Yet such readings not only reduce the scope of the ethical questions that the novel's search of the past raises but also downgrades the complexity of the problem of guilt that, for the large part, generates the narrative. Looking at the ways the narrative rethinks tidiness and untidiness brings to light the novel's sustained impulse to consider Briony's crime in a broader context. Upon a close view, the seeming levity with which Briony dwells on the topic of her tidiness and Cecilia's untidiness in the private, domestic sphere belies its interrelatedness with the violence in the world at large. The novel's use of the terms "tidy" and "untidy," which are revealed to be charged with ideologies of gender and sexuality, is in turn gestated in relation to the global atrocities of the war; significantly, these very terms are also used to construe fictional narratives as they relate to the readers and the world.

Thinking about tidiness and untidiness thus enables me to fill in the gap in the existing criticism which consists in negotiating the novel's theme of atonement as encompassing both the private and the public, and examining the ways in which such negotiation sheds light on the novel's exploration of the relationship between the text and the world—the here and now that the reader inhabits. This gap, to my mind, can be related to the lack of criticism that attends to the problem of gender and sexuality in the novel as informing the central themes of atonement, writing, and turning to the past. Such a lack is curious given the prominence of the sexual theme in the novel, so that one wonders whether in disregarding it criticism is entwined in the willful repression of what

cannot be contained. Even when the problem of gender and sexuality is broached, it is considered to be instrumental to the unfolding of the plot rather than a subject in its own right that deserves close study. Contesting such critical tendency, this chapter investigates how matters of gender and sexuality that figure in the novel's representation of the past are pivotal to its scrutiny of the logic of violence buttressing warfare and its reconfiguration of fiction as it relates to the reader and the world.

In remembering the history of the Second World War, *Atonement* underscores the atoning subject's volitional act of forgoing the self's autonomy as much as it speculates about violence. This renunciation, which the novel gestates through its exploration of intersubjective encounters and is crucially linked to the novel's reconfigured sense of untidiness, informs the text's thinking of the relationship between the author and the novel, and between the novel and the world. The novel's engagement with the gendered themes of tidiness and untidiness, then, can be construed as its search for an enabling relationship between the text and the world that breaks through the seams of a tidy narrative to make itself susceptible—open—to various voices in its task of atonement.

Tidy World and Virtue Rewarded

> The problem of these fifty-nine years has been this: how can a novelist achieve atonement when, with her absolute power of deciding outcomes, she is also God? There is no one, no entity or higher form that she can appeal to, or be reconciled

with, or that can forgive her. There is nothing outside her . . . It was always an impossible task, and that was precisely the point. The attempt was all. (350-51)

Coming to the close of her narrative, Briony explicitly addresses atonement as having been the motive for the "fifty-nine-year assignment" (349) in which she set out to describe her past crime. Articulating her purpose for writing, however, Briony simultaneously acknowledges the impossibility of achieving atonement. Highly reminiscent of the forlorn artist Lily Briscoe in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* whose arrival at a vision transpires at the moment of relinquishing its stability, Briony is able to put an end to her storytelling upon disowning her writing as fulfilling its proposed purpose. Its impossibility was a foregone conclusion, as there is nothing outside of her with whom or with which to reconcile or to ascertain that reconciliation has been made. The novel thus ends in the declaration of an unsealable rupture.

As befits Briony's expressly stated purpose of writing about the past, the centrality of Briony's crime in the novel cannot be denied although it takes place more than 50 years before the time in which Briony writes. On a sultry summer day in 1935, thirteen-year-old Briony misinterprets the events that transpire between her older sister, Cecilia, and the charlady's son, Robbie. Witnessing the awkward sexual displays between them and mistakenly taking them for Robbie's violent behavior, Briony decides that Robbie is a "maniac" and wrongly accuses him of rape when her fifteen-year-old cousin Lola is violated by a man later that day. The accusation is easily accepted by the adults and tacitly affirmed by Briony's co-criminals—Paul, who is later revealed to be the rapist but lets the blame fall on Robbie, and Lola, who persists in hiding the truth

about the crime. The consequence of the accusation surpasses anything that the adolescent Briony could have imagined, partly attributable to the outbreak of the Second World War. Robbie, prosecuted and imprisoned for several years, is released in 1940 on the condition that he join the British Expeditionary Force fighting in France during the war. Throughout this period, Robbie has been in touch in letter correspondences with Cecilia who, having abandoned her family in bitterness for consenting to Robbie's accusation, pledges her love and waits for him. While Robbie is primarily recounted as being happily reunited with Cecilia after escaping France, Briony makes a belated confession to the readers at the end of the novel that such was a wishful ending that she contrived in place of its tragic counterpart: Robbie dies of infection while awaiting the return to England, and the bereaved Cecilia dies months later during a bombing by the Nazis.

Briony's earnestness in bringing out the past in the open even as she addresses her authorship of the text and its fictionality thereof begs the question of how to construe the relationship between the two. How does her authorship of the text bear on the import of her proposal to make amends? Does Briony's task have any meaning outside its being an aesthetic quest? While Briony lays bare the conditions of her writing, she nonetheless affirms the status of her novel as an "attempt" (351), leaving it open to readers to speculate about the meaning of her endeavor. It is not surprising, therefore, that many critical responses to the novel center upon the problem of how to interpret Briony's aesthetic enterprise as a task of atonement. Examining McEwan's novel within the Western heritage of secular confessions, Elke D'Hoker observes that contrary to

religious confessions, the concept of authority that grants absolution necessarily remains unsettled in fiction. In her reading, however, D'Hoker contends that Briony's arrival at a subjective truth—claiming her version of the lovers' story as her truth—evidences her "achiev[ing] atonement of a kind . . . atonement in the sense of 'reconciliation with self,' 'being at one with oneself'" (41-2). David O'Hara is with D'Hoker when he affirms that Briony's writing is "a vital act of atonement" (86), ultimately redressing her earlier misdeed. For O'Hara, the grounds for such a judgment rest on Briony's evolution as a character who grows out of her ego-driven, manipulative young girl self into being a writer who develops meaningful empathy with other minds in the act of writing: communing with the victims of history like Robbie, Briony "lends them her imagination at the expense of her ego" (95).

If D'Hoker and O'Hara locate the possibilities of atonement in the novel's characterization of Briony, Kathleen D'Angelo names the reader as the legitimate bestower of absolution. Looking at the various literary elements in the novel put to the service of constructing "critical, responsible, and invested" readership (102), D'Angelo suggests that the possibility of Briony's atonement depends on her success in shaping such readers; for given the imminent death of the author (Briony) and the close of the novel, the responsibility falls on the readers as ones "capable of granting final atonement and absolution for her crime" (102). Conferring the obligation on the readers, then, D'Angelo leaves the question of atonement open.

Other critics have refused to grant the more or less sympathetic perspective of the foregoing readings about Briony's pursuit to make amends through an aesthetic medium.

Common to these readings is the view that Briony's writing is in essence an act of evading moral responsibility. Comparing McEwan's novel to Henry James's *What Maisie Knew*, Richard Robinson notes that through the unique narrating point of view, both novels exploit "the incompatible but interpenetrating moral worlds of child and adult" (484). Yet while the complexity achieved through such perspective "settles on the unsolvable . . . 'the brink of mystery'" of human behavior in James's novel, the obliquity and indirection in McEwan's novel land on a curious solution, "the secret of the novel's composition" (487), the revelation that its writer is Briony herself. In other words, whereas James's fiction makes morally meaningful what its sophisticated poetics open up, McEwan's novel glorifies its narrative control at the expense of delving into the deeper stakes of Briony's crime. On a similarly critical note, Patricia Waugh notes that Briony's act of writing instantiates an evasive, irresponsible abuse of the aesthetic imagination: her "empathy is hijacked to buttress an escapist fantasy used to avoid the pain and suffering that real reparation would require" (130). Commenting that Briony's enactment of self-punishment for her crime by writing was "actually the result of her inability to atone" (63), Kogan Ilany likewise judges Briony's pursuit as seeking relief from her irksome past, helping her "avoid being in contact with the guilt and remorse that could damage her self-esteem" (64).

While differing in their approaches to the theme of atonement, these critics commonly postulate that atonement is singly of and concerning Briony: the wrongdoing to be atoned for in the novel is Briony's past crime of perjury. Such a view narrows the moral scope of the novel by foreclosing the possibility of giving the much needed

attention to the other wrongdoings no less significantly illuminated in Briony's search of the past. Furthermore, although Briony's childhood crime occasions her writing *within* the novel, such a framing should not overshadow the fact of *Atonement* being McEwan's creation written in the twenty-first century that imaginatively engages the time encompassing 1935, the Second World War, and the present (1999). Taking these matters into consideration enables us to reappraise the import of Briony's aesthetic quest as well as rethink the theme of atonement as a crucial subject of McEwan's novel and not merely of Briony's. In what follows I argue that *Atonement* is a fiction of ethical remembering, not only within the aesthetic limits of the novel in which Briony plays a part as a character but also pertaining to the readers engaging the historical past in the act of reading the text. This section, in particular, examines Briony's account of the fateful day in 1935 in Part One of the novel in terms of the ways in which the present perceived by Briony informs how she relates the past, both the content and the mode of engaging it. A closer look will reveal the novel's refusal to treat the past merely in its pastness and its concern with addressing the continuity across distinct moments in the past and the present, so that the violence of one instance gains in critical significance by virtue of another.

The present that Briony perceives, juxtaposed against the past that she revisits, reveals striking similarities in the way injustice is perpetrated. Briony's understanding of the present is epitomized in her helplessness in the face of the fact that the possibility of publishing her novel—and setting right, albeit in the form of a belated confession, the wrongs done in the past by making known to the world the truth about her crime—is

foreclosed by the foreseeable litigation for libel by her co-criminals, Paul and Lola. Having become immensely rich based on the profits of a wartime chocolate business, they "could ruin a publishing house with ease from their current accounts" (349). As when the truth about the crime was in the hands of the privileged more than half a century before ultimately resulting in the demise of Robbie and Cecilia, Briony's endeavor to redress the wrongs of the past and give the victims a proper burial must give way to those who have the means to "defen[d] their good names with a most expensive ferocity" (349) even if it means perpetuating oppression. The vigor of Lola, who has always been "the superior older girl" (341) and who at eighty boasts of "her boldness of stride in the perilous high heels, her vitality" (341), is overtly compared to the shabbiness of Briony, whose health is rapidly declining with vascular dementia, heightening the sense of the power structure. The meagerness of the one—who has suffered a lifelong pang of guilt—against the apathetic, thriving other is poignant.

Such a perception of the present makes it imperative for Briony to turn to the past, not with a nostalgic or complacent standpoint looking back upon the things of "the past," but with the urgency to bring out into the open the injustices that continue to the present with the view to interrogate the status quo. Rereading the narrative with this in mind illuminates how the problem of gender and sexuality is given prominence in Part One of the novel as instantiating practices and habits of thought undergirding the oppression of those othered by the dominant group, the upper-class male. The miniscule close-up of the Tallises divulges the various facets of wrongdoing inflicted against the Other in the matters of gender and sexuality; and in carrying the consequences of the

false incrimination of Robbie over to the scene of the battlefield, the novel intimates that the resources that made possible the structural violence in the microcosm of the Tallis household are inseparable from the legitimation of the global atrocities. By bringing discrete moments of violence within its purview of its representation, the narrative induces readers to see them as linked forms of violence. Seen from this view, Emily Tallis's married life maintained on deceit cannot be thought apart from Marshall's rape of Lola; nor can Lola's "performance" of femininity be separated from the self-aggrandizing worldview that underlies the brutal tendencies that pave way to the World War.

The mode of engaging the past that characterizes Briony's writing, likewise, is placed in the service of disclosing and upsetting the conditions that sustain structural violence. The way in which Briony's guilt is given shape in the novel, in particular, makes her aesthetic quest a continual and self-conscious dismantling of her deepest assumptions, in contrast to the critical view that it is merely an act of evasion, whether as a refusal to confront her unpleasant reality of indebtedness or as a self-indulgent act of hiding behind her authorial ego. Briony's guilt occasions her writing to the extent that she is subject to its influence; at the same time, Briony *makes* herself subject to guilt by bringing under painful deliberation the elements that have caused her to be aware of the wider implications of her wrongdoing. That is to say, while Briony apparently has reasons to feel responsible for Robbie's downfall, her sustained engagement with the past is as much a *volitional* act: for her, "guilt refined the methods of self-torture, threading the beads of detail into an eternal loop, a rosary to be fingered for a lifetime"

(162). Guilt continuously breaks down Briony's integrity, parallel to the way the self-contained narrative that she composed as a child and the worldview which upholds it is turned on its head throughout the novel. There is an impulse in the novel, in other words, to make her engagement with the past an occasion to uncover mechanisms of violence. It is not surprising, in this sense, that the novel sets off with delineating the young Briony's making of a narrative, *The Trials of Arabella*, a preeminent expression of her "passion for tidiness" (7), which serves as a counterpoint to the novel. In delving into the problem of wrongdoing, Briony looks intensely at the worldview underlying the penchant for tidiness that infiltrates the culture's treatment of those outside the norm given expression in the ways the conservative ideology infringes upon the private sphere of intimacy.

From early on in the novel, a distinguishing feature of Briony is her strong desire for tidiness. Embodying a "wish for a harmonious, organized world" (5), Briony's tidiness governs the practice and conception of life and art. Briony's room, "the only tidy upstairs room in the house," is otherwise expressed as "a shrine to her controlling demon" (5): farm animals all face one way, dolls in unison are kept at an identical distance from the walls of their mansion, and various small figures display an evenness in their ranks and spacing that suggests "a citizen's army awaiting orders" (5). Briony's seemingly innocuous passion for order calls for critical scrutiny when its correlation to her "desire to have the world just so" (4) is encapsulated in her writing:

> Her passion for tidiness was also satisfied, for an unruly world could be made just so . . . A love of order also shaped the principles of justice, with death and

> marriage the main engines of housekeeping, the former being set aside exclusively for the morally dubious, the latter a reward withheld until the final page . . . A universe reduced to what was said in [a play] was tidiness indeed, almost to the point of nullity, and to compensate, every utterance was delivered at the extremity of some feeling or the other, in the service of which the exclamation mark was indispensable. *The Trials of Arabella* may have been a melodrama, but its author had yet to hear the term. The piece was intended to inspire not laughter, but terror, relief and instruction, in that order . . . (7-8)

At this stage in life, Briony's love of writing consists in imposing orderliness on the otherwise "unruly world." Yet this search for order is not merely a matter of form in the aesthetic sense. In fact, in deeming "instruction" the ultimate goal of her play, Briony prioritizes the fulfilment of "the principles of justice" rooted in the existing order. In this world, virtue is rewarded and evil meets punishment with unequivocal certainty.

In its delineation of the process in which the protagonist's individual autonomy achieves homogeneity with social order, *The Trials of Arabella* resembles the structure of a *Bildungsroman* spelled out by Franco Moretti. In his book *The Way of the World*, Moretti relates the rhetorical structure of the *Bildungsroman* in the nineteenth century to the socialization of the European middle classes. A significant task of the *Bildungsroman* was to contain "the unpredictability of social change, representing it through the fiction of youth: a turbulent segment of life, no doubt, but with a clear beginning, and an unmistakable end" (Moretti 230). Moretti points out that in such a rhetorical structure was inscribed and articulated "[t]he cooperation of literature and law

in the symbolic legitimation of the existing order" (212). The events of Briony's play, too, are considered and treated in light of their conformity to social norms; and while its instructional purpose is to guide her dear brother, Leon, "away from his careless succession of girlfriends, toward a right form of wife" (4), it markedly features a "female" protagonist who turns away from "love which did not build a foundation on good sense" (3) to submit to the wisdom of the society, a choice which meets an unmistakable end of marriage "with its formal neatness of virtue rewarded" (8) and the reconciliation with "a whole society of approving family and friends" (9). The hyperbolic manifestation of the rhetorical structure in *The Trials of Arabella* whereby the ending converges with the existing order effaces the complexities of the motives that make up human action.

Briony is cognizant of the fact that her play, in construing human actions in the simplified category of good and evil, necessarily "reduces" the universe, manifesting "tidiness . . . almost to the point of nullity" (7), and feels obliged to compensate the corollary lack of nuances and intricacies in her play with melodramatic effects. Arabella's early "reckless passion" for the wicked count has meaning insofar as it serves as a foil to her consummation of marriage with the prince, love founded in "good sense" (3) that is in harmony with the existing order. Thus, even though Briony becomes exposed to divorce as a tangible reality with the visit of her cousins—the "vulnerable Quinceys" (12) in the aftermath of the disintegration of their parents' marriage--, divorce is simply considered an aberration which, showing "an unglamorous face of dull complexity and incessant wrangling" (9), is ruled out as a subject to be genuinely

engaged, in art as in life. Briony's artistic imagination closely resembles the way she accommodates obscurities and otherness in the everyday. Not entirely oblivious to the implications of going all out for a seamless plot in art and life, Briony nonetheless keeps that knowledge at arm's length: "the scribble of other minds, other needs" is at best considered "only in a rather arid way" (35), and "messiness of other minds" is deemed as nothing more than "a weed [that] had to die" (70).

It is not surprising that given its alignment with the dominant ideology, Briony's view of events earns the support of the adults around her such as her family and the authorities in charge, given pointed expression in Robbie's prosecution. Critics have noted a crucial continuity between Briony's fatal crime and the milieu that she inhabits. While James Phelan comments that "McEwan relies on the careful tracing of the convergence of the different characters and events to show how Briony's transgression was overdetermined" (329), Ilany Kogan examines Briony's accusation of Robbie against the backdrop of the British establishment, "with its diplomats who plan mass bombings, its rapacious businessmen, its repression of women, its maintenance of feudal class systems" (67). Throughout Part One, the narrative gives a thorough and vivid picture of Briony on the threshold of adolescence: aged thirteen, a dreamer, placed at an awkward stage in which she is reluctant to acknowledge her ignorance and inexperience of the ways of the world, Briony is portrayed as a child in need of assurance. Her youth, all in all, makes it more conducive for her to be the mouthpiece for the worldview of the Tallis household, because she lacks the experience and understanding to attain a critical distance from it. Dominick Head disparagingly points out the self-justificatory note

implied in the text's repeated references to Briony's youth. Head claims that these references, becoming "abrasive or defensive," attempt to underline "the impercipience of childhood, and so the *inevitability* of Briony's misperceptions" (165; emphasis in the original text); to my mind, however, the repeated suggestion of Briony's stage in life—the last phase in the "age of eloquence" (65), as mourned endearingly by her mother Emily—is more to the effect of heightening the sense of the rupture in Briony's fantasy world of tidiness, which also thematically augurs the impending World War.

Briony's remembrance of the day in 1935 that makes up Part One is shaped by the understanding she arrives at by placing herself in the position of the oppressor and continually plunging into the heart of suffering for her past offense. Such a perspective enables her to discern the structural violence that impinges on interpersonal relationships that is powerfully manifested in the sexual lives of the characters. The process by which the twenty-three-year-old Cecilia and Robbie, friends since they were seven, are drawn to each other teems with the undertones of the sensual and erotic signaling a turn in their relationship. The moments, depicted with admirable and sensitive detail, powerfully illuminate how "the familiar [i]s transformed into a delicious strangeness" (19) as the lovers awaken to the intricacies of romantic encounter only to be contained within the imperatives of the dominant discourse about gender.

Unable to identify the source of unease she feels around her childhood friend Robbie, Cecilia continues an untidy conversation with him full of "spikes, traps, and awkward turns" and "no chance to relax" (26) which, after several push and pulls, ends in her willful triumph when she succeeds in making Robbie feel that he needs to "make

amends" (27, 29) with her. Cecilia's tense and wandering behavior during this conversation gives a full portrait of a young woman who has fallen in love: she is inordinately and newly anxious about his judgment of her, especially that he might think she has a "taste for the full-blooded and sensual" (24) when she opines about literature; she newly notices the beauty of his eyes, his stature, and likes the "interesting combination in a man [that she finds in Robbie], intelligence and sheer bulk" (24); she asks if he feels jealous about her preparing a flower vase for her brother's friend, Leon; and when Robbie mistakenly ruins the vase in Cecilia's hands, she exhibits the boldness to provocatively strip her clothes in front of Robbie and dive into the fountain to retrieve the missing piece.[44]

Robbie's solitary moment in his room reveals that the romantic attraction is mutual. The scene in which Cecilia climbed out of the pond as she retrieved the broken piece of vase, stripped of clothes and wet, is replayed in Robbie's mind with detail as he "ma[kes] himself see it again" (74). Looking back upon their tense conversation, Robbie is convinced that "he loved [Cecilia's] fury, too" (75); he harbors a "pathetic hope," in wanting to believe that "she hid the unconscious desire to expose herself to him behind a show of temper" (76). Resolved to deliver a note to her justifying the oddity of his behavior of late, Robbie finds himself not being able to restrain giving words to his erotic desire. After a series of "genteel" drafts, he writes the fateful note which, in all its apparent vulgarity, embodies the incipient intimate sphere of the young lovers.[45]

The novel's detailed attention to such private moments heightens the sense of structural violence that infringes upon them which in turn resignifies the intimacy of the

lovers in terms which are alien to them. Briony, the onlooker of the lovers' incident in the fountain and of their lovemaking in the library, interprets Robbie's actions as assaults against Cecilia; and while Briony's sexual naiveté largely accounts for the limitations of her perspective, adults make plain their predisposition to make moral judgments about Robbie based on his social class in the ease with which they hold him culpable for Lola's rape.[46] Cecilia's insistence on the consensual nature of her sexual encounter with Robbie is not taken for what it is but met with condemnatory judgment of Cecilia in light of gender ideology. Lola's performance of the passive feminine figure, taking a "retreat behind an air of wounded confusion" (157) in the aftermath of the assault, is also reflective of the conventional attitudes about gender that bear upon the sexual lives of individuals.[47]

While epitomized in the events surrounding Lola's rape, the oppression of gender and sexual norms is present at various moments throughout Part One. In the novel, women are not merely victims of gender ideology but portrayed as solidifying it by adhering to, rather than significantly taking issue with, the socially defined assumptions about gender. Early on in the novel, Emily is represented as critical of the reality of women's education:

> [Cecilia] had been educated at home until the age of sixteen, and was sent to Switzerland for two years which were shortened to one for economy, and she knew for a fact that the whole performance, women at the Varsity, was childish really, at best an innocent lark, like the girls' rowing eight, a little posturing alongside their brothers dressed up in the solemnity of social progress. They

> weren't even awarding girls proper degrees. When Cecilia came home in July with her finals' result—the nerve of the girl to be disappointed with it!—she had no job or skill and still had a husband to find and motherhood to confront, and what would her bluestocking teachers—the ones with silly nicknames and "fearsome" reputations—have to tell about that? (61-2)

As behooves her mother's cynicism, Cecilia finds herself in desperation and empty (103) after her years at Cambridge, needing an adventure but with nothing pressing on her to leave; lacking the "benign explanation" (101) for life that her brother Leon easily finds for everything, she envies even as she adores him for whom "[l]iterature and politics, science and religion" (101) need not have place. Yet discerning as Emily is about the reality of women's place in society, and suffering from migraines in all likelihood for that sensitivity, she remains indifferent if not averse to the idea of problematizing the status quo. Cognizant of Jack Tallis's continued infidelity in their married life, Emily thinks that "[h]is deceit was a form of tribute to the importance of their marriage": prioritizing "conventional hypocrisy" over facing conflict that could risk "sources of contention in her life—the house, the park, above all, the children"—she hopelessly ruminates that "even being lied to constantly . . . was a sustained attention" (139). Despite being a victim of rape, Lola is far from being delineated in a sympathetic light, as the grounds for her actions persistently stem from self-centeredness, not caring about the repercussions of her actions. When she decides to marry Marshall knowing that he is her rapist and even though she stubbornly conceals that knowledge and lets the blame fall on Robbie, the violence of the rape—a quintessential objectification of the Other—is

glossed over and results in the destruction of one who is as much at a disadvantage as she. Briony derisively comments on Lola's marriage as little short of being virtue rewarded given Marshall's wealth and social status: "a chocolate magnate, the creator of Amo. Aunt Hermione would be rubbing her hands" (306).

In this seemingly harmless pursuit of security, characters willingly suppress the lurking disquiet and unease about their choices—choices which play along with structural oppression. Their blind search for an illusion of safety by abiding by this way of life is powerfully incarnated in the novel's figuration of "night creatures [who] were drawn to lights where they could be most easily eaten by other creatures" (139). Looking at moths encircling a lamp, Emily thinks about the mystery of their attraction to light where they become most vulnerable to demise and is reminded of a theory given by a professor:

> He had told her that it was the visual impression of an even deeper darkness beyond the light that drew them in. Even though they might be eaten, they had to obey the instinct that made them seek out the darkest place, on the far side of the light—and in this case it was an illusion. (140).

The irony of meeting death at the very place in which the moths seek safety parallels the ways in which the pursuit of the illusion of security—often at the expense of the Other—proves to be a nearsighted, self-defeating act at the end of the day. As it turns out, the ordinary and peaceful day ends in the event of rape, an egregious misconduct against the Other; and the setting of the house, which has been "giving an impression of timeless, unchanging calm" (18), would be abruptly transported to the scenes of the battlefield. In

the subsequent unfolding of events after this day, the novel intensifies the sense of connectedness between the penchant for tidiness and the madness of the War, notably in their akin ways of ruling out the human face of the Other. The prioritization of mastery upon which Briony built her world disintegrates as the Tallises and the world at large become embroiled in the massive atrocities of the War over which none can claim control.

Cecilia's Untidiness and the Ethics of Undoing

The tranquil setting in Part One gives way in Parts Two and Three to the battlefields of World War 2. The time is 1940, five years after the day delineated in Part One, and events are seen from the point of view of Robbie fighting as a private in the British Expeditionary Forces in France (Part Two) and of Briony serving as a trainee nurse in a London hospital (Part Three). The tense ending of Part One with Lola's rape, which brings to the surface cracks in the tidy world craved by Briony, finds its parallel in a disintegrated world in a much amplified scale. While the fateful day in 1935 ends in the prosecution of Robbie, the consequences of Briony's—and Lola's and Marshalls'—crime of false witness are carried over to the War. Robbie, released from prison on the condition of enlisting in the army, struggles to survive on the retreat to Dunkirk and meets death. The microcosm of the Tallises and the world at large experiencing the war are flagrantly juxtaposed in the way the characters come to view their private lives in light of the world in turmoil. Briony ruminates on the relation between the two as she looks back to her crime: "Her secret torment and the public upheaval of war had always

seemed separate worlds, but now she understood how the war might compound her crime" (271-2). Briony's private guilt about her past wrongdoing is constantly brought on to the wider field of violence. Tending a wounded solider, Briony dreads the "look of reproach" in the soldier's eyes that seems to be saying, "[w]hat have you done to me?" (284), a condemnation of the violence attributable for his hurt. Violence perpetrated in the official and large spaces of the battlefield, far from making seem lighter the crimes committed in private spaces, is noticeably considered as being entangled with small-scale everyday practices.

Such a tendency to think of private lives as entwined with or in light of the global turmoil pervades Parts Two and Three, underlining the inseparability of the private and the public. Part One has prompted readers to view Briony's crime in a milieu larger than the individual. Richard Robinson specifically observes that Briony's act is "complicit with the adult codes of her social class [although she] does not possess an instinctive knowledge of what is really happening" (486). Textual emphasis on context is reaffirmed when Brian Finney notes that Part One is intensely concerned with depicting the "social and economic categories that especially characterized British society in the 1930s" ("Briony" 76). In Part Two, we see that the context drawn in Part One is in turn linked to the imminent global turmoil. Finney continues to point out that the portrait of lives on the summer day reflects "a collective myopia" that the West was suffering from in 1935 with the rise of fascism (77). Brian O'Hara likewise comments that "Briony's aesthetic management of others very nearly parodies the more formal aspects of Fascism, which is itself looming on the horizon of the Tallis's world" (77), suggesting

the closeness between the child Briony's "passion for tidiness" and the towering political climate paving the way to the war. Such observations draw on the interconnectedness of the events of Part One and the outbreak of War as the culmination of the dominant political regime. As it turns out, the wrong done against Robbie, focalized in Part One, is the beginning of the countless instances of unjustifiable violence to which innocent lives would succumb. On a sleepless night after three and a half years in the army, mulling over with bitterness vanished lives in the battlefield whose death is the end result of "the indifference with which men could lob shells into a landscape" (190), Robbie is reminded of "another vanished boy, another vanished life that was once his own" (190). The succession of dismal events against the backdrop of the World War seems to allow little hope for redemption. Despite their endeavors to sustain their love through letters, Robbie and Cecilia die without ever being reunited; Paul Marshall, who lets Robbie take the blame of rape in his stead, not only becomes a chocolate magnate from war profiteering but also reaffirms himself as being exempt from the consequences of his crime when he marries Lola. Social justice is repeatedly called into doubt.

Amidst the unfolding of events that lead to antiheroic conclusions, the novel betrays a contrariwise impulse that interrogates the fantasy of wholeness upon which everyday practices, aspirations, and political ideology rest. In other words, a movement which is incompatible with the pursuit of tidiness—a "symmetry" in which "everything fitted" (158) and whose truth is "founded in common sense" (159)—in the content and form of life is at work; and this movement is manifested in Cecilia's untidiness as given expression in her love relationship with Robbie.[48] Cecilia's untidiness, which at first

glance is passively viewed against the norm of tidiness, gains in thematic significance as it reveals itself to be refractory to the cultural binarism which seeks to contain it. The reconfiguration of untidiness in the novel crucially divulges the made-up nature of wholeness posited by the cultural ideal of tidiness; but it also intimates how such a wholeness rests upon a possessive and exclusionary movement that is not only at the expense of those othered by the dominant group but also is self-defeating, paving the way to massive violence, from the consequences of which no one is exempt.

In the novel, Cecilia is introduced to the reader foremost as the owner of a very untidy room with "a stew of unclosed books, unfolded clothes, unmade bed, unemptied ashtrays" (4-5), one that is meticulously compared against the tidiness of Briony's. Cecilia's untidiness is explained in terms of stubbornly leaving things incomplete—"unclosed," "unfolded," "unmade," "unemptied"—as if they are in wait and anticipation, matching the "various possibilities" (20) that she keeps open for her life after Cambridge. It is this sense of incompletion that Briony notices about Cecilia's room:

> What squalor and disorder her sister lived in! Both wardrobe doors hung wide open. Various dresses were skewed out of their rows and some were half off their hinges . . . Briony stepped over and around the mess to get to the dressing table. What was the impulse that prevented Cecilia from replacing the caps and lids and screw-tops of her makeup and perfumes? Why did she never empty her stinking ashtray? Or make her bed, or open a window to let in the fresh air? . . . Cecilia might have been ten years older, but there really was something quite hopeless and helpless about her . . . it was right, the younger girl thought as she

> pulled open another door, that she was there for her, thinking clearly, on her behalf. (166-7)

While the insistent untidiness of her sister is apparently beyond Briony's understanding, it is sufficient reason for Briony to judge Cecilia to be "quite hopeless and helpless," lacking the soundness of sense to "thin[k] clearly" about her relationship with Robbie. As Robinson notes, Cecilia's untidiness proves to be decisive for Briony's misunderstanding of her sister's scandalous encounter with Robbie in the library: "mess equates to a ruinous sexuality" (487). For Briony, in other words, Cecilia's untidiness becomes the basis of the moral judgment of her character rather than being regarded simply as an attribute or a habit, a judgment that resonates with the dominant culture's view that infuses moral meaning into untidiness.[49]

Rather than being mere carelessness of habit, Cecilia's untidiness is emblematic of a frame of mind particular to her. Taking pleasure in an "untidy bunch of rosebay willow herb and irises" (19) with which to arrange a vase of flowers, Cecilia prefers a "natural chaotic look" (22) and an "artful disorder" over "willful neatness" (42). Her untidiness and her inclination to have things untidy have a consistency that makes the look of the disarray in his room immediately conjure for Robbie the thought of Cecilia:

> The unmade bed, the mess of discarded clothes, a towel on the floor, the room's equatorial warmth were disablingly sensual. He stretched out on the bed, facedown into his pillow, and groaned. The sweetness of her, the delicacy, his childhood friend, and now in danger of becoming unreachable. (75)

To Robbie's mind, the untidiness of the room—summoning the presence of Cecilia—is irresistibly sensual, auguring the sexual encounter between the two that would take place later that day. Their lovemaking in the library, characteristically described as the moment in which the young lovers break the old habit of friendship "to become strangers on intimate terms" (126), suggests another crucial aspect of Cecilia's untidiness: a willing forfeiture of the self to meet another world.

Cecilia's openness to the strange is prefigured in an earlier scene in which she responds to the Quincey cousins' call for help in search of socks. Reading their "closeted boredom" (94) in the immense mess of their room, Cecilia feels a pang of sorrow for the young cousins having been left to themselves in the Tallis estate far away from their home; and she comes to relate to their lives, feeling "how hopeless and terrifying it [would be] for them to be without love, to construct an existence out of nothing in a strange house" (94). Immediately prior to this scene, Cecilia, in the swarm of doubts and uncertainties of unexpectedly encountering the newness of her old friend Robbie, was miserably self-conscious of herself before the mirror, seeing "an austere, joyless woman" striving to fabricate a look of being "relaxed. . . and, at the same time, self-contained" (90-91). After tending to the needs of the twins, however, Cecilia finds herself surprisingly liberated from such self-consciousness, "completely satisfied with what she saw" in the mirror (95): she "cared less, for her mood had shifted since being with the twins, and her thoughts had *broadened*" (96; emphasis added). By exposing herself to be subject to otherness, Cecilia forms a new relation not only to the twins but to herself, no longer aspiring to be self-contained. Cecilia's responsiveness is a

counterpoint to the way in which for Briony, rehearsing her play with the twins "offend[s] her sense of order" (35). Briony becomes impatient as "[t]he self-contained world she had drawn with clear and perfect lines had been defaced with the scribble of other minds, other needs" (35). The twins have a meaning to her insofar as they fit the "self-contained world" drawn out by Briony, which they fail to do.

Cecilia's untidiness, which thus runs in a contrary logic to the pursuit of tidiness, warmly infuses new life into the untotalizable nuances in life, opening up a space ungoverned by the drive for homogeneity. Contrary to the condemning view of the wantonness of Robbie's wrongly delivered note to her, Cecilia cherishes it as intimate and private, that which surpasses social judgment. Thus, upon finding out that the letter has been read by her family and the police inspector, Cecilia furiously responds with the assertion of its ownership (167). In this sense, her lovemaking with Robbie stands for the nature of erotic activity as viewed by Georges Bataille, namely that it is "an aspect of our lives that apparently is as separate as possible from our union with the social group" (*Visions* 249). The secret of the encounter, by essence, makes it refractory to the system.

Cecilia and Robbie's lovemaking in the library characteristically foregrounds the relinquishment of the self in the encounter. The loss is configured as "breaking" (126), "stepping out" (127), a "selfless[ness]" (128), and a radical alteration—"transformation" (129)—of the familiar elements to a strange unity, to the point of no return. In *Visions of Excess*, Georges Bataille explains how a unity necessarily entails loss:

> Human beings are only united with each other through rents or wounds . . . If elements are put together to form a whole, this can easily happen when each one

> loses, through a rip in its integrity, a part of its own being, which goes to benefit the communal being. Initiations, sacrifices, and festivals represent so many moments of loss and communication between individuals. Circumcisions and orgies show adequately that there is more than one link between sexual laceration and ritual laceration; the erotic world itself has been careful to designate the act in which it is fulfilled as a 'little death'. . . it is in the creation or the maintenance of a new unity of being that they resemble each other. (*Visions* 251)

Bataille finds resemblance in sexual laceration and ritual laceration in that the "rents or wounds" in the act are put to the service of creating or maintaining "a new unity of being" (251). Significantly, loss generated by the "rip in [one's] integrity" is construed in terms of its bearings on the community, implications that go beyond the private. By virtue of entailing a loss, the act which is most private in essence "goes to benefit the communal being" (251). Bataille significantly likens the practices of religious sacrifice, which involve violence and destruction, to the extravagant expenditure of the Sun that dispenses energy without any return: he writes that "to sacrifice is not to kill but to relinquish and to give" (*Bataille* 213). He expounds on the lavish expenditure of the Sun foremost in terms of its effect on growth, namely that it forestalls stagnation and stasis. The moment in which the separateness of individual is foregone—"a 'little death'"—brings about intimacy, and because the relinquishment is a mode of an unproductive expenditure which releases energy alien to the laws of reciprocity, the moment fundamentally, even if only temporarily, alters the makeup of the community.[50]

The act of losing oneself persists in the relationship of Cecilia and Robbie long after they are physically separated subsequent to Robbie's prosecution. Cecilia breaks away from her family in order that she may preserve their love; she goes on to "destro[y] a part of herself for [Robbie's] sake" (196) so as to keep alive what she holds to be true and intimate in their relationship. While she first abandons her family without a full grasp of the meaning of this abandonment, by making such a leap she comes to attain a deeper understanding of her society. Thus she writes to Robbie: "Now that I've broken away, I'm beginning to understand the snobbery that lay behind their stupidity. My mother never forgave you your first. My father preferred to lose himself in his work. Leon turned out to be a grinning, spineless idiot who went along with everyone else" (196). Gaining a new perspective on how their act of condoning an immense injustice impinges on the world at large, and making herself susceptible to the change in her views, Cecilia takes a stand for social justice at the expense of the ties with her family in the face of the incommensurability of her choice. Her family loyalty is recast as Cecilia realizes that their indifference to finding the truth about Lola's rape originates in their insistence on keeping their world unscathed even if it means "wrecking" the life of Robbie. By naming it "stupidity," Cecilia rigorously condemns their willful blindness to the consequences of their action. In this sense, Cecilia's relationship with Robbie is a striking counterpoint to the marriage of Lola and Marshall, which can be viewed as an instance in which "self-interest and law found the joyless unity of beings" (Bataille *Visions* 250). Alongside its import in the private realm, their union is considered in light of its wider implication as one founded on violence, deceit, and a breach of justice.

Attending their wedding, Briony listens to the vicar's words with a full awareness of the irony of the situation: "[marriage] was ordained for a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication, that such persons as have not the gift of continency might marry and keep themselves undefiled members of Christ's body" (305).

The antiheroic conclusion that awaits the love of Cecilia and Robbie, however, attests to the immense risk entailed by Cecilia's choice. Given the length of time Cecilia is physically separated from Robbie, and the indefiniteness of the wait during wartime, one is led to question the exorbitance of her choice which is not bound by the law of reciprocity. What motivates Cecilia to sustain her love in spite of the uncertainty of the outcome, if not the anxiety of a highly dismal ending? Pointing out that there exists "a play of energy that no particular end limits"—an energy characterized by "excess" (*Accursed* 23)—, Bataille states that the prevailing practice of restrictive economy is accountable for the improper disregard of such energy. Restrictive economy is limiting as it "merely generalizes the isolated situation" (23) based on the principles of necessity, scarcity, and rational consumption, which in turn serves to "obscure the basic movement that tends to restore wealth to its function, to gift-giving, to squandering without reciprocation" (38). In place of the perspective which views economic events in arbitrary isolation, Bataille espouses viewing them in interaction with the general, as parts of a unity. From the perspective of Bataille's "general economy," then, it would not be out of the ordinary that "a transfer of American wealth [be made] to India without reciprocation" (40): not only would the American surplus be contained, but also the rise in the global standard of living would keep pressure of danger low. Contrary to the

prevailing practices, the tendency to expend without return is affirmed in Bataille's theory of consumption. The counterintuitive dynamic in the desire for expenditure is revealing in the way that it posits a centrifugal movement that counters the logic of symmetry which operates on an anticipated outcome. At the same time, the movement tends toward the salubriousness of the unity in that it releases a play of energy which, not limited by the fear of loss or the desire for aggrandizement, acknowledges the coexistence of space outside the totalizing system. Cecilia's untidiness, in this sense, affirms human potential ungoverned by the dehumanizing implications of restrictive economy.

Reading Cecilia's untidiness alongside Bataille's formulation of an energy characterized by "excess," it seems worthwhile to note that an openness to such counterintuitive impulses significantly permeates the scenes in the battlefield, particularly in the ways characters step down from familiar terrain to "unwrite" long-held beliefs and practices.[51] Cecilia, who was discerning enough to see the "unfathomable stupid[ity]" (47) of Marshall, a would-be chocolate magnate and a warmonger, discovers the snobbery of her family (196) only after seeing them in the light of the world in turmoil. Other characters, too, practice untidiness when they willingly embrace unfamiliar situations which disrupt the integrity of their former selves. The process in which they untidy—disarrange—their pre-existing assumptions and engage strangeness enables them to initiate a new relationship with the Other. In *Love's Knowledge*, Martha Nussbaum writes that just as beliefs are internalized from our society, emotions are learned by stories, "shap[ing] the way life feels and looks" (287).

Taking the example of Samuel Beckett's *Molloy Trilogy*, however, Nussbaum suggests that some stories show the ways in which the learned stories can also be *unlearned*:

> If stories are learned, they can be unlearned. If emotions are constructs, they can be dismantled. And perhaps the silence onto which this deconstructive project opens is an opening or clearing in which human beings and animals can recognize one another without or apart from the stories and their guilt (288).

The "opening" or "clearing" put into play that Nussbaum notes of Beckett's novel finds its parallel in Leo Bersani's concept of impoverishment. In *Arts of Impoverishment*, Bersani writes that "the antinarrative strategies of Beckett's work leaves silence uncovered by the unity of the words and sounds that punctuate them" (23); forgoing such unity in representation implies art's renunciation of a possessive movement toward the real—a sadistic mode that necessarily reduces and dismisses the complexity of life in trying to compensate for it through art. There is power to be found in such impotence, however, in that it is "to be lost or disseminated in a space that cannot be dominated, and to register attentively how relations are affected by a shattered ego's displacements within that space" (9). In other words, such a mode of relinquishment is more enabling in that a greater sensitivity is brought into play with which to inscribe the alterations in relations within that space where displacements of the ego transpire.

While the notions of "undoing" and "impoverishment" in Nussbaum's and Bersani's writings respectively discuss the aesthetics of the narrative mode and how it bears on the subject-object relations in Beckett's art, they are helpful for understanding how McEwan's novel reveals the ways relations are altered in the moment of suspension

of an epistemological privilege and are able to engender new unities. Briony's choice to be a trainee nurse to join the war effort instead of going to Cambridge surprises Cecilia. The novel is not slow to show, however, that this choice of Briony's to submit to duty which involves emptying out the self to tend to others' needs is not entirely out of a selfless motive, but driven more or less by a desire to ease herself from the needling guilt of her past crime: the service demands of her an "*unthinking* obedience," "a process by which other concerns [a]re slowly excluded" (259; emphasis added). Yet if such a choice may be the result of her passion for tidiness—to sustain and defend her sense of self—, it is by virtue of this very self-imposed penance that Briony comes to recognize herself as implicated in the lives of strangers, casualties that primarily strike her as "a wild race of men from a terrible world" (274). The disruption and alteration of her selfhood is given expression in her encounter with Luc Cornet, a French soldier of the same age as Briony. Given an order by Sister Drummond to speak with him, Briony soon finds that this casualty who has lost a side of his head conflates the location for Millau, his hometown in France, and Briony for his sweetheart. Uncomfortable and feeling obligated, at first, to disabuse him of the delusion, Briony gradually suspends her sense of time and place to inhabit the space marked by Luc and become a partaker of his past:

> He said, "You know that my mother is very fond of you."
>
> "Is she?"
>
> "She talks about you all the time. She thinks we should be married in the summer."

She held his gaze. She knew now why she had been sent.

. . .

"Do you love me?"

She hesitated. "Yes." No other reply was possible. Besides, for that moment, she did. (291-92)

As she lets go her practical mindset so as to be in the moment with Luc, Briony's relation to him as a nurse tending a dying soldier is transformed to lovers in a delicious unison, a moment of oneness that alters both: he, rapturously transported from the realness of suffering, and she, broadened to feel *with* him, so that she imagines with sadness "the unavailable future—the boulangerie in a narrow shady street swarming with skinny cats, piano music from an upstairs window, her giggling sisters-in-law teasing her about her accent, and Luc Cornet loving her in his eager way" (293). Luc's "unavailable future" as imagined and mourned by Briony resonates with the unavailable future for Robbie and Cecilia as they die during the war. Their love, denied the "space and a society to grow in" (213) in the world in which they lived, would be brought into being in Briony's fictive incarnation in which she gives a new ending to their love. Briony's moment with Luc, prefiguring the poignancy of her contrived story of Robbie and Cecilia, intimates how Briony's task of atonement—mending of the fracture of love, justice, and what it means to be human—necessarily involves being at one with the other in disempoweredness, just as she cedes her former assumptions to relate to the love of Robbie and Cecilia.

The moment of feeling with the other enables Robbie to intuit what is genuine to his desire as distinct from "mimetic desires"—mediated desires, the distorting role of which René Girard finds responsible for the violence of "mark[ing] out and destroy[ing] victims" (Frear 132). On the demoralizing retreat to Dunkirk, Robbie and his fellow soldiers face excited troops about to lynch an RAF man. The failure of the RAF to protect their fellow soldiers from the enemy air fire culminates in an enraged mob action insisting that the RAF man must "pay" for what they had suffered, holding him "answerable for the Luftwaffe's freedom of the skies, for every Stuka attack, every dead friend" (237). Finding himself vulnerable to unpleasant excitement, Robbie considers the situation at a distance:

> It was madness to go to the man's defense, it was loathsome not to. At the same time, Turner understood the exhilaration among the tormentors and the insidious way it could claim him. He himself could do something outrageous with his bowie knife and earn the love of a hundred men . . . But the real danger came from the mob itself, its righteous state of mind. It would not be denied its pleasures. (237)

Identifying with the tormentors and sensing his own closeness to "do[ing] something outrageous" to become a hero in the mob, Robbie also marks the human face of the RAF man and the ways in which not the person but the idea of the man in utter "weakness and submission" provokes the angered crowd, so that "only one end" (238) awaits him. Descrying the humanity of the RAF man that resembles his very own, Robbie chooses a different course of action and helps the man escape, thereby undermining the mob's

collective drive for violence. Robbie's decision is based on his understanding that the mob's mimetic desire for violence arises from their "righteous state of mind" (237). This, however, is far from a heroizing moment for Robbie. The wartime experience has led Robbie to fundamentally interrogate his previously held assumptions that separate the good from the evil:

> What was guilt these days? It was cheap. Everyone was guilty, and no one was . . . All day we've witnessed each other's crimes. You killed no one today? But how many did you leave to die? (246-7)

The problem of violence is brought to a broader horizon where no one is immune to its consequences: no one can be singly named the oppressor, and the wrongdoing is communal. In "Mimesis and Violence," René Girard observes that what is particular to the story of Joseph in the Old Testament is that it "espouses the perspective of victim" (18). The Bible weightily addresses the ways in which the revelation of Joseph's victimage and the community's refusal to acknowledge it, places ethical demands on human beings (16-7). The burden of Joseph's victimage falls not only on those involved, but squarely on the community (19). The ways in which Robbie sees his relation to wrongdoing from a different perspective resonates with Girard's examination of Joseph's victimage as a communal burden.

While the novel presents a dark portrait of the violent ramifications—in both the private and the public sphere—of a worldview founded on self-aggrandizement, it also sheds light on a distinct contrariwise drive that tends toward the ego's shatteredness, a drive that aligns with the novel's reconfiguration of untidiness. Untidiness, increasingly

dislodging its meaning as a mere conceptual other to the cultural norm of tidiness, comes to signify the perpetual breaking down of the self to meet the Other. The novel affirms the possibilities of being *with* the Other—a counterpoint to the hostilities and exclusionary belief-habits that pervade the narrative—in its visions of genuine contact in the moments of meeting of another world.

Metafiction: the Text as World and the World as Text

In the last long passage of the novel, the readers encounter an unexpected twist, perhaps more surprising than the previous moment in which Briony reveals herself as the writer of the novel. Briony writes:

> There was a crime. But there were also the lovers. Lovers and their happy ends have been on my mind all night long . . . It is only in this last version that my lovers end well, standing side by side on a South London pavement as I walk away. All the preceding drafts were pitiless. But now I can no longer think what purpose would be served if, say, I tried to persuade my reader, by direct or indirect means, that Robbie Turner died of septicemia at Bray Dunes on 1 June 1940, or that Cecilia was killed in September of the same year by the bomb that destroyed Balham Underground station. That I never saw them in that year . . . How could that constitute an ending? What sense of hope or satisfaction could a reader draw from such an account? Who would want to believe that they never met again, never fulfilled their love? Who would want to believe that, except in the service of the bleakest realism? (349-50)

Having just disclosed the fact that the novel that readers have read is the last of her multiple endeavors in which she set out to describe her past crime, Briony makes a curious turn when she admits taking poetic license as a writer by revising a portion of the past so as to give the love of Cecilia and Robbie a happy ending. The reason for such a change of facts, Briony continues, is the "sense of hope or satisfaction" that readers expect in reading fiction. In taking this artistic liberty, Briony deviates from the principle of veracity she claims to have upheld thus far—"to disguise nothing—the names, the places, the exact circumstances—[to] put it all there as a matter of historical record" (349).

Once again Briony foregrounds her status as the author of the novel, one who has the "absolute power of deciding outcomes" (350) and who is entitled to give a different ending to the account of the past than things as they really were. Briony's act of calling the reader's attention to her act of composition has invited various critical responses. On the one hand are critics who critique the blatant metafictional framing as undermining the moral import of the novel. Dominick Head observes that while the narrative offers readers "a strong sense of lived experience that is morally moving" (162), the self-conscious disclosure of its fictionality saps the reader's ethical investment as it proclaims the universe of fiction as one being unto itself. Bringing into scrutiny the ways in which Briony's implication in the narrative stance inflects the story, Head argues that in the final analysis, the metafictional element in McEwan's novel "suggests a crisis about the novel as a vehicle for moral ideas, and the function of the author in terms of any ethical dimension beyond the responsibility to writing" (172). In a similar

vein, Maria Margaronis notes that the self-reflexivity implies that "our accounts of the past cannot but be self-serving . . . [and] have no claim to truth" (148). In this sense, all writing "is a kind of betrayal" (148): representing history only incurs an epistemological regret. The effect of the twist, for critics like Richard Robinson, is likewise self-serving for the novelist, as it turns the focus of the novel to the "secret" of the composition: the degree to which the reader is taken by surprise—at first by the revelation that Briony authored the novel, and then by the disclosure near the end that Briony had imaginatively concocted a happy ending for the lovers—attests to McEwan's mastery of authorial control, an emphasis upon which the novel's buildup of moral complexity is undermined (487).

Other critics have voiced an inverse proposal that the novel's insistence on its constructed nature attests to the "ethical essence of narrativity" (O'Hara 90). Brian Finney suggests that the metafictional moment should be viewed in terms of what it discloses about the author and narrator, Briony. For Finney, Briony's revision evidences her imaginative "project[ion] into the feelings and thoughts of others, grant[ing] them an authentic existence outside her own life's experiences" (81) contra her former solipsistic views. O'Hara, too, affirms the ethicality of the self-conscious narration in McEwan's novel in that it "submits narrativity as that which puts the self into interactive and meaningful contact with the Other and the world-at-large" (91). Like Finney, O'Hara places importance on the way in which Briony achieves empathy with Robbie and Cecilia in the writerly process, and equates such process to her act of throwing herself into "being-for-another" (82). Rather than undermining the reader's faith in narrative,

Briony's disclosure of fabrication enacts a meta-mimesis which espouses mimesis as a "creative process through which different possibilities of being are made communicable" and "a lifeline through which the self can feel for others" (91).

Such critical responses crucially address the problem of where to locate the ethicality of fiction. These critics commonly point out that the narrating persona Briony and her disclosure of the fact about the composition impinge on what we decide about the moral import of the novel. Given that all fiction is constructed, calling the reader's attention to the fact of fabrication alone may not be a decisive moment. What makes this revelation more complex is the uniqueness of Briony's position relative to the narrative and the fact that "atonement" is the professed structural principle of the novel. Briony is a participant in the story; one can surmise that her experience of guilt and suffering for the past wrongdoing is embedded in the telling of the story. Yet Briony, as a narrator, also occupies a space removed from the story, an exploratory site not necessarily subject or confined to the the code and order of realism. Her confession of contriving the outcome of the lovers accentuates such a position. One needs to look at both levels to explore the ethics of the novel as it relates to its metafictionality. In what follows, I argue that Briony's disclosure of her invention performs textual untidiness in two ways. Rather than leave the past in its pastness, Briony uses her artistic medium to engage the past differently in a fictive space that nullifies the determinants that made the past what it was. While she explains that such contrivance has been made for the readers to draw "a sense of hope or satisfaction" (349) from the text, it is not fantasy for its own sake; rooted in her beleaguered deliberations of the implications of her past wrongdoing,

Briony's remade ending espouses the mystery of human encounter and intimacy refractory to systems of knowledge and judgment. In the making of space and a society in which the love of Robbie and Cecilia would grow (213), Briony's revision denaturalizes ideologies and mores that go without saying and opens up the possibility to envision change from the existing order of things. Second, Briony's comment that the revision is also a response to the (imagined) expectation of the reader in effect breaks through the allegedly "airtight" world of fiction and places the text and the reader on the same plane. The reader, not merely positioned in the passive receiving end, is considered to be constitutive of the making of the hybrid textual space, even outside the text's aesthetic limits.

With a tinge of irony, Briony notes that in tampering with facts so as to give the past a more palatable resolution, she might be repeating the fairytale-like happy ending in *The Trials of Arabella* which she concocted as a girl. Her comment, of course, cannot be taken at face value, for despite her penchant for a "tidy finish" (334), Briony obfuscates the closure of the narrative in such a way that defies the tidiness of the ending in *The Trials of Arabella*. The fate of the novel cannot be separated from the fate of the narrator as protagonist Briony. Aged seventy-seven when she addresses the readers and suffering from vascular dementia, Briony's mental health is rapidly declining, making unsure where her narrative is heading; nor can we be assured of the publication of "Briony's" novel, given the prospective libel charges by Lola should Briony publish it. The fictionalized union of the lovers, however, is envisioned as the very space in which Briony thinks about these matter-of-fact issues. This literary space, resonating with

Michel Foucault's formulation of heterotopia, is that in which the seemingly incompatible dimensions—the real and the illusory—meet and are put in conversation with each other. In "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," Foucault exemplifies the ship as a heterotopia:

> If we think, after all, that the boat is a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea and that, from port to port, from tack to tack, from brothel to brothel, it goes as far as the colonies in search of the most precious treasures they conceal in their gardens, you will understand why the boat has not only been for our civilization, from the sixteenth century until the present, the great instrument of economic development . . . but has been simultaneously the greatest reserve of the imagination. The ship is the heterotopia par excellence. In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates. ("Other Spaces" 9)

As "a floating piece of space," the ship at once "exists by itself" and "is given over to the infinity of the sea." Not intact from real space, it is also at a remove from it to allow alternatives to the order that governs real space. The alternatives simultaneously reveal the order of things as they are in real space and explore an otherwise to that order. Foucault elaborates on the mirror as another example of heterotopia, insofar as it "does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy," enabling me "to reconstitute myself there where I am" (4). In other words, in heterotopia, reconstitution transpires and is investigated side by side with the existing

order of things. The incommensurable simultaneity of the happy ending of the lovers and Briony's here and now in *Atonement* makes possible a literary space not informed by a unified subjectivity.

In "The Storyteller," Walter Benjamin locates the origin of the novel in the way "the solitary individual, who is no longer able to express himself by giving examples of his most important concerns, is himself uncounseled, and cannot counsel others" (87). The emergence of the novel coincides with the breakdown of the communicability of one's concerns. Thus, the novelist marks a contrast to the storyteller, whose very essence lies in the communicating of his experience: "the storyteller takes what he tells from experience . . . [a]nd he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale" (87). Benjamin's concept of the storyteller thus posits the passability of experiences: counsel is "less an answer to a question than a proposal concerning *the continuation* of a story which is just unfolding" (86; emphasis added). The feat, an incomplete and open-ended one by nature, is nonetheless not independent of the storyteller. Storytelling "sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again" (92). In other words, the story is also *sui generis*, inseparable from the specificity of the speaker; yet passed on from the storyteller to the listener, it is turned to "the experience of those who are listening to the tale," leading to the continuation of the story. The story lacks the fullness that characterizes the novel, the reading experience of which "yields [readers] the warmth which we never draw from our own fate" (101). Benjamin's construal of the novel and (the younger) Briony's understanding of stories share the assumption that reading is a uni-directional process, whereby the readers

vicariously experience what is presented to them by the writer. In her youth, Briony likens the story to "a form of telepathy" in that, "[b]y means of inking symbols onto a page, [she is] able to send thoughts and feelings from her mind to her readers" (35). Briony posits no gap between the symbols of her sentence and the way they are understood by readers. Writing as a self-contained form necessarily rules out the reader's imprint on the text.

In bringing to the fore the presence of readers in the process of reading and pointing out that the contrived ending of the lovers is the result of taking into consideration their expectations, Briony's authorship is more that of a Benjaminian storyteller recounting the past in the particularity of the here and now than that of the novelist. The self-consciousness with which Briony writes about her act of composition posits a reader actively engaging her narrative. Even as she assigns her role of author as "God" with the "absolute power of deciding outcomes" (350), Briony paradoxically foregoes the authority as the final voice of her fifty-nine-year long enterprise. Rather than rest content with a tidy closure, thus, the reader becomes beholden to the call to play her part, in the words of Benjamin, in the "continuation of [the] story which is just unfolding" (86). Neither can the reader be assumed to have the final word; reading is not about "attempt[ing] to evaluate or even solve a text's problems" (Newton 11) but a process which "engages [readers] in [the text's] concrete, formal, narrative particularity . . . [and has them] confront claims raised by that very immediacy, an immediacy of contact, not of meaning" (11). In *Narrative Ethics*, Adam Zachary Newton expounds on the relationship between text and reader as akin to the interactive problematics of ethics,

an intersubjective encounter that binds them "as claim, as risk, as responsibility, as gift, as price" (7). In the act of reading, a process parallel to that which transpires in fictional narratives whereby "characters and authors construct others in order to escape a certain deadlock of/in subjectivity" (57): placing the encounter in the world and the text on the same plane, Newton intimates the crossing of borders between the fictional and the real world. More to the point, he writes that "narrative literature shares structures and assumptions with other forms of social understanding" (24). The readers' committal in the process of reading—"the ethical price exacted from readers by texts" (25)—gains in significance for the reason that it bears on their dealings with their here and now.

Reading *Atonement* as a memory text that looks to the past of the World War by way of the microcosm of the Tallises surrounding the event of Lola's rape, readers are called forth to take part in an untidy dialogue with no hopes for a divine intervention to resolve the text's deepest quandary about atonement. As Briony writes, "[t]here is nothing outside her" and it is only in "her imagination [that] she has set the limits and terms" (351). Left to their own devices, readers share in her state of destitution. One might interrogate what meaning can be found in repeatedly returning to the event more than half a decade past. What motivates Briony to write, despite her hopelessness about the publication of her novel and her uncertainty about restitution? The answer, to my mind, lies in the question. With no gesture towards closure, Briony can only point to what she raises in her narrative. She sees the injustice of the here and now—the truth about Lola's rape aggressively silenced by the powerful and rich—as linked to the oppression that has led to vanished lives (190) such as Robbie's and Luc's. With a sense

of helplessness, Briony nonetheless recognizes those lives, the faces that have been erased, as those that cannot be forgotten. In the specificity of her present time, Briony's narrative calls for change.

What does it mean for readers in the postmodern era—generations removed from the past represented in Briony's novel—to read *Atonement*? What conditions of postmodern life makes such historical novels relevant? In *Life in Fragments*, Zygmunt Bauman notes that "the roots of postmodern moral problems go down to the fragmentariness of the social context and the episodicity of life pursuits" (9). Whereas the modern project sought to keep moral ambivalence at bay by formulating "the prescriptions and proscriptions of an ethical code" (4) and thus produced "an 'unencumbered', 'disembedded' personality" (5), the postmodern world has reinstated man as the lonely moral actor responsible for his choices. In the words of Derek Attridge, the postmodern man acts "in the knowledge of the aporia implicit in every deed" (69). Bauman suggests that this postmodern condition may be chance as well as bane (8): bane, for the reason that the privatization of ethical rules and the episodic nature of life's experiences appear to make it easy to get away from the consequences of one's actions, but also chance, with "a prospect of a greater awareness of the moral character of our choices [and] of our facing our choices more consciously and seeing their moral contents more clearly" (7). The experience of engaging the processes in which characters make moral deliberations in the text's "concrete, formal, narrative particularity" (Newton 11) can lead to the readers' heightened awareness about the moral dimension of their choices. Becoming better readers of the world, readers would

be equipped with a greater sensitivity to the wider-reaching consequences of their actions both in time and the world at large.

One may have objections to this idea that appears to draw from a particular text, which is specific to its context, to gesture toward a generalized notion of human affairs. Yet as Martha Nussbaum suggests in *Love's Knowledge*, historical particularity and the idea of being human may be intertwined. She writes:

> Particularity and historical context are not visible to the godlike intelligence; and the importance of context and particularity for us as we are is inseparable from the fact that we are bodily finite beings of a particular sort, beings who go through time in a particular way . . . [I]t is only when one focuses on the human and the differences between the human and the bestial, the human and the divine, that we begin to understand why particularity and history—and particular love—matter to us as they do. (391)

In other words, it is by virtue of our humanness that context and particularity speak to us across time and space. The unrealized love of Robbie and Cecilia gains in pathos for the reason that it brings into focus the linearity of human time and irrevocability of past events; and because erotic relationships, as Bataille suggests, put us "in the presence of realities that are not only the most obscure, but also the most *familiar*" (*Visions* 249; emphasis added), the love of Robbie and Cecilia has the power to speak to readers across time and space. Not stopping at the evocation of emotions, readers in turn are prompted to assess what constitutes their response and partake in the text's call to rethink habits of thought and worldview that have been

detrimental to human intimacy and justice. Thus, our responsiveness—and responsibility—to the text's elicitation cannot be dissociated from a profound sense of what it means to be human.

The underlying rationale for marking the connections between the text and the world and nurturing the capacity to relate to the lives of strangers are closely related to the experience of massive violence that characterizes the twentieth century. With the historical traumas of genocides and massive destruction—a past that, in the words of Andreas Huyssen, "mars *a priori* any attempt to glorify it" (25)—, there is a greater imperative to be able to see the victims for who they are—their human face—so as to remember them in an enabling way. Narrative fiction performs the role of redeeming the humanness of those that have vanished as objects by its elicitation to readers to engage their lives as another human being. In this sense, the textual space performs a role analogous to protests in the social sphere to keep the public eye open to injustices perpetrated; and indeed, the significance of the endeavors to enliven public consciousness to past atrocities can by no means be underestimated. Huyssen points out the ways in which the long, persistent protests of mothers and grandmothers in Argentinia to establish what became of the *desaparecidos* ("the disappeared") and the crimes inflicted on their children during military dictatorship of the Argentinean state and to seek justice through the courts "forced the country to *keep* facing the reality of state terror" (98; emphasis added). As a result, there have been ever intensified debates on "the legal conflict regarding how and whom to prosecute [and] the cultural and political conflict of how to commemorate" (98).

Huyssen further suggests that these efforts exemplify the way in which Holocaust discourse was productively inscribed in the local controversy, giving it a global dimension. While there have been naysayers who voiced an acerbic attack on the practices of relativizing the Holocaust, Huyssen maintains that while it is by no means his point to downgrade the significance of the particularities of historical cases, what is to be gained by references to the Holocaust outweighs such qualms: Holocaust discourse "functions like an international prism that helps focus the local discourse about the *desaparecidos* in both its legal and its commemorative aspects" (98). In the long run, the fight for public memory paved the way for Argentina to construct its cultural memory.

What does it mean for fiction—with imaginary characters and events—to look back and give voice to historical trauma? The controversy about the propriety of the novelist's act of fictionalizing events beyond their firsthand experience and of the reader's ethical investment in the fictionalized accounts have illuminated crucial questions about the novel as a moral medium as well as the author's role in regards to the morals of the novel. As a memory text, *Atonement* engages the violence of the Second World War by way of a close look at the "passion for tidiness" that presides over the child Briony's mind and which aligns with the beliefs and practices of the Tallis household and the society of which it is a part. By revealing Cecilia's untidiness, significantly given expression in the novel's attention to the problem of gender and sexuality, to be a contrariwise impulse to break down the integrity of the self so as to keep alive the dimension of otherness, the novel envisions enabling

possibilities of being with the Other as distinct from a possessive relationship to Other that underlies the ideology that paves way for the War. In the connections that it draws between the private and public, the past and the present, the novel encourages a reading that relates the world of the text to the specificity of the reader's here and now so that injustices across time are put together as linked historical forms in an enabling dialogue. Finally, the novel's textual untidiness—its act of calling attention to its constructedness—breaks through the airtight world of fiction to elicit readers in its concrete moments of deliberation, exacting the price—their role—in the making of a more livable world.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This dissertation began with the simple question: why the representations of "untidy" women in fictions that engage genocide and wars? How do we situate the minutiae of these women's experiences in the fabric of narratives about historical atrocities? My study of the textual moments in which female characters are noticed for untidiness in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), D.M.Thomas's *The White Hotel* (1981), and Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001) has revealed British society's deeply ingrained episteme that works upon exclusion. By intimating a correlation between structural violence associated with social ideas of untidiness in the small-scale moments of the everyday and the violence of history-making events that have incurred numberless deaths, the novels that this dissertation considers have shed light on the critical potential of unassuming, private lives to uncover the systemic underpinnings of mass annihilation.

My study has suggested the ways in which the import of attending to the private lives of the "untidy" female characters lies not so much in recuperating their experiences of injustice as those that have been marginalized in history as in broaching the matter of sexuality to rethink systems of understanding that the novels align with the violence of historical atrocity. Beyond its meaning imposed by the cultural signifying system that constrains women's sexual behavior, "untidiness" as engaged in novels by Woolf, Thomas, and McEwan gains in significance for illuminating the profound aspects of human existence refractory to totalizing structures. My dissertation has made the case that for their rhetorical efficacy, these novels depend on the reader's affective engagement with the value of the

irreducible that is brought to light in the ways the narratives thematize sexual life. The novels' treatment of the matter of sexuality, in other words, has closely to do with their appeal to readers' ethical sensibilities, to cultivate their sensitivity to the imperative to redress the violation of what is to remain singular and intimate to the individual in order that life is made more bearable. The representations of untidiness in these novels, then, are inseparable from their query into what makes a livable life to counter the totalizing forces that lay foundations for mass deaths.

Yet the critique of the brutalizing system *per se*, as I have sought to suggest, is not the defining moment. As memory texts that look back to the past, the novels in this study are concerned with exploring, in a more active sense, a mode of being in the world that does not play along with exclusionary habits of thought, to an extent adumbrated in their envisionment of fulfilling sexual encounters. In each of my full chapters, I have examined how these novels reconfigure "untidiness," disabusing the term from its cultural signified to recast it in terms of its enabling sense as the state of keeping alive the dimension of otherness in life. My analyses of the textual moments in which female characters practice ethics of untidiness have revealed that bearing an alterity within the self is bound up with the perpetual breakdown of the self's autonomy. By forgoing the hierarchical dichotomy between the righteous self against the culpable other, and by atoning for wrongdoing accountable for the suffering of the Other in their volitional acts of sharing the burden imposed by the consequences of violence, the women embody the conceptualization of the self as "a porous boundary, given over to others" (Butler *Undoing* 25) in a wider field of injustices. The ways in which their practices displace the logic of violence open up a

productive space to diversify discourse, altering the terms with which to construe wrongdoing.

My dissertation has also observed the ways in which novels by Woolf, Thomas, and McEwan, in their textual untidiness, gestate a space not presided over by epistemic violence. Rather than assume to be self-contained, these historical fictions enact the reconfigured sense of untidiness in continually bringing alterity to bear upon their narratives. In variously calling attention to their ontological status as fabricated discourse, the novels from the outset depart from Rankean *wie es eigentlich gewesen* or from Lukacs's notion of social totality in their representations of history. Figuring brokenness in their very form, the narratives elicit the reader's role to partake in their state of destitution in search of an ethical mode of relating to historical enormity. Their state of privation is turned into inaugural moments to enliven conversations about the past with the view to keep eyes open to atrocities even as they refuse to turn that history and humanly contrived deaths into readily recognizable narratives. Renouncing teleological and determinist approaches to history, the novels bring the violence of history as a generative site to bear upon the readers' concerns in the here and now in pursuit of making a more livable world.

How do we situate these historical fictions among a welter of contemporary endeavors to remember history? The narratives by Woolf, Thomas, and McEwan are distinctive in their ways of positing a porous—untidy—boundary between the text and the reader: the gaze of the reader upon these narratives' engagements with the past is turned back upon the reading subject, so that the two—the textual processes and the reader—become indissociable. The challenge posed by these narratives, in other words, is for

readers to commit themselves to the text's shattering processes of relating to a violent past. Without letting go the wholeness of their worlds, so these narratives seem to suggest, it would be difficult for readers to meaningfully relate to lives that have been scourged and destroyed by violence. Speculating on the bombings by the Nazis at the height of the Second World War, Woolf called for the urgency, among other things, to "drag up into consciousness the subconscious Hitlerism that holds us down" ("Thoughts" 169) to make a world of peace. Woolf detects the enemy that deters living in harmony with otherness as not being exterior to ourselves, so that an ethical practice of living begins with the willful act of giving ourselves over to the ongoing process of breaking down our integrity to fight tyranny, to meet the Other.

Even after the barbarity of the Nazi Holocaust, the world has repeatedly witnessed genocides that have highlighted politics of remembering as a crucial moral concern that impinges not only on the present but on future generations. As exemplified by the novels that this dissertation examines, the British historical novel's turn away from Nietzsche's ideas of "antiquarian history" aligned with the aims of solidifying the borders of the nation to the harboring of an expanded historical sense that perpetually opens itself out to alterity is a salubrious move in an ever growing media-saturated world that sees crimes perpetrated against the Other in unprecedented diversity and proportions. I would like to investigate what insights can be gained by looking further into the threshold moments in which such a transition has been made within the genre to explore the moral capacity of British historical fiction committed to envisioning fundamental change.

NOTES

[1] Roland Barthes's seminal essay "The Discourse of History" (1967) attacks the vaunted objectivity of history by foregrounding the coded nature of locution, namely that a particular way of looking at the world is embedded in discourse. In *Metahistory* (1973), Hayden White likewise underscores this encoding—which he terms "emplotment"—as grounds for opposing narrative history. Targeting the narrative mode of representing history, the expositions of Barthes and White resonate with the reexamination, by their contemporary historians, of the conventions of nineteenth-century historiography. A. S. Byatt points out that "the renaissance of the historical novel" (9) in Britain from the late twentieth century coincides with "the refusal of narrative by contemporary historians" (10).

[2] I limit my discussion to experimental and self-referential historical novels that can more or less be grouped under Linda Hutcheon's category of "historiographic metafiction" in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988) which Hutcheon identifies as postmodern historical novels that give a vivid representation of a moment in history even as they emphasize the textuality of that representation.

[3] The classic historical novel as expounded by Georg Lukács, for instance, is characterized by its ability to "present a 'total' picture of a society at the point of historical change, a kind of microcosmic snapshot of a real period of time" (Nicol 100); the typicality of the hero is significant. In *The English Historical Novel*, Avrom Fleishman emphasizes the historical novel's achievement of universality and its role

to shed light on the eternal human condition governed by the "real" events that it embodies.

[4] Jed Esty's book, *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England*, gives a compelling analysis of the idea of the nation's insularity. Esty alludes to how England negotiated the problem of a "lost cultural wholeness" (6) concomitant to its imperial expanse in the early twentieth century by turning to "Anglocentric representations of meaningful time and bounded space" which correlated to the totality of the national culture. Alluding to the mid-century scorn among English writers upon the genre of the historical novel, Byatt notes how such dismissals had to do with the reactionary nationalism associated with the genre that aligned itself with the "'nostalgia/heritage/fancy dress/costume drama industry'" (9).

[5] "Unclean(ness)," "dirt(y)," "mess(y)," "impropre" (the French term for "unclean"), and "clutter(ed)" are some such proximal words that I discuss in my study.

[6] The proposition that I mention in the first part of this sentence is more or less informed by the main thesis in Sianne Ngai's *Our Aesthetic Categories*. Ngai attends to three words—zany, cute, and interesting—among a welter of words used to describe our aesthetic response. She sheds light on the extent to which these unassuming words and the non-aesthetic features of culture are mutually informing. As words that speak most directly to "everyday practices of production, circulation, and consumption" (1), the zany, cute, and the interesting also attest to the ways in which aesthetic experience has been "transformed by the hypercommodified,

information-saturated, performance-driven conditions of late capitalism" (1). Although the usage of the term "untidy" in the novels that I examine seldom concerns aesthetic judgment, Ngai's methodology is useful for thinking about how our use of everyday terms is telling about culture.

[7] Angela Kershaw and Angela Kimyongur corroborate this point when they maintain that individual women's experiences during this period should be considered against the context in which "progressive and regressive definitions of femininity existed simultaneously" (6).

[8] A pioneer British woman physician and gynaecologist who practiced during the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, Scharlieb writes this observation in *The Hidden Scourge* (1916) in which she discusses the "moral" ramifications of the venereal diseases that then emerged as a social problem for the nation as a whole.

[9] Gikandi's point resonates with a moment in which Lois, a 17-year-old protagonist in Elizabeth Bowen's *Last September* (1929), reacts with anger to Gerald in the aftermath of an Irish attack. Lois is frustrated by the fact that she had nothing better to do than to be cutting out a dress, which she likens to being in "some kind of cocoon," in the middle of "such violent realness" (66). While Gerald, a British officer and her lover, asks lovingly but *condescendingly* what else she could have done, Lois bursts out that she could "at least have *felt something*" (66) and derides the hypocrisy of acting as if nothing had happened. What is interesting in this scene is that she compares herself to England, saying that her situation of not expressing any sentiments other than calm is as bad as England itself which is "so moral, dreadfully

keen on not losing her temper" (66). Lois and Gerald form a different relationship to Englishness. Gerald esteems England's tranquility—and Lois's servility to gender norms—as desirable, views with which Lois is at variance.

[10] Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927) thematizes this process: Lily Briscoe's aesthetic quest which breaks away from the art of her forbears is coterminous with her prolonged search of the past in which Mrs Ramsay—who dies during the Great War and in many ways stands for prewar values—figures.

[11] Walter Benjamin sees the issueless private concerns that characterize Marcel Proust's elongated search of the past in *À la Recherche du temps perdu* (1913-1927) as symptomatic of man's loss of natural memory, such that he is unable to "assimilate the data of the world around him by way of experience" ("Baudelaire" 158). Richard Terdiman likewise separates history from memory when he exposes how history, in "taking on the function of 'preserving' the past," simultaneously "hid the individual *dispossession* of the past" (31; emphasis added): history ceased to be an all-encompassing memory of the past, so that its account necessarily rules out other countless memories.

[12] From the late twentieth century, studies such as Mark Hussey's collection *Virginia Woolf and War: Fiction, Reality, and Myth* and Levenback's *Virginia Woolf and the Great War* have sought to revise the prior notion of Woolf as "an impassive bystander whose interest in the war was 'negligible'" (Levenback 2). Of Woolf's novels written in the 1920s, Julia Briggs comments that the Great War is "the defining moment, the line that separate[s] the past from the present, . . . an abyss or a

watershed" (70). With the exception of *Orlando: A Biography* (1928) which is a satiric account of the history of English literature, all the other three novels written in the 1920s—*Jacob's Room* (1922), *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), and *To the Lighthouse* (1927)—are set before, during, and/or after the Great War.

[13] Wollaeger attends to the profusion of nationally directed writings, during the war, targeted to mold popular opinion to the political aims of the state. Brian Finney also notes the proliferation of manipulated public discourse when he writes of the fact that in its early stage in the 1910s, even established writers such as Thomas Hardy and H. G. Wells were secretly recruited by the state to write pamphlets and books in advocacy of the war ("Mrs Dalloway" 126). The establishment of a National War Aims Committee in 1917 was another such effort to inculcate patriotic sentiments as well as counter civilian skepticism about the War.

[14] "We can fight with the mind" comes from Woolf's essay "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid" (1940) in which Woolf, thinking about "Englishmen in their planes, the Englishwomen in their beds" (169), holds both parties accountable for fighting tyranny—"subconscious Hitlerism that holds [them] down (169). Woolf vindicates the power of private thinking by women "in their beds" to combat the inner slavery in the mind that breeds Hitlers (170).

[15] Of her manuscript of "The Pargiters" (1932), Woolf voices her concern in her diary that "this fiction is dangerously near propaganda, I must keep my hands clear"; likewise, in writing *The Years* (1937), a later version of "The Pargiters," Woolf reminds herself that art should contain "millions of ideas but no preaching," a

credo consonant with her aversion to the manipulative rhetoric which she associates with propaganda.

[16] Wollaeger contextualizes the formation of such a public when he alludes to Jacques Ellul's explication that "propaganda gave citizens increasingly deprived of traditional forms of support . . . a justification for otherwise useless feelings of anger and resentment" (*xii*). A significant aspect of propaganda that Ellul brings to light is that it served as a safety measure to contain citizens' anguish in the face of alienating experiences of modernity: it "channel[ed] alienation into safely xenophobic forms" (*xii*).

[17] Tammy Clewell's essay "Consolation Refused: Virginia Woolf, the Great War, and Modernist Mourning," which I discuss later in the chapter, pointed me towards this source by Derrida. In her analysis of Woolf's search for "feminist grievance" that counteracts the "aggressive mourning discourse" inherited by patriarchal tradition (179), Clewell examines how the sustenance of grief in the narratives of *Jacob's Room* and *To the Lighthouse* configures mourning in the feminist tradition that departs from consolatory tropes. I am greatly indebted to Clewell's insight which conceives genuine mourning as a "decentering of self" (181), as exemplified in the way in which the narrator in *Jacob's Room* renounces signifying authority in relating to Jacob, the lost other. Yet I see my work as being concerned not so much with how art performs mourning practices to redress oppressive ideology as with how the thematizing of death as an inexorable alterity in *Mrs Dalloway* inflects the mode of relating to deaths incurred by mass atrocity. My emphasis is

upon how speculations underlining these processes work toward the making of a literary dialogic space to engage deaths and toward the configuring of an ethical reading subject.

[18] Donald J. Childs points out that these Piccadilly girls appear as the subject of conversation between Rachel Vinrace and Helen Ambrose in Woolf's earlier novel, *The Voyage Out*, in which Helen explains to Rachel that "Piccadilly girls" refers to "prostitutes." Following this, Childs expounds upon Sally's anger at Hugh as an accusation of his sexism, his sexual violation (kiss) upon her as resonating with "a habit of objectifying women that [Sally] regards as connected to the objectification of women in the phenomenon of prostitution" (43). While Childs's observation aptly connects Hugh's kiss with gender ideology, the moment also highlights, as I discuss, the society's abiding view that seeks to silence—or at least make light of—women's voices. In fact, the gravity of the issue is entirely lost on Peter Walsh even as he relates it: he betrays his astonishment at the intensity of Sally's anger and remarks somewhat casually that "[s]he was really spiteful, *for some reason*" (95; emphasis added).

[19] The view of women as being sexually passive by nature is expressed in the thoughts of Peter: "But women, he thought, shutting his pocket-knife, don't know what passion is. They don't know the meaning of it to men. Clarissa was as cold as an icicle. There she would sit on the sofa by his side, let him take her hand, give him one kiss on the cheek" (105). A dramatic irony occurs in this moment in which Peter

thinks Clarissa asexual, contrary to the reader's understanding of the the extent to which she takes her sexual life seriously.

[20] Cramer takes note of various social phenomena, such as the upsurge of critiques about male heterosexuality; the search for "identities and lifestyles free of gender conscription" (181); the spread of "long-standing prejudices regarding women's sexuality" by sexologists and psychiatrists that associated heterosexuality, marriage, and motherhood with women's health and insisted on the innateness of female sexual passivity and masochism (181). This period also saw feminist campaigns against "marriage as a form of institutionalized sexual slavery" (183).

[21] This attribute of Richard is pointed out at various moments in the narrative. For instance, Peter thinks about the ways Richard took up things "in the same matter-of-fact sensible way; without a touch of imagination, without a spark of brilliancy, but with the inexplicable niceness of his type" (97).

[22] Various unrelated things such as the methodical strokes of Big Ben, the mysterious presence in the car (surmised to be the Prime Minister), and skywriting by the aeroplane evoke responses of large numbers of people simultaneously, giving the impression of a unison, although the narrative also illuminates the diverseness of these responses by intricately tracing the minds of different characters. London in *Mrs Dalloway* is also "dominated by emblems of the Crown and Empire" (Moran 175). Strolling down London's Imperial Quarter, Peter Walsh is surrounded by tributes to empire visually represented in statues and monuments; marching boys lay

wreathes on the Cenotaph to commemorate the War in consonance with their patriotism to the State.

[23] Cuddy-Keane studies how Woolf's fiction serves as "a participant in a public communicative system" (234) by the ways in which it brings what is specific to the operations of literary texts such as "fluid and associative thinking" and "sensitive, intuitive, empathetic and holistic forms of thought" (238) to diversify public discourse. In my study, I observe Woolf's aesthetics of life, a narrative mode and form of representation that defy closure, as an intervention into public discourse about the War.

[24] North points out that when Woolf began writing the novel, she was "still impressed by what the *Daily Mail* called 'the greatest single development in outdoor advertising" (81). The scene in the novel is Woolf's rewriting of a contemporary event.

[25] "Tyrant" as denoting "an absolute ruler" ("Tyrant, n.1") or "a king or ruler who exercises his power in an oppressive, unjust, or cruel manner" ("Tyrant, n.3") had been largely out of use by the end of nineteenth century. Woolf thus seems to use of the term in a broader sense to denote the exercise of power or authority in an oppressive, despotic, and cruel manner ("Tyrant, n.4a"). An example of the usage of this term in the early twentieth century that appears in *Oxford English Dictionary* is as follows: "The marriage had not proved a happy one... He had been a *domestic tyrant*" ("Tyrant, n.4a"; emphasis added). In Woolf's *oeuvre*, the tyrant comes in many forms which include: traditions, universities, the institution of marriage, dogmatism,

religion, patriarchy, and egotistical characters. Woolf's engagement with life in her novel is inseparable from seeing the ways in which the "tyrant" places constraints on living.

[26] The far-reaching implications of Sir William's practice, beyond his treatment of Septimus, are corroborated in the text, which connects it to the Empire, the ruling powers, and patriarchy: it takes its effect "in the heat and sands of India, the mud and swamp of Africa," "through factories and parliaments" (130), in funds, reforms, and institutions (131); in the domestic sphere, it brought about "the slow skinking, water-logged, of [Lady Bradshaw's] will into his" (131).

[27] James Naremore succinctly explains this free indirect discourse as the shifts between traditional omniscient view independent of characters' consciousness to interior monologues "where the mental processes are presented *as if unmediated* by a narrative consciousness" (qtd. in Caughie 74; emphasis added).

[28] Snaith explains in her book that the rigid dichotomy between the private and the public sphere has served as a tool of women's subjugation throughout Western history as it banished women, historically confined to their role in the private sphere, from the public sphere. Snaith intimates that Woolf's method of going in and out of the consciousness of characters situated in spaces which encompass the private and public dispels such a dichotomy and is in keeping with Woolf's egalitarian ideals.

[29] Houlbrook's book opens with the journal account of Cyril that associates the pleasures of his homosexual life in London with what is specific to the metropolis. While this resonates with the popular view of the city as a space of liberation,

Houlbrook significantly points to the irony that our very access to his journal testifies to the policing of gay presence. A photograph of Cyril's letter to his homosex partner that appears in Houlbrook's book is reproduced by the permission of the "Metropolitan Police Authority" (2).

[30] The narrative characteristically catalogues the apparently trivial things that go into the preparations--"plates, saucepans, cullenders, frying-pans, chicken in aspic, ice-cream freezers, pared crusts of bread, lemons, soup tureens, and pudding basins" (216)—which resonates with the scene of Lady Bruton's lunch: "a soundless and exquisite passing to and fro through swing doors of aproned, white-capped maids, handmaidens not of necessity, but adepts in a mystery or *grand deception* practiced by hostess in Mayfair from one-thirty to two, when, with a wave of the hand, the traffic ceases and there rises instead this profound illusion . . ." (136; emphasis added). The latter example, although more poignant in its sarcasm, gives the identical message that upper-class parties are sustained by labor fastidiously kept out of sight.

[31] Clarissa's penchant for thinking through unpleasant emotions, although amplified in this scene, is seen in various instances throughout the novel and differentiates her from characters who do not want to think about or acknowledge it. This latter group is exemplified by Lady Bradshaw. The narrator relates how she "had gone under" the will of Sir William: "Once long ago, she had caught salmon freely: now, quick to minister to the craving which lit her husband's eye so oilily for dominion, for power, she cramped, squeezed, pared, pruned, drew back, peeped

through: so that *without knowing precisely what made the evening disagreeable . . .* disagreeable it was" (131; emphasis added).

[32] The opening of Lyotard's discussion of the differend addresses the logic of Faurisson's demand for "a single former deportee capable of proving . . . that he had really seen, with his own eyes, a gas chamber" (Faurisson qtd. in *Differend* 3). For Faurisson, the only way to prove the existence of a gas chamber is the testimony of its eyewitness who would have already been killed by it: "The only acceptable proof that [the gas chamber] was used to kill is that one died from it. But if one is dead, one cannot testify that it is on account of the gas chamber" (*Differend* 3). Lyotard examines both the structure of language that makes possible Faurisson's argument and the ensuing result of such argument, namely the situation in which the victim, already killed in the gas chamber, has no means to prove it and is thus silenced. Lyotard notes that "the proof for the reality of gas chambers cannot be adduced if the rules adducing the proof are not respected" (16).

[33] Ann Tomiche notes that for Lyotard, postmodern art "testifies to an irreducible differend" (39) for the reason that in place of settling on a consolatory aesthetic form, it calls attention to unpresentability; and in interrogating its own foundations and "keep[ing] the dispute unresolved" (40), postmodern art for Lyotard serves as a model for his exploration of the political.

[34] Ricoeur specifically notes the prophets of Israel whose interpretations resonate with Hebrew historiography that "did not hesitate to interpret the Babylonian exile and the destruction of the first temple as a punishment inflicted upon the

children *because* of the sins of the fathers" (291). In other words, the wrongdoing inflicted upon the later generations is understood as due consequence of the sins of the earlier generations, conflating the murderers and victims.

[35] Early criticism on the novel greatly centered on the accusation of plagiarism. In response to this controversy, Thomas defends his adaptation of certain passages from Kuznetsov's novel on the grounds that he deliberately avoided "some spurious imaginative 'recreation'" (*Times*) of an "unimaginable suffering," and firmly voices his belief that only the eyewitness was qualified to speak about it.

[36] To be sure, Kuznetsov's *Babi Yar* cannot be taken as a "factual" account in the strict sense of the term in that it shares the properties of fiction: for one thing, it gives narrative coherence to Dina Pronicheva's testimony. However, in its outright declaration that it consists of "**only the truth—AS IT REALLY HAPPENED**" (14; bold and capitalized letters in the original text) without bothering about "any literary rules [or any political systems, frontiers, censors or national prejudices]" (14), Kuznetsov professes preserving the factual truth to be the paramount concern of this "document." In fact, Thomas's likening of the borrowed portion of Kuznetsov's work in his own novel to "a recording camera" (*Times* 383) suggests his view that *Babi Yar* is close to being factually accurate.

[37] The novel's Freud underscores the document as being the product of Lisa's illness, pointing out the disparity between the "gross" expressions in her writings and the "shyness" and "prudishness" of her person, while the novel's Sachs takes much interest in the document as a creative work which is absorbing enough to make his

train journey pass "speedily and interestingly" (10). The discrepancy in their responses to Lisa's text has the effect of calling into question the authority of Freud's framing of Lisa's documents.

[38] Anna is the patient name of Lisa. Chapter Three, which consists of a case analysis by the novel's Freud, provides this name for the protagonist. Chapters One and Two are elaborations of an unidentified woman's sexual fantasy in verse and prose respectively. It is only in the following chapter, Chapter Four, that readers find out the actual name of the author of the aforementioned verse and prose who is also the novel's protagonist, Lisa Erdman.

[39] Reading the historical Freud's psychoanalysis as "the intellectual response of a Jewish doctor in unstable, anti-Semitic fin-de-siecle Vienna" (22), Wirth-Nesher makes a case that the dissolving of distinctions between races that Freud's paradigm of human history postulates betrays his own misery about his Jewishness. In a related discussion, Sander Gilman L. has argued that Freud's theory that "universalizes" (100) mental illness is an expression of his discontent about the prevalent racial stereotype that associates the Jew with pathological condition. However, Freud's biographer relates Freud's interview in 1926 which ascertains his strong ties with his Jewishness, all the more for its marginalized position. Freud comments: "My language is German. My culture, my attainments are German. I considered myself German intellectually, until I noticed the growth of anti-Semitic prejudice in Germany and German Austria. Since that time, I prefer to call myself a Jew" (448).

[40] Although the novel's Freud does not give moral judgments about Lisa's sexual life but underscores the vulgarity of her texts in view of public morals, he repeatedly suggests that her hysterical symptoms are closely related to Lisa's difficulty to own aspects of her sexuality that do not align with social norms. Yet Lisa has a more complicated response to her sexuality, as will be revealed in the following discussions of her later course of life and confessions to Freud.

[41] A curious similarity can be found between Kürten and Lisa in the ways that side by side with their longings which are considered to be "irrational" in light of public morals, the ordinariness of their personhood is noticed. Kürten is deemed at once a "Monster" and "rather a nice man" (179), while Lisa's untidy documents are described by the novel's Freud as "the gross expressions" (9) from a "normally shy and prudish girl" (10). The marked emphasis on the fluidity of blood in configuring Kürten's thirst—the image of "drink[ing]" and it "gush[ing] out" (178)—is also reminiscent of Lisa's own attachment to fluidity which is given expression in the overflow of breastmilk and menstrual blood in her erotic fantasy.

[42] Of the misreadings of this famous edict by Adorno, refer to Marian Eide's *Terrible Beauty: The Violent Aesthetic in Twentieth-Century Literature*, pp 31-32. Here Eide explains how Adorno's ban has often been read out of context, as pronouncing the frivolity of verse hopelessly inadequate after the barbarity of the genocide, "because it presents beauty as a frail antidote to evil, because poetry can never adequately respond to extreme suffering, because aesthetic diversion evades our collective obligation to prevent the recurrence of genocide" (31); in place of such

readings, Eide proposes Slavoj Žižek's interpretation that reads the ban dialectically, pointing out "the inadequacy of language to express extreme violence directly or realistically, while at the same time evoking it poetically" (32). The impossibility in Adorno's dictum, in the words of Žižek, is an "enabling impossibility [as] poetry is always, by definition, 'about' something that cannot be addressed directly, only alluded to" (qtd. in Eide 32). Thus for Žižek, it is not poetry but realistic prose that Adorno bans. Poetry has historically been the form writers and readers have turned to in response to atrocity.

[43] Robert Eaglestone notes that even history is authorized to be history by following the conventions of a certain genre of writing rather than having a transparent relation to the events it recounts. Pronouncing the postmodern dictum that objectivity in the accounts of history is "a fondly cherished myth" (30), Eaglestone emphasizes the tenets of constructivism, namely that history embodies "a philosophy of history" (30) and is "always history *from a certain worldview*" (34; emphasis added).

[44] Such a demeanor of Cecilia is unusual given that she is noticeably portrayed as a submissive daughter up to this point. In place of Emily Tallis, long bedridden with migraines, Cecilia is busy making arrangements for the household in accordance to her mother's wishes; for her, "being at odds with her father about anything at all, even an insignificant domestic detail, made her uncomfortable" (44), so that all the education that she got from college could not "quite deliver her from obedience" (44).

[45] In this letter version, written after multiple drafts in which Robbie attempts to express his attraction to Cecilia in a more roundabout way, Robbie goes straight

into the matter of his sexual urges and writes, “In my dreams I kiss your cunt, your sweet wet cunt. In my thoughts I make love to you all day long” (80). Although Robbie by no means intends this letter to be seen by Cecilia, Cecilia is far from being offended by it when she reads it.

[46] To be sure, there are other plausible reasons that may have factored into Briony’s resolve to accuse Robbie. For one thing, there was Briony’s earlier unrequited love of Robbie. For another, there are suggestions throughout the novel of a sense of rivalry that Briony feels throughout about Lola, two years her senior, whom she names the “the superior older girl” (341). Thus, Briony welcomes the opportunity to prove herself to Lola as being mature enough to help her deal with the sexual assault. Her conversation with Lola after the rape reveals her desire to take the lead in the situation (156).

[47] Lola Quincey occupies a unique space in the narrative. On the one hand, she is the victim of rape by Paul Marshall. Paul comes across Lola for the first time when she is in her most vulnerable moment—arguing with her twin brothers over the reality of their parents’ divorce—and clearly takes advantage of Lola’s situation. After a failed attempt to sexually assault earlier that day, he eventually puts it into practice in the forced advances in the dark when she is in search of her lost twin brothers. On the other hand, there is also evidence that Lola is attracted to Paul or his wealth or both. She notices an “attractive combination” of both a curious and a cruel face in Paul and admires his brogues. Lola not only chooses to marry Paul, but

remains "faithful" as a dog (337) to him and is depicted as his co-conspirator in concealing the truth about their wrongdoing.

[48] The ways in which the sexual life is put in the forefront in divulging the violence embedded in the culture's emphasis on homogeneity is highly pertinent to the cultural view that aligns the matter of sexuality with abjected forms of existence and seeks to bind it to its order. Bataille categorizes sexuality along with filth, death, and decay, as that from which culture recoils (*Bataille* 13).

[49] While Cecilia's untidiness, as denoting messiness, is readily associated with the unsoundness of her judgment, the popularized use of the term "tidiness" by this period suggests how the concept of "untidiness" may be bound up with the moral dimension of one's character. Gendered in its usage, "tidiness" is clearly associated with the conformity with the mores of the society that define proper conduct of women (Davis 498).

[50] In his discussion of the festival, another form of unity, Bataille writes that the moment is doomed to be met by an offsetting force: "The festival assembles men whom the consumption of the contagious offering (communion) opens up to a conflagration, but one that is limited by a countervailing prudence: there is an aspiration for destruction that breaks out in the festival, but there is a conservative prudence that regulates and limits it" (*Bataille* 215). Consciousness, after the moment of contagion with which it engages in a state of anguish, is careful to reserve the necessities of the outside reality.

[51] Bataille's positing of violence as being constitutive of forming a new communion that releases subjects from their servility to extant systems of knowledge is distressing, especially given the affinity of violence to war. In *The Accursed Share*, Bataille includes war as a form of non-productive, lavish consumption, an expenditure corollary to the excess that cannot be absorbed in growth, and specifically notes the two World Wars as organizing "the greatest orgies of wealth—and of human beings—that history has recorded" (*Accursed* 37). However, naming the expenditure of war as "catastrophic" rather than "glorious," Bataille points out the difference between the two types of expenditure: the first is emphatically material in nature and governed by "self-interest" (*Bataille* 218) whereas the second is associated with the "generous giving" of *potlatch* (*Bataille* 23). Crime, in principle, reveals and confounds the system and order of things. However, one should be aware not to apply the principle of violence to justify war. Bataille writes: "War is not limited to forms of uncalculated havoc. Although he remains dimly aware of a calling that rules out the self-seeking behavior of work, the warrior reduces his fellow men to servitude. He thus subordinates violence to the most complete reduction of mankind to the order of things" (*Bataille* 218).

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