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Beyond Mourning and Melancholia: Depression in the Work of Five

Contemporary North American Women Writers

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation is an investigation into the representation of mourning and melancholia in the work of Elizabeth Smart, Evelyn Lau, Siri Hustvedt, Sarah Sheard and Kathryn Harrison.

The thesis addresses women's historic exclusion from the discourse of melancholia from a feminist perspective. It will consider the political and theoretical implications of women's absence from this discursive field by focusing on the cultural legacy of their devalorised status. Freud's essay, 'Mourning and Melancholia', first published in 1917, is cited as an important conceptual model exercising considerable influence over subsequent theoreticians working within this area. My thesis builds on Freud's attempt to establish a clear-cut binary division between the twinned states of mourning and melancholia. The thesis reveals how Freud's construction of melancholia as a pathological condition, shadowing the normative state of mourning, has been linked with psychoanalytic constructions of femininity by leading feminist theorists such as Irigaray, Silverman and Kristeva.

The first chapter provides an overview of melancholia as a gendered discourse privileging male practitioners; the subsequent chapters provide symptomatic readings of five novels written by five contemporary North American women. The psychoanalytic interpretation of these readings, ranging from blocked or postponed mourning to the ideological loss of a father through incest, illustrate the close epistemological relationship between the construction of femininity and melancholia within Western historical and philosophical traditions.

This thesis is not concerned with merely re-interpreting Western cultural prejudices related to the discourse of melancholia from a late twentieth century postfeminist perspective. Instead, the thesis demonstrates how contemporary women writers are engaged in a revisionary approach to the representation of loss within their work, by insistently inscribing their active, desiring bodies on the discourses of heterosexual femininity and melancholia. By refusing to disappear from the margins of the melancholic text, I show how the resisting melancholic daughter produces a counter-discourse that destroys the conventional dynamics of the family romance within Western literary traditions. The 'writing cure' replaces the 'talking cure' in this context. By removing the patriarchal figurehead from the text, and the psychoanalytic confessional discourse surrounding it, women writers challenge misogynist constructions of femininity within contemporary literature.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: BEYOND MOURNING AND MELANCHOLIA

(i)   Melancholic Discourse

> Compensating for loss may be one of our most familiar psychological experiences, colouring every aspect of our relation to the world outside us, but it is also a profoundly defamiliarising affair, installing surrogate others to fill the void where we imagine the love-object to have been.
> (Diana Fuss, 1995:1)

> The realization that the one is pleased by the other's grief over him: the recognition not of the hate but of the love felt by the object for the subject: the acceptance ultimately of the narcissistic bliss at having received the object's love despite dangerous transgressions - this is what melancholics expect from psychoanalysis (Abraham & Torok, 1994: 37)

> Sethe's is the face that left me   Sethe sees me see her and I see the smile   her smiling face is the place for me   it is the face I lost   she is my face smiling at me   doing it at last   a hot thing   now we can join   a hot thing (Toni Morrison, 1988: 213)

This thesis is an investigation into the cultural construction of the depressed or melancholic woman in the work of five contemporary North American women writers. The five writers to be considered are Elizabeth Smart, Evelyn Lau, Sarah Sheard, Siri Hustvedt and Kathryn Harrison. The primary objective of this thesis is to establish a theoretical model that explains the cultural production of femininity and melancholia within the patriarchal symbolic order. Following on from this analysis, there will be an examination of the epistemological similarities between the construction of femininity and melancholia within western culture. The cultural legacy of this artificially engineered relationship between femininity and melancholia, figured as pathological mourning in the West, will be scrutinised in order to reveal the difficulties experienced by women who attempt to achieve positive representations of loss within dominant discursive and cultural practices. The

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secondary objective is to challenge the gendered assumptions imbricated in melancholic discursive practices.[1] This study will then reconsider why melancholic discourse privileges masculine expressions of loss at the expense of the feminine.

Psychoanalytic and feminist discourse theory will be used in conjunction to investigate the politically and psychologically contentious category of female melancholia.[2] The research methodologies, referred to above, will be utilised to explore the origins of melancholia as a fundamentally gendered discourse within western signifying practices. Moreover, this theoretical approach will be integrated into the textual analyses that follow to assess whether melancholia is a structural problem located within the female subject's psychological processes, or whether it is generated by the discursive pressures that marginalise women within a phallocratic, patriarchal order. Furthermore, attention will be focused on women's complex and problematic entry into the signifying economy of the Symbolic order. This study will then draw attention to women's internalisation of feelings of shame and disappointment engendered by their realisation that, after entering the symbolic domain of language and law, they occupy the underside of the rigid hierarchically-organised economy of difference sanctioned by the patriarchal order. The implications of the little girl's renunciation of her first love-object, the mother, after the passing of the positive Oedipal phase will be discussed in relation to the symbolic economy of language and law where power accrues to the phallic signifier at the expense of the child's first maternal object-choice.[3] The thesis will then consider whether feminine melancholia arises as a result of the female subject's understanding of herself as the self-negating Other, culturally deployed to ensure patriarchal

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supremacy or whether her depression is contingent on her distancing herself from the signifying practices that permit empowered representations of loss within patriarchal structures.

A wide range of theoretical texts that reflect developments in feminist and post-structural, literary and cultural theory will be consulted in order to interrogate the connections between subjectivity, representation and context within melancholic discourses. In order to achieve these overall objectives the post-structuralist work of the French feminists Luce Irigaray (1985) and Julia Kristeva (1989), as well as the Anglo-American psychoanalytic critic Kaja Silverman (1984) will inform the debate surrounding melancholia as a discursive practice. The principle issues within this debate centre on Luce Irigaray's premise that feminine melancholia arises as a result of women's exclusion from the dominant signifying economy of western patriarchal society. Alternatively, in *The Acoustic Mirror* (1984), Kaja Silverman argues that women become depressed within patriarchal societies because they are forced to renounce their first love-object, the mother, if they are to be successfully inducted into the patriarchal dimension of language, desire and law (1988:156). Meanwhile, Julia Kristeva advances the contentious view that feminine depression occurs because women are unable to accomplish the complete separation from their mother that would enable them to successfully negotiate their passage into the symbolic domain of language and law. Kristeva's theoretical position is complicated further by her belief that artistic production is the only effective 'counter-depressant' for this alienating condition.[4] Kristeva's theory that cultural production is the only antidote to depression is contentious because it is conflated with the notion that women never accomplish complete

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separation from their mothers. Their subsequent attachment to the 'Thing', which in Kristeva's words constitutes 'the real that does not lend itself to signification' (1989:13) creates further problems for women, who have been historically excluded from representation and signification within western philosophical traditions. By postulating that the female subject is further disadvantaged by an ambivalent primary attachment to the mother, Kristeva has constructed an additional layer of oppression that both imitates and reinscribes what Juliana Schiesari describes as 'a transposed or transvestitized oedipal drama which is then textualized as a categorical difference in biological natures and as the essential quality of women's depression' (1992: 80/81).

The five texts to be discussed will therefore be viewed from a feminist perspective that shows how these very concerns are textualised within the narratives to be considered. The thesis will therefore focus on three crucial questions in relation to melancholia, depression and femininity. Firstly, is melancholia the inevitable outcome of women's alienation from the dominant signifying practices within patriarchal structures? Secondly, is melancholic depression concomitant with woman's position within a patriarchal order whereby she is forced to relinquish her attachment to her first love-object, namely the mother, in order to function productively within a patriarchal regime? Finally, does feminine depression occur because women are unable to negotiate the transition from the imaginary to the symbolic order because of their attachment to the primary, maternal love-object? These questions are raised in conjunction with the problematisation of femininity as it is constituted and compromised by the processes of late consumer capitalism.

Accordingly, James Annesley's book, *Blank Fictions: Consumerism,*

Culture and the Contemporary American Novel (1998) will be integrated into the close textual readings of the five novels discussed here. Annesley's interrogation of the 'new kinds of experiences ... new forms and subjects' (1998:1) represented in contemporary American fiction have a particular resonance for the textual analyses that follow. The five novels cited herein are situated in the same period to those contained in *Blank Fictions*; they are located in North American urban situations and are therefore informed by a similar cultural context. Moreover, Annesley's assertion that these new fictions focus on 'the extreme, the marginal and ... violent' (1998:1) formations within contemporary American society is of particular relevance to the novels to be considered in this thesis. The dissonant behavioural patterns revealed in these texts combined with the nihilistic vision espoused by their narrators are therefore shared by the protagonists of the 'slacker' generation that is 'celebrated' within blank fictions.[5] Furthermore, Annesley's identification of 'violence, indulgence, sexual excess, decadence, consumerism and commerce' (1998: 6) as the central thematic concerns of blank fiction are familiar reference points within the novels of Smart, Lau, Sheard, Hustvedt and Harrison. Annesley's interpretation of these blank fictions is articulated through the processes of commodification that he maintains inform the 'structural, stylistic, linguistic and metaphorical levels' (1998: 6) of blank fiction. Annesley's emphasis on the commodity as a contextualising structuring device is therefore integrated productively within this project where it is deployed to reveal how experiences are compromised by commodification in late consumer capitalism.[6] The invasive processes of commodification therefore pose a particular threat to lives that have been damaged by addiction, prostitution or incest. Moreover,

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the commercial encroachment of the dominant economic forces of late capitalism is revelatory of the manner in which systems of oppression are inextricably entwined within patriarchal structures which Annesley maintains leads to a situation where 'pleasure and commodities are experienced as one and the same thing' (1998:130).

The layering of multiple intersecting forms of patriarchal domination, referred to above, is also of fundamental importance to feminist discourse theorists who have sought to politicise Foucauldian principles regarding discursive formations in order to foreground feminist concerns.[7] According to Sara Mills, recent research within feminist discourse theory has revealed how 'women as individuals and as members of groups negotiate relations of power' (1997: 78) within patriarchal societies. Furthermore, Mills maintains that discourse theory is an important theoretical tool that feminists can use to interrogate 'ways of analysing power as it manifests itself and as it is resisted in the relations of everyday life' (78). This particular theoretical approach is therefore crucially important to this project, which illustrates the strategies of resistance that are deployed by women to counteract the effects of the oppressive power relations imbricated within dominant discourses. Discourse theory therefore illuminates the mechanisms that marginalised or oppressed groups can mobilise to negotiate more empowered positions within dominant discursive formations. Mills asserts that feminist theorists have demonstrated the efficacy of discourse theory as a resource that can be used for reworking patriarchal power relations in their reinscription of 'the "political" in the private sphere [which attempts] to map out possible strategies for bringing about change within an increasingly complex system of power' (1997: 80). This form

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of theoretical intervention broadens the scope of the present study by revealing how deeply-entrenched power relations endorsed by patriarchal institutions can be undermined by subtly shifting the terms of reference that protect their underlying ideological assumptions. This field of enquiry can therefore provide a useful insight into the mechanisms deployed by patriarchal regimes to persuade oppressed or marginalised groups to internalise and thereby maintain a subordinate subject position in relation to the dominant power brokers within that society. Hence, discourse theory is used to illustrate how women have been manoeuvred into a subordinate position within melancholic discourses in relation to men, who enjoy exclusive rights to the discursive apparatus that valorises expressions of loss within western philosophical traditions.

The textual analysis of the five novels selected for discussion will take the form of case studies. The case study format has been utilised to illustrate the manner in which a analytical approach can explore the similarities between the psychological transactions that take place within the analyst/analysand relationship and the rhetorical strategies that constitute the building blocks of narrative fiction. [8] This approach foregrounds the importance of psychoanalysis within contemporary culture by revealing how the Freudian concept of the psyche as a two-tiered split between the conscious and the unconscious mind informs culture, narrative fiction and critical discourse. Psychoanalytic theory will therefore be used in conjunction with feminist discourse theory to demonstrate how the repressed returns to disturb discursive boundaries thereby defamiliarising the reassuring signifying practices, which indicate the dominant institutions that they service remain intact. The notion that the emotional residue of repressed or secret histories can destabilise discursive

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structures is central to Abraham and Torok's theory of the 'intrapsychic secret'.

In their essay 'Mourning *or* Melancholia: Introjection *versus* Incorporation'

(1994), the two theorists identify repression as the mechanism that stretches

melancholic discourse to its limit. The theorists postulate that discourses are

unwittingly subverted by 'the carrier of a shared secret' who incorporates, and

therefore identifies with, the subject of a repressed or secret history, in order to

'perpetuate a clandestine pleasure by transforming it after it has been lost, into

a *intrapsychic secret*' (1994:131). The secret histories that are contained within

the close readings, featured in the following chapters, challenge the parameters

of the discursive formations that surround them, ranging from an adulterous

liaison in Elizabeth Smart's *By Grand Central Station* (1992) to an incestuous

relationship between father and daughter in Kathryn Harrison's *The Kiss*

(1997). The next section will reveal in more detail how psychoanalysis can be

utilised as a theoretical tool to investigate the cultural representation of loss

within the secret histories outlined above.

(ii)   Therapeutic Narratives

Psychoanalytic theory has provided feminist criticism with an ideological

framework that enables us to theorise the constitution of sexual identity and

subjectivity. Post-structuralist psychoanalytic theory has added another

dimension to classical Freudian ideas, referred to above, by shifting the

theoretical emphasis away from the more literal anatomical approach, initiated

by Freud, to the figural interpretation of texts favoured by Jacques Lacan. The

'return to Freud' advocated by Lacan, increased the strategic options available

to feminists by focusing attention on to the way that the unconscious informs

language and representation. Indeed, Lacan's famous dictum, 'the unconscious is structured like a language' (1977: 151), draws attention to the asymmetrical model of sexual relations that prevails within patriarchal structures. The fractures within this model of social adjustment as practised under the patriarchy are made clear in Lacan's account of the Mirror Stage. The Mirror Stage reinterprets Freud's resolution of the Oedipal complex by instituting Desire as the disruptive impulse that propels the subject out of the utopian state of the Imaginary into the Symbolic realm of language and representation. From this point onwards, according to Lacan, the disturbing figure of Desire must be repressed to ensure the subject's transition from the state of pre-Oedipal unity with the mother into the Symbolic domain of language and law (1977: 4). Lacan has, therefore, constructed a theoretical paradigm whose first principles are based on loss, misrecognition and the unstable signifier. The subject who has passed through the Mirror Stage is thereafter a divided subject who recognises at a subliminal level that experience of subjectivity will always be mediated by the paternal authority of the Symbolic order.

Lacan's worldview is therefore informed by an ethos of incoherence and uncertainty where the subject is required to constantly negotiate between her sense of half-remembered plenitude with the pre-Oedipal mother and the prescriptive demands of the patriarchal Symbolic. This slippery world of divided loyalties is further undermined by the subject's position within a chain of constantly changing and endlessly deferred signifiers. The subject's experience of linguistic uncertainty is therefore mapped onto the body via the signifier's relationship to other signifiers within the linguistic chain which carry

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their own hidden cultural and ideological associations. The subject, therefore, inherits a linguistic network that always already exists and which is predicated on a linguistic substitution for irreplaceable loss. Meaning is therefore derived from the subject's manipulation of the rhetorical figures of metaphor and metonymy, which stand in for the trinity of difference, self and the Other as cultural legacy of the subject's entry into the paternal Symbolic.

Entry into the Symbolic order poses yet another psychological conundrum for the female subject. From this point onwards, according to Lacan, the woman occupies a negative relation to the phallus which now takes the position of the transcendental signifier (1977: 82). Woman's newly disenfranchised position in relation to the phallus opens up the field of *jouissance,* which describes a psychological terrain exceeding representation and is therefore beyond the jurisdiction of the phallus[9]. According to Juliet Flower MacCannell, post-structural feminists such as Irigaray, Cixous and Kristeva have presented a more diverse understanding of the concept of *jouissance* that challenges the Lacanian position described above (1992:186). As we shall see, the varying interpretations offered by the three theorists either reject, invert or subvert the Lacanian premise that *jouissance* is contingent with the idea of castration as the theoretical cornerstone of the Oedipal complex. Their scepticism is therefore, according to MacCannell, grounded in their reservations regarding the Oedipal imperative that 'to be a 'man' means to identify with the lack in the Other (i.e. to accept castration)' (1992:186).

It is clear therefore that this feminised space is paradoxical. On the one hand, it appears to offer the female subject and feminist critic a psychological location opposed to the notion of lack that is inextricably linked with 'woman' in

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classical psychoanalytic theory. On the other hand, it is impossible to contemplate *jouissance* outside the framework of the Symbolic realm of language and law. Hélène Cixous celebrates this uncharted territory as a potentially transgressive site from which women can undermine the totalising nature of masculine discourse. In 'Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays' (1981), Cixous cautions women against 'appropriating their [patriarchal] instruments, their concepts, their places for oneself or of wishing oneself in their positions of mastery' (1989:114). Instead, she urges women to dismantle this monolithic structure by mobilising a feminist aesthetic to overcome what she sees as a tyrannical masculine discursive economy. Hence, women should, according to Cixous, resist the temptation to take 'possession to internalise or manipulate' (1989: 115) masculine rhetoric. Instead, they should use the subversive potential that is nourished by the extra discursive realm of feminine poetics to 'shoot through and smash the walls' (115). It is both surprising and disappointing therefore that Cixous uses martial imagery to describe the strategies that women should use to instate a radically alternative discursive economy that is not validated by the phallus. Cixous' radical manifesto for a woman-centred discursive economy is both under-theorised and overly ambitious. Cixous fails to deliver the terms of reference that will convince the reader that she has devised a linguistic formula that is not predicated on feminine lack. Indeed, it is difficult to take her agenda seriously when it appears to be couched in vitriolic terms, imitating the language and tone of the aggressor. Moreover, Cixous' argument collapses all too easily into essentialised rhetoric, merely echoing and mimicking the phallocentric discourse she is attempting to overturn.

Other feminists such as Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva rebel against the same Lacanian premise that this abstract male signifier should wield such all-encompassing discursive power. Their strategies for dispersing, or indeed destroying, the phallocentric power base vary enormously but can be seen to emerge from the sense of unease and discomfort generated by the cultural discourses that prevent women from accessing their signifying practices. In contrast to the subversive attack on phallogocentricism noted above, Luce Irigaray considers that a cultural revolution is needed to 're-interpret the whole relationship between the subject and discourse, the subject and the world, the subject and the cosmic, the microcosmic and the macrocosmic' (1987:119).[10] In other words, a new cultural template is required if we are to rework signifying practices along more egalitarian lines; these would grant male and female subjects equal access to their underlying economy. In order to achieve such a revised model it would be necessary to deregulate the hierarchically organised systems of difference underpinning patriarchal social systems. In other words, Luce Irigaray's vision of equality is revolutionary because it would require the dissolution of the binary systems of difference that privilege the masculine subject in patriarchal language.

Julia Kristeva has distanced her theoretical project from that of feminists such as Irigarary and Cixous who advocate the construction of a radically alternative signifying economy predicated on the specificities of women's bodies and pleasures. Instead, Kristeva argues that the feminist movement's reliance on political discourse to solve the inequalities between men and women within western culture fails, because it cannot explain the complexities of love and desire in non-political relationships. In a conversation with Rosalind

Coward, Kristeva articulates her fear that politics has been transformed into a new religion where 'we think that everything is political. When we say political we say something which cannot be analysed, it's the final act' (1984: 25). If we do so, she claims that 'we will be overwhelmed by the so-called mystical crisis, or spiritual crisis' (25). Kristeva suggests that such crises could be transcended by recourse to 'psychoanalysis or something else like art, [only] through such discourses can we try to elaborate a more complicated elaboration, discourse, sublimation of these critical points for the human experience which cannot be reduced to a political causality' (25).

Kristeva's criticism of the belief that human phenomena cannot be explained by political discourse is reflected in her sceptical approach to the Women's Movement. Furthermore, her belief that political movements reinforce cultural stereotypes of femininity by positioning them within the continuum of an over-arching metanarrative has influenced her decision to use psychoanalysis to formulate a possible way out of this cultural impasse. Kristeva argues that the psychoanalytic tool of transference can form a bridge between the unspeakable dimension of the semiotic and the Symbolic world of language and the law. Kristeva believes that this can be achieved by the introduction of the notion of the 'father of personal prehistory' who breaks up the feminised space of the pre-Oedipal and facilitates 'the preliminary split within the void of primary narcissism' (1986:12). The intervention of the pre-Oedipal father, according to Kristeva, prevents the subject from being devoured by the innate hostilities present in the pre-Oedipal realm. Furthermore, Kristeva suggests that the idealised figure of the pre-Oedipal father provides the impetus that propels the child out of the pre-Oedipal repository of negative drives and

impulses (1984: 21). By postulating the importance of a third figure, who is able to dissipate what she sees as the claustrophobic space of the mother/daughter dyad, Kristeva has effectively problematised the idealised version of pre-Oedipal dynamics adumbrated in the work of maternalists, such as Nancy Chodorow, for example, who celebrates the radical alterity of the mother in *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978).[11]

Feminists such as Jacqueline Rose have expressed their sense of unease associated with Kristeva's denigration of the political arena in favour of the more personalised sphere of love and the imaginary outlined in *Tales of Love* (1983). Rose indicates that Kristeva has overlooked the political content that is present in loving, idealised relations. By shifting her theoretical perspective from the potentiality inherent in the semiotic moment to the privations of the Symbolic, Rose suggests that Kristeva's 'account of the political ... is a relegation of the political to a marginal and inadequate arena of work' (1984: 27). Furthermore, Rose is wary of the unwritten assumption that she believes is implicit in Kristeva's more recent work that 'only in art and love are we living beings' (1984: 27).

This is a position that is shared by many Anglo-American feminists such as Janice Doane and Devon Hodges who believe that Kristeva's construction of the mother as origin 'fixes her there, elevated for our emulation ... or approbation [which] reinforces conventional representations of women, that makes it congenial to a conservative political agenda' (1992: 79). John Lechte provides a more positive interpretation of Kristeva's renewed emphasis on psychoanalysis in the 1980s, as well as her assertion that artistic production can traverse the link between the semiotic and the symbolic that has been

severed in the depressed or melancholic subject (1991:170). Indeed, Lechte maintains that for Kristeva 'Poetry is capitalist society's carnival, a way of keeping death and madness at bay. Poetry is a refusal of a 'flight into madness' (1991: 6).

Kristeva's earlier work interrogated the obverse face of language, namely the unrepresentable, and therefore unspeakable, realm of poetic language. Her work to date has, therefore, been intimately concerned with developing a conceptual framework that will illuminate the previously unexplored terrain of pre-Oedipal 'pre'-language. Moreover, Kristeva's work in 'Revolution in Poetic Language' (1984) and 'Powers of Horror' (1982) has provided feminist theory with an analytical model that is able to scrutinise an area of language that had previously been relegated to the margins of speech that are traditionally associated with woman as man's unspeakable other.

Ironically, psychoanalysis or the 'talking cure' has done little to create an empowered niche for women within western signifying practices. As Elaine Showalter observes in her chapter entitled 'Hysterical Narratives' in *Hystories* (1997), Freud regarded the therapeutic situation as an archaeological process whereby the analyst is employed to recover the elements of lost speech that have been distorted or mangled through sexual repression (1997: 84). The analyst's role is therefore similar to that of an investigative journalist who is hired to uncover the mystery of lost origins for a given client. However, in the case of the female patients treated by Freud, the psychological origins of women are rendered unintelligible by the very signifying system used to unravel the unspeakable secret that lies at the heart of the mystery. Moreover, the analyst is situated in a supervisory position where s/he is able to edit and

therefore control the evidence that has been revealed during the investigation. As Showalter points out, the efficacy of this particular therapeutic situation is dependent on the client's readiness to believe in the analyst or narrator who frames the plot or case history (1997: 85).

Additionally, from a feminist standpoint, the analytical evidence is refracted through a signifying system that is the product of the patriarchal Symbolic. As a consequence, the results of the analysis resonate with the political ideology of the Symbolic that services the needs of its underlying economy. Freud's female patients were therefore caught up in a patriarchal imbroglio that constructed them as unsuspecting mouthpieces for the needs and prejudices of the analyst. As Elaine Showalter puts it when discussing the case of Freud's most famous female analysand:

> If Freud is a reliable narrator, he succeeded in penetrating the mystery of Dora's hysterical symptoms. In his terminology, he unlocked her case and exposed her sexual secrets. Unable to face the truth, Dora ran away from therapy and remained sick for the rest of her life. But if Freud is a reliable narrator, Dora is a victim of his unconscious erotic feelings, which drove him to dominate and control her. Dora has no voice in Freud's text: we don't hear her part of the dialogue, and her historical and Jewish identity are both suppressed (1997: 85).

The archaeological approach to psychological investigation, described above, is one that is also favoured by Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok. However, their methodology is fundamentally different to that of Freud and Lacan. Abraham and Torok's theory of psychic development is based on their belief that the individual's identity is constituted by historical events that exceed their immediate lived experience.[12] The psychic drama of individuation is therefore played out on a number of different levels rather than the singular Oedipal complex that forms the pivotal moment in Freudian and Lacanian theories of psychic development. Abraham and Torok's version of psychic organisation

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begins with the child's undivided union with the mother, which is gradually

ruptured when the child begins to detach the mother's words from her person.

As soon as this process begins, Abraham and Torok conjecture that the child

begins to construct an external world predicated on the split between the word

and the mother's unconscious. Moreover, Abraham and Torok contend that the

child remains marked by her/his knowledge that the mother has an unconscious

of her own, which they call the Core or Kernal. However, unlike Freudian

theory, Abraham and Torok's conceptualisation of dual unity with the mother

involves a psychic internalisation of the mother's unconscious. The theory of

dual unity is therefore not predicated on a rejection of the mother in favour of

the Oedipal father or the Lacanian realisation that the child can never satisfy

the needs of the mother. Instead, Abraham and Torok's version of psychic

development denotes a diverse field of repressions and affects that are

inherited from the mother, thereby constituting a distinctive individual who has

been formed by the unique history of the mother. As Esther Rashkin, notes,

this conceptual model offers 'a new vantage point from which to reconsider the

structure and motive forces of certain works of literature traditionally classified

as uncanny, fantastic, occult, or supernatural, a corpus whose study has until

now been largely oriented by Freud's theory of the return of the repressed'

(1988: 32).

Abraham and Torok's theory therefore marks a departure from the

phallocentric narratives of Freud and Lacan that are organised around

castration anxiety and the incest taboo. Abraham and Torok's model of psychic

development situates the child in a more autonomous relationship with the

mother that is formed by her/his own unique history instead of simply being

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constructed as a prescriptive mechanism in the Oedipal narrative. As Esther Rashkin notes, the theory of dual unity opens up a number of exciting possibilities for literary interpretations. Abraham and Torok's conceptual model 'calls into question the validity of identifying Oedipal dramas as latent structures central to mental organization with explanatory or heuristic power. It also suggests the need to re-evaluate the legitimacy of hermeneutic models based on instinct-theory, prohibitions, and the phallus' (1988: 37).

Moreover, Abraham and Torok's theory of dual unity or as Esther Rashkin describes it 'The Child Gives Birth-to itself' (1988: 36), offers a vital interpretative key to reading and understanding melancholic texts. Abraham and Torok's concept of 'transgenerational haunting'[13] challenges dominant ideological formations of melancholy as a neurotic even pathological category by widening the interpretative lens so that it is able to focus on the unspeakable secrets of the previous generation (1988: 42).[14] By excavating the psychic history of a particular family Abraham and Torok are able to reveal how the secrets that remain embedded in their past, influence symptom formation in the present generation. Again, Esther Rashkin draws attention to the hermeneutic possibilities inherent in this particular analytical model that 'offers a new way to interpret the behaviour of fictional characters and some insight into how texts made enigmatic, if not illegible, by the mute presence of secrets may be explained' (1988: 42).

Abraham and Torok's theory of dual unity, therefore, offers an alternative theoretical framework for understanding melancholic texts. Their revisionary strategies contest the orthodox Freudian premise that symptom formation in hysterical women is due to sexual repression that frequently results in chaotic

behavioural patterns that oscillate wildly between frigidity and nymphomania.

As we have already seen, Abraham and Torok's theorising of textual gaps and silences differs from the ideological silencing that French feminists such as Cixous and Irigaray suggest arises from women's exclusion from phallocentrically organised signifying practices. Furthermore, Elaine Showalter remarks that:

> To see hysteria as a form of silencing makes clinical and historical sense. Both traditional medical accounts of hysteria and Freud's case histories stressed such symptoms of blocked speech and communication as the *globus hystericus*, or sense of choking, the *tussis nervosa*, or chronic nervous cough; *aphasia*, or inability to use words, and *aphonia*, or loss of voice. (1997: 87)

It is clear, therefore, from the evidence of classical Freudian psychoanalytic theory and the revisionary post-structuralist practices favoured by Abraham and Torok, that textual gaps and silences denote a particular ideological project under threat. As Elaine Showalter has demonstrated in the above extract, a pervasive cultural anxiety can be clearly detected in the medical and Freudian case studies that document evidence of hysterical silences related to women. The next section of the introduction will focus on the historical events that have contributed to the ideological uneasiness surrounding such textual omissions. The excess of meaning, which always threatens to expose a cultural investment in any ideological project perceived to be under threat, can be clearly seen in the discourses through which melancholia circulates. Here, masculine intellectual achievements are insistently reaffirmed at the expense of women's silence.

With this question in mind I would now like to trace the development of the concept of melancholia in the West. Furthermore, the brief analysis of the emergence of a melancholic psychological category within Western signifying

practices that follows is viewed from a feminist perspective. It is important at this point to qualify this perspective. All feminist projects are necessarily concerned with promoting women's rights, points of view and concerns in order to improve the social, economic and cultural conditions in which they live. Feminism is then a political and ideological enterprise that attempts to restore women's social, economic and ideological standing within a patriarchal culture that is according to M.H. Abrams 'organized and conducted in such a way as to subordinate women to men in all cultural domains, religious, familial, political, economic, social, legal, and artistic' (1988: 208). Feminism is therefore an ambitious and multifaceted political movement that embraces many different projects within its overall remit. Furthermore, it is a social and intellectual movement that has been used by feminists to revise the male-centred assumptions and aspirations that underwrite the patriarchally-inflected ideological formations present in cultural production within the West. The revisionary practices deployed by feminists to draw attention to the gender-bias within Western culture has been particularly useful to feminists who are intent on revealing how masculine interests are served by literary texts. Feminist criticism of literary texts is of crucial importance to this particular thesis, which is committed to exposing the gendered assumptions implicit in Western conceptualisations of grief and loss. Moreover, this project deploys a post-structuralist feminist analysis of the symbolics of loss within Western patriarchal culture which aims to deconstruct the binary oppositions that constitute the organising principles of language within western culture. As we have already seen, these radical revisionary practices have been pursued by French feminists such as Irigaray, who has attempted to subvert the systems of

difference imbricated in patriarchal discourse. The post-structuralist strategies of psychoanalytic theorists such as Juliana Schiesari and Kaja Silverman are also integrated within this study to interrogate the intersecting dynamics of language and identity in order to establish how and why women have come to occupy a subordinate subject position, predicated on the cultural construction of polarised sexual difference, instated by western signifying economies.

It is however vitally important to acknowledge the historical and cultural processes that inform our understanding of the past so that we can avoid what Gillian Beer refers to as 'presentism' (1989: 63), which she claims 'takes *now* as the source of authority, the only real place' (1989: 67). An awareness of the historical and cultural specificities of gender formation is therefore crucial to an informed understanding of what Juliana Schiesari calls a 'politics of lack' (1992: ix). Schiesari glosses this term as 'the attribution of value to some subjects who lack but not to others who appear equally "lacking" (1992: ix). Schiesari's interpretation of the symbolics of loss (re)presents the past by describing how value accrues to the masculine subject within the humanist melancholic tradition, thereby producing a 'gendered politics of melancholia and lack' (1992: x). Schiesari uses the psychoanalytic tool of transference to investigate the relationship between Renaissance and post-structuralist psychoanalytic texts to produce a generative interpretative space, one that is opened up by replaying the past and the present according to this therapeutic model. Schiesari has therefore avoided the epistemological pitfalls implicit in the term 'presentism' which according to Beer describes a practice which 'naturalises and fixes culturally constituted contemporary meanings of femininity: [that] militate against seeing the past or the present as sites where meanings can change'

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(1989: 223). The need to attend to the historical and cultural specificities of historical literary texts is therefore crucial to this thesis, which focuses on the sexual politics implicit in the melancholic tradition. Moreover, the analysis of the gendered divisions within this tradition is followed by an assessment of women's internalisation of the androcentric norms and prerogatives present in this cultural model to establish whether or not it is possible to transform women's contemporary understanding of melancholic depression. By deploying such a feminist critique of Western conceptual models of loss, it is anticipated that a gendered bias towards the empowered male intellectual will be detected at the expense of the depressed woman.

(iii)   Mourning The Past

In his influential paper 'Mourning and Melancholia' (1917), Freud attempts to construct a conceptual framework for the psychologically challenging condition of melancholia. The abstruse nature of the task confronting him persuades him to caution the reader against 'too great expectations of the result' (1957i:152). Moreover, in a particularly tentative preface to his paper, Freud the theoretician feels compelled to appraise the reader of the ambiguous organisation of the boundaries that contain his argument, when he states that 'Even in descriptive psychiatry the definition of melancholia is uncertain; it takes on various clinical forms ... that do not seem definitely to warrant reduction to a unity' (152). Furthermore, he continues to undermine an already unconvincing analytical model by adding the proviso that a 'claim to general validity for our conclusions shall be forgone at the outset' (152).

Freud's evasive approach to the psychological category of melancholia is

shared by more recent commentators such as Stanley Jackson. In the introduction to his comprehensive study of *Melancholia & Depression: From Hippocratic Times to Modern Times* (1986), the author reveals a similar reluctance to establish substantive terms of reference for his own investigation of the melancholic condition. The inherent instabilities and contradictions of this category are captured in his assertion that:

> At any particular time during these many centuries the term that was in common use might have denoted a disease, a troublesome condition of sufficient severity and duration to be conceived of as a clinical entity; or it might have referred to one of a cluster of symptoms that were thought to constitute a disease; or it might have been used to indicate a mood or an emotional state of some duration, perhaps troublesome, certainly unusual, and yet not pathological, not a disease; or it might have referred to a temperament or type of character involving a certain emotional tone and disposition and yet not pathological; or it might have meant merely a feeling state of relatively short duration, unhappy in tone but hardly a disease (1986: 3)

The above passage reveals the way that the psychological category of melancholia has continued to exceed disciplinary boundaries. Jackson states that melancholia exists in an area of diverse interacting discourses. The situation of the melancholic category within this competitive discursive field explains some of the difficulties encountered by theoreticians who have attempted to insert this category within a wider ideological network. Similar problems were experienced by the Renaissance scholar, Robert Burton (1577-1640), when he attempted to compile a definitive account of the melancholic condition in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* as early as 1621. Ruth Fox identifies the problematic nature of Burton's methodology when she reveals that his book 'contains a scientific discourse treating a medical subject by means of traditional methodology in a traditional schema' (1976:1).

As we have already seen, some three centuries later, Freud's attempts

to contain melancholia within the parameters of a scientific discourse suffers from a similar methodological design fault. By his own admission, 'Even in descriptive psychiatry the definition of melancholia is uncertain; it takes on various clinical forms (some of them suggesting somatic rather than psychogenic affections) that do not seem definitely to warrant reduction to a unity' (1957l: 152). Despite these reservations related to his theoretical enterprise, Freud continues his efforts to situate melancholia within a scientific framework of understanding. Freud seeks to stabilise melancholia by linking it to what he describes as 'the normal emotion of grief' in the belief that it will miraculously 'throw some light on the nature of melancholia' (152).[15] Freud's investment in a purely scientific discourse, to map meaning onto this notoriously elusive category, fails to address the impact that changing historical conditions continually exert on psychological structures. Consequently, we observe his argument collapsing under the strain of its own self-reflexive rhetoric, until he feels compelled to 'call a halt and postpone further investigations into mania until we have gained some insight into the economic conditions, first, of bodily pain, and then of the mental pain which is its analogue' (1957i:170).

Here again, Freud's prescriptive formula for melancholic foreclosure fails to prevent his argument from propelling itself along another more unsettling trajectory. Stanley Jackson traces this ideological confusion back to the Renaissance when thinkers such as Robert Burton and Timothie Bright (c.1550 - 1615) strove to curtail the plurality of their chosen discourse by producing complex classification systems to account for the causes of melancholia (1986:97). In a footnote related to Burton's theoretical penchant for rigid categorisation, Jackson draws the reader's attention to the status of more

recent work on melancholia, adding that: 'One sees here that there is nothing new about the elaborate, multifactorial schemes put forward by some twentieth-century authors in efforts to reconcile many conflicting etiological views of a particular mental disorder' (97). Despite the generic uncertainties surrounding the issue of melancholia, it is possible to trace a theoretical shift away from the view that melancholia was a disorder that primarily affected the imagination and the intellect. As Stanley Jackson notes:

> By the early nineteenth century, as opinion was shifting away from the conviction that melancholia was definable as partial insanity, the tendency was less and less to conceive of the emotional state being determined by primary damage to the intellect, and more and more to think of the primary damage being in the realm of the emotions with the intellect affected only secondarily under the influence of the emotions.
> (1986: 400)

The shift in the melancholic paradigm, outlined above, is of major significance to any project that aims to challenge the gendered assumptions implicit in writing by women on the themes of loss and bereavement.

The increased tendency to view melancholia as a primarily affective disorder coincided with changes in the management of madness and insanity. As Elaine Showalter points out in her detailed account of women and madness in English culture: 'The advent of the Victorian era coincided with a series of significant changes in society's response to insanity and its definition of femininity' (1987:17). Accordingly, the percentage of women admitted to asylums increased dramatically which suggests an institutionalised link with femininity and psychopathology. In her more recent book, *Hystories* (1997), Showalter reveals that the three great 'physician-advocates' of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were Jean-Martin Charcot, Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan (1997:11). Showalter believes that these charismatic male

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authority figures were instrumental in giving the increasingly female-defined condition of hysteria 'a compelling name and narrative' (11). Here, we see femininity being deployed to help define the emerging field of psychoanalysis. Showalter reveals that the vast majority of Charcot's hysterical patients were females who were required to exhibit their abnormal behaviour at the Salpêtrière's infamous Bâl des Folles (1987:148).

Showalter detects a disturbing consonance between the specular, even theatrical, nature of Charcot's celebrity hysterics and the cultural construction of femininity during the nineteenth century.[16] She points out that the hysterical pantomimes that were regularly paraded in front of Charcot's adoring students were the physical manifestations of a masculine fear of female contamination (1987:154). Showalter believes that the paradoxical nature of this passive exhibitionism is illustrative of the managerial manoeuvres that were enacted by the emerging professions of psychiatry and psychoanalysis to remove the threat of the disorderly female. The theatrical displays of hysteria observed at the Salpetrière also helped to validate the burgeoning fields of psychiatry and psychoanalysis. Showalter demonstrates how effectively the female voice was silenced by these medical figureheads by turning the woman into 'the object of techniques of moral management, or of photographic representation and interpretation' (1987:154).

As the French theorist Pierre Macherey has observed, in *A Theory of Literary Production* (1978), textual silences indicate that an ideological project is under threat. This is clearly apparent in Charcot's hysterical tableaux where the female subject's silence appears to endorse the master's discourse. In this particular case, the master's discourse is of course psychoanalysis, which

privileges sight as its favoured interpretative tool. Laura Mulvey has exposed the link between visual pleasure and patriarchal privileges in her milestone paper 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975). In Mulvey's view, classical narrative cinema reinforces patriarchal interpretations of sexual difference by encouraging the male viewer to gain sexual satisfaction from their objectification of the female subject on film (1992:160).[17] A similar pattern of enforced objectification is present in Charcot's lecture theatres where Mulvey's observation that the male viewer is able to indulge his fantasies by 'imposing them on the silent image of the woman still tied to her place as bearer not maker of meaning' (1992:159) is especially significant. Similarly, Showalter maintains that psychoanalysis is founded on the concept of the castrated woman as a guarantor of masculine unity upheld by its 'emphasis on penis envy as the main determinant of female psychosexual development' (1987:19). Psychoanalytic discourse invests heavily in the language of the dominant patriarchal order, ensuring that the systems of representation encoded within that language are reflected in its own practices. As Showalter puts it, 'Changes in cultural fashion, psychiatric theory, and public policy have not transformed the imbalance of gender and power that has kept madness a female malady' (19).

A similar pattern of gender reinforcement can be traced in the emergence of the clinically depressed woman. In her essay on 'Melancholy and Melancholia' (1987), Jennifer Radden draws on the work of Michel Foucault to illustrate the transformation from the Elizabethan concept of melancholy to the contemporary idea of clinical depression. Radden notes the historical valorisation of melancholia as a discourse that signified the presence

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of the artistically privileged male.[18] As Stanley Jackson remarks, the

Elizabethans understood the melancholic disposition to be 'the basis for

intellectual and imaginative accomplishments, to be the wellspring from which

came great wit, poetic creations, deep religious insights, meaningful prophecies

and profound philosophic considerations' (1986: 99). The dazzling array of

accomplishments outlined above reflect a wide range of moods and

behaviours. As Radden notes, the notion of an extensive repertoire of moods

related to commonplace occurrences correlates with Foucault's theory that the

suppression of such behaviours coincided with the advent of medical structures

(1987: 245). Furthermore, the loss of the familiar elements of the early modern

idea of unreason after the eighteenth century connects with a similar chain of

events in relation to melancholia. In Jennifer Radden's words, 'rather than an

ordinary, familiar and everyday figure, the *depressive* of today is increasingly

rendered remote and alien, her condition unrelated to ordinary experience'

(245).

Similarly, the emergence of a depressive identity that is perceived as a

definite personality type is analogous to Foucault's premise that the

contemporary notion of the homosexual evolved in the nineteenth century.

Until that time, Foucault notes that 'sodomy was a category of forbidden acts'

(1990: 43). During the nineteenth century these diverse behaviour patterns

were distilled into the idea of the homosexual as 'a personage, a past, a case

history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a

morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology'

(43). The epistemological similarities between the emergence of the concept of

the homosexual as a distinct category noted above, and the cultural

construction of the female hysteric as outlined by Showalter, are therefore

striking.[19] Moreover, the cultural shifts that produced a sociological

environment that was conducive to the development of these identities, can be

traced back to the institutionalisation of the medical professions in the

eighteenth century. Radden argues that the new emphasis on the moral

management of madness by the medical profession led to the marginalisation

of what had previously been regarded as unreasonable behaviour patterns

(1987: 233). Closely following Foucault's analysis of the history of madness in

Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason (1973),

Radden asserts that:

> Foucault rightly attributed to the medical understanding a certain rarifying
> of madness. With the emergence of the medical point of view something
> was lost. *Déraison* (unreason) was transformed into *folie* (madness), as
> Foucault put it, and became what it is today: obscure, puzzling and remote
> from everyday human experience (1987: 233).

Radden draws on Foucault's understanding of madness to illustrate the

theoretical similarities between the emergence of madness and its more

quotidian counterpart, depression.[20] However, there are fundamental

differences related to the aetiology of these two categories. The differences

are connected to the notoriously unstable and contradictory category of gender,

which demands a constant rewriting and reworking of the conditions of

representation that it affects and indeed governs. Radden reminds us that

melancholia was a fashionable condition in Elizabethan times that

compensated for its distressing symptoms by transforming the subject into 'an

object of interest and respect' (1987: 236). It was therefore, an 'affliction' that

became the sole preserve of the distinguished male intellectual who was, as a

result, 'marked by his wit and wisdom' (237).

Juliana Schiesari notes that the medieval nun, Hildegard of Bingen, was the only woman known to have challenged the masculine discursive occupation of the category of melancholia (1992: 141).[21] According to Schiesari, Saint Hildegard of Bingen appears to be the only woman who participated in the medical and philosophical debates related to melancholia (141). Moreover, Schiesari argues that Hildegard of Bingen is the only early-modern theorist who 'confronted (critically) the question in terms of gender difference' (141). Furthermore, according to Schiesari, Hildegard of Bingen appears to have anticipated Freudian concerns regarding castration anxieties in the male subject. As she puts it:

> Now, some of these guys ... do cheerfully follow human nature in their contact with women, but nonetheless they hold these women in contempt ... And some of these guys may shun women, because they neither love them nor want to have them, but in their hearts they are as enraged as lions and share the habits of bears. (1992:144)

Hildegard's words therefore signify a departure from the prevailing Renaissance worldview that melancholia was the hallmark of a masculine intellectual elite. Schiesari also notes that Hildegard's theories refute the alternative medical tradition that melancholia was a disease that was incurred 'through some phantasmic encounter with a threatening femininity' (141).

Importantly, for this study, Hildegard's notion that the symptoms of melancholia derive from a fault in the subject's libidinal investment in the abandoned object foreshadows the Freudian emphasis on the ego's identification with the lost object. Furthermore, Hildegard's analysis of the ego's (mis)identification with the object extends beyond Freud's more cerebral preoccupation with psychical structures. Schiesari draws attention to Hildegard's concern with the sociological consequences of such psychological

impairments by focusing on the implications that such a theory holds for women (1992:148). As we have already seen in the passage quoted above, Hildegard discerns a deeply misogynistic impulse at work in the melancholic's relations with women. Indeed, she postulates that Hildegard's notion that male melancholics suffer from an inability to cathect with an object, namely a woman, leads them to:

> suck all the life out of the women they are with. They cannot find satisfaction in the company of women they are with. They cannot find satisfaction in the company of women, so either they remain with them while holding them in contempt, or else they reject women altogether and secretly nurture their repressed anger against women. Melancholics can never get enough and thus long for some heavenly Venus (or Saturn) that does not present herself corporeally, that is, as "vulgar" Venus. Since they long for this something beyond woman, they cannot love her for herself ... but only for this something beyond herself that she may represent but, of course, can never embody (1992:148/9).

Schiesari's interpretation of Hildegard's text *Causae et curae*, presents a proleptic leap of theoretical faith from medieval scholarship to the sexual politics of the late twentieth century. Ahead of Freud, Hildegard appears to have devised a framework of understanding that not only disrupts but actively reorganises the overall shape of medieval ideological thought related to melancholia. Hildegard's text is a radical reworking of the conventional medieval and Renaissance theories regarding masculine transcendence related to melancholia because she takes into consideration the complex interplay of physiological and psychological structures that have an impact on both men and women. Given that women occupy the negative underside of the patriarchal symbolic order, it follows that her relationship with the melancholic male will be a disabling one, characterised by a tendency to punish and control. As we have already seen in the passage quoted above, Hildegard has unravelled the prevailing psycho-social model of the beatific male melancholic

by replacing his anodyne image with that of the brutalised misanthrope. Once the male melancholic's privileged status has been eroded in this fashion, it becomes easier to consider the psychological and sociological implications for those who live in close proximity to such patriarchal figureheads, namely women and children (1992:149). Hildegard's portrayal of the tortured and punitive relationship that characterises the melancholic's relationship with the rest of humanity removes the elitist gloss from the Renaissance socio-cultural model outlined above. Interestingly, according to Schiesari, Hildegard's account of the physiological and psychological attributes of the melancholic female is consonant with those that are more commonly associated with her illustrious male counterpart. Schiesari notes that, unlike 'the brawny male melancholic, the melancholic woman is emaciated and weak' whose overabundance of black bile is a 'source of fatigue, fainting spells, and difficulty in concentration' (1992:150).

This is, of course, a constructionist argument that maintains that identities are not essentialised entities but are, instead, moulded from the wide range of social possibilities that exist at a given point in time. As we have already seen, in connection with the work of Robert Burton and Hildegard of Bingen, the identity of the melancholic was forged out of the prevailing social context. As this context changed and existing ideological structures were challenged, new identities evolved that reflected these changes. In the case of the melancholic, the changing context included fundamental shifts in gender boundaries and social regulation.

In the late twentieth century, dominant ideological formations were continually disrupted by the ideological changes noted above, creating a

cultural *zeitgeist* and sociological milieu that produced behavioural patterns that disturbed the existing *status quo*. In his materialist analysis of contemporary American blank fictions,[22] James Annesley conjectures that the inherent instabilities of these ideological structures and institutions indicates that 'culture is taking a new direction, exploring new kinds of experiences and moving towards new forms and subjects' (1997:1). The constellation of new and challenging bodily and psychological protocols, cohere around the putative subject of American consumerism outlined by Annesley, can be readily observed in the work of the five authors examined in this thesis. The final section of the introduction will attempt to contextualise the literary renditions of psychological loss and bereavement contained in the work of the five authors under consideration within the framework of indulgence, consumerism and excess noted above.

(iv)   Melancholy Narratives

The final section of the introduction surveys how the cultural legacy of western constructions of mourning and melancholia reveals itself in the work of Smart, Lau, Sheard, Hustvedt and Harrison. Post-structuralist psychoanalytic theory will be used to illustrate the multiple and heterogeneous sites of meaning that are generated by specific texts at particular moments in time. As Sue Vice notes in the introduction to *Psychoanalytic Criticism* (1996), character based textual analysis has been denigrated by critics in recent years because many critics believed that close readings merely produced a self-reflexive process whereby literary devices were wedded to Freudian psychic activities 'such as dream logic, or condensation' (1996: 6). Clearly, this is a reductive exercise

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that neglects the pressures exerted by social, historical and cultural formations. However, as Vice points out, post-structuralist Lacanian psychoanalytic theory is predicated on the theory that human psychology is preceded by the external structure of language (6). Following Shoshana Felman's premise in *Literature and Psychoanalysis* (1982), that unreconstructed Freudian readings of texts merely reproduced an Hegelian master-slave dichotomy where 'psychoanalysis has been the subject, literature the object' (1996: 7), Vice concurs with Felman that both disciplines should be 'enlightened, informed, but also affected, displaced by the other' (cited in Vice, 7). Therefore, Vice contends that psychoanalytic literary practice 'should be not masterful but mutual' creating a dialectic that is open to other meanings and implications (7). Language in the post-structuralist sense of the word describes a cultural process which, according to Vice, deals with 'the system of bodily utterances which constitute hysteria, the memoirs of a paranoid personality, literary criticism - whether spoken or written' (1996:8). Hence, the internal structuring of the human psyche is not a passive recipient of social and historical data but is involved in a dynamic mutual exchange of information that generates cultural systems of meaning.

The cultural systems of meaning embedded in the textual readings that follow are therefore in a state of perpetual flux. Psychoanalysis should not therefore be seen as a static entity that imitates patriarchal determinism by applying its hermeneutic healing powers to the compliant sick 'body' of literature. As Catherine Belsey observes, psychoanalysis has all too often been used to 'explain characters in the text or the symptoms of the author, as if to diagnose a pathology. I want to use it to read cultural history, but not on the

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assumption that cultures are sick' (1994:15). Belsey's comments on the efficacy of psychoanalysis as an hermeneutic theoretical tool are particularly relevant to this project. Indeed, Belsey's words echo Gillian Beer's premise that literary practices should 'emphasise the difference of past writings and past concerns from present-day beliefs and meanings ... to understand the historical processes of gender formation and gender change' (1989:223). Therefore, as Schiesari maintains, readings of gender within cultural representations of loss are never 'innocent' (1992: ix). Rather, the attribution of gender within such representations is the result of signifying practices that have changed through time to release polyvalent and often contradictory meanings.

The brief summary of the thematic concerns of each writer within this thesis will then utilise this transferential model to explain how the textual representation of loss has been problematised in the context of contemporary capitalism. Moreover, the survey considers how the structural properties of narratives of loss and bereavement have been schematically re-arranged in order to accommodate the ideological changes that have had an impact on women's relationship to dominant social formations and signifying practices. The various representations of loss reviewed, in the following chapters of this thesis, reveal themselves as the products of existing texts concerning loss that have been challenged by the radical re-working of the issues of gender, class and sexuality. Furthermore, these textual changes are embedded in a reciprocal contextual model where their position within a particular discourse either reinforces or disturbs the generic boundaries of the status quo. The tension between such radical and conservative impulses is revelatory of the unresolved issues that circulate around the discourse of loss and bereavement.

Indeed, the tensions that are clearly evident in all of the texts under consideration in this thesis arise when the various protagonists realise that their experience of loss has radically dislocated their existing worldview. The dissolution of the existing worldview occurs when a singular interpretation of an experience is no longer tenable. The proliferation of possibilities that gather around the fractured ideological project, in the case of young women, frequently compete with their desire to fulfil patriarchal assumptions.[23] Therefore, the conflicting desires experienced by young women in a patriarchal order resonate with anxieties that are generated by their knowledge that their reorganised ideological project will unsettle the rigid parameters of patriarchal structures.

Carol Gilligan claims that girls' resistance to the predicates of the patriarchal regime produces depressive symptoms because they abruptly 'discover through experience the realities which feminists write about: the prevalence of men's voices in societal and cultural institutions, and the disparities in economic and political power between women and men' (1992: 455). Furthermore, Gilligan argues that the unreconciled disturbances that continue to pulsate beneath the façade of adolescent girls' experience results in 'a sudden drop in girls' resilience and a marked increase in depressive symptoms, dissociative phenomena, eating disorders, suicidal thoughts and gestures, as well as behaviour which leads them into trouble with society and renders them economically and politically powerless' (455).[24]

The threat of expulsion from the perceived securities offered by the prevailing order are, therefore, strategically opposed to the sense of gratification produced by personally resolving issues such as incest survival, heroin addiction or suicidal depression - to be discussed in the novels under

consideration in this thesis. The fragility of the oppositional strategies, mentioned above, is demonstrated by the ability of the dominant order to redigest the dissonant voices of young women by labelling their work as the product of a rebellious period of their youth that denotes their passage into normative adulthood. By consigning expressions of psycho-social dissidence to the conservative category of the adolescent rite of passage *oeuvre*, the dominant order is able to contain the subversive potential inherent in such works, by claiming that they represent a psychological demarcation zone that separates youthful deviance from the responsibilities of dominant adulthood. The dominant order has therefore cleverly reinscribed its own restrictive psychological practices, by effacing any expression of indeterminacy that may threaten its own master narrative.[25] The rigorous policing of this boundary, with its own self-regulation, is clearly evident in the many of the novels written by young female writers in the 1980s. Writers, such as Tama Janowitz, Mary Gaitskill and Catherine Texier, produced novels that merely described the collision of cultural values referred to above. Within these novels, aberrant behavioural patterns were laced with salacious detail that meant that they were easily assimilated into American markets. As Elizabeth Young notes, these books 'became fashionable at this time [1980s] to, post haste, proclaim post-feminism, as if troublesome and cataclysmic social change had been assimilated as smoothly as Jello' (1992:143).

However, this trend appears to have continued in the 1990s, with the publication of books like Elizabeth Wurtzel's *Prozac Nation* (1994) and Mary Gaitskill's *Because They Wanted To* (1997). Similarly, in Britain, the public appetite for confessional family memoirs has increased dramatically with the

publication of books such as Jenny Diski's *Skating to Antarctica* (1998) or

Germaine Greer's *Daddy We Hardly Knew You* (1995). In a recent edition of

The Guardian, Angela Neustatter attributes the exponential rise in such works

to the overwhelming need experienced by 'introspective' authors 'to find

answers to questions about someone close who has been physically or

emotionally absent' (1998: 2). A similar experience of emptiness and emotional

impoverishment can be clearly discerned in all of the novels to be discussed in

this thesis. The immense neediness experienced by the narrators of all of

these novels ranges from the loss of a father through incest, in Kathryn

Harrison's *The Kiss* (1997), to the death of a schizophrenic mother, in Sarah

Sheard's *The Swing Era* (1993). However, all of the books in question, raise

questions that either remain unanswered or are subject to negotiation even at

the end of the novel.[26] As Kathryn Harrison notes before closure, 'the loss of

my father will haunt me ... now that I have known him, and he me, the rest of

my life depends on our exile from each other' (1997: 202). Therefore the

archaeological exercise, that was referred to in Angela Neustatter's article,

barely disturbs the surface of immeasurable loss experienced by the narrators

of the novels to be discussed in the subsequent chapters.

Angela Neustatter also claims that confessional autobiography can be

viewed as a literary mid-life crisis, stating that 'it's not a surprise, either, to find

so many of these books being written by authors in the middle-years, that time

when ... we cannot avoid facing intimations of our own mortality' (1998: 3).

However, these narrators do not enjoy the luxury of calculated judgement

conferred by age. Instead, they negotiate the psychological slippages of a

constantly shifting psycho-sexual identity that appears to have emerged during

adolescence, from within the constraints of late-twentieth century consumerism.

Interestingly, James Annesley includes *Prozac Nation, The Kiss* and the work of Evelyn Lau within the rubric of 'blank fiction' (1998:1). According to Annesley, these fictions are marked by their shared 'indifference and indolence' where 'the limits of the human body seem indistinct, blurred by cosmetics, narcotics, disease and brutality' (1). Annesley contends that the work of writers such as Donna Tartt, Susanna Moore, Catherine Texier and Evelyn Lau suggest a common context that is supported by the late twentieth century idealisation of the commodity (8). Annesley explains that commodification is such a persuasive ideological formation that it 'has both an economic significance and an expressive social function' (8). Annesley concludes that the materialist perspectives offered by commodification provide the most convincing interpretation of these apparently flimsy texts (1998: 9). Moreover, he claims it is ironic that 'in dealing with supposedly lightweight and ephemeral elements these texts manage to engage with the kind of weighty material forces that are fundamental to the whole functioning of late twentieth-century society (1998:10).

Annesley's approval of commodification as the hermeneutic device that can unlock the elusive theoretical concerns of blank fictions illustrates the limitations of this particular approach. Indeed, Annesley cites the title story of Evelyn Lau's *Fresh Girls* (1994) as an example of the way that commodification permeates the lives of the young narrators of blank fiction. Hence for Annesley, 'Lau's blank writing ... draws the narrator into an intense, heroin-induced contemplation of the commodified character of her chosen indulgence' (1998:129). Annesley builds on this observation by affirming that Lau's

narrator:

> recognises the extent to which her pleasures are dependent upon particular substances, a realisation that inevitably diminishes her euphoria and grounds these potentially transcendent experiences in specific kinds of material relations (129)

Annesley's description of the means by which the commodity informs and indeed reconstitutes the psychological integrity of the narrator supports his theoretical view that the dominant economic forces of consumerism dictate the material realities of late twentieth-century urban life. However, his theoretical approach fails to interrogate the way that the specificities of class, gender and ethnicity render Lau's narrator more susceptible to the excesses of commercial indulgence that he outlines in his text.[27] Although the issues of class, gender and ethnicity are not central to Annesley's overall project, it is feasible to argue that they are fatally intertwined in Lau's portrayal of prostitution, in this particular instance, as well as in her other work. As we have already seen, Annesley's account of the narrator's sudden capitulation to the vilified outer reaches of commodified experience draws attention to the manner in which deviant activities are contained by the dominant ideological formations that marginalise them in the first instance. This theoretical position is, of course, influenced by the Foucauldian premise that resistance is crucially implicated in all power relations. In Foucault's words, power 'depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support or handle in power relations' (1990: 95). There are, however, methodological problems in both of these accounts, hinging on their failure to theorise the historical reality of organised political resistance to dominant power structures. The emergence of the Women's Movement and the radical lesbian and gay agenda suggest themselves here. Furthermore, both of these theoretical perspectives pre-

suppose a fatal collusion between inside and outside that precludes political intervention.

Additionally, these theories offer very little scope to explore the problematic nature of this hermetically-sealed continuum that appears to have always existed. By contrast, psychoanalytic approaches have transferred this self-regulating procedure back into the human psyche, where the figure of resistance can be seen to correlate with the notion of identification in the Freudian theory of melancholia. As Jill LeBihan notes in her examination of the narrative operations of the murder mystery:

> [The] process of opening up the 'closed' texts of formula fiction (Eco 1979), of exposing the inside to the outside, coincides with the psychoanalytic focus on insides and outsides, on the permeable skin between the *heimlich* and *unheimlich*, and on the uncomfortable transformation of inside/self to outside/object that constitutes abjection (1997:1)

The process of identification that is central to this particular construction of subjectivity has important implications for all of the narratives to be studied in this thesis. As we have already seen in the earlier part of the introduction, the reconstruction of psychic topography, referred to in the extract above, is the direct consequence of a disappointment in object-choice. The dissolution of the object-relationship and the concomitant recuperation of the liberated libido back into the ego leads to the latter being mistaken for the lost object and judged accordingly. Freud, therefore, theorises a psychological manoeuvre that terrorises the subject by threatening to expose this hidden psycho-drama to the outside world. As LeBihan observes, the procedure described above, is 'a regressive, narcissistic, even cannibalistic process' (1997: 2). Following Diana Fuss, she claims that 'the continual repetition of identification, and the continual destruction of the otherness of the object by transforming it into the ego, can be

allied to serial killing' (1997:2).

Similarities can be observed, therefore, between the materialist perspective offered by Annesley and the Freudian construction of the dysfunctional melancholic subject. Moreover, the regressive identificatory process identified by Freud in 'Mourning and Melancholia' (1957), provides a theoretical rationale for the constitution of subjectivity outside the self-reflexive power loop adumbrated in the materialist and constructionist analyses of power relations referred to above. As we have already seen, the regressive identificatory process, identified by Freud as the defining moment in the constitution of the melancholic subject, is based on the notion of serial repetition that is sustained through the destruction of the other that has been newly incorporated into the ego. This destructive cycle is present in the narrative structure of all of the texts to be discussed in the following chapters. Moreover, this cannibalistic process features as an unsolicited structuring device within these texts inviting the reader to identify with the masochistic dynamics that are implicated in the text.

In her examination of the narrative operations of the murder mystery genre, LeBihan has observed how this vampiristic process sustains the consumer of closed formula fiction, in novels such as Minette Walters' *The Ice House* (1993) or even the Sherlock Holmes series. LeBihan argues that the melancholic subject position is reinvoked by the reader of these books who is able to rehearse the death encounter implicit in the discovery of the corpse.[28] Therefore, 'instead of coming face-to-face with death, through an introjection of the role of the detective or even through an acceptance of the corpse, the reader is put into the position of the melancholic subject' (1997:18). The

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endless deferral of psychological denouement present in melancholia is therefore dramatically realised in the guise of the murder mystery tale. Just as the detective always has one more case to solve, so the reader of this most conservative of genres must always move on to their next experience of death by proxy.

The serial deferral of indigestible secrets and desires, referred to in the previous section, closely resembles the narrative structure of romantic fiction. As we have already seen, the melancholic detective/reader of the murder mystery genre overcomes a series of obstacles in order to recover the corpse, only to move swiftly on to the next case. A satisfactory denouement of the case is therefore never achieved. Instead, the unresolved issues generated by the corpse are endlessly postponed so that the unspeakable secret that lies at the heart of the mystery is protected, transforming the reader into a voyeur who consumes 'the representation of the person who represents' (1997:18). Similar dynamics of deferral and misrepresentation are inscribed in romantic discourse where the hero must destroy all obstacles in order to gain true love. Once this goal has been attained, the story abruptly ends so that any secrets or difficulties that have been effaced by the narrative of pursuit need not be confronted by the reader. As Stevi Jackson points out, narrative closure 'indicates that the excitement lies in the chase, not in the "happily ever after" (1995: 53). Furthermore, this narrative strategy is compelling precisely because 'it enables readers to relive that excitement over and over again, without having to confront the fading and routinization of romantic passion' (1995: 53/4).[29] Moreover, Jackson concurs with Jennifer Radway that 'the consumption of romantic fiction is an adaptation to discontent not a challenge to its source ... [that] sustains the

ideal of romance which produced the discontent in the first place' (1995: 55).

The narrative staples of romantic fiction referred to above, are present in the first of the novels to discussed in this thesis. Elizabeth Smart's novel, *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down And Wept* (1945), is a fictional account of the author/narrator's affair with the English poet George Barker. The novel begins as the author's vision of idealised love, which eventually collapses through the demands of the material world. The gradual demise of the lovers' affair amply demonstrates the asymmetrical romantic model described by Radway and Jackson in the previous section. The distortions that are implicit in the romantic paradigm are, of course, the result of gendered discrepancies within heterosexual power relations in Western culture. These power differentials favour the masculine subject who is able to manipulate the cultural codes present within this model. Masculine dexterity in this particular area occurs because of women's traditional association with nature and emotion within Western representational systems. Stevi Jackson cautions against this essentialist model, arguing that the cultural reinforcement of emotion as feminine virtue merely reinscribes 'our location within patriarchal relations ... revalorizing what might be symptomatic of our subordination' (1995: 55).

The disabling symptoms of this culturally inscribed disease are clearly apparent in the pages of Elizabeth Smart's novel as well as the critical response to her work. The opening chapter will focus on Smart's book as an example of feminine writing that has suffered because of its perceived association with a cloying emotionality culturally equated with women. The principal aim of this chapter will be to establish the link between the naturalised assumptions referred to above and the de-valorisation of women's accounts of

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loss and bereavement in western culture. Secondly, the study will contend that

the asymmetrical power model described above is continuous with the

idealisation of the male melancholic as a member of an elite community

responsible for the production of canonised texts related to loss. Furthermore,

women's relegation from culturally sanctioned representations of loss will be

attributed to their inferior position within Western signifying practices. The

close textual reading of *By Grand Central Station* that follows will amplify the

anomalies inherent in these culturally contrived power models. This objective

will be achieved by revealing how women are unable to eroticise lack within

patriarchal symbolic structures and hence achieve cultural recognition for their

work in this field. Finally, the critical response to Smart's exemplary novel

reflects this cultural immunity to expressions of loss written by women. The

central argument regarding this issue will focus on the overwhelming critical

valorisation of rhetorical figures and poetic structure that effectively

marginalises Smart's evocation of the emotional anguish generated by her

experience of overwhelming loss at the end of her affair with Barker.[30] Critical

aversion to Smart's account of betrayal and loss is a reminder that expressions

of female grief remain unprocessed within the academy and thereby acquire an

iconic status bereft of political or ideological status.

The psychological problems that follow a case of failed or postponed

mourning are discussed in Chapter 2. This chapter is an investigation of the

work of the Chinese-Canadian author Evelyn Lau, focusing on her first novel

Other Women (1995) and her collection of short stories entitled *Fresh Girls*

(1990). The chapter will assess the problematic category of female depression

by drawing on the theoretical work of Julia Kristeva in *Black Sun* (1989) and

Abraham and Torok in 'Incorporation and Introjection' (1994). The chapter will assess whether or not the acquisition of language is able to mobilise the emotional affect that has been suppressed during a disappointment in object-choice. Melancholy, as failed mourning, is therefore constructed as an inability to symbolise and hence represent loss. The principal objective of this chapter is then to establish whether or not women can transcend grief through the transformative powers of artistic production. Julia Kristeva's assertion in *Black Sun* (1989) that melancholia arises out of alienation from the symbolic register will be followed by Abraham and Torok's work in their essay 'Mourning *or* Melancholia: Introjection *versus* Incorporation' (1994), which conjectures that melancholia occurs when the subject is unable to symbolise loss. Both theories will be used in conjunction to illustrate the efficacy of the notion of art and language as a curative effect for melancholia.

Questions related to the consequences of delayed or postponed mourning will be continued in the next chapter which focuses on Siri Hustvedt's first novel, *The Blindfold* (1992). A close textual reading of this novel is undertaken to illuminate the theory that orthodox psychoanalytic notions regarding the aetiology of the melancholic condition have neglected the female subject's complicated and problematic transformation of bisexuality into adult femininity. Accordingly, Freud's theory of 'reality testing', outlined in his germinal paper 'Mourning and Melancholia' (1917), will be critically assessed in connection with the female child's need to relinquish the mother in order to embody a patriarchally endorsed version of femininity. Furthermore, the central argument within this chapter will contend that the psychological discomfort that attends the dramatic reversal from maternal to paternal love, in the girl's

positive resolution of the Oedipal drama, is never fully resolved. Instead, the residual attachment of the girl to her first love-object manifests itself in her reluctance to undergo the psychological rigors of reality testing, which involves detaching libido from the lost love object. The psychologically impaired female subject is therefore persuaded to avoid this distressing procedure by using the lost object as a fetish or partial object to temporarily forego the arduous task of mourning. The girl's occupation of this liminal zone is mirrored in her adult relationships which reflect the ambivalent and narcissistic psychological environment in which she is ensnared. Consequently, her lack of commitment to either maternal or paternal love-objects is realised in a shifting psycho-sexual identity that veers chaotically between fleeting attachments to both men and women.

The unstable psycho-sexual dynamics that envelop Iris Vegan in *The Blindfold* undermine the narrator of Sarah Sheard's novel, *The Swing Era* (1993). Sheard's elegiac text relates the story of a daughter's mission to come to terms with the accidental death of her psychotic mother. This chapter investigates the melancholic subject's vulnerability to secondary narcissism and the attendant threat of psychosis, identified by Freud in his essay 'Mourning and Melancholia' (1957). Freud's assertion that failed mourning can explain the melancholic subject's regression to secondary narcissism is countered by Julia Kristeva's analysis of feminine depression in *Black Sun* (1989). Kristeva's theory that the female subject must commit matricide in order to function as a normative adult, within the Symbolic register of language and law, shifts the theoretical focus away from the Freudian paternally biased Oedipal trajectory, on to the pre-Oedipal mother/child dyad. The close textual reading of Sarah

Sheard's novel that follows demonstrates the visceral nature of failed or postponed mourning that prevents the grieving daughter from engaging in the reparative act of mourning that will enable her to begin to process or redigest her mother's memory, so that she is able to recommence her life. Kristeva's controversial theorisation of the disabling effects of the daughter's attachment to the maternal object will be cited to elucidate the daughter's struggle to implicate herself in a flexible discourse that will allow her to separate past from present and so reconcile the unresolved traumas of childhood and adolescence.

The curative effects of the 'writing' as opposed to the 'talking' cure will be discussed in the final chapter of this thesis. The final chapter examines Kathryn Harrison's autobiographical account of incest survival in *The Kiss* (1997). Unlike the narrator of the previous novel, Harrison's narrator mourns the loss of her father through a consensual, incestuous relationship initiated by him during her adolescence. The chapter will address the literary and cultural obstacles that prevent the author/narrator from adequately representing her experience within a fictional framework. This will be followed by an evaluation of the cultural and literary constraints preventing the daughter from constructing a counter-discourse that challenges the conventional norms and values of the romance genre. The act of literary patricide that is required to achieve representation within this discursive field embraces all of the issues and concerns of the previous chapters. Additionally, there will be a discussion of the problematic category of adolescence that is typically viewed through adult-centred discourses. The literary and cultural effacement of the resisting daughter in conventional romance plots is discussed in connection with

dominant discourses that render her dissatisfaction with the culturally sanctioned 'family romance' narrative silent and therefore invisible.[31]

Harrison's attempt to usurp the heterosexist romance plot by rearranging its traditional narrative structure represents her resolution to transform suspended mourning into grieving. By shifting the axes of the romantic paradigm, to include a resisting daughter and an absent father, Harrison is challenging the most cherished cultural values of the patriarchy. The act of resistance that shatters the normative assumptions underpinning its oppressive parameters translates invisible and indigestible loss into the transformative act of speech. However, the oppositional strategies, deployed by all of the five author/protagonists in this thesis, unwittingly reveal the resilience of the dominant ideological formations that inform them. Indeed, the collision of residual and emergent ideological and cultural formations can be clearly discerned in the first of the five novels to be discussed. Elizabeth Smart's novel *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down And Wept* was first published in 1945 and is therefore the chronological forerunner of the four other novels examined here. The novel is set in an American culture reverberating from the profound ideological changes engendered by the Second World War. The global cultural upheavals that emerge from such a catastrophe implicates the novel's author/narrator in a cultural plot that initially appears to trace an exciting, even liberatory trajectory, for its youthful creator. However, the promise of ideological and cultural plenitude is eventually destroyed by the very sociological formations that had initially allowed the author's vision of a more reciprocal and ideologically innovative sexual relationship to flourish. The destruction of this relationship by oppressive sociological formations demonstrates the fortitude of

the over-arching patriarchal structures that contain them. Indeed, the ingenuity and tenacity of these psychological and sociological mechanisms encourage a form of self-policing, ensuring that the boundaries of dominant ideological formations are not transgressed. These same formations keep intact a construction of femininity that Luce Irigarary contends is remarkably similar to that of the melancholic (1985). Paraphrasing Irigaray, Sue Vice claims that:

> Like the melancholic, a woman prefers affection to passion; has little interest in the outside world; and has suffered a primordial disappointment - castration, in the woman's case. In other words, female sexuality is necessarily pathological, as melancholia is in men (1998:165)

The following chapter will demonstrate how female sexuality is demonised within patriarchal structures by conflating it with the pathological condition that is culturally defined as melancholia. As we shall see, the narrator of Smart's novel gradually reverts to a mode of solipsistic contemplation, finding no objective correlative in the outside world to rescue herself or the reader of her elegiac text from a descent into psycho-social oblivion. The following chapters reveal the extent of this melancholic malaise within the writing of a selection of contemporary female writers. Indeed, the widespread occurrence of a melancholy poetics within contemporary women's writing suggests that this pathologised version of femininity has been internalised by a whole generation of writers who still struggle to dismantle its totalising dynamics.

This thesis is, then, an exploration of a pervasive sense of mourning that can be detected within contemporary women's writing. In what follows, I will attempt to establish how and why this elegiac mood permeates the writings of a diverse group of North American women writers. I will attempt to construct a working hypothesis to explain the presence of a melancholic poetics that is

inscribed in each of the novels to be considered in this thesis. The following chapters will therefore draw attention to the reasons why the narrators of these novels are compelled by a profound and disturbing need to register their sense of unbelonging within a bleak and often incomprehensible universe. The failure to achieve a sense of belonging coincides with the narrators' sense that knowledge is uncertain within a chaotic and disorderly world. The palpable sense of unease that is present in these novels is a consequence of the climate of irrational uncertainty that erodes the received fantasies of love and acceptance offered by familial and social networks. The feelings of disempowerment generated by this hostile environment are compounded by the narrators' struggle to articulate their own deep-rooted sense of arbitrary injustice that is engendered by their exclusion from dominant institutions. As we have already seen, the extent of this exclusion suggests a link with femininity as a contested site of meanings and possibilities. Resistance to the constraints and limitations imposed on femininity as a discursive practice results in a reinforcement of the doubts and uncertainties that already exist in a late capitalist culture dominated by excessive violence, decadence and consumerism.

This project focuses on the inscription of loss within contemporary North American women's writing. By training the theoretical lens on this conflicted discursive site, I will attempt to show how the category of loss is being continually reworked by a new generation of female writers. These writers bravely confront the myths and received values that have been promulgated by a profoundly patriarchal culture intolerant of feminine representations of grief and loss. Before revisionist strategies can be implemented, it is essential that

women find the tools to register their own sense of loss and bewilderment in a frightening universe that threatens to run out of control. Once a space has been cleared for women to work through their feelings of guilt, self-hatred and failure, without being castigated as isolated depressives, it may be possible to refashion mourning and melancholia into a discursive practice that ceases to be underwritten by divisive sexual politics that discriminate against women.

The following chapter will focus on Elizabeth Smart's evocation of loss and self-destruction in *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept.* Smart's compelling account of psychological exile foreshadows the experience of unrequited loss that is represented in all of the novels to be discussed in this thesis. In this sense, Smart's novel is exemplary, forming a textual point of reference for representations of unsuccessful mourning within contemporary women's writing. Smart's novel was first published in 1945 and therefore precedes the other novels within this thesis by some fifty-five years. The critical reception accorded to *By Grand Central Station* is illustrative of a widespread mistrust of feminine grieving that extends to the sheltered enclaves of academic learning. As we shall see, the novel was praised for its exuberant rendition of lyrical transcendence in the face of tragic loss. The shift of critical attention from the powerful portrayal of emotional betrayal and loss to the intricacies of verbal and rhetorical wordplay contained in the novel suggests a reluctance on the part of the academy to acknowledge female grief as a discursive reality. The critical blindness to textual representations of loss by women raises two questions that are crucial to all of the novels under consideration. The questions are centred around the academic failure to address the issues raised by women's experience of profound and catastrophic loss. Is this failure

contingent on a fear of the disorderly femininity that may be released by

unrestrained or protracted grieving, or is this failure suggestive of a refusal to

acknowledge that women can successfully manipulate the discursive apparatus

that has historically celebrated the ability of the masculine subject to glorify

loss? These issues will be addressed in the following chapter.

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[1]   Men have historically been the beneficiaries of triumphalist interpretations of
melancholic texts. Juliana Schiesari includes Petrarch, Ficino, Tasso, Rousseau,
Chateaubriand, Holderlin, De Quincey, Nerval, Dostoevsky and Walter Benjamin in the pantheon
of "great melancholics". Women are, of course, conspicuous by their absence. (1992: 3) See
also, Stanley W. Jackson (1986) *Melancholia and Depression*, New Haven and London: Yale
University Press, pp. 78 - 103 for an account of literary and popular forms of melancholy during
the Renaissance.

[2]   See Sue Vice (1998) 'Psychoanalytic Feminist Theory' in Stevi Jackson and Jackie
Jones (eds), *Contemporary Feminist Theories*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press (65), for
her review of Luce Irigaray's assertion that Freudian psychoanalysis collapses femininity into the
pathologised category of melancholia.

[3]   See Juliana Schiesari's insightful interpretation of Kaja Silverman's study of feminine
psychological disinvestiture following the resolution of the positive Oedipal phase in *The
Acoustic Mirror* (1984). Schiesari contends that Silverman's work illustrates how the structures
of femininity and melancholia begin to merge after the positive Oedipal phase when 'The
superego, an agency of the father, inherited at the Oedipal complex as one assumes one's
position in the ordering of sexuality, works to maintain and reinforce the dominance of the father
over the mother. It is no wonder, then, there are so many depressed women!' (74). See Kaja
Silverman (1984) *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema*,
Bloomington, Indiana University Press.

[4]   See Julia Kristeva (1989) 'Psychoanalysis - A Counterdepressant' in *Black Sun:
Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon Roudiez, New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 1 -
30.

[5]   The term 'slacker' is taken from Richard Linklater's film of the same name. According to
Annesley, the term is used to describe characters who 'seem intent on rejecting traditional roles
and determined to find alternative paths, preferably paths that offer the least resistance and
enable them to satisfy their obscure and often indulgent desires'. See James Annesley (1998)
Blank Fictions: Consumerism, Culture and the Contemporary American Novel, London: Pluto
Press, p. 122.

[6]   Annesley's interpretation of the title story of Evelyn Lau's *Fresh Girls* (1994) reveals how
the material imperatives of commodification infiltrate and thereby undermine pleasurable or
sensory emotions and experiences. In this story, the narrator injects heroin supplied by her
pimp. The narrator uses commercial imagery to convey the impact of the drug which she
experiences as 'a silvered feeling' that rushes along the back of her neck. Annesley maintains
that this incident illustrates how commodification 'grounds these potentially transcendent
experiences in specific kinds of material relations' (129). See James Annesley (1998)
'Decadence' in *Blank Fictions*, London: Pluto Books, pp 108 - 134.

[7]   See 'Feminist Theory and Discourse Theory' in Sara Mills (1997) *Discourse*, London:
Routledge, pp. 77 - 103, for a comprehensive overview of recent developments in this area.

[8]   The Freudian case study has long been criticised by feminists as an arena that
privileges the typically masculine analyst over the female analysand. Although there is no scope
for a detailed analysis of the status of the case study within post-structuralist feminist theory at
this juncture, see Claire Kahane and Charles Bernheimer (1985) eds. *In Dora's Case: Freud-
Hysteria-Feminism*, New York: Columbia Press, for a wide range of feminist responses to the
Freudian construction of femininity contained in his most famous case study.

[9]   Lynne Segal reads Lacan's theory of feminine *jouissance* as a repressive measure that
relegates women's expression of pleasure to the depoliticised realm of the Imaginary. Hence, 'it
cannot, therefore, provide a woman with any way of communicating her existence as an agent of
her own desire, but can only engage her in the mystery of women's place as the foreordained

object of phallic fantasy'. See Lynne Segal (1994) *Straight Sex: The Politics of Pleasure*, London: Virago, p. 132.

[10]   See Margaret Whitford (1991) *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine*, London: Routledge. Irigaray's notion that women are excluded from philosophical discourses in Western culture also explains their omission from canonised melancholic texts.

[11]   See Janice Doane and Devon Hodges (1992) *From Klein to Kristeva: Psychoanalytic Feminism and the Search for the "Good Enough" Mother*, Ann Arbour: The University of Michigan Press for a detailed overview of the development of object-relations theory and psychoanalytic accounts of mothering. Moreover, Doane and Hodges claim that Kristeva's work on feminine depression in *Black Sun* (1989) is indebted to object-relations theory and particularly the work of the French psychoanalyst André Green (65).

[12]   Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* (1987) suggests itself here. Morrison's novel is germane to this discussion because it engages with the category of race memory which is in Morrison's words dependent on the silent and hence forbidden presence of 'unspeakable thoughts, unspoken' (1987: 199). See Peter Nicholls (1996) 'The Belated Postmodern: History, Phantoms, and Toni Morrison' in *Psychoanalytic Criticism: A Reader*, Cambridge: Polity Press, pp. 50 - 74. Nicholls deploys Abraham and Torok's notion of 'transgenerational' haunting to interrogate Morrison's narrative of failed mourning.

[13]   According to Peter Nicholls Abraham and Torok's theory of 'transgenerational haunting' refers to 'something repressed [that is] transmitted across several generations'. See Peter Nicholls (1996) 'The Belated Postmodern: History, Phantoms and Toni Morrison' in Sue Vice (ed.) *Psychoanalytic Criticism: A Reader*, Cambridge: Polity, (63).

[14]   See Esther Rashkin (1995) ' A Recipe for Mourning: Isak Dinesen's "Babette's Feast" *Style*, Vol. 29, 3, Fall, pp. 356 - 375 for a textual demonstration of how Abraham and Torok's theory of repressed mourning can help to unravel the mysteries of repressed or blocked mourning.

[15]   Judith Butler detects some ambivalence in Freud's attitude towards the question of identification implicit in his notion of melancholia. Butler suggests that Freud's reluctance to clearly identify the psychological dynamics present in the category of melancholia, without linking it to the normative position of mourning, arises because it problematises his theory of gender acquisition. According to Butler, the incest taboo is predicated on the male child's disavowed grief when he must identify with his father in order to assume a normative heterosexual subject position. See Judith Butler, (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, London: Routledge, pp. 57 - 66.

[16]   Jonathan Dollimore suggests that the Western conceptualisation of loss is significantly gendered. Dollimore argues that this misogynistic symbiotic construction of femininity and loss has persisted throughout recorded history, particularly in the narrative of the Fall. See Jonathan Dollimore, (1998) *Death, Desire and Loss in Western Culture*, London: Penguin Press, pp. 23 - 27.

[17]   Jackie Stacey's 'Desperately Seeking Difference' addresses the question of desire between women in narrative cinema. Stacey maintains that Mulvey's theory of feminine spectatorship fails to account for the complex interplay of difference and otherness within feminine modes of viewing. Stacey argues that women gain pleasure by actively seeking difference when viewing images of women on the screen. She concludes therefore that Mulvey's 'rigid distinction between *either* desire *or* identification, so characteristic of psychoanalytic film theory, fails to address the construction of desires which involve a specific interplay of both processes' (129). See 'Desperately Seeking Difference' in Lorraine Gamman and Margaret Marshment (eds) (1988) in *The Female Gaze: Women as Viewers of Popular Culture*, London: The Women's Press, pp. 112 - 129.

[18]   Radden's paper attempts to establish that the early modern terms "melancholy" and "melancholia" correlate respectively with the contemporary terms "depression" and "depressive illness or reaction" (240). However, Juliana Schiesari maintains that ' what needs to be stressed is that melancholia as a *cultural* category for the *exceptional* man appears concomitant with a denial of women's own claims to represent their losses within culture'. See Juliana Schiesari (1992) *The Gendering of Melancholia*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, pp. 93 - 95.

[19]   See Alan Sinfield (1994),*The Wilde Century*, London: Cassell, for an analysis of the origins of the contemporary stereotypical construction of the homosexual. In particular, see the chapter entitled 'Speaking Its Name' pp. 109 - 129.

[20]   See the chapter entitled 'Foucault and Postfeminism' in Ann Brooks (1997) *Postfeminisms, Feminism, Cultural Theory and Cultural Forms*, New York and London: Routledge, pp 47 - 68 for a comprehensive overview of post-structuralist feminist responses to

Foucault's work. Brooks' chapter also clarifies some of the limitations of Foucault's work for feminist projects, particularly his failure to adequately address the cultural differences and contradictions implicit in the term 'woman'. See Ann Brooks (1997) *Postfeminisms: Feminism, Cultural Theory and Cultural Forms*, London: Routledge, pp. 65 - 68.

[21]   Juliana Shiesari reminds the reader that women have always devised strategies to represent loss and grief, notably in the devalued discursive formations of mourning and depression. What is at stake culturally is their exclusion from valorised melancholic discourses that have historically been focused on the privileged male intellectual. See Schiesari's chapter 'Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia" in *Gendering Melancholia* (1992), Cornell University Press: Ithaca and London, pp. 33 - 96.

[22]   The epithet 'blank fiction' is a contentious category that is notoriously difficult to define. Annesley claims that blank fiction is 'predominantly urban in focus and concerned with the relationship between the individual and consumer culture. Instead of the dense plots, elaborate styles and political subjects that provide the material for writers like Toni Morrison, Thomas Pynchon and Norman Mailer, these fictions seem determined to adopt a looser approach' (1998: 2). Elizabeth Young and Graham Caveney prefer the title "Blank Generation" fiction because they maintain that it 'conveys something of the flat, stunned quality of much of the writing. See Young & Caveney (1998) *Shopping in Space: Essays on American "Blank Generation" Fiction*, London: Serpents Tail, pp. v – viii.

[23]   The female literary tradition is littered with representations of women who found it impossible to adhere to the dominant cultural construction of womanhood. Sylvia Plath's evocation of a young woman's failure to comfortably position herself within prevailing socio-sexual discourses in *The Bell Jar* is perhaps the most striking recent example. Indeed, Plath's portrayal of psychological break-down in 1950s America influenced a whole generation of female writers such as Susanna Kaysen in *Girl Interrupted* (1995) and Elizabeth Wurtzel's *Prozac Nation* (1995).

[24]   See Judith Kegan Gardiner (1995) 'Can Ms Prozac Talk Back? Feminism, Drugs and Social Constructionism' *Feminist Studies*, 21, 3, Fall, pp. 501 - 517. Gardiner suggests that Wurtzel projects her ambivalent attitude towards recent changes and contradictions within feminism onto drugs like Prozac. Gardiner cautions that Wurtzel's alleged ambivalence towards Prozac masks her reluctance to assume responsibility for own choices and therefore makes her especially vulnerable to the 'psychotherapeutic hype' of the pharmaceutical industry' (515).

[25]   The troubled status of the adolescent body can be seen to be a literary staple within contemporary fiction. In what follows, a disturbing symbiotic relationship between the perceived threats of adolescence and femininity will be revealed, especially in Kathryn Harrison's *The Kiss* (1997). Meanwhile, see Jo Croft (1998) 'Writing the Adolescent Body' in Jan Campbell and Janet Harbord (eds) *Psycho-politics and Cultural Desires*, London: UCL Press, pp. 190 - 202.

[26]   Narrative fragmentation and disruption have been identified as a facet of the postmodern aesthetic. See in particular, Patricia Waugh (1992) 'Postmodernism' in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, Oxford: Blackwells, pp. 341 - 345. However, significantly for this project, all of the novels examined within this thesis appear to be uninterested in dismantling the grand meta-narratives that have historically imposed constraints on the development of a feminist epistemology. Indeed, the narratives under discussion do not challenge or disturb the ratifying law of the father. Instead, the narrators of these novels operate within a melancholic aesthetic that keeps the lost love-object at bay, through the psychological process of identification, outlined above.

[27]   See Lisa Adkins (1998) 'Feminist Theory and Economic Change' in Stevi Jackson and Jackie Jones (eds) *Contemporary Feminist Theory*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp 34 - 50.

[28]   This regressive process is very similar to Abraham and Torok's theory of cryptic writing whereby the lost object is incorporated into the unconscious where it is figured as a secret that is sealed off from the outside world. However, the narrative operations of the murder mystery tale cited here are more akin to the process of melancholic identification referred to above. The endless rehearsal of the death encounter present in the murder mystery tale operates on the same principles of repetition that are fundamental to melancholic identification, whereas the process of incorporation occurs at discrete intervals and involves a disavowal of the loved object instead of a rejection of the thoroughgoing work of mourning. For a definitive account of the process of incorporation see Jacques Derrida (1977) 'Fors', *The Georgia Review*, 31, 1, pp. 64 - 116.

[29]   Jackson's statement neatly illustrates the textual operations of melancholic identification in the murder mystery tale and traditional romantic narratives described above.

[30] See especially, Jean Mallinson (1978) 'The Figures of Love: Rhetoric In By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept', *Essays in Canadian Writing*, 10, pp. 110 - 118 and Alice Van Wart (1986) 'By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept' *Studies in Canadian Literature*, Vol. 11, 1, pp. 38 - 51.

[31] Steph Lawler's 'I never felt as though I fitted': Family Romances and the Mother-Daughter Relationship' in Pearce and Stacey (eds) (1992) *Revisiting Romance*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, pp. 265 - 278, is interesting in this context. Lawler's chapter is primarily focused on the intersection of class and gender in mother-daughter relationships; however her analysis of the underlying ambivalence in the mother-daughter relationship is relevant to Harrison's novel, where the narrator is engaged in a perpetual battle to replace both parents in and through the magical operations of fantasy.

CHAPTER TWO

The Loss That Cannot Speak Its Name: Unrequited Mourning in Elizabeth Smart's *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down And Wept*

(i)   Introduction

> When Freud introduced the notion of a dynamic unconscious, he brought a demon into the modern world which will not let anything alone, but which continually disrupts the things we take for granted and subverts the things we assume to be true (Frosh, 1997: 242).

In the Introduction I established that Elizabeth Smart's novel *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept* (1945) is a melancholic text that foreshadowed the form, structure and thematic concerns of post-war women writers (see 52). In what follows I will qualify this statement by showing why Smart's chronicle of exiled love is an exemplar of what I shall refer to as the female melancholic text. My main concern is to reveal how Smart's novel marks a literary turning point within this sub-genre of women's writing. I will contend that *By Grand Central Station* changed the literary landscape for the generation of women writing within the melancholic oeuvre after the Second World War. The structure of this chapter will be divided into two parts. Firstly, I will show how Smart's novel is affected by humanist melancholic traditions that privilege masculine expressions of grief and loss. My principal objective will be to show where Smart's book is located within western philosophical traditions that have historically excluded women from the discourse of melancholia. In the second part of this chapter, I will focus on the academic response to *By Grand Central Station*. I will draw attention to what appears to be a critical aversion to women writing about the eviscerating effects of catastrophic loss. This gendered gap within culturally sanctioned representations of loss will be explained in terms of women's problematic status within Western signifying

practices. Finally, I will discuss the literary and discursive implications raised by Smart's text. I will conclude this chapter by demonstrating how Smart's narrative can be seen to exceed the rigid conventions of melancholic discourse. I will illustrate this point by showing how Smart's narrator successively resists discursive and institutional oppression by refusing to subscribe to the narrow and disabling regime of femininity endorsed by western culture.

(ii) 'Beautiful Losers': Women's Literary Status Within Melancholic Discourse[1]

In the following section I will attempt to provide a contextual framework for Elizabeth Smart's novel. In the Introduction, I drew attention to the problematic status of women's writing on loss and bereavement in melancholic discourses (see p. 2). As I established women have been historically excluded from these discourses. We may recall that the great melancholic geniuses within western culture were unanimously male even though recent feminist research has uncovered a significant body of women's writing in this area.[2] Furthermore, masculine appropriation of the Renaissance discourse on melancholia influenced later theorists such as Sigmund Freud. According to Juliana Schiesari, the cultural legacy of this valorisation of masculine loss is clearly present in Freud's treatment of the fictional character of Hamlet in his essay 'Mourning and Melancholia' (1957i). Schiesari argues that Freud's depiction of Hamlet as a procrastinator who is dogged by moral scruples locates the hero-prince within 'a venerable cultural tradition that has, in fact, historically legitimated loss in terms of melancholia for men' (1992: 5). In what follows, I will show how the historical validation of melancholic writing by men has affected the critical response to Elizabeth Smart's novel.

By Grand Central Station was first published in 1945, and according to

Michael Oliver, the publication of the book:

> was met with a few surprised, confused, but favourable notices, and as
> the years went by it gradually became an underground classic in England,
> a rare book appreciated by a cult of readers who were able to attune
> themselves to the intense, personal vision presented by the obviously
> gifted young writer. The fact that during all this time Miss Smart published
> no further books naturally served to increase the literary and spiritual
> value of her singular masterpiece (1978: 106).

Oliver's reaction to the critical reception of *By Grand Central Station* is

illustrative of the existence of a gendered bias towards men within melancholic

discourses. It is remarkable that academic responses to Smart's novel

manifest such a pronounced level of confusion when dealing with a textual

representation of loss written by a woman, for as we have already seen, women

have always been involved within the cultural production of writings related to

mourning and melancholia. The critical response to Smart's narrative,

however, clearly indicates that women's involvement within this area was not

rewarded by an academic or indeed cultural recognition of their efforts. The

title of Oliver's article, 'Elizabeth Smart: Recognition', is therefore deeply ironic.

The irony lies in Oliver's central assertion that Smart's novel has finally received

the level of recognition that it richly deserves. Clearly, this is not the case. As

Oliver points out in the extract quoted above, *By Grand Central Station*

remained an 'underground classic' consumed by an elite group of readers, who

were able to 'attune themselves to the intense, personal vision' propounded by

this talented young author.

By framing Smart as a literary phenomenon, Oliver maintains the hidden

agenda that is embedded in western philosophical traditions: namely, that

women should not be involved in the production of literature related to grief and

loss. Evidence of Oliver's defence of the hidden assumptions implicit in these traditions can be detected in his emphasis on the 'singular' even 'spiritual' nature of Smart's novel. By foregrounding what he sees as the transcendent qualities present in the novel, Oliver carefully removes Smart's narrative of anguished loss from the gaze of both the academic and the mainstream reader. Smart's rendition of the 'messy' aftermath of exiled love is thereby safely positioned within the exclusive enclave of the literary *avant garde*. By implying that *By Grand Central Station* is only attractive to the rarefied palates of the literary elite, Oliver has conveniently shifted the focus of attention from the unsettling details of Smart's account of thwarted love into the relatively comfortable forum of literary aesthetics. Even so, Oliver remains intent on drawing attention to the marginal status of a text that can paradoxically only achieve recognition if it is pushed underground. The discomfort aroused by the publication of Smart's novel is a clear indication that the discourse of melancholia still legitimates the cultural output of male *auteurs* at the expense of women.

The sense of astonishment, bordering on embarrassment, provoked by Smart's book can be detected in some women's response to the novel. For example, in her preface to the 1966 edition of the novel, Brigid Brophy hails the book as an example of not 'more than half a dozen masterpieces of poetic prose in the world, which nevertheless 'made small stir' in the literary world (1992: 7). Here again, emotional intimacies are eschewed in favour of the more cerebral delights of rhetorical wordplay. Moreover, the underlying subtext of both of the commentaries noted above reveals the authors' veneration of the novel's complex poetic structure and poignant lyricism. By focusing on the

rhetorical splendour of the narrative, both critics ignore the novel's central themes of betrayal and loss, even though the novel was originally conceived as the author's reaction to the end of her relationship with the poet George Barker. Significantly, for this project, the critical effacement of the novel's dramatic theme of catastrophic loss appears to be wilfully sacrificed so that the text can receive cultural or critical acclaim. This valorisation of rhetorical figures, at the expense of the emotional anguish that they are designed to explore, suggests a critical aversion to narratives that detail female loss.

The critical reaction to Elizabeth Smart's devastating portrayal of emotional abandonment suggests that the humanist celebration of masculine inspiration through impairment is still prevalent within western culture. This is a position that is espoused by Juliana Schiesari in her chapter on 'The Gendering of Freud's 'Mourning and Melancholia' in *The Gendering of Melancholia* (1992) and Jennifer Radden's essay 'Melancholy and Melancholia' (1987). The theoretical rationale that underpins this chapter, will build on Schiesari's and Radden's accounts of the privileged status of masculine accounts of grief and loss from the Renaissance onwards. Their work is supportive of the central argument, within this chapter, that contemporary women's writing still suffers from women's historic exclusion from the discourse of mourning. Women's exclusion, in turn, continues to prohibit their participation in artistic production.

Moreover, the response of some feminist critics to *By Grand Central Station* reflects the durability of the humanist myths surrounding masculine transcendence implicit in western culture. In a relatively recent paper, 'The Inscription of "Feminine *Jouissance*" in Elizabeth Smart's *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept'* (1994), Denise Heaps disappointingly condemns

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Smart's novel because she feels uncomfortable with a text that involves 'the annihilation of another woman's pleasure and the infliction of pain' (1994: 154). Here, we witness a deeply judgmental interpretation of Smart's complex evocation of psychological despair following abandonment. Significantly, Barker's adulterous liaison with Smart, conducted in close proximity to his wife, escapes the worst excesses of Heaps' moralising invective. By adopting a morally scrupulous approach to only one half of this adulterous equation, Heaps unwittingly protects the misogynist impulses that are imbricated in melancholic discursive practices. Moreover, Heaps' condemnation of Smart's supposed moral turpitude, reveals an even more disturbing intolerance of the sexually active woman within western culture.

The conflation of anarchic loss and sexual abandonment contained in *By Grand Central Station* triggered cultural anxieties related to the potential destruction of the polarised set of differences encoded in western discursive practices. This underlying fear of the threat of female sexual agency reverberates throughout melancholic discourse revealing its more insidious undertones in the infamous witch hunts of the early modern period. Schiesari maintains that masculine castration anxieties were projected onto the figure of the melancholic female who threatened to collapse binary definitions of womanhood by revealing the presence of feminine desire. Thus, 'the horror of the witch, or of the female melancholic, is that she would all too openly reveal what is projected onto her, a longing for the phallus though it be long gone, unattainable, or perhaps never there in the first place' (1992: 255). Smart's tale of sexual subversion and experimentation therefore troubles the boundaries of sexual difference that bolster the predicates of the patriarchal symbolic order.

Smart and her autobiographical narrator must therefore suffer the fate of women who dare to exceed the narrow prescriptions of patriarchal discourse by exposing a desire to explore forbidden sexual and psychological terrain. As we have already seen in the response to Smart's novel, the cultural fear of women's sexual agency is so widespread and deeply entrenched that some feminist commentators such as Heaps have themselves internalised the more punitive elements implicit in western discursive practices.

(iii)   Delusion and Impoverishment

The next section of this chapter will continue this theme by focusing on what women have lost by not being able to access the discourse of melancholy. In order to answer this question I will draw attention to the presence of woman as the repressed Other within melancholic discourse. I will examine what is at stake in cultural terms within this rigid category that elevates the grandiose figure of the male melancholic whilst completely ignoring the work of women writing within this field. Moreover, I will question why society continues to discriminate against women such as Smart who bravely attempt to access melancholic discourse. Schiesari and Radden's work on the devalued status of femininity within melancholic discourse will be used to elucidate why it is women have been unable to enjoy the cultural kudos bestowed on the esteemed male melancholic.

In 'Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia" (1992),Schiesari refocuses attention on loss as an ontological category. By so doing, she shifts critical attention onto loss as a separate issue, rather than a reaction to the object itself. This is a departure from Freud's theory in which the melancholic ego becomes identified with the abandoned object. As Freud puts it, 'the shadow of

the object fell upon the ego so that the latter could henceforth be criticized by a special mental faculty like an object, like the forsaken object' (1957i: 159). By steering the reader away from this regressive process, Schiesari places the spotlight on the 'what' of the lost object. This new emphasis, in turn, redirects attention back to the subject of the loss (1992: 43). Schiesari's critical manoeuvring of Freud's theory invites the reader to contemplate what the melancholic subject loses in themselves. Schiesari has, therefore, shifted attention away from the cannibalistic process of identification and destruction that forms the central pivot of Freud's argument.[3] By inverting the subject/object paradigm in this way, Schiesari foregrounds the repetitive nature of the melancholic condition in a different way to that outlined by Freud. Schiesari veers away from the relentless cycle of identification and destruction that is such an integral part of Freud's argument. Instead, she doubles back to reveal the melancholic ego, closing off the lost object so that it can protect itself from the searing pain of unresolved loss (47).

The delusional impoverishment of the ego provides the melancholic subject with what Shiesari calls a 'pretext through which the ego can represent itself' (42). The melancholic ego then attempts to resolve the confused relation between inner and outer by using loss as a lens that presents a distorted version of the external world to the subject. The contortions of the lens make sense to the melancholic ego because its appears to endorse the impoverished worldview that follows the ego's identification with the abandoned object. As Schiesari puts it, this dysfunctional relationship works because the ego 'derealizes or devalues any *object* of loss for the sake of loss itself: a sort of suturing between lack and loss, an idealization of loss that paradoxically

empowers the ego' (43). As we have already seen, according to Schiesari, this shift in focus results in a new emphasis on the 'what' of the lost object, that in turn points back to the *'subject'* of the loss (43). This is, then, a departure from the 'whom' that is lost in mourning. The changes that take place in the melancholic ego give rise to a repetitive and intensely self-reflexive pattern of behaviour. The obsessive symptoms of this condition will be observed in the close reading of *By Grand Central Station* that follows.

Scheisari notes that 'Mourning and Melancholia' (1957i) was written under the shadow of Freud's purely speculative conviction that his own days were numbered (34). Freud's anxiety reveals itself in his frustrated attempt to compartmentalise loss by relegating it to a fixed psychological category that will suppress for good the elusive melancholic signifier (40). Thus, Freud reveals the kind of masculine fears that were referred to earlier in this chapter, in connection with discursive practices. On the one hand he is afraid that this disorderly signifier might upset the libidinal economy that he has tried so hard to construct; on the other hand, he fears that the whole framework of perception that privileges masculine expressions of loss may be disrupted. Thus, Freud's essay slots into what Schiesari calls a 'long-standing tradition of treating melancholia as a typology to be classified rather than as a condition to be specified' (35).

Freud's feverish attempt to file away this troublesome category, which was becoming increasingly outmoded at the time of writing, reveals his underlying anxiety that the lofty status of the male melancholic may be usurped by the desiring Other, namely the melancholic female. Evidence of Freud's nervousness when dealing with the colonising zeal of melancholic discourse

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can be found in his analogy of the open wound. Here, melancholia is figured as the cavernous, castrating space that threatens to swallow the cultural privileges bestowed by the all-conquering penis. As Catherine Bates maintains, in 'Castrating the Castration Complex' (1998), Freud's repeated use of the term castration is consistent with his own definition of fetishistic practice. Freud therefore manipulates the term castration in a similar manner to the fetishist who 'does not simply deny the fact of castration; rather, he contrives to hold on to two conflicting and contradictory ideas at once' (1998:103). Furthermore, Bates advances the view that Freud's fetishistic deployment of the castration syndrome allows him to sublimate his fear that the phallocratic order may be destroyed by the female organ. As she puts it:

> castration allows Freud to confront and dodge the issue [castration complex] at the same time. It enables him to take the bull by the horns and to look inadequacy, loss and dismemberment fully in the face; but it also veers off at the final moment, preserving the all-important organ and thus allowing phallic mastery to remain intact (1998: 104)

Freud's virtuoso performance in attempting to control this essential if unruly constellation of symptoms is remarkably similar to his handling of the category of melancholia. Indeed, Elizabeth Schiesari claims that Freud's metaphoric description of melancholia as an 'open wound' functioning as a cathectic magnet to the subject's libidinal reserves, reveals a masculine fear of the wound as a site of castration. This in turn raises the spectre of sexual difference, which threatens to swallow up the phallus in a sea of excess meaning. Schiesari argues therefore that Freud displays a cultural fear that the binary logic that underpins the notion of sexual difference within the West will be unravelled if he is unable to metaphorically staunch the flow of this mysterious 'open wound' (1992: 41).

Furthermore, Schiesari believes that Freud's mobilisation of the term 'open wound' clearly reveals his desire to achieve textual closure with a quick metaphorical fix. Moreover, Schiesari maintains that Freud latches on to a crucially vague metaphor to harness the phallus and thereby 'precipitate meaning onto a condition that seems to be in excess of meaning' (41). Schiesari believes that Freud's resolve to stem the tide of 'excess meaning' bleeding from this 'open wound' is symptomatic of his own fear that the hierarchical systems of meaning underlying his own theory of sexual difference will be challenged unless he hastily performs surgery on this irritating wound (41). In fact, Schiesari's footnote pertaining to Freud's 'open wound' metaphor reveals that he first used the expression in an unpublished draft article titled 'Melancholia' in 1895. Interestingly, this particular article attempts to theorise a connection between melancholia and 'female' sexual disorders such as anorexia and hysteria (41). Schiesari argues that the metaphor's subsequent appearance in Freud's 1917 essay is a symptom of his identification with the blood-stained body of Emma Eckstein who was mutilated during nasal surgery performed by his friend Wilhelm Fliess. Although this remains a matter for speculation, Schiesari suggests that Freud's redeployment of this metaphor in this particular context is revelatory of the author's own melancholic disposition when he was writing 'Mourning and Melancholia'. Here again, according to Schiesari, the open wound which Freud refers to in his paper, reminds the reader of a 'what rather than a who' (42). The unspecified what reveals that something has been repressed. The mysterious gap in the signifying system signals the presence of an impoverished ego. Schiesari infers that the altered state of the ego within the melancholic subject is caused by the unresolved or

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repressed loss that cannot speak its name rather than the lost object of Freudian theory.

The next section of this chapter will explore the textual implications of this gaping hole as figured in Elizabeth Smart's novel *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept.* In a textual sense, Smart's autobiographical narrator searches for an objective correlative to express her sense of profound and cataclysmic loss. As T.S. Eliot maintains in his essay, 'Hamlet and His Problems' (1919), 'The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion' (cited in Abrams, 1988:123). As we shall see in the next section the search to find a suitable objective correlative in *By Grand Central Station* is complicated by the gender of the narrator. Smart's narrator embarks on a quest to find a textual formula to express the set of emotions provoked by profound grief and loss. This quest is continually jeopardised by the set of historical, philosophical and rhetorical oppositions built into the very language that Smart's narrator attempts to manipulate in order to convey her sense of irreplaceable loss.

(iv)   Undying Love

By Grand Central Station is an impassioned tale of doomed love. The novel is a testament to Elizabeth Smart's relationship with the poet George Barker. Smart's narrative is moreover an ambitious reworking of the traditional elegy.[4] M.H. Abrams reminds us that the traditional elegy was designed 'to denote the subjects and moods frequently expressed in [elegiac] verse form, especially complaints about love' (1988: 47). It is noticeable that Abrams cites

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a list of eminent male writers such as Donne, Milton and Tennyson in his exposition of the dominant features of this particular genre. Here again, we are on familiar territory, confronted by a male dominated tradition that celebrates the work of melancholic male geniuses whilst totally ignoring the work of female writers within this genre. Presumably, the numerous examples of women writing about grief and loss are not included because they violate the strict rules of decorum that govern this literary genre. Elizabeth Smart's book, therefore, constitutes a radical reshaping of this male-defined genre that signifies more than a simple inversion of traditional poetic decorum. Indeed, Smart assimilates some of the central codes and conventions that feature prominently within this genre. For example, M.H. Abrams notes that Milton's 'Lycidas' (1638) enriched the tradition of pastoral elegy by 'echoing the many earlier pastoral laments for the untimely death of a poet' (1988: 37). Similarly, the central theme of Smart's novel is the untimely death of her relationship with the poet George Barker. It is notable, however, that Smart's book is not considered to be part of any great poetic tradition. Critics such as Jean Mallinson (1978) and Alice Van Wart (1986) focus on the transcendent lyricism of Smart's novel, whilst carefully placing the text in a self-referential loop. By concentrating on rhetorical figures, and the novel as a poem, both critics divorce Smart's text from any of the great traditions. Moreover, there is no evidence to suggest that they believe that Smart's book represents a new departure within women's writing or indeed the more convention-bound pastoral elegy referred to above. Both critics prefer to emphasise the localised affects of imagery and allusion creating the impression that Smart's text functions as an aesthetically pleasing but thematically redundant rhetorical exercise. Indeed, Van Wart concludes her

aptly named essay, '*By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept:* The Novel as a Poem' (1986), with the theory that the novel 'harmoniously integrates narrative intentions and poetic conventions to create a paradigmatic poem-novel' (51). Here, again, the representation of raw untamed emotions within the novel has been sacrificed for the tranquil perusal of figurative language.

As we shall observe, the dramatic events traced within the novel induce feelings of consternation within the reader. Smart promotes this underlying sense of perpetual anxiety by juxtaposing a wide range of counterlogical, figurative elements within the novel. The harsh, frequently jarring effect caused by the collision of these dissonant, non-logical elements is invoked by the narrator's pursuit of an objective correlative to convey her sense that she inhabits a world that is dangerously out of control. For example, Smart shatters the orderly decorum of pastoral elegy when she describes the savagery of the Californian landscape:

> Poison oak grows over the path and over all the banks, and it is impossible even to go into the damp overhung valley without being poisoned. Later in the year it flushes scarlet, both warning of and recording fatality (1992: 19)

Here, the lush exoticism of a semi-tropical paradise is invaded by the presence of evil that is as perverse as it is threatening.[5] In other words, the landscape is personified as a voluptuous predator waiting to devour the unsuspecting trespasser. This situation is analogous to the events that precede the beginning of the affair between Smart and Barker. The luxurious overblown imagery of the opening chapters captures the narrator's sense that she is destined to inherit a violent yet grandiose world, full of dramatic incident. This impression of carnal exhilaration at the beginning of the novel is significant

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because it foreshadows the equally sudden and cataclysmic collapse of youthful expectation documented in the latter part of the novel. Even more significant, for the purposes of this thesis, is the eventual dissolution of the pattern of binary oppositions that help to create the sense of compulsive hedonism in the opening chapters of the novel. As we shall see, towards the end of the novel, the dramatic impetus generated by the underlying pattern of binary logic begins to work against the narrator. Once the narrator directly opposes the dominant institutions of the law, by attempting to elope with her married lover, she discovers that the hierarchical systems of meaning locked into binary logic are invested with patriarchal prerogatives that favour the masculine subject. Thus, the magnificent fluidity of the earlier images begins to falter when the narrator is engaged in a confrontational situation with the law. Ultimately, the dominant symbolic structures imbricated within these oppositions close down the inspired trajectory of the narrator's hopes and aspirations.

(v)   Down and Out in New York City

The following section will focus on the gendered assumptions built into the hierarchical set of meanings noted above. This will be preceded by a brief synopsis of the novel. *By Grand Central Station* is a dramatic elegy that recounts the chaotic and passionate relationship that developed between Elizabeth Smart and George Barker. Their sporadic relationship spanned a number of years and included four children. In the words of Smart's biographer, Rosemary Sullivan, this unconventional relationship was characterised by an unfulfilled 'longing ... to possess the other to fill an

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emptiness, hating the loss of self as one runs to embrace that loss' (1991:156/7). The novel takes the form of a dramatic monologue that charts the severe fluctuations in the lovers' combative relationship. Significantly, the lovers remain anonymous throughout the text, so that the central theme of love trapped within a brutal and uncaring regime cannot be diluted by excess verbiage. The action starts on the Californian coast with a brief detour down to the Mexican border, loops back to Canada and finally concludes in the back streets of New York City.[6]

Place and setting are critically important to this tale of exiled love. The events described within the novel take place during the Second World War. The distant backdrop of destructive warfare played out on the battlefields of Europe is crucial to Smart's theory of love as a swift and explosive *coup de gras.* Critics such as Oliver (1978) and Mallinson (1978) have also observed that the backdrop of the Second World War is conspicuous by its absence, implying therefore, that Smart strategically relegates the catastrophic effects of war to the margins of her novel. By marginalising the effects of war, Smart is able to foreground what she believes is the equally devastating arena of exiled love. In Smart's own words, love still 'uproots the heart better than an imagined landmine' (1992: 79).

An alternative view is presented by Denise Heaps who maintains that Smart 'shuns World War II and instead goes off to war against conventional morality, society and religion' (1994: 147). However, Heaps' assessment of Smart's rhetoric implies that her motivation is overtly political. I would suggest that the textual broadside launched against the institutions of language, law and religion is instead symptomatic of what Schiesari refers to as the refigured ego

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of melancholia. The refigured ego 'derealizes or devalues any *object* of loss for the sake of loss itself' (1992: 43). Thus, Smart maintains that 'the headlines speak to us of our private lives: yet still the mangy dog skulking under our window arouses a realer pity' (1992: 79). Here, evidence of Smart's reconstituted melancholic ego can be seen in the narrator's quest to find an objective correlative through which she can articulate the emotional resonance of loss.[7] Indeed, in the opening pages of the novel, she manipulates her prose so that each image that she refers to conveys the sense of impending doom that she retrospectively believes was present right from the start of her relationship with George Barker. Therefore, Smart chooses to focus on Californian legends that speak of 'bloodfeuds and suicide, uncanny foresight and supernatural knowledge' (19), whilst the brilliant blue of the Pacific merely 'reaches all its superlatives' (18).

Alice Van Wart covers similar theoretical ground in her essay 'By *Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept*: The Novel as a Poem' (1986). She views Smart's overall project as an effort to restore the searing pain of lost love through writing and thereby rescue it from being submerged in a wasteland of hackneyed prose (38). Van Wart contends that Smart manoeuvres metaphor in a transformative sense in order to construct an apocalyptic vision that is grounded in the narrator's assertion that 'there is no reality but love' (38). Van Wart places *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept*'s uncompromising rhetoric in the tradition of Blake, Donne and Herbert.[8] Van Wart believes that Smart's frequent allusions to these male writers was initiated in order to invest her own text with some of the 'heroic ideals of love' traditionally celebrated in these earlier works (38). Smart's vision is then according to Van Wart, a single

minded *tour de force* that brutally compresses syntax and the more familiar representations of time and space in order to create an alternative universe, governed by the dictates of the narrator's heart. Smart's physical suffering, is then, according to Van Wart, secondary to the psychological trauma instigated by her affair with Barker. Hence, the geographical backdrop of California, Arizona and New York drifts past the narrator's window so that she can more fully concentrate on her primary reference point which is according to Van Wart, a 'journey in the heart' (39).

I would suggest that Smart's appropriation of canonical texts written by men is revelatory of the revisionist strategies deployed within her novel. Smart's wholesale plundering of these texts suggests a will to ruthlessly manipulate and hence defamiliarise the work of these canonical writers. Smart's irreverent attitude towards these texts is made clear in her dismissal of philosophy, which she maintains, 'like lichens, takes centuries to grow and is always ignored in the Book of Instructions. If you can't Take It, Get Out' (84). I would contend, therefore, that Smart's impious attitude towards western philosophical traditions reveals her impatience with outdated figures of speech designed to serve the political needs of an elite group of male intellectuals. It is therefore, all the more surprising, that critical attention has for the most part been unproblematically directed towards Smart's innovative use of rhetorical and figurative devices. As the titles of Mallinson's and Van Wart's essays suggest, their authors' primary concern is to reveal the novel's underlying structural pattern. Jean Mallinson identifies the novel's dominating tropes of metalepsis and zeugma in order to explain the sense of psychological dislocation which the narrator experiences living in a material world that will not

recognise her vision of idealised love. In fact, Mallinson's overriding aim is to theoretically dissect the poetics of the novel to more fully appreciate the manner in which Smart conveys 'experience apprehended and suffered through language' (1978: 108).

Mallinson's theoretical approach pays tribute to the novel's palpable sense of unease without ever searching for the psychological source of such overwhelming loss. Mallinson notes that in Smart's highly charged world things and people are ruthlessly and arrogantly transformed into potent signifiers of love until nothing remains neutral (111). Thus, according to Mallinson, the 'Lucky Syrinx', unlike the narrator of *By Grand Central Station,* 'chose a legend instead of too much blood. For me there was no choice' (111). Again, the mysterious origins of this disabling worldview remains unchallenged by Mallinson who merely describes its colonising symptoms. As Mallinson points out, even the most mundane artefacts are transformed into highly charged signifiers that are 'either for or against love' (112). Accordingly, the 'transient coffee-shops and hotels' (43) that punctuate the lovers' journey to the Mexican border to seek a divorce, appear to collude in the idea of the couple's risky venture. The narrator's glance therefore helps them to 'achieve a perfect identity, a high round note of their own flavour, that makes me tearful with the gratitude of reception' (43). Here, we see the narrator making a gigantic leap of faith that unwittingly reveals the characteristic signs of the refigured ego referred to earlier in this chapter. Hence, the narrator assumes that the whole world shares her own manichean psychological perspective that ruthlessly categorises things and people according to their positioning within her own self-reflexive vision.[9]

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Mallinson's ear is obviously tuned to the farcical effects of the narrator's worldview that ransacks a disappointing rhetorical and figurative lexicon in order to find a suitable language in which to express her feelings of enforced exile. The narrator is thus forced into a rhetorical straitjacket that can only register extremes such as 'the hyperbole of hysteria' or 'the hyperbole of intensity' (110). It is disappointing, therefore, that Mallinson views such extreme measures more as a question of choice than coercion. Accordingly, she quotes Harold Bloom's premise that hyperbole is 'the natural trope for lovers, to whom the imperatives of love speak in extremes' (cited in Mallinson 1978:110). Mallinson's detailed and insightful exposition of the poetical structure of Smart's book disappoints precisely because it presents the text as a *fait accomplit* divorced from a social or historical context. Inevitably, such a strictly figurative approach excludes the complex histories and identifications implicated in language and metaphor before they are utilised as the building blocks of prose.

Kadiatu Kanneh cautions against this reductive, theoretical appraisal of language in her essay 'Love, Mourning and Metaphor' (1992). Kanneh argues that metaphor should lead to a 'heightened awareness of the relationship between body and word, the past and the racial politics of the present' (151). This notion of a linguistic 'work in progress' is singularly lacking in most of the critical material related to Elizabeth Smart's novel. Jean Mallinson's essay certainly conforms to John Crowe Ransom's assertion, that the first law of criticism recognises 'the autonomy of the work itself as existing for its own sake' (cited in Abrams,1988: 223). However, the New Critics' reverential approach to the autonomy of the text is still clearly present in Alice Van Wart's essay, written as late as 1986. As the title of her essay suggests, she also views Smart's

novel as a carefully constructed artefact that should be handled with care. By treating the novel as a valuable, but essentially dusty, museum exhibit, both critics relegate *By Grand Central Station* to the category of an interesting curiosity that is nevertheless rather embarrassing. The novel remains cramped by its poetic structure, in both of these accounts, because critical attention has been diverted from the author's wish to be included in a dialogue that has an impact on her own experience as a privileged white woman whose cultural identity has been undermined for the first time.

It is difficult to see how such a purely rhetorical interpretation of the novel can be sustained. Within the novel, the grim isolation of contemporary life is captured in the metaphor of New York's Grand Central Station. Smart repeatedly returns to the image of this stark and forbidding monolith to reiterate her central conceit: that time and technology have eroded our ability to express and experience profound emotions. Hence, once incarcerated within the oppressive confines of this joyless structure, 'odours of disinfectant wipe out love and tears' (112). Again, we observe Smart using Grand Central Station as a formula or objective correlative through which she can articulate the pervasive sense of loss that is engendered by her sense that the language she inherits is itself alien and uncompromising. In short, the language that served the canonical writers of the past so well is singularly unaccommodating when it is used by a woman who is attempting to challenge the dominant institutions of the law and religion.

This is made abundantly clear in the fourth part of the novel when the narrator attempts to cross the Mexican border with her married lover in order to lead a life that is free from the constraints of the patriarchal symbolic order.

Within this section of the novel, the reader witnesses for the first time the narrator being forced to negotiate with the representatives of the dominant institution of the law. Smart's account of her arrest at the Arizonian border, is a chilling example of the panic that is generated by the collision of two warring discourses, which threaten to crush the ideologically disadvantaged subject. Until this point in the novel, the narrator's confrontational prose style had been allowed to function independently of the law. In the initial throes of her relationship with Barker, the narrator sublimates her fear of reprisals by 'severing all the wires of understanding [where] I functioned like a normal being, and went about among devastation without seeing that it was there' (31).

The border is itself a crucial metaphor in the exchange that takes place between the two parties functioning as a figurative and psychological barrier that separates the two worlds. This physical and psychological borderline state also puts an end to the protean metaphors that Smart used to describe the beginning of her affair with Barker. The Arizonan border incident occurs at a literal and metaphorical mid-point in the novel that signals the end of the narrator's romantic commitment to her own imaginative world. From this point onwards the two discourses cease to be orderly neighbours and instead enter into a bloody and sustained conflict. Accordingly, during the police interrogation, the narrator uses the biblical 'Song of Songs' to counterpoint the policeman's dialogue. When the narrator is confronted by the intrusive question 'Did intercourse take place?' (47), she inwardly responds by quoting from the 'Song of Songs'. The narrator's silent rejoinder '(I sat down under his shadow with great delight and his fruit was sweet to my taste)' (47) therefore remains unheard. Significantly, Smart contains the Song's mellifluous word-

play in parentheses indicating that she cannot risk repeating its lines within the harsh disciplinary regime enforced by representatives of the law. This means that the narrator remains silent for the greater part of her interrogation by the police.

The narrator's apprehension at the Mexican border means that she is forced to participate within the coercive regime of confessional discourse. Sara Mills maintains that 'the confessional is perhaps the discourse which displays the operation of power most clearly' (1997: 81). Moreover, drawing on the work of Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (1979), Mills reveals how the regulatory regimes implemented within the prison system were integrated into the private spheres of church, school and home 'so that discipline is internalised by individuals and begins to be seen as self-discipline' (1997: 81). Further, Mills maintains that for Foucault 'those who confessed and displayed themselves as compliant subjects, in the process constructed themselves as compliant subjects' (81). This self-perpetuating system of internalised surveillance can be clearly seen in the incident on the Arizonian border.[10] Here, the narrator's words are assimilated into the regulatory framework of confessional discourse, until 'fourteen sheets ... fly over the continent like birds of ill omen [to] blackball me from ease' (1992: 49).

For the feminist theorist, Jennifer Radden, the narrator's internalisation of confessional discipline within the police interrogation cell would be seen as evidence of Foucault's position within *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (1973), that dissident behaviour, following the Enlightenment, was controlled by segregation. The emergence of the concept of 'madness', following the Classical period, closely resembled the cultural

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installation of the homosexual as a distinct personality type who embodied previously disparate patterns of same-sex behaviour. The following section will focus on the manner in which Foucault's analysis of post-Enlightenment segregation, in the field of madness, has impacted on the contemporary construction of the female depressive as the quotidian counterpart of the Renaissance melancholic.

(vi)   Angel At My Table

In her paper, 'Melancholy and Melancholia' (1987), Radden advances the view that medical containment of the disparate pattern of behaviours attributed to the melancholic during the Elizabethan period has contributed to the current idea of the lonely and isolated *depressive*. Clinical rationalisation of behaviour patterns has of course affected other subcultures such as those of the homosexual and more recently the drug user.[11] However, in the case of melancholia, gender has been mobilised in order to dissociate the condition from its historical associations with the accomplished male to its current position as the preserve of the disenfranchised woman. Schiesari views the contemporary dilution of the elevated category of melancholia, to the more commonplace term depression, as a result of the cultural construction of lack as phallic within patriarchal hierarchies and symbolic structures (93). Lack is therefore woven into the dominant discourse as a signifier of masculine worth that is visibly displayed in the field of artistic production. On the contrary, female loss is meshed with cultural ideas of deprivation that are totally unrelated to artistic license.

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Schiesari believes that the gendered bias that favours the male within the discourse of melancholia, has led to the organisation of 'a universe of imaginary individuals, separate from community and unified only in their nostalgic quest for the lost object' (93). Women are thus excluded from this valorised pursuit and instead relegated to the essentialised, fixed category of depression. Similarly, Radden emphasises that the privileging of clinical behaviourial patterns over psychological characteristics in recent years has shifted attention away from the *affects* of depression (1987: 245). Radden's use of the word affects relates to the devalorised pattern of behaviour that she believes has been imposed on women by the medical-juridical authorities of the late nineteenth century. Radden believes that the ruthless segregation of women, following the Enlightenment, has led to a situation where those who display symptoms of sadness or indeed depression are 'increasingly rendered remote and alien, [their] condition unrelated to ordinary experience' (245).

Elizabeth Smart is a striking example of how the category of melancholy has been moulded to fit the female subject. In conversation with Rosemary Sullivan, the writer explains that she was aware of her own exclusion from literary circles; indeed she complains that she 'had no place at the literary table. They would speak to me one on one, but I had no place at the table' (1991: ix). Smart's understanding of her own isolated position within the literary community also reflects changes in the melancholic tradition. Schiesari points out that melancholia has mutated into depression because it has been stripped of the 'romanticized discursive apparatus' (1992: 95), that had traditionally conferred a privileged status on its male practitioners. The devalued status of feminine loss is suggestive of a cultural and ideological conservatism that is not prepared

to tolerate changes in the way that narratives of female loss are incorporated into the old worldview. Accordingly, *By Grand Central Station* translates into a story that displays all the old anxieties that still adhere to the unresolved issues implicit in the category of melancholia itself. Hence, the contemporary notion of melancholia strains under the weight of the conflicting analyses that promise to present a single, coherent interpretation of its status within culture. The excess of meaning that inevitably ensues from such a conceptual model generates a desire to achieve closure as quickly as possible in order to prevent further instability. This ideological drive to hastily conceal the faultlines[12] that rupture the surface of the melancholic conundrum is a sign that its overarching ideological project is under threat.

By ideologically removing Elizabeth Smart from the 'literary table', the cultural establishment sought to dissolve the threat of a woman being able to access the romanticised discursive apparatus referred to in the previous paragraph. The critical failure to address the thematic concerns of Smart's narrative of loss, speaks of the fear that the gendered privileges coded into this discursive apparatus may be unpacked by such a subversive text. Hence, critics such as Mallinson and Van Wart praise the complex poetic structure of the novel without once questioning why such an exemplary text is relegated to the margins of the literary canon. Indeed, the preoccupation with Smart's rhetorical strategies is suggestive of an unwillingness to disturb potentially awkward questions of women's right to represent loss and grief.

As we have already seen, the tricky question of the representation of loss, within *By Grand Central Station*, has frequently led to a critical emphasis on transcendence, which is usually embedded in the author's use of

archetypes. Alice Van Wart claims that Smart's 'transformation of the lovers into archetypes thematically links the lovers of the particular world with the legendary world of heroic ideals' (44). Both Mallinson and Van Wart accept Smart's borrowing of literary archetypes at face value. They do not appear to question whether Smart's retreat into the world of the literary hologram is itself a symptom of the vexed issue of representation within a melancholic context. As a pioneer of the female melancholic text, Smart was required to work within an ideological and cultural framework that preceded her entrance into the literary world. In order to make sense of such a world Smart plunders the western repertoire of myth and archetype in order to lay the foundations for her own understanding of the experience of grief and loss. The traditional melancholic text was one that was written by a cultivated male who used his writing to consolidate his position as an intellectual. The elevated status conferred on the author of such a text produced what can best be described as an empowered difference that shunned the commonplace.

By Grand Central Station could never be described as a quotidian text. However, the novel amply demonstrates the slippage from empowered representation to devalued 'other' when gender enters the melancholic equation. Smart raids the literary larder so that she can produce a gourmet feast but instead serves up a dish whose strangeness is distasteful to the scholarly palate. Accordingly, Van Wart notes the 'melange of allusions echoing Blake, Donne and Rilke' (45) that Smart uses to convey the urgency of sexual desire:

> My heart is eaten by a dove, a cat scrambles in the cave of my sex,
> hounds in my head obey a whipmaster who cries nothing but havoc as the
> hours test my endurance with an accumulation of tortures. Who, if I cried,
> would hear me among the angelic orders? (1992: 24)

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This masterly conflation of image, metaphor and syntax captures some of the chaotic violence of the initial stages of desire. Predictably, Van Wart reads the narrator's portrayal of erotic desire as a celebration of nature that forces the enthralled subject to obey 'the imperatives of love' (45). The narrator is therefore implicated in the conservative trope that nature is always identified with the feminine. As soon as Van Wart invokes this inflexible trope, it becomes apparent that she has abandoned a more theoretically rigorous examination of the way that culture shapes and modifies our understanding of gender roles. Hence, Van Wart explains the narrator's feelings of guilt that follow this incident as the inevitable result of a 'moral code [that] the narrator cannot deny' (45).

By reading Smart's text through a traditional doctrinaire moral code, Van Wart denies the complex interplay of conflict and contradiction within the novel. Van Wart is therefore blind to the way that Smart maps meaning onto the mythological and archetypal figures that feature within this text. In the extract that is quoted above, the narrator is keenly aware that her voice will not be heard by angels who are, after all, representatives of phallocentric privilege. As we have already seen, in the introduction to this chapter, the narrator's position within *By Grand Central Station* more closely resembles the Renaissance construction of the witch. Schiesari is fully aware that the witch was demonised within Renaissance discourse because she might 'all too openly reveal what is projected onto her, a longing for the phallus though it be long gone, unattainable, or perhaps never there in the first place' (1992: 255).

A similar sense of textual excess is present in *By Grand Central Station.* For Schiesari, the demonisation of the witch during the early modern period

arose as a result of changes within the symbolic order that displaced 'the centrality of its phallic representor, God the Father' (255). These changes coincided with the emergence of a modern sensibility that had become acutely aware of decay and the passage of time. The melancholic's fear that he was no longer protected by the textual authority of God the Father urged him to project his fear onto the figure of the witch (255). In a similar vein, Marina Warner has noted that women in early modern times tended to live longer than men. Women were therefore surplus to demographic requirements. The potential problem of empowered femininity embodied in the figure of the wealthy widow was quashed by the patriarchal law of succession which prevented women from accessing their husband's estate. Therefore 'destitute and homeless old women became a feature of nineteenth-century society' (1992: 229). Here, again, the disenfranchised single woman threatened to undermine patriarchal privileges; her unprescribed role within the family unsettled the rigid boundaries of the sacrosanct laws of primogeniture.

Warner points out that like Schiesari's witch, female storytellers were traditionally represented as 'an unhusbanded female cut loose from the moorings of the patriarchal hearth; kin to the witch and the bawd' (230). Therefore the female storyteller's power to undermine the ideological boundaries of family life is doubled through the interweaving of power and narrative. Marina Warner reflects that the proverbial 'old wives' tale' demonstrates the 'instrumental use of literature to form the young ... and the earlier annexation of narrative by speakers who were trying to help themselves' (21). The storyteller was therefore a potent symbol of visual and textual excess that threatened to poison the supposedly tranquil haven of family life.

According to Warner the storyteller also threatened to usurp the role of the more traditionally empowered family members by influencing a younger generation so that 'the targets of narrative hatred [began] to fit in to the economy of family life' (237).

As we have already seen, Elizabeth Smart makes liberal use of literary archetypes within her novel. Alice Van Wart claims that Smart evokes literary archetypes in order to 'transcend imaginatively her particular circumstances' (1986: 44). However, I would maintain that this humanist method of imposing thematic and structural cohesion through transcendence cannot be accessed by readers of Smart. For example, when she invokes the spectacle of Jupiter's rape of Leda which according to legend led to the Trojan War, she is clearly aware of the consequences. Smart's knowledge that 'All legend will be born' but 'who will escape alive' (25), is not cited as a simple rhetorical tool of transcendence. By invoking this calamitous image, Smart imbues the mythological archetype with the power to unsettle the reader's expectations of what might follow. The archetype has been dislodged from its mythological pedestal and recirculated within contemporary discourse where it provokes uneasy memories of bloody internecine warfare between men and women. As Warner maintains, the literary archetype that escapes its usual orbit has the power 'to compact emnity, recharge it and recirculate it' (239). Therefore these dangerous images are soaked in the residue of the 'lived experiences of women' where they retain 'all the stark actuality of the real and the power real life has to bite into the psyche' (238).

Smart's reading of the ideological network that surrounds her in the first part of her novel is both fearless and uncompromising. She triumphantly and

unceremoniously ransacks mythical, biblical and literary traditions to promote

her vision of love. In the first part of the novel, Smart's narrator seizes

conventional morality and threatens to shake every bit of orderly and stable

meaning out of its restrictive confines. This wilful streak of bravado allows the

narrator to select a married man as her lover and father of her children whilst

inviting his wife along as an unsuspecting accomplice.

At the beginning of the novel, the narrator imitates Barker's wife whom

she claims exudes 'a confidence that appals' (17). In one fell swoop she

promises to rewrite past, present and future according to her own needs and

desires. Preparation and willpower describe the narrator's opening gambit

when the reader first encounters her awaiting the arrival of her prospective lover

and his wife on a streetcorner in Monterey. Accordingly, the narrator informs us

that every inch of her being has been commandeered so that

> 'all the muscles of my will are holding my terror to face the moment I most
> desire. Apprehension and the summer afternoon keep drying my lips,
> prepared at ten-minute intervals all through the five-hour wait. (17)

The sensuality and eroticism of this unconventional lover's tryst is controversial

because it opposes the basic tenets of masculine privilege, which imply, that

women should be the object of men's desire. Not only has a woman

engineered the lovers' fateful meeting but she has also subsidised the

impecunious couple's passage to America from Japan. As Rosemary Sullivan

observes, Barker and his wife had been framed in every sense of the word by

their host who had orchestrated 'a scenario whose dynamic had already been

set' (54). In fact, Smart was able to overcome her initial sense of

disappointment with the 'lanky, bespectacled' poet who emerged from the bus

in Monterey because he 'provided the cerebral exploration that she so ardently

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desired' (155). Smart therefore flagrantly violates the unspoken rule that women should be the recipient of male attention rather than the instigator of passion. The bus station at Monterey is at once transformed into a confused terrain where gender and sexuality have been reshuffled to form an ideological grid that defies convention.

Accordingly, normative constructions of gender and sexuality collapse once the affair begins at Big Sur. Here, the binary structure of heterosexuality is quickly called into question by the lovers who refuse to be contained by the markers of conventional sexuality. The active/passive component of the cross-sex grid is regularly effaced by the couple who explore every inch of the culturally imposed categories of bisexual, homosexual and lesbian relations. Recalling Barker's encounter with a printshop boy, the narrator sees her lover change before her eyes into an 'hermaphrodite ... with a golden indeterminate face ... with armpits like chalices' (20/21). Later, the narrator experiences the sudden falling away of enforced cultural barriers when she sees her lover transformed into 'an Assyrian girl', the second of two sisters with the narrator as the controlling 'protive' (82). Earlier on in their relationship, Smart dissolves what she sees as the rigid parameters of heterosexual role-play when she discerns the shape of a young girl in her lover's body. The ebb and flow of erotically-charged flesh encourages the narrator to abandon the binary structure of conventional coupledom by allowing her to 'rise as virile [as] a cobra, out of my lodge, to assume control' (22).

Denise Heaps views this elision of binary oppositions as an example of a Cixousian sexual desire (1994: 146). Heaps maintains that Cixous's notion of *écriture féminine,* or 'writing said to be feminine', is concerned with the need to

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celebrate the articulation of feminine desire within phallogocentric discourse. According to Heaps, Cixous believes that it is possible to launch a subversive attack on phallogocentric privileges from within patriarchal discourse. Heaps claims that for Cixous writing is 'a space where one may valorize the feminine or deconstruct the hierarchical binary oppositions that have structured symbolic systems in general, a place where one may upset the harmony of a phallocractic binary system of thought that always subjugates the feminine' (1994: 143). Within this construction, the rigid apparatus of the phallic economy is swept away by a joyous tide of bisexual energy that refuses to recognise patriarchal constraints. However as we have already seen, in relation to Kadiatu Kanneh's work on the metaphors of mourning, this particular articulation of desire is blind to the complexities of history, race and class. The inscription of desire within such a text is inevitably short-lived and episodic because it is suffocated by the very structures that it purports to outwit. The binary opposition gives birth to the amorphous script that promises to deliver us from the tyrannies of sexist oppression. Therefore, Cixousian desire is reliant on a patriarchal template to map meaning onto its own more flexible contours. This is exactly what happens to the narrator of Elizabeth Smart's novel. Gradually, her adroit manipulation of time, metaphor and space is undermined by the institutions that she had once so enthusiastically overthrown.

After being detained at the Mexican border, Smart's referential world begins to fall apart. Alice Van Wart remarks that this carefully contrived rhetorical world collapses because it cannot ultimately resist the weightier world of facts (50). The narrator's dizzying world of metaphoric mayhem begins to capitulate to the demands of a material world that must be appeased in the

shape of banal and hackneyed prose. Barefoot and pregnant in a seedy New York hotel room, the narrator finally acknowledges that 'the page is as white as my face after a night of weeping. It is as sterile as my devastated mind' (127). Accordingly, facts begin to empty out the elaborate wordplay that accompanied the delirious start of the couple's affair. The insistent rhythm of the opening chapters finally gives way to the staccato clichés of the penultimate paragraph:

> I myself prefer Boulder Dam to Chartres Cathedral. I prefer dogs to children. I prefer corncobs to the genitals of the male. Everything's hotsy-totsy, dandy, everything's OK. It's in the bag. It can't miss.
> (1992: 112)

Smart's prose has reverted to the masculine world of facile oppositions and clichéd slang. In her essay 'Life Out of Art: Elizabeth Smart's Early Journals' (1992), Alice Van Wart claims that Smart preferred the more flexible contours of the diary form to conventional journalism (22). Van Wart believes that Smart's preference is grounded in her abhorrence of 'the conventional modes of rhetoric based on inductive or deductive thinking and organization' to be found in male writing (22). Further, Van Wart maintains that Smart's style is exemplary of the 'eidetic ... open-ended, and generative' style of writing that is particularly 'well suited to encompass the multifarious nature of women's lives' (22). Although Van Wart's reading of Smart's writing style leaves itself open to essentialist interpretations, it is possible to discern an authorial contempt for the reductive closed forms of conventional rhetoric in the penultimate paragraph of the novel. Here, banal stereotypes are invoked to describe an imagined opposition between old and new worlds. There is a refusal of the exuberant fluidity of the figurative language contained in the opening chapters. The inscription of feminine libidinal desires is diluted in the final chapters of the novel after her interrogation by the police authorities The narrator clings to the

idea that European culture symbolised by Chartres Cathedral is infinitely preferable to the *lumpen* horror of America's Boulder Dam. Smart's earlier combative instincts, which champion the cause of unfettered love, are therefore gradually worn down by the demands of the referential world. As the narrator of the novel declares 'love is my double or nothing' (98); without its sustaining influence there can be 'no ounce of consolation if this fails' (99).

This is a landscape of indecency and fear where the unsuspecting subject should fear to tread. Rather like Stephen Hawking's 'black hole'[13] that devours everything that crosses its path, Smart's narrator dances around the periphery of this gaping chasm that lures the spectator inwards with its dazzling display of overblown grandeur. In discovering this unholy place, Smart has exposed the very crux of her malady. As a female subject located within patriarchal structures, Smart mirrors the lost object trapped within her lover's own melancholic ego. She is therefore the focus of his contempt as the walking embodiment of his own lack, the hated object his own superego urges him to kill. It is a small wonder that the narrator misunderstands her lover's accusation that their affair is nothing more than a 'minor' martyrdom' (86). She is correct in her assumption that he has no 'idea of the size and consequence of my wounds' (86). For him, the wounds speak only of the poignancy of his loss marked by his ability as a poet to articulate the pain he suffers, as a consequence of his need to replace the lost object. Barker can therefore access femininity and turn base metal into gold by using it to foreground his privileged status as a masculine subject. Thus, Barker fits seamlessly into a long line of melancholics such as Shakespeare's Hamlet, who are able to eroticise their lack through comparison with women who are unable to register

their loss within patriarchal symbolic structures. Like Smart, such women are represented within culture as the lowly hysteric or depressive who has sown the seeds of her own destruction.

The acute sense of betrayal that is experienced by the narrator when she discovers that she has been literally and metaphorically abandoned by her lover shatters her notion of a world that is illuminated by the heroic ideals of love. Instead, love becomes a pawn that is traded like any other product in a market place that is driven by the economics of exchange. Here, the narrator's idea of euphoric love is devalued because it cannot be freely circulated or sold to the highest bidder. Hence, 'grief trumpets its triumph. It is raving. It craves violence for expression, but can find none' (104). The narrator's tightly fought corner is not relinquished easily. Instead, she immerses herself in what she describes as the 'operatic grandeur' of unspeakable pain and loss that she believes lights up 'Grand Central Station like a Judgement Day' (103).

On an even grander scale, Smart's text has been abandoned by critics and readers alike. The closing chapter of her novel closely documents the narrator's experience of this sudden fall from grace. The textual emphasis shifts from a feeling of exultation to that of betrayal, seduction and distrust towards the end of the novel. After being abandoned by her lover at Grand Central Station, the narrator complains that she 'will *not* be placated by the mechanical motions of existence' nor be 'betrayed by such a Judas of fallacy: it betrays everyone: it leads them into death. Everyone acquiesces: everyone compromises' (103). The rationale behind this cataclysmic collapse is one of ownership. How and when is a subject allowed to don the magisterial 'language of love', and significantly for this novel, when will that robe be

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removed? Elizabeth Smart discovers the reasons for this treachery at first hand through the process of writing, whilst contemporary readers can trace it through the novel's critical reception.

The closing chapter of *By Grand Central Station* plays havoc with the underlying principles of Judeo-Christian symbolism. Metaphors and imagery are picked up and discarded by the author who finds that they are totally inadequate for her needs. Accordingly, the narrator discovers that pregnancy evokes an inner landscape that is submerged by a tidal wave of water across which 'the ghost of an almost accomplished calamity beckons' (104). The sense of impending doom experienced by the narrator is reflected in the apocalyptic metaphors that she uses to describe the meeting of the two incompatible worlds that she has tried so hard to separate. Suddenly, the water is 'full of astronomical points' (104). The anarchic thrust of nature has captured the whole world in its 'magnetic death-trap' until 'everything is caught in its rush' (104). The impact of this catastrophic collision convinces the narrator that the sublime sphere of the imagination and the referential world of facts and figures cannot exist side by side. Each world has its own agenda that will be ruthlessly implemented, despite the narrator's attempts to manipulate them to satisfy her own needs. Accordingly, everything is swept away 'on the swollen river of [her] undammed grief' (104). Finally, the narrator realises that she can no longer keep a savage world at bay; 'the drowning never ceases' (104) until she feels that the weight of 'the entire sea is on top of me' (104).[14]

(vii) Conclusion

Elizabeth Smart's novel traces the narrator's journey from youthful energy and expectation to premature disillusionment. The reader leaves the narrator alone and abandoned in a seedy New York hotel room that reinforces the narrator's own sense of moral and ideological dereliction. The journey taken by the narrator is shared by the reader who empathises with her sense of abandonment at the end of such a short and calamitous expedition. It is tempting therefore to interpret Smart's exemplary text of unrelieved mourning as a metaphor for the status of women's writing related to loss, grief and bereavement. However, I would argue that *By Grand Central Station* marks a change in the status of the melancholic women's text. In the remainder of this concluding section, I will contend that Smart's is an important text within the history of melancholic writing by women. I believe that the significance of Smart's text lies in its uncompromising celebration of love combined with its revolutionary inscription of female libidinal desire.

Desire is perhaps the most powerful and destructive force within *By Grand Central Station*. Yet, unusually, it is neglected by critics of the novel who prefer to contemplate the formal and rhetorical composition of Elizabeth Smart's prose style. As I maintained, in the introduction to this thesis, desire is a profoundly disruptive force within western culture. As Jonathan Dollimore points out, the 'death/desire' convergence is central to western philosophical traditions (1998: 68). According to Dollimore, the early modern period regarded mutability 'as an instability which simultaneously disintegrates and drives both the world and the self' (68). The immanence of death in life is crucial to any informed interpretation of *By Grand Central Station*. Indeed, the novel is

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littered with references to the corrosive effects of time and death. Furthermore, Smart's novel deals with another related trope; sex as the agent of death.

Death, like incest, is one of the few remaining taboos within western culture. It is therefore predictable, that within the West, such onerous philosophical questions would be debated by celebrated male intellectuals such as Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton. Death and mutability are integrated into the Western conceptualisation of loss or as Dollimore puts it 'the source of life is always already the place of death' (68). Moreover, Dollimore sees desire as the restless dynamic that continually disturbs another Renaissance conceit; namely, that 'learning how to die is learning how to live' (69). Dollimore frames the voice of melancholia as an agent of moderation within this particular construction. It follows, then, that the category of melancholia within this cultural paradigm performs a practical function. Here, melancholic wisdom helps the troubled subject to stoically accept the certainties of death.

Melancholia is therefore applied as a metaphoric salve to the irritating wound of desire. As we have already observed, at some length, those who administered this 'moderating' cure were always male subjects, of privileged status, who worked hard to perpetuate the myth of their own exclusivity. Their exclusivity is moreover a product of their supposed specialised knowledge of the self-defeating process of earthly decay. As a writer, Elizabeth Smart sits uneasily within this literary and philosophical tradition. Her status as a woman within a resolutely patriarchal, phallocratic order immediately locates her in what is perceived to be an inferior discursive situation to that enjoyed by her male counterparts. Critical aversion to Smart's subversive position as a woman writing within an androcentric tradition is revealed in their tentative reaction to

the central theme of irreplaceable loss that resonates throughout this novel. By being seen to usurp a masculine position within the discourse of melancholia Smart threatens to decipher the secret code that attributes value and status to its male practitioners.

Smart shatters the unwritten code within Western culture that women should ordinarily be the object of authoritarian scrutiny. This is particularly true of analytic situations where women have been constructed as the compliant 'other' who validates masculine, scientific discourse. Smart presumptuously appropriates this position by initiating an extra-marital affair with an unknown man in a foreign land. She has therefore wilfully unsettled the boundaries of class, race and gender by refusing to observe the complex disciplinary protocols built into dominant discursive formations. By refusing to adhere to the disciplinary regime enforced by these dominant institutions, Smart invites punishment. She flagrantly ignores patriarchal strictures that construct men as the desiring subject, thereby refusing to assume a submissive position within this power relationship.

Importantly, however, for the purposes of this thesis, Smart has inserted herself and her text into the discourse of melancholia. By invading this male-dominated discourse with her transgressive text, she shifts the terms of reference, which dictate that the consolatory discourse of melancholia can only be practised by men. Smart has placed the female subject firmly within the frame of melancholic discourse where she is able to participate in the revision and subsequent reworking of the terms and conditions that govern its circulation within culture. Smart's confessional novel is influential within this discursive field because it displays an active female subject who moreover

constructs herself as a desiring subject within the dominant heterosexual institution of marriage. Even though Smart's rebellious attitude towards conventional morality invites the approbation of the dominant institutions of the law, she functions a reminder that these institutions are not inviolable.

Smart's irreverent attitude towards the dominant institutions of language and law is of especial significance for women who want to register their own sense of loss, disillusionment or inability to grieve. Throughout *By Grand Central Station* we see Smart's narrator involved in a violent clash with dominant formations. Her will to make strategic interventions into these discursive regimes demonstrates that women can occupy an active subject position within avowedly patriarchal institutions and discursive practices. More importantly, for this project, the narrator's self-presentation indicates that she has sufficient narcissistic reserves to express the catastrophic sense of loss she experiences at the end of her affair with Barker. Moreover, the narrator of *By Grand Central Station* reveals that it is possible for women writers to actively transform their sense of loss productively by participating within cultural and artistic enterprises. By engaging in these areas women are able to break the historical embargo that prevented women from contributing to the discourse of melancholia.

As we have already seen, the perceived social deviance of Smart's anonymous narrator provoked the dominant legal-juridical institutions. The oppressive, punitive measures meted out to Smart's narrator indicate the scale of her transgression in daring to challenge these bastions of patriarchal privilege. It is unsurprising, therefore, that some women writers continued to internalise the sense of loss and outrage engendered by their subordinate

positioning within such oppressive institutions and discursive formations. The next chapter will focus on the question of postponed mourning in the work of the Chinese-Canadian writer Evelyn Lau. Lau's work is revelatory regarding problems encountered by women who attempt to reframe these negative emotions within a more empowering narrative. For a second generation Chinese-Canadian writer, such as Evelyn Lau, the internalisation of self-imposed failure by her female narrators is exacerbated by their experience of racial marginality. By postponing the thoroughgoing work of mourning Lau's narrators appear to silently endorse the cultural constraints imposed on women by the oppressive dominant discourses of patriarchy, imperialism and ethnocentrism. Only when writers begin to identify women's experience of internalised failure, as a product of the asymmetrical binaristic structure of Western discourses, will it be possible to register their understanding of grief and loss within the symbolic order of language and law.

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[1]   *Beautiful Losers* (1966) is the title of an elegiac novel, written by another Canadian writer, Leonard Cohen.

[2]   Juliana Schiesari provides an extensive bibliography of feminist anthologies of premodern women writers who explored issues related to mourning and melancholia. See Juliana Schiesari 'Introduction' in *The Gendering of Melancholia: Feminism, Psychoanalysis and the Symbolics of Loss in Renaissance Literature*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, p. 4.

[3]   See the introduction to this thesis for a detailed description of the process of identification within psychoanalytic theory, especially p. 4. .For an insightful interpretation of the part played by identification in the constitution of subjectivity, see Jill LeBihan (1997) 'Tearing the Heart Out of Secrets: Inside and Outside Murder Mysteries' Unpublished M.A. paper: University of Sheffield, pp. 1 - 20.

[4]   Patricia Merivale's essay on the elegiac romance in Canadian fiction is interesting within this context. According to Merivale, the central protagonists within this sub-genre are the narrators who recount the story of a dead man who has influenced their own life. The elegiac romance differs from the pastoral elegy because the story of the dead man is invoked to reshape the present of the narrator who feels that their lives have been overshadowed by deceased man. Interestingly, all the novels cited in Merivale's paper are written by male authors. Further, the narrators of the novels are unanimously male along with the deceased party who exists outside the frame of the text. The homosocial element in this particular literary sub-genre operates in a similar manner to the discursive practices of melancholia where women are not represented. See Patricia Merivale (1980) 'The Biographical Compulsion: Elegiac Romances in Canadian Fiction' in *Journal of Modern Literature*, Vol. 8, 1, pp. 139 - 52.

[5]   Smart's evocation of the savage Californian landscape is similar to Kathryn Harrison's description of Muir Woods in northern California. Harrison describes a landscape where 'The trees bear blossoms as big as my head; their ivory petals drift to the ground and cover our tracks' (1997: 2). Both writers share a fascination that is akin to loathing when describing

southern American states. The deep-seated sense of unease generated by these overblown landscapes serves as a metaphor for their own feelings of dislocation and displacement. The unsettling perversity implied by their prose reflects the narrators' sense of their own social deviance as an 'adulteress' and an incest survivor respectively.

[6] The United States of America are portrayed as an oppressive militaristic regime within the novel. America is also invoked as a metaphor for patriarchal domination. The harshness of the American regime is contrasted with the more benign aspects of Canadian life. When the narrator briefly returns home to Canada, she notes that 'after the greed already hardening part of the American face into stone, I fancy I see kindness and gentleness looking out at me from train windows' (56). This dichotomy is also worked into other contemporary Canadian novels such as Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1986).

[7] Smart's search to find an objective correlative is echoed in a later Canadian novel, *The Swing Era* (1993), to be discussed in a subsequent chapter of this thesis. In this novel, another youthful narrator attempts to sublimate similar feelings of isolation and dislocation provoked by her experience of living with a psychotic mother. In her case, the Catholic church and later Buddhism are used to obliterate the violent self-loathing she experiences as a result of her unconventional home life.

[8] In his chapter on John Donne, Dollimore contends that the recurring trope of death was invoked in early modern literature 'not simply as the end of desire, nor simply its punishment; shockingly, perversely, death is itself the impossible dynamic of desire' (76). Smart frequently cites Donne and other celebrated early modern writers to reinforce her own intensely personal vision of an apocalyptic death in life. However, it must be stressed that Smart had considerably less to gain from her portrayal of the viscious circularity of desire and death than a distinguished intellectual such as Donne. See Jonathan Dollimore (1998) 'Death's Incessant Motion' in *Death, Desire and Loss in Western Culture*, London: Penguin, pp. 71 - 83.

[9] In *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*, manicheanism is defined as a term 'for the binary structure of imperial ideology' (134). The rigid polarisation of good and evil implicit in this term is used as a rhetorical strategy by Smart to illustrate her own apocalyptic vision of a savage uncompromising world. See 'Manicheanism' in Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1998) *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*, London: Routledge, pp. 133 - 135.

[10] Kadiatu Kanneh's gloss on Cixous' theorisation of a feminine mode of discourse in 'The Laugh of the Medusa' (1985) is significant here. Kanneh points out that Cixous' theory that women should positively affirm their difference through 'writing the body' is misinformed. Kanneh draws on Cixous' example of female public speaking to illustrate her point that women's tremulous performance within the public arena is not a reflection of 'an inherent feminine essence but of the direct results of social marginalization and intolerable sexual visibility' (142). Kanneh's premise that patriarchal society is intolerant of women who make themselves visible within the public domain is borne out by Smart's nervous behaviour throughout the police interrogation. See Kadiatu Kanneh (1992) 'Love, Mourning and Metaphor' in Isobel Armstong (ed.) *New Feminist Discourses*, London and New York: Routledge, pp. 135 - 153.

[11] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick notes that the taxonomic reframing of the drug user as addict has inserted her 'into a narrative of inexorable decline and fatality, from which she cannot disimplicate herself except by leaping into that other, even more pathos-ridden narrative called *kicking the habit* (131). The cultural construction of the addict as an object of authoritarian scrutiny is similar to the pathologised identity imposed on the female depressive in the twentieth century. See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1992) 'Epidemics Of The Will' in *Tendencies*, London: Routledge, pp. 130 - 142.

[12] I am borrowing Alan Sinfield's term, faultline, to analyse the disintegration of contentious ideological projects. Sinfield contends that 'faultline stories' occur when 'a part of our worldview threatens disruption by manifestly failing to cohere with the rest, then we reorganize and retell its story, trying to get it into shape - back into the old shape if we are conservative-minded, or into a new shape if we are more adventurous' (4). See Alan Sinfield (1994) 'Shakespeare and Dissident Reading' in *Cultural Politics - Queer Reading*, London: Routledge, pp. 1 - 20.

[13] Stephen Hawking compares the event horizon or entrance to the black hole in space to Dante's evocation of the gateway to Hell. Here, 'anything or anyone who falls through the event horizon will soon reach the region of infinite density and the end of time' (99). See Stephen Hawking (1997) 'Black Holes' in *A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to Black Holes*, London: Bantam Books, pp. 89 - 108.

[14] Stanley Jackson points out that the feeling of being 'weighed down' is a familiar metaphor within melancholic literature. Jackson traces its history from Homer's *Odyssey*,

through the Renaissance to the present day. Interestingly, Jackson points out that its current incarnation has been influenced by the 'dynamics and energetics of physical science' (399) in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. See Stanley Jackson (1986) 'Metaphors for Melancholia' in *Melancholia and Depression: From Hippocratic Times to Modern Times*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, pp. 395 - 399.

CHAPTER THREE

The Irresistible Force Meets the Unspeakable Object: Postponed Mourning In The Work of Evelyn Lau

Because in the process of elaborating a theory of sexuality, Freud brought to light something that had been operative all along, though it remained implicit, hidden, unknown: *the sexual indifference that underlies the truth of any science, the logic of every discourse* (Irigaray, 1985: 69)

(i)   Introduction

This chapter is an investigation into the cultural construction of female melancholia. The work of the Chinese-Canadian writer Evelyn Lau will be used to explore the ideologically contentious category of female melancholia by focusing on her use of a melancholic poetics to illustrate the female subject's exclusion from dominant signifying practices. Women's removal from such practices and the discursive formations that frame them are interrogated in two of Lau's texts. A case study of Lau's first novel *Other Women* (1995), and the vignette 'Roses' taken from her collection of short stories *Fresh Girls* (1994), will be used to illuminate the consequences of women's absence from the discursive structures through which melancholic discourses circulate. The pervasive aura of melancholy that envelops both of the narrators in the cited texts will be interrogated to assess whether or not the acquisition of language is able to mobilise the emotional affects that have been suppressed following a disappointment in object-choice. The case study that follows the introduction will focus on the psychological consequences that accompany the examples of failed or postponed mourning that are portrayed in both of these narratives.

The primary concern of this chapter is to assess the continued absence of women from dominant discursive structures that construct them as the invisible and silent other in relation to man's unified whole. This chapter will

therefore amplify the concerns raised in Chapter 2 related to Elizabeth Smart's exclusion from the 'literary table' by the literary establishment.[1]. Secondly, this chapter will consider the psychological implications engendered by the female subject's position within a family history whose linear narrative is disrupted by a series of gaps and omissions that threaten its ideological coherence. Crucially, these figurative gaps within the text, suggest the presence of an unresolved family secret that continues to haunt subsequent generations of that family. The chapter will then focus on the female subject as the unwitting beneficiary of these mysteries and her discursive position within these secret histories. Finally, I consider the links between language, artistic creation and identity in Evelyn Lau's writings. The question of empowerment in and through language and artistic creation will be discussed in relation to women's subordinate position within dominant discursive structures. Evelyn Lau's work will be used to illustrate how the patriarchal construction of femininity is analogous with the position of woman as man's devalued counterpart within melancholic discursive formations. Moreover, throughout the chapter the female body will be framed as a conflicted construct within dominant discursive structures. Within this context, melancholic depression is perceived as a discursive pressure that is insistently inscribed on the female body.

(ii)   Serial Lovers

Arguments regarding the literary deployment of the serial lover or erotomaniac, who uses an endless supply of unsuitable objects to structure their lives, and by analogy the text, are by now well rehearsed.[2] However, the position of the melancholic in literature, whose choice of object seems equally unsuitable, is by comparison relatively sparse. As we have already seen in the

introduction to this thesis, melancholic discourse has traditionally been a privileged site through which an elite masculine community was able to circulate empowered expressions of grief and loss. Women's absence from this veritable male pantheon of melancholic philosophers persisted until the nineteenth century when the emerging disciplines of medicine and psychiatry constructed the female hysteric as the disempowered other within this most reductive of binary patriarchal structures: namely the doctor/patient or analyst/analysand relationship. Here, the female hysteric effectively serviced the professional needs of a burgeoning male dominated institution that required the presence of a compliant female body on which to demonstrate its new-found skills.[3] The cultural legacy of this changing but equally disabling even co-dependent relationship can be clearly discerned in Elizabeth Smart's articulation of boundless grief contained in *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept* (1992). As we have already observed in Chapter 2, this exemplary portrayal of loss and emotional bereavement was initially neglected by the Academy. When the novel was reinstated as a canonical text it was accorded the relatively obscure status of a cult classic that was celebrated for its verbal dexterity and figurative innovation instead of its evocation of cataclysmic loss.[4] Once the academic focus of attention had been safely shifted onto rhetorical wordplay, the unsettling world of gaps, omissions and psychological free-fall could remain undisturbed. Smart's depiction of violent and corrosive grief therefore remained unprocessed at a literary and academic level.

Textual evidence that this academic blindness still persists can be found in the work of the Canadian writer, Evelyn Lau. The protagonists of Lau's novel and short stories inhabit the kind of bleak claustrophobic spaces that Elizabeth

Smart's abandoned narrator occupies at the end of her relationship with the poet George Barker. Similarly, the physical confines of apartment block, brothel or anonymous hotel room generate an atmosphere of psychological (dis)ease that signals the presence of unresolved or secret histories that remain embedded within the closed-circuit of the narrator's psyche. Similar examples of what can be described as melancholic mise-en-scène can be found in all of the texts to be considered in this thesis. For example, towards the end of *The Kiss* (1997), Kathryn Harrison's chronicle of incest survival, the narrator shares a series of sleazy hotel rooms with her father, convincing her that in her 'own story [she has] at last arrived in the dirty place where [she] belong[s]' (1997:158). Similarly, for Iris Vegan, the narrator of Siri Hustvedt's *The Blindfold* (1992), the closed, fetid spaces of New York's West 109th Street seep into her unconscious, creating a self-referential universe where fact always threatens to collapse into a dark and morbid fiction. This disquieting world of solipsistic fantasy is symptomatic of the cramped discursive space afforded to the female author of the melancholic script where the over-arching metanarrative of masculine sorrow imprisons her within its own claustrophobic frame.

Further evidence of the nihilistic vision espoused by Lau and the other writers discussed in this thesis can be detected in the objectified representations of sexuality that proliferate in all of their texts. As James Annesley notes in his analysis of sexual representation in *Blank Fictions: Consumerism, Culture and the Contemporary American Novel* (1998), the extensive coverage of sex in recent times is symptomatic of a cultural need 'to control the body, to strip away its protective layers and manipulate its

movements, ... speak[ing] of a culture in which the need to objectify is of paramount importance' (1998:41/2). Representations of casually orchestrated sex have therefore become increasingly commonplace in mainstream culture. Paradoxically, the blanket exposure of sex as a purely recreational activity has lured critical attention away from the more disturbing elements of this widely debated cultural phenomenon referred to above. In what follows, critical emphasis will be refocused on the shrouded psychological histories that reveal themselves in these very acts of objectification. The remainder of the chapter will consider the consequences of transforming the psyche and the body into a living site of mourning rather than utilising the symbolic power of language to replace the lost object. Abraham and Torok contend that intrapsychic tombs are erected within the self-enclosed dimension of the psyche when the subject feels unable to acknowledge and therefore register a loss. The loss is then incorporated within the psyche along with:

> The words that cannot be uttered, the scenes that cannot be recalled, the tears that cannot be shed-everything will be swallowed along with the trauma that led to the loss. Swallowed and preserved. Inexpressible mourning erects a secret tomb inside the subject. (1994:130)

The presence of a psychological mausoleum within the psyche will be demonstrated within the work of Evelyn Lau. Before considering the textual implications of psychic incorporation, there will be a discussion of the theoretical context surrounding postponed or suspended mourning. The following section of this chapter will trace the development of theoretical responses to the notoriously elusive category of melancholia, beginning with Freud's contemplation of the dynamics of psychic substitution and ending with Julia Kristeva's postulation that language and artistic endeavour can provide the therapeutic solution to melancholic depression.

(iii)   Mourning and Melancholia: The Theoretical Context

Freud registered a profound interest in the complex dynamics of psychic substitution as early as 1908 in his paper 'The Relation of the Poet to Day-dreaming' (1957j). Here, Freud clearly states his belief that mourning is a continual process which arises from the subject's reluctance to give up a loved object. As he puts it:

> Anyone who knows anything of the mental life of human beings is aware that hardly anything is more difficult to them than to give up a pleasure they have once tasted. Really we never can relinquish anything; we only exchange one thing for something else. When we appear to give something up, all we really do is adopt a substitute (1957j:175).

This emphasis on the relinquishment of the lost object is reiterated in a later paper 'On Transience' (1916), where he considers the subject's tendency to avoid directing libido towards an object which s/he anticipates losing quickly. In this paper, Freud ponders the logistics which underpin this phenomenon, concluding that the subject's reluctance to invest in transient objects is based on their experience of the anticipated pain incurred by the loss of a loved object. Freud attributes this anxiety to the impact of 'powerful emotional factors' which spoil the subject's enjoyment of beauty which provokes 'a revolt in their minds against mourning' (1957p: 80). This 'foretaste of mourning' causes the mind to 'instinctively recoil from anything that is painful' and consequently the 'enjoyment of beauty [is] interfered with by thoughts of transience' (1957p:80/1). Hence, the expectation of pain mars present enjoyment because the 'libido clings to its objects and will not renounce those that are lost even when a substitute lies ready at hand.' (1957p: 80).

In his book, *Death, Desire and Loss in Western Culture* (1998), Jonathan Dollimore contends that Freud's preoccupation with the interwoven dynamics of

human desire and loss, adumbrated in the above essay, are revelatory of Western anxieties related to the mutability of human life. Indeed, Dollimore argues that psychoanalysis merely represents another level of sophistication in western culture's drive to construct a theoretical model that can explain the agonising threat of this paradoxically seductive phenomenon (1998:181). Dollimore sees psychoanalysis' expansion of human introspection as an opportunity to develop a new language that reiterates what was by now an open secret in the West that 'death is absolutely interior to life' (181). More importantly for this project, Dollimore conjectures that the encounter between Freud and the unknown poet outlined in 'On Transience', affected the composition of his later more influential essay 'Mourning and Melancholia' (1917). Dollimore elaborates on the significance of this encounter by drawing our attention to Freud's assertion that 'those who ... seem ready to make a permanent renunciation because what was precious has proved not to be lasting, are simply in a state of mourning for what is lost' (quoted in Dollimore, 1998: 181). Once more, Dollimore asserts that this statement is steeped in the rhetoric of the mutability tradition within western culture. Moreover, he identifies the traumatic fusion of loss and desire clearly delineated in this paper as the forerunner of the theory of *identification*,[5] which was to prove so crucial to Freud's understanding of melancholia (182). Furthermore, according to Dollimore, Freud's interpretation of melancholia embraces 'not just an experience of loss, but a deep identification with what is lost' (182), thereby establishing a symbiotic psychological relationship that is riven by desire (182).

Freud's classic study of mourning and melancholia, written in 1917, continues and builds on these earlier theoretical models of loss. In this paper,

Freud analyses the subject's response to various forms of loss, ranging from 'the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as fatherland, liberty, an ideal and so on (1957i:153). The first sentence of Freud's paper frames the state of mourning as a 'normal' emotion (152), which allows the subject to withdraw his/her libidinal attachment from his/her original object choice, and thereby transfer it to a subsequent object. The process by which this is achieved may be lengthy, involving the requisite time and energy needed to persuade the ego to abandon its original libido position by introjection and 'reality testing'. Reality testing, according to Freud, describes the painful memory work that the subject must undergo if s/he is to escape the cyclical, and hence pathological nature of melancholia, where the subject is unable to relinquish their original object choice and resume object relationships in the future. Successful reality testing is only accomplished when the subject is willing to withdraw from his/her psychological investment in the object by loosening the libidinal ties that bind it through memory. This period of profound readjustment is described by Freud as a tortuous process where 'deference for reality' is gained only after every 'single one of the memories and hopes which bound the libido to the object is brought up and hyper-cathected' (1957i:154). Once this process has been completed the subject is able to accept that the object no longer exists and thus move on to make new object choices.

Freud goes on to inform the reader that the circuitous route required to restore psychic equilibrium 'is not at all easy to explain in terms of mental economics', but once achieved 'seems natural to us' (154). Subsequent readers and critics alike[6] have found his resolution of the mourning process

unsatisfactory, both in its naturalising impulse and because of its reliance on melancholia as the binary opposite that proves the rule of mourning. Freud's theory constructs melancholia as pathological mourning because of a shift in the disposition of the libido, which is externalised in normative mourning by withdrawing from the lost object and proceeding to make a connection with a new one. The melancholic subject, however, withdraws his libidinal attachment to the lost object and incorporates it into his own ego. Freud believes that this situation gives rise to secondary narcissism.

According to Freud's schema, the melancholic reinstates the object within their own ego, which is then subjected to a series of sadistic assaults from within. The subsequent lowering of self-esteem that Freud cites as a feature of melancholia, arises out of the ambivalence inherent in the subject's relationship with the lost object. Freud attributes the subject's tendency to indulge in self-reproach as a consequence of their *identification* with the abandoned object. Subsequent psychoanalysts such as Fenichel (1945), Abraham (1949) and Bibring (1953) remain unconvinced by Freud's rigid categorisation of the states of mourning and melancholia, arguing that ambivalence and identification are present in both conditions and need not represent a slippage into psychopathology.[7] Leowald (1962), conjectures that internalisation resembles the Oedipal crisis where the relinquishment of objects leads to the formation of the superego (1962: 21). This model also serves a dual purpose in protecting the subject from the pain of loss and furthering the possibility of emancipation once this has been achieved.

Unlike Freud, the psychoanalytic theorists Abraham and Torok contend that language provides the means by which the subject is able to resist

pathological mourning. In 'Mourning *or* Melancholia: Introjection *versus* Incorporation' (1994), the authors elaborate on what they feel is a blurred distinction between the psychoanalytic terms introjection and incorporation. The authors trace the origins of introjection back to infancy 'where the mouth's emptiness is experienced alongside the mother's simultaneous presence. The emptiness is first experienced in the form of cries and sobs, delayed fullness, then as calling, ways of requesting presence, as language' (1994:127). The cries which accompany the child's experience of the absence of the breast, eventually give way to verbal requests addressed to the mother, which partially compensate for the initial loss. The ability to convert loss into speech is viewed by Abraham and Torok as the key to nonpathological mourning, the erasure of loss through the communion of language (127/8).

The addition of the linguistic component expands on Sandor Ferenczi's original formulation in *First Contributions to Psycho-Analysis* (1952), where 'introjection' following on from his theories of transference, is identified as the normative process whereby the ego is broadened and enriched by the inclusion of libidinally charged objects. Abraham and Torok point out that this process also explains the way in which the reality of loss is integrated into the ego. Again, the authors foreground the importance of the linguistic element within this process, by explaining how the subject's inability to articulate loss inhibits mourning and frequently follows on from the fantasy of incorporation. Incorporation is described as the process whereby a subject introduces 'all or part of a love object or a thing into one's own body, possessing, expelling or alternatively acquiring, keeping, losing it' (1994: 216).

Because the fantasy arises out of a loss which the subject experiences as guilty or in some way shameful, the psyche is unwilling to make the adaptations and adjustments which would accommodate the transformation of the loss within the psychic terrain. Instead, the fantasy of incorporation imitates transformation by a form of magic, achieving this 'by implementing literally something that has only figurative meaning. So in order not to have to "swallow" a loss, we fantasize swallowing (or having swallowed) that which has been lost, as if it were some kind of thing' (1994:126). Ultimately, incorporation 'reveals the gap within the psyche; it points to something that is missing just where introjection should have occurred' (127).

Abraham and Torok speculate that incorporation occurs when the usually spontaneous process of introjection, conversion of loss into language, becomes reflexive and the new self-awareness transforms the object into something which the subject is literally unable to swallow. Incorporation therefore occurs when '*words* fail to fill the subject's void and hence and imaginary thing is inserted into the mouth in their place' (1994:128/9). Abraham and Torok's formulations construct cryptic incorporation as a psychic half-way house situated somewhere between mourning and melancholia, which is occupied by the subject who has been thrust out of the symbolic matrix. The crypt becomes a tomb when the object threatens the integrity of the subject or when exposure of the link between subject and object reveals the divisions, contradictions and erasures that characterise the relationship.

(iii) The Feminine Crypt

Crypts are constructed only when the shameful secret is the love object's doing and when that object also functions for the subject as an ego ideal.

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It is therefore the *object's* secret that needs to be kept, *his* (sic) shame covered up. (Abraham & Torok, 1994:131)

The next section of this chapter, will concentrate on the specific psychological obstacles encountered by the female subject. As we have already seen in the introduction to this thesis, women have historically been excluded from melancholic discourses. Women's absence from the corpus of melancholic texts therefore provides convincing evidence that women's mourning was a disparaged practice that did not warrant public recognition. Juliana Schiesari's work on the gendering of melancholic discourse has provided conclusive evidence that women such as Hildegard of Bingen did produce an extensive commentary on the problematic category of melancholia (1992:141). Female invisibility within the melancholic tradition must therefore be attributed to their subjugated position within patriarchal structures. The following section will illustrate how female alienation from what can be seen as the melancholic canon is compounded by their own internalisation of their own inferior positioning within the symbolic matrix. Accordingly, the work of Helene Deutsch, Abraham and Torok and Julia Kristeva will be cited to illustrate why the complex interplay of love, hate and desire make female melancholia such a difficult category to explain.

Abraham and Torok's definition of the psychic crypt cited above is revelatory of the grandiose yet self-deluding nature of the melancholic subject. The theorists' elucidation of pathological mourning helps to clarify the confusions arising from the subject's ambivalent relationship with the lost object. Here, the subject's desire for love and approval from the lost object is interwoven with their fear that discovery of the guilty secret that once connected them would result in savage punishment and the destruction of their identity.

Helene Deutsch and Julia Kristeva are psychoanalytic theorists who are also concerned with the complex set of bodily and psychological protocols that underlay melancholic structures. Both theorists investigate the vagaries of ambivalent love-relationships by focusing on the melancholic's ability to cleverly disguise the origin of their despair. Deutsch writes from a distinctly Freudian perspective, using an hydraulic analytical model to explain the psychological consequences of cases of unacknowledged grief. Kristeva's central concern is the period that proceeds language acquisition, namely the pre-objectal and the pre-linguistic, which she believes poses particular problems for the female subject who is according to Kristeva clearly more susceptible to melancholic depression.

Helene Deutsch's work on mourning is clearly indebted to Freud's formulation of melancholic identification in 'Mourning and Melancholia' (1917). As the title of Helene Deutsch's 1937 paper 'Absence of Grief' suggests, it is the very absence of mourning which signals pathology. Like Freud, Deutsch advances the view that identification with the lost or dead object initiates pathological mourning reactions. According to this schema, mourning may be masked or delayed indefinitely if the ego is diverted elsewhere, apparently engaged in dealing with other more pressing issues (1937:15). This diversion from the normative trajectory of mourning is the result of ambivalent feelings being projected onto the object, in accordance with Freud's theories regarding melancholia promulgated in 'Mourning and Melancholia'. Again, she deploys a typically Freudian hydraulic model to describe the melancholic economy, whereby absence of grief will eventually be compensated for in the expression of a series of seemingly unmotivated depressions that follow on from the

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original object loss. This finite economy is also responsible for the implementation of an array of narcissistic defence mechanisms that prevent the commencement of the work of mourning. In order to illustrate this point, Deutsch cites the example of the undeveloped ego of the child which is unable to withstand the onslaught of ambivalent impulses which arise during mourning. In order to escape the psychic strains involved in mourning, the child frequently manifests an indifference to the death or loss of a loved person (1937:13).

An analogous set of events can be observed in adults who betray no emotion after the death or loss of a loved one. The lack of affective emotion that usually accompanies bereavement occurs as a result of an insufficiently developed ego, characterised by 'the free and unoccupied portion of the ego, and on the other hand a protective mechanism proceeding from the narcissistic cathexis of the ego' (1937:15). Deutsch observes that adults who suffer from this particular phenomenon are able to relinquish libidinal ties with remarkable ease and rapidity, but as we have already seen, she notes that this behaviour is punctuated by a series of "unmotivated depressions" (16).

Deutsch's paper leans towards Freud's work on 'Mourning and Melancholia' in its emphasis on a normative conceptual framework to describe mourning. Deutsch's paper is similarly focused on a goal-oriented drive to achieve a 'normal' and uncomplicated state of mourning. This overly deterministic concentration on the liberatory potential of the mourning process ignores the complexities of the subject's identification with the object - with the interplay of guilt and anxiety . Hence, Deutsch uses a hectoring tone to inform the reader that the process of mourning '*must be carried to completion*" (1937: 21) if the mysterious and unquantifiable state of normality is to be achieved.

Deutsch's dogged adherence to the Freudian paradigm that normalises mourning at the expense of the pathological state of melancholia, constrains what could be a much more informative and persuasive discussion of pathological mourning reactions. Freud's ideological framework serves to naturalise the marginalised cultural status of the non-normative state of melancholia, constructing this state as the guilty other that shadows the culturally acceptable state of mourning. Indeed, Freud intimates that both states conclude in a similar manner when he writes that 'the way in which it passes off after a certain time has elapsed without leaving traces of any gross change is a feature it shares with grief' (1957i:163).[8]

Unlike Abraham and Torok, who draw attention to the complex relationship which exists between the subject and the incorporated object, Deutsch utilises a typically Freudian dialectic to prove her theory that psychic disequilibrium will be regulated by a series of displacements which ultimately relieve psychic suffering. Again, this naturalising manoeuvre, borrowed from Freud, frames the "unmotivated" depressions which she refers to in her paper as a consequence of incomplete mourning, as a simple psychic defence mechanism present since childhood which is waiting to be triggered in the melancholic adult. Hence, she is able to conclude that 'One might assume that the very general tendency to "unmotivated" depressions is the subsequent expression of emotional reactions which were once withheld and have since remained in latent readiness for discharge' (1937:22).

Unlike Deutsch, Julia Kristeva's work on depression and melancholia, *Black Sun* (1989), builds on Freud by analysing intrapsychic relations prior to the object loss. Her work is an exploration of what she refers to as "The

Thing",[9] which is the pre-objective and pre-linguistic space that exists before the acquisition of language. In common with Abraham and Torok's psychic crypt, Kristeva's *Thing* defies signification, forming an intrapsychic double- bind which both attracts and repels. Kristeva postulates that the depressive or melancholic subject mourns the loss of the *Thing,* to which they long to return and not the lost object described by Freud. Her work is of particular interest to this project because of its examination of feminine depression. Kristeva suggests that women experience more problems with depression because they find it more difficult to separate from the mother and by implication the *Thing.*[10] This added obstacle *en route* to subjectivity places an extra burden on the female subject, when she is forced to move towards the symbolic. The complications arise when she seeks to recover the lost object as an erotic object. Kristeva puts forward the contentious theory that the heterosexual woman is especially challenged when she attempts to make the transition into the symbolic, because unlike the male heterosexual or female homosexual, she must expend a great deal of psychic and symbolic energy if she is to eroticise the other sex instead of the mother (1989: 74). Kristeva believes that the female subject is able to overcome this impasse and escape the demands of the maternal object by transposing this symbolic energy onto an imagined partner, a third party who as she puts it:

> (is) able to dissolve the mother imprisoned within myself by giving me
> what she could and above all what she could not give me, while remaining
> in a different place - no longer the mother's but that of the person who can
> obtain for me the major gift she was never able to offer: a new life
> (Kristeva, 1989: 78)

This prioritising gesture on the part of Kristeva clearly privileges and indeed valorises the heterosexual woman at the expense of the lesbian and the

childless woman, by claiming that maternity represents the high watermark of successful femininity.[11] This theoretical viewpoint is surely problematic in its blurring of the cultural and symbolic and the very different demands which each makes on the feminine.

Kristeva's celebration of maternity as both reward and rite of passage, from melancholia to 'successful' subjectivity, bears many similarities to the uneasy slippage between mourning and melancholia, which Freud describes in his 1917 essay.[12] However, when Kristeva writes about the disavowal of loss and the narcissistic anguish incurred by what she refers to as the 'black hole' of melancholia, her work begins to traverse similar theoretical territory to that covered by Abraham and Torok in their paper 'Mourning *or* Melancholia: Introjection *versus* Incorporation', referred to above. Kristeva acknowledges this philosophical debt during her discussion of the "black hole", used to illustrate the case history of Isabel, one of her melancholic patients. Interestingly, the symptoms manifested by this particular subject conform to those described by Abraham and Torok and Helene Deutsch, in their emphasis on the absence of grief and the repression of sadness and despair. The similarities between both methodologies, and the ways in which they are mapped onto the subject, are striking because of their investment in language as the curative substitute for the lost object. As Kristeva puts it:

> I had the impression that she (Isabel) had fitted in her psychic space one of those "crypts" Maria Torok and Nicolas Abraham talk about, in which there was nothing, but the whole depressive identity was organized around this nothingness. Grief, humiliating by dint of having been kept secret, unnameable, and unspeakable, had turned into a *psychic silence* that did not repress the wound but took its place, and what is more, by condensing it, gave it back an exorbitant intensity, imperceptible by sensations and representations (1989:87)

However, the projects of Kristeva and Abraham and Torok diverge in their differing deployment of a psychoanalytic aesthetic to describe the creative act. For Abraham and Torok, artistic production mobilises metaphor, which implicates the artist into a verbal relationship with a wider 'speaking' community. For them 'language acts and makes up for absence by representing, by *giving figurative shape* to presence it can only be *comprehended* or *shared* in "a community of empty mouths" (1994:128). In this way, metaphor is mobilised as an instrument of introjection, which enables the subject to engage in a recuperative project whereby the lost object is integrated into the psyche. Once this has been accomplished, the psychic topography is reorganised so that the subject is able to function within a community of speaking mouths. Melancholic rhetoric becomes pathological when figurative language cannot be released and is instead literalised: by denying the polyvalence of metaphor, the subject is able to protect her/himself from the shame associated with the incorporated object. Here, language acts as a return of the repressed which haunts the subject, reminding him or her of the original shame, forcing the 'cryptophoric subject ... to annul the humiliation by secretly or openly adopting the literal meaning for the words causing the humiliation' (1994:131). Thus, incorporation is linked with the figure of *antimetaphor*, that effectively seals the vault concealing the objectal shame (131).

For Kristeva, the language of melancholia is a separate language that can be inserted into a field of competing discourses. Within this framework, melancholic language emerges as a result of the *'psychic representation of energy displacements'* (1989:21), which cleverly resist psychoanalytic or

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semiological quantification. These *inscriptions*, or energy disruptions, lead

Kristeva to postulate that:

> representations germane to affects, notably sadness, are *fluctuating* energy cathexes: insufficiently stabilized to coalesce as verbal or other signs, acted upon by primary processes of displacement and condensation, dependent just the same on the agency of the ego, they record through its intermediary the threats, orders, and injunctions of the superego(1989:22)

Here, the act of literary creation is constructed as a solipsistic process that

gives way to 'sadness as imprint of separation and beginning of the symbol's

sway', which, in a curiously rehabilitative move, promises 'joy as imprint of

the triumph that settles me in the universe of artifice and symbol, which I (the

subject) try to harmonize in the best possible way with my experience of

reality' (22). Later, Kristeva hints that the 'semiotic' and the 'symbolic', can

be transformed into 'the communicable imprints of an affective reality,

perceptible to the reader' (22). Language, is then slotted into an intrapsychic

space which remains suspended at the level of fantasy; there is no indication

that such an abstract conceptual framework is ever disturbed by cultural

experience nor how such an ambiguous construction of 'sadness' impacts on

the creators of literary texts. Instead the reader is confused by the dazzling

interplay of rhythms, signs and forms which remain divorced from their

cultural context.

Abraham and Torok differ from Kristeva in their emphasis on

mourning as a psychological process that enables the subject to live in and

through loss. For them, arrested figuration represents the verbal signal

which indicates the subject's refusal to engage in the recuperative act of

mourning. Their paper insistently draws attention to the qualitative

differences between mourning and melancholia: as the opposition between

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antimetaphor and metaphor, which embodies the verbal opportunity to transcend psychic bereavement.

The following section of this chapter will address the textual implications of suspended mourning as figured in Evelyn Lau's first novel *Other Women*, and in 'Roses', a vignette taken from her collection of short stories *Fresh Girls*. In both of the close readings that follow, the symptoms of a psychic foreclosure that prevents the subject from participating in mourning are revealed in the ambiguous gaps and silences that punctuate the texts. The heady conflation of desire, hate, love and fear is palpable within the textual disruptions and ellipses that threaten to reveal the unresolved issues embedded deep within the narrator's secret histories. Similarly, the terse prose style and insistent repetition indicate that a particular narrative is being continually reworked in order to prevent the unravelling of the concealed narrative that lies just beneath the surface.

(iv)   Romancing the Other

Other Women (1995) relates the story of an unconsummated affair that takes place between Fiona, a successful self-employed artist, and Raymond, the married businessman whom she meets at a local-fund raising event. The sparse plot is unexceptional, covering similar narrative terrain to that contained in the most conventional romance fiction. However, the paucity of the plot combined with the deadened prose style suggest that the text is itself a site of mourning. Alternative interpretations of this flimsy, even unchallenging, narrative can be sustained. James Annesley includes Evelyn Lau's work in the loosely defined range of blank fictions that he contends share similar aesthetic and ideological concerns (1998:3). Annesley maintains that these concerns are

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focused on 'the relationship between the individual and consumer culture' in contemporary urban America (2). Moreover, Annesley contends that the intersecting social and economic structures described in these novels are informed by a stylistic aesthetic that conveys 'blank, atonal perspectives and fragile, glassy visions' (2). Lau's terse, pared down prose style and materialistic thematics conforms to Annesley's delineation of the subject matter of 'blank fictions'. However, once the critical focus of attention has been shifted away from a materialist interpretation of the text onto a psychoanalytic reading of Lau's novel, a radically different fiction begins to emerge. The 'fragile, glassy visions' that Annesley perceives as a defining feature of a materialist aesthetic can also be interpreted as a symptom of melancholic or depressive illness.

The opening pages of *Other Women* do reveal a pattern of brittle, even inconsequential, imagery that closely resembles Annesley's rendition of a 'blank' aesthetic. The narrator's reconstruction of her last meeting with her married lover takes place in the glacial interior of the kind of anonymous hotel room that features prominently in novels written by Lynne Tillman, Bret Easton Ellis and Susanna Moore. However, the retrospective framing of the lovers' last meeting which is constantly reinvoked in this novel, signals the presence of an unprocessed secret history. The ghostly legacy of this indigestible secret leaves its imprint on the narrator's recollection of the collapse of her entanglement with her lover. The affair itself is framed as a series of brief episodic encounters that do not appear to justify the magnitude of the narrator's emotional investment in them. Indeed the narrator's confession that 'there were nights that had shaped the past fifteen months of their lives, nights that convinced her she was alive' (1995: 5), is revelatory of a secret history scarred

by the memory of a past that has been troubled by serial loss and abandonment. The narrative itself is contained by a spectral frame that reveals itself at critical junctures in the text. These disruptions within the narrative gesture towards a disturbing subtext of familial ambition and discontent. In the opening chapter, the lovers' final encounter is disturbed by the narrator's memory of the 'warm gold ... lamplight in her parents' house, in the impoverished neighbourhood where she grew up' (9). The nostalgic (re)vision of childhood memory is invoked here as a framing device for the inner narrative that describes the demise of the lovers' affair. Accordingly, the elegiac (re)construction of a drooping rose fluttering silently 'above its reflection in the polished wood of the end table' (9), within the lamplight of the lovers' hotel room, is analogously linked to an unreliable memory of an increasingly fictionalised childhood. Significantly, this hastily constructed pastiche of childhood comfort fails to generate the emotional security that the narrator so clearly hopes to achieve. Instead, the narrator is confronted by a scenario that is riven by contradiction and a pervasive sense of melancholic grief. Ultimately, the narrator is forced to recognise that the 'feeling of familiarity' invoked by the lamplight within the room is not reciprocated by her lover, when 'After all, his own memories of lamplight would be different' (9).

Within the text therefore, references to childhood and family history are sparse and sporadic, often framed as unwelcome reminders of a troubled past which momentarily threaten to dispel the vortex of loss that envelops the novel's mordant narrator.[13] This failure to tie up the lost threads of childhood by incorporating them into the broader narrative of her subsequent history is symptomatic of the disease that blights the narrator's adult life: namely the

inability to mourn successfully or to acknowledge that a bereavement has in fact taken place. The aetiology of this disease can be traced by the reader back to the narrator's troubled childhood, whilst the symptoms reveal themselves in her nostalgic longing to rewrite her childhood narrative by returning to a past which is unmarked by the moment of fundamental division from her mother.[14] Fiona's silence about the unspeakable other of her childhood emerges first as the missing backdrop to the free floating present described within the novel, and secondly in her fascination with other women, particularly Helen, the wife of Raymond. Other women offer a tantalising glimpse of what it is to be successfully 'othered' from the mother, effectively freed from the historic and potentially suffocating primary tie with the mother, or more specifically the moment of fundamental division, referred to above, when the child's demands on the mother outstrip her ability to fulfil them.[15] The physical demands of the split linguistic subject are manifested by the text's insistent emphasis on orality; the numerous references to fellatio and the disordered eating and drinking patterns which emerge as a result of this lack of alignment with the mother.

Fiona's doomed attempts to make good this moment of lost plenitude with the mother, through displacement onto a series of disposable object-choices such as Raymond, her married lover, are returned to obsessively as a textual mantra which informs and indeed sustains the structure of the novel. Towards the end of the novel, we learn that Fiona's previous lover was yet another married businessman who slotted her into his working schedule in a similar manner to that which was subsequently deployed by Raymond. This is a package which the narrator owns has the advantage of being 'turmoil' free,

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requiring little or no emotional investment from either party so that 'in the year they knew each other he never once asked what she did with her days' (1995:167). This tardy confession, like so many others, is slipped into the text surreptitiously, subtly shifting the reader's perception of the exclusivity of the narrator's current obsession, or her ability to detect the serial nature of her object choices.

Fiona's inability to identify and therefore acknowledge and articulate the underlying pattern of losses that structures her life locates her within the theoretical frame of Abraham and Torok's paper, where the reluctance of the subject to participate in the reparative process of mourning through her/his psychic disavowal of mourning impedes her/his ability to recover, by her/his refusal to communicate her/his loss in and through language. A similar closeting of a secret and imperfect history is characteristic of Fiona's attempts to lay a false trail leading away from her troubled relationship with her mother, which is clearly evident in her dealings with Raymond and his wife Helen.

Towards the end of the novel, Fiona recalls discovering her mother's diaries, which had remained, unbeknown to her, hidden in the bottom of her closet throughout her childhood. The recovery of the diaries is however short-lived; the dramatic uncovering of the lost artefact triggers such an emotive reaction in the narrator's mother that she immediately destroys them, meticulously dissecting their contents with her strongest scissors, the ones with which Fiona recalls 'she used to cut fabric' (1995:189). The reappearance of the diaries forms a disquieting childhood memory for the adult narrator, who realises that the psychological effects of the discovery of the diaries, which recount her mother's extra marital affair, implicate her within yet another

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indigestible secret history. Recalling the incident from the standpoint of an eight year old child, she is aware that 'I felt the significance of what had happened, although I could not have put it into words. I did understand that my mother had now lost something she could never get back, and that life could not be the same again for her (189).

Figurative gaps, omissions and silences related to the suppressed outer frame of the narrative occur with an increasing regularity, disturbing the linear progression of the inner narrative. Indeed, the inclusion of the scissors and the part that they play in destroying a family chronicle is transformed into a castrating metaphor that is clearly evident in other melancholic texts written by women. In Kathryn Harrison's autobiographical novel, *The Kiss*, for example, family history is wilfully rearranged by the narrator's maternal grandmother who removes any evidence of her erstwhile son-in-law's role within the family structure by cutting out his physical representation in the family photograph album. This domestic artefact has therefore revealed its own literal and figurative secret history in its transformation from domestic implement into an instrument of castration. Ironically, this castrating trope draws the reader's attention to the melancholic core of the narrative where psychological loss can never be transcended by simply reshuffling photographic evidence. The castrating action of the scissors denies the intricate and meticulous 'working through' of memories that Freud claimed was indispensable to successful mourning. The vigorous motion of the blades is juxtaposed with the static and monolithic family history that it attempts to dislodge. Paradoxically, the slicing of history into digestible shards of memory merely reconstructs the original tableau of unrequited loss that informs these troubled histories.

Accordingly, Fiona's insatiable appetite for incorporating an interminable stream of substitutes begins to shift from Raymond, onto his wife Helen, who is transformed into the 'other' woman, becoming a tantalising shadow of yet another object choice. Fiona's is once more the opened mouth that can swallow but not speak; hence she fantasises about the unknown woman visualising a scene where 'she could open her mouth and, with just a few words, enter Helen's life' (1995:8). The sheer immensity of the narrator's need takes the form of psychological rape: her colonising zeal is no less shocking because it is anonymous. Later, she imagines that 'she knows what it is like to live inside Helen's body' (72), her well-rehearsed fantasies becoming 'increasingly intimate and violent' (184). These projected fantasies work in reverse by illuminating the framing discourse that is located in her relationship with her mother. The intrusive and increasingly compulsive nature of her fantasies begin to imitate the unrequited yearning that the narrator experiences when she remembers her mother. The narrator's obsession with the material realities of other women's lives is merely a displacement of her maternal longing. This process is the figurative location where the narrator attempts to resolve her experience of maternal abandonment. By endlessly rehearsing this psychological impasse, Fiona hopes to regain the emotional plenitude that she believes once united her with her mother.

Fiona's fear of maternal loss is then played out, in and through the wife of Raymond; Fiona's putative aim is to obviate the pain and sorrow of loss by merging with Helen who has unknowingly been transformed into a surrogate mother. Fiona's barely sublimated desire to fuse with this new maternal object is then symptomatic of the cannibalising threat of melancholia where the

otherness of the object is systematically consumed by the ego. Hence, Fiona claims that she 'wanted to know Helen's body so well [that] I could climb in and zip up her skin around me' (1995:184). By vampiristically incorporating the other residing in this surrogate maternal object, Fiona believes that she can conquer the pain of separation and the fear of abandonment that she experienced as a young girl. The narrator's solitary manoeuvres emerge as a figurative plea to the other woman to include her in what Abraham and Torok refer to as 'the communion of "empty mouths", where calling becomes a way of 'requesting presence, as language' (1994:127), and where 'without the constant assistance of a mother endowed with language, introjection could not take place' (128).

Before Fiona can participate in such a communion of 'empty mouths' she must resist the cannibalising impulse referred to above by learning how to rework events within her own life so that she is able to implement a revised interpretation of past events that can be woven into the fabric of her present life. According to Freud, the process of introjection involves the capacity to replace the lost object with a representation that symbolises that loss within the memory (1957i:154). The memory is then transformed into a flexible model that the subject can manipulate freely so that it functions productively within the psyche. The regressive identificatory process present in the psychological process of incorporation reverses the re-structuring programme implicit in introjection by consuming the incorporated whole object. This 'magical' cannibalistic process is clearly present within Lau's narrative where it reveals itself in the repeated emphasis on orality. The narrator swallows food, parental

imagos, even her lovers' semen, wholesale, refusing the difficult and thoroughgoing work of introjection.

Removal from the imaginary to the symbolic coincides with weaning or rejection of the mother's milk; Fiona's endless rehearsal of this shift from one order to another represents a reversal of this process and a return to dependence on liquid oral ingestion. This reversal of sociocultural norms is clearly evident in her recollection of her first meeting with Raymond which she describes in cannibalistic terms as the moment when '[she] first breathed you into me, gulping you in until I became dizzy and the room circled around me' (1995:14). Later, the normative Oedipal configuration is obliterated when the narrator reconstructs a disturbing encounter with Raymond who now appears to occupy the role of surrogate father to the narrator's obedient daughter:

> 'With a child's belief in magic I got down on my knees in front of your body. When I put my mouth over your penis above its net of hair, one moment shifted irrevocably into the next, shifted so hard I thought I heard the sound of something breaking' (1995:23).

The reversal of conventional norms referred to above involves the ingestion of a pattern of behaviour considered pathological in the adult female; Fiona's constant return to the primal scene is a subversion of the symbolic notion of the individuated subject; by repeating the moment of division, she threatens the very fabric of the symbolic which leads to her own marginalisation. Significantly in this context, Abraham and Torok suggest that the prohibition of speech results in the subject 'actually taking into ... (her/his) ... mouth the unnameable, the object itself. As the empty mouth calls out in vain to be filled with introjective speech, it reverts to being the food-craving mouth it was prior to the acquisition of speech' (1994:128).

Fiona's mouth represents the food-craving chasm which threatens to engulf anyone who comes into close contact with her. The ever recurring trope, where the lamplight in an anonymous hotel room is transformed into 'the same warm gold as the lamplight in her parents' house, in the impoverished neighbourhood where she grew up' (1995: 9), is indicative of the kleptomaniac subject who frantically collects random artefacts for inclusion in Abraham and Torok 's 'intrapsychic tomb' (1994:130). Fiona never appears to function within a community. She always situates herself on the periphery of any social activity, focusing on a series of interchangeable objects such as Raymond, whom she can suck into the highly charged vortex which surrounds her.

Abraham and Torok note that 'The magical "cure" by incorporation exempts the subject from the painful process of reorganization' (1994:127), drawing the subject into the essentially conservative trope of fantasy. Laplanche and Pontalis believe that incorporation has three meanings: 'it means to obtain pleasure by making an object penetrate oneself; it means to destroy this object; and it means, by keeping it within oneself, to appropriate the object's qualities' (1973: 212). As we have already seen, Fiona attempts to import the qualities and attributes of those closest to her, such as Raymond and Helen, rehearsing their episodic encounters which are 'gone over again and again in my hours of solitude, imbued with the colour of my desire, fondled like a fetish object, a shoe or a glove' (1995:25). Fiona's quest, to absorb every available object or person to fill the unspeakable chasm within, accelerates when Raymond hints that he wishes to terminate their relationship, resulting in her frantic bid to replace him with an ever increasing array of substitutes, such as alcohol, food and memory. Fiona describes this sudden fall from grace as 'a

certain level of intoxication that felt like being inside a dream, and when she felt the protective layers begin to disperse, and light start to intrude, that was when she knew she needed another drink' (31). Fiona's attempts to insert herself into an Oedipal triangle with the childless couple Raymond and Helen signal to the reader that her incorporation of this new configuration is in fact just another substitute for her own troubled relationship with her own parents.

Fiona records how the encrypted shame and revulsion, associated with her memories of childhood, disrupt her waking moments:

> when she did finally slip, almost accidentally, into sleep, it was to dream about her parents. It had always been this way - the two people she managed to ignore in her waking hours still controlled her nocturnal world. But now her dreams about her family she had left behind were confused with her longing for Raymond, which grafted itself upon the familiar scenes from childhood - her mother screaming, her father leaving. Only now her father's face was Raymond's and her mother wore the same clothes Fiona had worn the night she met the man she loved (1995:39/40)

Fiona's admission of the source of her pain occurs one third of the way through the novel, during a holiday which she takes in order to 'break the pattern by going somewhere new' (35). By this stage in the novel it is clear that physical changes of location cannot dislodge the psychic incorporation of objects and the stockpiling of object substitutes is itself beginning to alter the shape of the narrator's life, as well as the text. From this point onwards, the disparate parts of Fiona's pathology begin to converge: the disturbed sleep pattern, bulimia and the obsession with Helen. We learn that her evenings are now spent 'in her studio, bags of junk food and photographs of his wife Helen spread out on the desk in front of her ... One after another, Fiona tears open packages of cream-filled cookies and sugared donuts, conveying the contents almost robotically to her mouth' (71). Increasingly, Fiona's fantasies are projected onto occupying the body of Helen, until she is convinced that she 'thinks she knows what it is

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like to live inside Helen's body' (72). Fiona even confesses that 'if she does not exist in the public's perception of what is real, she does not' (76); a gesture backwards to the erased point of reference which represents her childhood and which cannot therefore act as an integrative force within her adult life. Predictably, the masochistic fantasies culminate in the narrator's murderous impulse to incorporate the body of Helen, when she imagines:

> her strong hands around Helen's fine, wifely neck ... choking her until she moans and spits up Raymond's love. Then at last she can relinquish her, let her head snap back, her body limp as a doll's that has been played with plenty and can now be retired'(1995:78).

In the final pages of the novel, Fiona admits that her preoccupation with Raymond's wife has been 'obscene and one-sided' (1995:192). As we have already seen, Fiona's obsession with Helen became 'increasingly intimate and violent', forcing her to fantasise about stripping Helen naked, 'to familiarise myself with her body, her responses ... I wanted to know Helen's body so well I could climb in and zip up her skin around me' (184).[16]   Fiona believes that if she were able to simultaneously occupy and annihilate Helen's body she would be able to rewrite her own history and insert herself within a new and more empowering childhood narrative. Fiona's projection onto the wives and lovers of men within her social milieu, and her valorisation of their anonymous spouses, gestures towards her belief that she is somehow responsible for the breakdown of her own particular 'family romance'.[17]

The conclusion of the novel sees Fiona locked into a double bind . She admits that she continues to believe that 'there will never be anyone else for me' (1995:192), and indeed there appears to be little prospect of Fiona ever being able to 'spit up' Raymond's love in the same way that she fantasises

forcing Helen to do in her fantasies. Fiona's jealously guarded secret is her wish to replace the oedipal configuration with another more flexible model which could function productively within the field of competing discourses that crowd her adult life. Fiona swallows whole the memory of her mother's shattered subjectivity which she believes haunts and shadows her own bid for acceptance within patriarchal structures. It sees improbable, given the evidence above, that Fiona will ever be able to construct a 'transference bridge' with language, that will enable her to swallow the unspeakable loss of childhood, by unlocking the silence which severs the link between mourning and artistic creation.

(v)   Resisting The Talking Cure

In the next section of this chapter I will examine another exemplar of melancholic incorporation contained in the work of Evelyn Lau. The following section will focus on one of the short stories contained in the collection *Fresh Girls* (1994). 'Roses' relates the story of an abusive relationship that is formed between an adolescent sex worker and a psychiatrist. The narrative operations in this story reveal an absolute intolerance of separation and object loss that is compounded by the narrator's disenfranchised position as a sex-worker who is engaged in an apparently futile attempt to resist co-option into the invasive commercial network surrounding her. Lau's slim volume of short stories recounts the tales of a series of similarly marginalised women who are striving to insert themselves into a more empowering narrative and social context. Annesley's views on the decadent protagonists of much contemporary American fiction are significant within this context. Within his chapter on 'Decadence' in *Blank Fictions* (1998), James Annesley views the subject's

desire for freedom and autonomy as the product of millennial anxieties that have been provoked by what he refers to as an 'apocalypse culture' (1998:108). Within this nihilistic context, Annesley contends that pleasurable or potentially transcendent experiences are perpetually mediated by the commercial imperatives of the material world (129). Material considerations therefore encroach on personal freedoms, preventing the individual subject from functioning autonomously within this social and economic context. This profoundly coercive situation is therefore predicated on the colonising dynamics of commodification which are characteristic of late capitalism.

The effects patriarchal domination necessarily exerts on identity formation are clearly evident in this 'Roses' where the narrator attempts to renegotiate the boundaries between subject and object. The frequent allusions within the text by the narrator to a coercive past relationship between herself and her father suggest that her participation, in carefully orchestrated scenarios of masochistic domination by the psychiatrist, represent her desire to act out the internalised rage that she experiences whenever she recollects her troubled relationship with her father. This 'prototype' relationship operates as a narrative frame that prefigures the ensuing partnership with the psychiatrist, suggesting that the anonymous narrator of this story is acting out the prohibited emotional frenzy that marked her relationship with her father. This spectral frame that haunts the central narrative operates in a similar fashion to that deployed in *Other Women*. In this narrative, however, the lost maternal object has been replaced by the paternal object. The substitution of one paternal imago for another has significant implications for the relative subject position of the narrators of these texts. The remainder of this section will illustrate how

patriarchal culture exerts additional pressure on melancholic structures by encouraging the circular interior dialogue that takes place between the internalised object, the ego and the critical agency of the superego. The previous section of this chapter examined the consequences of maternal object loss by foregrounding the psychological penalties that attend the female subject's failure to separate from her first love-object. The next section will extend this analysis of object intolerance by examining how closely patriarchal conceptualisations of femininity resemble the pathological composition of melancholia.

I will show how society's refusal to sanction a role for such women outside of its prescriptive regime forces the narrators of both of the Lau texts cited in this chapter to form abusive relationships with a series of unsuitable men in an attempt to escape to a new 'otherness,' which is not haunted by the constant intrusion of a past conformity to patriarchal structures. This bid to achieve mastery is often at odds with their women's positioning within the symbolic, where women are frequently trapped in the double bind of wanting to adhere to the ideology which has been implanted, whilst bitterly and rebelliously angry about their own negative relation to the symbolic order. This disabling relation to patriarchal structures situates them within a masochistic and addictive subplot which creates a paradoxical situation where their marginality forces upon them the construct of abject, which in turn leads to objectification, thus urging them to judge themselves in terms of the predicates of the symbolic order.

Frequently caught in a present permeated with images of degradation and pain imported from their pasts, Lau's protagonists struggle to escape a

relentless and addictive cycle of sex, masochism and violence. This constant slippage into a masochistic and addictive aesthetic informs all of the fractured histories contained in Lau's stories, often producing a series of *tableaux vivants*, where the female protagonists seem locked into a mode of erotic contemplation which depresses their ability to act. In both of the narratives discussed in this chapter, masochism features as the addictive trope underpinning the series of repetitive and unproductive acts, which are used ostensibly to escape damaged subjectivity by regaining psychological agency. This addictive aesthetic is recycled within the theatrical spaces of anonymous hotel room or apartment block, producing a feeling of detachment from the body, which in turn induces a schizophrenic split between mind and body. The pervasive sense of inertia, which occurs as a result of this split, only serves to heighten the hallucinogenic sense of unreality which divides the world from the subject in an addictive space.[18] Interpellated by a web of sociological and ideological fixes, both characters conform to the classic notion of the addict, a subject who according to Vice 'can only orientate her or himself, in addictive fashion, in relation to something outside the self, which appears to offer the opportunity for incorporation or possession, like a glass of whisky, but which also remains autonomous, like the bottle' (1992:118).

The feminist critic and psychotherapist, Charlotte Davis Kasl has noted how 'Addictive behaviour keeps shame constantly recycling, and the shame increased the tendency toward violence', forcing one of her clients to admit that 'It took increasingly more and more violence to get "high", to become sexually aroused, or to feel anything at all' (1990:199). Therefore, patriarchal constructions of femininity and melancholia operate in a similar manner to

patriarchy and imperialism where, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin observe, both of these political metanarratives 'exert analogous forms of domination over those they render subordinate' (1998:101). Similarly, Ashcroft *et al* claim that 'both discourses share a sense of disarticulation from an inherited language and have thus attempted to recover a linguistic authenticity via a pre-colonial language or a primal feminine tongue' (102). Women's experience of disenfranchisement from dominant languages within a post-colonial context is particularly apposite for the study of melancholic disaffection figured in Evelyn Lau's narratives. As we have already seen, the narrator of *Other Women* reveals her internalised feelings of revulsion against the subordinate position that she occupies in relation to dominant signifying practices by projecting her distress onto a series of surrogate maternal objects.

In 'Roses', the narrator's experience of internalised oppression is complicated by her racial identity and her professional status as a prostitute. This double marginality is clearly evident in her tacit assumption of subordinate, even masochistic, subject positions in relation to a series of abusive male authority figures. The narrator's sense of discomfort at being negatively located within patriarchal relations is intimated at the beginning of the story when she reveals that the psychiatrist's favoured pedagogical texts included *Lolita* and *The Story of O*, both exemplary narratives of female subordination (1994: 29). Although the narrator's racial identity is never fully revealed, markers of race are strategically inserted in the text. The mask that the psychiatrist purchases from a Japanese import store to ostensibly 'scare off his rage', unsettles the cultural signifiers of race, class and gender (32). His imputed rage, therefore, emerges from his own problematised relationship to dominant signifying

practices. Indeed, his proximity to the disturbing 'otherness' of the narrator

revives the spectre of his own ambiguous positioning within dominant

discourses and institutions. Later, the narrator reveals that the psychiatrist is

not a Canadian national. Rather, he is himself an imported citizen from

overseas who unsettles this settler culture by working 'for two years in one of

our worst mental institutions' (30).

Lau's text therefore exploits the cultural deficit that separates the Orient

from the Occident according to Edward Said's notion of Orientalism. Ashcroft

et al quote directly from Said's germinal study *Orientalism* (1978), in order to

explain the underlying dynamics that maintain its structure. Orientalism is,

therefore according to Said:

> the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient 'dealing with it by
> making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by
> teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western
> style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.
> (1998:168)

The constructed nature of this institutionalised instrument of power and

authority can be clearly detected in the relationship between the psychiatrist

and the narrator Their brief encounter is grounded in 'Orientalist' aesthetics

and politics, drawing on stereotypical polarised constructions of Occident and

Orient to explain their manipulative and abusive exchanges. Accordingly, the

narrator observes that 'after two weeks his tenderness went the way of his

plants' (1994: 32). The brutal regime of carefully orchestrated abuse that

follows reveals the fragility of Orientalism as a theoretically constructed

category that was designed to engineer artificial power differentials. Hence the

narrator invites the psychiatrist to beat her, stretching obediently across his

knees in 'the way my father used to like to see me do' (33). Here, the narrator

assumes the position of the colonial other who is defined by her relationship to imperial discourse. The position of the other is contingent upon her subordinate position to the coloniser thereby performing a regulatory function within the overarching metanarrative of imperialism. By internalising a marginalised subject position in relation to the imperial centre represented by the psychiatrist, the narrator automatically occupies a masochistic position that rapidly exceeds the prescriptions of role-play.[19] Indeed, the brutalising nature of their exchanges are described in aesthetic terms that reveal the extent of the narrator's marginalised relationship to dominant discourses. Within such a radically bifurcated regime, the narrator describes the explosion of pain inflicted on her by the psychiatrist in epiphanic terms:

> I wiggled obediently and raised my bottom high into the air, the way my father used to like to see me do. Then he moved up to rain blows upon my back. One of them was so painful that I saw colors even with my eyes open; it showered through my body like fireworks. It was like watching a sunset and feeling a pain in your chest at its wrenching beauty, the kind of pain that makes you gasp. (1994:33)

Ashcroft et al's assertion that patriarchy and imperialism operate in conjunction to marginalise the colonised other is clearly evident in this passage. Here, we witness the narrator attempting to trace connections with a network of coercive and abusive practices that have circulated within her past.

However, the narrator's masochistic capitulation to painful excess is itself open to other more empowering interpretations. In her analysis of 'Feminist Theory and Discourse Theory' in Discourse (1997), Sara Mills describes how recent developments in feminist discourse theory have produced a more sophisticated theoretical approach to Foucault's work on discourse (1997: 80). Mills demonstrates how feminist discourse theorists such as Dorothy Smith have problematised traditional Foucauldian analysis on confessional discourse

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by extending his original terms of reference. Mills contends that feminist discourse analysts such as Smith have produced:

> a more socially context-bound view of discourse, which is attentive to what individual subjects do within and through discursive structures, rather than assuming that discourses force us to behave in certain ways.
> (1997: 86)

By adding the variables of class, race and gender to the original Foucauldian model of power relations within confessional discourse it is possible to discern a more empowered position for women within this particular disciplinary regime. Viewed through such a theoretical lens, Evelyn Lau's protagonists and narrators attempt to work through and hence recover some of the political power that has been eroded by their subordinate position within patriarchal relations. In 'Roses', the artifice of the sado-masochistic contract binding the two central protagonists exposes the underlying discursive structures that produce their stylised behavioural patterns. Moreover, it is apparent that the narrator of this text attempts to manipulate these structures productively in order to achieve a more active subject position within the hierarchically organised context of the heterosexual patriarchal power base that is embedded in this particular sado-masochistic contract. Hence, the narrator attempts to use pain as a vector of power by claiming that 'the pain cleansed my mind until it breathed like the streets of a city after a good and bright rain. It washed away the dirt inside me' (1994: 33/4). Furthermore, the narrator exploits pain to negotiate more empowered subject positions within other cultural contexts and narrative forms. Hence, the material and ideological specificities of the narrator's current situation described in the text encourage the narrator to make links with her past.

The narrator begins to formulate a fantasy of her early life that is shaped by the cultural dynamics of her present situation. Stevi Jackson elaborates on the significance of socialising discursive formations in her analysis of 'Love, Romance and Subjectivity' in her chapter on 'Women and Heterosexual Love' contained in the *Romance Revisited* (1992) collection. Jackson's commentary on women's attraction to violent coercive narratives is particularly relevant to this discussion. Jackson contends that 'Emotions are not simply 'felt' as internal states provoked by the unconscious sense of lost infantile satisfactions - they are actively structured and understood through culturally specific discourses' (1992:57). Furthermore, Jackson maintains that these discourses 'differentiate between love as nurture, being 'in love', lust and sexual arousal - all of which are conflated in the psychoanalytic concept of desire' (57).

Crucially, therefore, Lau's narrator begins to fabricate a narrative of childhood bliss when she is constrained by the stylised manoeuvres of a sado-masochistic framework. Suddenly, the current scene shifts to reveal an earlier encounter with her father where:

> The sounds melt like gold, like slow Sunday afternoons. I think of cats and the baby grand piano in the foyer of my father's house. I think of the rain that gushes down the drainpipes outside my father's bathroom late at night when things begin to happen. I think of the queerly elegant black notes on sheets of piano music. The light is flooding generously through the windows and I am a little girl with a pink ribbon in my hair and a ruffled dress (1994:35)

The links which the narrator has forged between the psychiatrist and her father are therefore drawn from the literary and romantic staples of Western culture. The narrative that the narrator devises is melded from a wide range of conflicting discourses. The narrator of 'Roses' attempts to anchor emotion to a limited repertoire of unsuitable narratives, firmly locating the female subject in a

subordinate position. The recuperation of the childhood narrative referred to above, is therefore transformed into an inverted *bildungsroman* where the key protagonist's quest for fulfilment always returns to its original location on the underside of patriarchal binary structures.

However, as Stevi Jackson suggests in the conclusion to her chapter on 'Women and Heterosexual Love', 'if ... emotions are culturally constructed, they are not fixed for all time' (1992: 58). Lau's story illustrates that emotions are indeed shaped by the discourses that frame them. The concluding paragraphs of 'Roses' also expose the disruptive influence of desire upon the cultural construction of emotions as well as the durability of the discourses that frame them. Moreover, Lau's tale of coercive desire and masochistic subordination reveals a disturbing link between the construction of femininity and pathological mourning within Western discourses.

In the final paragraph of the story, the narrator recalls how the psychiatrist promised her 'a rose garden' (1994: 36). This Edenic representation of romance, like so many other tropes and clichés in the story, is immediately undercut by our knowledge that, in this case, the 'flowers of romance' are in fact bruises which range like 'a rash of raspberry dots, like seeds' (36) between the narrator's breasts. This elegiac rendition of what can only be described as a paradoxical representation of sado-masochistic romance, perfectly captures the disturbing correlation between dominant constructions of femininity and melancholia within Western discourse. Lau's narratives present a pessimistic representation of female subjectivity that operates within the same punitive boundaries as Freud's classical definition of melancholia, discussed above. As Judith Butler maintains, this is a self-

negating process where the melancholic 'is said to incorporate that other into the very structure of the ego, taking on attributes of the other and "sustaining" the other through magical acts of imitation' (1992: 57). Indeed, *Other Women* and 'Roses' offer representations of women who are immersed in a received narrative of pathological mourning where they appear to be unable to determine or generate meaning.

However, as we have already seen, discursive structures are unstable sites where power relations are constantly renegotiated. Consequently, strategies of resistance are an integral part of this intrinsically fluid relationship. As Mills maintains, it is 'the process of engaging with discursive structures that constitutes us as particular types of individuals or subject positions' (1997:96). Female subjectivity as portrayed within Lau's texts is therefore a flexible construct where the individual narrators attempt to undermine the disciplinary practices that inscribe the cultural markers of pathological melancholy on their passive bodies.[20] The resilience of the binary structures that systematically reinforce and thereby regulate the boundaries of subjectivities ensure their cultural longevity within discursive frameworks. There is therefore a cultural investment in the key ideological concepts of pathological femininity and melancholia that pressurises the female subject to submit to the disciplinary imperatives of dominant discourses. It is then, the self-negating production of pathologically- inflected femininity within patriarchal structures that manoeuvres Evelyn Lau's marginalised subjects into subordinate subject positions. The rigid demarcation of Lau's protagonists into cultural spheres that reinforce their marginality appears to prohibit any opportunities of self-expression or indeed self-empowerment. However, as we have already seen, the discourses through

which melancholia circulates are subject to change and modification, femininity being perhaps the most notable example. Discursive structures do not therefore exist in isolation; they are bounded by other discourses that disturb the foundations on which their frameworks are built. The resulting fractures in the overall structure of these discursive frameworks are therefore caused by individual subjects who operate within their ideological parameters.

In the concluding section therefore, there will be an assessment of the ideological pressures exerted by women on oppressive patriarchal structures to establish what progress has been made in constructing a discursive space that is not predicated on pathological constructions of femininity and melancholia. Furthermore, there will be an analysis of the role played by language in the disestablishment of the restrictive disciplinary practice of melancholia within dominant discourses. Finally, there will be an evaluation of art as a discursive site that is traversed by conflicting power relations. The premise that art is a conflictual model that privileges the masculine subject will be followed by an appraisal of the progress made by women to participate productively within this discursive field.

(vi) Conclusion

Within this chapter, I have focused attention on the intersecting modalities of mourning, melancholia and the twinned states of addiction and co-dependency that frequently underwrite a depressive subject position. Additionally, I have drawn attention to women's exclusion from melancholia as a representational form. Furthermore, I established that women's disenfranchised position within this particular discursive field was reinforced by patriarchal notions of femininity which are predicated on women's subordinate

relationship to man within western culture. Moreover, it then became possible to detect a discursive similarity between the cultural constructs of melancholia and femininity. As Juliana Schiesari, maintains in the introduction to her ground-breaking study of melancholia:

> Thus as early as Ficino and as late as Freud melancholia appears as a specific representational form for male creativity, one whose practice converted the feeling of disempowerment into a privileged artefact. The melancholic not only became perceived as an exclusive someone but also perceived himself as exclusive (1992: 8)

It becomes increasingly clear that masculine ownership of this culturally privileged discursive construct is made possible by women's expulsion from their celebrated ideological project. The restraints that prevent women from accessing and therefore decoding the underlying rules of engagement within this discursive enterprise are therefore remarkably similar to the patriarchal structuring of femininity.

Indeed, Freud's description of the constitution of the melancholic ego in 'Mourning and Melancholia' is informed by a binary dialectic predicated on the subordination of the object by the dominant subject. Hence, Freud manipulates the discursive rules that govern his definition of melancholia by maintaining that 'in this condition one part of the ego sets itself over against the other, judges it critically, and, as it were, looks upon it as an object' (1957i:157). The asymmetrical power relations implicit in patriarchal definitions of femininity are thus encapsulated within Freud's revised notion of the melancholic 'condition'. The resolutely patriarchal inflection accorded to what Freud now clearly regards as a pathological condition is reinforced by the switch in gender attribution that occurs a few paragraphs later. Once Freud has established that melancholia is a condition that should be subjected to authoritarian scrutiny, he proceeds to

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construct the erstwhile masculine melancholic subject as a 'woman who loudly pities her husband for being bound to such a poor creature as herself.' (1957i:158). Freud's construction of the melancholic as a dispossessed woman who has internalised a version of the self-negating rhetoric, endorsed by the burgeoning medical institutions of the late nineteenth century, is symptomatic of an ideological project that was constantly threatened by other discursive structures. As we have already seen in the introduction to this thesis, revisions to existing notions of sexuality and femininity impacted upon nineteenth century medical institutions who in turn needed a plentiful supply of disadvantaged female subjects to validate their professional status. Additionally, compliant female minds and bodies were required to secure masculine integrity As Showalter remarks:

> Hysteria [was] tolerated because in fact it has no power to effect cultural change; it is much safer for the patriarchal order to encourage and allow discontented women to express their wrongs through psychosomatic illness than to have them agitating for economic and legal rights (1987:161)

Within the draconian context of nineteenth century institutional regimes, it is clear that cultural constructions of femininity and hysterical malfunction were yoked together to allow the patriarchal order to recreate itself at women's expense. The penalties exacted by such institutions were amply demonstrated in the preceding chapter in Elizabeth Smart's autobiographical account of her thwarted attempt to defy authoritarian pressure by escaping to Mexico with her married lover. After being forcibly detained by the border police, she echoes the chief inspector's remarks:

> Let this be a lesson ... You should have gone to different hotels, you should have lived in different countries, you should have been born in different epochs, in different worlds, then none of this would have happened (1992:49)

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Here, Smart articulates her own experience of a culturally constructed femininity in and through a representative of one of the most powerful and influential institutions of the patriarchal order. By ventriloquising the inspector's indictment of dissonant female behavioural patterns, Smart uses the language embedded in discourse to launch a metaphorical broadside against the inspector's harsh invective. In this example, reproduction of the inspector's directives counters the institutionalised authority invested in the policeman's statement by mocking the discursive restraints that this patriarchal figurehead attempts to impose on her status as a single white female. Therefore, Smart's exposure of the discursive components of the policeman's speech demonstrate that she cannot be manoeuvred into the familiar subordinate subject position endorsed by the patriarchal order. This particular 'rebellious daughter'[21] therefore, refuses to be placated by the discursive constraints of dominant discourse.

Rebellious counter-discourses indicate that those subjects who suffer oppression by such discursive constraints demand positive changes to the psychological and material realities of their existence. The overall shape of the emancipatory changes implicit in counter-discourses are frequently masked by the shadow of the oppressive construct that restricts the oppressed subject's autonomy. The subject's discontent is therefore frequently experienced as an escalating inchoate force that compels them to demand change before they have produced an agenda that explicitly clarifies their political position. This intensely claustrophobic discursive space is reflected in the cramped physical structures that contain the melancholic protagonists of Evelyn Lau's narratives. Indeed, the dilapidated physical dimensions of the anonymous quasi-public

spaces described in Lau's writings closely resemble the discursive status of melancholy femininity within the work of all of the writers under consideration in this thesis.

The bleak uncompromising spaces sketched by Lau in the novel and short story discussed in this chapter are refracted through the lens of protagonists who appear to obey an inner compulsion that forces them into an attitude of sacrificial servitude. It is this emotional rectitude that frustrates readers; indeed in her review of *Fresh Girls* for the *Observer* newspaper, Julie Myerson claims that Lau's nihilistic narratives left her longing for the protagonists 'to quit the sex-shop circle altogether and head out into the world' (1995:18). The self-enclosed vision espoused by Lau's narrators is firmly resisted by the protagonists of counter-cultural novels written by men. Within novels like William Burroughs' *Junky* (1977) and Jack Kerouac's *On The Road* (1976), the disenfranchised masculine narrators are depicted using the open road as metaphorical site from which they devise a counter-cultural attack that is highly critical of the dominant discourses that prevailed in post-war American culture. Accordingly, Burroughs' literary alter-ego is able to successfully manipulate medical and judicial institutions to his own advantage, persuading Mexican 'croakers' or doctors to issue counterfeit prescriptions for illicit drugs' for five pesos' (1977:118). Writing at a similar time as Elizabeth Smart, the geographical and metaphorical terrain of the Mexican border is accessible to Burroughs. Unlike Smart, however, Burroughs is able to conduct a range of illegal activities that escape the attention of the police authorities.

It becomes increasingly clear therefore that the masochistic aesthetic that informs Lau's writings is a product of the pathological inflection of a

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melancholic femininity that is culturally engineered by dominant discourses. The emotional anomie that stifles the process of working through grief is therefore a product of inflexible discourses of feminine behaviour rather than a fixation on an imagined loss. Furthermore, the disciplinary power that is articulated in and through the female body determines the compulsive behavioural patterns described in Lau's writings rather than any underlying neurosis. The disciplinary powers invested in patriarchal discourses therefore contribute to the artificial production of femininity. Deviation from the cultural conventions encoded within the overall construction of femininity convince the female subject that her behaviour is unacceptable and cannot therefore be processed by the normalising mechanisms implicit in dominant discursive structures. Within this discursive context, melancholia or depression represents the ideological chasm that separates the set of behavioural patterns sanctioned by dominant discursive practices and those that remain outside of the constraints of the discourses of femininity.

Julia Kristeva's theorisation of feminine depression and melancholia sits uneasily with the discursive explanation of female modes of grieving outlined above. There are however some common reference points within both of these theoretical approaches. Proponents of feminist discourse theory would agree with Kristeva's assertion that feminine depression occurs when the subject is unable to access dominant signifying practices. However, Kristeva's rendition of the melancholic as a 'depressed narcissist' who 'mourns not an Object but the Thing' (1989:13), would prove theoretically problematic for devotees of discourse theory. The crux of the problem resides in Kristeva's allegiance to a reciprocal working relationship between subject and object. Furthermore, her

vague and inconclusive description of the 'Thing' as 'the center of attraction and repulsion, seat of the sexuality from which the object of desire will become separated' (13), fails to theorise why some women become depressed whilst others do not.

Kristeva overcomes this theoretical conundrum by postulating that melancholy is contingent on female sexuality where *'its addiction to the maternal Thing and its lesser aptitude for restorative perversion'* (1989: 71) make women especially susceptible to the debilitating effects of the melancholic condition. Kristeva's contention that women's psychological composition renders them particularly vulnerable to melancholic depression is a concept that many feminist theorists find particularly challenging. For example, Janice Doane and Devon Hodges argue that problems arise within this theoretical equation because 'The mother's role is naturalized when she becomes the origin of sexual difference rather than a casualty of existing structures of sexual difference' (1992: 61).

Likewise, for Juliana Schiesari, the intensely conservative imperatives embedded in Kristeva's theorisation of melancholy present insurmountable problems for the feminist critic. Schiesari is uncomfortable with Kristeva's essentialist construction of the biologically interchangeable mother/daughter dyad which is crucial to her ideas on the origins of female melancholia. Schiesari believes that Kristeva's formulations 'replicate the very narrow set of possibilities available to women under patriarchal law, namely silent subservience or a reactive violence whose target always seems to be another woman' (1992:92). Schiesari therefore advances the view that Kristeva's conceptualisation of female depression merely reiterates the profoundly

mysogynistic trajectory of the phallic order. Indeed, Kristeva's explanation of feminine depression as a casualty of inadequate separation or differentiation between mother and daughter supports classic Freudian interpretations of femininity as passive, silent and pathological. This situation is clearly delineated in Lau's novel *Other Women*, where as the title suggests, women compete with other women for the imagined security offered by the phallus. Schiesari argues that Kristeva's theory fails because it is located in the imaginary instead of the symbolic order. By relegating women's melancholia or depression to the self-enclosed space of the imaginary, Schiesari maintains that Kristeva upholds the conservative ethos of the phallic order which instates what she refers to as 'misogynist rivalry with other women' (1992:93). Schiesari argues that it is imperative that female melancholy must be rearticulated at the level of the symbolic, where:

> Only the radical construction of a feminine symbolic can give value and legitimacy to the voicing of women's depression, not as some personal failure to "differentiate" but as the very site of mourning, of expression, and of community (1992: 93)

Furthermore, Schiesari contends that Kristeva's construction of a feminised quest for the lost object within the imaginary merely perpetuates the gendered hierarchies imbricated in patriarchal definitions of loss. Indeed, Kristeva's own definition of this feminised melancholic quest demonstrates the self-reflexive rhetoric embedded in her own theory. Here, the depressed woman 'wanders in pursuit of continuously disappointing adventures and loves; or else retreats, disconsolate and aphasic, alone with the unnamed Thing' (1989:13). As Schiesari correctly maintains, feminist analysis must strive to 'redeem the cause of depression to give the depression of women the value and dignity traditionally bestowed on the melancholia of men' (1992: 93).

The registering of female loss within a community that not only tolerates but actively encourages positive representations and interpretations of women's modes of grieving is imperative if we are to dismantle the patriarchal fiction that women are and always will be pathologically depressed beings. Abraham and Torok's reworking of Sandor Ferenczi's concept of 'introjection' in 'Mourning *or* Melancholia: Introjection *versus* Incorporation' exploits the sociocultural potential contained within the psychoanalytical term introjection. Their new definition of the term shifts the term to the symbolic register where it now describes the process whereby language compensates for absence within a '*comprehended* or *shared*' 'community of empty mouths' (1994:128). The two theorists' revision of Ferenczi's original definition of transferential love is therefore expanded to accommodate the principles of positive representation of loss. Here, the melancholic or depressed solution to grief is no longer inextricably linked to the problem remaining locked inside the lost object, which is then imprisoned within the enclosed space of the imaginary.

The question of linguistic and artistic reparation, implicit in Abraham and Torok's revisionary interpretation of the psychoanalytic term introjection, will be continued in the next chapter. The liberatory potential contained in Abraham and Torok's theory of language forming a psychic bridge, which can provide the melancholic subject with the means to destroy the psychological tomb of their her/his self-censorship, will be explored in relation to Sarah Sheard's second novel *The Swing Era* (1993). The painful transitionary politics implicated in Abraham and Torok's theoretical model, referred to above, are tested within the divided and contradictory relationship that exists between a daughter and her recently deceased mother. Furthermore, the retrospective (re)evaluation that

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takes place within the novel is constantly disturbed by the disciplinary pressures exerted by a society that is threatened by the restructuring of women's political and social roles.

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[1]   See Chapter 2, p. 81.

[2]   See Vice (1992) for a comprehensive discussion of how the erotomaniac functions within literary texts. The chapter 'Addicted to Love' also provides insight into how the consumer of addictive texts becomes implicated in an addictive continuum through the act of reading. See Sue Vice (1992) 'Addicted to Love' in Lynne Pearce and Jackie Stacey (eds) in *Romance Revisited*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, pp. 117 - 127.

[3]   See the introduction to this thesis for a more detailed overview of the historical construction of female hysteria, especially pp. 16 – 21.

[4]   See Chapter 2 of this thesis, pp. 58 - 63. Also, see Brigid Brophy's foreword to the Flamingo edition of *By Grand Central Station* (1992), London: Flamingo, pp. 7 - 13.

[5]   Janet Sayers interprets Freud's use of the term identification in relation to depression as the process whereby 'the libido - and with it the abandoned object (both hated and loved) - are withdrawn into the ego (quoted in Wright, 1992: 167). Later still, he implied that this involves regression from libidinal object ties, to oral incorporation of the object - that is, to an original form of emotional tie preceding and initially indistinguishable from object-love'. See Janet Sayers 'Identification' in Elizabeth Wright (1992) (ed.) *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary*, Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 167 - 168.

[6]   Lorraine D. Siggins provides a more detailed survey of the literature regarding mourning. Siggins provides a range of examples including those of Abraham and Fenichel who use mourning as a theoretical point of departure to elaborate on object-loss and introjection in abnormal states of mind. See Lorraine Siggins (1966) 'Mourning: A Critical Survey of the Literature' in *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 47, pp. 14 - 25.

[7]   See Lorraine Siggins (1966) 'Mourning: A Critical Survey' in *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 47, 14, p 21 for an extended discussion of this issue.

[8]   This is especially problematic with regard to narcissism. Freud equates narcissism with idealised romantic love, believing that the subject always sustains the tendency that emerged in infancy, to form a romantic attachment with an object which has been infused with a version of our self projected onto an other. Rosalind Minsky provides an interesting interpretation of narcissism and its implications for mourning. She provides an interesting reading of the film *Truly, Madly, Deeply*, drawing on the narcissistic elements inherent in the grieving subject's relationship with her dead husband. Her gloss on the film draws attention to the ambivalence that the subject always directs onto the lost object and her/his need to work through this anger if they are to resume normal relations in the future. If Freud is saying that the states of mourning and melancholia conclude in a similar manner, his original elaborate differentiation of the two states seems at best misguided and not a useful prototype for Deutsch to draw on. See Rosalind Minksy (1996) 'Freud: The Rejection of Femininity' in *Psychoanalysis and Gender. An Introductory Reader*, London: Routledge, pp. 25 - 75.

[9]   Interestingly, Marie Cardinal refers to her own depressive illness as 'The Thing' in *The Words to Say It*, (1983), trans. Pat Goodheart, London: Pan Books, see especially p. 15.

[10]   See especially 'Psychoanalysis and Its Abject: What Lurks Behind The Fear Of The Mother' M.F. Bruneau (1992) in *Studies in Psychoanalytic Theory*, Fall, 1:2, pp. 24 - 38.

[11]   This seems to represent at best a simplistic and reductive account of female subjectivity and at worst a rather cynical construction of heterosexual relations at the expense of homosexual. For a similar dismissal of this sexual 'leap of faith' see Lisa Kennedy's review of *Black Sun* 'Art Ache: The Last Temptation of Julia Kristeva' in *Village Voice Literary Supplement*, (1990), November, p.15.

[12]   Full discussion of Lacanian notions regarding the unconscious structured as a language is not possible here. For a more detailed commentary read, Vice (1996) 'Jacques Lacan: the Unconscious Structured As A Language', pp.115-119 and Minsky (1996) 'Lacan: The Meaning of the Phallus' pp. 137 - 178.

[13]   Lau's preoccupation with her own childhood, along with its constant disruption of her adult life, is recorded in her interview with Andrew Billen (1994). Gudrun Will (1995) expresses her frustration with Lau's neo-autobiographical stance in *Other Women* when she writes: 'It seems clear that Fiona is a mask for the author, whose talents are simply transported to the

visual arts' (41), implying that her writing suffers from a rather simplistic mixing of fact and fiction. See Gudrun Will (1995) 'Juvenilia' in *The Vancouver Review*, Fall/Winter, pp. 41 - 42.

[14] For an extremely lucid analysis of the cultural implications of Freudian theory regarding resolution of the Oedipal Complex, see Rosalind Minsky (1996) 'Freud: The Rejection of Femininity' pp. 25 - 77 and 'Feminist Interpretations' pp. 178 - 205 in *Psychoanalysis and Gender: An Introductory Reader* for an appraisal of the critical responses made by two French feminist theorists, Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray.

[15] Lorrie Moore's collection of short stories, *Self-Help* (1998), is interesting within this context. In the first story, 'How To Be an Other Woman', the narrator describes a brief relationship with a married man. As the title suggests, Moore's narrative is located within the discursive framework of a therapeutic self-help manual. Moore therefore simultaneously updates and ironises the didactic imperatives of the traditional conduct manual which maps out a pattern of female behaviour that is sanctioned by dominant discourses. Significantly, for this particular project, Moore's narrative follows a similar trajectory to that outlined in Lau's *Other Women*, where the central protagonist becomes increasingly fascinated with the image of her lover's wife or partner. In both of these texts, the narrators use 'other women' as maternal surrogates with whom they attempt to resolve their ambivalent relationships with their own mothers.

[16] As the title of Lau's novel suggests, the author's attention is be focused on the narrators' relations with other women. The novel is most successful when the author deals with Fiona's reactions to other women, particularly Helen. Critics such as Gudrun Will (1995) have also noted this, as well as their frustration with the way that the psychological implications of such relations are often treated as a side issue: 'The title of her book points to what is best in it - though even here there is a problem, in that all the interesting episodes are peripheral to the main action'. See Gudrun Will (1995) 'Juvenilia' in *The Vancouver Review*, Fall/Winter, pp. 41 - 42.

[17] I am borrowing the title of Freud's paper 'Family Romances' (1957o). Within this paper, Freud elaborates his theory that neurotics find it particularly difficult to achieve independence from parental authority. Freud contends that these individuals often replace their parents by others who typically enjoy a higher social station at the level of fantasy. Freud maintains that these parental substitutes represent the subject's wish to recover the idealised image of their parents that prevailed in early childhood. The narrator of *Other Women* attempts to elide her own troubled relationship with her parents by replacing them with her lover and his wife. See *Collected Papers Vol. V*, trans. Joan Rivière, London: The Hogarth Press, pp. 74 - 79.

[18] Gill Coren (1994) notes that Lau's 'faithful devotion to the bleakness of her characters', leaves the reader 'wanting to understand them better, emotional alienation is all around but how and why? We never find out' (15). As I suggest within my argument, this is because Lau's characters have repressed their ability to mourn, because of their incorporation of a shameful secret imported from their past. This leads to their tendency to literalise situations, which is reflected in the formal structure of the text. See Gill Coren (1994) 'Cold Comfort Girl' in *The Times*, 24 December, p. 15.

[19] The study of the Czech-Canadian artist Jana Sterback, by Jennifer McLerran explores the manner in which disciplinary cultural pressures operate in and through the female body is significant to this discussion. Interestingly, according to McLerran, Sterbak maintains that she believes that both Czechoslovakia and Canada are characterised by a "colonized identity". McLerran argues that Sterbak's awareness of the pressures exerted on the subject by this 'doubling' of imperialist discourses informs her work. In McLerran's words, 'Sterbak shows us that the individual as constructed through discourse is always both subject to and subject of disciplinary power' (537). See Jennifer McLerran (1998) 'Disciplined Subjects and Docile Bodies in the Work of Contemporary Artist Jana Sterbak', *Feminist Studies* 24, 3, Fall, pp. 535 - 552.

[20] See Sara Mills' example of anorexia exerting discursive pressure on the female body in *Discourse* (1998), London: Routledge, pp. 94 - 95.

[21] The term 'rebellious daughter is borrowed from Elaine Showalter (1987) in *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and Culture 1880 - 1980*, London: Virago, see p. 145.

CHAPTER FOUR

NOW YOU SEE IT - NOW YOU DON'T: MELANCHOLIC AMBIVALENCE IN SIRI HUSTVEDT'S *THE BLINDFOLD*

(i)   Introduction

> But the melancholic cannot bear the continuous oscillation of things
> between being and nothingness which leaves its dizzying rhythm imprinted
> upon the world and reality, somewhere on the border between
> appearance and the inapparent ... He has broken with his forefathers'
> reasoning and with their orderly succession of dead men. Rather than
> accept the order of impermanence, he immobilizes all things in a dead
> landscape in which they may be embraced in a single gaze containing a
> love which crosses the borders of necrophilia.
> (Rella, 1987:30)

This chapter will look at the inscription of a melancholy ambivalence in Siri Hustvedt's first novel, *The Blindfold* (1992). My principal concern within this chapter is to reveal how this ambivalence reveals the narrator's reluctance to undergo the arduous process of 'reality testing' outlined in Freud's paper 'Mourning and Melancholia', first published in 1917. The defensive rhetorical strategies, adopted by Hustvedt's narrator in *The Blindfold* , differ from the narrative operations of postponed mourning observed in Evelyn Lau's work, discussed in the previous chapter. The continual repetition of identification and destruction of the other, recreated within Lau's narratives, is not present within Hustvedt's novel. Instead, the regressive identificatory process delineated in Lau's work is replaced by a fetishistic disavowal of the lost love-object in *The Blindfold*.

The narrative deployment of the lost object, as a fetish or partial object, to temporarily forego the thoroughgoing task of mourning can be clearly discerned in Hustvedt's tale of narcissistic ambivalence. Within this chapter, I intend to question what is at stake in the narrator's disavowal of the lost object.

As Laura Mulvey maintains, in the preface to her study of *Fetishism and Curiosity* (1996), fetishism is a 'psychological and social structure that disavow[s] knowledge in favour of belief' (xi). In what follows, I will focus on the terrifying knowledge the fetish conceals.

By scrutinising the use of the fetish as a structuring device within Hustvedt's text we are reminded of Mulvey's notion that the fetish is a complex and contradictory figure. In Mulvey's words:

> The more the fetish exhibits itself, the more the presence of a traumatic past event is signified. The 'presence' can only be understood through a process of decoding because the 'covered' material has necessarily been distorted into the symptom. The fetish is on the cusp of consciousness, acknowledging its own processes of concealment and signalling the presence of, if not the ultimate meaning of, a historical event (1996: xiv)

This chapter investigates the nature of the paradoxical 'open secret' half-concealed by fetishism that can only be read through its mangled textual symptoms. As Mulvey points out, the fetish is typically deployed in a liminal zone where the terrifying event preceding its use always threatens to disrupt the subject's consciousness. As the novel's title suggests, the blindfold is a literal and figurative shield that allows the subject to cling to an illusory psychological *status quo*. However, the inadequacy of the blindfold as a protective device is clearly apparent in both its physical and semantic constitution. The assumption of the blindfold induces a blindness that folds the subject back into a nostalgic sphere, stifling agency by shunting the subject between a multiplying chain of deferred signifiers.

The blindfold, as fetish, within Hustvedt's book is a figurative cry for help by Iris Vegan, the novel's young narrator. As Mulvey claims, the 'fetish acknowledges its own traumatic history like a red flag, symptomatically

signalling a site of psychic pain' (1996: 12). Unlike the youthful protagonists of Lau's narratives, who carefully concealed the origins of their pain, Hustvedt's narrator insistently draws attention to the hidden presence of an historical event that constantly disturbs her consciousness. The narrator's belief in the screen that obscures the source of her pain, in turn, incites the curiosity of the reader who embarks on a quest to uncover the traumatic event embedded in the narrator's past. The need to restore what Mulvey refers to as 'the delicate link between cause and symptom' (12), provides the narrative impetus in Hustvedt's story of sliding psycho-sexual identity.

The tenuous link between cause and symptom involves a dialectic between past and present that has been temporarily severed by the confused narrator. The uneasy truce that separates past from present within some women's lives has been investigated by Linda Anderson who conjectures that:

> [The hysteric's] sickness is a symptom of a sickness which might thus be more accurately attributed to the symbolic itself. The woman's turning towards the past could also be taken, therefore, as a gesture of regret towards the present and towards a symbolic system, which, constructed only in terms of the masculine subject, denies her a place or a home within it (1997: 9).

This sense of exile described by Anderson is familiar to us through the work of Smart's *By Grand Central Station*. As we may recall, the narrator's sense of belonging was systematically eroded by the demands exerted by an oppressive patriarchal regime. As the novel progressed, the narrator was alienated from her geographical homeland, family, language and literary tradition. The overwhelming sense of dislocation that envelops the narrator at the end of the novel gestures towards what Anderson calls 'a nostalgic desire for what never was' (9). Smart's narrator experiences retrospective anger and frustration when she reconsiders her past from the perspective of a woman who has been

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abandoned by her lover and destroyed by the patriarchal machinery that orchestrated her every move. In the final chapters of the novel, the narrator is bitterly resentful of the disciplinary measures imposed on her by patriarchy's all-encompassing regime.

Alternatively, in Evelyn Lau's work, the youthful narrators bypass the strenuous task of 'reality testing' by immersing themselves in the regressive process of incorporation where the lost object is encapsulated within the self. The meticulous and convoluted procedures undertaken by these young women to avoid the painstaking work of mourning are a testament to their experience of estrangement within the symbolic world of language and law. Moreover, their desire to recuperate an imaginary plenitude with the lost maternal love-object draws attention to the female subject's isolation within the symbolic domain. Indeed, the female subject's backward glance to an idealised sphere unhampered by patriarchal constraints is a measure of her profound feelings of dislocation within the patriarchal symbolic order. Anderson poses the question, 'what is it that women are trying to remember? What is it that they might have forgotten?' (1997:8). These questions are crucial to this chapter, which focuses on a young woman's need to hastily reassemble familiar reference points within her own world, in order to suppress the knowledge that she is a stranger in what once appeared to be a familiar and comfortable world. As Siri Hustvedt declares in an interview with *Contemporary Authors*:

> Alone and single, Iris looks for a fixed point of reference - a truth in which to ground herself - but can't find it. The world slips and slides beneath her. Her sexual identity shifts as well (1994: 2).

In what follows, I will argue that the melancholic 'hangover' that permeates Iris' existence cannot be simply discharged through the mechanism

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of an essentially hydraulic Freudian economy. Furthermore, I will argue that classic Freudian methodologies, predicated on the piecemeal withdrawal of emotional affect from the lost object during successful mourning, positions women within an etiolated psychological landscape where loss is always double. This doubling of loss reverberates throughout the female psyche, after the resolution of the Oedipal complex, when the little girl realises that she is castrated. The little girl's appalling discovery that this raw wound exactly mirrors the lack inscribed on the mother's body is overlaid by her realisation that her physical lack translates into a cultural lack. This all-encompassing cultural disaffection means that she is distanced from the act of representation. Juliana Schiesari claims cultural disenfranchisement means that 'in economic terms ... women's lack has been appropriated and turned against them and against any claims they may make for a lack that is productive, i.e. symbolic' (1992: 64). Loss is endlessly rehearsed within this disabling cultural paradigm preventing women from constructing an empowered subject position within language. The little girl's expulsion from the signifying economy means that she is unable to articulate her sense of a primeval loss or indeed give her grief a name.

(ii)   Blindfold - Or Blind Alley?

Before proceeding with the textual analysis of *The Blindfold*, I would like to clarify the category of fetishism within psychoanalysis that will be used to illuminate my discussion of Hustvedt's novel. The brief discussion that follows reveals how fetishism is deployed to allay cultural fears of the unfixed female body threatening to spiral out of control.

As Laura Mulvey maintains, 'for Freud, the body that is the source of fetishism is the mother's body, uncanny and archaic' (1996: 14). Freud's assertion begs the question, why must the mother's body be expelled from the regulated space of the symbolic? Why must the female subject fear the nurturing body that so closely resembles her own? Some of the answers to this question can be found in Freud's essay on 'Fetishism' (1957). Unusually, Freud attempts to be forthright when describing the fetish, stating that, 'to put it plainly: the fetish is a substitute for the woman's (mother's) phallus which the little boy once believed in and does not wish to forego.' (1957:199). The answer to this question is not as straightforward as Freud would have us believe. What is clear from Freud's explanation is that the exemplary fetishist remains resolutely male, steadfastly resisting the knowledge that his mother's body is in some way intolerable to the symbolic system. Fetishistic practices are thus anchored to sexual difference within a patriarchal signifying economy. After the intervention of the Oedipal complex, the subject 'in progress' must renounce the beloved body that until recently wrapped her in a seamless realm of maternal plenitude, if she is to take up a normative subject position within the symbolic.

The precarious nature of this cultural construct provides a framework for fetishistic practices. As Mulvey notes, the aesthetics of fetishism within patriarchal culture:

> derives from the structure of disavowal in the Freudian model ('I know, but all the same') which creates an oscillation between what is seen and what threatens to erupt into knowledge (1996: 14).

Freud's own knowledge of the unwieldy processes underpinning his notion of fetishism is clearly apparent in his dismissal of alternative theories. Hence, he

confidently recommends that sceptics who 'still doubt the existence of the castration complex or who can still believe that the horror of the female genitals has some other foundation: for instance, that it derives from a supposed memory of the trauma of birth' (1957: 201/2) should rework their own particular theories in the light of his own incontrovertible evidence. Here, Freud has wilfully suppressed knowledge in order to promote belief in his own unstable theory.

Freud's unsupported reference to the proponents of 'birth trauma', perhaps reveals an underlying fear of the work of female analysts such as Melanie Klein. Furthermore, his dismissal of alternative theories draws attention to his own investment in the theory of castration as the pivotal moment in the Oedipal crisis. If fetishism is deployed to ward off the memory of the loss of the primary love-object, instead of the mother's castrated body, then the whole framework of Freudian analysis threatens to collapse. Identification with the idealised mother, combined with a reluctance to give up the unstructured pre-Oedipal state, is precisely the argument put forward by subsequent analysts from Klein to Kristeva, who attempt to situate the female subject within the psychoanalytic project as an active agent rather than the excluded other of the patriarchal Symbolic. According to Julia Kristeva, in *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1986), art is the 'fetish *par excellence*' the mechanism that 'badly camouflages its archaeology' (115). Artistic endeavour lubricates the machinery of the symbolic process by 'reinvesting the maternal *chora* so that it transgresses the symbolic order; and, as a result, this practice easily lends itself to so-called perverse subjective structures' (115). However, Kristeva inserts a cautionary note by stating that poetic function differs from

fetishistic mechanisms because it 'maintains a *signification (Bedeutang)*' (115).
Therefore the text differs from a fetish because 'it *signifies*; in other words, it is
not a *substitute* but a *sign*' (116). *The Blindfold,* as text, demonstrates the
difficulties involved in activating the pre-symbolic semiotic stasis described by
Kristeva in her essay.

(iii)   The Melancholy Fetish

The Blindfold, focuses on the surface of the things and people that
crowd the life of the narrator, the curiously named Iris Vegan.[1]   As Jennifer
Levin observes, we are introduced to the chaotic world of the narrator, a
graduate student at Columbia University 'as she struggles through course work,
translations, oral exams, unsuccessful love affairs and friendships, financial
hardships, nervous collapse' (1992: 33). The uneasiness underlying what Levin
calls an 'academic coming-of-age story' (33), indicates that the narrator feels
her existence to be constantly under threat. Unable to prioritise her activities
the narrator sinks into a listless state where she is unable to work or play. The
involuntary inertia that confines her to her tiny two-room apartment on West
109th Street forces her to focus on the minutiae of what becomes an
increasingly isolated existence. Before long, Iris begins to retreat into the
recent past, projecting her nervous angst onto her ex-lover, Stephen, who she
imagines 'stirring in [his] humid sheets, never comfortable, never relieved' (1).

We learn that the events contained in the novel occurred eight years
earlier (9).[2] The retrospective framing of the key events in the novel is an
indication of a number of unresolved issues embedded in the narrator's past..
Indeed, the opening paragraph of the novel evokes a series of ghostly images

from that time. We sense that the narrator's attachment to her mysterious past is endlessly rehearsed in the present. Hence, a simple case of mistaken identity on a New York street corner, provokes a sudden panic attack, 'in that instant, before I understand that it's someone else, my lungs tighten and I lose my breath' (9).

Iris' return to her past is figured as an *unheimlich* activity which threatens to destabilise her present. Her excavation of her past, announced on the first page of the novel, indicates her desire to rewrite the present. The uneasy dialectic between past and present invades Hustvedt's writing injecting an urgency that betrays her fear of the past returning to undo the present. Past events are recycled to present clues to Iris' shifting identity, which threatens to crumble beneath her. As Hustvedt maintains, Iris is surrounded by people 'who are moved by fictions of their own which infect Iris, influencing her thoughts and actions' (1994: 2). Influence is figured in the novel as invasive and pernicious signalling Iris' sense of unbelonging within an unstable world. Her rewriting of her own identity is an attempt to fix this precarious world and involves a cleansing of the unruly desires that still reverberate within her life eight years later.

Rosemary Betterton claims that:

> Feminist writing of the self ... resembles unfinished business, often taking the form of a series of movements between present and past, self and Other, towards the production of an identity that is still 'in process' (1996: 173).

Betterton's commentary on the way that feminist writing negotiates the fluid categories of identity and difference is reflected in Hustvedt's assertion that 'the mystery of the novel is the omnipresent sense of not knowing: that both the self and others are ultimately enigmatic' (1994: 2). Hustevdt's

tantalising, inconclusive remarks, about the central concerns of her novel, reflect her narrator's fearful fascination with ambiguous identities and spaces. Betterton borrows Kristeva's term, the subject 'in process', to illuminate her account of the relationship between the symbolic and the semiotic in women's writing. She contends that memory operates like the semiotic within language, constantly disturbing linear narratives. Importantly, for this particular text, Betterton draws a parallel between the abandoned maternal home, as figured in Pam Skelton's aptly named *Ambivalence Towards the Mother* (1989), and the lost memory of the mother's body in language. Betterton's interpretation of Skelton's painting as a paradoxical celebration of confinement and freedom can be clearly discerned in Hustvedt's conflicted metaphors of constriction and flight (1996: 176).

Betterton contends that 'the ambivalent feeling of containment and conversely, breaking through boundaries, is a recurring theme' in Skelton's paintings (176). These contradictory impulses also resonate throughout Hustvedt's text. Indeed, the textual emphasis on ephemera or the fleeting moment that cannot be captured in time is intensified with the introduction of the reclusive figure, Mr. Morning. Iris accepts a job examining and tape-recording the affects of a young woman, murdered in the laundry room of Mr. Morning's apartment block. Iris is quickly drawn into the eerie world of her new employer. Iris' entry into the strange interior of Mr. Morning's shabby apartment signals a shift in the narrator's consciousness. Abruptly changing her name, to protect her identity, Iris reveals that:

> It was a defensive act, a way of protecting myself from some amorphous
> danger, but later that false name haunted me; it seemed to move me
> elsewhere, shifting me off course and strangely altering my whole world
> for a time. When I think back on it now, I imagine that lie as the beginning
> of the story, as a kind of door to my uneasiness (11).

Iris' morbid research project unearths disturbing, unprocessed memories within her own life, reviving old conflicts between feminine passivity and her projections of agency and assertion. The unsaid or unspoken hovers above the crumbling dimensions of this shadowy interior, forcing Iris to confront elusive memories from her own past. The unsettling sense of displaced lives being uprooted to disturb the present adds to the charged atmosphere invading the space between Iris and her mysterious employer.

Hustvedt reveals that her novel was generated 'by a fear of secrets' (1994: 1). The fear of the secret past lurking behind every chance encounter is palpable in Hustvedt's excavation of the unknown. Morning's desire to prise 'open the very essence of the inanimate world' by meticulously describing the personal effects of the murdered woman, Sherri Zalewski, unleashes uneasy memories lurking outside the frame of Iris' immediate consciousness. These enigmatic memories are unnerving, forcing the narrator to exercise 'a kind of belated nineteenth-century positivism' (16) when describing the dead woman's effects.

Morning's 'anthropology of the present' (13) disturbs, because it unsettles the easy familiarity of domestic objects and artefacts. Morning's proposal, that the most mundane objects are imbued with a secret life, is a reminder of Freud's supposition that the *heimlich* object is always shadowed by its *unheimlich* otherness.[3] Eventually, fear of the dangerous secret essence locked inside these objects infiltrates the narrator's own apartment inducing episodes of sleeplessness, shadowed by 'shattered images of exhaustion' (19).

Iris' encounter with Mr Morning, whose name is increasingly suggestive of a willed corruption of the word mourning, draws her into a web of intrigue

where she discovers disturbing similarities between her own life and that of her sinister employer. Mr. Morning's tiny apartment is presented as a more foreboding version of Iris's own flat, with its 'tall stacks of newspapers' (10/11) teetering precariously beneath 'a window whose blinds had been tightly shut' (11). The eerie glamour of Mr. Morning's retreat it signals a descent into a shadowy borderline state mysteriously detached from the ebb and flow of everyday life. The gothic ruins of the flat function as a site of abjection, haunted by the repulsive spectre of Morning's decaying flesh. The 'amorphous danger' (11) detected by Iris on entering this deadly space begins to contaminate her whole existence. Morning's flat fascinates because it is situated at the margins of society, where, Julia Kristeva assures us, 'meaning collapses' (1982:2). Unpoliced by social regulations, Morning's flat suggests proliferating, amoral spaces or vacuums awaiting habitation. Morning's flat festers like a carbuncle on the shadowy underside of the metropolis within an alien borderline territory that prefigures Iris' psychological deterioration.

The sense of social and bodily transgression implicit within Iris's encounter with Morning emerges from the ambiguous relationship between inside and outside, present within their transactions. The dialectic between inside and outside has proved problematic for the discipline of psychoanalysis. As LeBihan notes in her analysis of the dissecting room within popular murder mysteries, the feminine has been constructed within psychoanalysis as 'something outside the symbolic; something sealed off, private; something that has to be penetrated, forced open by those that would know its dark secrets' (1997: 5). Mr. Morning's apartment is a dark and amorphous space that mirrors the dark and corrupt interiors attributed to femininity within patriarchal

discourses. His apartment festers like a carbuncle above the busy streets of Manhattan, a grotesque example of unpoliced desires flagrantly violating ideologically imposed boundaries. Both protagonists founder within this visceral, claustrophobic space. Morning uses Iris and the dead woman to displace castration anxieties, informing Iris that he wants to keep her 'pure and her nameless' (28), whilst Iris uses the investigation as an experiment to test the treacherous borderline separating self from other in patriarchal discourses. Iris is fascinated by the dead woman's artefacts that are *unheimlich* reminders of the uneasy negotiation of sameness and difference within mother/daughter relationships. The psychic conflict that ensues creates a restlessness within the narrator that provokes her shifting sexual identity later in the novel.

Hustvedt's novel is an inversion of the traditional *bildungsroman* genre where a typically male protagonist achieves awareness by undergoing a series of 'character-building' life events. In *The Blindfold*, and other novels by contemporary women writers such as Kathryn Harrison's *The Kiss* (1997) and Donna Tartt's *A Secret History* (1992), the moment of 'enlightenment' is inserted at the beginning of the text instead of the end. These moments of 'enlightenment' are rarely revelatory, or even epiphanic[4], but are generally a tropological trigger, activating the narrator's submersion into a phantasmagoric world of the grotesque which appears to have always already existed. As we have seen, Iris's own 'anthropology of the present' (13), or journey to enlightenment, differs from Morning's more privileged scrutiny of abandoned objects. Morning's ambiguous presence revives vague disembodied memories of something that is unspeakable and unnameable which occasionally erupts into Iris' consciousness. Mr. Morning's proposal to meticulously describe Sherri

Zalewski's effects fascinates the narrator because it offers a conduit through which she can investigate these nameless fears. Mr. Morning's request that Iris should whisper her descriptions into the tape-recorder so that the 'purity of the object won't be blocked from coming through, from displaying itself in its nakedness' (15), plays on these fears. Iris absorbs these facts readily, concluding that Morning's disturbing idiosyncrasies are underpinned by 'a weird kind of logic' (15). Morning is constructed as a latter-day Casaubon whose literally doomed project bears some resemblance to the dry scholarship which informs 'The Key To All Mythologies' in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*. However, unlike Casaubon, Mr. Morning is an accomplished communicator who is able to persuade Iris that his literary crankiness may be grounded in sound academic sense. The extent to which he achieves this aim is evidenced by the mesmerised attention that Iris pays to Mr. Morning's most eccentric monologues. When listening to a previous assistant's description of a plain white sheet, Iris confesses that 'The description itself was tedious and yet I listened with anticipation, imagining that the words would soon reveal something other than the sheet' (14).

Mr. Morning's investigation of the murdered woman's possessions arouse Iris's own suspicions that disturbed histories unsettle the certainties associated with a fixed identity. Mr. Morning's morbid project invokes the rhetorical figure of *prosopopoeia* [5] which recalls the past whilst at the same time marking its perpetual absence. This inscription of a rhetorical double bind parallels Iris' investigation into the primeval space that preceded her entry into the symbolic. Her fear is therefore coloured by nostalgia for the silent unnameable lost moment of plenitude before the imposition of the symbolic.

This fateful interweaving of fear and nostalgia emerges when Mr. Morning chides Iris for forgetting to mention the odour given off by one of the dead woman's gloves. Mr. Morning's claim that smell evokes 'something crucial, something unnoticed before, a place, a time or word' that impregnates 'the things we forget in closets and attics' (20), revives archaic conflicting emotions within the narrator. However, Mr. Morning's quest to fix the lost essence of the object insistently calls attention to the figurative marker that closes off the investigation and effectively stands in for the lost object. Iris discovers this for herself when she notices that 'the more I wrote, the more specific I was about the glove's characteristics, the more remote it became. Rather than fixing it in the light of scientific exactitude, the abundance of detail made the glove disappear' (18).

Mr. Morning is driven by his ambition to achieve mastery over Sherri Zalewski's abandoned objects, revealing a belief that ownership will obliterate the object's horrific origins. Hence, Mr. Morning is mesmerised by a birthmark on Iris' neck claiming that he 'always found flaws like that poignant, little outward signs of our mortality' (22). Here, Morning discloses masculine anxieties related to castration, death and decay; categories that are crucially implicated in the cultural construction of femininity in the West. As Elizabeth Bronfen maintains:

> A mastery of the father figure ultimately means usurping his lot, or one in relation to him. Mastering the maternal body, on the other hand, means mastering the forbidden and the impossible, for the maternal body serves as a figure double inscribed by the death drive - as trope for the unity lost with the beginning of life and also as trope for loss and division always already written into pleasure and imaging (1992: 35).

Mr. Morning's 'weird logic' therefore resonates throughout western philosophical traditions as a cultural fear of women and death.

Mr. Morning and Iris attempt to confront their own demons through the ghostly traces left behind by an unknown woman. The fetish is a device which both parties manipulate in order to withstand the melancholic traces within their own lives. By communicating with the 'other side', Mr. Morning hopes to bypass the nagging fear that he will be undone by the 'monstrous feminine' lurking behind the calm composure of each of his female assistants. Rosemary Betterton has remarked on the transgressive potential locked into cultural representations of the female body, claiming that 'the fetishized surface of the female body masks the horror of the 'marginal matter' contained in its interior' (1996: 135). Betterton maintains that Western fears related to the abject female body are powerfully realised in the work of the American photographer, Cindy Sherman.[6] Building on the work of Laura Mulvey in 'A Phantasmagoria of the Female Body: The Work of Cindy Sherman' (1991), Betterton reveals how Sherman's series of photographs, *Untitled* (1987), 'reconstructs her own body in a monstrous anatomy made up of prosthetic parts or else fragments it in a waste of bodily fluids, decaying food, vomit and slime' (135). Sherman has, then, according to Betterton, reproduced the mysogynistic iconography of western representations of femininity. By including a reflected image of her face in a pair of her abandoned sunglasses Sherman cleverly 'reinforces the horror of seeing a disintegration of the self' (135).

Betterton explains that by reproducing a landscape strewn with her own internal debris, Sherman 'uses the grotesque, not so much to elude the objectifying gaze, as to expose its profoundly fetishistic structure' (135). Here, the fetish is revealed as a cultural 'coping' mechanism used as a salve to ease the 'diseased' wound of femininity. Sherman's excavation of the Western

conceptualisation of femininity as a version of the comic grotesque has a particular resonance for Hustvedt's depiction of melancholy fetishism in *The Blindfold.* Iris fears that her psychic paraphernalia may be exposed to the scrutiny of others in a similar manner to Sherman's visible evacuation of her own bodily products in *Untitled* (1987).

As the plot develops, it becomes increasingly clear that Iris agrees to disturb the dead woman's peace because she is anxious to allay her fears that her identity is in jeopardy. Iris' fascination with the fragile remnants of Zalewski's life reflects her inward fear that her femininity is comprised of a similar assemblage of diseased artefacts threatening to puncture the cosmetic veneer of her youthful body. Iris discovers that her bid to resolve ambivalent feelings, related to her identity, cannot be assuaged by her intrusive scrutiny of the dead woman's effects. Indeed, her surveillance of Zalewski's remains adds to her anxiety. Whilst investigating her final object, a soiled cotton wool ball, Iris is 'overwhelmed by a feeling of disgust' (25). Confronted by such an inviolable entity, Iris realises:

> The cotton ball told me nothing. It was a blank, a cipher; it probably had no connection to anything terrible, and yet I felt as if I had intruded on a shameful secret, that I had seen what I should not have seen (25).

Iris' examination of the detritus of a dead woman's life reinforces barely sublimated feelings of self-loathing related to her identity. Femininity, as perceived in the West, is the shameful secret that Iris attempts to suppress by scrutinising this motley assortment of soiled goods. By classifying Zalewski's possessions, Iris hopes to devise a means of stabilising profound fears related to cultural conceptions of disorderly femininity.

Iris discovers that her investment in language, evidenced by her status as a graduate student of English literature, offers little recompense. Whilst attempting to find words to describe the cotton ball, she realises that, 'the thing was lost to language; it resisted it even more than the glove' (25). Metaphors fail to produce the necessary transformation, causing the object to sink 'so completely into the other thing that I abandoned making comparisons' (25). Failure to decipher the secret histories locked into these artefacts persuades Iris to abandon her doomed project. Her decision to thrust Zalewski's effects into a garbage can somewhere off Broadway, is informed by insecurities related to her own understanding of the gross materiality of her own body. However, the durability of the cultural fears associated with grotesque femininity remain after the items have been cast aside. After consigning Zalewski's pitiful paraphernalia to the trash can, Iris flees from them 'as if they were about to rise up and pursue me' (38).

Flight is a crucial metaphor within the novel. Iris' actions signal a flight from the cultural definition of femininity as passive and inert. Yet, paradoxically Iris also attempts to adhere to the predicates of the symbolic order by taking up a subordinate position in relation to male figures such as Morning and later on, Professor Rose. As Hustvedt notes, Iris 'courts the attentions of men and hides from them, finally acting out her own erotic ambiguity by disguising herself as a boy' (1994: 2). Iris' 'waywardness' is a symptom of the conflicted desires resonating throughout her body culminating in her ambivalent attitude towards her own female flesh fluctuating and disintegrating around her. After the intriguing incident with Mr. Morning, Iris continues to run away from an increasingly bizarre series of situations and people. These include a brief affair

with the unscrupulous Professor Rose who asks Iris to assist him translating

and editing an obscure German novella, titled *The Brutal Boy*. Written in 1936,

during an upsurge of fascist sentiment, the novel celebrates the antics of a

young boy named Klaus, who like Iris, 'begins to be troubled by cruel fantasies

that appear in his head without warning' (134). Nudging the boundaries of

'civilised' culture Klaus escapes the stifling restrictions of his bourgeois

background by taking his warring and paradoxical emotions onto the street

where he is 'happy just to walk where he should not walk and see what he

should not see' (135). Predictably, life begins to imitate art, when Iris begins to

assume Klaus' identity, believing that she 'understood Klaus', entering into his

'story completely' (140).

Iris' 'magical' appropriation of Klaus' fictitious identity proves to be as

illusory as her role within Morning's doomed 'anthropology of the present' (13).

Believing that the 'brutal boy found his second incarnation in me', Iris acts out

her neuroses in the streets and bars of New York's lower East Side, frequenting

a series of seedy establishments such as Magoo's and the Babydoll Lounge.

She 'dresses up' in Klaus' attire, exchanging her regular clothes for a suit and

fedora. Her sexual transformation is completed by her decision to cut off her

hair, an action that fills her with a sense of 'steely satisfaction' (167). Iris's foray

into the seamier side of New York life begins to fall apart when her new

'identity' is discovered by her acquaintance, the fashionable art critic, Paris.

Pressurised by yet another morally bankrupt male authority figure Iris discovers

that she is unable to sustain this masquerade. Unable to successfully imitate

the actions of her fictional alter ego, Iris begins to drown within this self-

imposed exile of downtown sleaze. Eventually, the outward trappings of

conventional life disintegrate leaving Iris stranded in a theatrical world as fragile and inconsequential as her attempted disguise.

(iv)   Conclusion: The Unbearable Nothingness of Being

Siri Hustvedt's novel investigates the slippery relationship between inside and outside that sustains the ideological boundaries separating masculine and feminine within patriarchal regimes. Her novel explores the manner in which cultural notions based on Western fears that these boundaries may collapse, are mapped onto bodily landscapes as well as inanimate objects. Mr. Morning's inscrutable 'anthropology of the present' (13), begins to make sense when we include it within these resilient justificatory belief-systems. Indeed, Morning's 'weird logic' (15) operates along similar principles to those espoused by Freud in his theorisation of fetishism. As we have already seen, Freud believes that masculine fear of the monstrous-feminine, hiding behind the cosmetic facade of feminine beauty, is disguised by his use of the fetish, instated to dissolve 'the terrifying shock of threatened castration at the sight of the female genitals' (1957I : 201). Likewise, Morning applies this creaking cultural theory to his intricate examination of a dead woman's personal effects in an attempt to resolve anxieties related to the unstoppable feminine essence that he feels may seep out of these objects to contaminate his own existence.

Fear of the female body as a transgressive site capable of upsetting deeply entrenched assumptions related to sexual difference pervades this narrative. Hustvedt's plot reveals the relative ease with which masculine subjects can manipulate these assumptions to their own advantage. Morning and Paris engage in archaeological projects to uncover the 'disgraceful' nature of unbridled femininity teasingly located within the 'mysterious' female body.

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Morning's confident perusal of his feminine 'spoils' reveals his furtive enjoyment of this cultural game where the fetish is deployed as an oxymoronic marker which simultaneously signals anxiety and mastery. Similarly, Paris revels in his manipulative interrogation of Iris' 'dressed up' masculinity.

Morning's preoccupation with the supposed excessive femininity locked into Zalewski's ephemera reveals an underlying fear that is paradoxically overlaid by a sense of fascination related to his mastery of the object, however fleeting or transient. As Mulvey maintains, 'danger and risk are exciting' (1996: 14) for the fetishist. Iris quickly realises that she is unable to participate as an equal partner in the 'games, riddles, innuendo' (25) devised by Herbert Morning, even though she does experience a 'familiar shudder of excitement' before examining the dead woman's effects. Iris' fears are twofold; firstly, she is disturbed by an unspeakable dread that she will regress to the inchoate mess of unregulated sexuality culturally ascribed to women and secondly that her sexual identity is constantly called into question by those around her. We may recall that Iris' shifting psychosexual identity is clearly evident in her relationships with male authority figures. In both of her relationships, with Herbert Morning and later Professor Rose, she readily assumes the subordinate status of an assistant employed to fulfil the grandiose ambitions of each employer. Yet, Iris' discomfort within these inferior roles, which closely resemble the cultural status of femininity within the West, are clearly visible in her transactions with these men. Iris recoils from both men whilst simultaneously seeking their approval, finding refuge in a fictional masculine identity unhampered by the need to accede to patriarchal authority.

Iris is torn by the need to satisfy the demands of both father and mother. Unconvinced by the privileges bestowed on the girl child if she transfers her affections to the paternal figure, within patriarchal culture, Iris remains haunted by the memory of the primary love-object, her mother. Iris feels uneasy within the condensed linear timescales favoured by patriarchal regimes, witnessed by the constant pressure of time that induces alternating states of mania and exhaustion. Trapped between these bipolar states, Iris eventually succumbs to a catastrophic migraine that requires hospitalisation. Iris' symptoms become more pronounced within the hospital when she fails to respond to conventional treatment. Whilst undergoing treatment, Iris becomes obsessed by the intriguingly named Mrs. O.[7] Mrs. O is an overwhelming figure who dominates Iris' ward, the 'object of rumour, gossip, and speculation' (98). Iris notes that 'like most people confined to an institution, she had been divested of a past life' (98). A statement which prepares the reader for Iris' projection of fearful longing onto this enigmatic maternal figure. Iris' vision of Mrs. O. is overlaid with half-remembered images from her own past, until 'what remained was a fragmented being, a person shattered into a thousand pieces [which] inhabited the room like a crowd of invisible demons' (97). Hovering precariously, somewhere between life and death, Iris peers into Mrs. O's face, trying to 'dredge up the lost face and name', drawn by 'an uncanny sense of familiarity' which leaves 'a residue, a doubt that stayed with me' (99). Iris is left to ponder 'What had spawned that moment of recognition? Was it really something in her expression or was it something inside me? (99).

Iris scans her memory in vain to recapture an image that eludes her. Iris' experience of re-remembering is uncomfortable, plagued by suspicion and

uncertainty. She is haunted by the *unheimlich* quality of these vestigial memories where the cosiness of familiar objects is overshadowed by a dangerous and defamiliarised other. Iris experiences these ambivalent sensations when she considers Mrs. O's multiple personae whose 'plurality gave the room an air of expectation' (100). Mrs. O's insinuating presence disturbs Iris' confidence in her own bodily and psychological unity by troubling ideologically imposed boundaries that separate inside from outside, convincing her that something within the unspeakable, unnameable depths of her being responds to Mrs. O. The invasive migraines that follow are symptomatic of Iris' experience of corporeal unity being transformed into the undifferentiated flux of the borderline condition.

Iris' suspended state of being within the hospital ward is a symptom of her illness; her exhaustion a sign that she is tired of trying to fulfil the predicates of the symbolic. As we have already seen, Linda Anderson considers the plight of the hysteric, whose neurotic investment in the past forces her to continually repeat past events, at the expense of historical or linear time (1997: 8). Anderson re-evaluates this Freudian construction by closely following Elizabeth Grosz's position that the hysteric's 'sickness is a symptom of a sickness which might be more accurately attributed to the symbolic itself' (9). Similarly, Iris's retreat from the world is a temporary disavowal of the demands of the symbolic and a symptom of her own discomfort within its coercive regime.

Iris' unprocessed longings within the hospital indicate a melancholic disposition which proves to be as untreatable as her migraine. Her distorted vision, brought on by frequent migraine attacks, prevents the painstaking work of mourning, gradually inducing profound sleep. Iris' 'irresistible' (105) sleep is

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an emphatic refusal of 'reality testing' and the tiresome process of balancing

loss and compensation exacted by successful mourning.[8] As we shall see in a

later chapter, Kathryn Harrison suffers from episodes of narcolepsy following

her incestuous relationship with her father. Sleep, in both of these instances,

signals a departure from the harsh disciplinary regime imposed by the symbolic.

It also marks a 'safe' return to the undifferentiated state preceding the symbolic

that cannot be tolerated during consciousness.

Iris' frequent lapses into contradictory states of paranoid lassitude are

evidence of an underlying problem. Iris longs to return to the ease of a

primordial state, unscarred by the divisions imposed by the symbolic, where

sexual difference is experienced as a ruthless scientific rendering of two

unequal parts. Iris' need to return to this 'unknowable' realm is revealed in the

incident where she wakes to find herself in bed with Mrs. O. Iris experiences

'an erotic sensation' (105) when awakening from her dream, which is almost

simultaneously quashed by a wave of revulsion that translates into 'a physical

memory that shuddered through me without warning' (106). The physical

horror that attends Iris' erotic sensations emanates from a cultural loathing of

the feminine as an unmediated mass whose tentacles reach out to compromise

the rigid division of self and other within a patriarchal order.

However, Iris refuses to submit to the totalising force of the psychological

revulsion induced by the cultural association of woman and death. Hospital is

merely a temporary respite from the arduous task of negotiating the stumbling

blocks integrated into a symbolic matrix that will not tolerate the culturally

dissonant conflation of women and death. At a subliminal level, Iris is reluctant

to yield her inchoate memories of blissful unity preceding her entry into the

symbolic register. The startling sensation of eroticised pleasure she experiences with Mrs. O is evidence of her residual attachment to this moment in her past.

Refusal to relinquish a lost object or memory is the most crucial symptom in the Freudian model of melancholia as pathological or impossible mourning. As he puts it, the melancholic condition 'seems puzzling to us because we cannot see what it is that absorbs him (sic) so entirely' (1957i: 155). Here, again, Freud's methodology obscures his own understanding of this bewildering condition. Iris is a fictional example of a cultural phenomenon, where women are not allowed to register their profound sense of loss on entering the symbolic. Anderson is keenly aware of the manner in which the Freudian construction of mourning and melancholia is based on an asymmetrical model that neglects the thoroughgoing work of mourning attending every woman's induction into the symbolic order. Her analysis of Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth* (1933) traces the inscription of unresolved grief in this autobiographical text.

Anderson describes how Brittain protects the memory of her lover, Roland, killed during the Great War, through marriage to a worthy but less inspiring man. Brittain is, according to Anderson, unwilling to submit the memory 'to change and the normal process of forgetting' because she is reluctant to surrender her memory to 'the world of symbolic exchange' where it would reside in 'the same world as the rest of her experience' (1997: 98). Other feminist theorists, such as Kathleen Woodward, are also sceptical of Freud's need to categorise and contain the unrepresentable aura of affect attached to loss and memory, claiming his reluctance is redolent of 'the dominant tradition

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in Western culture of the emotions as negative: the emotions are associated with woman - and with death - and they are something to be gotten rid of' (1993: 94). Moreover, she challenges the popular notion of psychoanalysis as the 'talking cure', believing instead that 'the goal of analysis ... is not so much to give affect voice - a subtle vocabulary, a rich poetics - as to purge it once it has been remembered. Affect in short is represented as pathogenic, often "paralyzing" (1993: 94). Furthermore, emotional experience is seen as 'something that needs to be "discharged" or "abreacted" through the labor of analysis or "work", Freud's preferred term' (1993: 95).

Here, Freud reveals his psychological aversion to a 'feminised' realm of affect that resists 'reality testing'. Freud's refusal, of the woman's libidinal attachment to this unrepresentable sphere, is responsible for the blind-spot within Freud's theory of melancholia. This theoretical hiatus is made clear when he confesses:

> In yet other cases one feels justified in concluding that a loss of the kind has been experienced, but one cannot see clearly what has been lost, and may the more readily suppose that the patient too cannot consciously perceive what it is he has lost (1957i: 155).

Freud's emphasis on the masculine pronoun provides a clue to his blindness. By approaching melancholia from a masculine perspective that remains primarily focused on male attachment to loss, Freud removes female loss from his agenda. Although it is important that we should not succumb too readily to Gillian Beer's charge of 'presentism', that is, rereading 'the past from the unavoidable perspective of present cultural influences and knowledges, without denying the specificity and difference of the past' (1989: 223), we should remind ourselves that Freud shifts attention onto the woman when he enters

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the 'devalorised' zone of the nagging wife who 'loudly pities her husband for being bound to such a poor creature' (158).

Unlike more illustrious male counterparts, such as Hamlet, whose melancholic attachment to the past, 'comes very near to self-knowledge' (156), women are only allowed to register their sense of alienation or dislocation through a male partner. Freud has very neatly touched on women's inability to represent loss within the symbolic register without contemplating how their inferior status within a patriarchal regime compounds this situation. Freud's observation that the melancholic wife feels able to complain because 'everything derogatory that they say of themselves at bottom relates to someone else' (158), reveals the asymmetrical structure of gendered relations in the West where women's experience of loss can only be represented through masculine discourse. Anderson's dissection of Vera Brittain's struggle to come to terms with the competing demands of mourning and melancholia are significant here. Anderson notes that Brittain's autobiographical novel, *Testament of Youth*, represents a 'willed and courageous act of survival' by its author to integrate both categories into a symbolic order 'which violently casts out alterity as madness or death' (1997: 100). Hence, Brittain's own version of 'reality testing' 'leads her back slowly to 'normality' and the 'melancholic' survival of an imaginary past, which makes both language and temporality strange' (100).

Anderson's conceptualisation of melancholia as a marker of 'excess', 'an alterity ... which remains outside realism, a voice of desire and lamentation ... drawn to limits and edges' (100), indicates a feminine 'resistance to a symbolic order which exacts from us not just the acceptance of loss, but the negation of

the loss and the denial or symbolic killing of the (m)other' (99). Anderson's vision of melancholia as an expression of resistance to an oppressive regime is a departure from the Freudian definition of melancholia whose symptoms so closely cross-check with his description of disabled even pathological femininity following the resolution of the oedipal phase. Here, according to Luce Irigaray, in *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985), melancholia represents the logical conclusion of the Oedipal complex for the little girl, once she 'discovers her own castration and that of her mother - her "object", the narcissistic representation of all her instincts - she would have no recourse other than melancholia' (cited in Schiesari, 1992: 63).

Vera Brittain's inscription of melancholic longing, according to Anderson, is registered at the margins of the symbolic, constantly worrying the ideological boundaries that separate pathological, melancholic femininity from the acceptable face of public mourning. Her contention that women retain a feminised space for themselves within the patriarchal order, where they are able to mark the very specific losses endured by women within the symbolic, constructs women as active agents within their own narratives, able to embark on their own journey towards psychic resolution. However, Brittain's autobiographical novel is, ironically, a testament to the resilience of the discourses that construct woman as the melancholic Other threatening to dissolve the cultural division between acceptable public mourning and private, feminised melancholia. As Anderson concludes, Brittain's 'rational' marriage, combined with her decision to abandon her study of English, in favour of History, reflects her need 'to value reason and rationality and to conceive of the future in terms of imperatives and obligations' (100).

As a wife and mother, Brittain is assimilated into the confines of the patriarchal order, dutifully avoiding the dangerous liminal zone that threatens to collapse public mourning into private melancholia. Her decision, to adhere to the predicates of the symbolic order, differs from Iris Vegan's more precarious purchase on 'rational' subjectivity. However, Iris' mental blanks and visual gaps bear witness to her unwillingness to surrender her memory to the 'world of symbolic exchange' (1997: 100). Just as Brittain's text helps her to overcome an unnameable loss, Iris' fascination with the inner 'life' of abandoned objects is figured as a fetish which temporarily soothes her experience of sexual and cultural ambivalence within the symbolic economy. Iris' fascination with what Gordon Burn calls 'the *thingness* of things' or the 'mystery of the mundane' (1993: 23), is symptomatic of the terror induced by a world that has been shorn of familiar reference points, bereft of its primary love-object. Hence, a dirty white glove, disused hand-mirror or soiled wad of fibre stand in briefly for the mother's body, offering a tenuous link with a murderous past.

Siri Hustvedt's novel explores a contradictory world of fear and fascination where subjectivity is threatened by the mysterious attractions of the disaffected Other. The anarchic 'pull' exerted by the 'disorderly' Other from the fringes of the symbolic order, infiltrates the body of Iris Vegan, undermining her tenuous grip on reality. Accordingly, she uses an increasingly bizarre set of objects and people to stand in for the mother's body. Iris is invaded by conflicting appetites and desires which she attempts to appease. However, her strategy of appeasement is doomed to fail within a symbolic, which as we have already seen, 'casts out alterity as madness or death' (1997: 100).

Unsurprisingly, therefore, Hustvedt declares that she does not regard Iris'

behaviour as dysfunctional. As she puts it:

> Despite the fact, that her behavior on occasion veers into the pathological,
> I don't regard her as a bizarre person ... she courts the attentions of men
> and hides from them, finally acting out her own erotic ambiguity by
> disguising herself as a boy, Klaus, the character in a German novella she
> has translated with the professor she loves (1994: 2).

Hustvedt presents a profoundly disturbing description of femininity

careening out of control. An ingenious series of disguises is required to hide

the horrific evidence of desiring femininity that must be ruthlessly expelled from

an uncompromising symbolic order. Femininity is portrayed as guerrilla

warfare, where the female subject escapes enemy fire by her clever

manipulation of role-play and disguise. Hustevedt concludes that 'Iris is made

through the eyes of others' (1994: 2); unfortunately her own eyes must remain

resolutely closed.

The discussion of feminine identity and maternal loss will be extended in

the following chapter. Julia Kristeva's study of maternal loss in *Black Sun*

(1989) is used to illuminate a daughter's struggle to come to terms with the

death of her psychotic mother in Sarah Sheard's *The Swing Era* (1993).

Accordingly, Kristeva's theory that language and artistic production offer some

compensation for maternal loss is cited to help explain the difficulties

encountered by a daughter who struggles to involve herself in a flexible

discourse that will allow her to 'move on' by working through the unfinished

business that separates mother and daughter within the symbolic economy.

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[1] In a TLS review of *The Blindfold,* Gordon Burn reads the naming of Iris as an intertextual game carried out by Siri Hustvedt and her husband, the writer, Paul Auster. As he puts it: 'There are other literary nods and winks between wife and husband: Iris ("Siri" backwards) is the name of a character in *Leviathan,* who is the wife of a New York writer; when she is in hospital, a friend brings Iris "a volume of poems called *Unearth* by an American poet I had never heard of" (Paul Auster). See Gordon Burn (1993) 'Mysteriously Mundane' in *The Times Literary Supplement,* No. 4690, p. 23.

[2]   Kenneth A Bruffee argues that the legacy of the past being played out within the present is a feature of Elegiac Romance. Although *The Blindfold* does not fall within the remit of this particular genre, the reader has a sense of the past manipulating the present and even holding it to ransom. Bruffee sees the narrative structure of Elegiac Romance as a 'dynamic metaphor which expresses the peculiarly modern emotional predicament in which the will of the present is imprisoned by the persisting will of the past' (469). See Kenneth Bruffee (1971) 'Elegiac Romance' in *College English*, Vol. 32, pp. 465 - 76.

[3]   Freud maintains that 'the 'uncanny' is that class of the terrifying which leads us back to something long known to us, once very familiar' (370). See S. Freud, 'The Uncanny' in *Collected Papers vol. IV*, trans. Joan Rivière, London: The Hogarth Press, pp. 368 - 407.

[4]   In her excellent analysis of fiction-elegy, Karen E. Smythe argues that self-reflexive tropes such as the epiphanic moment are 'the preferred form of consolation for modernist fiction-elegists such as Joyce and Woolf' (21). Smythe contends that such tropes are consolatory because they produce a liberatory or cathartic effect on the reader even if the narrator's discovery is merely revelatory as in the case of Gabriel Conroy in Joyce's 'The Dead'. Smythe asserts that rebirth in language is undercut in the late modernist elegies of Mavis Gallant and Alice Munro where "disfigured epiphanies" suggest that 'the past cannot be rectified, is rarely pleasurable, and should not be transformed into an atemporal deluding fiction' (21). See Karen E. Smythe (1992) *Figuring Grief: Gallant, Munro, and the Poetics of Elegy*, Montreal: McGill - Queen's University Press.

[5]   Karen Smythe's comments on *prosopopoeia* in fiction-elegy are helpful here. She suggests that unlike modernist writers who use *prosopopoeia* to emphasise the metaphoric potential within the trope in order to foreground presence within the absent, late modernist writers emphasise the synecdochic characteristics of metonymy and memory which conversely draw attention to the hostilities that frequently mark the gap between past and present (1992: 13).

[6]   Gordon Burn draws attention to the work of the French conceptual artist, Sophie Calle in his review of *The Blindfold*. Burn notes that Calle is fictionalised as 'Marie Turner' in Paul Auster's novel, *Leviathan*. Burn notes the interchangeable thematic concerns of both novels in his quotation from *Leviathan*, 'It was an archaeology of the present, and attempt to reconstitute the essence of something from only the barest fragment: a ticket stub, a torn stocking, a blood stain on the collar of a shirt'. See Gordon Burn (1993) 'Mysteriously Mundane' in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 4690, p. 33.

[7]   Hustvedt' enigmatic naming of 'Mrs. O' seems deliberate here. Her name plays on Pauline Rèage's, *The Story of O*, which traces O's total capitulation to the disciplinary measures imposed on women within the patriarchal symbolic order. Additionally, the figure O could be interpreted as a symbol of the undifferentiated realm of the pre-symbolic.

[8]   I am borrowing Linda Anderson's term which is used to describe Kristeva's definition of mourning as an economy of losses and compensations. See Linda Anderson (1997) 'Vera Brittain: 'Not I But My Generation' in *Women and Autobiography in the Twentieth Century: Remembered Futures*, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, pp. 77 - 100.

CHAPTER FIVE

Mourning the Mother: Maternal Deprivation in Sarah Sheard's *The Swing Era*

(i)   Introduction

The previous chapter focused on the inscription of melancholic

ambivalence in Siri Hustvedt's *The Blindfold* (1992). We may recall, that the

narrator's narcissistic ambivalence prevented her from undergoing the

painstaking work of 'reality testing', outlined by Freud in 'Mourning and

Melancholia'. In what follows, I will build on the evidence sustained in the last

chapter, maintaining that the disavowal of the lost maternal object was

engendered by a cultural fear and loathing of the female sexual body. As we

have already seen, this fear of bodily contamination and disintegration is

heightened when it is projected onto the maternal body. Moreover, these

ambivalent projections are fatally intertwined in the mother/daughter

relationship, where physical and psychological proximity exacerbate cultural

anxieties related to the active, desiring female body.

This chapter will investigate the implications of the 'monstrous-feminine'[1]

embedded in Western notions of motherhood. These fears culminate in

apocalyptic projections of annihilation by the primal mother whose monstrous

presence threatens the subject's bodily and psychic unity. These concerns will

be explored in Sarah Sheard's novel *The Swing Era* (1993). Sheard's novel

focuses on the complicated ties binding the narrator to her recently deceased,

psychotic mother. The narrator's anguished quest to achieve agency through

self-definition is constantly threatened by memories of maternal breakdown and

her knowledge that she is implicated in a family history of mental illness passed

down through the female line. Sheard's book illustrates how these profoundly ambivalent impulses reverberate within the mother/daughter relationship. Her intimate dissection of the chaotic 'swings', battering this uneasy alliance, remind us of Freud's belief that 'the loss of a love-object constitutes an excellent opportunity for the ambivalence in love-relationships to make itself felt and come to the fore' (1957i: 161). I will challenge Freud's observation that:

> Where there is a disposition to obsessional neurosis the conflict of ambivalence casts a pathological shade on the grief, forcing it to express itself in the form of self-reproaches, to the effect that the mourner himself is to blame for the loss of the loved one, *i.e.* desired it (1957i: 161).

I will argue that Freud's framing of pathological mourning, as a failure to relinquish the lost-object through withdrawal of libido, fails to explain the little girl's inability to transcend her sense of overwhelming loss upon entering the symbolic world of language and law. Her 'reward' for successfully negotiating the Oedipal complex is dependent on her assumption of an identity predicated on her understanding of herself as the embodiment of physical and cultural 'lack'. As Luce Irigaray remarks in *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985), woman's inferior position within the symbolic economy 'affords women too few figurations, images, or representations by which to represent herself' (quoted in Schiesari, 1992: 64). The self-reproaches identified by Freud, as a hallmark of melancholic disorder, translate into feminine frustrations directed against their self-defeating identity, located outside the productive symbolic economy of language and law.

Freud's theory that the melancholic subject is vulnerable to the potentially fatal condition of secondary narcissism (1957I: 161) is interrogated in this chapter. Julia Kristeva's study of feminine depression, in *Black Sun* (1989), is integrated into the analysis of maternal object-loss to illustrate the difficulties

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encountered by a daughter who is intent on inscribing her sense of loss and abandonment by her first love-object, within a discourse that constructs her as an outsider. Before revealing how these concerns struggle for recognition within Sheard's novel I will attempt to place my argument within conflicting psychoanalytic debates surrounding femininity, sexuality and the effects of maternal deprivation.

(ii)   Death Letters

> Although we know that after such a loss the acute state of mourning will subside, we also know we shall remain inconsolable and we will never find a substitute. No matter what may fill the gap, even if it be filled completely, it nevertheless remains something else. And actually this is how it should be. It is the only way of perpetuating that love which we do not want to relinquish (quoted in Siggins, 1966: 17)

The letter quoted above was written to Freud's long standing friend Ludwig Binswanger, in response to the news of the death of his son. The analyst opens the letter by notifying his friend that the death of his daughter, Sophie Freud-Halberstadt, occurred 36 years to the day of writing the letter.[2] The letter was also written twelve years after his definitive work, 'Mourning and Melancholia', first published in 1917.[3] Freud's private correspondence, addressed to an old friend, appears to refute the conceptual framework he constructed to describe the normative state of mourning in this important essay. As he puts it:

> The testing of reality, having shown that the loved object no longer exists, requires forthwith that all the libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to this object ... when the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again (1957i: 154)

Indeed, Freud's private position appears to closely resemble his definition of melancholia in this famous essay. According to Freud, deference to reality is an essential element in successful mourning, the vital ingredient that

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rescues the subject from the endless repetition of pathological mourning, more commonly known as melancholia. Although Freud's recollection of his daughter's death suggests that his response to her death falls into the healthy category of mourning, where 'there is nothing unconscious about the loss' (155), his deliberate perpetuation of the grieving process locates him within the liminal zone of unresolved, pathological mourning outlined in his essay.

Linda Anderson's interpretation of the differing trajectories of mourning and melancholia, contained in Freud's essay, clearly identifies the normative status of mourning in relation to the endless rehearsal of loss within melancholia. According to Anderson, Freud considers that:

> It is only through the acknowledgement of loss that the work of mourning can be completed; yet the melancholic, we could say, by denying the loss, also lives it endlessly; denies their own existence rather than the loss (1997: 96)

By clinging to an unreconstructed image of his deceased daughter Freud also endlessly denies his departed loved-one, lost a generation earlier. Freud's stubborn refusal, to immerse himself in his own hydraulic economy of losses and gains, suggests that his experience of loss, on both a personal and a global scale,[4] has subtly shifted the academic foundations supporting his original theory. Conditions of production obviously affect the contents of a personal letter written to an old friend and those contained in an academic paper, but even allowing for these, Freud appears to be shifting his original position, identified in 'Mourning and Melancholia', when he informs Binswanger that after such a loss the subject will 'remain inconsolable and will never find a substitute' (1929: 386).

However, in her critical survey of literature related to mourning, Lorraine Siggins traces Freud's reluctance to relinquish the lost object in earlier papers such as 'On Creative Writers and Daydreaming' (1908), where he states:

> Whoever understands the human mind knows that hardly anything is harder for a man than to give up a pleasure which has once experienced. Actually, we can never give anything up; we only exchange one thing for another. What appears to be renunciation is really the formation of a substitute or surrogate (quoted in Siggins, 1966: 17)

It is difficult to square Freud's philosophical observations, detailed in a private reminiscence addressed to an old friend, with his authoritative stance in 'Mourning and Melancholia', where he clearly considers libidinal withdrawal from the lost-object, as a requisite for successful mourning (1957l: 154). Indeed, Freud's refusal to succumb to the rigorous procedure of 'reality testing', in his own experience, suggests that he is unwilling to surrender his intimate memories to the more commonplace register of everyday losses and gains. By embracing his anguished memories of the sudden death of a loved-one, Freud's position closely resembles Vera Brittain's steadfast refusal to let go of the memory of her lover, Roland, shot down during the Great War in her autobiographical novel, *Testament of Youth*, published in 1933. As we have already seen, Linda Anderson conjectures that Brittain's refusal to yield to the intrusive process of 'reality testing' was governed by her unwillingness to 'allow her memory ... to become part of her own experience' (1997: 99).

Freud's very similar reluctance, to submit his memory to the world of 'symbolic exchange', suggests that he is also 'refusing the compensations of language, unwilling to surrender 'the real thing' (99). Jonathan Dollimore also detects the many inconsistencies and discrepancies in the constellation of papers written prior to the publication of 'Mourning and Melancholia' in 1917. In

'On Creative Writers and Daydreaming' (1908); 'Thoughts for the Time on War and Death' (1915) and particularly 'On Transience' (1916)[5], Dollimore notes that Freud integrates the western philosophical concern with mutability into 'the pain of melancholic desire rooted in loss, and the pull of death' (1998: 182). Desire is indeed the hidden disruptive element in Freud's theorisation of normal and pathological mourning. By protecting his recollections of his daughter Freud constantly rekindles his desire to perpetuate the irreplaceable nature of his love for his beloved 'Sunday child'. By offering his experience of catastrophic loss to his old friend Binswanger, Freud clearly wishes to ease the pain and sorrow associated with sudden bereavement. However, his friendly advice assumes a pathological cast when it is read alongside his earlier theoretical paper where he declares that when 'the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again' (154).

Privately, Freud appears to have achieved a different understanding of the nature of introjection within the mourning process. As Siggins points out, other psychoanalysts such as Karl Abraham recognise that introjection features in 'the normal process of mourning, too, the person reacts to a real object by effecting a temporary introjection of the loved person' (quoted in Siggins, 1966: 17). However, Freud's extended mourning still remains outside the frame of normative mourning within Abraham's more flexible conceptual model. Siggins' own position on pathological mourning reactions reflects the difficulties associated with establishing when mourning becomes dysfunctional. Significantly, Siggins declares that she believes that mourning becomes pathological:

> If the process of mourning is unduly prolonged. Such a prolongation of
> mourning may be due to a delay in beginning the process, or to a
> retarding of the process once it has begun, or both. This is, of course, a

matter of degree: while extremes are readily classified, the dividing line is often unclear (1966: 20)

Siggins' definition of pathological mourning could be applied to Freud's description of his own experience of extended mourning in his letter to Binswanger. However, as she maintains, the dividing line between these two categories is notoriously unstable. Siggins points out that Freud only mentions identification when discussing melancholia in 'Mourning and Melancholia'. In a later essay, 'The Ego and the Id' (1923), Siggins draws attention to a subtle shift in his attitude towards identification. In this essay, Freud conjectures that identification plays a pivotal role in all psychological transactions, claiming that 'it may be that identification is the sole condition under which the id can give up its objects' (quoted in Siggins, 1966: 17).

Freud's belated recognition of the role played by identification within all relationships is crucially important to this thesis. As Diana Fuss notes in the introduction to *Identification Papers* (1995), 'identification is an embarrassingly ordinary process, a routine, habitual compensation for the everyday loss of our love-objects' (1). Fuss goes on to argue that Freud 'summons and reworks the concept of identification to keep firmly in place a normative theory of sexuality based upon oedipal relations' (12). This conservative revisionary process can also be detected in his attitude to mourning. Freud carefully separates the categories of mourning and melancholia, when discussing the process of identification, in order to bolster his theory that the normative process of mourning helps to explain the pathological condition of melancholia. Freud extols the therapeutic role played by identification in mourning in his letter to Binswanger, claiming 'this is how it should be, it is the only way of perpetuating that love which we do not want to relinquish' (quoted in Siggins, 1966: 17).

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Freud's defensive attitude towards his theorisation of sexuality and melancholia through the mechanism of identification reinforces women's negative position within the discourses of mourning and melancholia.

Building on the work of feminist film theorists who have examined the dynamics of identification and disidentification in relation to spectatorship, Fuss notes how the generative gap separating identification and desire for the male spectator, 'is collapsed for the female spectator' (7). This leads to a process of overidentification with female protagonists on the screen. This process 'operates for women as "desire to desire" - the desire to take on and to inhabit the desire of the other' (7). Fuss recognises that identification is of fundamental importance to feminism, whilst acknowledging at the same time, the difficulties associated with building a politics of identification around the unstable dynamics of the unconscious. Within this chapter, however, I want to examine the narrative operation of identification in *The Swing Era* (1993). Sheard's text demonstrates how these dynamics operate in relation to the violent, potentially destructive relationship binding mother to daughter. As Fuss points out:

> Identification operates on one level as an endless process of violent negation, a process of killing off the other in fantasy in order to usurp the other's place, the place where the subject desires to be (1995: 9)

The close reading following this section reveals how these regressive dynamics are figured in Sheard's narrative. However, my concern within this chapter, is to reveal how Sheard's text demonstrates the cannibalistic tendencies described by Fuss in her study of identification and how they can be transformed to produce a situation where the subject is able to share Freud's desire to perpetuate 'that love which we do not want to relinquish' (1966: 17). Sheard's study of maternal loss reveals how memory can be used as a site of

resistance withstanding the damaging regime of self-punishment that Freud perceives to be the chief characteristic of melancholic behaviour.

Julia Kristeva's work on feminine depression in *Black Sun* (1989) offers another way of reframing melancholic discourses to formulate a more empowered response to problems associated with grieving. Kristeva's controversial views on melancholic depression are connected to language acquisition. She believes that by naming our loss we are able to transcend the debilitating stasis of melancholia. Words are therefore transformatory tools used to carve a way out of the suffocating realm of asymbolia where meaning collapses (1989: 24). Anderson views this arduous process of translating loss into gain as a 'ceaseless transposing of affect into symbol' where ' words ultimately cover an absence; in speaking we are also naming our loss' (1997: 98). Naming of loss is a difficult, potentially treacherous, area for the female subject within Kristeva's rationale. As Kristeva points out in a conversation with Dominique Grisoni, she believes that female depression is 'more difficult to treat because a woman's attachment to her mother is often insurmountable' (1996: 81). Kristeva's profoundly pessimistic analysis of maternal loss borrows heavily from Western philosophical traditions. Jonathan Dollimore reveals how deeply misogynist ideologies informed these traditions culminating in psychoanalytic texts conflating women with death. According to Dollimore, these ideologies are grounded in cultural narratives 'ranging from chronic unconscious male fear of engulfment or even castration in sexual intercourse, to the difficulty of the boy child leaving the mother for another woman' (1998: xxiii).

These explanations resonate throughout Kristeva's description of the 'death-bearing woman' who overshadows the female subject's bid to achieve individuation. The mother's power, according to Kristeva, resides in her daughter's 'specular identification with the mother as well as the introjection of the maternal body' (1989: 28). Identification with the destructive force of contagious femininity lies at the core of Kristeva's dissection of melancholic discourse. Kristeva confuses woman's traditional association with the unstable flux of nature leading to a situation where identification with the mother inevitably creates self-loathing within the daughter.[6] Given the self-defeating nature of this particular narrative, it becomes increasingly difficult to contemplate how the female subject can reactivate the 'realm of signs' where, according to Kristeva, the excess of affect eventually produces new languages that dispel the asymbolia associated with melancholic discourse (28).

The remainder of this chapter will address the difficult question of maternal identification as it is figured in *The Swing Era*. Sheard's vivid portrayal of maternal loss rehearses the compulsive dynamics tying mother and daughter into an oppressive relationship which reinscribes misogynist myths related to the 'death-bearing woman'.

(iii)   The Swing Era

A strong egoism is a protection against disease, but in the last resort we
must begin to love in order that we may not fall ill, and must fall ill if, in
consequence of frustration, we cannot love (Freud, 1914e:42).

Sarah Sheard's novel, *The Swing Era* (1993), opens with the narrator's recollection of a party held to celebrate her eighth Birthday . We learn that her mother has arranged a themed party for her daughter - a treasure hunt,

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involving her in lengthy preparations, designed to show her affection for her beloved daughter. A few lines later, the reader discovers s/he is being invited to participate in a mystery where the uncovering of vital clues may lead them to the secret treasure that lies at the heart of the family home. However, it becomes clear that this is no ordinary home, and therefore no ordinary secret. Rather, we are being asked to witness the last stand of its two co-conspirators honouring a pact marking their last engagement. Suitably clad, in swashbuckling attire, mother and daughter welcome their guests into an intensely theatrical domestic space. This will be the last occasion on which the daughter will be allowed to play a key role in this particular drama; in future she will be granted only a walk on part.

With hindsight, the narrator marvels that the children arriving at the door 'seemed not to notice anything unusual' (1), about her mother, whose beauty acts as a magnetic focus, luring people in leaving them wanting to know more. Later, we learn that the secret lying at the heart of this scene of domestic bliss is the mother's 'madness', which takes the form of manic depressive mood swings which terrorise and fascinate husband and daughter.

Like any good detective story, the reader is provided with all the vital clues to help her, like Frederika, to unravel the mystery that surrounds their beguiling host. For the house contains as many snares as those present in the fantastic space of the child's birthday party, whilst the 'theatrical warnings' (2), issued by the mother, point to a much darker presence than the 'crocodile' lurking under the stairs. In a theatrical swoop, the mother reveals the cake which takes the form of 'Port Airedale impeccably rendered in coloured icing, the turrets of our house clearly recognizable, Belvedere Park behind, the

winding hill downtown, Hart River, the Sound, our school - all there, even a sailboat tacking into harbour' (2).

We learn that the child's birthday gift from the mother is a compass, a fitting but ominous signifier of the uncertain events to follow. The compass is evoked as metaphor for the uncertain conditions prevailing within this divided home; it's 'blue-tipped needle' hovers expectantly, 'ambivalent at first, as though, unwilling to point', the narrator notes how it would 'swing around and around and then wobble back towards home: True North, this way' (2). The reader's attention is redirected backwards towards home, in a play on the pioneering notions associated with the expression True West. The reader's attention is instead nudged in the northerly direction of home where the key issues in the novel wait to be resolved. From this point onwards, we are fast-forwarded into the events that immediately precede the main events of the novel. The reader is hurried through a series of dramatic events that form the backdrop to the narrator's formative years. These years depict a childhood and adolescence saturated in religions of various denominations, ranging from the Catholic church of her childhood, steeped in ceremony and religious dogma, to life as a novice priest in faraway Nepal.

Sandwiched almost imperceptibly between these disparate pieces of the jigsaw is a brief record of the narrator's visit to her mother's psychiatrist. Frederika's decision to downplay the significance of this visit, where she is first made aware of the hereditary nature of the disease which affects the female members of her family, can be read as an early symptom of repression, where the narrator endeavours to combat the threat of psychic fragmentation in and through sublimation. The fear surrounding the collapse of the narrator's

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psychic structures, organises and informs the structure of the text, producing the stop-start sequence of events which leads to the condensation of crucial and dramatic moments in the text. These constant temporal shifts between childhood, present and the recent past in Nepal, reflect the narrator's quest for continuity, repeatedly undermined by her fear of betrayal by history that has already destroyed the infrastructure of her mother's family.

A sense of history traversed by a complex network of crossed wires and closed circuitry persists throughout the novel. History prompts negotiations and recollections in this novel, hovering uneasily between the future and the past forcing painful memories of betrayal and abandonment. Frederika treads warily in the Nepalese temple, glimpsing deliverance in the 'stinging blows' that interrupt a recollection of her 'mother's crazy laughter in the middle of the night' followed by the inevitable sound of 'the ambulance pulling up' (11). On her return home from Nepal, Frederika learns from her father that her mother accidentally electrocuted herself whilst taking a bath by tugging on the over-head light. The accident has a casual nonchalance that gently mocks the two remaining family members left to negotiate an uneasy truce in the wake of sudden and unpredictable death. Clearly at odds with her new knowledge of such an unwelcome yet remarkable sequence of events, Frederika learns from her father that the accident might have been avoided if the electrical circuitry within the home had been regularly overhauled. He explains 'The wiring was old. He'd always meant to fix it' (28), revealing a history of 'living' with undue attention, ultimately causing the disintegration of this small, severely dysfunctional family unit. Half-hearted attempts at therapy push father and

daughter into a fragile truce where both protagonists tiptoe around the gaping omission of the woman who formed the third and vital point of their triangle.

The reader's attention is drawn to the mother's disembodied presence which follows father and daughter like a guilty shadow, disturbing the delicate balance of family loyalty linking father to daughter. The mother as revenant troubles their fragile alliance, haunting the desultory drinking sessions designed to offset the aching loneliness of sudden bereavement. Maternal memories invade Frederika's mind producing apocalyptic visions of her mother's 'electrified body crashing back into her bathwater' (29), stirring up the pungent 'funereal' smell enveloping the household (29)..

The remainder of the novel is a testament to Frederika's battle to wrap up the unfinished business started with her mother. Frederika's return home is a reverse pilgrimage whose messiness is contrasted with the ascetic regime enforced by the monks in Nepal. In order to negotiate some sort of peace with her dead mother, Frederika knows that she must learn how to comfortably occupy the borderline state separating both extremes if she is to resist the dictates of the 'swing era'.[7] Frederika owns that her retreat to Nepal was undertaken so that she could learn 'how to live moment to moment, free of anger and anxiety' (12). Her sudden ejection out of this order, back to the repository of unrepressed desires masquerading as home, signals a biblical return to the wilderness. Frederika knows that her 'anonymous' life in Nepal has been destroyed by the demons back home when she explains that 'Until this visitation', she had travelled 'Halfway around the world to escape - in vain' (13).

Frederika's fear of the disruptive nature of repressed drives is a learned experience based on her intimate knowledge of her mother's chaotic mood swings. Her overwhelming fear of being engulfed by the ferocity of these unregulated drives is demonstrated by her attitude towards the flesh, particularly her own body. Recalling the discontents of her early life, immersed in religion, she reveals how she 'intended to live a life of the mind' where she would 'tread [her] own path, in contemplative, serene footfalls' a life miraculously free from anger, stress and fear (3). She swallows her 'rage and disappointment' (3) when she discovers that 'girls could not become priests', betrayed once again by her monstrous female flesh. Frederika punishes her body, distrusting the monstrous ebb and flow of bodily fluids proclaiming her femininity.[8] Frederika's punitive reaction to her own body is based on her internalisation of powerful traditions within the West where woman is associated with the destructive forces of nature. Her attachment to religious dogma is invoked as a means of containing the disruptive flow of femininity seething within her veins. Later in the novel, this internalised revulsion manifests itself in the multitude of self-inflicted scars covering her body. Frederika reads her own body in terms of the grotesque that constantly violates bodily boundaries by the power of its uncompromising primal flux. Clearly, the mind is valorised at the expense of the betraying/treacherous body, and organised religion, appears to offer a range of symbolic props which help to stave off her feelings of painful dislocation.

Everywhere she looks, Frederika sees her own loneliness and isolation. Within the confines of the church, she is surrounded by tragic exemplars; turning to face the alter, she witnesses 'the mournful gaze of Christ in stained

glass, his own heart bleeding in his hand' (4). Later in Nepal, the emergence of sexual desire is harshly repressed. Frederika acknowledges that she 'had grown accustomed to inhabiting a neutral zone of (my) body'; like her fellow travellers, she 'surrendered sexual expression in (her) quest for something beyond' (14). The fragility of this construct is poignantly realised in an encounter with a Swiss trekker. His sexual appraisal of her body inadvertently resurrects the old mind/body conflict, causing her to resort to the familiar tactic of vilifying her 'naked body, scarred and mottled', worthy only of the offensive epithet '*Dog meat*'.

On returning to Port Airedale, Frederika resumes the act of mourning, started before she left for Nepal. Predictably, the old strategies of self-hate and loathing are projected onto the landscape of her hometown, which she describes as an 'aboveground burial accorded to junk that was too much to cart away' (21). This unsightly blot on the landscape registers as extreme loathing with the narrator, reminding her of own flight from this scene of dereliction, 'in a hermetic compartment of one kind or another ... hurtling past intervals of such landscape, unbreathed, unenterable, at right angles to my own progress from past into future I'd inherited the linear track, kept to it all this time' (21). Frederika's progress from past into future is distorted by the condensations and displacements plaguing her every move. Like the faulty circuit, which had abruptly hauled her mother in, Frederika's sudden flights from real events within the present are destined to fail until she confronts the horrors that she feels lie embedded within family and history.

The narrator reluctantly takes the first steps towards achieving these objectives by revisiting the scene of her mother's death, 'trying to imagine how it

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must have been for her, alone in this room witnessed only by these gleaming tiles, the pedestal sink in which I'd baptized my dolls' (31). By investigating the specificities of her mother's death, Frederika is attempting to clear a space where she can begin to negotiate with the silent object that colonises her ego. At last, she declares, the 'finality of her absence squatted down inside my throat, heavy, unbudgeable I who had once wanted it so badly. I could admit that now' (30). Frederika's task is a formidable one, where she must learn to destroy the closed circuit of unconscious hatred which she has broken off from the mother and redirected against herself, thereby transforming this burden into a flexible discourse which is able to bridge past, present and future.

Frederika wants to maintain an equitable existence where she can tread the middle ground separating rigid adherence to law and religion on the one hand and a collapse into delirium on the other. In the past, she had assumed a variety of predominantly religious roles as a defence against the repressed hostility that welled up in her every time she contemplated her relationship with her deceased mother. Frederika continues to cling to ascetic regimes where bodily reminders of mutating flesh are partially compensated for by the Puritanical regimes underpinning religious practices. Frederika applies this fastidious logic when she interprets her mother's death, seeing the indelible imprint of the electrical circuit on her mother's body as evidence of religious intervention. Her discovery of 'a horn mark ... scorched into the sole of her foot and a second burn, which could not be explained, on her left hip' (31) merely intensifies the sacramental significance of the moment. Electricity is invoked as a positive charge reaching across generations in the motif inscribed on her mother's body. Frederika is reminded of her mother's revelations of her

treatment for shock therapy. She recalls her mother's description of the searing impact of this barbaric practice reverberating throughout her body, creating 'a hissing noise in her ears, like tires on a wet night, and a light that flared like a struck match' (32). Her mother's ability to master traumatic pain, and transform it, with a theatrical sleight of hand, into something which belongs to her alone, is envied by her daughter who tells us that she had 'always dreaded electricity ... watching it strike trees onshore, dreading its approach' (32).

Trying to recapture her mother's features, and her mother's utterances, the narrator is at last attempting to empathise with the fabulous figure who had 'gone to such lengths to escape mothering me' (32). This new approach involves a redrawing of the physical geography of the house, which is hastily mapped onto Frederika's consciousness. Familiar territory is dissembled, made strange within this *unheimlich* psychic space where the past unsettles the fragile certainties of the present. We learn that unlike her nineteenth century forbears, this particular 'mad woman' inhabited the basement not the attic[9], transforming it into a magical underworld, which seems to mock the strict regimentation of life 'above stairs'. Frederika recalls how this parallel universe, bounded by its own laws, regularly disturbed the uneasy bond linking father to daughter. By wilfully suppressing this troublesome 'oppress-ence', Frederika remembers how she tried to 'pretend the basement wasn't part of our house' (keeping her) ears shut against her whenever she was there, although this had been more difficult in winter when the furnace carried her voice up through the hot-air vents (34).

This oscillation between attempted normalcy and outrageous deviance within the household resembles Frederika's precarious mental state. The act of

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planting flowers on her mother's grave recreates the painstaking work involved in separating these two worlds. Her fear that these opposing realms may collapse into each other is revealed by her agonised response to the unearthly proximity of decaying flesh and freshly turned soil. Physical activity cannot suppress the rush of conflicting emotions shouting for recognition, '*Keep her down*, What, still angry ... *While she remains absolutely breathless ... Keep her down and get on with it ... The best is behind me, the worst beneath me. Keep her down ...* ' (42). This incident resonates with all the unspeakable horrors of abjection which Kristeva outlines in *Powers of Horror* (1980).[10] The narrow girdle of earth which threatens to collapse mother into daughter, and vice versa, resembles the dynamics of abjection, with its implicit threat of annihilation brought about by its disrespect for borders and hence the sanctity of subject and object. Frederika hesitates when she has finished planting her flowers 'afraid to move for fear I'd pass out, knowing that my mind had folded a pleat of memory into time-not sure how deep the fold or whether what I'd lost would ever come back' (43). Like Kristeva's recalcitrant daughter, Frederika feels she is literally mired in the 'shame of compromise, of being in the middle of treachery' (1996:156).

Frederika feels like a traitor in the midst of a vicious circle of guilt and retribution which operate in a similar fashion to Kristeva's boomerang, 'a vortex of summons and repulsion (which) places the one haunted by it, literally beside itself' (1982:153). Frederika's urgent need to resolve the conflicting emotions accompanying her mother's death is revealed by her need to reinterpret the 'undecipherable' death of her mother (138) through a sign which she has recovered herself. The arduous task of reworking the past is figured within the

text as an inversion of the Freudian concept of 'reality testing'; Frederika uses the past as a yardstick to measure the present. Frederika's 'reverse mourning' is clearly evident in her search to empathise with her dead mother's needs at the time of conception by investing this crucial moment with a biblical intensity and lyricism. Did her mother ever pray *'Please, oh Father, cause a daughter to enter my belly'*? (32). Later, her father recalls predicting that she would 'be a girl, although even in labour my mother was convinced she'd delivered a boy. You've made a mistake, Doctor, she had said. Look again. No mistake' (33). Sex and gender threaten to sink into an abyss of nothingness where borderlines remain open to the invasion of the abject Other.

Frederika no longer feels that she has the time or luxury to ponder the metaphysics of loss if she is to resume a 'normal' life. Frederika is, in fact, intent on constructing a philosophy, or ethical framework, which will protect her from the 'mistakes' encoded into her paternal heritage. If she is able to trace the faulty gene which has beset her life to date, she believes may be able to deliver herself from its legacy of anxiety, depression and hypomania. This explains her 'enthusiastic' response to the Catholicism of her childhood and later the Buddhist retreat in Nepal. Her fascination with the principles of Yin and Yang, 'the Asian principle of opposites' (38), reflects her need to restore complementarity to her life, instead of the heady cocktail of occidental oscillation and 'swings' she associates with her mother's illness.[11]

Frederika's search for recognition and acceptance by organised religions and institutions is carried over to the relationships she attempts to foster outside her home. Frederika's retrospective analysis of her relationship with her elderly neighbour, Rennie, is a particularly striking example of a young

adult's desperate need to find a 'safe house' representing a stable point of reference in an otherwise chaotic, unstable environment. Despite its unruly squalor, Cawthra House acts as a hospice during Frederika's adolescent years, providing 'a respite from (her) family situation' (45), where she is able to 'leak a little of the shame and anger out' (45). The narrator's construction of Rennie, as a surrogate mother who inculcates a sense of self within the narrator, during a crucial stage of her development as an adolescent, eases the pain of her increasingly pathological fixation with the causes of her mother's and hence her family's psychological breakdown. Interestingly, Frederika notes that the name Cawthra House is in fact onomatopoeic, observing that it's title sounds 'like a catch in the throat' (44). The events following this incident, show how easily this 'catch' in the throat can mutate into the proverbial lump in the throat. This indigestible lump can only be processed when the subject is ready to acknowledge that a loss or bereavement has taken place. Frederika's confused response to her mother's death reveals how the past constantly disturbs the present reviving memories of other abrupt departures within her short life. Her mother's death reminds Frederika of Rennie's sudden demise. Watching the departing ambulance carrying away Rennie's body, the stunned narrator remarks that 'no tears came and I stopped feeling anything at all for some time after that' (49).

Frederika experiences Rennie's death as a betrayal that disguises the disturbing, arbitrary nature of death. By denying death, Frederika attempts to reduce its devastating power. This complete absorption in self hampers her relations with others, particularly her new-found friend Lucille, who urges Frederika to stop clinging to the past so that she can forge new relationships

and rebuild her future. Lucille works hard to dislodge the destructive narcissism entrenched in Frederika's personality culminating in her discovery of the narrator's self-inflicted scars:

> She stroked back and forth, pressing harder and harder on the scars themselves, until the memory of how I'd made them shook me suddenly with a convulsion like orgasm. I squeezed my eyes shut and drew up a knee to fend off her probing but she was onto me, knew she'd begun to uncover what she was curious about (1993: 100).

By massaging Frederika's fiercely guarded wounds Lucille begins to nurse Frederika out of her solipsistic world of anguished contemplation. Lucille's revelation of Frederika's festering scars liberates her from this claustrophobic space nudging her into a dimension where she is able to begin the rigorous work of 'reality testing'.

Lucille is the catalyst, who shakes Frederika out of her reverie, forcing her to confront the crippling effects of her self-absorption. She refuses to accept Frederika's projections or the defensive mechanisms that she constructs as a consolation for her own suffering. Her recognition of Frederika's impassioned renunciation of her origins is achieved through her own experience of isolation as a lesbian within Port Airedale. Both women are engaged in the difficult task of researching and rewriting their own lives. We learn that Lucille is reading history at university, or as she puts it, 'the history of history ... men dipping their wicks in ink' (85). Significantly, for this novel, Frederika discovers that the historiographer in Lucille 'loved to excavate the subject of mothers' (95), a revisionist practice shared by the narrator. Both women embark on a healing process based on revising impossible desires, even if Lucille appears to have secured the authorial role carefully dictating the textual changes in Frederika's narrative.

As a lesbian, Lucille is a marginalised figure in the conservative enclave of Port Airedale. Her position, as outsider, influences the utopian narratives which she relates to Frederika about her uninhibited life as a student in the cosmopolitan city of Montreal. These open-ended narratives are little more than narcissistic flights of fantasy, where the key protagonist, Lucille, objectifies herself as the focus of a communal 'G-force of lust' (92). Her willingness to immerse herself in fantastic narratives shaped entirely by selective memories of her recent past is another defensive strategy she shares with Frederika. Frederika's narratives are by contrast characterised by subterfuge, shorn of the narcissistic excess of many of the images colouring Lucille's accounts of her sexual exploits in the heady metropolis of Montreal. At the mid-point of the novel both women's 'life' narratives are weighed down by memories of defining moments in their pasts. The second half of the novel reveals the difficulties involved in rewriting personal narratives to embrace the challenge of new experiences instead of simply commemorating the dead.

Both women meet at transitional points in their own narratives where the intersection of past and present forces them to re-evaluate their lives. Luce's discovery of Frederika's scars represents a cathartic turning point in the novel, disguising Lucille's own more covert attempts at a new self-fashioning. Fear of exposing the narcissistic wound, concealing their own unsuccessful desires, forces both women to recall their lives in a series of snatched kaleidoscopic images. These images collapse at the point where action is required in order to propel the narrative along a liberatory trajectory involving the re-scripting of their hopes and desires. This is painfully realised in the moment where Luce coaxes the pain out of the scars that brutalise Frederika's body. Luce takes Frederika

to the brink of the precipice where she is able to briefly tolerate the undoing of the defences surrounding her experience of failed mourning.

Luce forces Frederika to confront this secret core of unprocessed desire embedded deep within her psyche by touching on her fear of future pain by reminding her 'it's the present that counts' (102). Luce cleverly manipulates Frederika's fear of disturbing the past by mocking her retreat into the sanitised world of organised religion. Luce reveals how Frederika's religious principles mask a chronic 'indifference to passion' by reminding her of the dictionary definition of the word passion as, 'Strong emotion. Outburst of anger; sexual love; strong enthusiasm for a thing' (102). Frederika responds by yoking 'Passion' with the 'suffering of Christ on the cross' (103), shifting herself back into the narcissistic world of static contemplation. Luce's volatile accusations disguise her reluctance to disclose details of her secretive past which remain cloaked in fantasy. Instead, she retreats into the security of a valorised identity as a lesbian warrior, challenging Frederika to 'Try being a lesbian, anywhere. You're a coward in a monk's clothing' (103). Luce's hasty departure signals her own fear of working through the losses associated with her marginalised existence as a lesbian.

(iv)   Death Throes

> Moreover, serious depression or paroxysmal clinical melancholia represents a true hell for modern individuals, convinced as they are that they must and can realize all their desires of objects and values. The Christly dereliction presents that hell with an imaginary elaboration; it provides the subject with an echo of its unbearable moments when meaning was lost, when the meaning of life was lost.
> (Kristeva, 1989:133)

Following Luce's departure, Frederika confesses 'although I was accustomed to being alone and liking it, I still felt a wrench of pain each time I

recalled her words-and pure loneliness' (104). Unwittingly, both women have

taken the first steps towards confronting the narcissistic pain subtending failed

mourning or depression. Their initial reactions of shame and rage arise

because they are unable to tolerate the discovery of the melancholic core

lodged deep within themselves. Their failure to find any redeeming virtue in

each other to compensate for the agonising loss of discovery intensifies the

feelings of emptiness following their parting.[12]

In the penultimate chapter of the novel Frederika and Luce decide to go

on a last-minute canoeing holiday. Sheard's choice of imagery in the closing

chapters is deliberate. She combines the energising and destructive forces of

nature in the text to reveal the harrowing process of undoing the past in order to

move on. Water is figured as a structuring device in the text signalling the

interelatedness of desire and death within the novel. Water combined with

electricity brings about Frederika's mother's death in the first part of the novel.

In the closing chapters, water translates into the nurturing feminised medium

bridging past with present. Immersing herself in the river, during her canoeing

trip, Frederika celebrates the 'opaque jelly of warm water [which] closed over

my eyes and plugged my ears ... I wanted to stay under forever' (146). The

amniotic sac of water envelops Frederika, transmitting the voice of her mother;

silenced for so long, sounding 'sweet, like a bird's, sending shivers across [her]

heart' (146/7).

This complex blend of imagery and intertextuality draws on numerous

accounts of feminist awakenings, such as Kate Chopin's novel of the same title,

where Edna Pontellier searches in vain for a context to nurture her burgeoning

self-awareness. Edna's quest for self-definition foreshadows Frederika's bid to

introject the memory of her dead mother. Water becomes the medium enabling her to surmount her inability to mourn, acting as an extended metaphor within the text, transforming memory into a recuperative device instead of an act of retribution. Accordingly, the floodgates of memory open up when Frederika is immersed in the water, evoking the memory of a childhood incident that took place on the same stretch of river. The narrator recalls a skating expedition with her mother. The explosive force of the memory produces a (re)vision of her mother. Her 'elegant tracery' on the ice emerges as a symbolic language Frederika feels she can incorporate therapeutically within her own life. Once the indecipherable becomes legible, Frederika believes the incident has been willed to her, displaying her mother's anxiety to 'teach me everything she knew while there was still time' (148).

For the first time in the novel Frederika resists the temptation to hide behind the 'strenuous activity of burrowing out endless (false) refuges' (148). Her knowledge that she is 'responsible for [her] own suffering and therefore [her own] happiness' (148) releases the hidden core of shame and rage associated with her mother. By introjecting the memory of her mother Frederika swallows the previously indigestible object shadowing her existence. Frederika's response to her redefined psychological topography is registered in a textual sense by a change in the figurative language used to express loss. Now, Frederika realises that her past is unique, part of an ongoing process that speaks of her own struggle to achieve selfhood. A new curative aesthetic is introduced into the text replacing the religious iconography of her youth with secular images from the present.

(v)   Conclusion

By breaking the taboo of silence surrounding her mother's life and death, Frederika takes the imaginative leap into language that Kristeva maintains partially alleviates the oppressive burden of melancholia (1989: 24). Kristeva has written, 'if it lives, your psyche is in love ... the psyche is one open system connected to another, and only under these conditions is it renewable' (1987:15). Sarah Sheard's novel illustrates the immense hurdles preventing the subject from participating in the holistic process of regeneration outlined by Kristeva. More importantly, Sheard's text dissects the endless repetition of failed mourning revealed through her narrator's reluctance to relinquish her attachment to the memory of her dead mother.

Sheard's book reveals how failed or unsuccessful mourning figures as a visible and textual sign that the interactive processes, outlined by Kristeva, have ground to a halt. The uncomfortable stasis emerging from this sudden failure to process grief illustrates the pain associated with a refusal to mourn. Refusal to mourn is summed up by Jacques Derrida in 'Fors' (1977) as a process of cryptic incorporation. As he puts it:

> What the crypt commemorates as the incorporated object's "monument"
> or "tomb", is not the object itself, but its exclusion, the exclusion of a
> specific desire from the introjection process: a door is silently sealed off
> like a condemned passageway inside the self (1977: 72).

Derrida's description of the melancholic self is revelatory of the ambivalence marking their relationship with the dead object. By steadfastly refusing to acknowledge death the melancholic subject forestalls the terrifying experience of processing grief.

The Swing Era reveals how melancholic incorporation is sustained within a severely dysfunctional family. Furthermore, the novel illustrates how its silent

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manoeuvres are perpetuated within social structures and the philosophical traditions informing them. Frederika feels she has everything to lose by acknowledging her mother's mental illness and her own place within her family history. By locking the memory of her mother deep within a psychic crypt Frederika is persuaded that she can successfully deny the reality of her life and death. Moreover, she wants to believe she can escape her mother's infectious influence by retreating into the institutionalised world of organised religion. The fear of contamination by her overbearing parent magnifies her rejection of her own femininity. Frederika's vilification of her own flesh mirrors a wider cultural hostility to the female and maternal body. By refusing food, sex, friendship and love Frederika believes she can keep her bodily margins free from defilement.

Sheard's book demonstrates the durability of the cultural taboos surrounding madness combined with misogynist interpretations of the female body. Moreover, Sheard's text reveals why we should be suspicious of Freud's injunction to his friend Binswanger, that we should perpetuate 'that love we do not want to relinquish' (quoted in Siggins, 1966: 17). The historical association of women with the body and nature in Western philosophical traditions makes it especially difficult for the female subject to introject the memory of her mother's body when it has been labelled as a grotesque, subversive force within Western culture. Conversely, Freud's position as a celebrated analyst and leading intellectual, at the time of writing, enables him to take advantage of the masculine appropriation of culture in the West. The master theoretician can enjoy his privileged position within melancholic discourses by translating his symptoms of painful withdrawal into inspired rhetoric. It is therefore relatively

easy for him to perpetuate a love that is not based on identification with that which he must deny in order to maintain his cultural integrity.

Julia Kristeva's analysis of melancholic ambivalence in *Black Sun* (1989) shows how deeply ingrained such discourses are within Western culture. Her notion of the 'death-bearing woman' merely reinvokes misogynist constructions of the female body as a destructive agency within culture. Her contention that 'matricide is our vital necessity, the sine-qua-non of our individuation' (27/8), reinvests cultural concepts of the castrating phallic mother with new vigour. As Janice Doane and Devon Hodges point out, Kristeva's assumption that she is gendering the Western discourses of depression and melancholia is a mistaken one. Her essentialist account of feminine sexuality as an 'addiction to the maternal Thing and its lesser aptitude for restorative perversion' (quoted in Doane and Hodges: 1992: 62), reveals her indebtedness to patriarchal cultural narratives declaring that 'women *are* more sick than men and that this sickness is an intrinsic feature of femininity' (62).

Furthermore, Kristeva's assertion that poetic language can help the melancholic subject to substitute language for loss seems equally misguided. Her theory fails to explain how the female subject is supposed to operate within the world of social interaction if she cannot identify with her primary love-object. Serial denial equates to serial killing, within Kristeva's account of feminine depression. If we must murder that which we love most, in order to survive, how can we hope to function productively as social beings within a culture where identification is the act that helps us to achieve our sense of self-hood?

In the final chapter of this thesis I will evaluate the position of the resisting daughter within discourses of suspended mourning. Kathryn

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Harrison's autobiographical account of incest survival in *The Kiss* (1997),

challenges the narrative conventions governing the place of the dutiful daughter

in relation to her father in the traditional romance plot. By shifting the paradigm,

to instate a resisting daughter with an abusive father, Harrison undermines the

ideological assumptions informing this particular genre. Harrison's account of

paternal loss reshapes the narratives of postponed or failed mourning observed

in the previous chapters. By resisting the temptation to 'safely' incorporate the

lost paternal object by secretly identifying with his cultural status as patriarchal

figurehead, Harrison forces herself to confront the spectre of thwarted filial

desire.

Sarah Sheard's novel, illustrates the visceral nature of the melancholic

state which relentlessly infiltrates the subject's worldview, placing them in

physical and psychological jeopardy. Perhaps Kristeva's most important

contribution to the question of melancholia, can be found in her emphasis on

the subject's need to engage in an amatory discourse which connects artistic

creation and mourning. Instead of treating melancholia as the poor relation of

the more distinguished mourner, Sheard's text advocates a more

compassionate response to the subject who longs to grieve.

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[1]   The monstrous feminine is Barbara Creed's term. Creed defines the 'monstrous feminine' as femininity masquerading in an alien form. Creed maintains that representations of the monstrous feminine can be found in films such as *Alien* where they are expelled in order to protect the symbolic order. See Barbara Creed (1986) 'Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection' in *Screen*, 27: 1.

[2]   See Elizabeth Bronfen (1992) for a comprehensive overview of Freud's reaction to the death of his daughter Sophie Freud-Halberstadt. Significantly for this project, Bronfen notes that the 'language Freud uses to describe his reaction to the unexpected death of his Sunday-child is significantly poised between a deference to the irrevocable reality of death and a defiance of what an unconditional acknowledgement of death would imply: namely the ego's relinquishing of its narcissistic libidinal cathexis'. See 'The Lady Vanishes' in *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic,* Manchester: Manchester University Press, p. 15.

[3]   In 'The Lady Vanishes' (1992)Elizabeth Bronfen sees Freud's correspondence regarding the death of his daughter Sophie, as a 'rhetorical move from the Other to the self, which reads the death of the daughter as a sign for his own vulnerability and mortality (15). She also emphases that 'Any articulation of another's death ... invariably returns to the surviving speaker. It returns to support the ego's narcissistic cathexis because it is coupled with a realisation of

one's own mortality' (15). See Elizabeth Bronfen (1992) 'The Lady Vanishes' in *Over Her Dead Body*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 15 - 16.

[4]   Interestingly, Elizabeth Bronfen (1992) draws the reader's attention to the difference between Freud's response to the death of his daughter Sophie and that of his father in 1896. Bronfen cites Freud's admission in the second edition of the *Interpretation of Dreams* (1908) that his father's death constituted 'the most important[significant, *bedeutsam*] event, the most poignant [cutting, *einschneidendsten*] loss, of a man's life' (16) In his letter to Wilhelm Fliess (2 November 1896), Bronfen places emphasis on Freud's confession that the old man's death had produced a 'writer's block' which had induced a sense of rootlessness in the author (16). By contrast his reaction to his daughter's death appears to have been experienced on a more personal specific level, 'That is to say, his father's death, though relegated to the realm of the impersonal, the general, is explicitly acknowledged as having led to his theory on dreams, by way of the detour through self-analysis. The death of his daughter is, on the other hand, explicitly acknowledged as belonging to the realm of the personal and specific' (17). Bronfen's elucidation of the widely differing responses elicited by the two deaths are of significance to this project because they focus on Freud's narcissistic reaction to the news of Sophie's death sublimated in work which helped him to 'restore his wounded narcissism ... Writing about death seems to become a way of regaining control after the disrupting experience of death, of reassuring continuity in the face of discontinuity, of mastering the absence of the Sunday-child ('snatched away as if she had never been') (17). See Elizabeth Bronfen (1992) 'The Lady Vanishes' in *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 15 - 39.

[5]   Lorraine Siggins notes that all of these papers deal with Freud's 'repeated affirmation (that) a loved object is never really relinquished' (17). See Lorraine Siggins (1966) 'Mourning: A Critical Survey of the Literature' in *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 47, pp. 14 - 25.

[6]   Jonathan Dollimore discusses the gendering of the Western preoccupation with death, desire and loss in the introduction to his study of this subject. He argues that misogynist traditions within Christianity, particularly the narrative of the Fall, associate women with death. Because women are traditionally associated with nature within these narratives they are constructed as agents of death and mutability. Dollimore illustrates how 'feminists' such as Camille Paglia have internalised these essentialist doctrines within their work, arguing that 'the historical repugnance to woman has a rational basis: disgust is reason's proper response to the grossness of procreative nature' (quoted in Dollimore, 1998: xxiv). See Jonathan Dollimore, 'Sexual/Gender Differences' in *Death, Desire and Loss in Western Culture*, London: Penguin, pp. xxiii - xvii.

[7]   See Joy Cantor (1989) 'On Giving Birth to One's Own Mother'. In an interesting reading of Delmore Schwartz's 'In Dreams Begin Responsibilities', Cantor discusses the stasis which results from unprocessed memory, She believes that the key metaphor of the story teaches us 'that if one does not acknowledge and overcome one's angry fascination with one's internalized parents, then one will unconsciously project them outward onto everyone one encounters'(85). See Joy Cantor (1989) 'On Giving Birth to Ones Own Mother' in *Triquarterly: Evanston*, 75, pp. 78 - 91.

[8]   In her excellent analysis of the representation of the female body in Western art, Rosemary Betterton examines the cultural legacy of women's association with nature against the masculine appropriation of the mind and spirit. She argues that these traditions had led to 'the grotesque female body which eats, has sex, menstruates, excretes and ages [being] systematically denied and suppressed within European bourgeois culture' (137). These powerful traditions of disgust for the female body within Western culture can be clearly discerned in *The Swing Era*. See Rosemary Betterton (1996) 'Body Horror?: Food (and sex and death) in Women's Art' in *Intimate Distance: Women, Artists and the Body*, London: Routledge, pp. 130 - 161.

[9]   I am of course referring to Gilbert and Gubar's seminal work *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. See Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1979) *The Madwoman In The Attic*, New Haven: Yale University Press.

[10]   This particular incident is a powerful reminder of Kristeva's use of the metaphor of milk cream to evoke the abject pain involved in the separation of infant from parent. Sheard's phraseology is remarkably similar to Kristeva's in the passage where she describes the daughter's rejection of the milk cream separating her from her parents, 'since food is not an "other" for "me", who am only in their desire, I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject myself within the same motion through which "I" claim to establish *myself*' (3). See Julia Kristeva (1982) *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, New York: Columbia University Press.

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[11] In his discussion of Buddhism, Jonathan Dollimore points out that Buddhism revokes the notion of the transcendent autonomous self resonating throughout Western philosophical thought. Instead, Buddhism maintains there is no soul, the individual is 'only a fleeting series of discontinuous states held together by desire, by craving', therefore 'the extinction of desire is the goal of human endeavour' (55). Dollimore's account of the basic tenets of Buddhism shows why Frederika is attracted to a religious tradition committed to eradicating the pain inherent in desire. See Jonathan Dollimore (1998) 'The Illusion of the Self: Buddhism' in *Death, Desire and Loss in Western Culture*, London: Penguin Press, pp. 53 - 56.

[12] Here again we can see the theoretical overlapping of notions of addiction with those of pathological mourning. Sue Vice's examination of love-addicted texts compares the differences between pathological love described in novels such as Josephine Hart's *Damage* (1993) and the more reciprocal model explored in Jane Rule's *Desert of the Heart (1964)*. According to Vice, the latter novel eschews the convention of ending love through death offering instead a narrative which offers 'life, and uncertainty' (125). This is of course analogous with the situation played out between Luce and Frederika in *The Swing Era* (1993). See Sue Vice (1992) 'Addicted to Love' in Lynne Pearce and Jackie Stacey (eds), *Romance Revisited*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, pp. 117 - 127.

CHAPTER SIX

Kiss and Tell: 'The Writing Cure' in Kathryn Harrison's *The Kiss* (1997)

(i)   Introduction

> When we define the Photograph as a motionless image, this does not
> mean only that the figures it represents do not move; it means that they
> do not *emerge*, do not *leave*: they are anaesthetised and fastened
> down, like butterflies. Yet once there is a *punctum*, a blind field is
> created (Roland Barthes, 1982: 57).

Roland Barthes' description of the photograph in *Camera Lucida*

(1982) reveals his fascination with the static image captured in celluloid.

However, it is possible to detect a restlessness disturbing the surface of his

display of academic contemplation. His frustration with the unrelenting

stillness of these arrested images gathers momentum, changing his

dissertation on the nature of photography into a testament of grief for the loss

of his beloved mother. Barthes scrutinises the bland surface of his

photographs for the '*punctum*' or blind field (57) that offers a privileged insight

into the private world of the silent image, so suddenly withdrawn from the

public gaze. In an ironic twist of fate, *Camera Lucida* was published

posthumously following Barthes' death in a road traffic accident in 1980. To

the reader of this most intimate of theoretical texts, the real-life postscript

accompanying the book is a fitting epitaph to two lives that had remained

resolutely entwined during life. Barthes' impassioned bid to make the

photograph 'speak' by locating its tantalising, hidden essence pervades his

text, making his untimely expulsion from the corporeal body to that of the

ethereal image captured in celluloid, translate into a fully realised *liebstod*,

where the bereft son and his beloved mother replace the traditional lovers of

the conventional romance plot.

Barthes' allegiance to his mother eschews the framework of traditional romantic fiction where the lover must overcome a variety of obstacles in order to achieve closure.[1] In his case, the quest is pursued beyond the grave, challenging the narrative operations of romantic fiction as well as the formal restraints of academic discourse. *Camera Lucida* exploits the gap between scepticism and the suspension of disbelief. His pursuit of the photograph's lost essence is intimately connected with a desire to recuperate lost ownership. In other words, his desire to recover the past is contingent on his wish to recreate his past, as he knew and understood it. This possessive impulse is made clear when he discovers a photograph of his mother as a young girl. He renames the lost snapshot as the 'Winter Garden' photograph, thereby carefully filing his claim for ownership of her overlooked image. Here, melancholic grief is interchangeable with a desire for ownership, to recover the past as it once was. His bid to recapture his mother's lost essence continually feeds his obsession. As he puts it:

> For I often dream about her (I dream only about her), but it is never quite my mother, sometimes, in the dream, there is something misplaced, something excessive: for example, something playful or casual - which she never was: or again I *know* it is she, but I do not *see* her features (but do we *see*, in dreams, or do we *know*? (1982: 66)

Barthes repeated emphases draw attention to his growing sense of frustration connected to his failure to resurrect his mother's elusive presence. His pedantic attention to detail reveals a darker quest to possess his mother's 'sovereign *innocence*' (69) on his own terms.

Barthes' elegiac theoretical text remains outside the frame of the discourses of mourning and melancholia, occupying a space which, according to Kathleen Woodward, exists somewhere '*in between* mourning and

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melancholia' indicating that grief may be 'interminable but not melancholic in the psychoanalytic sense, a grief that is lived in such a way that one is still *in* mourning but no longer *exclusively* devoted to mourning' (1991: 90). Thus, according to Woodward, when 'we speak of a person as being *in* mourning, what inevitably we have in mind in classical Freudian terms is that at some time in the future she, or he, will be *out* of mourning' (90). By framing mourning as a normative even prosaic procedure Woodward reveals how Freud is able to theorise melancholia as a pathological condition. Melancholia is then 'characterized primarily as a *state* not a *process.* It is denial of the reality of loss. It is a "disorder", a "disease" (90). Woodward's interpretation of the Freudian model of melancholia as a pathological state commemorating failed or unsuccessful mourning informs the theoretical framework of this chapter.

In this chapter, I will focus on the implications of Woodward's formulation of melancholia as a process that changes and develops over a period of time. I will examine how Woodward's revisionary interpretation of Freud's theory of melancholia as an evolving process affects gender. I will examine this issue by comparing Barthes' self-conscious assumption of an indeterminate, open-ended process of mourning with Kathryn Harrison's occupation of a similar role, following her incestuous relationship with her father, in her autobiographical novel *The Kiss* (1997). The analysis of gender within Woodward's reworking of Freud's 'clear-cut' binary definition of mourning and melancholia entails a re-evaluation of the daughter's role within the discourse of mourning. Her location within this extra-Oedipal territory also affects her position within the framework of the conventional romance genre

where she is constructed as a daughter who resists paternal power. By unsettling the margins of the romance plot, Harrison's 'resisting' daughter upsets the asymmetrical model of gender relations practised in the West. Moreover, her adolescent status threatens culturally sanctioned representations of romance within Western discourses. I will reveal how adolescence has traditionally been constructed as a problematic category disrupting the normative, linear transition between childhood and adulthood.

As Jo Croft remarks in her essay, 'Writing the Adolescent Body' (1998), 'adolescence is conceived, paradoxically, both as an epoch of sexual uncertainties and as an anchor for the most normative accounts of sexuality' (1998: 190). All of the narrators considered in this thesis are troubled by their position within this contradictory, age-based category. Their location within such a conflicted discursive field suppresses their ability to achieve agency through a clear and well-defined sense of selfhood. As we have already seen, the narrators discover their narratives perpetually undermined by adult-centred discourses that cannot decide whether to construct them as alienated outsiders or troubled, introspective narrators about to be assimilated into the dominant narrative of docile, non-threatening femininity.

More importantly, for this project, I will discuss how such novels have been framed as transient narratives charting their narrators' uneasy passage through the troubled stage of adolescence. As Jo Croft maintains, the adolescent text, 'raises several key questions about the relationship between literary production, historical narratives and the body' (1998: 191). As Croft points out, the intersection of these three categories has produced a body of work that has been 'defined and delimited by its relationship to physical

chronology' as a 'phase we all go through' or something 'we put behind us' (191). Adolescence, therefore, bears an uncanny resemblance to the pathological state of melancholia which Freud confidently assures us 'passes off after a certain time has elapsed without leaving traces of any gross change' (1957i: 163). Both categories figure within cultural narratives as contentious, potentially embarrassing, transitional zones to be hurried through before complying with the culturally sanctioned roles ascribed to women within patriarchal structures.

As we shall see, in Kathryn Harrison's chronicle of incest survival, problems arise when the adolescent narrator's history has been compromised by her abusive father. Once the paradigm of dutiful daughter and overbearing father shifts within the sentimental family romance,[2] their narrative is transformed into an ongoing process, where the unresolved crises of young adulthood cannot be contained by the constraints of the adolescent 'rite of passage' novel. Harrison's experience of parental abuse, which results in the loss of her father through incest, means that her 'desire to write' can never be inscribed within what Croft refers to as the 'common-sense' period of adolescence when 'literary production is typical, predictable and developmentally healthy' (191). Instead, Harrison's dramatisation of parental neglect and abuse extends beyond the margins of normative conceptions of the introspective adolescent journal endorsed by dominant discourses. Her story is integrated into a wider, evolving text where the production of narrative helps her to articulate a link between art and successful mourning. The 'talking cure' is transformed into the 'writing cure' which dissolves the self-

referential nugget of indigestible, unbearable loss lodged deep within the core of her troubled history.

(ii)   Daddy's Girl

The following section focuses on the literary implications of Harrison's juxtaposition of the incest survival chronicle with the heterosexual romance plot. By yoking these dissonant, antithetical discourses together Harrison dismantles the self-affirming apparatus of the sentimental family romance narrative. Harrison challenges the conventional 'family romance' plot by succumbing to her father's sexual advances. By physically embodying her father's desire Harrison upsets the strict decorum governing literary representations in the father-daughter 'romance'. As Lynda Zwinger points out, in her assessment of the 'The Daughter's Daughter' in *Daughters, Fathers and the Novel: The Sentimental Romance of Heterosexuality* (1991), 'the father- daughter story both reinforces and is reinforced by generic rules, has as its object precisely the fixing of subject/object positions' (131). Zwinger goes on to argue that if these dynamics become unstable or disorderly, 'heterosexuality as it is culturally constructed and enforced' begins to look like 'a permeable unstable fiction' (131). Furthermore, Zwinger states that the daughter must present herself as a compliant, marriageable body whom the father is able to exchange, according to the rules of exogamy, in order to protect his position as patriarchal figurehead (133). Significantly, for this project, Zwinger points out that the daughter's removal from the patriarchal economies, referred to above, destabilises paternal authority by foregrounding the 'hidden' possibility of heterosexual desire underpinning the

sentimental romance plot. By 'keeping the daughter home', Zwinger suggests

that the father's intention towards his offspring appears to be dangerously

'complicit with the prescriptions of patriarchal heterosexuality' (133).

Harrison's narrative reveals an unstable, even chaotic, family unit torn

apart by the devastating centrifugal forces of race and class. Harrison's

maternal grandparents effectively banish her father from the family home

when they discover his modest, non-Jewish origins. Her father's expulsion

from the midst of this conservative, bourgeois family undermines his paternal

authority. His exclusion from what Zwinger calls the 'family plot of

heterosexuality' (118) causes the collapse of this unwieldy, dispersed family

structure. Harrison's unnamed father returns periodically to visit his

estranged wife and daughter, a shadowy *unheimlich* spectre whose presence

suggests the dissolution of the clear-cut legal boundaries absolving his

responsibility as husband and father. His infrequent visits revive the uncanny

spectacle of a feminised figure striving to retrieve his status as the unifying,

phallic signifier within his first family.

These visits become increasingly intrusive and insistent, culminating in

the kiss that Harrison perceives as 'a transforming sting' administered by her

father 'in order that he might consume me' (70). Significantly, Harrison

interprets this insidious wound as a parental ruse designed to induce her

'desire to be consumed' (70). She infers that her father's kiss operates as a

transgressive virus within the text that threatens to disrupt the ideological

assumptions underpinning conventional family life. Harrison notes that the

'transforming sting' operates like a 'narcotic that spreads from my mouth to

my brain' (70). Harrison's description of the sting that permeates her whole

body merging inside with outside operates as an extended metaphor throughout the text. The text bristles with anxieties related to precarious boundaries or margins. In this particular instance, her father's kiss exposes his daughter's private, inner space to his own paralysing gaze, objectifying an interior that in cultural terms threatens his fragile masculinity.

Jill LeBihan examines these slippery marginal zones in her analysis of the popular consumption of murder mystery stories. As she points out:

> If we connect the grotto with the crypt, then, we have something like the familiar understanding of the feminine in psychoanalysis: something outside the symbolic; something sealed off, private; something that has to be penetrated, forced open by those that would know its dark secrets (1997: 5).

Harrison's father wishes to penetrate his daughter's dark interior in both a physical and an ideological sense. Metaphors of exploration have long been associated with the notion of masculine endeavour. However, in this case, the valorised imperialist concept of colonial discovery is analogous with the more pejorative aspects of Western capitalism. Here, the frontiers of the narrator's body are plundered by her father's crucifying gaze in order to nullify the danger posed by her unpoliced feminine boundaries. He wishes to keep his daughter's body 'sealed off', a private 'practice' ground of eroticised horror. His apparent ownership of this feminised testing ground fails to dilute the horrifying ambiguity of his daughter's forbidden interior. By succumbing to the compulsive horror emanating from his daughter's body he is made aware of his fractured status within the Symbolic as a symbol of corruption, the disorderly inadequately gendered husband and father.

Harrison declares that 'the kiss is the point at which I begin, slowly, inexorably, to fall asleep, to surrender volition, to become paralyzed' (70). By

slipping away from the predicates of the Symbolic order, Harrison 'escapes' into yet another liminal zone located somewhere between living and dying. She is aware of the invasive properties of the kiss, growing:

> Like a vast, glittering wall between me and everything else, a surface offering no purchase, nor any sign by which to understand it. I can see past and through it to the life I used to have, but mysteriously, the kiss separates me from that life (1997: 71).

The ideological wall or barrier operates in a similar manner to Luce Irigaray's premise that 'the mirror image reflects a male imaginary, and, within this system of representation and desire, the woman's 'sex organ represents *the horror of having nothing to see*' (quoted in Betterton, 1996: 136). The narrator begins to see herself in terms of the Symbolic as a fractured medley of disseminated bits and pieces dissociated from any familiar reference points. Within such a system of representation the narrator loses sight of herself as a 'unified' subject circulating within the familiar social networks of family, school and home. She begins to subside into the 'cold, sinking torpor' of shock that absorbs signifying systems such as language, gestures and speech until she can 'only answer people's questions internally, my voice won't speak the words I hear in my head' (75).

Her father's anti-Oedipal stance, within the novel, threatens those who come within his orbit. Family members find their role within the Oedipal script mysteriously displaced by his slippery, maverick status. Her father's appropriation of differing subject positions within his family ranging from father, husband and lover opens up the cultural interface between fear and fascination which Stallybrass and White maintain 'always bears the imprint of desire' (1986: 191).

Julia Kristeva claims that ambiguous borderline states convey a similar sense of uneasy fascination in her study of abjection. In *Powers of Horror* (1982), Kristeva maintains that the 'inbetween, the ambiguous, the composite' threatens social hierarchies by disturbing clear-cut systems of identity, system and order (4). She claims that abjection unsettles 'civilised' binary divisions, adopting a stance that is:

> Immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that dissembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it, a debtor who sells you up, a friend who stabs you (1982: 4).

Kathryn reads her own body as a site of abjection that is regularly visited by her abusive father. She objectifies her body as an *unheimlich* space that is out of control. Yet, paradoxically, that very same body is rigidly policed by the masculine gaze. Rosemary Betterton sees a similar invocation of desire and disgust in representations of the female body by artists such as Cindy Sherman, Helen Chadwick and Jana Sterbak. Following Luce Irigarary, she reads the contradictory status of women's bodies within Western culture as the product of phallic systems of representation (1996: 136). As Irigaray points out, these systems of representation:

> Put woman in the position of experiencing herself only fragmentarily, in the little structured margins of a dominant ideology, as waste, or excess, what is left of a mirror invested by the (masculine) "subject" to reflect himself, to copy himself (quoted in Betterton, 1996: 136)

As we have seen above, Kathryn begins to see her body as a monstrous shape-shifting phenomenon responding silently to the intrusive masculine gaze. This culturally determined hostility is inscribed on the surface of her body in a miasma of self-inflicted scars, the abandoned remains of a 'lifetime of hidden thwarted desire (97). Her own mortified body exists as a shadow of her father's more substantial form which she notes

appetites satisfied, hurts soothed' (96). She interprets his florid excess as the antithesis of her own flesh 'always silenced, its hunger and pain ignored' (96).

Harrison's novel uncovers a shadowy facsimile of patriarchal norms and values shading imperceptibly into the sentimentalised fiction of the family romance. As Zwinger maintains, the production of the 'modern bourgeois family novel' or 'the middle class father-daughter romance' is dependent on the construction of the daughter as the 'quiescent object of (impassive) paternal desire' (118). The subtle shift from adoring, mystified daughter to sexualised object is achieved without rancour or dissent in *The Kiss*, suggesting a disturbing consonance between the Oedipal dynamics of the sentimental romance plot and its close cousin, the incestuous narrative. Marina Warner hints at the dangerous *unheimlich* nature of such narratives in her appraisal of the father-daughter incest tale in *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* (1995). In 'The Silence of the Fathers', she recounts Freud's decision to protect the identity of the abusive father in his case study of Aurelia Kronich in his *Studies on Hysteria* (1895). According to Warner, Freud's 'delicacy' attests to his knowledge of the widespread nature of incest and its prevalence within the middle class families who formed the mainstay of his client group in turn of the century Vienna (350). She points out that his denial of paternal incest in this case study 'speaks volumes about the sensitivity of the issue for him' (350). I would argue that Freud's sensitivity arose from his repressed knowledge that the Oedipal dynamics underpinning his theory of sexual difference are virtually interchangeable with those of the father-daughter incest narrative. As we noted in the previous chapter, Diana Fuss gestures towards Freud's

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conscious reworking of the concept of identification to bolster his theory of normative sexuality (see p. 191). Indeed, his anaesthetised description of the process of identification required to successfully resolve the Oedipal complex remains unconvincing. Freud slides over the complex nature of identification in 'The Passing of the Oedipal Complex' (1924), when he states that:

> The object-cathexes are given up and replaced by identification. The authority of the father or the parents is introjected into the ego and there forms the kernel of the super-ego, which takes its severity from the father, perpetuates his prohibition against incest, and so insures the ego against a recurrence of the libidinal object-cathexis. The libidinal trends belonging to the Oedipus-complex are in part desexualised and sublimated, which probably happens with every transformation into identification; in part they are inhibited in their aim and changed into affectionate feelings (1957w: 273).

The simple transition from libidinally charged object-cathexes into anodyne affection, outlined in this paper, is achieved with ruthless efficiency. Freud cleanses the infectious category of desire from his description of the mechanics of identification in order to present a theoretically sound clinical paradigm. Diana Fuss draws attention to Freud's historical reluctance to include the unruly category of desire into his neat conceptualisation of identification. She notes his awareness of the interrelatedness of identification and desire in 'Mourning and Melancholia' where he describes identification as 'a preliminary stage of object choice ... the first way' (quoted in Fuss, 1995: 12). Fuss argues that Freud's intransigent attitude towards identification, amounting to a willed repression of its complex relationship with desire, occurs because it forms the 'theoretical lynchpin' of his theory of oedipality (12). Fuss asks 'what is identification if not a way to assume the desires of the other? And what is desire if not a means of becoming the other whom one wishes to have?' (12).

Fuss diss-assembles the Freudian scientific jigsaw in order to expose the contaminating influence of desire fatally intertwined with the more sedate category of identification.

(iii)   My Heart Belongs to Daddy

The following section will assess the complications arising when the identification/desire opposition becomes blurred. Kathryn Harrison's chronicle of thwarted desire and eviscerating loss following her relationship with her father opens up the closed binary of identification/desire within the Oedipal drama. By cracking open the repressed history of desire, shadowing the orderly process of identification, we are able to observe its disruptive influence on the sentimental family romance.

Harrison's decision to use *Sleeping Beauty* as a textual frame for her chronicle of incest survival suggests her disenchantment with conventional literary texts where the dutiful daughter is constructed as the object of her father's sentimental desire. Marina Warner's description of her passionate interest in fairy stories indicates why Harrison may have selected the folk tale over more literary renditions of the resisting daughter. Warner attributes her fascination with this genre to the fairy tale's power to evoke memories of childhood marked by the 'vividness of experience in the midst of inexperience' and the 'capacity for daydreaming and wonder' (1995: xiv). Interestingly, Warner adds that she has 'since discovered that there is nothing in the least childlike about fairy tales, and this, together with the suspect whiff of femininity hanging around them, attracted [her] to study them' (xiv). Warner's appraisal of the transformative capacity of the fairy tale illuminates Harrison's

decision to insert her testament to incest survival within the parameters of the folk tale. By reframing her story within the generic category of the fairy tale, Harrison partially recuperates some of the 'capacity for daydreaming and wonder', drained out of her own childhood history of emotional neglect and abandonment. Furthermore, we may speculate that Harrison also detects the 'suspect whiff of femininity' lingering around her own story of patriarchal domination and abuse.

The title of Harrison's novel exploits the conventional romantic awakening that accompanies the kiss in fairy tales such as 'Sleeping Beauty'. She deliberately distorts the narrative thrust of this tale by substituting her absentee father for the handsome prince promising deliverance from an oppressive regime. Instead, the narrator is inducted into a nightmarish dystopia where she is carefully concealed as her father's hidden object of desire. Interestingly, in the light of Harrison's inversion of this story, Warner points out that our traditional understanding of the tale as revelatory of virtue rewarded is false. Grimm's sanitised version of Giambattista Basile's fourteenth century romance, *Perceforest,* cleanses the original story's preoccupation with sex without consent. Warner states that 'Sleeping Beauty' has been successively revised in response to fluctuations in readership (1995: 220). The tale was retold in order to accommodate cultural shifts within the family related to the daughter's position within the home. Significantly, for this chapter, these cautionary tales focused on the daughter threatening to exceed her decorous role within a script that demands that she should always submit in mind if not body to the needs of her father (220).

As Warner points out, fairytales are replete with heroines who 'take refuge from violation or unfair accusations in silence' (xxi). However, the silent refuge can be readily transformed into a textual platform within these tales giving 'women a place from which to speak' (xxi). The female protagonists within these tales are then able to manipulate the patriarchal codes embedded within dominant discourses to their own advantage. Warner points out that fairy tales tend not to fit into a simple binary of passive or active but are instead written in an optative mood that anticipates and encourages change (16). These tales are therefore 'works in progress' that resist conventional closure. In fact, these open-ended tales operate as a primitive form of therapy that anticipates the Freudian notion of 'working through'. Warner maintains that the typical heroine of these tales is framed 'imagining the fate that lies ahead and ways of dealing with it' (16). The resourceful narrators are therefore portrayed as active agents who refuse to be constrained by oppressive ideologies. The heroine's ability to launch strategies of resistance is fully realised in 'Donkeyskin' where an embattled daughter resists the advances of her father by hiding in a filthy donkeyskin. According to Warner, the heroine is finally able to re-establish her sense of worth by exposing her mass of golden hair (xxi). As we shall see in the textual analysis, following this section, the tricks of transformation and rapid metamorphoses contained in 'Donkeyskin' are remarkably similar to those outlined in *The Kiss*. Hair is a powerful symbol of potent sexuality in the novel used to simultaneously disguise and reveal the narrator's 'disorderly' femininity.

The dust jacket of the hardback 4th Estate edition of the novel draws

attention to hair as an ambivalent signifier of youthful sexuality. The

iconography of the frontispiece hints at the castration anxieties reverberating

throughout the text. A pair of opened scissors covered in hair rests uneasily

behind the gothic letters proclaiming the novel's intriguing title. The opened

scissors strike a jarring note gesturing towards the novel's subtext of

repressed, forbidden sexuality. Marina Warner reveals how hair used as

disguise paradoxically reproduces 'the traditional iconography of the very

passion [the heroine] is fleeing' (355). Animal hairiness traditionally invoked

images of monstrous concupiscence which were projected onto social

outcasts or those 'practising vice' (357).

Warner's comprehensive analysis of the cultural significance of hair

draws attention to its role in the formation of identity. As Warner points out,

'in the quest for identity, both personal and in its larger relation to society, hair

can help' (372). Significantly, for this project, Warner reveals that hair has

been used to represent loss in rituals of fertility and mourning (373). She

suggests that the Victorian predilection for tokens and *memento moris*

invokes a sense of the uncanny because the artefact is 'neither dead nor alive

[making] the beholder's flesh creep' (373). Similarly, Warner adds,

'maidenhair can symbolize maidenhead - and its loss too' infused with 'the

flux of sexual energy that this releases' in fairy tales like 'Rapunzel' (373).

Towards the end of *The Kiss*, Harrison reveals that her hair contributed to her

sense of self; either pinned up or let down, it constituted a 'dressed up'

identity within which she could hide. Her decision to cut her hair before her

mother's death is fraught with conflicting emotions connected with notions of

selfhood and sexual identity. Harrison confesses to her mother that she used her long hair as a 'safeguard of my femaleness' (196). By relieving herself of the burden of this powerful symbol of disruptive femininity, Harrison promises her mother that 'she can die knowing the affair between her husband and her daughter is finished' (196). More importantly, by divesting herself of this explosive reminder of sexual coercion, Harrison feels able to take control of her own destiny.

Hair is figured as a potent metaphor of sexual compromise within this novel. Harrison shields her youthful body from her father's intrusive gaze in her reassuring cloak of golden hair. As we have already seen, she confesses that her hair was 'the safeguard of my femaleness when I'd given up my breasts and my period' (196). Hair is the uncanny signifier that transgresses boundaries and thresholds in the novel, blurring rigid divisions between sexuality and 'innocence', youth and maturity. By discarding her hair, Harrison feels able to escape the confusion and compromise of her youth. The textual interpretation of *The Kiss* following this section reveals that such clear-cut classifications and definitions are rarely achieved.

(iv)   Kiss and Tell

Kathryn Harrison uses her autobiographical narrative to work through the emotional devastation following the end of her relationship with her father. The narrator mourns the loss of her father as a result of their incestuous affair. Her narrative implicitly and explicitly tests reality in a Freudian sense by meticulously tracing the emotional history of their forbidden alliance. The agonising process of letting go involves the equally complicated task of

rewriting the future without her father's overwhelming presence. This gaping

hole, in the weave of her narrative, challenges the fictional daughter to tell her

story without the culturally sanctioned linkage of dutiful daughter with adoring

father. Harrison's novel reveals the treacherous terrain covered by the literary

daughter who attempts to usurp her father's authority. Shorn of the

oppositional splits upholding the notion of sexual difference in the West,

Harrison's affair draws attention to the culturally constructed nature of

heterosexual desire within the sentimental family romance.

Paradoxically, the narrator's position, as the physical embodiment of

her father's desire, means that she is unable to participate within patriarchal

models of femininity. Her temporary loss of her father followed by their

incestuous relationship illustrates the fragility of Oedipal relations within the

family romance. The narrator's role within this newly distorted family scene

illuminates the socially constructed nature of sexuality within Western culture.

Her knowledge of the civilised veneer shrouding her family's conflicting

political/sexual agenda affords the narrator a privileged view of the artificial

even theatrical nature of sentimental heterosexuality at the heart of family life.

As Linda Zwinger points out the theatricality of sentimental heterosexuality is

revealed in:

> The stylized flirtation with transgression, the mock violations, the
> elaborate fictions of complicity and mutuality, the creed that a woman
> cannot be violated against her will (if she gets it, she asked for it) - these
> are elements of the father-daughter romance; a romance predicated
> upon the figure of the sentimentalized, desirable daughter and
> shadowed by the figure of the defeated son (1991: 9)

By violating the incest taboo, which props up the fiction of orderly

relations within the Oedipal family drama, she begins to write herself out of

the conventional father/daughter narrative and into the uncharted territory of the resisting, dangerously sexualised daughter. The reconfigured narrative that ensues foregrounds the figure of the defeated son[3] attempting to restore his authority as the patriarchal figurehead at the helm of the familial vessel.[4] Harrison's abusive father fits neatly into this role, witnessed by his failure to secure this privileged status within his first marriage. By allowing himself to be 'bought off' by the narrator's maternal grandparents, he merely reinforces his position as an impostor wreaking havoc in the crumbling edifice of his first family's tortured lives. Harrison's novel rewrites the family romance plot by substituting the daughter instead of the father at the heart of narrative producing a counter-discourse to the well-worn tale of the father's overreaching desire.

The Kiss shares similar thematic concerns to those raised in Evelyn Lau's novel, Other Women, discussed in Chapter 3. Both of these novels focus on daughters harbouring secret and indigestible histories. These texts reveal the disturbing symptoms produced by their narrators' psychic incorporation of clandestine family histories. In Other Women, the forbidden family subtext remains shrouded in mystery illustrating the narrator's reluctance to let go of her concealed family history. Her undisclosed secret becomes a reassuringly familiar structuring device within her own psychological narrative that is less threatening than a direct confrontation with the hidden nature of her concealed shame. The symptoms of cryptic incorporation reveal themselves when both narrators attempt to shed their psychological burden. Both narrators adopt different strategies to deal with their unresolved grief and therefore achieve emotional regeneration with

varying degrees of success. As we have seen above, Lau's narrator postpones the reparative process of mourning by seeking comfort in endless substitutes, who stand in for the original object loss. In contrast, the narrator of *The Kiss* recreates herself as the 'bad' object that no one could possibly love. This oppositional strategy provides her with the impetus to re-establish her identity outside of her family home.

Harrison's novel is situated in a liminal zone somewhere between childhood and adulthood. The narrative rehearses notions of 'in-betweenness' peopled by those who exist outside the social order. Outsiders are used as structuring devices within the novel, which is located within the suspended state of the American road genre. Ideas of the outsider as an attractive depoliticised 'Other' resisting conventional norms and values are attractive to the young narrator. Lulled by the seductive rhythm of her father's car, she drifts past endless tourist destinations where once familiar landscapes are made uncannily strange. The narrator notes that:

> Increasingly, the places we go to are unreal places: the Petrified Forest, Monument Valley, the Grand Canyon - places as stark and beautiful and deadly as those revealed in satellite photographs of distant planets. Airless, burning, inhuman (1997: 3).

These dark cadaverous spaces, exposed to the blank gaze of the spectator, begin to resemble the narrator's distorted sense of her own body.[5] The defamiliarised inner reaches of her own body are mapped onto the unforgiving landscape, which is increasingly divorced from the reassuring confines of time or context. Their silent passage through forgotten times and places is 'separated from family and from the flow of time, from work and from school' (4). These deadly touristscapes are framed as film stills, forming the backdrop to the narrator's pathological relationship with her body. Like the

ever-changing landscape creeping past the window she begins to glimpse her body in snatched bits and pieces.

The snapshot images of archaic landscapes reveal the narrator's fear that her cheating body will merge into the deadly Californian landscape where 'the road always stretches endlessly ahead and behind us, so that we are out of time as well as out of place' (3). She discovers a hidden affinity with the bleached anarchic vistas that respond to a deep-seated fear of her own femininity. There is a seamless assimilation of inner and outer landscapes within the narrator, dissolving the ideologically imposed boundaries separating the subject from the abject 'Other'. Moving along a road that dissolves as soon as it is formed, the narrator consumes a series of deathly images. This evokes a disturbing panorama of sexual unease, where the narrator is captured, 'standing against a sheer face of red rock one thousand feet high; kneeling in a cave dwelling two thousand years old' (4).

The stylised framing of dissonant images parallels the narrator's feelings of dislocation within this alien landscape. Harrison defamiliarises the reassuring *mise en scène* of the family photograph, reproducing her feelings of estrangement travelling on the road with her father. The endless displacement and deferral of emotion characterising the road movie seeps into the plot producing a constant backdrop of lush movietone imagery where roads disappear in a shroud of blue fog and trees bear gigantic blossoms as big as the narrator's head (4). The narrative operates as a camera within the opening scenes of the novel, silently consuming towns, cities and a succession of anonymous motel rooms. The images reproduced in the text are encrypted within a series of petrified tableaux stripped of colour and

intimacy. These transient images are textual reminders of Derrida's theory that incorporation 'negotiates clandestinely with a prohibition it neither accepts nor transgresses' (1977: 72).

The harsh flash of exposure briefly illuminates their clandestine meetings posed against the silent backdrop of cities 'where we've never been before' (3). Derrida maintains that 'secrecy is [an] essential' ingredient of cryptic incorporation speaking only 'to silence or to ward off intruders from its secret place' (72). Photographic images are symptomatic of cryptic incorporation within the novel, silently commemorating 'the exclusion of a specific desire from the introjection process' (72).[6] The narrator's father takes numerous photographs of his daughter in increasingly compromising positions promising her they will 'show you who you are' (159). The photographs are figured as secret supplements, camouflaged within the inner reaches of the psyche which, according to Derrida, 'hides as it holds' (1977: 67). The illicit cache of photographs is an ambivalent reminder of a secret history conducted between father and daughter where both protagonists fear to expose the nature of their forbidden relationship.

Photographs operate as cryptic writing within the text. Their indelible imprints mimic the process of cryptic incorporation where indigestible objects are magically incorporated into the melancholic psyche (see Derrida 1995: 71). By taking pictures of his daughter, the narrator's preacher father deludes himself that he can 'love the dead as a living part of me, dead *save in me*' (Derrida: 71). The narrator discerns the traces of thwarted melancholic desire in his photographs which 'have the same qualities as those documenting medical anomalies' (Harrison: 159). Later, she recognises a similar 'flat and

dispossessed' expression on the faces of soldiers, injured during the Civil War, silently gesturing towards the 'places where bullets entered, and perhaps, exited' (159).

The narrator's remaining family resist the laborious process of introjection, preferring to identify with the incorporated object commemorating a wasteland of unresolved grief. The narrator's grandmother hurriedly removes her father's image from family photographs, repeating the magical trick of incorporation where uncomfortable memories are ingested as monolithic unprocessed objects into the psyche.[7] The narrator is intrigued by her father's uncertain presence within the few surviving photographs held by her mother, noting his marginal status within the frame where he 'seems as incidental as a bystander' (6). Her father is a visual signifier of impossible, unresolved desire within these snapshots, anticipating his subsequent position as the encrypted marker of her mother's failed marriage.

Disturbed sleep patterns hint at the presence of grafted markers of secret despair within mother and daughter. The narrator's mother uses sleep as an antidote for her unrelieved mourning, escaping into this silent refuge, 'whenever she can' (7). Meanwhile the narrator learns how to cradle her own unprocessed grief within the 'cottony somnolence' of sleep, mastering the 'trick of selective self-anesthesia' that leaves her 'awake to some things and dead to others' (137). Magically imitating her mother's enchanted sleep, she slumbers, 'in response to impossible desire' (137). Indigestible sorrow squats deep within the narrator's maternal family. Harrison's mother flits through a series of romantic involvements with other men, whilst remaining 'romantically fixated ... on my father' (10). Meanwhile, his second wife tells the narrator

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that she 'takes as her husband a man who is not entirely present to her, who is always looking back over his shoulder at my mother and at me' (10).

Failure to articulate grief in and through the reparative act of mourning figures as a shared reference point within the narrator's family. Blocked or failed mourning binds family members together, bolstering their unspoken resolve to hide the source of their 'impossible desire' (137). The family's reluctance to shift the memory of the narrator's father locks them into a mode of repetition precluding the reparative act of remembering. By ingesting his memory wholesale, the family prolongs their sojourn within the vacuum of unresolved, impossible mourning. The narrator's father is also imprisoned within this airless, joyless space where the spectre of his 'failed' past is figured as an insurmountable impediment to the act of mourning. His resistance to the painful task of converting loss into language is revealed in his obsessive interest in photography. By simply rewinding a film, he hopes to restore his position as patriarchal figurehead within his first family.[8]

The narrator's father attempts to use photography as an interpretative weapon to unlock the secrets buried deep within the steely vault of his first wife's privileged East Coast family. She remembers how he told her that he began to take photographs 'to compensate for ... his lack of imagination' (87). Disturbingly, he reveals to his daughter that his camera is his constant travelling companion: 'without its help he can't visually recall where he's been' (87). Her recognition that her father 'can't picture things in his head', thinking 'only in words, a text unrelieved by any sensual memory', offers an unsettling insight into his distorted psychic topography. Her father's disclosure that he is unable to synthesise literal and sensual imagery reveals the extent of his

illness. By abruptly severing the transformative capacity of memory and imagination from the literal word, he perpetuates his secret history of thwarted masculinity. Abraham and Torok's theory of *antimetaphor* illustrates his inability to express thoughts in figurative language and so convert language into loss. As Esther Rashkin maintains, in 'A Recipe for Mourning', antimetaphor suggests the presence of a 'tainted secret' that 'must not be shared in a communion of other mouths' (1995: 370). Rashkin describes the violent repression of figurative language as 'pathological rhetoric' that literalises 'the words associated with the lost object's shame as a means of undoing or nullifying that shame' (370). Rashkin interprets antimetaphor as a tropological denial of 'the shame associated with the loss' realised through the destruction of the 'metaphoricity of words' (370).

By steadfastly denying figurative representation, the narrator's father closely guards the secret shame of his impotent, failed masculinity. The narrator traces the origins of her father's perception of his own failed masculinity through his subordinate relationship with his own father. She reveals how he understands his own father, and 'thus his own manhood', through his 'mythic, sexual appeal' based on a powerful combination of 'violent sexual jealousy' and 'fatal sexual vanity' (121). His revelation that his father's sexual magnetism caused women to follow him in the street hints at his feelings of inadequacy when compared to this all-conquering figurehead. His perception of his own marginalised status, within patriarchal structures, explains his disorderly relationship with his own daughter.

Working within a Lacanian theoretical model, Elizabeth Grosz claims that the phallus is the essential if illusory link organising relations between the

sexes so that 'the phallus *qua* signifier map[s] the position(s) each occupies as a feminine or masculine subject in the patriarchal symbolic order' (1990: 116). The illusory, even 'virtual', nature of this psychic topography, described by Grosz, implies that patriarchal 'security' is tenuous and therefore always under threat. Indeed, Grosz points out that masculine anxieties related to sexual performance and impotence culminate in a 'desperate search of the other through whom the man can have his position as the possessor of the valued/desired organ confirmed' (118). Viewed from this theoretical angle, the narrator's father translates into a wilderness figure attempting to recuperate paternal phallic authority by occupying his daughter's body, telling her that "You belong to me" (85).

Escalating fear of betrayal and impotence underpin his decision to violate his eldest daughter in his maternal home. The narrator is aware that he 'needs to do it at his mother's house. He needs the power granted by her presence, and he needs to thwart that power' (128). Her father's violation of this most ancient taboo, in the heart of his maternal home, is a forcible reminder of his emasculated status within his own household. Her father's unspeakable act forces the narrator to confront his masochistic relationship to his own masculinity. She realises that he 'resents his servitude, along with the castration implied by the robes he's forced to wear (he calls them skirts)' (126). Moreover, the narrator is aware of the violent de-idealisation of his own masculinity, forcing him to find 'a target in mothers: in mine and in my grandmother, who took away his wife and child; in the church itself, through whose wall he once put his fist' (126).

The narrator's reappraisal of her father, following their abusive encounter, strips him of the romantic discursive apparatus traditionally ascribed to the outsider who rescues the 'heroine' from the dreary anomie of suburban life. Instead, she begins to see an indeterminate figure, neither masculine nor feminine, who uses her body to reassert the fiction of his own paternal authority. Kaja Silverman's discussion of 'The Ruination of Masculinity' (1992) in Rainer Werner Fassbinder's films illustrates how demasculinated figures, such as Harrison's father, seem doomed to repeat their troubled pasts. In films such as *In a Year of Thirteen Moons*, the castrated central protagonist endlessly repeats the agonising events leading up to his mental collapse, reconceiving 'figural history as the ruthless subordination of the present and the future to the past' (250). The erosion of the transformative figure of hope, in relation to a better future, is refused in Fassbinder's cinema, which, Silverman maintains, 'produces representative after representative of psychic stasis' (251). She argues that this debilitating vacuum occurs because:

> Its prototypical characteristics cannot muster all of their mental resources on behalf of a better world, not only because self-presence is an impossible goal, and agency extremely limited, but because they carry within themselves a malign past which cannot help but repeat itself. It is consequently not only the social order which seems resistant to change, but subjectivity as well (1992: 251).

Silverman's portrayal of a bleak emotional landscape, doomed to endless repetition, reprises the scene of dereliction binding father to daughter in *The Kiss*. The text is constructed in a series of flashbacks focusing on the narrator's father's perpetual absence. His reappearances within the text provoke harsh and bitter memories related to his failure as son, husband and father. The seamless assimilation of the present, by the past, reinvokes the

murderous cycle of annihilation through identification, miring all three protagonists in the graveyard of melancholic ambivalence.

(v)   Conclusion

In the introduction to her study of identification, Diana Fuss claims that this process 'invokes phantoms. By incorporating the spectral remains of the dearly departed love-object, the subject vampiristically comes to life' (1995: 1). This necrophilic activity can be clearly observed in Kathryn Harrison's story of paternal betrayal and abandonment. As Fuss astutely maintains, 'these revenants of the unconscious frequently take us by surprise. Identifications startle us by the apparent suddenness of their emergence, the violence of their impact, the incalculability of their effects' (1/2). Harrison's novel uncovers a panoply of unreconstructed psychical histories, shadowing the strained relationships within her own family. The powerful, even catastrophic, consequences following cases of repressed or pathological identification are painfully rehearsed in Harrison's rendition of the unbearable loss of her father through a consensual, incestuous relationship, initiated by him.

Harrison's retrospective narrative exposes the destructive nature of failed identification, which, according to Fuss, 'sets in motion the complicated dynamic of recognition and misrecognition that brings a sense of identity into being, also immediately calls that identity into question' (1995: 2). Harrison's fateful encounter with her father occurs during the formative years of adolescence. Adolescence has been historically constructed as an ambiguous and therefore dangerous category that is complicated by its

tendency to be approached through the normative frame of adult-based theoretical models. Indeed, Harrison's father approaches his daughter from a similar standpoint by exploiting the cultural notion of youthful femininity being briefly exposed to subversion and manipulation by unscrupulous adults. His perverse preoccupation, with his daughter's naked image, bears witness to his wish to capture the evaporating text of adolescent femininity on celluloid before it disintegrates.[9] His furtive project is sustained by a desire to access the fleeting sexual charge embedded in his erotically challenging offspring.[10]

Ironically, the 'flat dispossessed' aura surrounding his photographs reflects back the circular monotony of his own self-imposed exile within what Silverman describes as 'an unchanging and unchangeable world, in which past, present, and future fold back upon each other in an endless reprise of the same' (1992: 253). The narrator's father inhabits yet another liminal zone suspended between the demands imposed by parents, family and the church. The physical reality of his second family is haunted by the overwhelming force exerted by his first wife and her reclusive family. His inability to introject the shamed lost object of his masculinity accounts for his compulsive 'attraction' to the source of his unreconstructed grief. His extended stay in such an intolerable vacuum is a result of his fear of exposure. He fears the discovery of his defective, incomplete manhood witnessed by his failure to convince his first wife and her family that his masculinity remained intact.

Interestingly, Kaja Silverman observes that the bleak atrophic vision promulgated by Fassbinder *In a Year of Thirteen Moons* is infused with an aura of delirious masochistic pleasure. She suggests that, 'although there may be no escaping the vicious circle of pain and oppression, there is

nevertheless a way of functioning within it which permits life to be sustained, at least for a time, and which occasionally yields moments of an intense and self-transcending pleasure' (1992: 255/6). Silverman's vision of transcendent survival, within an alternative sphere situated at the 'razor's edge of negativity' (256), invites comparisons with the masochistic self-deprecation practised by Harrison's father in *The Kiss*. Furthermore, her contention that masochistic ecstasy in Fassbinder's film is figured as a paradoxical utopian realm, predicated on the 'exquisite suffering' of its central protagonist, has important implications for the manner in which male subjects continue to be inscribed within melancholic discourses.

Indeed, Silverman's description of the utopian trajectory of Fassbinder's film bears an uncanny resemblance to Roland Barthes' willed resistance to mourning in *Camera Lucida*. As Silverman points out, Fassbinder's cinema is 'utopian not only in its attitude of unremitting refusal, but in the access which it yields to a psychic "elsewhere", an access which is synonymous with what I will call "masochistic ecstasy"' (257). The similarities between Silverman's appraisal of Fassbinder's representation of masochistic sublation and Barthes' theory of sustained mourning, adumbrated in *Camera Lucida*, are particularly striking. Barthes remarks that:

> It is said that mourning, by its gradual labor, slowly erases pain; I could not, I cannot believe this; because for me, Time eliminates the emotion of loss (I do not weep), that is all. For the rest everything has remained motionless (quoted in Woodward, 1990: 97/8).

Kathleen Woodward emphasises how Barthes externalises the figure of his deceased mother in his essay. By choosing to preserve the pain associated with bereavement, Barthes resolutely and self-consciously declines to participate in Freud's prescription for successful mourning through

the arduous process of 'reality testing'. His decision to wilfully prolong the eviscerating pain of loss is remarkably similar to Silverman's description of 'rapturous ... exquisite suffering' in Fassbinder's treatment of masochistic ecstasy in his film *In a Year of Thirteen Moons*.

Woodward concludes that Barthes 'explores photography as a "wound", as a way of refusing to allow the pain of his mother's death to subside and of asserting his attachment to her' (105/6). However, Woodward turns aside from the masochistic dynamics implicated in Barthes' rehearsal of his mother's death by failing to question what he stands to gain from repeatedly 'witnessing and producing his own loss' (107). Silverman's analysis of masochistic divestiture in *In a Year of Thirteen Moons* helps us to understand why the male subject would choose to locate himself within this *cul-de-sac* of unrelenting pain. She argues that Fassbinder's representation of masochistic ecstasy, in this film, reveals 'the thrill of foregoing mastery ... the thrill at being lifted up and out of sadism, and at residing within rather than "swallowing" the other' (1992: 267). Silverman's theorisation of a psychic 'other' place, where the male subject can shed the 'defensive operations' that 'sustain normative male subjectivity', translates into yet another example of the male subject's mastery of melancholic discursive practices. Silverman's conceptualisation of a psychic retreat, where the masculine subject can unload the 'cultural fictions' covering 'the abyss at the center of subjectivity' (256), illustrates why melancholic discourses are still dominated by male practitioners such as Fassbinder.

As Juliana Schiesari points out, the discourse of melancholia celebrates 'heroic suffering and consecrates the situation of lack as blessed'

(1992: 8). Silverman's dissection of the paradoxical losses and gains implicit in her notion of masochistic empowerment, through pain, illustrates how Roland Barthes and Harrison's abusive father survive within such an ostensibly moribund, self-defeating space. It is no accident that both men focus on photographic representations of 'departed' family members in order to replay and hence relive the delirious pain subtending their own 'heroic suffering'. Corey K. Creekmur suggests that photographic representations reflect their creator's desire to 'fix, isolate and analyse motion through the production of amazing stills' (1978: 47). Creekmur's description of authoritative control through the medium of photography is illustrative of a masculine need to name and control. His notion of the photograph as a starkly manipulative space explains why masculine figures such as Barthes or Harrison's father reject the thoroughgoing process of mourning. By immolating themselves within the closed space of unresolved grief both men exist within a reassuringly familiar patriarchal context that supports their privileged status within its ranks.

In *On Photography* (1978), Susan Sontag describes the powerful appeal of photography as a 'mass art form' practised 'mainly as a social rite, a defense against anxiety, and a tool of power' (8). Sontag's describes photography as a conservative process that can be manipulated in a pornographic sense. By promiscuously circulating photographic images she implies that is possible to reinforce the power of dominant discourses by constantly reiterating monolithic interpretations of set pieces such as the family photograph. Harrison illustrates how easily these stylised tableaux can be undermined when she reveals the shady underside of these conventions

during her trips to the heritage landscapes of southern California. She readily exploits these duplicitous images revealing how easily they yield up their dark, *unheimlich* interiors. By actively engaging with the discourse of photography she creates counter-cultural images that threaten her father's oppressive manipulation of the photographic image.

Unlike her father, Harrison's fictional narrator is unable to access the discursive valorisation of de-idealisation prevailing within Western philosophical traditions and practices. As Schiesari points out, 'the more the artist suffered, especially through self-denial, the more he became emblematic of superior aesthetic virtues' (1992: 8). Roland Barthes clearly benefits from the traditional construction of the tortured melancholic man of letters, consumed by the 'Sisyphean labour' (1982: 86) involved in endlessly rehearsing the past. Even Harrison's disaffected father manages to accrue power through his history of 'inspired' suffering engendered by his experience of thwarted desire. The narrator draws on cultural narratives upholding the fiction of masculine superiority through suffering, when she concludes that, 'now I have known him, and he me, the rest of my life depends on our exile from each other' (202). She remains transfixed, 'anesthetized and fastened down' (1982: 57), within her father's circular melancholic rhetoric.

Harrison leaves us with the confession that 'the loss of my father will haunt me as it did in the days long past, when I saw a man with no face walk in the halls in our house. Somewhere in the world is a father I can't know' (202). Harrison's novel is a therapeutic text mourning the loss of a significant Other who traditionally performs a crucial, centralising role within the sentimental family romance. The novel helps her to test reality, in a Freudian

sense, by meticulously working through the confusing and painful aftermath of her forbidden relationship with her father. As Freud points out, this all-consuming task is 'carried through bit by bit, under great expense of time and cathectic energy, while all the time the existence of the lost object is continued in the mind' (1957i: 154). Harrison's concluding remarks suggest that her version of 'reality testing' will persist throughout her life. As a wife, mother and grandmother, she will constantly rework her ideas of what these categories mean without her father. Freud conjectures that 'mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as fatherland, liberty, an ideal and so on' (153). Harrison's loss is both conscious and unconscious, combining the physical loss of her father with the unconscious loss of liberty engendered by the ideological destruction of her own idealised 'fatherland'.

Her book is a testament to the destruction of the desires and dreams projected onto her idea of what such a father should represent. Her novel commemorates the demise of her own sentimental family romance plot traditionally held together by the fictional authority invested in the father as a patriarchal figurehead. The collapse of this reassuring fiction impels her to inscribe her story within a counter-discourse where the daughter replaces the patriarchal father at the heart of the narrative. In overcoming this monumental ideological hurdle she transforms her story from a pathological commemoration of shameful, secret desire into a textual representation celebrating her right to grieve.

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[1]   Stevi Jackson concludes that the 'happy ever after' conclusion of fairy tales and romances papers over the contradictions between these two forms of love. This narrative closure indicates that the excitement lies in the chase, not the 'happily ever after' (53). Barthes' unrelenting grief for his dead mother deviates from the repetitive trajectory of the

heterosexual romance plot in its bid to extend the quest for ideological fulfilment beyond the grave. *The Kiss,* reveals how the traditional 'happy ever after' conclusion of fairy tales frequently mask a much darker fiction where ideological struggles continue long after the tale's official closure. See Stevi Jackson (1992) 'Women and Heterosexual Love' in Lynne Pearce and Jackie Stacey (eds), *Romance Revisited,* London: Lawrence & Wishart, pp. 49 - 63.

[2] I am borrowing Linda Zwinger's definition of the sentimental family romance plot to describe the asymmetrical power structure traditionally enforced within Western patriarchal structures. According to Zwinger, 'the story of heterosexuality ... points to the production of a genre (the modern bourgeois family novel), a story (the middle class father-daughter romance, and a figure (the sentimental daughter) all designed for and invested with the particular purpose of rendering null and void any daughterly desire to deviate from that patriarchal incorporation' (118). See Linda Zwinger (1991) 'A Child Never Banished From Home: The Daughter's Daughter' in *Daughters, Fathers and the Novel: The Sentimental Romance of Heterosexuality,* Wisconsin: Wisconsin University Press, pp. 117 - 140.

[3] I am borrowing Linda Zwinger's term 'the defeated son' to describe Harrison's father's subordinate position within her mother's family. Zwinger contends that the desirable daughter must be sentimentalised within the conventional family romance in order to 'protect her desiring father from himself, as desiring what he should not take' (9). The father's inferior status within Harrison's maternal family disturbs the contrived dynamics of sentimenal family life outlined by Zwinger. See Linda Zwinger (1991) 'Introduction' in *Daughters, Fathers and the Novel: The Sentimental Romance of Heterosexuality,* Wisconsin, Wisconsin University Press, pp. 1 - 9.

[4] Linda Zwinger points out that sentimental daughters often prop up the patriarchal authority of the fictional father in novels such as *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma.* She notes that these novels present 'paternal deficiencies which must be made good, and made good they are by the daughter in the story who most fully occupies a (metaphorically) writerly position' (126). Here, we see the daughter occupying a melancholic role that mimics what Zwinger sees as 'the ultimate patriarchal duty of orchestrating exogamous exchange' (126). Traditionally, therefore, the sentimental daughter perpetuates patriarchal mandates through her hysterial identification with her father. By refusing the melancholic role of the sentimental daughter Kathryn Harrison fatally undermines the patriarchal privileges accorded to the father within the traditional family romance. See Linda Zwinger (1991) 'A Child Never Banished from Home: The Daughter's Daughter' in *Daughters, Fathers and the Novel: The Sentimental Romance of Heterosexuality,* Wisconsin: Wisconsin University Press, pp. 124 - 127.

[5] Jill LeBihan's description of the critical category of the grotesque is enlightening in this particular context. LeBihan builds on Mary Russo's description of the grotesque, as a bodily metaphor, resembling 'the cavernous anatomical female body' (quoted in LeBihan, 1997: 4) by synthesising it with Derrida's notion of cryptic incorporation. By connecting the grotto with the crypt, LeBihan points out that 'we have something like the familiar understanding of the feminine in psychoanalysis: something outside the symbolic; something sealed off, private; something that has to be penetrated, forced open by those that would know its dark secrets' (5). (5). The mysterious menace of the Californian landscape, described by Harrison, closely resembles the cultural demonisation of the female body described above. See Jill LeBihan (1997) 'Tearing the Heart Out of Secrets: Inside and Outside Murder Mysteries', Unpublished Masters Paper, Sheffield: Sheffield University, pp. 1 - 20.

[6] Corey K. Creekmur draws attention to the defensive operation of the photograph in the work of mourning. He argues that the photographic imprint 'persuades' the ego that the lost object will exists in the Imaginary, thereby avoiding 'any painful confrontation of the reality of the object's absence' (46). See Corey K. Creekmur (1978) 'The Cinematic Photograph and the Possibility of Mourning', *Wide Angle,* 9: 1, pp. 41 - 49.

[7] The destruction of her father's image within the family album is similar to Evelyn Lau's description of her mother's secret letters in *Other Women.* Both women reveal a deeply entrenched reluctance to undergo the thoroughgoing work of introjecting grief by magically excising the source of their unreconstructed grief and anger. See Evelyn Lau (1995) *Other Women,* London: Minerva, p. 189.

[8] Kathryn Harrison's first novel, *Exposure* (1993), is a thriller that focuses on yet another daughter's troubled relationship with her father. Within this novel, the central protagonist, Ann Rogers, is photographed by her father in a series of compromising studies including masturbation and self-mutiliation. After her father's suicide Ann works works for a commercial

photographic studio in New York producing videos of weddings and christenings. The theme of obsessive and intrusive photography anticipates the theme of paternal abuse in *The Kiss*. Interestingly, Robert Zeigler see Ann's work at Visage Video as an healing exercise that contrasts with her father's pathological fixation with the photographic image. See Robert Zeigler (1996) 'The Body in Pictures in Kathryn Harrison's *Exposure*' in *Notes on Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 26, 5, pp. 6 - 7.

[9]   The fictional father in *Exposure* is also disturbed by his daughter's adolescent status. Robert Zeigler postulates that his suicide is caused by 'his inability to circumscribe Ann in his pictures and thereby stop her progression into adolescence' (7). Zeigler suggests that Edgar Rogers' disillusionment with his daughter's maturing body hinges on his fear that he will be unable to control her body. As a result of her father's manipulative preoccupation with her bodily image Ann feels that her own identity is in jeopardy. As Zeigler puts it 'Harrison shows that even the most author-centered text cannot control interpretations. Subordinated to her father as no one, Ann is also universalized in the Museum of Modern Arts' retrospective on Edgar's work as the property of everyone' (7). See Robert Zeigler (1996) 'The Body in Pictures in Kathryn Harrison's *Exposure*' in *Notes on Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 26, 5, pp. 6 - 7.

[10]   Carol Mavor focuses on the interface between adolescence and photography in her essay on the work of the Victorian artist Clementina Hawarden. Mavor argues that Hawarden's studies of her daughters exploit the idea that adolescence and photography merged together form a cultural window that is briefly open to subversion and manipulation. As she points out, the photograph is 'developed extra quickly, like a Polaroid picture, like a fourteen year old girl, like her last breath before death. So much, so fast' (93/5). See Carol Mavor (1997) 'Becoming: The Photographs of Clementina Hawarden, 1859 - 1864' in *Genre*, 29, Spring/Summer, pp. 93 - 134.

CHAPTER SEVEN

WRITING THROUGH: RECLAIMING THE RIGHT TO GRIEVE

(i) Conclusion

> I could have everything I ever wanted, but I held back. Now that I could
> have it, there was no need to rush the moment. Once I had it, it would
> change, and I would never have this moment - the moment of changing
> from not having to having - again ... Every second was in itself complete
> and fulfilling and totally interesting. It was the best few minutes of my life,
> and if I could have stopped time there altogether I would have, and you
> would see me still in that room, the orange light hitting the dust beams in
> the air, and the water, and her southern smile (Jane De Lynn, 1991: 51/2).

> Unfortunately, lying makes us feel omnipotent. It creates a terrible
> loneliness. Here, tonight, I feel cut off from you and from everyone. Truth
> telling, therefore, has to be an ultimate value, until it clashes with another
> ultimate value, pleasure, at which point, to state the obvious, there is
> conflict (Hanif Kureishi, 1998: 136).

In a recent *Guardian* article, Elaine Showalter attempts to stem the tide

of criticism directed at the British women's novel of the 90's. The article was

commissioned in response to Lola Young's damning indictment of

contemporary British women's fiction as 'insular; parochial and piddling' (1999:

2). As chair of the Orange Prize, for British women's fiction, Young complained

that British women writers were 'thinking small' in contrast to their American

counterparts who were taking 'small intimate stories and setting them against

this vast physical and cultural landscape' (quoted in Showalter, 1999: 3).

Showalter attempts to put the record straight by placing recent work by writers

such as Michele Roberts, Jeanette Winterson and Pat Barker in a wider cultural

framework which owes as much to the British New Woman novel of the 1890s

as recent developments in marketing and electronic technology (3).

Showalter reminds the reader that Young's 'damning verdict' is by no

means rare. She points out, that Young's invective was matched by the 'dire

judgements' heaped on the New Woman novel of the 1890s, proving how 'cyclical and familiar such literary perceptions have become' (2). Furthermore, Showalter reveals that she has detected a worrying tendency to ignore or patronise women's fiction deemed to be 'too popular, domestic or feminine' (3). As a literary historian, Showalter views such intolerance as evidence of:

> A perpetual bias against feminine subject-matter and female subjectivity, as prevalent now as a century ago, [which] tends to belittle stories about women's lives, especially the unpoor, unaged and unmad, as if they could not be worth serious literary attention (1999: 3)

Showalter's polemic endeavours to redress the cultural denigration of recent women's fiction by emphasising its position within an evolving tradition of women's writing. She is then able to locate the allegedly xenophobic British women's novel of the 90s within one of the tradition's many peaks and troughs. Showalter attributes the apparent loss of faith in British women's writing to 'the gap between reader responses and authorial concerns' (2/3), brought about by readers' familiarity with previously forbidden territory such as incest or female sexual fantasy, which has now been addressed by an earlier generation of women writers. Showalter implies that the British women's novel is currently undergoing 'a paradigm shift' (2), carefully regrouping its forces, before moving on to tackle weightier issues. By 'assimilating influences that are global', or responding 'to the hybrid and multicultural society of modern Britain' (3), Showalter confidently assures the reader that 'the insularity and locality of setting that characterised British women's writing a century ago has now largely disappeared' (3).

Showalter's stalwart defence of the British women's novel of the 90s reveals a hidden assumption that women's writing is still perceived to be the impoverished poor relation of writing by men. It is difficult to imagine male

novelists being subjected to the same degree of public and academic scrutiny by both readers and peers. Indeed, the accompanying soundbites, provided by literary 'luminaries' such as Rose Tremain, Lisa Jardine and David Lodge, suggest that women's writing is a 'suitable case for treatment' forever marginalised by the authority and *gravitas* accorded to writing by men. Tremain suggests that English writers are compromised by their inability 'to transport themselves to a more colossal landscape' (3), whilst Jardine maintains that 'women are now writing counter-current novels, that run against the grain of the tradition, and they can do that anywhere' (3).

All three women's commentaries reveal underlying insecurities related to women's ability to produce work that actively engages the reader or indeed extends beyond the limitations of the middle-class 'aga-saga'. Indeed, Showalter's argument yields a disturbingly apologetic subtext where women writers must once more demonstrate their ability to engage with wider 'global' issues set against 'vast physical and cultural landscapes' (3). Showalter's tendentious approach, to an alleged domestification of recent women's writing, suggests that Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore's declaration, after Jardine, that the collapse of the West's grand narratives have resulted in a radical restructuring of the central tenets of humanism, seems somewhat premature (see Belsey and Moore, 1989: 18). Both Young and Showalter, unwittingly encourage a return to the grand sweep of such narratives, even if their judgements are tempered by their familiarity with the deconstructive turn of much recent poststructuralist theory. Indeed, both critics adopt a curiously imperialist stance when appraising the work of other women writers, exerting a degree of domination over their subordinate status, which Ashcroft *et al*

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maintain describes the crucial intersection of feminism and post-colonialism (1998: 101).

Literary and cultural invisibility is familiar terrain for the woman writer. As this thesis demonstrates, women were excluded from the discourse of melancholia even though recent research suggests that women did contribute towards this area (see Schiesari 1992; Radden 1987). As we have seen, in relation to Schiesari's work on melancholia as a gendered discourse, the cultural investment in women's expressions of loss suffered in comparison to the philosophical and academic kudos accorded to celebrated male melancholics such as Ficino, Petrarch or even the fictional character, Hamlet. As she astutely maintains, women's historic failure to register within this discursive field has occurred because:

> the *discourse* of melancholia has historically designated a topos of expressibility for men and has accordingly given them a means to express their sorrows in a less alienated way, while relegating women to an inexpressive babble whose only sense (at least for the doctors of melancholia) is their need for a good man (1992: 15)

Schiesari's commentary on the way that the discourse of melancholia legitimates the production of masculine expressions of loss, whilst devaluing women's work within this particular field, is remarkably similar to the way that academics such as Young infer that some British women's writing is 'narrow, claustrophobic and narcissistic' (1999: 2). Her declaration that recent women's fiction amounts to little more than an 'interminable flood of gaseous chatter' which threatens a lamentable 'feminisation of the literary marketplace' (quoted in Showalter, 1999: 2) reveals the close links between the production of femininity and melancholia within Western culture. It is simply unimaginable to

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envisage critics describing Hamlet's expressions of loss and grief as a flood of 'gaseous chatter' sullying the 'literary marketplace' (2).

Hanif Kureishi's recent novel, *Intimacy* (1998), illustrates how the cultural politics related to gender operate within melancholic or depressive discourse. Kureishi's book is an elegiac narrative relating the story of the author's mid-life crisis that coincides with his decision to leave his partner and two young children. Kureishi's inchoate grief is exacerbated by what he refers to as a 'new restlessness' (131) afflicting affluent, middle-aged professional men. The critical comments, on the cover of the Faber and Faber paperback edition of the novel, congratulate the author on his 'astute and painful dissection of male sexual restlessness' told with 'seriousness, tenderness and upsetting aplomb' (*Mail on Sunday*). Meanwhile, *The Observer* celebrates Kureishi's 'excoriating' honesty, whilst *The Independent on Sunday* proclaims that '*Intimacy* speaks to, and for, a lost generation of men: those shaped by the Sixties, disorientated by the Eighties and bereft of a personal and political map in the Nineties'. The congratulatory rhetoric, accompanying the novel's publication, firmly situates Kureishi's novel in the great tradition of melancholic *auteurs* such as Petrarch or Nerval, whose work according to Western metaphysical thought, displayed the gift of artistic creativity refracted through a growing cult of sensitivity (see Schiesari 1992; Radden 1987). Kureishi's prose reflects this sense of privileged lack when he declares that, 'I believe in individualism, in sensualism, and in creative idleness. I like the human imagination: its delicacy, its brutal aggressive energy, its profundity, its power to transform the material world into art' (1998: 132).

The carefully cultivated sensitivity embedded in Kureishi's worldview, merely reiterates the rigid binarism implicit in melancholic discourses where masculine sensitivity is purchased at the expense of women's devalued utterances. Freud's assertion, that the melancholic 'has a keener eye for truth' (1957i: 156), is clearly evident in Kureishi's studied discomposure. Significantly, however, in the light of Professor Young's deprecating remarks about the woman's novel of the 90s, Kureishi's portrait of metropolitan ennui is received as a striking example of transcendence achieved through the art of writing. The 'personal' within this novel is resolutely 'political' speaking, as we have already seen, 'to and for, a lost generation of men' (*Independent on Sunday*: backcover).

As Sara Mills maintains, in her analysis of 'Feminist Theory and Discourse Theory', the feminist rallying cry 'the personal is political' still retains some of its resonance today because it redefines the meaning of the word political (1997: 79). In this particular instance, the feminist slogan demonstrated how the 'political' infiltrates the minutiae of everyday domestic routine, helping a generation of women to understand that the division of labour within households was a structural and political issue rather than a private arrangement between two individuals (79). It seems that some feminist critics, such as Young, are beginning to lose sight of the way that power relations are negotiated in and through discursive formations. Young's observation, that 'the novel as a work of art is disappearing ... the reason is that more and more in our modern age, novels are written by women for women' (2), suggests a disturbing undercurrent of 'feminised' self-loathing combined with an even more worrying blindness to the way that political power is disseminated within

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discursive structures. If Kureishi's novel can address 'a lost generation of [melancholic] men', it would seem reasonable that novels written by women should be able to address the political interests of women readers.

More importantly, for the purposes of this thesis, Young's premise that women's participation in the literary production of the novel is undermining its artistic and theoretical credibility demonstrates how readily oppositional or dissonant discourses can be assimilated by the dominant institutions of the day. Juliana Schiesari illustrates how melancholic discourse has continually appropriated the sense of loss encapsulated within the devalued status of women's mourning. This loss has been recuperated in order to 'legitimate the male in his "excessive" suffering, even in his "femininity"', leaving 'women as an oppressed and nameless (or generic) other' (1992: 13). This tendency for dominant masculine discourses to reappropriate feminine ideological thought, has been noted by other feminists such as Tania Modleski, who has raised concerns that the recent emergence of gender studies within academia has co-opted feminist thought for the benefit of male academics working within this field (see Modleski 1991). Moreover, Young's concern that recent women's fiction suffers from 'a disproportionate emphasis on female sexuality' (quoted in Showalter, 1999: 2), shows how dominant discourses evolve in response to the needs of the disciplinary society they are designed to service and maintain.

As Mills points out, after Foucault, confessional discourse operates along hierarchical lines constructing compliant subjects who automatically and unself-consciously occupy a subordinate position within this discursive structure (1997: 81). Mills, sees therapy as the quintessential confessional discipline, where the typically female analysand is encouraged to internalise societal problems as her

own in the presence of an empowered male therapist (81). Mills' commentary on the disciplinary nature of confessional discourse reveals how discursive formations perpetuate cultural narratives that shape and reorder people's lives.

Mills' analysis of psychoanalytic therapy is especially significant for this thesis, which examines how and why women have been excluded from the discourse of melancholia. Indeed, as a discursive practice, melancholia reveals how exclusionary politics operate to marginalise and in many cases prevent women from accessing its own elitist androcentric rhetoric. As Diana Fuss points out, in her study of identification, Freud shores up his unwieldy construction of sexual difference when he attempts to theorise identification's relationship to the oppositional figure of desire (1995: 11). According to Fuss:

> Freud distinguishes identification (the wish to be the other) from sexual object-choice (the wish to have the other). For Freud, desire for one sex is always secured through identification with the other sex; to desire and to identify with the same person at the same time is, in this model, a theoretical impossibility (1995: 11)

Fuss neatly dismantles the suspect engineering supporting the Freudian construction of identification, which performs such a crucial role in his theory of mourning and melancholia. Fuss correctly maintains that identification and desire 'form the cornerstone of Freud's theory of sexual identity formation' (11). Yet, as Fuss points out, 'psychoanalysis's basic distinction between wanting to be the other and wanting to have the other is a precarious one at best' leaving 'its epistemological validity seriously open to question' (11).

By unravelling the convoluted plot of gender acquisition, within Freudian theory, Fuss reveals the 'artificial' constructed nature of Freudian theory. Her dissection of the unstable reference points within his theorisation of identification and desire demonstrates how cultural narratives are sometimes

shaped by dubious conceptual models assembled to support a theoretical point. These already 'suspect' theories, reflecting the cultural prejudices sanctioned by dominant discourses, are distributed through discursive networks influencing the way that the sexes relate to each other as well as the stories they tell about each other. However, as Mills explains, feminist discourse theory reveals how discursive procedures are flexible open-ended structures constantly reworked and revised by successive generations (1997: 82). By contextualising confessional discourse, Mills argues that women are able to reinterpret oppressive subject positions by disavowing the received rhetoric of 'failure' and 'self-blame' in favour of an informed critique of the production of femininity and sexuality within Western culture.

However, as this thesis demonstrates, received narratives related to femininity within the West are mired within a deeply entrenched misogynist framework that proves difficult to resist. These oppressive structures intersect with other discursive formations, such as melancholia, to produce a narrative that conveys the message that women are more prone to suffer from depression than men because of the way in which they are inducted into the Symbolic order (see Radden 1987; Schiesari 1992; Kristeva 1989). The durability of these discursive formations is demonstrated by their power to influence feminist intellectuals, such as Julia Kristeva, who maintains that the 'greater frequency of feminine depressions' is contingent on defective feminine sexuality with 'its addiction to the maternal Thing and its lesser aptitude for restorative perversion' (1989: 71). These unsupported statements, related to feminine depression, illustrate how dominant discourses have 'conspired' to

produce a theoretical position that is both masochistic and self-defeating for women.

Kristeva's unproblematic assumption of the more punitive aspects of the discourses of femininity and melancholia are a testament to their ability to influence the cognitive powers of a distinguished philosopher and intellectual. However, the five novels under consideration in this thesis reveal how discourses are situated within an ever-changing social context. As the feminist discourse analyst Dorothy Smith points out:

> Members of discourse orient to the order of the discourse in talk, writing, creating images whether in texts or on their bodies, producing and determined by the ongoing order which is their concerted accomplishment and arises in the concerting (quoted in Mills, 1997: 86).

It is possible to trace women's active engagement in the production of femininity and melancholia in the five narratives considered in this thesis. Elizabeth Smart's account of the violent suppression of her ecstatic discourse by the hostile patriarchal machinery surrounding her in post-war America differs from Kathryn Harrison's refusal to grant her father the intellectual and aesthetic kudos traditionally accorded to the melancholic male figure, however repulsive, reviled or dispossessed. Sheard and Harrison's texts dramatise women actively reinterpreting their own life narratives, reassembling the self-defeating elements which had previously encouraged them to internalise the negative version of femininity promulgated by dominant discourses. Within both of these narratives women are portrayed as active agents who use language to carve out more empowered subject positions which in turn enrich their relations with others.

These narratives deploy a new curative aesthetic where art or language is used to transform what had hitherto appeared to be insurmountable

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psychological obstacles to the reparative act of mourning. The narrators of both of these texts are examples of resisting daughters who ultimately refuse to passively insert themselves within the all-encompassing snare of dominant discourses (see Zwinger 1991; Mills 1997). Both novels suggest that the transition from the silent world of the melancholic to what Abraham and Torok call a 'community of mouths' (see Abraham and Torok 1994; Rashkin 1995) is achieved at great expense, both physically and emotionally.

All of the novels considered in this project present female subjectivity under threat from an oppressive and prescriptive patriarchal regime. The narrators of all five novels are portrayed as women striving to break free from the restrictive confines of femininity as it is figured within the patriarchal Symbolic. As I have already mentioned, these women must reorganise and restructure the received narrative of femininity if they are to transform the endless rehearsal of loss integrated into the perennial script of melancholic femininity. In order to achieve such a transformation the women must engage with the unsayable or forbidden subtext of sexual difference within patriarchal structures. These women use language as an ideological weapon to write their way into creating a new identity predicated on the notion that the unsayable must be said and heard. In their lives, the personal is indeed the political, even if their rescripted narratives threaten the integrity of the nuclear family at the heart of the Symbolic order.

At the end of the twentieth century, the 'writing cure' has replaced the 'talking cure' within melancholic discourse. The reshaped and reordered narratives, discussed above, are testaments to women's will to register their right to mourn within a patriarchal system designed to ensure women's silence.

The melancholic life narrative is the medium where such women work through their loss, away from the intrusive presence of the analyst who sanctions what can be said within psychoanalytic confessional discourse. The open page is the new arena where women are able to reclaim their devalued emotions so that they can at last begin to articulate their losses and begin to mourn, so that writing through becomes synonymous with working through.

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