

“ONLY CONNECT”? LITERARY INTERVENTIONS IN
A TIME OF CRUELTY

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ABSTRACT

My dissertation, *“Only Connect”? Literary Interventions in a Time of Cruelty*, investigates how fiction and drama of the early twenty-first century focus on the social problem of cruelty, mainly defined as ignorance of, indifference to, or weariness of the suffering caused by gross economic inequality. I contend that politically committed works of literature from the U.S., Britain, and Australia hone in on the suffering of others as the most urgent and widespread problem of our time, which can be summarized in bell hooks’ words as the fact of “lovelessness” in advanced capitalist societies. I read literary texts that delve into the political, aesthetic, and philosophical sides of this problem, including work by Caryl Churchill, Tony Kushner, Ian McEwan, Martin Crimp, Richard Flanagan, Pat Barker, Cormac McCarthy, J.M. Coetzee, and Karen Finley. My dissertation proposes that literature provides an affective realm wherein individuals can witness, discover, and reflect upon situations of others vastly different from their own, thereby allowing them to apply this understanding in real life and form more empathetic relationships in the world.

My research brings together diverse voices in political science, theories of emotion, philosophy, and aesthetics and aims to provide a more capacious model of literary analysis beyond what Rita Felski has aptly called the “limits of critique.” As she reminds us, “Works of art do not only subvert but also convert; they do not only inform but also transform—a transformation that is not just a matter of intellectual readjustment but one of affective realignment as well.” For this reason, I emphasize that my chosen literary texts and performances

do not simply respond to but intervene in the problem of cruelty and help shape our experience of this lived reality. My research therefore participates in the interdisciplinary debate about how to justify literary scholarship to the wider academic community and proposes that the contemporary field, with its blending of genres and geographic reach, can lead the way.

DEDICATION

To my parents, Michael and Bridget Borato, and in loving memory of Alan Lazor, Anne Borato, and Misleya Muñoz Ortiz

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INTRODUCTION: "ONLY CONNECT"

"War is inherent to humanity"

The Santa Fe Committee

E.M. Forster's 1910 novel, *Howards End*, opens with the words "Only connect." The novel tells the story of how the new industrial class in England superseded the landed class at the beginning of the twentieth century, and how the wealth of the emergent class was built on the system of imperialism. It symbolizes this takeover by the arranged marriage of Margaret Schlegel and Henry Wilcox, a marriage that saves the Schlegel family from financial ruin. While her sister, Helen, balks at Margaret's pragmatism and at the crudeness of the rising class, Margaret believes she has something important to pass on to her husband: "Mature as he was, she might yet be able to help him to the building of the rainbow bridge that should connect the prose in us with the passion. Without it we are meaningless fragments, half monks, half beasts, unconnected arches that have never joined into a man" (167). Margaret worries that Henry has neglected to examine the passion within him, thus cutting short the possibilities for deeper self-knowledge and connectedness with others. While Margaret's sermon is intended for one man, and the fragments and half, unconnected aspects of self that exist within him, Forster's novel suggests that Margaret herself is an essential bridge between these two classes.

While *Howards End* does not present a radical vision of social change, it suggests that England's future will be marked by new alliances between the classes. Helen's child symbolically enforces such a union with Leonard Bast, a man who has become a victim of the

sisters' failed philanthropic efforts and their protégé in a humanities education. The novel is sceptical of such good intentions, which mask their self-interest. But it upholds Margaret's words as evocative of humanist principles that have been put under threat by encroaching nihilism: "Only connect! That was the whole of her sermon. Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer. Only connect and the beast and the monk, robbed of the isolation that is life to either, will die" (168). Margaret's sermon constitutes a deliberate effort on the part of the writer to both respond to and intervene in the significant events of his time through his modernist cosmopolitanism.¹ The injunction "Only connect!" recalls Forster's humanist dream amid the cataclysmic reality of his age, a period marked by "the destruction of civilization and reason in the First World War, of the world changed and reinterpreted by Marx, Freud and Darwin, of capitalism and constant industrial acceleration, of existential exposure to meaninglessness or absurdity" (Bradbury 27). As critics have noted, Margaret's dictum is influenced by Frederick Schlegel, with whom she shares a patronym, and whose philosophy "points to a form of sociality—rather than a firm social synthesis—in which fragments, individuals, and cultural models link up and support one another *mindful of each other's incompleteness and distinctiveness*" (Moraru 141). The present dissertation seeks to interrogate an approximate vision of sociality within contemporary literature. This vision of sociality arises in a period even more unstable than Forster's, in which war appears to be the only constant, even "inherent to humanity."

¹ Forster's cosmopolitanism is evident in the emphasis he places on "disinterested ties, friendship and affective bonds, human affiliations, and generally on the other's nurturing proximity to the self no matter how far apart the two may be by location, ethnoracial background, or political allegiance" (Moraru 134).

Indeed, one lasting preoccupation in recent artistic practice is the confrontation with human violence as a normative facet of contemporary existence. The dark subject matter of paintings by Francis Bacon expresses this cautionary mood. Bacon's experience, in his words, of "the revolutionary Irish movement, Sinn Fein, and the [world] wars, Hiroshima, Hitler, the death camps" made it impossible "to paint bunches of pink flowers." But his work is not pessimistic, he insists: "My temperament is strangely optimistic. But I am lucid" (Whyte). In the twenty-first century, Bacon's requisite defense of lucidity *as distinct from pessimism* persists as the peculiar situation of writers concerned with the many wars and invasions that have taken place since the end of the Cold War. Provoked by the terrorist attacks against U.S. citizens on September 11, 2001, a particular strand of contemporary writing in English has reignited the question of art's capacity to transform reality. In a significant body of contemporary writing from the U.S., Britain, and Australia, social life, or the convoluted fabric that comprises one's interactions, relations, and complications with a multitude of others, has emerged as a place of inquiry. Giving life to this inquiry is the fact—the undeniable persistence—of human cruelty, which these works attempt to view negatively as the absence or failure of love. I define love not only as deep affection but also as the will, as distinct from the capacity, to see and inhabit perspectives beyond one's own. As J.M. Coetzee's authorial surrogate, Elizabeth Costello, explains, "There are people who have the capacity to imagine themselves as someone else, there are people who have no such capacity (when the lack is extreme, we call them psychopaths), and there are people who have the capacity but choose not to exercise it" (*Elizabeth Costello* 133). The creative struggle against this absence and/or failure constitutes the core of this body of work.

The particular ethical shift that I draw out does not necessarily imply a return to earlier moral paradigms, but a focus on individual ethics within social and political life that approaches

a more collective discussion about the human. Related to but distinct from suffering, which is an enduring facet of *natural* life, I define cruelty as a historically sustained condition of *political* life, in which weakness is exploited rather than acknowledged, “that primary way in which we are, as bodies, outside ourselves and for one another” (Butler 27). By using the term cruelty, I mean to emphasize the role of domination under capitalism and the specific character of U.S. domination in this historical period. My definition of cruelty shares some affinity with Lauren Berlant’s notion of “cruel optimism,” which she reveals to be “a fantasy, a collectively invested form of life, [known as] the good life,” but my project departs from this work by distinguishing the false optimism of ideology from Bacon’s (and others’) “lucid” optimism (11). Such optimism does not long for the irretrievable “good life” but rather aspires towards the promise of human connection and commitment within this time of cruelty. I approach these writers in particular because they connect the violence of quotidian life under contemporary capitalism with physical expressions of violence such as terror and war. In the works of writers such as Caryl Churchill, Tony Kushner, Ian McEwan, Pat Barker, Richard Flanagan, Martin Crimp, Cormac McCarthy, J.M. Coetzee, and Karen Finley, the dilemma of how one is to live in a time and place hostile to living persists as a philosophical and aesthetic problem worthy of attention.

This question arises, in part, out of the seemingly connected nature of the contemporary period or what is often described as the phenomenon of globalization. Whether it appears in conservative accounts, such as Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* (1996), or in liberal accounts, such as Kwame Anthony Appiah's *Cosmopolitanism* (2006), the question of how one is to live in a community of strangers has become urgent. The city is no longer the single location of immigrant experience and cultural exchange; national populations, whether governments like it or not, have changed dramatically as the result of free trade policies and unstable borders. As

Arjun Appadurai's *Fear of Numbers* argues, "Leaky financial frontiers, mobile identities, and fast-moving technologies of communication and transaction together produce debates, both within and across national boundaries, that hold new potentials for violence" (37).

More fundamentally, the question of social cohesion has taken on greater significance after the dramatic attacks against U.S. political-economic power on September 11, 2001. Days after the attacks, cultural critics were already talking about the death of irony.² The historical climate that led to this event was characterized by a deep sense of anti-American feeling throughout major parts of the world for its status as the single remaining superpower after the fall of the U.S.S.R. The violent beginning of the twenty-first century thus marked a kind of uncomfortable reckoning for the United States. During this time it became clear—at least to citizens informed about their country's history—that the decades of systemic and physical violence led or supported by the government had not passed without drastic consequences for itself and the rest of the world.

Until recently, the motivations behind the September 11 terrorist attacks have not been explored in much historical depth. Part of the difficulty in understanding these motivations is the delayed release of relevant information and other obstacles that come with national security

² See Geoffery Nunberg, "Since Sept. 11, We're Watching Our Words" in the *Los Angeles Times*, 4 November 2001: "'The Age of Irony died yesterday,' wrote Andrew Coyne in Canada's *National Post* on Sept. 12, a report confirmed a few days later by no less an authority than *Vanity Fair* editor and Spy co-founder Graydon Carter: 'There's going to be a seismic change. I think it's the end of the age of irony.' Roger Rosenblatt came to the same conclusion in a *Time* essay that decried the intellectuals and 'pop-culture makers' whose detachment and unseriousness now seems a dangerously empty pose: 'The ironists, seeing through everything, made it difficult for anyone to see anything.'"

interests.³ After 9/11, there emerged a new, largely jingoistic discussion about militant Islam, which had prevented a deeper public discussion about the rise of anti-American sentiment and aggression throughout the world. This discussion was also thwarted by the Bush administration's decision to retaliate against Afghanistan and then dismantle the government of Iraq. My investigation joins efforts to consider the legacy of the Cold War and its aftermath to understand the motivations for the attacks, a history we have yet to digest fully and which the U.S. government has failed to learn from in subsequent policy decisions.⁴ This history, I argue, has three important components: first, the re-emergence of ideological proxy wars under the Reagan Doctrine; second, the dominance of neoliberal capitalism during and after the demise of "actually existing socialism"; and third, the failure of the Left to combat the quagmire of Cold War ideological thinking. Without attempting to cover comprehensively these twenty or more years of history, I will take a moment now to explain the significance of each of these events.

As records clearly show, the militants who attacked New York and Washington, D.C. in 2001 were from the terrorist network Al-Qaeda, which had been protected by the Taliban in Afghanistan in exchange for military support against the Northern Alliance. The Taliban rose to power after the Civil War in Afghanistan had created a serious power vacuum. Under the Reagan Doctrine, the U.S. swelled its covert support of resistance efforts against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, which culminated in the 1986 sale of the Stinger anti-aircraft missiles to the

³ The U.S. government has just declassified 28 pages of a 9/11 document that details Saudi Arabia's role in preventing the U.S.'s efforts to combat Al Qaeda in the years before the attacks (Mazzetti). The reason for the delay was the administration's worry about offending the Saudi government as a political ally.

⁴ I refer not only to the Bush Doctrine but also foreign policy under the Obama administration, whose support of multiple factions before and during the Civil War in Syria has been widely documented.

Mujahidin, a break with the embargo on “Made in America” arms (Rubin). After the withdrawal of Soviet power, the U.S. abandoned these efforts because its interests of weakening the U.S.S.R. had been achieved. While it would be simplistic to suggest that the U.S. support of the Mujahidin led to the rise of the “Afghan Arabs” and the Taliban, its allocation of cutting-edge military technology to the Pakistani government certainly allowed for unwieldy alliances: “By delegating responsibility for arms distribution to the ISI [Pakistan’s intelligence agency], the United States created an environment in which radical Islam could flourish” (Rubin).

The Reagan Doctrine was in reality only an acceleration of U.S. interventionist policy throughout the long Cold War but this acceleration was such that the period has been deemed a Second Cold War. As the epigraph to this introduction lays bare, Reagan’s foreign policy was no less ideological than his domestic policy. Reagan saw the threat of communism as directly connected to the economic crisis of the 1970s and said as much during his campaign speeches: “The Soviet Union underlies all the unrest that is going on” (qtd. in Cronin 148). Thatcher was equally vocal in her anti-communist rhetoric, tying nicely the idea of free markets with free speech (Cronin 148-49). Thus the foreign policy mandates of both nations were to exaggerate the threat of communism, at least until the election of Mikhail Gorbachev allowed the administrations to gain the upper hand.

In the beginning of his presidency, Reagan followed foreign policy suggestions from the conservative think tank formed in what is known as the Santa Fe Committee. The fundamental axioms of the committee indicate the inner workings of the Reagan Doctrine: “Nations exist only in relation to each other. Foreign policy is the instrument by which peoples seek to assure their survival in a hostile world. War, not peace, is the norm in international affairs” (qtd. in Small 53). Arguing that the U.S. has been involved for some time in World War Three, it recommends

that Reagan dispense with the former Carter administration's policy of détente—a policy that had already been weakened in the case of Nicaragua—and return to the aggressive, war-mongering principles of the Monroe doctrine. He did just that: “Reagan saw the Third World as little more than an arena of East-West conflict. He signaled his intentions to vanquish the incipient regionalism of the Carter administration when he affirmed that the battle against international terrorism would take the place of human rights among his foreign policy priorities” (Moreno 84). Reagan's counter-terrorism efforts therefore established a dangerous precedent that would be used again in George W. Bush's “War on Terror”: putting state-sanctioned violence in the name of national security over the concerns of human rights.

Under Reagan's successor, George H. Bush, German reunification was accomplished, Europe reconfigured its balance of power, and the Washington Consensus—that free markets encouraged free societies—materialized as a global model: “Put very simply, the failure of socialism was taken, and not without reason, to prove the superiority of markets over states in economic governance and organization. [...] Forty years of state socialism, party dictatorship and Soviet domination left citizens in these countries with no appetite for a more humane socialism” (Cronin 181). As Robert Kagan has noted, “American power, unchecked by Soviet power, filled vacuums and attempted to establish, where possible, the kind of democratic and free-market capitalist order that Americans preferred” (47). U.S. international influence arose organically in many countries within Eastern Europe but had less promising results in the Middle East. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 signalled that in some parts of the world military force would be necessary to maintain American interests. Between 1989 and 2001, Kagan informs us, “the United States intervened with force in foreign lands more frequently than at any other time in its history” (48). One response to this show of force was the forming of the militant

organization Al-Qaeda, which violently opposed the United States' influence in the Middle East. During this time, Al-Qaeda declared a "Holy War" against the United States for the "involvement of the United States armed forces in the Gulf War in 1991 and in Operation Restore Hope in Somalia in 1992 and 1993, which were viewed by Al-Qaeda as pretextual preparations for an American occupation of Islamic countries" (Caruso).

History is always told from the winning perspective. Yet Reagan and Thatcher's great paradigm shift could not be explained without the story of the Left and why it failed to provide a convincing alternative during the 1970s crisis. In a time when Keynesian economic policy was called into question, the fact that Friedrich Hayek's economic model gained momentum over others proved to be a significant defeat. By the time of the crisis, the international Left had split into two historical camps: the Old Left, which had become wary of alternatives after the experience of fascism and Stalinism, and the New Left, which believed that this wariness had turned into acquiescence. The scepticism of the Old Left can be explained by the failure of the second international socialist revolution of 1914-18. It is within this context that the second international socialist revolution emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century, when capitalism was again in crisis. The movement of the second international was abruptly thwarted when the German Social Democrats' gave their legislative support for World War One in 1914. The international component of the revolution thus failed, leaving Russia to become "the epicenter of revolutionary political struggle, but with the paradoxical outcome of what Lenin called a 'deformed workers' state' administering 'state capitalism' on the frontier-backwater of global capital" ("Short History"). Despite Russia's isolation and the serious problems that soon arose from it, the United States' communist party continued to support it as the only model of "actually existing socialism," which included, in addition to the purges, the German-Soviet

nonaggression pact of 1939. Unfortunately for the Left, Joseph McCarthy's subsequent persecution of communists left little room for criticism from within, and those who did express criticism were accused of supporting the purge.⁵

McCarthyism amounted to a communist eradication that had far-reaching consequences in the political sphere, producing an environment inhospitable to debate and dissent. In *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, Edward Said shows how the field of humanism had become depoliticized after World War Two. Citing conference proceedings about the humanities in crisis and speeches calling for the field's need to clarify America's democratic values, he suggests that Cold War ideology played a large role even in literary movements such as the New Critics: "The notion of nonpolitical aesthetic analysis was meant as a barrier against the overt politicization of art that was said to be conspicuously evident in social realism" (38). Thus, he claims, humanistic education helped consolidate nationalist ideology, "a certain unstated idea of freedom that was believed to derive from a noncoercive, albeit triumphalist attitude towards our supposedly 'better' reality" (39). References to the "free world," as it became known, had to ignore the bloody mess of proxy wars and military coups that had become part of the fight against communism. Such hypocrisy helped to foment the New Left movement, which opposed, fought, and finally ended the Vietnam War. But the movement, wearied by the battle, retreated by the late 1970s, leaving the Right to map out its future.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the tide of triumph that followed it could be described as the third and final wave of the Cold War. According to Kenan Malik, the concept of pluralism and tolerance for dissent faded once again under pressure to "articulate a coherent and

⁵ Irving Kristol, for instance, criticized liberal support of communists in *Commentary* in 1952 and this attack was interpreted as tacit support for McCarthy.

singular national identity” (*The Meaning of Race* 179). When national identity becomes the basis of political empowerment, opposition to that political category becomes a matter of culture and ethnicity—not political identity.⁶ As Walter Benn Michaels has argued, the concept of culture promotes greater fragmentation among members of society, thereby reducing the likelihood and frequency of political mobilization. Michaels notes, “Because the transformation of ideological differences into cultural differences makes the differences themselves valuable the politics of a world divided into cultures [...] must be the politics of survival” (34). Michaels argues that after the Cold War, these differences of belief were given up (one might say they became irrelevant) in favour of cultural differences that must be preserved. In only a matter of twenty or so years, then, Reagan and Thatcher had ushered in the end of political organization.

Terrorism is one unpleasant expression of this post-political period. In an address on the subject of terrorism since September 11, Gayatri Spivak affirmed, “Suicidal resistance is a message inscribed in the body when no other means will get through. It is both execution and mourning, for both self and other, where you die with me for the same cause, no matter which side you are on, with the implication that there is no dishonor in such shared death” (96). Moishe Postone has named this political despair a historical condition of “helplessness.” My investigation seeks to reorient public discourse surrounding terrorism towards a larger conversation about the systemic violence of capitalism. I call this systemic violence cruelty

⁶ For example, Arjun Appadurai argues that state violence and other forms of terrorism arise out of the conflict between the objective need to open national markets and the political desire to preserve or in some cases create national identity at the expense of minorities within these countries. He observes, “In a world characterized by global articulations and tensions between cellular and vertebrate political forms, regions, nations, and cities can produce complex fractal replicas of larger struggles” (101). Thus, according to Appadurai, a minority identity such as Muslim within one nation can be refracted as a global majority and thus, a global struggle, against oppression from within.

because it more often entails forms of coercion that are not physical, including the cruelty of indifference to suffering. The literature selected for this study suggests that such cruelty appears to be the undergirding principle of social relations under capitalism. Slavoj Žižek has written insightfully on this matter, pointing out that terrorism and other forms of physical violence are only the visible expressions of “the violence inherent in a system: not only direct physical violence, but also the more subtle forms of coercion that sustain relations of domination and exploitation, including the threat of violence” (9). He points out that terrorism is mistakenly thought to be an ideology unto itself; rather, he suggests, it is a reaction to and expression of dissatisfaction with Western-style capitalism: “The terrorist pseudo-fundamentalists are deeply bothered, intrigued, fascinated by the sinful life of the nonbelievers” (85). The research of Marc Sageman suggests that recruits are not traditionally religious: “Al-Qaeda’s members are not the Palestinian fourteen-year-olds we see on the news, but join the jihad at the average age of 26. Three-quarters are professionals or semi-professionals. They are engineers, architects, and civil engineers, mostly scientists” (qtd. in Malik, *From Fatwa to Jihad* 23). Therefore, these militants are engaged in questioning another fundamentalism, one that is so deeply entrenched and complete it does not appear visible to its adherents. Capitalism, whose proper religion is science, claims such certainty: “The ‘worldless’ character of capitalism is linked to this hegemonic role of the scientific discourse in modernity. Hegel had already clearly identified this feature when he noted that for us moderns, art and religion no longer command absolute respect: we can admire them, but we no longer kneel down before them” (Žižek 82).

In some ironic and pointed way, the events of September 11 helped clarify this ideology and make it more visible to those who may have doubted its power. For instance, after the attacks, we can clearly see the systemic violence of capitalism reflected in U.S. international

influence after the end of the Cold War and its direct physical manifestation in the policy response to 9/11, which explicitly used a friend/foe distinction in its address to the international community. Recall the words of then President George W. Bush to the rest of the world on September 20, 2001: “Every nation in every region now has a decision to make: Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists” (Bush). While the U.S. as a state actor must always pretend to distinguish between military and civilian populations, the practices of torture and indefinite detention that became part of the War On Terror betray the government’s false pretences to democratic and humanitarian principles. In this way, the attacks and the subsequent war deepened the abyss between American identity and those who fell outside its self-serving ideology, including, of course, those within its own borders. The historical climate of terrorism and counter-terrorism once again made it possible to consider political questions that had lain dormant during the so-called end of history, the period following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the United States as the single world superpower. For these reasons, many writers of the time felt that political awakening could be brought about through literary practice.

In alerting us to the need to reclaim the humanities, Gayatri Spivak affirms: “It is the history of this failure of cultural instruction, recoded as triumph, that we must question, *not the instruction itself*” (96, emphasis added). For this study I have selected writers who may or may not explicitly address 9/11 or the War On Terror. Rather, they are attempting to reclaim the instruction of the humanities by expanding ways of thinking and being beyond the constraints of U.S. ideology through literary efforts. Their approach is largely influenced by what they perceive as a certain continuity between the movements of modernism and postmodernism through a lasting interest in human subjectivity and the capacity of art to transcend reality. They largely

share the belief that there is no objective, external reality outside individual human understanding but that there nonetheless exists a need to express and share these subjective understandings with others in an effort to redeem reality from its oppressiveness.

Malcom Bradbury and James McFarlane contend that one of the defining features of modernism is its insistence on the primacy of artistic expression in apprehending the uncertainty and chaos of its time: “There may be a poverty in the universe and a trauma in man, but the artist has the means to transcend both history and reality by the dispositions of his technique, creating Joyce’s ‘luminous silent stasis of aesthetic pleasure’” (25-6). While the term modernism opens up all kinds of semantic possibilities and contradictions, the sense that “the task of art is to redeem, essentially or existentially, the formless universe of contingency” seems to be one of its continuities (50). The modernist fusing of romantic and realistic impulses, of the rational and irrational, has been revived in contemporary writers who view the project of postmodernism as an extension and revision of, rather than a breaking with, the modernist literary movement. As Monica Latham has argued in her analysis of contemporary revisions of Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*: “Woolf’s Dallowaysian modernism haunts and imparts a particular flavour to a certain Anglo-American literary fiction today and informs a series of contemporary creative practices” (129). Like Latham’s authors, the writers chosen for this study return to modernist themes, in particular the social concerns of E.M. Forster.⁷ Additionally, most of the texts differ from their postmodern contemporaries and predecessors in their use of such strategies with less emphasis on parody and irony. In the present study, the indirect rewriting of an original modernist text can

⁷ Of course, the various movements of modernism were generally not in favour of Forster’s social realism. His novels faced criticism from high modernist writers such as Virginia Woolf, who felt that his materialism “imprisoned” beauty “in a fortress of brick and mortar whence he must extricate her” (Duckworth 297).

be observed in two novels: Ian McEwan's *Saturday*, a rewriting of *Mrs. Dalloway*, and Richard Flanagan's *The Unknown Terrorist*, a rewriting of Heinrich Böll's *The Lost Honor of Katharina Blum*. Other writers explored here evidence a lasting interest in modernism in other novels written during their career, including J.M. Coetzee's *The Master of Petersburg*, which depicts the life of Fyodor Dostoevsky, and Pat Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy, which takes up the modernist subject of World War One.

In drama, the postmodern signatures of irony and parody are not as heavily employed in the contemporary period; rather, drama appears less indebted to revisionist writing, perhaps on account of its special ability as performance to be constantly adapted with fresh eyes. However, Tony Kushner occupies a unique place in his elucidation of Brechtian techniques on contemporary political themes, from the AIDS crisis to the legacy of the Cold War. Caryl Churchill, ever an experimentalist, has moved from Brechtian influences to the more conceptual arena of the later work of Samuel Beckett. While Martin Crimp might be the closest postmodernist among this eclectic group, he too eschews easy classification within the *in-yer-face* movement of the 1990s, innovating upon modernist strategies such as the omission of *dramatis personae* and character names within the dialogue. While not every novel, play, or performance examined here can be described as radically innovative, each experiments with received ideas regarding the issue of cruelty through formal and thematic means.

One of the formal and thematic concerns that comes to us by way of literary modernism is the relation between the particular and the whole. For instance, Virginia Woolf's formal innovation of setting a novel over the course of a day suggests that the particular reveals the whole (Latham 130). In postmodernism, it might be argued, this concern gave way to an incredulity towards wholeness itself, in which, as Theodor Adorno put it, "the whole is the false"

(*Minima Moralia* 50). Such was the case in Jean-Francois Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (1984), which held that in opposition to metanarratives such as the emancipation of humanity, the little narrative, the *petit récit*, “remains the quintessential form of imaginative invention” (60). Therefore, the postmodernist work of art “puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unobtainable” (81). The novels and plays explored in this dissertation reveal a postmodern tendency to hone in on particularities, including their focus on individuals with disparate lives, but they differ from a postmodernist emphasis on mini-narratives in their assertion of an unacknowledged relationship between these particular lives and a greater social whole. That is to say, they do not shy away from postulating that these little narratives can reveal a larger allegorical significance. This ability, it seems, belongs to the realm of humanistic practice that Edward Said proposes in *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*. He insists that critique be a central feature of humanism and that a specifically “*modernist* theory and practice of reading and interpreting the part to the whole” be employed, “in such a way as neither to deny the specificity of the individual experience in and of an aesthetic work nor to rule out the validity of a projected, putative, or implied sense of the whole” (55-56). In summary, these writers share a hesitance to discard the strategies of their modernist forebears because they view the creation of a modern consciousness as an incomplete project.

The methodology of the present investigation thus puts forward the utility of psychology, particularly theories of emotion, for understanding what, if any, continuity exists between individual relationships and larger social relations, which the selected literary works tentatively propose. As J.M. Coetzee observes, “Language is the working medium of both writers and

psychotherapists. Both are occupied with the exploration, description and analysis of human experience, with finding or inventing linguistic and narrative structures within which to contain experience, and with the outer limits of experience” (*Good Story* v-vi). This characterization expresses the way in which literary practice and psychological approaches are better equipped than sociological and political methodologies in grasping the complexity of human interactions. At the same time, it suggests that literature and psychology can also address the questions formerly raised by postmodern incredulity toward positivist conceptions of truth and reality. For such incredulity is possible in the medium of fictional writing, which offers a form for expressing one’s reception of reality while remaining conscious of one’s subjective relation to that representation. My study puts forward literature, literary analysis, and performance as a container of experience, but others could make the case that the same can be done through the arts more broadly, such as cinema, the visual arts, and music, as well as architecture and sculpture. In her exchange with J.M. Coetzee, psychotherapist Arabella Kurtz explains how artistic expression provides a model for what psychotherapy aims to achieve:

The art I love seems to say this to me: “Look at what is going on around you—in all its richness and detail and colour, its beauty and its ugliness; don't stop looking and thinking about what you see; but also don't forget that it is you who are looking, that you have a position and a place from where you look—and so do other people. Inhabit that place fully.” (*Good Story* 17)

In another way, this characterization approximates Said’s explication of a modernist interpretative strategy that understands one’s particular experience and its relation to a larger collective experience. Both literary practice and psychoanalytic theory, then, are important methods by which I examine the question of cruelty.

However, my methodology would be rather limited if I only looked at the psychological aspects of this problem. In the present investigation, I attempt to synthesize a Marxist political perspective, which I have begun to sketch out above, with the insights of psychoanalytic theory on intersubjectivity and complex social systems. On a political level, the selected literature shares the premise that the idea of the social contract—the giving up of absolute liberty and independence in exchange for peace and equality—has been abandoned in favour of free-market enterprise and expansion. For this reason, all of the texts are politically aware in the sense that they want to reclaim the concept of the social contract, which implies a politics of social consciousness and responsibility. By this I do not mean a politics of capitalism with a happy face, a favourite target of Slavoj Žižek’s critique. Rather, I mean the development of a strong politics of social interdependence, which could lead to the demystification of the free market’s ability to fulfill the idea of the social contract. The political-philosophical concept of disinterestedness, put forward by Emmanuel Levinas, offers some possibilities for cultivating responsibility. In “Idealism and Ideology” Levinas delineates a particular kind of social relation, which he separates from ideology and describes as a form of disinterestedness:

The invincible concern for the other man in his destitution and in his lack of resources, in his nakedness, in his station or lack of station, as proletarian, this concern escapes the doubtful finality of ideologies. The seeking out of the other man, however distant, is already a relationship with this other man, a relation in all its directness, which is already proximity. How tautological it is to speak of ‘drawing nigh to the neighbour’ (*l’approche du prochain*)! What occurs in this case is something other than the complacency with ideas that suit the particularism and interests of a group. (242)

Arguing against the assumption on which “ideology” rests as the articulation of political interests, Levinas demonstrates how deeply pessimistic and limited such a perspective is. Fredric Jameson’s redefinition of ideology as “strategies of containment” seems pertinent here: “Lukács’s central analysis of the ideological character of classical German philosophy may from this perspective be seen as a creative and original variant on Marx’s theory of ideology, which is not, as is widely thought, one of false consciousness, but rather one of structural limitation and ideological closure” (52). Jameson thus argues for totality as a mediating ideal, an “imperative to totalize”: “In this sense, Hegel’s great dictum, ‘the true is the whole,’ is less an affirmation of some place of truth which Hegel himself (or others) might occupy, than it is a perspective and method whereby the ‘false’ and the ideological can be unmasked and made visible” (53). What Levinas calls the “finality of ideology” could be translated in such a way. I suggest that the selected texts can point towards larger patterns of social relations, if not towards a fictionally realized whole. For instance, *Saturday*’s structure of events encourages readers to reflect upon the limited perspective of the novel’s protagonist and thereby feel sympathy for the perspective of one of its “minor” characters. A re-evaluation of the concept of disinterestedness, which I will explore in the first chapter, is a good place to begin developing a politics of interdependence.

The obstacle to social responsibility, this dissertation argues, is the ideological closure within neoliberalism, which promotes narcissism as its central value and objective. In some cases, this ideology appears to be a form of structural, mythic narcissism at the root of these examined relationships. It is most evident in the paradigmatic example of American individualism (and exceptionalism) but has its roots, no doubt, in the rise of bourgeois

subjectivity in the United States.⁸ My study explores the development of this ideology as a strategy for maintaining an unprecedented accumulation of wealth in the ruling classes of the world's wealthiest countries. Thomas Picketty's recent economic study, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, statistically shows the resurgence of inequality after 1980 that "reflects an unprecedented explosion of very elevated incomes from labour, a veritable separation of the top managers of large firms from the rest of the population," particularly in the United States (34). In popular culture, neoliberal ideology is often associated with an American way of life because it is where post-Fordist or late capitalism developed. However, it might be better defined as the ideology of the single imperial superpower during this period. In economic and political language, the term post-Fordist capitalism is used to denote the structural transition from state-centric capitalism to the neoliberal order of free markets and finance capital. This form of capitalism first developed in the United States and has contributed to the flattening or decentering of the bourgeois individual into a free-floating and ultimately disposable existence.

As David Harvey writes in *The Condition of Postmodernity*:

The dynamics of a "throwaway" society as writers like Alvin Toffler (1970) dubbed it, began to become evident during the 1960s. It meant more than just throwing away produced goods (creating a monumental waste-disposal problem),

⁸For examinations of American individualism and bourgeois subjectivity, see Beckert, Sven and Julia Rosenbaum. *The American Bourgeoisie: Distinction and Identity in the Nineteenth Century*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010; and Barlow, Aaron. *The Cult of Individualism: A History of an Enduring American Myth*. Santa Barbara, C.A.: Praeger, 2013. For wider discussions of individualism and neoliberalism, see Bauman, Zygmunt. *The Individualized Society*. Malden, M.A.: Polity, 2001; and Beck, Ulrich and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim. *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and its Social and Political Consequences*. London: SAGE, 2002.

but also being able to throwaway values, lifestyles, stable relationships, and attachments to things, buildings, places, people, and received ways of doing and being. [...] Individuals were forced to cope with disposability, novelty, and the prospects for instant obsolescence. (286)

The texts under discussion reveal that the economic basis of contemporary capitalism inherently contradicts humanistic, democratic values such as equality and freedom; if we are to accept the implications of Harvey's pronouncements, it rejects stable values of any kind. Thus, they argue, the structure of such societies is only truly compatible with a politics of narcissism and a form of governance that is biased towards those whom it benefits. The odious nature of this politics and form of governance has been somewhat obfuscated by the term neoliberalism, which is not especially popular in the United States. Very simply, the term refers to the modified resurgence of eighteenth and nineteenth-century liberalism that favours free market capitalism. It is misleading in its apparent neglect of the great economic crisis of the twentieth century, which demonstrated that markets were too unstable to be unrestrained by some form of government regulation. My argument contends, then, that the ideology of neoliberalism is really an ideology of narcissism and cruelty, having produced a society of cruel, narcissistic citizens.

The struggle and failure of many to realize the myth of the individual, the present study finds, leads to frustrations that may be satisfied by violence. While the American-led ideology of narcissism remains powerful, these writers demonstrate that the objective reality of such societies means that the majority of its citizens cannot develop as individuals capable of interdependence; instead, they suffer the frustrations of agency that are implied by late capitalist mass culture. In the words of American journalist Dwight Macdonald, who was observing this objective shift in 1961, "The masses are in historical time what a crowd is in space: a large

quantity of people unable to express their human qualities because they are related to each other neither as individuals nor as members of a community. In fact, they are not related *to each other* at all but only to some impersonal, abstract, crystallizing factor” (8). Following this development and David Harvey’s identification of the “postmodern condition,” the human individual, it seems, has ceased to exist in objective terms for the majority of citizens. Or, as Zygmunt Bauman puts it in *Liquid Modernity*, “Ours is, as a result, an individualized, privatized version of modernity, with the burden of pattern-weaving and the responsibility for failure falling primarily on the individual’s shoulders” (8-9).

The current consequences of this ideology of neoliberalism, with its emphasis on the individual’s responsibility for him- or herself, are abstracted social relations and human cruelty. Developing upon the insights of Moishe Postone and Hannah Arendt, I pay particular attention to narratives of individuals who struggle and ultimately fail to find their humanity within neoliberal societies. Sometimes, as is the case in Richard Flanagan’s *The Unknown Terrorist*, this failure leads to expressions of violence that can satisfy or put an end to this frustration. In this way, violence and terror appear to be the individual’s response to his or her alienation against the centre of power. In other cases, as in Pat Barker’s *Double Vision*, the individual is able to recover his or her relation to the social world and overcome this despairing cycle of violence.

In moving towards the conditions of possibility for the latter to occur, the present study argues that the experience of cruelty and/or violence does present openings for political interdependence with the aid of humanistic education. Not long after the attacks of September 11, 2001, Ian McEwan wrote in *The Guardian* about love as the only proper defense against human cruelty: “It is hard to be cruel once you permit yourself to enter the mind of your victim. [...] As for their victims in the planes and in the towers, in their terror they would not have felt it

at the time, but those snatched and anguished assertions of love were their defiance” (“Only Love”). Writers have long known that acts of violence and cruelty are merely the failure of the human capacity to imagine oneself into the victim’s position. McEwan’s point, however, is that in times of cruelty, only the reassertion of love and its existence can provide an adequate response. Around the same time, Judith Butler called for a similar re-evaluation of social relations based on the recent experience of loss and an acknowledgement of our vulnerability:

Is there a way that we might struggle for autonomy in many spheres, yet also consider the demands that are imposed upon us by living in a world of beings who are, by definition, physically dependent on one another, physically vulnerable to one another? Is this not another way of imagining community, one in which we are alike only in having this condition separately and so having in common a condition that cannot be thought without difference? This way of imagining community affirms relationality not only as a descriptive or historical fact of our formation, but also as an ongoing normative dimension of our social and political lives, one in which we are compelled to take stock of our interdependence. (27)

This vision of community requires a stripping of ideology based on the fundamentally narcissistic (and patently false) feeling that an individual is autonomous, invincible, and incapable of helping or being helped by others. The tragic experience of New Yorkers in the days following the attacks made this fact traumatically visible, as Karen Finley conveys in her performance piece *Make Love*. But what does this vision of community look like in concrete terms, on an intersubjective level? In the final section I explore the romantic ideals undergirding narcissistic ideology that must be given up in order to practice forms of being in the world that are open as opposed to closed, interdependent as opposed to isolated and autonomous. In *All*

About Love bell hooks observes, “Despite all the lovelessness that surrounds us, nothing has been able to block our longing for love, the intensity of our yearning. [...] Like all great mysteries, we are all mysteriously called to love no matter the conditions of our lives, the degree of our depravity or despair. The persistence of this call gives us reason to hope” (219).

When asked about his views on contemporary American literature, David Foster Wallace said in an interview: “Do we need fiction that does nothing but dramatize how dark and stupid everything is? In dark times, the definition of good art would seem to be art that locates and applies CPR to those elements of what’s human and magical that still live and glow despite the times’ darkness.” (26). What Wallace’s comment suggests is that the dominance of realism implicitly rejects the belief in art’s capacity to transform and make reality bearable. It is to deny what McEwan finds redeemable about the imagination, its ability to love in the midst of hate. In *The Political Unconscious* Fredric Jameson offers a provocative distinction between realism and romantic or “magical” narratives. He suggests that the orthodox belief held by Marxist criticism that realism, as a “narrative discourse which unites the experience of daily life with a properly cognitive, mapping, or well-nigh ‘scientific’ perspective” (104), as the form *par excellence* of properly political, socialist literature, is wrong; instead, following the lead of genre critics such as Northrop Frye and Vladimir Propp, he argues that romance, properly historicized, tells us more about the narrative base of a society and makes visible its ideologeme. The reason for this is that realism as a form has become reified and beholden to a historical present that is too stagnant and codified. The “multiple temporality” that was once the domain of writers such as Scott, Balzac, and Dreiser, “tends to be sealed off and recontained again in ‘high’ realism and naturalism, where a perfected narrative apparatus [...] begins to confer on the ‘realistic’ option the appearance of an asphyxiating, self-imposed penance” (104). He concludes:

It is in the context of the gradual reification of realism in late capitalism that romance once again comes to be felt as the place of narrative heterogeneity and of freedom from the reality principle to which a now oppressive realistic representation is the hostage. Romance now again seems to offer the possibility of sensing other historical rhythms, and of demonic or Utopian transformations of a real now unshakably set in place; and Frye is surely not wrong to assimilate the salvational perspective of romance to a reexpression of Utopian longings, a renewed meditation on the Utopian community, a reconquest (but at what price?) of some feeling for a salvational future. (104)

Clarifying Jameson's distinction within psychoanalytic terms, the reification of realism suffers from an oppressive dominance of the reality principle. According to Arabella Kurtz, "the reality principle controls and modifies the innate drive for pleasure in response to the demands of the outside world" (195-96). Romance, as Frye and others show, provides some necessary relief from this oppression in the form of fictionalized wish fulfillment. Jameson's contention, then, is that the turn (or return) to the romantic form provides a structural heterogeneity that is now absent in realism. As well, Jameson implies, there is much historical significance for the dominance of romance in the present.

This dissertation extends and builds upon Jameson's important argument albeit in methodological terms that are quite different from his historical materialism. In chapters one and two, I examine the tension between realism and romance in contemporary political literature through the lens of human cruelty and disconnectedness. Keeping this notion in mind, I ask to what extent these works reproduce, through realism, the problem of cruelty and to what extent they seek to transform the problem through fictional antidotes to cruelty. In this way, the

discussion sets up a tension between cruelty and love: cruelty becomes the constant, somewhat oppressive domain of realism while love takes on the romantic narrative movement that overcomes cruelty. In chapter three I explore the foundations for romantic narratives through the concept of love as an antidote to cruelty. Here I suggest that the foundation of romantic narratives is a problematic conception of utopian thinking that is being revised by writers such as Cormac McCarthy, J.M. Coetzee, and Karen Finley. In this way, I attempt to answer Jameson's parenthetical question more deeply and fully: at a *great psychological price* comes this return to utopian longings and feeling for a salvational future. Indeed, the development of a politics of interdependence through humanistic literary practice requires a stronger engagement with the narrative of love than we have at present.

Ironically, the inability to discuss the social world on a psychological level points to the magnitude of the difficulty to think beyond individuals. This dissertation begins with such an intention in mind: to move from individual relations expressed in literature to a larger pattern of social psychology that the literature presents collectively. The conclusion attempts to understand this difficulty as part of an effort that is now underway in the humanities. It is an effort that requires a great deal of thought, rethinking, and incorporation of new and formerly ignored perspectives. In Said's words, "Across the board, the restrictions of basic core university courses to a small number of translated and dutifully venerated Western masterpieces, the narrowed perspectives on what constitutes 'our' world, the obliviousness to traditions and languages that seem to be outside respectable or approved attention [...] must be jettisoned" (53). For this reason, the effort is ongoing and no doubt far behind the present pace of economics and politics. As well, this dissertation contends that novels and performance offer a complementary picture of literary engagement with imagined as well as actual communities. In *Utopia and Performance*,

Jill Dolan emphasizes that live audiences “form temporary communities, sites of public discourse that, along with the intense experiences of utopian performatives, can model new investments in and interactions with variously constituted public spheres” (10). In distinction to lyric poetry, the two genres of drama and fiction, by virtue of their narrative form, share a sustained interest in characterization, point of view, and emplotment. According to psychological research on the nature of narrative and empathy, “Literary fiction provides simulations of social complexes as they unfold, as characters interact with each other and react to the repercussions of plans and the intrusions of accidents” (Mar and Oatley 175). Whether read in isolation or performed in a large auditorium, the texts throw at us difficult philosophical questions about human beings and their involvement that have a direct effect on our own interactions and behaviour. “Like mathematics,” the authors claim, “narrative clarifies understandings of certain generalizable principles that underlie an important aspect of human experience, namely intended human action” (Mar and Oatley 175). One of the presuppositions of my study therefore entails a focused attention on perspective and emplotment, as well as a psychoanalytic reading of character. Examined together, I argue that these writers enact the kind of resuscitation that David Foster Wallace had in mind. They struggle, ultimately, with the question of hope: how does it behave, what forms does it occupy? They offer creative practice as a continuous search for human connection, the “seeking out of the other,” to use the words of Levinas.

Finally, my text selection is not limited to one national location in an effort to embrace the larger perspective that contemporary literature inevitably represents. In arguing for a wider approach to contemporary literary analysis, Suman Gupta observes: “While a country-specific understanding of the present is, of course, still very pertinent in some ways, in others it is obvious that there is a constantly growing sense of the present in larger terms—in international

or even global terms,” which, importantly, is “not merely reflected in literary works, but also influences the way literature circulates” (32-33). One way in which this approach is undertaken is through the emerging field of world literature. Stemming from far-reaching practices in comparative literature, world literature seeks to understand better the relationship between literary production and circulation, mostly through the method of distance reading. While my analysis continues to rely heavily on the practice of close reading, this dissertation considers work from the U.S., Britain, and Australia as participating in a larger conversation that is relevant to all democratic societies dealing with the implications of neoliberal ideology and policies. What follows is a detailed outline of this dissertation’s three chapters and conclusion.

CHAPTER ONE

In the first chapter I compare different conceptions of the state of the world, which range from extremely dark to cautiously optimistic. The three works I examine—*Far Away*, *Saturday*, *Homebody/Kabul*—attempt to capture, like state-of-the-nation plays and novels before them, the *Geist* of contemporary life, which has naturally extended beyond the purview of the nation into the world. They reflect the concerns of being a citizen within a particular nation, but the focus has shifted to the individual’s relation to the rest of the world. I argue that the texts chosen challenge the idea of a private sphere, laying the foundation of my thesis that the quality of interpersonal relations says something crucial about larger forms of social organization. I explore how ideology serves individuals’ desires to dominate others and ignore their suffering.

I begin this discussion with Caryl Churchill's *Far Away*, a play that reveals how the process of ideology obscures the ownership of production and its violent realities. *Far Away* uses a millinery as a metaphor for artistic labour, which is implicated in a system of oppression that unfolds, eventually, into world war. The inherent violence of the global capitalist system is conveyed brilliantly in a scene in which the true use value of the decorative hats is revealed: in a parade of prisoners who wear them before being marched off to their deaths. For the milliners themselves, however, this is just business as usual. The parade scene underscores the discrepancy between the lifeless, physical suffering of the prisoners and the absurd, repellent extravagance of the hats. The third act collapses political categories and divisions such that the elements are at war with humans. In this way, the play blasts apart the division between the developed and developing world in a final vision of total war that is anything but "far away."

In the second part of the chapter, I move to Ian McEwan's *Saturday* for a more focused picture of how ideology inheres within the individual mind. In a series of mundane events including a minor car collision the protagonist comes to realize the extent of his responsibility in a web of social interactions that have far-reaching ramifications. Henry Perowne, an upper-class neurosurgeon, is at fault in a car accident and is nearly robbed by the group of men whom he hit. Noticing that one of the men has a rare neurological disorder, he uses his knowledge of the illness to manipulate his way out of taking any responsibility for the accident. Embarrassed and enraged, this man follows Perowne throughout the day and takes revenge by breaking into his house and threatening to rape his daughter and murder his wife. While Henry's abuse of power provokes this violent retaliation, Henry's daughter prevents the violence from taking place in an unusual reversal that reasserts the power of literary empathetic engagement. Henry is thus able to

recognize his earlier mistake as a failure to elicit empathy, which I encourage readers to appreciate as the success of ideology.

Finally, I consider how the armour of ideology is stripped by dramatic encounters with others in Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul*, and whether such encounters provide a lasting transformation of political consciousness. Tony Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul* underscores the cruelty of distance by contrasting the British homebody's isolation with a contact narrative of searching and mutual cultural appropriation. Through the metaphor of a "homebody," Kushner uncovers a Western tendency for closure and self-sufficiency that is not only untenable in the global present but also wilfully ignorant. The play is composed of two parts: the first act, which conveys the Homebody's newly acquired self-awareness about her condition, and the second act, which attempts to put together the incomplete narrative trail that follows her decision to go abroad to Kabul, Afghanistan. Her personal/political journey is completed, formally, by her daughter Priscilla's search for her remains. Thus the play shows how real rather than imagined encounters with difference open the possibilities for disinterestedness, which might lead to greater intersubjective understanding.

The primary organizing principle of this chapter is the question of connection in the contemporary global world. This chapter examines the complex chain of responsibilities presented in the protagonists' proximate relations—family, friends, neighbours, co-workers, acquaintances, strangers—and how such relations are juxtaposed, reflected, or otherwise illuminated by more distant relations with the outside world. I argue that all three texts express a fascination with distant lands because they serve as a foil to advanced capitalist societies' tacit denial of death. The first cruelty in such advanced societies, then, is capitalism's empty promise of immortality and perfection or, put another way, the apparent meaninglessness of modern life.

Against the unreal backdrop of remote war, we are able to grasp how death itself seems unnatural, in the words of Louis Menand, “the great taboo, an absurdity, the worst thing one can imagine” (xv).

CHAPTER TWO

Having demonstrated the false or unfulfilled promise that aggravates the profound alienation and anxiety experienced within advanced capitalist societies, I move in the second chapter to more direct confrontations with human cruelty: cults of death, witnesses, and mourners. Here I argue that, following Moishe Postone and Hannah Arendt, violence springs from a frustration of agency. After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, few are willing to make the claim—at least publicly—that violence may still be considered a creative, powerful act; however, even fifteen years after that humbling event the uncomfortable relationship between violence and aesthetics continues to stupefy. In this chapter I suggest that the selected texts are at pains to show that, absent a sense of genuine agency, violence, more often than not, appears as the only available vehicle of self-expression.

I begin with Martin Crimp’s 2008 play, *The City*, which suggests the impossibility of creative action due to art’s commodification in late capitalism. *The City* calls into question the entire narrative reality of the play with the failing creative capacity of its author, a translator by trade. While nothing explicitly violent happens in *The City*, Crimp’s work often suggests a history of violence and trauma that prevents the narrative components from cohering. I argue that the play does not mourn the loss of art so much as it mourns the loss of the individual, who has

been reduced to a feeble consumer. Thus, the play insists that the domination of market values and predetermined desires shrinks imaginative freedom and intersubjective relations.

Having established the loss of the individual, I move to a discussion of Richard Flanagan's *The Unknown Terrorist*. This novel uses the thriller genre to meditate on the depletion of aesthetic pleasure in human experience, which produces isolation and a calculated, premature death. The protagonist, Gina Davis, is a stripper in Sydney, Australia who is interpellated by the media as a suspect in an attempted terrorist bombing. Over the course of the novel, she fulfills the violent destiny the media has constructed, becoming a fugitive who resorts to bloodshed because she has been presumed guilty. Thus, Gina chooses vigilantism over the law, in Postone's terms, as "an act of self-constitution as outsider" (108) that to some degree satisfies the frustrations of helplessness. I contend that the novel reveals the consequence of shrinking imaginative experience in political and social life as violence as an act of creative self-determination.

Then, I offer a reading of Pat Barker's *Double Vision* to show how the text refuses violence as a creative instrument by using sculpture as a vehicle for imaginative contemplation. By closing the chapter with this reading I suggest that the union of art and love has formed an alternative, more capacious literary politics. *Double Vision* takes as its subject two parallel lives attempting to overcome trauma: Kate Frobisher has endured a recent injury from a car accident and the loss of her husband doing war photography in Afghanistan and Stephen Sharkey, a colleague and friend of Kate's late husband, has retired from war journalism due to post-traumatic stress syndrome. Both use different art forms—Kate, sculpture, Stephen, writing—to heal. Through artistic expression and contemplation they are able to overcome violent circumstances and violent futures. I argue that artistic practice encourages openness and

vulnerability regarding others, thereby allowing the benefits of positive intersubjective experiences and the recognition of the other to constitute other forms of self-determination that are alternative to violence.

In a comparison of these protagonist-creators I suggest that the problem of cruelty is inextricably bound to the problem of imagination. Where in the first chapter I show how invention in isolation distorts, in the second chapter I argue that the lack of freedom to invent—because of an ethical need to inform or a practical need to work—frustrates and stunts a society. Throughout her novel, Pat Barker uses the captions from Francisco Goya’s *Disasters of War* series as an intertextual debate the artist still finds oneself in: “No se puede mirar. (One cannot look at this.) Yo lo vi. (I saw it.) Esto es la verdad. (This is the truth.)” Yet, ironically, the inability to indulge in “ocio”—the closest English translation is “leisure”—has the double-edged effect of distancing and abstraction. Without any creative relief from the shock of reality, in other words, the work of assimilation, or mourning, becomes the work of imaginative attenuation, a shrinking of other possibilities. Finally, building on the insights of Fredric Jameson and Northrop Frye, I conclude that the romantic mode provides a space to recuperate imaginative alternatives to the present, if we heed the dangers of utopian fantasy.

CHAPTER THREE

In the third and final section, I show how the problem of cruelty is critiqued as the failure of fulfilling romantic ideals of love. Through revisions of love, I argue that the roots of cruelty surface as the failure to recognize the complexity of human motivations and desires. I begin this

section with Cormac McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men*. I suggest that the novel's upsetting of generic conventions redefines the role of hero in narrative paradigms from Christianity and popular culture. In the novel, the twin protagonists offer two divergent expressions of godly ambition, the one a murderous force defying human reason, the other in its obsessive pursuit as an opportunity to expiate his sin and the sins of mankind. I contend that Sheriff Bell's defeat by evil on a mythological scale insists upon this redefinition as well as the promise that remains at the novel's end. This promise is expressed in the image of love as an enduring form of artistic labour and in the character of Bell's wife, Loretta.

In the second section, I look at J.M. Coetzee's *Slow Man*, which challenges the consequences of narrative simplicity by presenting two competing and unreliable narrators who offer motivations, summaries, and perspectives on the protagonist's end-of-life involvement with his caretaker and her family. Rather than offering readers an improbable love story, the text asserts its inability to do so and deftly explores the reasons for this failing. *Slow Man* puts forward Paul's recognition of himself through the eyes of others as a hopeful possibility for deeper intersubjective understanding. While painful, the process allows him to integrate his romantic ideas about himself with other perspectives that enrich and broaden his experience of the world.

In the third section, I show how Karen Finley's performance piece *Make Love* espouses a similar ethical position. In its careful blend of irreverent humour and compassion, Finley uses the multiple personalities of Liza Minnelli as a synecdoche for New Yorkers following the attacks of September 11, 2001. Through this popular persona, Finley calls attention to the sickness of heart that has beset the American populace. This sickness, I argue, may be located in the Left's capitulation to consumerism and the persistence of patriarchy within individual relationships.

Thus I will show how each work puts forward a critique of different conceptions of love: heroic love, sacrificial love, and self-love. Finally, I will consider how these critiques offer alternative conceptual frameworks based on the acceptance of failure and vulnerability.

All three texts put forward a principle of hope that acknowledges failing as a necessary part of living without giving in to despair. It recalls Francis Bacon's notion of a certain necessary lucidity that prevents one from retreating to previous romantic forms, such as painting "bunches of pink flowers" or writing lyric poetry, as Theodor Adorno famously remarked. This chapter brings the overarching conversation between the previous chapters to the fore as the relation between art and life. It therefore acts in some way as a response to the problems raised previously to reveal that the dynamic explored between aesthetics and ethics might be illuminated from a different point of view by the dynamic between idealism and realism, or between Jameson's romantic mode and the oppression of reality. I suggest that the tenuous isolation of a pure aesthetics divorced from reality, such as that investigated in *Far Away*, or the mandate to replicate reality in its rawest form, as in *Double Vision*, ends up, finally, reproducing an artificial distinction. My reading of *No Country for Old Men*, *Slow Man*, and *Make Love* argues that, while the romantic mode is useful insofar as it creates an imaginative space from which to challenge and change reality, it must at the same time come to terms with the problems and history of the utopian impulse, what it excludes and what it refuses to accept. Such work is necessary before we can begin to revive genuine forms of love.

CONCLUSION

In the conclusion, I review the texts' critiques of cruelty as understood politically, aesthetically, and philosophically. I suggest that they provide an antidote to cruelty in their search for various expressions of human connection through love's embrace of humility and responsibility. I conclude by considering the role of family relations as foundational for the dynamics of social and political life. In particular, I indicate that parental relations reflect political realities in their representation of authoritarian and absentee figures, symbolizing, respectively, right-wing leadership and the withdrawal of the New Left.

In addition to this review, I touch upon other literary works that could have been considered for this investigation, including authors and playwrights such as Mohsin Hamid, Philip Roth, Wallace Shawn, Zadie Smith, and Christopher Shinn. Finally, I discuss two clear directions emerging from my study, which are to consider the role of romance as a genre and mode in reified responses to cruelty and to seek out and analyze literary imaginings of collective life from areas outside of the U.S., U.K., and Australia.

CHAPTER ONE: NEOLIBERALISM, A TIME OF CRUELTY

“The social relations specific to capitalism do not appear to be social and historical at all.”

Moishe Postone, “The Holocaust and the Trajectory of the Twentieth Century”

The title of the present chapter might have included the words “capitalism” or “globalization.” After all, my subject takes up both of these terms in a number of contexts, especially as they apply to events that have occurred over the last decades of the twentieth century. I choose the term “neoliberalism,” however, because it points to the specific political and economic policies that have influenced capitalist governments in the U.S. and Britain since the crisis decades that began in the 1970s. Capitalism and globalization are historical developments that have occurred more or less beyond the control of individual governments, whereas neoliberalism was one ideological response to these changes, which has been adopted elsewhere in the world after its purported success. In attempting to understand the instabilities and fears that characterized the early millennium, I argue, we must look deeply at the legacy of neoliberalism as a particular ideology, which is no doubt responding to both capitalism as an economic system and globalization as the historical process that spread this system.

One of the greatest difficulties any literary analyst faces when writing about her own historical period is the proximity of time. Efforts to historicize periods in literature have always required its passage, a kind of cultural sedimentation that aids in the creation of our historical narratives. Nevertheless, historicization is of primary importance in Marxist literary analysis,

even in contemporary literary analysis, which takes literature as a fundamental historical object. The best literary analysis of this kind assumes that historical processes involve a dynamic relationship between the abstract machinery of change and exemplary human action. In other words, it does not treat literature as a mere transmitter of historical movement but as an active witness and even participant, with the ability to sense and interpret history. The interpretative approach of Fredric Jameson offers such a model:

Yet even if our aim, as literary analysts, is rather to demonstrate the ways in which modernism—far from being a mere reflection of the reification of late nineteenth-century social life—is also a revolt against that reification and a symbolic act which involves a whole Utopian compensation for increasing dehumanization on the level of daily life, we are first obliged to establish a continuity between these two regional zones or sectors—the practice of language in the literary work, and the experience of *anomie*, standardization, rationalizing desacralization in the *Umwelt* or world of daily life—such that the latter can be grasped as that determinate situation, dilemma, contradiction, or subtext, to which the former comes as a symbolic resolution or solution. (*Political Unconscious* 42)

For the present chapter, I look with hindsight at the attacks of September 11, 2001 as a manifestation of a much larger historical problem, which I have identified in the introduction as cruelty, or the absence and/or failure of human love. While this event is by no means the single determinate situation of its time, it is important for this investigation as an event that radically brought history back to the unwitting minds of North Americans. The title of historian Robert Kagan's book on the subject, *The Return of History and the End of Dreams*, effectively captures this sentiment, which recalls Francis Fukayama's famous declaration that history had effectively

ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Two of the literary texts under discussion precede 9/11; yet in their political sentience they grasp its meaning, appearing as one critic put it, “eerily prescient” (Marks). These are Caryl Churchill’s *Far Away* (2000) and Tony Kushner’s *Homebody/Kabul* (2001). The third text selected for this chapter, Ian McEwan’s *Saturday* (2005), reflects on and even compensates for this historical event as its aftermath unfolds in the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

In attempting to understand these texts’ special relationship to history, I want to emphasize that they are troubled, first and foremost, by a form of idealism that had characterized the end of the twentieth century, particularly in the United States. We must recall that, in 1991, Fukuyama sincerely believed that humanity had reached, in his words, “the endpoint of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government” (3). Such ideological idealism was not atypical of Cold War rhetoric and seems to belong more to that period than the one it was supposedly celebrating. Indeed, the underlying historical thesis of the works under discussion is that the historical experience of the Cold War, particularly in the U.S.’s dealings throughout the 1980s, continues to haunt us into the twenty-first century. This legacy is one of secrecy, darkness, and brutality, of extreme cynicism and violence. In an interview with Danny Postel, Fred Halliday described the twenty-first century historical situation provocatively as follows:

To my mind, Afghanistan is central to the history of the Left, and to the history of the world, since the 1980s. It is to the early 21st century, to the years we’re now living through, what the Spanish Civil War was to Europe in the mid and late 20th century. It was the kitchen in which the contradictions of the contemporary world,

and many of the violent evils of the century, were cooked and then spread out.

(Halliday)

Further on, Halliday makes this point even more succinctly: “Bin Laden is the illegitimate child of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan” (Halliday). Their legacy forms an important historical contradiction teased out in the works of the present chapter: on the one hand, a violent and illegitimate conception of foreign policy that led to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, on the other hand, a blind faith in the market’s ability to stabilize, to “tame and perhaps even eliminate *thumos* in people and in nations” (Kagan 7).

As Kagan and other historians have shown, the end of communism did not bring forth a Kantian dream of perpetual peace. Rather, the 1990s saw the rise of what he calls “great power nationalism” and reconfigured imperialist rivalries. While the United States saw itself as the watchman of a new world order, other economies in India and China had been growing rapidly, forming new alliances and counter-alliances that “a nineteenth century diplomat would recognize instantly” (Kagan 10). The historical thread that runs through the early twenty-first century and the nineteenth century seems to be a renewed faith in invisible market forces. At the same time, the globalization of national economies produced anxieties about national ethos, creating fresh targets of fear and violence throughout the world. For this reason, the rise of nationalism during this period must be considered, like the rise of fascism, as a product of capitalist modernity and not, as Samuel Huntington claimed, as a return to clashing civilizations. Moishe Postone usefully characterizes fascism not as an atavistic historical regression but as “historically new forms of thought in the nineteenth century” (“The Holocaust” 92-93). He explains:

The nation was not only a political entity; it was also concrete, determined by a common language, history, traditions, and religion. In this sense, the Jews

following their political emancipation constituted the only group in Europe that fulfilled the determination of citizenship as a pure political abstraction. They were German or French citizens, but were not really considered Germans or Frenchmen. They were of the nation abstractly, but rarely concretely. [...] In a period when the concrete became glorified over the abstract, against “capitalism” and the bourgeois state, this became a fatal association. The Jews were rootless, international, and abstract. (94)

We could apply the same logic to the abstract problem of globalization throughout the 1990s, which is the mere expansion of capitalist development, as Arjun Appadurai has done. Against the abstract forces of globalization, minorities of whatever stripe, like the Jews before them, became the target of nationalist racism during this period. Appadurai observes: “The body of the historically produced minority combines the seductions of the familiar and the reductions of the abstract in social life, allowing fears of the global to be embodied within it and, when specific situations become overcharged with anxiety, for that body to be annihilated” (48). The brief euphoria of the 1990s, then, quickly transformed into a nightmarish world covered in refugee camps, as the photography of Sebastião Salgado has documented.⁹ In an important way, though, there is something more savage about the historical reality at the turn to the twenty-first century, with its technological brilliance and ease of life, than what occurred at the turn to the twentieth. This savagery, the present chapter suggests, is related to the strange blend of political cynicism and false idealism at the heart of neoliberal ideology.

⁹ Salgado’s *Migrations* (2000) documents the mass movement of peoples across more than 35 countries over a period of seven years at the end of the twentieth century. His life work is the subject of Wim Wender’s documentary *The Salt of the Earth* (2014).

What became known to the world as the Washington consensus—the belief that liberal capitalism was the only proper political-economic structure of democracy—had been formed a decade earlier in the domestic policy overhauls that occurred in the U.S. and Great Britain by the Reagan and Thatcher administrations. This transformation can be summarized as the transition from Keynesian liberal economic policy to the embrace of neoliberal ideology put forward by Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman. The new ideology, which emphasized the role of the free market and privatization, found expression during the economic recession of the late 1970s and became popular through Reagan and, to a lesser extent, Thatcher: “What the two Conservative allies achieved was a genuine transformation whose success can be measured by the extent to which the new paradigms they articulated became the conventional wisdom of politics and the inheritance that their successors and opponents would seek to modify and transcend, but not to reverse” (Cronin 120). The battle was particularly vicious in Great Britain, where labour unions and government ownership was fairly embedded (Cronin 105). There, welfare programs were defunded as unnecessary government spending on a culture of lazy individuals. According to Kenan Malik, the government’s opinion was that “no amount of intervention could transform poverty. Since the poor were distinct, different, apart from society, they could not be considered as part of a common community but should be regarded as a threat to the integrity of society” (*The Meaning of Race* 202).

As privatization took over and trade unions lost power, the concept of class disintegrated. Sam Gindin observes that the defeat of labour signalled “the complete breaking down of expectations, the reintegration of people in capitalism as individuals rather than a class” (2-4). While one could make the argument that individualism had already been developing for some time in the U.S., research shows that the economic crisis prior to Reagan “had led political actors

to discuss with some seriousness measures that we would today consider hopelessly radical, such as shortened workweeks, nationalization of key industries, large public works projects, and wage and price controls” (Prasad 44). As well, reduced taxation was not necessarily popular with the American electorate when the Economic Recovery Tax Act of 1981 was implemented (Prasad 45). Nonetheless, the fall of Soviet communism in 1991 helped to justify neoliberal ideology and give rise to the Washington consensus. This consensus, as Walter Benn Michaels has argued, effectively displaced the concerns of social equality within political discourse and replaced those concerns with identity. As Gindin emphasizes, individuals increasingly became isolated from forms of social solidarity and collective struggle.

The psychical motivations for the Washington consensus will be explored throughout this chapter as part of my historical analysis. As Sigmund Freud argued in *Civilization and its Discontents*, the social contract imposes certain limits on individuals’ wills, which results in the development of a socially constituted conscience and an attendant sense of guilt. In history, religions have “claim[ed] to redeem humanity from this sense of guilt, which they call sin” (93). In our secular age, religion no longer holds such redemptive powers. Ideology, on the other hand, is capable of making this negotiation. The ideology of neoliberalism, stemming from what Walter Benjamin once called “capitalism as religion,” goes even farther than religion by promising the satisfaction of individual desires without the burden of social consequences. As J.M. Coetzee puts it, “It is not the rare, extreme case of the torturer that troubles me, but the much more frequent cases of people for whom repression—which at this point we can go back to calling forgetfulness—has worked, and has in fact become the foundation of a happy and successful life” (*Good Story* 28). The ideology of neoliberalism, in other words, is the

philosophy of Narcissus championed by Ayn Rand: it uses the appeal of the happy life to discredit the question of social responsibility.

Given that the term ideology dates back to the late eighteenth century, it is important to distinguish my use of the word and the difficult ambiguities it stirs in this discussion.¹⁰ I invoke its Marxist heritage while acknowledging that even among Marxists there is much debate as to its material power and the implications emerging therefrom. In their reversal of the Hegelian dialectic, Marx and Engels identified a disjunction between ideas and material reality in *The German Ideology*. But after the failure of socialist movements and the rise of fascism, the Marxist orthodoxy of “false consciousness” appeared too simplistic with regard to the human psyche. As Georg Lukács writes in *History and Class Consciousness*, “Ideological factors do not merely ‘mask’ economic interests, they are not merely the banners and slogans: they are the parts, the components of which the real struggle is made” (58). Other Marxists, in placing emphasis on *Capital* over Marx’s earlier writings, go further by throwing into question the economic basis of social existence. For instance, against the traditional Marxist interpretation of ideology as a mystification of the relations of production, Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar put forward the concept of ideology as a separate and autonomous factor within the social totality in *Reading Capital*, which they argue is more powerful than economic and political factors of social formation (Holland and Wihl). In his theory of interpellation, Althusser contends that the individual is given a social identity through ideological state apparatuses, such as churches, educational institutions, political parties, and so on (143). For these reasons, the work of Althusser leaves little critical or imaginative space outside of ideology that might

¹⁰ For instance, the word takes on particular salience during and after the Cold War as a complete belief system opposed to capitalism.

challenge its structuring power. While his emphasis on the unconscious contributed much to our current understanding of the workings of ideology, I believe that Althusser's reading of the social totality must be historicized within the dominance of the welfare state and of welfare capitalism.

I therefore follow Fredric Jameson's reappraisal of Lukács' theory of ideology as a "structure of containment," which is characterized in terms of an abstraction or alienation from the totality of social existence, in which "history becomes fossilized in a *formalism* incapable of comprehending that the real nature of socio-historical institutions is that they consist of *relations between men*" (Lukács 48). This definition of ideology implies that these structures of containment do not hold absolute power over our critical consciousness, as Althusser would suggest; by revealing the limitations of these structures we are able to grasp a wider understanding of the social totality and our existence within it, however small that opening may be. In revising our conceptual language of how we envision the process of critique, Rita Felski suggests:

Perhaps we should imagine the transcendent or quasi-transcendent impulse of critique differently: not as a grounding but as an opening. In contrast to the image of a stable foundation resting firmly beneath one's feet, the metaphor of an opening—the shaft of light falling through a window-slit; the bright patch of blue sky amidst gathering storm clouds—captures the sense of an alternative that is glimpsed but not yet fully visible. It is less a matter of invoking a solid and unshakeable ground than of gesturing toward something that is immanent with, yet also irreducible to, present experience. (126)

In the following, I argue that literature is capable of showing this dynamic and that such knowledge comes with transformative experiences with others, as only life can show and the literary form concentrate.

The form of the texts being explored throughout this chapter is thus fundamental to the political objective of increasing self-awareness. They resemble, in one sense, nineteenth-century socialist efforts to reveal political conditions of industrialization. This Victorian tradition of writing has often been referred to as “condition-of-England” novels: “Early Victorian Condition-of-England novels tried to be a repository of social conscience, an ability to empathise with unbearable social inequities and injustices. A number of writers were strongly motivated to arouse sympathy for the conditions of the emerging working class” (Diniejko). A similar didactic strategy is present in the work under discussion here and no doubt has its roots in these historical efforts to educate the middle and upper classes about necessary reforms. However, it would be too narrow to group the contemporary texts I have chosen as solely sharing the didactic purpose of informing readers of the state of social conditions under globalization. What the comparison affords, I think, is that the question of social relations returns not in the form of working-class solidarity but as the ability to find a sense of belonging in a world being reconfigured by the new economic model of freedom.

The condition-of-England classification would be too narrow, as well, because it would have to ignore the influence of modernist literary techniques on the contemporary texts I have selected. For both Churchill and Kushner’s plays, the dramatic strategies of Bertolt Brecht are extremely relevant to their political content. While Brecht’s dramatic theory changed over his lifetime, contemporary dramatists continue to make use of his theory of estrangement for political awakening. In his theory of epic theatre, Brecht privileges narrative exposition over the

dramatic unfolding of plot in order to break up the clear divide between spectator and object, thereby dislocating the fatalism he believes undergirds dramatic naturalism. For Brecht, *katharsis* reaffirms the necessity of the status quo by dehistoricizing and universalizing a lamentable human condition: “The bourgeois theatre emphasized the timelessness of its objects. Its representation of people is bound to the alleged ‘eternally human’” (96). This is why Brecht prefers the analogy of a “sporting public” in his modern audiences to the notion of docile bodies, subjected to the horrors of some predetermined tragedy. In epic theatre, “one can as it were take a pair of scissors and cut it into individual pieces, which remain fully capable of life” (70). Thus, through this formal distancing, self-reflexive judgment and action are cultivated and prevent readers and viewers from sympathizing with the fictional characters. As Brecht outlines in his comparison between dramatic and epic theatre, the epic must emphasize “the course” rather than “the finish” in following its progressive ideology, foregrounding the human as the “object of inquiry” because “he is alterable and able to alter” (37).

Both *Far Away* and *Homebody/Kabul* reject the features of “bourgeois theatre” as timeless and unalterable by removing sympathetic engagement with their characters and by emphasizing the historical circumstances in which we find them. In Churchill’s case, neoliberal ideology is made visible as a structural process through *Far Away*’s juxtaposition of the natural world with political epistemology. While Churchill’s later work has been considered by critics to have left behind its earlier socialist commitments, I think no play better illustrates the structural and psychological power of ideology than *Far Away*. In Kushner’s case, the political awakening of the Homebody and her subsequent death points to the limits of individual knowledge and power. In the absence of a collective politics in which she could find connection, in other words, the Homebody has no choice but self-annihilation. As mentioned previously, these plays also tap

into a historical temperament that seems to anticipate the 9/11 attacks. Kushner has denied that his work is prophetic, with good reason. In one scholar's words, "History, Kushner would agree, is there for the reading, for guarding against the disposal of inconvenient facts" (Colleran 213).

In a different way, Ian McEwan's *Saturday* makes use of modernist strategies by incorporating Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* as a formal intertext. The novel does so by invoking events from the earlier work that take on new significance in their changed historical context. The most obvious example is at the novel's opening, when the protagonist, Henry, sees something unusual in the sky. This moment recalls a scene in *Mrs. Dalloway* when Clarissa Dalloway watches a plane skywriting, which "breeds fear and confusion" because the First World War has just ended (Latham 140). In the context of *Saturday*, a point to which I will return in greater depth, the fear Henry experiences is the threat of an impending terrorist attack. Moreover, *Saturday* borrows the thematic interest in seeing the world from the perspectives of the "sane and the insane, side by side" by using Henry's neurosurgeon's eye alongside the failing mental capacity of Baxter as well as Henry's mother, who is suffering from dementia (Latham 142). Thus, *Saturday* demonstrates a sustained interest in the concerns of the previous century brought up to date. These are, principally, the loss of greatness and grand historical narratives, the ability of individuals to interpret and cope with this loss, and the role of aesthetics in changed historical situations.

The works under discussion seek to blast apart the wilful ignorance of Fukuyama's sentiment, which reveals above everything else the self-absorption permitted by Cold War ideological forms of thinking and existing in the world. In what follows, I explore how neoliberal ideology serves individuals' desires to dominate others and ignore their suffering. I begin this discussion with Caryl Churchill's *Far Away*, a play that reveals how the process of ideology

obscures the ownership of production and its violent realities. Then I move to Ian McEwan's *Saturday* for a more focused picture of how neoliberal ideology inheres within the individual mind and in what ways it reveals itself. Finally, I consider how the armour of ideology is stripped by dramatic encounters with others in Tony Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul*, and whether such encounters provide a lasting transformation of political consciousness into what Lukács once called "class consciousness."

IDEOLOGY: FAR AWAY

Of the three works chosen for this chapter, Caryl Churchill's *Far Away* best illustrates the complex of agents involved in ideological alienation. *Far Away* premiered at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs in London on November 24, 2000. In three short acts, it moves from a disturbing family scene to a procession of prisoners being marched off to their deaths to a world war that makes no distinction among humans, animals, or the elements. For this reason the play might be called dystopian, though the first act, which depicts human smuggling, is hardly the stuff of science fiction. The second act also draws on reality—hat makers in a millinery complaining about their working conditions—but shows the product of their labour as the designer hats are worn during the procession of ragged prisoners, a correlation which remains primarily abstract in life outside the play. Like the other texts, its titular warning seeks to reconnect the actions of individuals with larger social forces that appear distant and irrelevant to their lives.

The first act prompts our suspicion that private life is not untouched by events that are as familiar and confounding as the daily news. The protagonist, Joan, is staying at her Aunt Harper's house, unsettled by "a shriek" (135) and the sight of blood, which she slipped on after climbing outside of her window (138). Harper attempts to keep her niece ignorant of what is happening—"there might be things that are not your business when you're a visitor in someone else's house"—until it is clear that Joan knows too much (137). Harper's comment, no doubt suspicious, resonates on a second level as parroting cynical justifications of violence by means of cultural relativism: what happens in the confines of this place does not concern outsiders. Harper tells her that her uncle is "helping [the people] escape" and that the blood is from "before" (140). Despite evidence to the contrary—"He was hitting a man with a stick . . . He hit one of the children"—Harper convinces her niece eventually through improvisation: "That would have been the child of the traitor" (141). Thus, in this simple vignette, the intuitive ethical doubts of a child who has witnessed something disturbing are rerouted into a grotesque moral logic. Acts that appear inhuman are rendered palatable—they need to be confined because they are escaping violence—while violence itself is condoned as an exception, only to be used on traitors. "But now you understand, it's not so bad," Harper consoles her niece; "You're part of a big movement now to make things better. You can be proud of that" (142, my emphasis). As Susan Sontag observed months before the U.S. invasion of Iraq: "It remains as true as ever that most people will not question the rationalizations offered by their government for starting or continuing a war. It takes some very peculiar circumstances for a war to become genuinely unpopular" (*Regarding* 38). With this knowledge comes a higher order of justice to which Joan now belongs: "You can look at the stars and think here we are in our little bit of space, and I'm on the side of the people who are putting things right, and your soul will expand right into the sky" (142). In

these last lines we glimpse the play's trajectory. The war will not be fought on (consciously) political grounds. It is natural, elemental.

As we move into the second act, the covert tactics of war hinted at previously—the transport and enslavement of human beings, including children—have shifted to the highly publicized role of the state. What's more, they have been integrated successfully into cultural production. What is left of artistic creation is justified and maintained in the service of state brutality: the adult Joan is employed as a designer in a factory that manufactures wildly outrageous hats that will adorn the bodies of chained prisoners on parade before execution. Without remarking on the parades themselves, her co-worker Todd instructs Joan on the troubling changes taking place in the millinery: “We used to get two weeks before a parade and then they took it down to one and now they're talking about cutting a day” (144). Aside from this comment, there are few clues to the purpose of their labour; Todd casually remarks that he “stay[s] up till four every morning watching the trials” (145) and later Joan confesses that she “[doesn't] like staying in the evenings and watching trials” (146). While the two discuss where they went to school and the fine aesthetic details of their creations—Todd: “Too much green.” Joan: “It's meant to be too much”—they never speak directly about the horror of their work. This silence does not appear to be caused by a fear of censorship (Todd risks his job for better conditions, after all) but more likely because, without the agency to demolish a system on which they have come to depend, they no longer see it as horrific (147). The effect of the unexpected parade scene is therefore all the more shocking for its excessive visual stimuli.

Blending the two disparate but equally familiar worlds of fashion and prison camps, Churchill creates a grotesque image of the contradictions of advanced capitalism. On the one hand, the hats are a symbol (a perversion, really) of limitless freedom; on the other hand, the

prisoners remind us that such freedom from responsibility is a terrible deception because living in civilization implies that “the members of the community restrict themselves in their scope for satisfaction” (Freud 41). The instructions for the parade scene are sparse: “*A procession of ragged, beaten, chained prisoners, each wearing a hat, on their way to execution. The finished hats are even more enormous and preposterous than in the previous scene*” (149). As Julia Boll notes, some productions chose to emphasize associations with particular current events, such as the use of orange jumpsuits in the 2004 Dublin production, which recalled prisoners at the extrajudicial detention camp in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba (170). Equally plausible are the many historical analogues:

[The scene] conjures associations of prisoners being transported to the concentration and extermination camps in Hitler’s Third Reich, the expelled Armenians’ march in the Middle East, streams of refugees fleeing the war-torn former Yugoslavia, the train of prisoners on their way to Pol Pot’s Killing Fields, the Rwandan exodus. Refugees, prisoners, asylum-seekers, slaves or forced laborers are all possible interpretations. (Boll 170)

The procession underscores that something hideous—torture—has been desperately “dressed up,” thereby making visual the abstract nature of late capitalism, of its ability to distance reality: “What fundamentally characterizes capitalism is a historically specific, abstract form of social mediation [...] one that subjects people to impersonal, increasingly rationalized, structural imperatives and constraints that cannot adequately be grasped in terms of social groupings or of institutional agencies of the state” (Postone, “The Holocaust” 104). Its direct reference to contemporary events also reveals that, as audience members attending the theatre, we are not outside the borders of ideology.

The presence of live, chained bodies on stage—up to one hundred, following Churchill’s directions—compels us to see the parallels between the theatre and Joan and Todd’s profession. For after the parade scene ends, Joan and Todd return to work to begin designing new hats. We learn that Joan has won her first contest, which means her hat will be preserved in a museum, unlike the rest:

Joan Sometimes I think it’s a pity that more aren’t kept.

Todd There’d be too many, what would they do with them?

Joan They could reuse them.

Todd Exactly and then we’d be out of work.

Joan It seems so sad to burn them with the bodies.

Todd No I think that’s the joy of it. The hats are ephemeral. It’s like a metaphor for something or other.

Joan Well, life. (150)

Churchill’s knack for dialogue is not without its sharp-edged humour: the only remaining joy in Todd’s job is in witnessing the burnings. Here she captures beautifully the harsh sense of reification that pervades the play, as the liveliness of the hats contrasts pointedly with the thingness of the bodies. That is, Joan is concerned about the so-called “life” of her hat but not about the actual lives of the heads that wore them. Ironically, in failing to watch the death parades and see them as the product of her labour, Joan sees only the hats, free-floating metaphors for “something or other.”

More than anything, *Far Away* explores the history and making of contemporary terrorism. As Arjun Appadurai has shown, this history is inextricably tied to the historic process of globalization, embodying the full abstraction of capitalism across the world. He claims that

the dual pressure on nations to globalize domestic markets and recognize minorities at home produced a “crisis for the sense of national boundaries, national sovereignty, and the purity of national ethnos” (65). According to Appadurai, the violence of fascist racism “is not about old hatred and primordial fears. It is an effort to exorcise the new, the emergent, and the uncertain, one name for which is globalization” (48). The final act of *Far Away* captures this reality brilliantly. Nothing remains neutral: mallards “commit rape” and “are on the side of the elephants and Koreans” (155) and cats “have been killing babies . . . in China. They jump the cots when nobody’s looking” (153). Harper intimates in the last lines of the first act that political identifications such as “left” or “right” have given way to essentialist and sometimes mutually contradictory forms of classification based on nationality, type of work, or species. For instance, Harper tells Todd that “the cats have come in on the side of the French” (153). When Todd replies, “But some cats are still ok [...] I know a cat up the road,” Harper counters, “No, you must be careful of that” (153). The dialogue defamiliarizes the ignorant use of political, religious, and ethnic identities in debates about human rights throughout the 1990s by replacing these identifications with animal groups, such as the cats. These identifications “demonstrate the same unbending righteousness in which Harper had instructed Joan as a girl. But it is now rendered absurd in a conflict of perpetually shifting allegiances among ever more atomised and ill-defined groups: children under five, musicians, the Spanish” (Gobert 33). In this way, the landscape of total war seems anything but “far away”; rather, it invokes the outburst of genocides witnessed by the world throughout the 1990s and like previous acts, intimates the sense of

endlessness to so much violence and cruelty. Sadly, it seems to confirm Samuel Huntington's clash of civilizations thesis, in a way that reflects the real power of ideological thought.¹¹

At the end of *Far Away*, Joan returns in the final moments, having come back in the night to see her husband, Todd. But her journey is quickly dismissed as weakness by Harper: "Everyone has people they love they'd like to see or anyway people they'd rather see than lie in a hollow waiting to be bitten by ants" (158). She continues, "And you're risking your life for you don't know what because he says things that aren't right. Don't you care? Maybe you don't know right from wrong yourself" (158). Once again, the meaning of "far away" resonates: not us, not here. The performative act of classifying and then separating good from evil allows characters like Harper to absolve themselves of appalling acts of violence, mimicking contemporary politicized terror. In "History and Helplessness," Moishe Postone observes:

The sort of future society and polity implicitly expressed by the political praxis of militant social movements that distinguish military from civilian targets differs from that implied by the praxis of movements that make no such distinction. The latter tend to be concerned with identity. In the broadest sense they are radically nationalist, operating on the basis of a friend/foe distinction that essentializes a civilian population as the enemy and closes off the possibility of future coexistence. [...] In such cases, the twentieth-century dialectic of war and revolution is transformed into the subsumption of "revolution" under war. (105)

¹¹ In the aftermath of 9/11 Edward Said wrote a delayed polemic against Samuel Huntington in an article titled "The Clash of Ignorance" in *The Nation* October 4, 2001. There he pointed out the racist fantasies undergirding what he called "the West versus the rest." Appadurai, however, concurs with Huntington's thesis: "He was right to see that there was a new sort of ideological totalitarianism afoot in the world, especially as regards the hatred of the United States" (116-17).

Speaking specifically of groups such as the Irish Republican Army and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, which do not discriminate between political and civilian targets, Postone claims that war has become a permanent feature of the twenty-first century. He explains that it has become permanent because current political organization and thought rule out the prospect of future coexistence between different identity groups. The third act reveals the full political weight of the Cold War in the decade of its aftermath. An imaginative portrait of a world full of action without reflection, *Far Away* suggests that ideology prevents us from possessing the capacity to recognize the suffering of others, and especially our complicity in that suffering. By defamiliarizing ideological assumptions, it evokes a profound sense of absence that is beyond mourning: it terrifies. Despite this darkness, the play ends with Joan recalling a moment of arrest when she was standing in the river on her escape from the war, a moment I will return to in greater depth at the chapter's conclusion. That the play begins and ends in Harper's home underscores that the ideology of neoliberalism only works when it is fully domesticated and internalized. A similar public-private crossing will be explored in the next text under discussion in order to elaborate upon this special dimension of ideology.

IDEOLOGICAL INDIVIDUALS: SATURDAY

The division of labour implies the contradiction between the interest of the separate individual or the individual family and the communal interest of all individuals who have intercourse with one another. –Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*

Far Away reveals the larger process of ideological transmission, first on the level of the family and then on the level of social organization and cultural production. In doing so it outlines the ways in which neoliberalism obfuscates unpleasant realities and likewise absolves the individual. But it does not investigate the psychological mechanics of this process, and even less suggests a way through the problem. For this we need to turn to Ian McEwan's daylong novel, *Saturday*, where neoliberal ideology is scrutinized more closely on the individual level. Unlike *Far Away*'s resistance to audience identification, the longer form of the novel allows big political events to acquire meaning and attachment through the microscopic attention to a particular life, in McEwan's case, through the tiny but resonate details of a single day. Published in 2005, *Saturday* has already produced an impressive body of scholarship and many diverse critical interpretations. It has been included in discussions as divergent as the post-9/11 novel, the "new atheist" novel, cognitive approaches to linguistics and literature, as well as revisions of modernist practice and thought. The novel centers around two private events that occur over the course of a Saturday: a car scuffle that ends in the protagonist, Henry Perowne, abusing his power as a neurosurgeon and a brutal retaliation by the victim of his abuse, Baxter, on Perowne's family, all of which is set during the February 15 anti-war protests against the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. Written from the third-person focalized perspective of Perowne, an upper-class

Londoner mildly uneasy about his wealth and more than ambivalent about the possible war in Iraq, the text allows readers to follow intimately the cracking of his myth of self-perfection.

Set in the new century of terror, *Saturday* reinvigorates the modernist concern with perception as it unfolds in time, an experience that has been radically transformed by technology. The novel opens with an act of reading that makes direct reference to a similar moment in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, which has taken on new significance. In this opening scene McEwan foreshadows Perowne's day of reckoning: nude and in a pre-dawn conscious state of "lightness and ease" (2), he witnesses a burning plane from his bedroom window as he tries to make sense of what it means. At first impression, he thinks he sees a meteor; he revises his guess to a comet; then, on hearing "a low rumbling sound" which "tells him everything," he realizes that "it's traveling along a route that *he himself* has taken many times in his life" (13, emphasis mine). The plane is not, like Woolf's, an attempt to grasp technological modernity, but now an emblem of calamity, of terror.

Despite this latent anxiety, Perowne maintains the outward appearance of a neurosurgeon's detached interest and cool. Within the first pages we see that Henry views himself as an apostle of the new religion of science. Before the troubling sight, Henry watches two figures pass through the square, "supervising their progress with the remote possessiveness of a god," "hot little biological engines [...] endowed with innumerable branching neural networks sunk deep in a knob of bone casing, buried fibres, warm filaments with their invisible glow of consciousness" (12). Before that, Henry champions the health and vigour of London that contemporary life has made possible. In his early morning euphoria he sees technological progress reflected in the city's architecture as a harmonious extension of the Enlightenment:

Standing here, as immune to cold as a marble statue, gazing towards Charlotte Street, towards a foreshortened jumble of façades, scaffolding and pitched roofs, Henry thinks the city is a success, a brilliant invention, a biological masterpiece—millions teeming around the accumulated and layered achievements of the centuries, as though around a coral reef, sleeping, working, entertaining themselves, harmonious for the most part, nearly everyone wanting it to work. And the Perownes' own corner, a triumph of congruent proportion; the perfect square laid out by Robert Adam enclosing a perfect circle of garden—an eighteenth-century dream bathed and embraced by modernity, by street light from above, and from below by fibre-optic cables, and cool fresh water coursing down pipes, and sewage borne away in an instant of forgetting. (3)

With the knowledge of the events that will unfold over the course of this Saturday in February, it is impossible to read this passage without a shade of authorial irony. Even Perowne questions the oddity of his sudden utopian fervour, attributing it to exhaustion or other physical sources. There are several poetic celebrations of modern life in the opening chapters, which all seem to begin with a statement that affirms his position. “There is grandeur in this view of life,” he repeats, quoting Charles Darwin’s *Origin of the Species* from a biography he reads in the bath. After Henry and Rosalind have made love, Henry wakes to the sound of her “hairdryer,” then the “solid clunk of her wardrobe door,” then the “silky whisper of her petticoat,” the one he bought in Milan. Chapter three begins, “Back in the padded privacy of his damaged car,” and four, “He doesn’t bother to park in the mews” because of his impatience to “be indoors” (53,121,179). While this view of life—a complete rejection of the pessimism of his daughter Daisy’s professors—has grandeur, it is also the view of the privileged. Henry’s act of misperception—

seeing this dream reflected in contemporary London—becomes the foremost concern of the novel. But the dream itself is never undermined.

The obvious challenge to Henry's ideal picture of London, of course, is Baxter. The car scuffle and his subsequent manipulation of the scene causes Perowne some alarm afterwards: "Did he, Henry Perowne, act unprofessionally, using his medical knowledge to undermine a man suffering from a neurodegenerative disorder? Yes. Did the threat of a beating excuse him? Yes, no, not entirely" (113). For Henry reveals his knowledge of Baxter's condition, "a witch doctor delivering a curse" (95), for the explicit purpose of abdicating his responsibility in the car accident and consequently, overturning his subsequent exposure as a wealthy man being exploited by thugs. In this way Perowne is also explicitly justifying his right to drive a Mercedes S 500, a "sensual part of what he regards as his overgenerous share of the world's goods" (74), without resentment or violent provocation from those less fortunate. Henry uses his superior knowledge to take advantage of Baxter's situation and turn it against him, since "clinical experience wrung [pity] from him long ago" (99). A representative of the underclass of Britain, Baxter's mere existence provides a strong counterweight to Henry's image of shared progress: "The distinction is made between 'the majority of the poor' and the underclass. The underclass is treated as somehow different from the rest of society and indeed as standing outside of society. The very term 'underclass' denotes people who do not fit in to the scheme of things" (Malik, *The Meaning of Race* 199). Though Baxter's difference is never discussed explicitly, he serves as a composite of various outsiders to the national community of Britain, excluded, quite literally, by an accident of birth: "If a parent has it, you have a fifty-fifty chance of going down too. [...] This is how the brilliant machinery of being is undone by the tiniest of faulty cogs, the insidious whisper of ruin" (94). With the parallels McEwan offers between Henry's biological

determinism and a more nefarious ether of social Darwinism, Baxter is marked by his disease as an unfortunate sacrifice for the common good.

For as much as Baxter serves as a foil to Henry, he also functions as his ideological double. By exuding ideological excess—Henry, the language of neuroscience, Baxter, the language of the streets—both uncover the inadequacy of such frames of reference for the complexity of their experience. While Baxter’s exclusion stems from presumable social and environmental reasons, Henry’s is one of choice; when frustrated by his daughter’s attempts to cultivate his literary education he reasons, “This notion of Daisy’s, that people can’t ‘live’ without stories, is simply not true. He is living proof” (67). The very next sentence underscores Perowne’s readerly naivety: “By the front door he picks up the post and the newspapers” (67). As many scholars have noted, the constant cycle of news throughout the novel suggests that even before the physical break-in, the tranquility of the Perowne home has been compromised by these “baffled and fearful” days (3). The stories Henry prefers, then, are produced for the masses and have more in common with salacious thriller novels than the “difficulties and wonders of the real” (66).

Henry’s lack of understanding is most apparent, though, when contrasted with his father-in-law, Grammaticus. Robert Adam’s name returns when Henry welcomes his father-in-law into his house and they discuss a different tower of London, appropriately named the Shard. When Grammaticus asks Henry what Adam would have thought of the ultra-modern skyscraper he offers, rather generously, that it might have looked more like a machine than an edifice. Unsurprisingly, Grammaticus corrects him, saying that Adam would have thought it had religious significance. Henry affirms this observation with approval, thereby giving Grammaticus an opportunity to chide him:

“For God’s sake, man. Look at the proportions of those pillars, the carving on those capitals!” Now he’s jabbing his cane towards the façade on the square’s east side. “There’s beauty for you. There’s self-knowledge. A different world, a different consciousness. Adam would have been stunned by the ugliness of that glass thing. No human scale. Top heavy. No grace, no warmth. It would have put fear in his heart. If that’s going to be our religion, he’d’ve said to himself, then we’re truly fucked.” (203)

As a poet and overseer of his grandchildren’s artistic fostering, Grammaticus has a claim on aesthetic authority and serves as a forceful opposition to Henry’s embrace of Philistinism. For Grammaticus, and the import of *Saturday*, the Shard is a synecdoche for the ugliness of pure science as religion. It also recalls the symbolism against which the attacks on the Twin Towers were directed; that is, it represents what Grammaticus calls a lack of “grace” and “warmth,” and what Kenan Malik describes as the negative expressions of Western modernity: “the loss of a sense of belonging in a fragmented society, the blurring of traditional moral lines, the increasing disenchantment with politics and politicians, the growing erosion of the distinction between our private lives and our public lives” (*From Fatwa to Jihad* 25). While Baxter’s illness may mirror the perceived narcissism of former Western ally Saddam Hussein, as Dominic Head has argued, his unpredictable behaviour is better understood in metaphorical terms as a physical manifestation of negative modernity in the extreme. In this way Baxter lays bare the irresolvable contradiction of Perowne’s own troubled sense of modernity, the hypocrisy of liberalism hinted at in the epigraph to the novel, from Saul Bellow’s *Herzog*: “Would you ask them to go labour and go hungry while you yourself enjoyed old-fashioned Values? You—you yourself are a child of this mass and a brother to all the rest. Or else an ingrate, dilettante, idiot.”

Henry's abuse of power provokes Baxter's violent retaliation. Baxter's hesitation to carry through his impulsive plan allows Perowne the chance to realize fully his earlier mistake. After Baxter has given Perowne's father-in-law a bloody nose, Henry reflects: "Why could he not see that it's dangerous to humble a man as emotionally labile as Baxter? To escape a beating and get to his squash game. He used or misused his authority to avoid one crisis, and his actions have steered him into another, far worse" (219). What ultimately prevents Baxter from cutting Perowne's wife's throat and raping their daughter is the very grace and warmth that is so deficient in Henry's clinical objectivity. Cunningly, the transformative scene in which Daisy, pregnant and naked, recites from memory Matthew Arnold's famous "Dover Beach," is refracted through Henry's disbelieving ear: "He feels himself slipping through the words into the things they describe," which for him is Daisy telling her lover that they must remain faithful, "especially now they're having a child" (229). Though the poem is performed for Baxter, we are given Henry's two interpretations—the first from his own limited perspective, and the second, from the imagined perspective of Baxter. In this moment the full transformation takes hold, as Henry recognizes Baxter's condition: "He sees Baxter standing alone, elbows propped against the sill, listening to the waves [...] It rings like a musical curse. The plea to be true to one another sounds hopeless in the absence of joy or love or light or peace or 'help for pain.' [...] The poem's melodiousness, he decides, is at odds with its pessimism" (230). The second reading, though more on target, can only see this melodiousness as a mistake. But for Baxter, the fact that Daisy composed something so moving is cause for elation. Through Baxter's reaction, then, we unearth the poem's significance for the novel. It is melodious *in spite* of the darkness it communicates: "But Baxter heard what Henry never has, and probably never will [...] a yearning he could barely begin to define. That hunger is his claim on life, on a mental existence" (288).

For this reason, Henry chooses to perform emergency surgery on Baxter after pushing him down a flight of stairs in self-defense, a surgery which will prolong his life at least for a few more years. He reasons that he should not pursue indicting Baxter because he has already been punished by his illness and because Perowne is also responsible for the day's events: "Is this forgiveness? [...] Or is he the one seeking forgiveness?" (288). The novel ends with Henry peering out from his bedroom window once more, "drawing his dressing gown more tightly around him," reconsidering his certainties about the impending invasion of Iraq: "He's weak and ignorant, scared of the way consequences of an action leap away from your control and breed new events, new consequences, until you're led to a place you never dreamed of and would never choose—a knife at the throat" (287).

Dominic Head has pointed readers of *Saturday* to Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* as an influential source-text for McEwan. In this collection, Arnold defends culture against claims of pure aestheticism as the humanist advancement of the social function formerly occupied by religion (though this particular work has garnered much criticism for its unabashed elitism, a point I will take up in the dissertation's conclusion). He argues that the motivations of science support culture and thus constitute a harmonious balance: "[Culture] moves by the force, not merely or primarily of the scientific passion for pure knowledge, but also of the moral and social passion for doing good" (339). For this reason it is imperative to read Henry's decision to restore Baxter to life, however briefly it may last, as an act of good intention. Though he is not as touched by poetry, Perowne has used his imagination to understand Baxter's perspective. He also has faith in the mystery of life's grandeur. As he acknowledges that consciousness "will be laid open one day," he insists, nonetheless, that "the wonder will remain, that mere wet stuff can make this bright inward cinema of thought, of sight and sound and touch bound into a vivid

illusion of an instantaneous present, with a self, another brightly wrought illusion, hovering like a ghost at its centre” (262). The rawness of Daisy’s embodied performance and the gift of Perowne’s skilled hands suggest that the novel rejects the advancements of knowledge for its own sake. The gift of culture—the marriage, we might suppose, of science and literature—is that it should enlarge and not diminish our sense of humanity.

TRANSFORMATIVE ENCOUNTERS: *HOMEBOY/KABUL*

The seeking out of the other man, however distant, is already a relationship with this other man, a relation in all its directness, which is already proximity. – Emmanuel Levinas, “Ideology and Idealism”

Perowne’s decision to perform surgery on Baxter is more likely an act of atonement for his initial exploitation of Baxter’s weakness and less for the subsequent harm he does in defending his family. Perowne’s atonement is possible because he recognizes his involvement in the day’s chain of events. The plot of *Saturday* thus relies on two things for its revelation to occur: individuals undergoing the risk of loss and understanding their role in history. The first point supports Judith Butler’s claim in *Precarious Life* that “loss has made a tenuous ‘we’ of us all” (20). Indeed, *Saturday* suggests that vulnerability plays an important part in this transformation, with the potential to prevent further violence and begin the process of reparation. The second piece is the recognition of one’s responsibility for others, a point *Far Away* raises and *Saturday* attempts to resolve. But *Saturday* does not suggest that Perowne’s ideological thinking has been overcome, since Henry reflects at the end of his day that “no amount of social

justice will cure or disperse this enfeebled army haunting the public places of every town” (282).

In other words, *Saturday* uses concentrated characterization and psychology to reveal the individual’s ideology to itself, but it shows that opening to be tenuous and rather limited.

Perowne’s political makeup is not, unfortunately, dramatically altered.

For Emmanuel Levinas, however, such recognition is the first step towards political regeneration. In his essay “Ideology and Idealism” he posits that the concept of disinterestedness refutes the inexorable confines of ideology. He writes:

In the social community, the community of clothed beings, the privileges of rank obstruct justice. The intuitive faculties, in which the whole body participates, are exactly what obstructs the view and separates like a screen the plasticity of the perceived, obscures the otherness of the other, the otherness precisely because of which the other is not an object under our control but a neighbour. (243-44)

In order to grasp the social totality we must dispense with the false distinctions of ideology and exist, in the words of Butler, “outside ourselves and for one another” (27). Tony Kushner’s Brechtian political strategy in *Homebody/Kabul* attempts such a transformation, though it implies, somewhat darkly, the absolute destruction of the ideological self.

Homebody/Kabul premiered December 19, 2001 at New York Theater Workshop, roughly three months following the September 11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center. It appeared in an earlier form as *Homebody* in December 1997 as a performed reading of the first act at The Chelsea Theatre Centre in London. Between the years 1997 and 2001, then, Kushner had been expanding the monologue into a full-fledged play, which he had finished before 9/11. In the afterward to the revised version he writes: “It was my feeling when writing the play that more arrogance, more aggression, more chaos, and more bloodshed were the last things needed

in addressing the desperate situation in which the Afghan people find themselves” (142). Though it has been critiqued for its ultimately Western focus, *Homebody/Kabul* uses the marauded land of Kabul, Afghanistan as the flashpoint for a family drama to unfold.¹² In this way two imbricated stories emerge, as the title’s unorthodox punctuation intimates: a private impasse and a historical problem. It tells the story of a British housewife who, having decided to “broach her borders” and travel to Kabul, Afghanistan (13), has either been killed mercilessly or has converted to a new life as a devout Muslim. We follow the wanderings of her daughter, Priscilla, who is propelled by a sense of her mother’s nearness and who ultimately dramatizes the transformative experience her mother had yearned for distantly in her home in London. The Homebody’s struggle to express herself in the opening monologue underpins the family’s traumatic past and the larger history that surrounds the people and land of Afghanistan, which are linked by symbols of gardens, books, and language. In the Homebody’s dizzying monologue, Kushner encapsulates the ways in which ideology inheres in the individual mind to reveal the wrongs of the West’s approach towards the rest of the world, which is to say, its ignorance and self-love.

The first scene consists in a lengthy monologue given by the play’s titular character before her departure and permanent absence from her existence as a housewife. Her words have the fleeting mark of infatuation:

A subject strikes my fancy: Kabul—you will see why, that’s the tale I’m telling—
but then, I can’t help myself, it’s almost perverse in libraries, in secondhand
bookshops, I invariably seek out not the source but all that which was dropped by

¹² Peggy Phelan articulates this critique most convincingly in *Theatre Journal* 55.1 (2003): 166-68.

the wayside on the way to the source, outdated guidebooks [...] I find these irrelevant and irresistible, ghostly, dreamy, the knowing what *was* known before the more that has since become known overwhelms... As we are, many of us, overwhelmed, and succumbing to luxury... (10)

The Homebody's subject is a "fancy," in the same way that a love interest can be a fancy. Her self-proclaimed passion—"I love love love love the world!" (12)—she warns us, is not "that overstretched self-aggrandizing hyperinflated sort of adulation" that bursts at the slightest prodding and lacks a solid core (27). Self-aggrandizing or not, her newfound desire seems to stem from a profound lack: the love she felt for her family has ebbed, though she maintains that her distance is another kind of love. She has decided against touching her daughter for fear of corrupting her: "The touch which does not understand is the touch which corrupts that which it touches, and which corrupts itself" (28).

We meet the Homebody in the process of her ideological unraveling, after an important encounter at a hat shop that has changed her and the course of her remaining life. We thus have to infer about the hopeless condition of the Homebody's former life through her recollections. Her monologue underscores the difficulty of "liv[ing] with the world's utter indifference," so that most of her contemporaries, including her husband, have resorted to the privilege of self-medication (12). She recalls the party for which the hats were bought, a room filled with "lovely lovely people all of them but when we assemble we rather... affect one another, one might even say *afflict* one another" (15). For this affliction "powerful antidepressants are consumed" (15). And she describes her own experience with prescription drugs as a physical curing: "I imagine my brain floating in a salt bath, frosted with a rime of salt, a pickle-brine brain, pink beige walnut-wrinkled nutmeat within a crystalliform quartzoid ice-white hoarfrost casing, a gemmy

shell, gemmiparous: budding” (16). For the Homebody and her loved ones, apparently, ideology works better with anti-depressants.

The Homebody’s decisive experience at the hat shop anticipates her eventual liberation from ideology. In her retelling, she describes her first memory of the place as a “dusty shop crowded with artifacts, relics, remnants, little... doodahs of a culture once aswarm with spirit matter [...] its magic now shriveled into the safe container of *aesthetic*” (17). The second trip changes her original ideas, after she sees the mutilated hand of the merchant. During her sales transaction at the counter she fantasizes that she asks the merchant in Pushtu what happened to his hand. He replies:

I was with the Mujahideen, and the Russians did this. I was with the Mujahideen, and an enemy faction of Mujahideen did this. I was with the Russians, I was known to have assisted the Russians, [...] I stole bread for my starving family, I stole bread *from* a starving family, I profaned, betrayed, according to some stricture I erred and they chopped off the fingers of my hand ... (23)

The Homebody’s imagined response is rich with contradictions that undermine the simplicity of ideological thinking. In this moment, she has apprehended history critically as a series of calamities rather than Perowne’s perfect image of progress. She realizes, too, that such calamities are not the result of some atavistic impulse but the complications brought about by warring modern nations. Her fantasy eventually leads her to the city of Kabul, where, “Demurely hidden from the sight of the ailing and the destitute and war-ravaged we, the hat merchant and I, make love beneath a chinar tree” (26). Thus her fantasy becomes its own fictional redemption: “He places his [mutilated] hand inside me, and it seems to me his whole hand inside me, and it seems to me a whole hand” (26). Unlike Perowne in *Saturday*, however, she remains untouched by

another. From reading bygone travel guides that begin at “the very dawn of history, circa 3,000 B.C.,” we appreciate that her life up until now has consisted mostly in passive consumption, reading “too many books, exceeding [her] capacity for syncretism,” or the kind of understanding that comes with experience.

At the party, guests take turns trying on the hats, an act “meltingly intimate, someone else’s hat atop your head, making your scalp stiffen at the imagined strangeness” (29). It is interesting to note that both Kushner and Churchill use hats as a synecdoche for production processes beyond sight. In *Far Away*, they serve as symbols of a disjunction between minds and bodies, as well as call to mind the absurd luxury of the upper classes. For Kushner, the hats remind us of “the suffering behind the craft: evil consequence of evil action taken long ago, conjoining with relatively recent wickedness and wickedness perpetrated now” (17). Towards the end of her monologue, the Homebody muses, “What has this century taught the civilized if not contempt for those who merely Do” (24). In this view of life, inaction seems the best choice. On the other hand, she contests, “our correspondent degrees of inertia” can just as well become a “form of malevolent action if you’ve a mind to see it that way. I do. I’ve such a mind” (24). Indeed, after her encounter at the hat shop she is reminded that suffering goes on and she knows, in her more lucid moments, that she can neither absolve herself of it nor fully comprehend it, having succumbed to the luxury afforded by distance:

Where stands the homebody, safe in her kitchen, on her culpable shore, suffering uselessly watching others perishing in the sea, wringing her plump little maternal hands, oh, oh. Never *joining* the drowning. Her feet, neither rooted nor moving. The ocean is deep and cold and erasing. But how dreadful, really unpardonable, to remain dry. [...] She does not drown, she ... succumbs. To luxury. She sinks.

Terror-struck, down, down into . . . um, the dangerous silent spaces, or rather places, with gravity and ground, down into the terrible silent gardens of the private, in the frightening echoing silence of which a grieving voice might be heard, chattering away, keening, rocking, shrouded, trying to express that which she lacks all power to express but which she knows must be expressed or else . . . death. (28)

Having experienced a kind of death by isolation within the private, the Homebody risks what remains of her life in order to “seek in submission the unanswered need” the rest of the world has forgotten (28). This aching contradiction, Kushner suggests, implores us to take action in ways that are desperate and extreme. The Homebody communicates her desire to move towards a higher level of understanding through experience. In closing, she reads a poem from the Persian Sa’ib-I-Tabrizi, who had an “encounter with the beautiful and strange” while passing through the city of Kabul (30).

By the second scene, the family is told abruptly that Mrs. Ceiling, the Homebody, has been beaten “repeatedly with stakes and rusted iron rebar rods . . . From the surmisable positions of the assailants” by “ten persons implicit” by Dr. Qari Shah (32). In this way she becomes a liminal figure within the play, her words and things lingering over the action as they take on double meanings. The Homebody herself is forever just out of reach, as when Priscilla tells her father, “Everything feels close here, the air, the mountains, not crowding in but there’s . . . well, proximity. Intimacy. Perfume. Like stepping into her clothes closet” (65-6). The Homebody’s confounding silence, whether by death or a radical conversion to Islam, as Priscilla is later told, stands in sharp contrast to her surfeit of words at the play’s opening. According to M. Scott Phillips, “To embrace the Other as the homebody does is a radically creative act, but it is an act of

self-abnegation, an attempt at rapprochement that ends in personal destruction” (16). The work of interpretation is thus left to Priscilla, at first an improbable fit for the task. While the Homebody’s husband, Milton, anaesthetizes his confusion and grief with a heroin-addled aid worker, Priscilla endures the weight of her mother’s decision, which is suggested by the burqa she initially refuses and finally accepts.

The play’s displacements are therefore part of its political project: “Kushner’s translation strategy is extremely risky insofar as he resists any appearance of an adequate, much less a fluent, cultural translation for his audience. The Afghan characters remain surprising and unknowable” (Spencer 403). As the absence of surtitles for the French, Pashtu, Dari and even Esperanto spoken in performance implies, the play is as much an experiment *with* alterity as it is *about* alterity.¹³ In his own words Kushner describes the difficulty of immersion into foreignness:

You have to approach it with an acceptance, at least at the beginning. That understanding is the most difficult thing in the world, and yet it’s the task. ... You won’t get it, but you have to keep trying to get it, and you have to understand that part of trying to get it is an understanding of the immense difficulties of getting it: surrendering intellectual arrogance, surrendering assumption, surrendering the notion that the world has to fit into some ideological model that you’ve cooked up to make the world simple and explicable to yourself. (Taft-Kaufman 47)

Kushner’s repetition of the word “surrender” is particularly germane to the type of narcissistic politics I have been exploring throughout this chapter. Accustomed to the certainties of ideology,

¹³ For a deeper discussion of Kushner’s translation strategy in *Homebody/Kabul*, see Spencer.

characters and audience members lose many vital orientations: the body as evidence of death, land as the embodiment of home, and most importantly, the idea that language is a stable organization of reality. For Kushner, learning how to cope with such loss is essential for individuals discarding their ideological self-defenses.

Kabul, too, provides fertile ground as a site of suffering and repentance. The characters Priscilla encounters lead her to new ways of understanding the suffering her mother fantasized absolving. The socialist poet Khawaja resists taking Priscilla to Cheshme Khedre, the putative gravesite of Biblical Cain, maintaining that the place is nothing more than a landmine. He shows her the question mark on her mother's map, which suggests it is unofficial:

This would be an entirely novel approach to cartography. The implications are profound. To read on a map, instead of "Afghanistan," "Afghanistan?" It would be more accurate, but such an accuracy as might discombobulate more than mere geography and make the hierophants of all fixed order dash madly for cover. (68)

In this cunning observation Khwaja directs us to the cause of so much bloodshed and suffering, the confounding disparity between political idealism, in the form of the nation-state, and lived experience, the contest of coercion implied by that question mark. Later, when they eventually go to Cheshme Kedre, Khwaja tells Priscilla, "A legend holds that [Cain] founded the city. . . . His heart was worn out with regretting, after so many centuries of remorse, it must have been. And Kabul has always been welcoming of strangers, weary travelers" (114). Modifying the fantastic version we were given by the Homebody—"Murder's Grave. Would you eat a potato plucked from *that* soil?" (22)—Khwaja alters Cain's significance by changing his defining action from murder to wandering with remorse. At the same time, he shifts the emphasis on Kabul from the site of Cain's grave to a city welcoming of weary travelers. Like the language of Esperanto,

he celebrates this quality of being “not universally at home, rather homeless, stateless, a global refugee patois” (58). When Priscilla apologizes for bringing her family’s difficulty to the city, Khwaja responds: “What have you ever brought us besides misery? Gharbi? Ferengi? The West? And many among us would like to give your misery back to you. You have to take home with you nothing but the spectacle of our suffering” (115).

At turns charming, manipulative, and seething with justified rage, Khwaja remains at a distance from Priscilla and the play’s Western audience. This resistance therefore makes Khwaja’s more poetic iterations difficult to interpret, because they are complicated by motivations to which we have limited access. To our aggravation, we never learn whether or not his Esperanto poetry is code for the Northern Alliance. The line, “I am a poet. It is not possible that I would lie” (116), invites our critical reservations, but it also makes us aware of the binary on which we depend to evaluate reality. In these terms, we can reflect, what is true is much more elusive:

Priscilla: I didn’t ask. What did [the poem] mean?

Khwaja: It is very simple. It is about someone waiting in a garden, in the snow.

Deep within, someone waits for us in the garden. She is an angel, perhaps she is Allah. She is our soul. Or she is our death. Her voice is ravishing; and it is fatal to us. We may seek her, or spend our lives in flight from her. But always she is waiting in the garden, speaking in a tongue which we were born speaking. And then forget. (118)

On one level, Khwaja’s words appear to be a slight manipulation of Priscilla’s gullibility, severely undercutting the Homebody’s exotic description of the hats she buys in London. But on another level, Khwaja’s reflexive humor—prefacing a difficult meditation with the words, “It is

very simple”—deepens the sad irony of his tragedy as it gets refracted in Priscilla’s own grief, in many ways a travesty of the “30,000 widows ... with 300,000 children to feed,” as Mahala, the woman Khwaja is helping to leave, puts it (90). Perhaps not immediately, Khwaja draws our attention to a particularly potent image of a garden covered in snow that will resonate at the play’s end, after we learn that Khwaja has been killed for treason against the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. The tongue which we are born speaking and then forget, of course, is love. Khwaja explains, “We spend of what we love. Through *zakat*. We give to one who has not” (118).

Priscilla recovers the language of love when she agrees to alleviate Mahala’s suffering and fulfill her mother’s last wish. Priscilla brings the woman back to London in her mother’s place, where she will again have access to libraries and live freely as she did before the occupation. Mahala leads Priscilla by example as a woman who possesses the understanding the Homebody lacked: “Your mother is a strange lady, to neglect a garden. A garden shows us what may await us in Paradise” (140). The image of a neglected garden contrasts with Khwaja’s earlier image of a dormant garden awaiting the harvest. Having literally replaced the Homebody in her kitchen with ample books at her disposal, “such strange books,” Mahala is rereading the Quran: “For all those terrible years, I was too angry. I am myself becoming Muslim again. The Book is so beautiful, even in English” (140, 137). Though she supports the Northern Alliance—“In Afghanistan, Priscilla, the choices are frequently narrow”—the garden imagery does less to suggest political regeneration in Afghanistan or “hymns of peace in dream language of universal brotherhood” than it suggests for the individuals involved in the play (138). If we disregard Priscilla’s initial conceptual lens and resist seeing Khwaja as either a utopian poet or an Afghani swindler, the intimation of a “tongue which we were born speaking” takes on greater significance.

To be sure, Khwaja and Mahala's multilingual eloquence stands out brilliantly against the gawky, single register in which Priscilla is able to speak. "Your newfound reticence becomes you," Mahala tells her in the periplum (137). Priscilla's lack of fluency is in many ways the product of her mother's vocal excess and self-absorption. By contrast, Mahala's fluency suggests a much needed appreciation of difference, including her own. Through encounters with others, the individual is able to recognize the parts of itself that seem foreign and undesirable: "An encounter with something that has previously been unconscious is very like coming up against something outside of oneself, even though it is something that happens inside one's own mind, because this thing or aspect of experience has not been a part of the self before" (Kurtz and Coetzee 82-83). The promise of a relationship between Priscilla and Mahala echoes the vision presented in the Homebody's words: "It is not enough to try to help one another; one must exchange places; one must be touched" (Colleran 213). For in the words of the Homebody, "How could any mother not love the world? What else is love but recognition?" (28). In this way, love is seen as the act of recognizing ideology as a structure of containment.

CONCLUSION: THE RECOGNITION OF INTERDEPENDENCE

During a brief scene at the millinery in Churchill's *Far Away*, Todd tells Joan, "One thing if I lost my job. ... I'd miss you" (149). While Elin Diamond cautions us against reading too far into Todd and Joan's union, suggesting that such romance "is deformed through the economy of capitalist relations to which it is tied" (161), Joan later affirms his love without conditions: "If you lose your job I'll resign" (151). Dymkowski observes that the staging of the

final moments of the second act in the production she saw, in which the two gift each other beads, “emphasized the text’s celebration of Joan and Todd’s generosity to each other” (61). Such generosity, she contends, “points to a positive potential in human nature, however much its basis in personal love suggests its limitations” (61). Indeed, Joan’s initial scepticism about her uncle’s activities in the first act carries through the entire play, in spite of her ideological conditioning. Joan’s decision to risk death in order to see Todd in the final act begs the question of ideology’s power. “I don’t see why I can’t have one day and then go back, I’ll go on to the end after this,” she promises her aunt (158).

But the play ends the night of Joan’s arrival, during which she expresses her profound confusion, a welcome moment in a play full of terrible certainties. For this reason, Joan’s final speech, during which she recounts her journey, is exceptional and beautiful:

Who’s going to mobilize darkness and silence? that’s what I wondered in the night. By the third day I could hardly walk but I got down to the river. There was a camp of Chilean soldiers upstream but they hadn’t seen me and fourteen black and white cows downstream having a drink so I knew I’d have to go straight across. But I didn’t know whose side the river was on, it might help me swim or it might drown me. [...] I stood on the bank a long time. But I knew it was my only way of getting here so at last I put one foot in the river. It was very cold but so far that was all. When you’ve just stepped in you can’t tell what’s going to happen. The water laps round your ankles in any case. (159)

In this bleakness, in which even darkness and silence will soon be claimed, Joan risks the river’s uncertainty and the touch of death around her ankles. Her modesty in the face of the river stands out sharply against the arrogance she encounters everywhere. This ability to imagine one’s own

weakness, as Churchill surely wants us to recognize, is the starting place of empathy and a different sort of politics.

For reasons that are probably clear, Churchill leaves this moment unfulfilled. *Far Away* impels recognition through its embodied performance in order to awaken and disturb the ideological shelter of its audiences. It is wary of offering more than Joan's dim flicker of hope because, as I discussed earlier, the time in which it was composed was overflowing with false hopes about the promise of capitalism. Unlike the other two texts under discussion, *Far Away* maintains an angry political tone and in this sense aligns itself with the louder works of the in-your-face theatre movement of the 1990s.¹⁴ In fact, because of plays such as *Far Away* and *Drunk Enough to Say I Love You?* Churchill is thought to have lost her convictions in the power of didactic political theatre.¹⁵ I offer that her strategy has merely changed to focus on a critical literary politics. *Far Away* outlines theoretically the problem of neoliberal ideology as a politics of narcissism. McEwan and Kushner, employing strategies of defamiliarization, focus this problem on individuals by showing how transformative encounters with others undermine this ideology and the myth of self-perfection.

All three texts in this discussion have been urgently in search of a social realm connected by a form of humanism adequate to the twenty-first century. Such a politics, they argue, requires

¹⁴ I am thinking in particular of Sarah Kane's *Blasted* and Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking*. For an interesting discussion of Churchill's conceptual shift in the late 1990s and her changing influences, see Elaine Aston, "But Not That: Caryl Churchill's Political Shape Shifting at the Turn of the Millennium." *Modern Drama* 56.2 (2013): 145-164.

¹⁵ "The breakdown of the left in post-Thatcher Britain has deprived those who seek change of an identifiable and coherent position to serve as a starting point for collective voice or action. The recent works *Blue Heart*, *This is a Chair*, and *Far Away* indicate this change, as they resonate with a strong sense of loss and emptiness. They present characters and situations with tragic potential, but this is subject-less tragedy, in which individuals are never fully revealed or defined" (Kritzer 58).

the replacement of narcissistic forms of social engagement with a more imaginative, abstract appreciation of the human that refuses the myth of the autonomous individual. In this case, Martha Nussbaum's philosophical work on the relationship between emotions and social organization provides useful political direction: "Mature interdependence requires acknowledging the imperfection of the human body, and its needs for material goods; it also involves renouncing the wish of envy to monopolize the sources of good" (227). Renouncing the wish of envy and by implication, overcoming the age-old problem of greed, may be a huge caveat since it means overcoming the seemingly bottomless source of aggression Freud describes in *Civilization and its Discontents*. But it is a transformation Nussbaum insists is possible with the right psychological armature. For Nussbaum, this means to hold "the child in her imperfection, telling her that the world contains possibilities of forgiveness and mercy, and that she is loved as a person of interest and worth in her own right" (217). Neoliberal ideology, by contrast, assumes that those in need of help are contemptible because they fail as self-sufficient individuals. In place of a neoliberal model of democracy, Nussbaum advocates one that acknowledges "that all have rights not only to liberty but also to basic welfare" and in which "all are allowed to be [...] imperfect and needy" (227). Through their critique of cruelty, the texts in this chapter point towards a re-evaluation of social relations that accepts that all have rights to basic welfare and wellbeing; more than this, those who flourish in a society in which these rights are not guaranteed are especially culpable.

Homebody/Kabul offers a mother's point-of-view in true conflict with itself in order to undermine the sense of omnipotence that ideology provides. The Homebody's literal dismemberment in a crucial way symbolizes the destruction that is implied by her recognition of her culpability, what she says is her inability to remain dry. Philips complains that, "far from

being a testament to the power of the weak messiah, [*Homebody/Kabul*] is rather an expression of profound humility in the face of history's disconfirmation of our overly optimistic projections and hubristic claims" (8). But given the historical context of the period, Kushner's scepticism seems more than justified. On the other hand, as a politically committed, socialist playwright, he would certainly not advocate political inaction. In proposing a way through the dynamic of capitalism, which "ceaselessly generates what is 'new,' while regenerating what is the 'same'" (104), Postone argues for a historical approach that would discover "the possibility of a new form of universality that can encompass difference and of a new future-directedness that can appropriate the past" ("The Holocaust" 102). Thus, Philips' characterization overlooks the play's true sense of hope initiated by Priscilla's search for her mother's body, which Kushner stresses is neither linear nor messianic. Rather, it involves the kind of understanding that comes with loss, recognizing one's vulnerability and at the same time appropriating one's past.

In a similar way, *Saturday* emphasizes the need for a renewed sense of political humility. It impels us to share Perowne's ambivalence about the impending invasion of Iraq, an ambivalence that seems peculiarly absent in the anti-war movement and its proponents, including his own daughter. But Perowne's personal mistakes over the course of the day, which mimic the West's diplomatic relations with Saddam Hussein, suggest that any claims to humanitarian concerns to support the invasion of Iraq have been profoundly compromised. Without a proper recognition of the original error, Perowne's mistake, as well as the West's, remains one of arrogance and self-importance. As his foil, Baxter provides a spur to Henry's recognition and self-knowledge. With his inclusion of the entire text of Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach," McEwan intimates that the triumph of ideology leaves behind a world that "Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light, / Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain" (33-34). A more

imaginative appreciation of human dignity, surely, entails the surrendering of neoliberal ways of thinking and being that would open the possibility for interdependence to be recognized and valued. For all its topicality, then, *Saturday* offers a much longer view of history and of social relations. Whatever problematic associations it stirs in calling up the legacy of Matthew Arnold, it seeks to historicize what appears to readers as an unprecedented moment in modern history. In fact, the boldness of McEwan's text is the subtle suggestion that terrorism and the subsequent war against terror are consistent with the banal acts of violence found in modern life; such violence is merely the negative expression of Western capitalist ideology, not, emphatically, its refusal. In the next chapter, I will explore why resistance efforts against this ideology have failed and why a reappraisal of aesthetic activity and engagement is essential to a political movement committed to its overcoming.

CHAPTER TWO: REIFIED RESPONSES TO CRUELTY

“Even the traditional idea of the contemplation of a work of art, criticized today as paralyzing and bourgeois, is not only not inimical to action but is for many the highest form of activity.”

Antoni Tàpies, “Theories, Politics, and the Death of Art”

In the previous chapter, I attempted to show that neoliberal ideology, which began in the U.S. and has spread outwards as a model of democracy, upholds individualism to the point of denying interdependent social relations. This denial, as shown in Caryl Churchill’s *Far Away* and Ian McEwan’s *Saturday*, leads to acts of barbarism and cruelty, such as the state and individual terrorism hinted at in both works. It is only when we cast off this denial, as Tony Kushner’s *Homebody/Kabul* insists, that we can begin to comprehend the violence of our modern history. *Homebody/Kabul* nicely introduces the connection between colonialism and neoliberalism and the argument put forward in the following chapter: that neoliberalism is largely responsible for the contemporary problem of terrorism.

The recent work of Kenan Malik supports this claim, albeit in slightly different terms. In *From Fatwa to Jihad*, he discusses the legacy of Western intervention from “Winston Churchill ordering the use of mustard gas against Iraqi rebels in the 1920s” to “America’s continuing economic and military support for Israel.” He continues, “There has always been resistance to such intervention, and often violent resistance, but Islamic opposition is relatively new, and nihilistic terrorism newer still” (85). In other words, Malik does not interpret contemporary terrorism as a coherent international political movement against Western imperialism, nor does he see it as a religious movement. Instead, his thesis is that the development of nihilistic

terrorism is a result of domestic policies in Britain of cultural segregation and exclusion. He adds, “At the heart of the work of both [Olivier] Roy and [Gilles] Kepel is an insistence that radical Islam is a modern philosophy, not a throwback to an ancient past, and one whose very attempt to cleanse itself of corrupting Western ideas and attitudes is given shape by those same ideas and attitudes” (87). In the previous chapter, I introduced this argument in my discussion of *Saturday*'s Baxter, who fits both the classification as social outsider and enraged provoker, while avoiding the obvious stereotype that he must cite Allah and the virgins in paradise to assume this role. If one supports Malik's thesis wholeheartedly, McEwan was right to choose an English citizen to play this particular part.

Now I would like to explore this argument in further depth. My contention in the ensuing discussion is that the outburst of terrorism at the beginning of the twenty-first century is indeed one nihilistic response to neoliberalism. In what follows, I will explore the reasons for this nihilism. The hypothesis I put forward is that neoliberalism's contempt for the inherent interdependence of social organization has led to collective resistance efforts largely based on identity and which provide to their members no clear objective save annihilation. Such efforts have no objective because the abstract nature of capitalism in the twenty-first century has obfuscated the sources of political power far beyond reach, even beyond national borders. The unwieldy roaming of finance, as discussed previously with the help of Appadurai, has made resistance efforts against it fairly ineffectual. Furthermore, the market has also penetrated the realm of imaginative refuge that might allow for collective regeneration. To better understand the role of the market in this disintegration of alternative possibilities, I will turn to cultural critics, such as Northrop Frye, who discuss how advanced capitalist societies stunt the development of individuals and thereby prevent the formation of a true collective in favour of a mass society. In

this way, I will suggest that the absence of an imaginative refuge, a place for the individual to recover him or herself that is not characterized by social exploitation, contributes to a generalized sphere of political nihilism and helps produce the cycles of violence we have been confronting for some time.

Much literary investigation into the nature of violence looks, microscopically, at the physical experience of violence and the difficulty of narrative to adequately grasp this experience. Research in this vein has contributed, among other notable things, to an expanding field known as trauma studies.¹⁶ Other sociology-oriented research into the subject of violence looks macroscopically into its systemic roots, often focusing on the rapid development of post-industrial technology during the last thirty years, important work that I do not wish to repeat here.¹⁷ Rather, my interest in the nature of violence comes by way of literary representations that are attempting to defend themselves against a more abstract form of violence, which they see as intricately connected to visible, physical violence. In this sense, such violence is not directly evident but is nonetheless present and palpable. It might be summarized as the expansion of social domination into everyday experience and the space that may be called aesthetic contemplation or activity. In Slavoj Žižek's words, "It is the self-propelling metaphysical dance of capital that runs the show, that provides the key to real-life developments and catastrophes.

¹⁶ See, for instance, Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996; Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001; Dori Laub and Daniel Podell, "Art and Trauma" *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 76.5 (1995): 991-1005.

¹⁷ I am thinking, in particular, of the example of Jean Baudrillard's pronouncements in *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*. What some identify as extreme polemic in Baudrillard appears to be consistent with the fundamental premise of more common arguments against post-industrial technological transformations, from declining rates in conversational capabilities in youth to drone warfare. These important arguments share an anxiety about the number of levels of representation of "reality."

Therein resides the fundamental systemic violence of capitalism, much more uncanny than any direct pre-capitalist socio-ideological violence” (12-13). This he terms “objective violence” in contradistinction to “subjective” or physical violence, which he sees as a mere manifestation of the former. I have chosen to discuss Richard Flanagan's *The Unknown Terrorist* precisely because it reveals this relationship through the seemingly invisible rhetoric of counterterrorism. Martin Crimp's *The City* points towards subjective and objective violence through the legacy of torture, while Pat Barker's *Double Vision* underscores the relationship more concretely through the lens of two recent, though distant, wars: the NATO intervention in Bosnia and the U.S.- Britain intervention in Afghanistan.

Because the works selected for this chapter are set against the backdrop of various wars, my discussion of violence needs to be situated historically within the context of its contemporary nature. This context has been shaped drastically by the experience of the Vietnam War, which marked the status of the United States as an imperial and belligerent power within the so-called cultural or collective imagination.¹⁸ The documented horror of the Vietnam War had more than a lasting impact on efforts to end such wars and its imperialist interests, with desperate calls to arms rippling throughout the world: “The formulation of adequate responses to such provocative revolutionary theorists as Mao, Che Guevara, Frantz Fanon, and Régis Debray preoccupied much of the New Left” (Redding 161). The relative success of the anti-war movement—the fact that the war ended, eventually—emphasized the U.S. government's betrayal of its people and the

¹⁸ While the Vietnam War was by no means the first intervention by the United States motivated by imperialist interests, it prompted the largest protest movement against it in the nation's history. It became widely unpopular due to its purely ideological purpose of defeating communism in Asia, which had been a policy throughout the 1950s and 1960s known colloquially as the Domino Theory or Domino Effect.

unjust sacrifice of its (primarily poor) youth: “The Vietnam War demoralized and divided the nation, amid televised scenes of riots and anti-war demonstrations; destroyed an American president; led to a universally predicted defeat and retreat after ten years (1965-75); and, what was even more to the point, demonstrated the isolation of the U.S.A.” (Hobsbawm 244). It epitomized, for many, the imperialist rivalries and extreme paranoia that had characterized U.S. behaviour during the long Cold War. It also engendered an entire generation of men who felt they had failed. Bell hooks writes:

Prior to the war, a hopeful vision of justice and love had been evoked by the civil rights struggle, the feminist movement, and sexual liberation. However, by the late seventies, after the failure of radical movements for social justice aimed at making the world a democratic, peaceful place where resources could be shared and a meaningful life could become a possibility for everyone, folks stopped talking about love. The loss of lives at home and abroad had created economic plenty while leaving in its wake devastation and loss. Americans were asked to sacrifice the vision of freedom, love, and justice and put in its place the worship of materialism and money. This vision of society upheld the need for imperialistic war and injustice. A great feeling of despair gripped our nation when the leaders who had led struggles for peace, justice, and love were assassinated. (107)

Moreover, the experience of Vietnam has haunted all subsequent U.S.-led engagements abroad, as George H. Bush demonstrated when he claimed that its legacy had finally been put to rest after the brief first Gulf War (Colleran 47).

Vietnam catalyzed an anti-war movement that contributed to the formation of the New Left and which had found a common enemy in the U.S. government, as Philip Roth’s *American*

Pastoral deftly conveys. During the 1960s, Hannah Arendt observed the rise of physical violence within the Left, diagnosing this phenomenon as a form of political despair. In her extended essay she views such groups' recourse to violent tactics a result of the bureaucratization of democracies and the dislocation of state power. She observes, "Bureaucracy is the form of government in which everybody is deprived of political freedom, of the power to act; for the rule by Nobody is not no-rule, and where all are equally powerless we have tyranny without a tyrant" (81). Such a dislocation, she contends, meant the disappearance of concrete aims of political struggle, resulting in profound frustration and thus, randomized violence: "Every decrease in power is an open invitation to violence—if only because those who hold power and feel it slipping from their hands, be they the government or be they the governed, have always found it difficult to resist the temptation to substitute violence for it" (87).

Much later, Moishe Postone developed upon these insights in the wake of twenty-first century terrorism, seeing radical Islam as an extension of radical politics. While Kenan Malik insists that terrorism is not a political movement, Postone shows how the legacy of anti-Semitic resistance efforts against capitalism helped shape militant groups as apparently apolitical as Al Qaeda. He observes:

The spread of anti-Semitism and, relatedly, anti-Semitic forms of Islamicism (such as the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and its Palestinian offshoot Hamas) should be understood as the spread of a fetishized anticapitalist ideology which claims to make sense of a world perceived as threatening. This ideology may be sparked and exacerbated by Israel and Israeli policies, but its resonance is rooted in the relative decline of the Arab world against the background of the massive

structural transformations associated with the transition from Fordism to neoliberal global capitalism. (“History” 101-2)

Looking historically at the consequences of the Cold War and *realpolitik*, Postone defines the limits of historical insight by the abstract structure of capitalism as “the tendency to grasp the abstract (the domination of capital) as concrete (American hegemony). This tendency, I would argue, is an expression of a deep and fundamental helplessness, conceptually as well as politically” (102). Helplessness, for Postone, is the absence of genuine agency within a citizenry and the ineffectuality of political mobilization against abstract power. The condition of helplessness might be imagined in Žižek’s terms as the cruelty of objective violence. Terrorism, or ideological violence, can then be understood in the context of objective, invisible forces. In Postone’s characterization, acts of violence offer relief from the profound frustration of helplessness; they also allow one to concretize creative energy against the intangibility of social domination: “In the face of alienation and bureaucratic stasis, violence was deemed creative, and violent action per se became viewed as revolutionary” (Postone, “History” 108).

Objective violence is a form of social domination that restricts individuals’ development and expression. We can understand the dynamic between objective and subjective violence better by reflecting on the concept of helplessness that has been historically determined by capitalism. In *The Double Vision* Northrop Frye characterizes this problem as a society's neglect of individuals, which he links tenuously with capitalist overproduction. He observes: “Primary concerns, for conscious human beings, must have a spiritual as well as a physical dimension”; otherwise they devolve into a “general collapse of moral standards that accompany overemphasis on the satisfying of physical wants” (7-8). Thus, Frye distinguishes between two types of societies:

A primitive or embryonic society is one in which the individual is thought of as primarily a function of the social group. In all such societies a hierarchical structure of authority has to be set up to ensure that the individual does not get too far out of line. A mature society, in contrast, understands that its primary aim is to develop a genuine individuality in its members. In a fully mature society the structure of authority becomes a function of the individuals within it. (8)

The implication of Frye's contention, and the argument put forward in this chapter, is that the cultivation of imaginative individuals through aesthetic activity will at the very least mitigate the frustrations felt by abstract social domination and at the very best provide the foundations for developing a mature society. Using aesthetic contemplation as the basis of individual development, the writers selected for this chapter defend literature as a highly active place of self-expression against the threat of objective violence and the direct reality of physical violence.

In what follows, I consider violence, or more properly the absence of spiritual vision, in three textual examples, which in different ways perform the inadequacy of self-expression in contemporary societies. I will argue that to individuals without a genuine sense of agency, violence, more often than not, appears as the most expedient vehicle of self-expression. In Martin Crimp's 2008 play, *The City*, expression fails characters as the imperfect imitations of whatever they witness. That is, the generalized experience of objective violence has stunted the characters' ability to create. In Richard Flanagan's *The Unknown Terrorist*, the individual is lamented for becoming a product of vicious external conditioning, which can only find relief in death. Thus the novel demonstrates the direct link between objective and subjective violence in an affective way that captures Žižek's problematic quite well. In Pat Barker's *Double Vision*, the individual attempts to recover itself in artistic creation against the threat of hollowness that

accompanies the experience of violence. While all three texts underscore the devastating experience of helplessness, only Barker's daring work points towards the possibility of overcoming this political condition.

Before moving into the larger argument of violence as a creative outlet, I will first lay out the existing impossibility of creative agency. I will discuss these conditions mostly through Martin Crimp's *The City* as an investigation of art as a commodity form. Then, having established the diminished role of human creativity in contemporary life, I will use Richard Flanagan's *The Unknown Terrorist* as an example of the extreme consequences of these conditions with the theoretical framework of Hannah Arendt and Moishe Postone. This framework develops upon the ideas already sketched out regarding violence as a response to a political condition of helplessness. Then, I will offer a reading of Pat Barker's *Double Vision* to show how the text refuses violence as a creative instrument by using sculpture as a vehicle for imaginative contemplation. Finally, I will conclude with some thoughts on the romantic mode and political imagination as articulated by Fredric Jameson and Northrop Frye.

THE GHOSTS OF ART: *THE CITY*

Martin Crimp's *The City* (2008) is a thematic sequel to his earlier play, *The Country* (2000), which upends idyllic myths about individuals escaping the traps of urban industrialization. *The City* has a similar purpose in critiquing idealizations of metropolitan life, insisting, as Michael Billington observes, "that modern urban existence is defined by despair,

and that there is a grisly continuum of collective unhappiness” (Billington). The play centers around a domestic collapse: Chris has lost his job and Clair has lost all respect for him. Meanwhile, their neighbour Jenny complains that she cannot sleep because she is disturbed by the sound of their children playing. But the play moves from these fairly banal concerns to a much deeper investigation into the unreliability of narratives, pointing to a serious difficulty in creative and self-expression.

The City begins with an epigraph from Fernando Pessoa’s *The Book of Disquiet*: “Everything we do, in art or in life, is the imperfect copy of what we intended.” The quotation immediately alerts us to the porous relationship between these two categories, implying that the actions of art and life are interconnected by a primary creative intention. Such a notion is not new but fundamentally Aristotelian. In the *Poetics* Aristotle writes, “Imitation is natural to man from childhood; he differs from the other animals in that he is the most imitative: the first things he learns come to him from imitation” (7). In his earlier play *Fewer Emergencies*, Crimp shows how characters struggle to create meaning with one another through failed imitations, finishing each others’ sentences and imagining a narrative world together that, in Aleks Sierz’s words, “collapses in the process of its own telling” (380). The foregrounding of narrative instability thereby dramatizes for Sierz “a crisis of representation” that has drastic political costs (381). In a similar way, *The City* suggests that individuals have become so alienated by the process of commodification that their actions have become meaningless and empty of intentions. By showing how characters struggle to comprehend this sense of alienation in their lives, *The City* departs from traditionally elitist critiques of the commodification of art. Such criticisms elegeize the loss of autonomous aesthetics and the developments of the high modernists. Crimp, by

contrast, focuses instead on the loss of individual human development, showing how the domination of market values and predetermined desires shrinks imaginative freedom.

Unlike *Fewer Emergencies* and other of Crimp's works that have replaced the dramatis personae with numerical values, *The City* includes character names and appears to have characters that are true to life. Crimp's apparent return to naturalism is deceptive, however, as we learn near the end of the play that the representation being dramatized has been authored by one of its characters, who happens to be a professional translator. It opens with a dialogue between Clair and Chris, which involves a summary of their days to one another, a common but sacred ritual among couples. Clair recalls a strange event in which a man approaches her looking for his lost daughter. But in the telling of the story, Clair begins to edit the details of her recollection, an immediate signal to readers of Crimp that the stable reality of naturalism being presented will soon unravel. She tells Chris that she saw the girl being "dragged off" by her aunt, but when Chris presses her about this choice of words, she revises: "No—but they were moving quite fast" (8). The odd fragility of Clair and Chris's dialogue recalls the games in *Fewer Emergencies*, in which characters help one another invent stories. Consider, for instance, the opening in the first act of *Fewer Emergencies* entitled *Whole Blue Sky*:

2: She gets married very young, doesn't she.

3: Does what?

2: Gets married very young, and immediately realizes—

3: Oh? That's it's a mistake?

2: Immediately realizes—yes—that it's a mistake. (7)

The manner of the dialogue resembles the exercises of improvisational comedy, albeit in a dramatically darker, less comforting tone. But a slightly different game is being played in *The City*.

Similar to the contained representation that is performed in Jean Genet's *The Balcony* through the conceit of a brothel, *The City* points toward and beyond its contained reality, though it holds the conceit, "the key," from us until nearly the end. In "clarifying" the details of her day, Clair explains that the man she met had been in the process of giving custody of his daughter to his sister-in-law and when he went to buy her a diary the aunt took his daughter away before he could say goodbye. Clair agrees to have coffee with him, realizing that he is a writer of recent (and probably short-lived) fame, and he gives the diary to her instead. This gift, as we will discover later, is key to understanding the conceit of the play: it provides Clair the opportunity she has been longing for to write her life story, that is, to write herself into creation. In the meantime, Chris attempts to tell Clair that he will soon lose his job because he has failed to "print" himself onto the minds of others, as a certain Jeanette has done (12). Crimp's use of the word print confirms the textual quality of human existence and the direct relation insisted early on between art and life. For in the logic of *The City*, lives do not exist without creators.

However, the reality and the script do not cohere. The characters' dialogue about their performed actions is often incongruent with the reality the audience sees on stage. While characters appear to be living fairly normal lives, a closer look reveals that they are in fact only skilled imitators, absent of wills. In scene two, for instance, when the neighbour Jenny comes over to talk with Clair about the noise her children make, she refers to being "right inside [her] garden" even though there is no indication in the stage directions that they have moved into the garden (19). There are other clues that the reality is more than skewed: Jenny wears the same

nurse's uniform and coat that Clair had described of the aunt of the little girl in the first scene. The metaphor of performance suggested by Jenny's piano playing confirms that she herself is not alive. She tells Chris and Clair that, "although I can get all the notes and understand just how intensely the composer must've imagined it, there's no life to my playing" (21). Her playing, she confides, is "emotionally dead": "If you stopped and began to listen—began to really listen—then the expression on your face would turn—oh yes—believe me—to dread" (21). Jenny's lifelessness resonates with the play's two layers of representation, much like the abrupt entrance of John Fowles' authorial "I" in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. In that novel, John Fowles appears as a frustrated author who cannot direct his characters' lives. By casting aspersions on Jenny's life within Clair's fiction, Crimp meta-theatrically reflects on his own characters, who are incapable of being—they cannot even make a garden.

Later on in the scene, Clair appears to be struck by a fit of nervous laughing when Chris talks about her desire not to be kissed. When he attempts to "impose [his] will" as she had instructed, he asks her why she is crying, to which she replies, "BECAUSE I AM ANGRY" (39). At this moment, Schubert's "Moments Musicaux," No. 3 in F minor begins to play in the distance from Jenny's apartment. In this way we come to understand the profound dearth of agency that thwarts characters' actions, making them lifeless marionette dolls instead of human beings. This absence of agency, it seems, is related to what Chris describes as "that look" that he receives from a random woman who may as well be his wife. It is a look of despair: "The way she looks at men in business class when they order champagne—touch her arm and order champagne for the girls they've left their wives for—silver-haired men watching the river turn to threads—cities to maps—whole oceans to a field of sparks" (35). In other words, despair has the ability to turn the complexity of reality into pure abstractions.

Crimp's choice of Schubert as a musical intertext recalls Ariel Dorfman's well-known play about torture during the Chilean dictatorship *Death and the Maiden*. In this play, Schubert's music comes to represent art that is no longer accessible after the horrors of torture. When the main character hears Schubert's String Quartet No. 14, "Death and the Maiden," being played, all that she can recall is the suffering she underwent during her repeated rape and torture by her captors. Jenny's lifeless playing thus comes to be associated with a widespread culpability for involvement in torture, much like the fictional doctor who played "Death and the Maiden." In another way, Jenny's unexplainable fear of Chris's voice suggests a level of trauma also associated with the performing, witnessing, or receiving of violence. Mireia Aragay et al. observes of the premiere production in Barcelona that "the set powerfully contributed to creating a feeling of disquiet" and that "there were no actual doors, which, together with the off-stage darkness, acted as a reminder of the perils lurking beyond the apparently safe confines of the middle-class nuclear household" (387-88).

In fact, Jenny confides, life is being stamped out by a "secret war" against another city that comes to signify creation. She knows this information because Jenny's husband is taking part as a doctor: "What they're doing now, in the secret war, is they're attacking a city—pulverising it, in fact—yes—turning this city—the squares, the shops, the parks, the leisure centres and the schools—turning the whole thing into a fine grey dust" (22). The experience of violence and the characters' complicity in this unnamed war completely transform the experience of aesthetic expression. Evidence of this perversion comes from the famous tortured writer, who confesses to Clair that, after finding out that his daughter died in a car accident, he "experienced ... a secret exaltation" because it "could only enhance [his] work ... making the fire burn ...

more brightly” (52). In a world that is so saturated with killing, creativity is impossible. What remains in artistic endeavour is merely the weak appearance of life.

The absence of life in art is further enforced at the end of the play when audience members first discover that all of the characters on stage are in fact inventions of Clair’s poor attempt at writing. “I was convinced that in order to be a writer I’d simply have to travel to this city—the one inside of me—and write down what I discovered there,” she confesses in the diary the writer gave her (61). Having searched for this city and found only “dust,” she tried inventing a city from nothing. She makes Chris read the diary aloud:

I invented characters and I put them in my city. The one I call Mohamed. The one I called the nurse—Jenny—she was funny. I invented a child, too, I was quite pleased with the child. But it was a struggle. They wouldn’t come alive. They lived a little—but only the way a sick bird tortured by a cat lives in a shoebox. It was hard to make them speak normally—and their stories fell apart even as I was telling them. (62)

Crimp’s meta-theatrical commentary cannot be overlooked: it is as though he is mimicking Aleks Sierz’s reading of his previous work, particularly *Fewer Emergencies*. Perhaps Clair is an occasion for meta-theatrical apology on behalf of Crimp the writer. Her first attempt to create a story from the events of her day is evocative of her last observation, and is a reoccurring theme throughout *The City* and Crimp’s work at large. If it is the case, *The City* might then be considered an artist’s apology for the difficulty of his life’s work. After he finishes reading her diary, Chris asks, “What about me? ... Am I invented too?” (63). Clair responds, “No more than I am, surely” (63). This revelation helps give meaning to the strange interchanges and encounters that characterize the entire play, including Chris’ speech, which transforms from dramatic

monologues about how he will not resort to suicide because he is unemployed into an imitation of the other butchers at his new job. As Clair insists, the characters are empty of life and appear more like dolls playing dress up—Jenny and the child take turns wearing the same coat—than individuals with unique wills. In this way, the play suggests that the basis of subjectivity for these individuals is a poor combination of imitation and weak invention from a struggling creator who is “no writer” after all: “I’d like to say how sad the discovery of my own emptiness made me, but the truth is I feel as I write this down nothing but relief” (63).

In *The Secular Scripture* Northrop Frye claims that even fabulous writers never invent from purely original material:

The transmission of tradition is explicit and conscious for the mythical writer and his audience: the fabulous writer may seem to be making up his stories out of his own head, but this never happens in literature, even if the illusion of its happening is a necessary illusion for some writers. His material comes from traditions behind him which may have no recognized or understood social status, and may not be consciously known to the writer or to his public. (9-10)

For this reason, Clair’s dilemma is particularly disturbing. The implication, it seems, is that whether or not they exist, such social traditions are impossible for her to reach, even subconsciously. The play concludes with Clair’s daughter attempting to play the same Schubert piece that Jenny performed, unable to get beyond the fourth bar.

Without a doubt, Crimp’s play gestures towards the depreciation of aesthetic experience in contemporary times. But it is not a straightforward lament for a bygone high culture, as some

readers and critics might wish to read it.¹⁹ Beyond the absence of high art, it asks us to consider the concomitant absence of life without artistic creation, for “to express something is to conserve its virtue and take away its horror,” as Pessoa’s *The Book of Disquiet* instructs (53). The true stakes of creative weakening are to be found, then, in the denial of agency and the construction of a consumer class. To be sure, any discussion of art and the commodity form must acknowledge the pioneering work of the Frankfurt School, and in particular the watershed essay, “The Culture Industry,” in Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. There, Adorno and Horkheimer argued that the formerly liberating sphere of leisure has been transformed into an industry devoted to escape from the mechanized labour process, such that “the basis on which technology is gaining power over society is the power of those whose economic position is strongest” (95). The consequences, they argue, were already profound and include two important developments related to aesthetic production: the suppression of individual participation in favour of static consumption and the subsuming of an aesthetic object’s use value to pure exchange (or market) value. The twofold nature of this problem is hardly new to us: it produces at once the mere appearance of aesthetics, a kind of art without life, and passive consumers who have no creative role in its unfolding, a kind of life without art.

American journalist Dwight MacDonalD elaborates on these consequences in identifying the emergence of what he called “Masscult,” or a “parody of high culture.” He observes:

Masscult offers its customers neither an emotional catharsis nor an aesthetic experience, for these demand effort. The production line grinds out a uniform product whose humble aim is not even entertainment, for this too implies life and

¹⁹ That is, the play does not, I believe, lead us to an elitist trap; its concern, by contrast, is with its characters’ inability to access the music of Schubert.

hence effort, but merely distraction. It may be stimulating or narcotic, but it must be easy to assimilate. (5)

Of course, much has occurred since these insights were made, including the equally well-known school of cultural studies, which claimed that Adorno and Horkheimer were far too dismissive of popular culture. While I do not disagree with this claim, the fact remains that at a certain historical point in the development of capitalism, aesthetic production and reception had changed in a very significant way, leading Frederic Jameson to suspect that postmodern art is not “art in any older sense, but an interminable conjecture on how it could be possible in the first place” (*Postmodernism* 65).²⁰ Crimp draws our attention to this context in the form of his ruined city, in which those “clinging to life” are, in Jenny’s terms, “the most dangerous people of all” (23).

Not only does this landscape suggest that art has been left in ruins, but that life, too, has suffered. *The City*’s publication date of 2008 suggests that the violent images and the references to terrorism are not merely symbolic; they also hint towards the real torture being done in the name of the War on Terror. When Jenny describes the city in which the secret war is taking place, she tells Clair about one incident involving a “terrorist” woman breast-feeding: “A brick splits the soldier’s skull. And the last thing the baby sees as its mother uses her fingers to slip its mouth off her nipple is a serrated kitchen knife—and I have my husband’s word for this—a small kitchen knife with a stainless serrated blade being used to cut the soldier’s heart out” (24).

Jenny’s rhetoric is an obvious parody of Western characterizations of resistance to the

²⁰ Jameson’s theory of the postmodern holds that aesthetic production “has become integrated into commodity production generally: the frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods (from clothing to airplanes), at ever greater rates of turnover, now assigns an increasingly essential structural function and position to aesthetic innovation and experimentation” (*Postmodernism* 4-5).

occupation of Iraq, applying the catchall category of terrorism for complex conflicts. The shadowy implication of this scene, it seems, is that the only ones who are living are engaged in a primitive fight for survival. The serrated kitchen knife returns later as a gift from Jenny to Clair, for the children, she tells her, to cut up their sandwiches. But the gift is really a kind of challenge to Clair to bloody her hands if she wants to feel alive. Clair's relief at the emptiness of her invented city, however, intimates that she is no longer what Jenny would call a dangerous person—that is, someone fighting for her life: “Here are the signs of people clinging on to life: rags, blood, coffee cups—and the stink of course—I'm a nurse—I smell it everyday—the particular stink people make when they're clinging and clinging on to life” (23). Referencing, no doubt, the Bush administration's slogans during the 2003 invasion of Iraq that the U.S. would be going to the “dark side” and the “dark corners” of the world (Clark), the people to whom Jenny refers are capable of a bodily struggle that is unimaginable—taboo, even—to Western audiences.

If the only people who are truly alive are living primitively and the only form of expression suitable to the contemporary world is violence, where does this leave Crimp's play as an aesthetic object? At the very least, we can assume, the pessimism of the play is not so thorough that it prevents Crimp from still engaging earnestly the dramatic form. Surely, Clair's desire as a writer-turned-translator—a refuge she likens to an alcoholic and his drinking—to express something true is not part of Crimp's parody. As a translator himself, Crimp exploits the tension between a writer's inventive capacities and how s/he transmits reality. The blurriness of this distinction seems integral to his critique of the contemporary situation. Too much so-called art, the play suggests, is either a falsification, an escape, or a weak translation of what is a violent and difficult reality to assimilate: “Faced with the complexity of the world, authors cannot provide any solutions nor clear moral messages, so what they have done is translate their

perplexity by changing the question, ‘what is going to happen?’ into ‘what is happening?’” (Aragay et al 389). To be sure, Crimp favours the latter over the former, acknowledging another truism of Pessoa: “A work that’s finished is at least finished. It may be poor, but it exists, like the miserable plant in the lone flowerpot of my neighbour who’s crippled” (46). In Crimp’s estimation, given the state of world affairs, the artist is especially crippled. The play suggests that art appears incapable of challenging the systemic violence of capitalism because it has been so thoroughly integrated into its structure, as the example of the tortured writer hungry for darker themes makes manifest. In some way, then, *The City* might be considered an *apologia* for Crimp’s rather pessimistic oeuvre, which undoubtedly shares Francis Bacon’s sentiment that an artist must not betray what he sees.

FRUSTRATED LIFE: *THE UNKNOWN TERRORIST*

The City thus moves from a seemingly naturalistic portrayal of urban domestic misery to a radical critique of the violence of the contemporary world. Chris’s unfulfilled desire to kiss Clair bespeaks a generalized sense of cruelty in the denial of one’s ability to express—in Chris’s case, his ability to express his love. I have suggested that *The City* points towards the difficulty of creative expression, and in the case of its protagonist, its impossibility. While *The City* hints at violence as both cause and consequence of this struggle, it cannot explore this phenomenon in any depth because the conceit holds that it is written by one of its characters. Richard Flanagan’s *The Unknown Terrorist*, however, follows the trajectory of this problem, concluding that the consequence of shrinking imaginative experience is violence. For the novel suggests that the

protagonist can only move from being a victim to becoming another victimizer. Using loosely the plot of Heinrich Böll's *The Lost Honour of Katharina Blum*, *The Unknown Terrorist* tells of the interpellation of a stripper known as the Doll into counterterrorist ideology in Sydney, Australia. Labeled the "Unknown Terrorist," she is wrongfully accused of planning an attack for her involvement with a Pakistani man who was murdered shortly after the plot was discovered.

Unlike *The City* and many of the texts selected for this dissertation, the form of *The Unknown Terrorist* hovers on the border between popular fiction and political literature, making use of the thriller genre as part of its political critique. Andrew McCann writes of this development within contemporary Australian fiction, noting, "All [texts] at least implicitly phrase their claims to political effectiveness through a refusal of autonomous aesthetic forms and a reproduction of what might be called (after Jacques Rancière) the popular gestus" (44-5). Among many others, the generic expectations of thrillers include a fast-paced, easily digested narrative, in which a tension emerges between appearance and reality, revealing conspiracies and underground worlds, as well as unambiguous moral divisions between good and evil. It is, in short, a perfect genre to consolidate and mobilize counterterrorist sentiment. Flanagan upsets these expectations, of course, and creates two incompatible narratives, the stronger of which survives. The protagonist fulfills the cruel destiny the media has created for her as a fugitive who resorts to bloodshed and self-destruction because she has nothing left to lose. In what follows, I will trace two interconnected strands in the novel: first, the liquidation of art and culture into pure pornography as evidenced in the Doll's profession, and second, the novel's dark suggestion that recourse to violence is the only remaining vessel of creative action.

The Unknown Terrorist frames its narrative with two short discourses that treat the subject of human love, preparing readers for the downward trajectory of its protagonist. The

opening frame begins with the notion that the inadequacy of human love has produced some of our most well known martyrs, among them Jesus, who is “history’s first, but not last, example of a suicide bomber” (2). It concludes:

Nietzsche had even less explanation than Jesus for love and its various manifestations: empathy, kindness, hugging a horse’s neck to stop it being beaten. In the end Nietzsche’s philosophy could not even explain Nietzsche, a man who sacrificed his life for a horse.

But then, ideas always miss the point. Chopin could offer no explanation of his Nocturnes. Why the Doll was haunted by Chopin’s Nocturnes is one strand of this story. In listening to what Chopin could not explain, she heard an explanation of her own life. (2)

There is a lot packed into this odd philosophical prelude. First, it instructs readers to consider the parallels between the self-described Son of God and the infamous philosopher who pronounced God’s death. Both, we are asked to imagine, struggled with the philosophical problem of human suffering and cruelty, which is put to us as the failure of human love. Second, it tells that the recognition of love’s inadequacy cannot be articulated by ideas put into words. Instead, it can only be expressed by Jesus’ sacrifice, Nietzsche’s madness, Chopin’s music, or finally, the story of the Doll. The implication of this suggestion, then, is that the problem of cruelty—in Flanagan’s terms, the failure of human love—cannot be justified by reason; it can only find consolation in the emotional, affective powers that art and narrative possess.

But, as we soon learn, the Doll’s world is deprived of this consolation because it is managed and restricted by industry, particularly the media, which has become the unquestioned

transmitter of society's political unconscious. Unsurprisingly, art and culture have been pulled into the same profit-driven tide:

So many ideas to parade, films to have watched, books to have read, exhibitions and plays to have seen, so much to have greedily gobbled ... But all these subjects existed only to lard the hard truth of the lunch: the gossip that traded knowledge for money and power; the finessed probings of position and status; the sly seeking of alliances and linking of chains of patronage; the constant aggrandizement of self, as necessary as a bull elephant's seal bark. (23)

This passage emerges from the cynical perspective of anchorman Richard Cody, whose falling ratings have precipitated an impending demotion, and who is consequently searching for a news opportunity that will redeem him. We are meant to see that Cody and the Doll work in the same pornographic industry, the only difference between them one of social legitimacy. We are also meant to appreciate the Doll's dream of private ownership as a higher goal towards which she is driven, however much ideological folly it appears. Cody, on the other hand, has deluded himself in another way, by conflating his self-worth with his profession. But the Doll has been careful to protect herself by means of a rather crude separation: "Everything the Doll did, every word she said, every gesture she made, everything she revealed and the many more things she so carefully hid, all of it, she told herself, was about money" (34). The brutal honesty expressed here is only a hyperbolic depiction of all the characters' lives. The Doll's ritual of covering her naked body in hundred dollar bills makes a powerful image of her underlying vulnerability: "These days, the Doll preferred the touch of money on her skin to the touch of a man" (58).

Unlike *The City*, which emphasizes the inaccessibility of Schubert's music, *The Unknown Terrorist* views classical music as a lasting resistance to false art, in the face of its opportunistic

apostles. But such resistance, unfortunately, has been excluded from those without status and power. The Doll's wealthiest client, Frank Moretti, serves the novel's blanket critique of the art world as another form of vapid consumption. As an art collector, his tastes are determined by their cultural, which is to say monetary, value: "When Frank Moretti spoke, that was all the Doll heard in his voice: money. Perhaps he thought it was ideas, wisdom, beauty, taste. . . . But it was just money—money he had, money he wanted, money he would get" (129-30). He insults the Doll by questioning whether she is capable of knowing what is beautiful, telling her that, "When you see ugliness, it hurts you" (131). Every week, Moretti pays the Doll to strip accompanied by the music of Chopin, while he inspects her body with a magnifying glass. Because of the truth expressed in the music she hears, however, the Doll finds this routine more unbearable than the work she does at the Chairman's Lounge:

How sad the world was! Doof music lied: it told the girls and the men that they were still young, that youth was forever, death always tomorrow, energy boundless, and that life was as relentless, as insistent as its promise of momentum for the better as the one hundred and forty beats per minute of the track playing. She could strip to a lie, because it gave her a mask. But Chopin brought her soul rushing back into her body, no matter how she fought to keep it out. With Chopin she knew the terrible wretched truth: she was naked and alone. (137)

In a world as manufactured as the Doll's, the listener of Chopin can only imagine such encounters with art negatively as "the terrible wretched truth," too difficult to bear. But the music takes on this melancholic tone only because it stands in sharp contrast to the abstract perfection of the body she is selling, which is to say, falsely promising. McCann appropriately deems *The Unknown Terrorist* "a lament for the loss of faith in culture itself as a redemptive

force,” arguing that the novel ends “with the failure of narrative to deliver its characters and its readers from a quotidian hell that is as culturally vapid as it is politically vicious” (51). While thematically the novel suggests that the music of Chopin resists commodification, formally it departs from the modernist faith in art to redeem the human.

Through the course of the novel, the Doll’s innocence is quickly complicated by her desperate perception of the situation. Outlandish as the scenario seems, the media’s portrayal of the Doll as an accomplice in a terrorist plot—based solely, by the way, on video footage of her entering the primary suspect’s apartment with him—prevents her from going forward to the police out of fear that they will prosecute: “Her own life felt to her only an ever more inaccurate reflection of what the media was saying about her. And maybe instead of fighting this, she began to think her real role was to find a way of agreeing with the television, the radio, the newspapers, not fighting and denying them” (172). But Flanagan makes her dystopian circumstances more believable by showing us a world that closely resembles ours; as one critic observes, “People at-large accept that the police, the government, and the media tell them about the terrorists in their midst without question [...] and accept, uncritically, all of the conclusions offered about Gina’s danger based solely on her sexual behavior” (Sheckels 37). In this way, something “vast and horrible” has happened and “somehow she was to blame. ... Perhaps what was wrong was not the world, she thought, but in her not agreeing with the world, and it was this of which she was guilty” (172-73).

To the Doll, what is left of beauty that hasn’t been claimed by someone else’s expertise or power appears as a cruel reminder of her alienation:

She thought how if they had bothered to look at it, many people would have found the sky that midday glorious, at once moody and enchanting. But when the Doll

dropped her eyes again and saw the sorry field of dust in which she had laid her stillborn son to rest, it seemed to her that the sky that day—like Moretti’s beautiful possessions, like all things said to be beautiful—was simply cruel. (239)

She finds this cruel because the remaining beautiful things have been stripped down to an abstract, inhuman value, which has no relation to her own life. Consistent with earlier iterations of the culture industry, the Doll lives in an imaginary desert where the oppressiveness of reality dominates and where what was once called popular literature is written “for a mob rather than a community.” It is “a packaged commodity which an overproductive economy, whether capitalist or socialist, distributes as it distributes food” (Frye, *Secular* 26). As I will develop more fully later, it is also devoid of what Frye loosely defines as romance: “Being directly descended from folktale, it brings us closer than any other aspect of literature to the sense of fiction, considered as a whole, as the epic of the creature, man’s vision of his own life as a quest” (15).

The finality of the Doll’s circumstances prevents her from seeking to overcome them. As a result she takes drastic measures to exercise control over her life, fully knowing that it will bring about its end: “All she had to speak with, to pay up with, was Moretti’s Beretta. It would help make it clear, if only for a split second before the trigger eased back and the chamber emptied, that she was herself and not an invention, a prejudice, a label” (309). In the end, the Doll chooses vigilantism over the law, which she discovers over the course of her ordeal to be corrupt. The Doll’s is a classic story of disillusionment and political awakening that Flanagan risks making almost comical. To be sure, he is at pains to critique not only the status quo but the failure of resistance efforts against it. In cold realistic language he refuses the possibility of viewing the Doll heroically:

In her final moment she realized all this too was just an illusion; there was no redemption, no resurrection. There was only this life from which she could feel herself ever more quickly leaving. The bullet was smashing apart bone, nerve fibre, memory, love, before it came out the other side of her head, leaving a hole the size of a ten-cent piece behind her left ear. (312)

The supreme irony of the text, and a well-known critique of counter-terrorism efforts, is that the Doll's original innocence is transformed by state power and paranoia into criminal violence. In other words, by framing the Doll's initial activity within illegal terms the media apparatus of the state eventually brings forth her desperately violent act. In true Foucauldian fashion, the state brings into being the terrorists it imagines through the production of discourse.²¹ While the book does not indicate any sense of a politically altered future, what is clear is that the Doll's anarchistic style of vigilante terror does not redeem her. Flanagan seems to belong to a different camp regarding the strategies of political change, where terrorism appears as an endless cycle of paranoia and violence. Hannah Arendt's acute critique of the resurgence of political violence in certain factions of the 1960s New Left reminds us that violence has deep connections to impotence: "Much of the present glorification of violence is caused by the severe frustration of the faculty of action in the modern world" (83). Writing many decades later, Moishe Postone remarked on the escalation of terrorist organization: "In a historical situation of heightened helplessness, violence both expressed the rage of helplessness and helped suppress such feelings

²¹ In "The Subject and Power" Michel Foucault summarizes his philosophical project as one that has been treating the relation of subjectivity to power in the twentieth century. He writes, "This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects" (781).

of helplessness. It became an act of self-constitution as outsider, as other, rather than an instrument of transformation” (“History” 108). As I have intimated earlier, the absence of political agency, I would suggest, stems from the absence of imaginative agency. “In the face of alienation and bureaucratic stasis, violence was deemed creative, and violent action per se became viewed as revolutionary,” in Postone’s words (“History” 108).

At the center of Flanagan’s text is the recognition of what Arendt observed in modern bureaucratic societies, that the “monopolization of power causes the drying up or oozing away of all authentic power sources” (85). The inability to locate authentic power is exactly what Žižek refers to when he identifies objective violence as the normative dimension of life under capitalism and thus the difficulty one confronts when attempting to perceive this abstracted form of violence (14). Those like Richard Cody who have managed some claim on power will not be interested in relinquishing it. “The practice of violence, like all action, changes the world, but the most probable change is to a more violent world,” says Arendt (80). The novel closes in the same moralizing discursive register as its opening:

The world had deliberately shed itself of all that reminded people of their impermanence, their fragility, their capacity and need for transcendence. The city was no longer the most marvelous of human creations, but the most oppressive. Nothing was left to balance the horror of life. Power and money were what were to be admired as life atrophied: except at the beach, beauty was to be despised and the contemplation of the world decreed as a sickness, depression, maladies. (316)

Like *The City*, *The Unknown Terrorist* views the disappearance of the appreciation of beauty as harmful to social life: no longer “the most marvellous of human creations,” the idea of social harmony embedded in the metropolis is now a nightmare of barrenness, emptied of imagination

and contemplation. The ruthlessness of reality is no longer balanced by creative freedom and individual experiences with the world: “Power and money were to be all that remained, and politics was what ensured their primacy. Politics places man at the centre of life, and in permanent opposition to the universe. Love, to the contrary, fills man with the universe” (316). Thus *The Unknown Terrorist* makes clear its opposition between politics—the realm of cruelty—and love. Love’s inadequacy, for Flanagan, is the inability to surrender this will to power. Put in these terms, love appears as the proper force of artistic creation, the desire to understand reality beyond the limited perspective of the self.

TOWARDS AN AESTHETICS OF FEELING: *DOUBLE VISION*

So far, my discussion of violence has been primarily concerned with objective forms of violence that show the absence of political and creative agency within individuals. I have argued that both Martin Crimp’s *The City* and Richard Flanagan’s *The Unknown Terrorist* take up violence and the absence of imagination as thematic and formal concerns. While *The City* contends that the imaginative faculties have been corroded by objective violence—a “secret war,” in Jenny’s words—*The Unknown Terrorist* concludes that the frustration of imaginative agency leads to acts of fatal aggression. I would now like to turn to concrete acts of violence to delve further into the problem of cruelty. Pat Barker’s *Double Vision* treats art’s relationship to war but in this exploration offers a different, more hopeful conclusion, using sculpture in place of violence as a vehicle for imaginative contemplation. By closing this chapter with a reading of

Double Vision as an aesthetic response to violence, I will suggest that the union of art and love has formed an alternative, more capacious literary politics within contemporary writing.

Double Vision plays with the interweaving stories of two parallel lives that are trying to overcome trauma: Kate Frobisher has lost her husband Ben while on assignment in Afghanistan and undergoes a debilitating car accident, while Ben's friend and fellow war correspondent, Stephen Sharky, is suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and is also newly divorced. Their lives, while near to the other's experience, largely cross paths through a third, shadowy figure named Peter Wingrave, and through discussions of the work of Francisco Goya. At the same time, Barker gives us two parallel artistic endeavors: Kate, a sculptor, has been commissioned by a Church to make a suffering Christ; Stephen is attempting to write a book about the representation of wars. Wingrave is a writer whom Kate has hired to help with the physical tasks needed of her project. He serves the novel symbolically as the predominantly intellectual aspects of the creative faculties which Kate and Stephen must battle: objectivity, finesse, manipulation. Through the course of the novel, Peter's presence in both their lives comes to signify damage and disfigurement: it is as if everything under his touch is harmed. Finally, we have two parallel love stories: Kate's continued devotion to her late husband, Ben, and Stephen's budding sexual relationship with his brother's caretaker, Justine. While these relationships are far from eternal—the former has ended physically in death, the latter appears at first to be pure physicality—they are important for each member as a means of healing, both of which focus on contact and vulnerability. In what follows, I will discuss the problem of ambivalence raised in *Double Vision* about art and human brutality and offer its final vision of creative experience as the unfolding of openness to another.

The ambivalence regarding art's relationship to human suffering offered in *Double Vision* is not a new problem. Of course, Frye's philosophical work by the same name takes its title from William Blake, who understands himself as having two parallel sights: "For double the vision my eyes do see, / And a double vision is always with me" (qtd. in *The Double Vision* 22). Frye explains, "the conscious subject is not really perceiving until it recognizes itself as part of what it perceives. The whole world is humanized when such a perception takes place. . . . whatever we perceive is a part of us and forms an identity with us" (23). For Barker, the problem is at least as old as Francisco Goya, who, for many including Susan Sontag, has become the artist *par excellence* of the horror of war. The novel acknowledges Sontag's last work, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, and includes an epigraph from one of Goya's captions to his *Los Desastres de la Guerra*: "One cannot look at this. . . . I saw it. . . . This is the truth." As Kate remarks: "It's that argument he's having with himself, all the time, between the ethical problems of showing the atrocities and yet the need to say, 'Look, this is what's happening' . . . There's always this tension between wanting to show the truth, and yet being skeptical about what the effects of showing it are going to be" (100). By "effects," Kate implies a host of things: shock, disgust, shame, helplessness, despair, and with repeated exposure, emotional defense and hardening. The novel thus poses the question of art's capacity not only to show but also to alter reality, for better or worse.

The novel also pits photography against other established art forms as a purely visual medium that is almost inhuman in its concealment of a creator. When we consider, for example, Ben's last photograph taken before he died, the subject evokes a technological endurance that outlasts the brief experiments of human history. The work is described as absent of human presence:

Right at the bottom left-hand corner he saw another photograph, this time of Soviet tanks, disused, rotting, corroded with rust. This mass of military debris filled most of the frame, so that from the viewer's angle they seemed to be a huge wave about to break. Behind them was a small white sun, no bigger than a golf ball, veiled in mist. No people. Hardware left behind after the Russian invasion of Afghanistan: the last war. But the composition was so powerful it transcended the limits of a particular time and place, and became a *Dies Irae*. A vision of the world as it would be after the last human being had left, forgetting to turn out the light. (123)

Framed by Barker's language as a lament for the dead, the photograph departs from traditional war photography by denying the exposure of human suffering. This idea is implied, rather, by the corroding vehicles meant for human use and their transfiguration by the creative eye into an ominous natural shape: a wave about to break. Ben's photography is distinguished in the novel as an art form, however, precisely because it plays with the conventions of his field, notably the overemphasis on pathos that is often vulnerable to political exploitation.²² In one print, for example, Ben "explode[s] the convention" of staged executions, by "includ[ing] his own shadow in the shot, reaching out across the dusty road. The shadow says I'm here. I'm holding a camera and that fact will determine what happens next" (123). As expected, the next image records the man who had been on his knees now lying "dead in the road, and the shadow of the

²² One authorial observation Barker more than likely borrowed from Susan Sontag's *Regarding the Pain of Others* is that a photograph can be used twice for competing political agendas: "You had to take the child's nationality on trust, though it might equally well have been the head of a Bosnian child lying in the market place in Sarajevo. It wouldn't be the first time the dead had been made to work overtime, appearing as victims in the propaganda of both sides" (130).

photographer, the shadow of a man with a deformed head, has moved closer” (123). But, while the text treats Ben’s work with a great deal of aesthetic appreciation, Stephen’s attitude as a writer (which is given the most authorial weight) towards his culture’s taste for “images before words” is ambivalent at best.

For instance, Ben has an unpleasant and ethically dubious connection to the memory that most disturbs Stephen, of a Bosnian girl they found raped and left for dead. In horror, Stephen had pulled down the girl’s skirt, which was bunched up around her waist, but couldn’t bring himself to close her eyes. In going through his photographic archive on Bosnia, Stephen discovers that Ben had gone back and repositioned the girl in order to document what they found: “He hadn’t staged the photograph. He’d simply restored the corpse to its original state. And yet it was difficult not to feel that the girl, spreadeagled like that, had been violated twice” (121). Early on, we learn that the source of Stephen’s trauma is this image repeating itself: “Her head was beside his on the pillow, and when he rolled over on to his stomach, trying to get away from her, he found her body underneath him, as dry and insatiable as sand. ... She had something to say to him, but he’d never managed to listen, or not in the right way” (55). Stephen’s distaste for Ben’s objectivity, of putting the demand to document the truth before an unwritten honour towards the dead, stems from his doubts in the capacity of images to document the truth because so much about their reproduction and control is uncertain.

What is more, Ben’s photographs—and photographs generally—lack something to save them from despair. When Kate re-encounters Goya's *Interior of a Prison* in the Bowes museum, she deliberately refuses to see it before spending some time in the sixteenth-century room, “a dark place [...] full of unmastered cruelty,” then emerging from it “hungry for the Goya” (152). She studies the small print and even kneels before it, suggesting the art form's contemplative,

spiritual invocation: “It was so small, not much larger than a sheet of typing paper, all the colours subdued. The interior of a prison, seven men in shackles, every tone, every line expressing despair” (152). She reflects that, compared with the complexity of this response, photographs elicit something less. Compared with the prints of Goya, photographs appear shallow: “Photographs shock, terrify, arouse compassion, anger, even drive people to take action, but does the photograph of an atrocity ever inspire hope? This did. These men have no hope, no past, no future, and yet, seeing this scene through Goya’s steady and compassionate eye, it was impossible to feel anything as simple or as trivial as despair” (152-53). Mary Trabucco observes, “The Goya represents a brief interlude in the history of representing and documenting suffering [...] How it creates a response cannot be explained: the hope generated by the painting is ineffable, for it goes against the way “every line, every tone express[es] despair” (148-49). In *The Double Vision* Frye notes the same problem as it unfolds in religious ideology: “As long as idolatry persists, and humanity is seeing in nature a mirror of itself, it forms primitive societies (in the sense used earlier) as an imitation of nature [...] Human beings get along as best they can in such a world, but the human spirit knows that it is living in hell” (27). Like the lifelessness expressed in artistic endeavours in *The City*, the novel wants us to consider the possibility that photographs are weak imitations of reality, not reality transformed by empathic art.

But it would be hasty to assume that the novel privileges the written word over visual media simply because it focuses the point of view on a struggling writer. In fact, I will suggest, the novel calls our attention to a similar crisis in writing. As I have demonstrated in the novel’s understanding of photography, this crisis is related to a perceived lack, not unlike the lack conveyed in *The City* as the dust that settles after war and in *The Unknown Terrorist* as art’s abandoning of truth. This lack is expressed metaphorically as a kind of artistic autism, which is

expressed literally in Stephen's nephew, Adam. "It's basically a sort of difficulty in seeing other people as people," Adam's caretaker Justine explains to Stephen (83). Peter Wingrave best symbolizes this defect in his creative short stories, which Stephen reads and finds unsettling in the wrong way: "The emphasis on female helplessness, the detailed observation that always implied empathy, and yet, somehow, mysteriously failed to deliver it. The stories kept slipping into sympathy with the predatory behaviour they attempted to analyse. There was no moral centre" (164). Another way to put Peter's problem is that his writing is too intellectual and lacks the compassionate component that delivers representation from mere mimesis. Put in Northrop Frye's terms, it ignores the material reality or the "revealed scripture" that is "uncreated, something coming from elsewhere," which prevents the creator from becoming "a Narcissus staring at his own reflection, equally unable to surpass himself" (61).

Peter's past undoubtedly haunts the novel's understanding of violence. As Mary Trabucco has noted, the opening scene in which Kate swerves her car off an icy road is told from two perspectives, her own and "that of the encroaching forest, whose menace becomes absorbed into the unexplained figure of a man who stands in the shadows of the forest where she has crashed, watching her suffer" (146). Kate begins to associate this figure with Peter's uneasy presence because of his ability to look at that which repels vision, the great problem of the novel. Peter's involvement with Kate's sculpture is similarly disturbing. Hired to help with the physical aspects of the project, Peter becomes enamoured of the artistic process, so much so that one day Kate discovers he has broken into her studio at night and is dressed in her clothes, miming her movements: "He was barefoot, his strong prehensile toes gripping and relaxing as his feet moved across the mess of white plaster dust, towards the figure, pause, strike, away" (177). After this incident, Kate pays a call to Justine's father Alec, the man who helped get Peter hired. There he

tells her that Peter had been in prison for a crime in his youth. Later, after the burglary at the house where Stephen and Justine are staying, Justine's father tells her that Peter murdered an elderly lady when she caught him robbing her house. The parallel events suggest that Peter's act is not unusual but simply the "collateral damage" of crime. Thus Barker links in subtle ways the domestic violence of Peter's crime, the burglary in which Justine is nearly killed, and the political violence of war.

After dismissing his help, Kate returns to the sculpture, which now appears to her terribly disfigured, though Peter has not physically changed it:

If it looked different, it must be because her way of seeing it had changed. The belly was scored in three, no, four different places. She put her hands into the cracks. Chest and neck gouged – it looked like a skin disease, bubonic plague, a savagely plucked bird. Pockmarks everywhere. [...] Beaten up. Somebody with a talent for such things had given him a right going over. This was the Jesus of history. And we know what happens in history: the strong take what they can, the weak endure what they must, and the dead emphatically do not rise. (180-81)

Peter's influence has the effect of changing Kate's perception of the Christ, a figure meant to contemplate human suffering and sacrifice. But the sculpture never could fully encompass this spiritual tradition because first, it is a modern Christ sculpted by a secular artist, and second, because history has undermined its original meaning. The Jesus of history is all matter and no transcendence: "Like the resurrection, it is a canonical image of Judeo-Christian martyrdom but the norm is changed. The Christ is never described in detail but demands attention even in a culture of spectacle because he disturbs and fascinates. These two facets underpin the images

Barker creates” (Monteith 290). The Christ described above appears more disturbing than fascinating; Kate’s struggle is to restore its fascination.

Most scholars have noted the novel’s articulation of two divergent modes of aesthetic engagement, privileging the tactile as deeply connected over the visual as surface spectatorship. Barbara Korte links this movement to the novel’s personal politics, too: “It is significant that Kate works with her hands and creates a Christ whose expression is as much physical as spiritual. By contrast, Peter Wingrave, Stephen’s negative foil, stands for an approach to life that is distanced and primarily visual,” calling him finally a “voyeur” (444). We can already see that the title of the novel reflects a bit of this division. Nick Hubble reads the title not as a division or binary but a final “reconciliation of two ways of seeing—the creative and the documentary—into a simultaneous mode of ‘double vision,’” which is more complex than it appears (114). But more than reconciliation, I prefer the idea of striking a balance between the imagination and a given reality or truth, which I suggested earlier with Northrop Frye’s secular and revealed scripture. This definition underscores the need for the artist to treat its subject as another and the creative process itself as a form of receptivity as well as mastery. I will now turn to the aesthetics of contact that Barker’s novel puts forward, which seeks to hold in tension the compassionate eye of creation with the simultaneous need not to lie.

Barker hints at the delicacy of this balance in Kate’s completion of the Christ: “Somehow or other she had to recover freshness of vision, to look at this as if she were seeing it for the first time. The secret was to put the critical intelligence to sleep, peel off the hard outer rind and work from the core” (292). She finds, however, that Peter’s role in its making is irrefutable: “Inside there, buried as deep as bones in flesh, was the armature that he’d made. The carving was hers, but the shape was his” (292). Given the original significance of the idol, however, it seems

appropriate that Peter's presence provides a needed material and historical relevance; in other words, Peter's ruthless honesty, what Stephen calls "coldness, manipulation, a passion to control" (170), is what gives the representation of martyrdom its documentary, historical significance. In this careful way, Barker reveals that martyrdom remains an influential aspect of our artistic and cultural taste. That is, it bespeaks a lasting desire within capitalism for divine redemption—a desire, perhaps, that is sadly unfulfilled by the living: "The nature of Kate's achievement—her vision—remains difficult to articulate; [...] The interiorization of another art form, the secondary nature of ekphrasis to read and critique artworks, illuminates the limits of empathy and the fact of complicity that haunt artistic representations of suffering" (Trabucco 157). At the same time, the novel insists on art's special capacity to contain this truth while providing a deeply affective response that takes the viewer outside of himself. In "Once More with Feeling," Derrick Attridge examines this affective capacity, arguing that "the pleasure produced by an engagement with the successful work of art is, in part at least, a pleasure we feel as our familiar horizons open up to an otherness that we, as products of our culture, had excluded from consciousness" (338). *Double Vision* argues that only a compassionate creator aware of her own limits of empathy can offer this kind of response.

For this reason, the novel closes with the conscious discovery of love, which has been provoked by a ruthless act of violence. After the botched burglary of Stephen's brother's home, in which Justine is badly beaten to the point of losing consciousness, Stephen realizes the extent of his attachment to the girl: "We live our whole lives one step away from clarity, he thought. That moment, careering down the steep hillside, knowing that however hard he ran he wouldn't get there in time, had taught him more about his feelings for Justine than months of introspection could have done" (265). While Kate mourns the loss of her husband through art, Stephen

recovers himself by living. “I believe people can heal themselves. [...] Get your body moving. Have sex,” he tells Justine’s father, almost unabashedly. Frye writes:

Love in the New Testament is agape or caritas, God’s love for humanity reflected in the human love for God and for one’s neighbour. The sexual basis of love is subordinated, because the primary emphasis is on the individual and the community, but erotic love is clearly a part of the total vision. Such love, it seems to me, has to begin with the human recognition that it is only human beings who have put evil and suffering into human life, and that no other entity than ourselves, certainly not God, is responsible for its persistence. (*The Double Vision* 81)

Odd though it may seem coming from a feminist writer, the emphasis on sex and the physical body is consistent with the novel’s critique of voyeurism. Barker is aware that the thing motivating spectatorship is related to that which motivates love: “Nothing like lust to make you feel life’s still worth living,” Stephen thinks just after meeting Justine (62). The distinction between spectatorship and genuine engagement, as I have pointed out earlier, depends on what one does with this motivation. Voyeurism, put simply, is the narcissistic perversion of desire. Engagement is its opposite, inviting the response of another. Martha Nussbaum instructs, “One of [emotional] development’s central tasks is the renunciation of infantile omnipotence and the willingness to live in a world of objects” (218). Without the intelligence of emotions to guide us, we are mere outsiders in a world of others.

After the burglary, Stephen takes Justine to the Farnes, and the novel closes with moments of tranquility floating above the sea’s rough waters. Stephen stills his recurring dream in bed, with the beautiful image of the two lovers’ fingers interdigitated, communicating without

words: “He climbed in beside her and for a moment they said and did nothing, lying side by side, fingers intertwined. The moonlight found the whites of her eyes. For a moment he saw the girl in Sarajevo, but she’d lost her power. This moment in this bed banished her, not for ever, perhaps, but for long enough. He rolled over and took Justine in his arms” (302). In a comparison of *Double Vision* with Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*, Sharon Monteith observes, “Crossing the water and reaching the shore is a metaphor for hope in both novels and in each Lily and Kate act as mediums, curiously divided between the prospect of completing an artistic project and their focus on a journey being undertaken by their emotional alter egos” (294). In the ending’s gentle suggestion of hope, *Double Vision* departs radically from *The City*’s uncertainty and *The Unknown Terrorist*’s provocatively resolute despair. For this reason, I believe, Barker’s writing of the novel constitutes an act of hope and love. It argues that social relations and art based in love can repair us. I will now consider these different conclusions alongside their use of the romantic mode.

CONCLUSION: THE ROMANTIC MODE AND POLITICAL IMAGINATION

If violence is the result of lovelessness and a lack of political and creative agency, then the tentative answer, as has been suggested by Barker’s text, as well as Kushner and McEwan’s texts in the previous chapter, is the cultivation of human love and thus the negation of violence and cruelty. The literary genre that has traditionally affirmed the bonds of love is romance. For Northrop Frye, the “central element of romance is a love story” (*Secular Scripture* 24). However, this genre has also come to be associated with imaginative refuge and hope. In *The Political*

Unconscious Fredric Jameson puts forth a theory about the re-emergence of romance in “magical narratives” as the result of the dominance of realism within the late capitalist historical period. He writes: “It is in the context of the gradual reification of realism in late capitalism that romance once again comes to be felt as the place of narrative heterogeneity and of freedom from the reality principle to which a now oppressive realistic representation is the hostage” (104). Published in 1981, *The Political Unconscious*, in part, documents the rise and fall of “genre criticism,” of which Northrop Frye remains the best and most politically attuned representative, in Jameson’s estimation. Building from Frye’s ideas in *The Secular Scripture*, Jameson observes the re-emergence of the romantic mode (as opposed to a genre or form) within literary criticism as an important political sign, though he does not explore this development within contemporary fictional narratives. He argues, “Romance now again seems to offer the possibility of sensing other historical rhythms, and of demonic or Utopian transformations of a real now unshakably set in place; and Frye is surely not wrong to assimilate the salvational perspective of romance to a reexpression of Utopian longings” (104). Jameson interprets these longings as a sign that the possibility of political transformation is so far beyond reach that it only exists as fantasy. As I have argued, *The Unknown Terrorist* certainly suggests that nihilism arises from unfulfilled utopian longings. The 9/11 attacks are probably the most obvious example of how utopian thinking can be fulfilled by the spectacle of violence.

Because all three texts take up the question of aesthetics, they impart some perspective on the romantic mode through their thematic content. That is, they point to the ability or lack thereof to invent alternative narratives to the present or, in Jameson’s politically sentient terms, “other historical rhythms.” In this, Crimp suggests the wellspring of utopian longings in the metaphor of the city, and in the preverbal intentions of daily action. The play’s continuity between the actions

of art and life are suggested by its epigraph (“Everything we do, in art and life, is the imperfect copy of what we intended”) and reaffirmed by the layers of representational ontologies, which always remind audience members of the characters’ doubly fictional status (created, that is, by one of the play’s characters). In this way, *The City* calls our attention not only to the fictional writer’s weak and vanishing creative will, but to the other characters’ inability to narrate their own experiences and subjectivities for various reasons as well. However, *The City* itself is not a romance narrative; it only points to a romantic desire that has been lost. This desire to express is thus a kind of anguishing failure, which is conveyed by Jenny’s complaints of her lifeless piano playing and by the haunting return of Schubert during intimations of unrequited love. We could also read the cleverness of those people “clinging to life” (23) in the secret war as a symbolic fight for the survival of desire among a hostile and oppressive reality.

Interestingly, Flanagan’s second novel is a formal departure from his early experiment with magical realism in *Gould’s Book of Fish*. In *The Unknown Terrorist* there is little that is untouched by reified realism. But we might consider those few moments that best express the Doll’s transformation of an oppressive reality by her engagement in the natural world, where she feels most liberated. In the opening, for instance, the Doll finds herself content to stay on the beach forever, “breasts and arses and wedding tackle all hanging in such wild disarray and the sun shining like there’s no tomorrow and over it all the waves returning the world to some other, better, larger rhythm—who couldn’t feel happy as a bird and, as her friend Wilder would say, free as a fart with all this?” (13). The Doll’s sexual encounter with Tariq is another example of her appreciation for the brevity of life. In a sort of Rabelaisian spirit, then, the novel celebrates those few moments when people are simply living without premeditation, pulled together by a spontaneous natural illumination and the Doll’s perceptive eye. The ending meditation confirms

this: “Except at the beach, beauty was to be despised” (316). But there is no salvational perspective in either *The City* or *The Unknown Terrorist*. Rather, both works refuse the mythological upward ascension and instead point emphatically in the opposite direction. *The City* has the affect of causing disturbance, much like the affect produced by Schubert and Chopin in the two, respectively. The play privileges truth over compassion, though it would be unfair to call it hopeless. *The Unknown Terrorist*, however, is much more cynical. While it successfully subverts expectations set by the thriller genre, expectations that have a clear social mythological function within Flanagan’s society, it rarely achieves the affect of disturbance that Crimp’s work is able to create. Its choice to use mass literary tropes makes it more akin to Horatian satire than Aristotle’s demands of tragedy.

In *Double Vision*, of course, something else happens. We indeed have a transcendent movement, the transformation of a suffering writer from symbolic death to life, which is cleverly problematized by an artist sculpting an unredeemable Christ. Barker’s displacement of the Christian narrative by Stephen’s secular dilemma does what Frye understands in his use of the “double vision,” namely, the spiritual evolution of human beings so that the problem of evil is understood as a human creation. At the end of *The Secular Scripture* Frye concludes, “In developing the forms of culture and civilization we seem to be recreating something that we did not get from nature” (186). Thus, the “artificial creation myth” has its purpose in “emphasiz[ing] the uniqueness, the once-for-all quality, in the creative act, and helps to deliver us, if not from death or Mallarme’s ‘chance,’ at least from the facile ironies of an endlessly turning cycle” (186). Of the three works under discussion, Barker’s text comes closest to offering readers this imaginative freedom that Frye deems essential for political regeneration.

Throughout this chapter, I have been speaking about three literary texts that try to understand the problem of cruelty—the failure of love—in secular terms. In the first chapter I explored texts that seek to establish the political basis for indifference, which they reveal to be a form of ideological narcissism. The texts under discussion in this chapter posit a tenuous reason for the persistence of human suffering as the suppression of individual expression and freedom in secular, neoliberal societies. By individual expression and freedom, I hope it will be clear by now, I mean the kind of double or spiritual development Frye describes that extends from primary needs to secondary ones, and that sees the needs of the self and the needs of the community on a similar continuum. The literature here merely presents us with the longing for this development. In the next chapter, I will explore imaginative representations of what problems await us in this cultivation of human love.

CHAPTER THREE: "THE HARD ROAD OF LOVING" IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

From our communal body [...] there flowed a love directed through the priestly performer, bent over the keyboard, to Johann Sebastian, and beyond him to whoever or whatever directed his hand.

J.M. Coetzee, The Good Story

Up to now, my research has been setting up the problem of cruelty from the perspectives of politics and aesthetics. In the first chapter, I considered how cruelty appears in politically conscious writing in the form of neoliberal ideology, an ideology that obfuscates and absolves individual responsibility towards the suffering of others. In the second chapter, I looked at the difficulty of overcoming the dominance of cruelty in writing of and about aesthetic endeavours. Both chapters point towards the problem of neoliberalism negatively through acts that disrupt the norm of cruelty. These acts, as I have argued, constitute deliberate gestures that insist on the endurance of human love.

In the first chapter I suggested that the political underpinnings of cruelty were shown to be indifference to inequality and the narcissism of the ruling class. At the conclusion, I contended that the egotism of Dr. Henry Perowne in Ian McEwan's *Saturday* blinds him from the suffering of Baxter, which Henry ultimately disregards as a pitiable tragedy encoded in the young man's DNA. Baxter's desperate retaliation against Perowne's cruelty reveals the impact of passing daily encounters and the web of social relations in which one is unconsciously

implicated. However, Daisy's reading of Mathew Arnold's "Dover Beach" constitutes a formal reversal of the day's events, thus suggesting the possibility of political awakening and change through art's ability to humanize. *Saturday* closes sanctifying not science but a humanistic understanding of one's inextricable obligation for another.

Approaching the problem of cruelty from the side of suffering, I turned in chapter two to the victims of cruelty and argued that the conditions for physical violence begin with the denial of agency and compassion through creative endeavours. The violence observed in *Double Vision*'s Peter mirrors the novel's actual episode of violence, a burglary, which reflects the larger cruelty of perpetual war. Like *Saturday*, *Double Vision* offers a microscopic relationship and the act of artistic creation in response to the devastation of war and the objective conditions of cruelty. The only recovery from violence available entails loving relationships, in the case of Stephen and Justine, and creative production, in the case of Stephen and Kate.

The matter of the following chapter, then, will be to interrogate this particular gesture as a form of romantic expression in contemporary literary production. This final offering of hope is not present in all of the works heretofore discussed; the exceptions include Martin Crimp's *The City* and Richard Flanagan's *The Unknown Terrorist*. As intimated earlier, though, these exceptions constitute a deeply serious warning to readers of the urgency of the problem. For this reason, I think, they are no less committed to changing the conditions of cruelty even if they do not offer much of an alternative vision in their representations. As I have been arguing, the critique articulated by Crimp and Flanagan is about the failure of love writ large, evidenced by Chris's desperate longing for a kiss in *The City* and Flanagan's suicidal Doll. For these writers, then, such small acts of kindness and empathy cannot change the enormity of the problem of cruelty. Any gesture of human connection also brings up representational problems that are

inevitably fraught with political implications: who can be connected, and what will this mean to the global readership now embedded in English writing? As Sarah Ahmed has argued, “Love is crucial to how individuals become aligned with collectives through their identification with an ideal, an alignment that relies on the existence of others who have failed that ideal” (124). Ian McEwan’s *Saturday* risked this representational endeavour and was criticized by many for its ultimate redemption of the novel’s protagonist and his white upper-class family.

The works in the present chapter are only too aware that the word love is semantically troublesome as a noun. As Richard Flanagan writes of the writer Vasily Grossman, “His humanism, placing kindness and goodness, truth and freedom, at the centre of life, as both the meaning and fullest expression of life, seemed weak, even quaint, in the face of the cocaine rush of turbo-capitalism” (*Australian Disease*). Or, as Jean Luc-Nancy concedes, “When [...] love is no longer the dominant theme of poetry, when it seems to be essentially relegated to dime-store novels instead, it is then that we inquire and question ourselves about love, about the possibility of thinking love” (83). But in the aftermath of September 11, 2001, the subject of love appeared relevant to writers such as Ian McEwan:

The hijackers used fanatical certainty, misplaced religious faith, and dehumanising hatred to purge themselves of the human instinct for empathy. Among their crimes was a failure of the imagination. As for their victims in the planes and in the towers, in their terror they would not have felt it at the time, but those snatched and anguished assertions of love were their defiance. (McEwan, “Only Love”)

For McEwan, the human capacity for empathy is instinctive and can only be destroyed through powerful ideological means. The individual assertions of love that he locates constitute the only

meaningful response to cruelty, and its only true refusal. Nancy writes, “The heart exposes, and it is exposed. [...] It does not say ‘love,’ which is the reflection or the speculation of an ego (and which engages love neither more nor less than the cogito), but it says ‘I love you,’ a declaration where ‘I’ is posed only by being exposed to ‘you.’” (89). This simple declarative statement that had been uttered by the victims of the attacks in their last moments was a sign that the heart had overcome the ego’s wish to survive and needed only to speak. Therefore, the philosophical discussion of love is impossible according to Nancy because the heart is “not a [thinking] subject” at all (89). Perhaps that is why love is such a difficult subject to write about, though in Flanagan’s words it is “the mystery with which literature is so often obsessed” (*Australian Disease*).

The historical attempt of thinking about love as a concept has only a few directions: it ennobles love, divides it into categories, or denies its existence altogether. In *Upheavals of Thought*, Martha Nussbaum observes that the traditions of philosophy and Christianity both insist on the suppression of erotic, bodily love in order to elevate love to an ideal: “What we find emerging [...] is a recurrent attempt to reform or educate erotic love, so as to keep its creative force while purifying it of ambivalence and excess, and making it more friendly to general social aims” (469). On the other side of the spectrum, Alain Badiou identifies a much different modern tendency rooted in moral pessimism: “Desire is the only thing that really exists. According to this vision, love is merely something the imagination constructs to give a veneer to sexual desire. [...] Love is being undermined—or de-constructed, if you like—in the name of the reality of sex” (34-35). Badiou dismisses the idea that love does not exist but speculates on the possibility that desire alone does not form a relationship (19).

In *The Masks of God*, Joseph Campbell writes of a divergent philosophical tradition of love rooted in the creative poetry and letters of the medieval troubadours. He names this form of love *amor* and distinguishes it from the Christian concept of *agape* and the neo-Platonic common good as that which is based on the earthly experience of the individuals involved. Campbell writes, “Our theologians still are writing of *agape* and *eros* and their radical opposition, as though these two were the final terms of the principle of ‘love’: the former, ‘charity,’ godly and spiritual, being ‘of men toward each other in a community,’ and the latter, ‘lust,’ natural and fleshly, being ‘the urge, desire and delight of sex’” (177). He thus sees *amor* as an alternative middle ground between these two extremes. He continues: “*Amor* is neither of the right-hand path (the sublimating spirit, the mind and the community of man), nor of the indiscriminate left (the spontaneity of nature, the mutual incitement of the phallus and the womb), but is the path directly before one, of the eyes and their message to the heart” (177). According to Campbell, this love is seated in the faculty of visual perception stirred by a creative dream. The subject of the following chapter is how this dream might be revived and reinvented through individuals recovering one another in love. Following this connection to the creative tradition and the conceptualization of Nussbaum, my argument will not suggest any real distinction between *eros* and *agape* or love between two individuals and the common good. Rather, I propose that the writers here are attempting to reclaim a space for love as *amor* on an individual, interpersonal basis that is necessary for the enlargement of social relations within a community. Badiou observes, “Love, like any process in search for truth, is essentially disinterested: its value resides in itself alone and goes beyond the immediate interests of the two individuals involved” (73).

In the following, I will look at three works that deal directly with models of love that are inadequate responses to contemporary times, which, I argue, are linked with Christianity, for

Cormac McCarthy; Plato, for J.M. Coetzee; and the patriarchal structures of desire, for Karen Finley. In each piece, failure holds a premium place; its object of critique is the idealization of love as fulfilling a preconceived sense of identity. As Badiou says, “Love focuses on the very being of the other, on the other as it has erupted, fully armed with its being, into my life thus disrupted and re-fashioned” (21). In this way, I believe, the writing (or performance in Finley’s case) is attempting to establish its own form, even archetype, of love appropriate to the time. This involves a great deal of risk with regard to difference, and, as I will explain, overcoming utopian ways of thinking that have dominated the previous century.

To begin, I will look at the romantic motif in Cormac McCarthy’s *No Country for Old Men* and suggest that the novel’s upsetting of generic conventions redefines the role of hero in narrative paradigms from Christianity and popular culture. I contend that Sheriff Bell’s defeat by evil on a mythological scale insists upon this redefinition as well as the promise that remains at the novel’s end. Then, I will consider the legacy of romance in J.M. Coetzee’s *Slow Man* and the conversation it has with multiple intertexts including the Bible, Miguel Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*, and Plato. In a different way, Coetzee puts forward a similar revision of romantic generic conventions: rather than offering readers an improbable love story, the text asserts its inability to do so and explores the reasons for this failing. What occurs, instead, is the protagonist’s intellectual and emotional development to a higher level of knowledge about “the hard road of loving,” as one of its intertextual characters, Elizabeth Costello, says (182). Then, I will consider Karen Finley’s performance piece *Make Love* as a biting critique of love as infantile desire. Through the popular persona of Liza Minnelli, Finley calls attention to the sickness of heart that has beset the American populace. This sickness, I argue, may be located in a generalized crisis of

masculinity as intimated by the powerful line, “George Bush’s mother is the father of this country.”

Thus I will show how each work puts forward a critique of different conceptions of love: heroic love, sacrificial love, and self-love. After exploring these critiques, I will consider in the concluding section how they offer alternative conceptual frameworks based on the acceptance of failure and vulnerability. I will consider, especially, Badiou’s understanding of love through difference. I argue that these alternatives recall Campbell’s description of *amor* as a middle point between purely bodily desires, the focus of Finley’s critique, and love that attempts to suppress its bodily power, the focus of Coetzee’s critique. This revision of love is expressed in Finley and Coetzee through an embrace of humour and humility. In McCarthy it is symbolized by the work of artistic labour, which endures despite its own limits, in a vision of love that never ceases to accompany brutal reality.

ROMANCE: NO COUNTRY FOR OLD MEN

The Bible is a divine comedy, with society gathered into one body at the end; the secular scripture is a human romance, and its ideals seem to be different. —Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture*

It may seem a bit unorthodox to read any Cormac McCarthy novel against the parameters of romance, never mind the bleak stuff of his later fiction. However, much criticism has noted a shift in McCarthy’s writing from so-called highbrow literary endeavours to more popular generic influences marked by the emergence of *No Country for Old Men* after a fairly long pause in

production.²³ Whether or not such a distinction has any significance for McCarthy himself, it is clear that he made the artistic decision to experiment with a new form that blends markedly different voices and styles of prose and which reflects an interest in popular culture that has hitherto gone unnoticed. This interest, I contend, sees the wish-fulfillment fantasies within popular culture along the same continuum as the myths of older ages. *No Country for Old Men* blends these two worlds seamlessly, thereby calling into question the structure of romance itself. As discussed in the previous chapter, Northrop Frye defines romance in *The Secular Scripture* as the “structural core of all fiction,” from classical antiquity to popular television soap operas, which is “man’s vision of his own life as a quest” (15). He explores this structure in greater depth following its classification in *The Anatomy of Criticism*, suggesting its sharp contrast from realism, which attempts to reproduce external reality: “Romance avoids the ambiguities of ordinary life, where everything is a mixture of good and bad, and where it is difficult to take sides or believe that people are consistent patterns of virtue or vice. The popularity of romance, it is obvious, has much to do with its simplifying of moral facts” (50). While there are many positive aspects of romance and the romantic mode that I outlined in the previous chapter, its tendency especially in popular literature towards moral simplicity is one of its great problems. By considering *No Country for Old Men* as a parody of romance, then, I do not mean to suggest that McCarthy wants to eliminate the imaginative impulse or do away with wishes altogether; rather, I will suggest that the novel demonstrates the incongruity that exists between the highly

²³ For an extended discussion of the novel’s reception as genre fiction, see Vincent Allan King, “‘What Have You Done. What Have You Failed to Do’: Aesthetic and Moral Complacency in Cormac McCarthy’s *No Country for Old Men*.” *Mississippi Quarterly: The Journal of Southern Cultures* 65.4 (2012): 533-56.

imaginative world of Sheriff Ed Tom Bell and the reality principle that Chigurh represents and which Bell must eventually confront, rather painfully. By starting with a critique of romantic structure and ending with an image of creative labour, the novel suggests that the great utopian promises of romance are no longer possible in a world that Chigurh inhabits. Bell's romantic vision has become a parody of itself, the falseness of which is confirmed by his inability to act within it. What remains instead is a humbler vision of the love that exists between individuals and of creative acts, which provides some hope for a distant future society.

Set in the year 1980, *No Country for Old Men* takes place during a historical rise in drug violence along the Mexican border and in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, five years following the final withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Vietnam (Cooper 18). In a conversation late in the novel one of the characters remarks, "This country was hard on people. But they never seemed to hold it to account. [...] All them young people. We dont know where half of em is buried at" (271). In this subtle way, the novel connects the recent sense of betrayal that citizens feel with a longer history of violence that remains unrecognized, suggesting that the blame has been wrongly displaced onto a foreign evil. Some critics have associated this invading presence with the sentiment of post-war America: "The anarchical violence of Anton Chigurh (motivated neither by greed nor by political agenda) becomes less the sign of one man's fear of a boogeyman and more the expression of an entire culture's anxiety about anarchy and a metaphorical foreign invasion" (Butler 43). Through the limited perspective of the protagonist, Sheriff Ed Tom Bell, the setting draws upon motifs found in both Western and Arthurian romances of a land ravaged by an unwelcome invader. Northrop Frye describes the plot structure of romance as follows: "A land ruled by a helpless old king is laid waste by a seamonster, to whom one young person after another is offered to be devoured, until the lot falls on the king's

daughter: at that point the hero arrives, kills the dragon, marries the daughter, and succeeds to the kingdom” (*Anatomy* 189). While there is no fabulous dragon in *No Country for Old Men*, the mythic, semi-human status of Chigurh, as I will draw out further on, underscores the magnitude of this destruction, which thrives in the mundane corporatization of the American west. The demonic ordinariness of this waste is communicated by the matter-of-fact style with which the murders are described. Critics have likened this descriptive style to a film script or piece of genre fiction because of the speed with which the sentences are read: “Bodies loaded on a truck: There were eight of them and they looked just like that. Dead bodies wrapped and taped” (169). Moreover, the lack of respect and care for the dead by the community signifies a general deterioration of morals.

No Country for Old Men has an aging king in the figure of Sheriff Bell, but his daughter, sadly, did not survive infancy. Bell’s dilemma is that the law is too old and feeble to handle the kind of evil it is up against and the would-be heroes have been morally corrupted. Bell’s first diary entry describes one young man he sent to execution for murdering his girlfriend in cold blood that makes him wonder if he is “some new kind” (1). He describes the young person’s eyes and reflects: “*They say the eyes are the windows to the soul. I dont know what them eyes was the windows to and I guess I’d as soon not know*” (2). This sentiment reflects Campbell’s observation that the eyes are the primary sign of the heart. In fact, the young have trouble even recognizing the waste in which they live. In his diary, Bell writes:

Because a lot of the time ever when I say anything about how the world is goin to hell in a handbasket people will just sort of smile and tell me I’m gettin old. That it’s one of the symptoms. But my feelin about that is that anybody that cant tell

the difference between rapin and murderin people and chewin gum has got a whole lot bigger of a problem than what I've got. (197)

The sense of a wasteland that Bell attempts to describe here is often dismissed by those younger than him as a sign of his aging mind. They are aware of his romantic longing for a past that may or may not have existed, when chewing gum in school was a measure of bad behaviour. The title's reference to Yeats' "Sailing to Byzantium" certainly confirms that Bell is the old man in the poem waiting to be "gather[ed] / into the artifice of eternity" (23-24). But as he points out, the fact that rape and murder have become ordinary problems says more about the existing generation than it does about one's past.

Within Bell's world is the parodic hero, Lewelyn Moss, an ordinary man whose fate is quickly changed when he discovers a briefcase full of money from a drug deal gone badly while hunting in the desert. The fact that we are introduced to Llewelyn as a hunter is significant because it supports many mythic conventions at once. The hunter in the open and empty desert is consistent with Western motifs that uphold vigilante justice amid lawlessness: "The visuals of *No Country for Old Men* effectively demythologize the lost West and its heroes—the hunter/warrior (Llewelyn Moss) and the Sheriff (Bell)" (Walsh 343). The hunting scene also recalls the figure of the hunter found in filmic depictions of the Vietnam War, such as *The Deer Hunter*, and goes even deeper to mythological structures of romance that have primarily erotic significance: "A knight rides off into a forest in pursuit of an animal, and as he disappears the dream atmosphere closes around him. [...] As we sink deeper into the dream, the quasi-sexual object of pursuit becomes the surrounding forest itself" (Frye, *Secular* 104). The fact that Moss—a name which reflects a forest—finds himself in a barren desert instead of a wooded

forest suggests that the imaginative world of romance is no longer available to us as readers. Furthermore, Moss cannot kill the animal but instead finds money as a suitable replacement. The event is shaped as a trial of sorts which Moss fails: presented with a great temptation, he thinks he can escape the consequences of his action, unseen except by a dying man who asks for water. Because the event has been witnessed, however, Moss's guilt returns him to the scene: "By this gesture of sympathy, Moss's fate, and that of his wife, is clearly foretold to informed readers of McCarthy's fiction" (Jarrett 38). In some sense, this is McCarthy's way of enforcing the reality principle on readers. What Moss does not yet know is that the bounty hunter hired to find the money is a ruthless killer known as Anton Chigurh, who has just escaped arrest and killed a deputy by strangling him with his handcuffs. The plot structure thus reverses the characters and their conventional values: instead of the good hero pursuing the evil dragon, we have a principled dragon pursuing a morally confused hero.

Moss's moral confusion is partly explained by the fact that he is a Vietnam War veteran, not a veteran, like Bell, of the Second World War. While Bell received a purple heart for his service, Moss had, in the words of his father, hippies "*spittin on him. Callin him a babykiller*" (294). Not only that, Moss told his father that he had given up visiting the families of his dead comrades because they looked at him enviously, wishing that he had died instead of their loved ones (294). In other words, the country that had welcomed Bell and Moss's father back from war has changed irrevocably. Moss's father explains, "*People will tell you it was Vietnam brought this country to its knees. But I never believed that. It was already in bad shape. Vietnam was just the icin on the cake. We didnt have nothing to give em to take over there*" (294-95). While Moss's father equates the emptiness that Moss's generation had with a lack of God, the belief is

left open by McCarthy to suggest that a certain frame of meaning—the narrative structure that had supported veterans like him and Bell—no longer coheres.

Thus, Moss's background contains no mythic origin story with promise of greatness. The only origin story comes from his wife, Carla Jean, of her dream that he would arrive for her one day in a Wal-Mart:

I didnt know who he was or what his name was or what he looked like. I just knew that I'd know him when I seen him. I kept a calendar and marked the days. Like when you're in jail. And on the ninety-ninth day he walked in and he asked me where the sportin goods was at and it was him. And I told him where it was at and he looked at me and went on. And directly he come back and he read my nametag and he said my name and he looked at me and he said: What time do you get off? And that was all she wrote. There was not no question in my mind. Not then, not now, not ever. (132)

On first reading I found in this little love story a welcome suggestion of meaning and intention amidst the randomness of Chigurh's violence. But on later readings it became clearer that the banality of the event was matched by the style of the prose, making the overall effect much diminished. The story can neither be read purely romantically, as Bell does, or bathetically, as some critics have,²⁴ the discord between such banal innocence, on the one hand, and such

²⁴ One critic interprets this scene as follows: "That Carla Jean dreams of a Wal-Mart romance marks not just how far late capitalism has encroached upon human psychology. In this bathetic passage, love becomes the fetishized by-product of consumer desire, a desire ludicrously ascribed to fate. Going in for some sporting goods, Moss emerges with a sporting wife—tagged and bagged" (Malewitz 729).

violence and greed, on the other, produces something closer to heart ache. Without a symbolic architecture to grant him greatness, the hero is wrested from “the comfort of mythic origins and the solace of seeing [his] plight as a divine punishment” (Walsh 339). McCarthy’s strategy in representing Moss’s struggle without mythic stature seems to long for a character that could invent his own symbolic architecture.

The mysterious quality of Chigurh in some way fulfills readers’ desire for a character with such mythic stature because his autonomy embodies something like Nietzsche’s *Übermensch*. John Llewelyn writes, “Nietzsche’s slave, like the slave of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, is preoccupied with how he is perceived by someone else and with whether he achieves recognition. [...] Nietzsche’s master, on the other hand, is indifferent to the opinion others have of him” (644). For Nietzsche, man does not want pleasure and the avoidance of pain, as Freudian psychology would have it, but power (Llewelyn 646). Chigurh’s seductiveness stems from his unfeeling commitment to this principle, which is to balance the debts of others. Another bounty hunter, Wells, describes Chigurh as a man with “principles that transcend money or drugs or anything like that” (153). His terror thus resides in his role as the harbinger of non-transcendental existence. Nietzsche writes, “My formula for greatness in a human being is *amor fati*: that one wants nothing other than it is, not in the future, not in the past, not in all eternity. Not merely to endure that which happens of necessity, still less to dissemble it—all idealism is untruthfulness in the face of necessity—but to *love* it” (647, emphasis in original). Many scholars have compared Chigurh’s intellectual presence to Judge Holden’s in *Blood Meridian*, a character who is known for his seductive nihilistic discourses. Physically, Chigurh is described in terms that give him a foreign, otherworldly quality. The friendly store clerk notices that his eyes are “blue as lapis. At once glistening and totally opaque. Like wet stones” (56). Indeed, blue light hangs

over the novel's entire reality, which suggests that the world the characters inhabit is split off from an older age marked by fire and, through the significance of Yeats' poem, eternity: "In apocalyptic symbolism the fiery bodies of heaven, sun, moon, and stars, are all inside the universal divine and human body. [...] The golden tree with its mechanical bird in *Sailing to Byzantium* identifies vegetable and mineral worlds in a form reminiscent of alchemy" (Frye, *Anatomy* 146). The airiness of Chigurh's method of killing, which is distinctive because the stun gun leaves no bullet trace, suggests that the centre of human existence formerly occupied by the belief in a transcendental god has been violently removed (78).

When Chigurh asks a store clerk, for instance, to flip a coin to determine whether or not Chigurh will kill him, he seems to relish the act's symbolic randomness. But Chigurh does not see this choice as absolutely random, and neither should readers. It is an enactment of multiple conditions and agents that only appear predetermined. Chigurh tells the man to keep the coin in a separate pocket because "it's [his] lucky coin":

Anything can be an instrument, Chigurh said. Small things. Things you wouldn't even notice. They pass from hand to hand. People don't pay attention. And then one day there's an accounting. And after that nothing is the same. Well, you say. It's just a coin. For instance. Nothing special there. What could that be an instrument of? You see the problem. To separate the act from the thing. As if the parts of some moment in history might be interchangeable with the parts of some other moment. How could that be? Well, it's just a coin. Yes. That's true. Is it?
(57)

The coin serves Chigurh as an instrument of "accounting," the measurement of this man's life and what he owes. On another level, though, the coin's literal significance is also important.

Later on in the novel, Bell mentions the biblical figure of mammon, the false god of worldly treasures (298). It appears in Matthew: “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (6:19–21, 24). In Chigurh’s mind, people and money are interchangeable, as when he tells Moss: “You bring me the money and I’ll let [Carla Jean] walk. Otherwise she’s accountable” (184). In the film adaptation, Ethan and Joel Cohen emphasize the parallelism of Chigurh and Moss by arranging two back-to-back scenes in which they bandage their respective wounds. Thus we could say they both serve the principle of mammon: the unbridled love of the self and its expansion. By giving the most charisma and power to Chigurh, though, McCarthy also plays on the popular myth of the anti-hero. Look at what he really is, McCarthy seems to say, in all his ugliness.

In the traditional quest-romance, according to Frye, the libido searches for “fulfilment that will deliver it from the anxieties of reality but will still contain that reality”; therefore, “the quest-romance is the victory of fertility over the waste land. Fertility means food and drink, bread and wine, body and blood, the union of male and female” (*Anatomy* 193). In *No Country for Old Men* there is no such victory. The sense is that all potentially good men, such as Moss, have been corrupted by the material world and are thus absent of spiritual power. The truth Chigurh reveals to Carla Jean is that her husband made several choices that led to her death. Tragically, Carla Jean dies knowing Moss chose his life over her own and died, stupidly, helping another woman. The contrasting imagery throughout the novel of coldness and warmth suggests that Moss has made a kind of crossing after picking up the briefcase of money:

When he woke it was 1:06 by the digital clock on the bedside table. He lay there looking at the ceiling, the raw glare of the vaporlamp outside bathing the bedroom

in a cold and bluish light. Like a winter moon. Or some other kind of moon.
 Something stellar and alien in its light that he hadn't come to feel comfortable
 with. Anything but sleep in the dark. (22)

This passage recalls the blueness that seems to penetrate all of the characters in the novel. It confirms that the light of the moon is not the divine light that Frye had described in relation to alchemy and the title's poem but a light nonetheless that appears alienated from Moss. Later on, he tells the girl he picked up on the side of the road: "You dont start over. That's what it's about. Ever step you take is forever. You cant make it go away" (227). And this is confirmed by what he tells Carla Jean during their last phone conversation: "I aint makin no promises [...] That's how you get hurt" (66). Again, McCarthy emphasizes that the reality as lived by Moss and Chigurh does not hold any occasion for redemption because neither one imagines his own redemptive possibilities.

This leaves us with the romantic longings of the novel's true protagonist. Against his better knowledge, Sheriff Bell believes he can capture Chigurh in the hope of atoning for an earlier failing he felt he made to his community. He confides to his Uncle Ellis that during World War Two in Germany he saved himself from an explosion, abandoning the rest of his regiment: "I said that I was twenty-one years old and I was entitled to one mistake, particularly if I could learn from it and become the sort of man I had it in my mind to be. Well, I was wrong about all of that. Now I aim to quit and a good part of it is just knowin that I wont be called on to hunt this man" (282). In trying to become the ideal man he imagines Bell fears being corrupted by the struggle. In his first diary entry he writes that there is "another view of the world with other eyes to see it" and that his duty is to preserve this sight: "I think a man would have to put his soul at hazard. And I wont do that. I think now that maybe I never would" (2).

Bell imagines that this view of the world lives on in the image of a stone water trough he observed in Germany during the war:

I dont know how long it had been there. A hundred years. Two hundred. You could see the chisel marks in the stone. It was hewd out of solid rock and it was about six foot long and maybe a foot and a half wide and about that deep. Just chiseled out of the rock. And I got to thinkin about the man that done that. That country had not had a time of peace much of any length at all that I knew of. I've read a little of the history of it since and I aint sure it ever had one. But this man had set down with a hammer and chisel and carved out a stone water trough to last ten thousand years. Why was that? What was it that he had faith in? [...] And I have to say that the only thing I can think is that there was some sort of promise in his heart. And I dont have no intentions of carvin a stone water trough. But I would like to be able to make that kind of promise. (307-08)

Bell chooses this image precisely because it stands out against the fact of Germany's long history of war. Someone before Bell's time had faith in himself and his progeny that the bonds of human love would endure throughout time despite the reality of war that existed around him. That promise is the same commitment that appears in Bell's dream of his father, who "was carryin fire in a horn the way people used to do" on a horse riding through a pass of mountains, "fixin to make a fire somewhere out there in all that dark and all that cold and I knew that whenever I got there he would be there" (309). It is most likely that the image of fire McCarthy draws upon in Bell's dream is associated with the origins of civilization, since fire is "the only of all the elements that man can produce on his own, which holds for him the sign of his resemblance to the gods" (Biedermann 201). These two images of creative labour and the labour of love suggest

a renewed vision of the romantic impulse, not its complete disavowal. Such a vision entails the abandoning of the wish for immortality and the love of one's fate, as advocated earlier by the words of Friedrich Nietzsche.

Fredric Jameson's identification of romance as the place of refuge from the reality principle intimates that responses to the order of neoliberalism are largely romantic and unrealizable. That is why, for instance, resistance efforts against neoliberalism are marked by the nihilism of terrorists like Chigurh or the unrealizable dreams of Ed Tom Bell. But rather than seeing the title of the novel as an emblem of romantic defeat, I believe we should read it as a meditation on preparing for mortal death in a place without redemption except through creative action. The speaker in the poem decides that his true home is in Byzantium, where the "artifice of eternity" (24) is created in "such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make / Of hammered gold and gold enameling" (27-28). Artifice, then, is not meant in the pejorative sense that it sometimes has of falseness and dissembling but as a monument to human intellect and creation, which of course lives beyond the mortal life of its creator. The ultimate meaning of this intertextual element goes beyond its associations with Bell to a reflection on narrative itself. The suggestion is that the stories one tells in literature must recognize the limits of reality while somehow preserving the imaginative kernel that looks just beyond those limits. Before drawing out the contours of this imaginative kernel, however, I want to discuss a related critique of romance that will also point towards the necessity of the reality principle.

ROMANCE: *SLOW MAN*

J.M. Coetzee's 2007 novel *Slow Man* addresses the tensions between love and care from the mythic legacies of Christianity and Greek philosophy. The initial plot surrounds the experience of loss and the vulnerability that comes with age: Paul Rayment is hit by a car on his bicycle on Magill Road and suffers the amputation of his leg, from the knee down. Rather than seeing his survival as an opportunity to live life anew, however, Paul gives in to a kind of despair, refusing to get a prosthetic limb and thus confining himself to his house. His world shrinks and he falls in love with his caretaker, Marijana, whom he offers to support financially in order that her son attend the school of his choice. When Marijana asks Paul why he would offer such a big gift, he declares his love to her. After this crucial moment, the story is suddenly deconstructed by the appearance of its supposed author, who repeats the first lines of the novel to Paul from her own notebook. Her name, readers of Coetzee will immediately recognize, is Elizabeth Costello, the eponymous character of Coetzee's previous novel. The author claims to have been summoned by Paul's dreary life and his "unsuitable passion." Thus the novel sets up a meta-textual discussion about desire's unwieldiness and the suffering entailed in one's attempts to restrain it.

From the very opening, the protagonist's life-changing event has the biblical resonance of a fall: "The blow catches him from the right, sharp and surprising and painful, like a bolt of electricity, lifting him up off the bicycle" (1). Many critics have noted the significance of Paul's name, which he shares with the converted Saint who underwent a similar fall from his horse and which he understood to be an act of God. However, the association is complicated by the

deliberate failure of the novel to elevate Paul Rayment to the status of St. Paul: “While the accident that opens *Slow Man* inevitably recalls this moment, the radical diminishment of Paul’s life and his failure to extend his love into the world underline his inevitable remove from such a higher meaning” (Vermeulen 663). Indeed, the word that comes to Paul while he is being taken to the hospital is the French *frivole*, his mother tongue, meaning frivolous: “A message is being typed on a rose-pink screen that trembles like water each time he blinks and is therefore quite likely his own inner eyelid. E-R-T-Y, say the letters, then F-R-I-V-O-L, then a trembling E [...] *Frivole*. Something like panic sweeps over him” (3). The message seems to appear external to Paul though encoded in his body, appearing in his rose-pink eyelids. But there is a sense, too, that the feeling comes to him because he has no relation to the strangers who are looking after him. The first questions he confronts after learning of his amputation come from the impersonal forms he must fill out: “Who and where are his family, the papers ask, and how should they be informed? [...] He is unmarried: unmarried, single, solitary, alone” (9). In sum, the panic that rushes over Paul is because he “realizes his worthlessness the second he flies into the air” (Amir 72). Such worthlessness is not, as Paul thinks, because he is unmarried and therefore alone; it is because there is no longer an adequate practice of care among individuals in Paul’s thoroughly secular society.

Paul’s great error, therefore, is thinking that he lives in another age, one that more closely resembles the older Christian one. He rejects getting a prosthesis because it is too unnatural, too technological. He responds to the unwelcoming question on the form with the bitterness of a child: “Those into whose lives you are born do not pass away, he would like to inform whoever composed the question. You bear them with you, as you hope to be borne by those who come after you” (8). He falls in love with his Croatian caretaker, Marijana, because she embodies the

ideal shape of a woman from the same continent of his birthright, the so-called old world: “intuitive,” “decent,” empathetic, maternal, sturdy (33). He imagines Marijana’s care for his stump as an act of sex—“A man and a woman on a warm afternoon behind locked doors”—then speculates on a phrase he recalls from catechism class: “*There shall be no more man and woman, but . . .* But what—what shall we be when we are beyond man and woman? Impossible for the mortal mind to conceive. One of the mysteries” (33). We learn that the catechism is from St. Paul, his namesake, who is “explaining what the afterlife will be like, when all shall love with a pure love, as God loves, only not as fiercely, as consumingly” (33). Paul encapsulates in these words the traditional Christian tension between erotic love and Christian love, that is, the conflict between the bodily expression of desire and the highest aim of agape, the self-sacrificial love that Christ offered. Arne de Boever adds another conceptual distinction of importance, observing, “*Slow Man* attempts to separate a Christian notion of care from the care practiced by the welfare state. But, as Paul quickly learns, this care is not easily practiced. Indeed, we might have entirely forgotten how to do so. How to distinguish it, for example, from ‘love’?” (28). Indeed, Paul reflects during his experience with his social worker on the vagaries of the welfare state: “If in this brave new world the crippled or the infirm or the indigent or the homeless wish to eat from rubbish bins and spread their bedroll in the nearest entranceway, let them do so: let them huddle tight, and if they wake up alive the next morning, good on them” (23).

Like Sheriff Bell, Paul wishes he were a man of another time and worries in his old age about never having reproduced. While contemplating his newfound desire for Marijana, he realizes:

He, alas, is no spirit being as yet, but a man of some kind, the kind that fails to perform what man is brought into the world to perform: seek out his other half,

cleave to her, and bless her with his seed – seed which, in the allegory or perhaps the anagogy unfolded by Brother Aloysius, he forgets which is which, represents God's word. A man not wholly a man, then: a half-man, an after-man, like an after-image; the ghost of a man looking back in regret on time not well used. (33-34)

For this reason, Paul wants to translate his desire for Marijana into a form of love that aims at self-sacrifice but he fails to see his stakes in the matter. He offers to pay for her son's private school tuition but cannot manage proposing the gift without involving himself: "He wants to own Marijana's motherhood and family, but what he really wants is to enjoy an extended version of himself by playing the role of a passive guardian. In his letter to Miroslav, he presents himself as a ghost, a being without a solid body, yet with obvious patriarchal authority" (Yoo 242). When pressed by Marijana for a reason for this great offer, he confesses, "I love you. That is all. I love you and I want to give you something" (76). Indeed, he is excited by the idea that she might harbour similar feeling: "In the books that his mother used to order from Paris when he was still a child [...] it would have been written that Marijana's lip curled with scorn while her eye gleamed with secret triumph" (76). Just as readers are expecting this unusual love story to develop, Elizabeth Costello, Coetzee's meta-fictional Australian author from two previous novels, arrives on the scene.

In Costello's opinion, Paul is slow because he does not take control of his desire. He vacillates between thinking of his love for Marijana as an innocent, benevolent presence, which he compares to the Godfather, and desiring an intimate, sexual relationship with her. Costello proposes a different subject for his affection, a woman also named Marianna, whom he saw in an elevator and had an erotic dream about; Elizabeth tells him she has been hideously blinded, has

lost her husband as a result, and is suffering with sexual longing. She arranges for them to make love, blindfolding Paul so that Marianna will not be exposed to his gaze. It does not go well; he finds that he cannot trust his experience with the blind woman because he could not see her: “Why does love, even such love as he claims to practice, need the spectacle of beauty to bring it to life? What, in the abstract, do shapely legs have to do with love, or for that matter with desire?” (149). Paul’s reflection, like Bell’s in *No Country*, recalls Joseph Campbell’s observation that love begins with the faculty of sight for its discriminating powers: “As in the poetry of the troubadours, so in Gottfried’s *Tristan*, love is born of the eyes, in the world of day, in a moment of aesthetic arrest” (186). While Paul has seen this Marianna before, he grasps intuitively that the reason he does not desire her is because he has already chosen Marijana. In his post-coital conversation with the other Marianna he asks her why they should let Costello make their choices. Unfortunately, he realizes, desire is not so easily channeled into more suitable objects.

In this way, we come to understand Paul’s dilemma, which Costello believes is like dithering in a purgatory of non-action: will he continue to hope he can be a purely positive presence in the life of Marijana or will he make a decision about his own life, whether he is a minor or a major character? Maria López observes the intertextual elements of Miguel de Cervante’s *Don Quixote* in the novel with interesting insights, linking Paul’s accident with Quixote’s comical falls from his horse Rocinate. She notes that the novel’s “quixotic intertextual dimension is made explicit when Elizabeth Costello calls Paul Rayment ‘my knight of the doleful countenance,’ a name that Don Quixote receives several times in Cervantes’s novel” (92). Importantly, Paul does not regard himself as a quixotic character: “Passion: foreign territory; a comical but unavoidable affliction like mumps, that one hopes to undergo while still

young, in one of its milder, less ruinous varieties, so as not to catch it more seriously later on” (45-6). Nonetheless, Paul declares his love in the fashion of a modern knight, interpreting his beloved’s response with the fictional cues he gleaned as a child from his mother’s pulp romances. As well, *Slow Man*’s meta-fictional texture, like *Don Quixote*’s, reminds us that the novel form originated from the adventures of medieval romance.

Thus Costello urges Paul to acknowledge his ambivalence in order to discover what, ultimately, he seeks from loving Marijana. In their Socratic-like conversations, Costello exhorts Paul to “push”: “Push the mortal envelope [...] Magill Road, the very portal to the abode of the dead: how did you feel as you tumbled through the air? Did the whole of your life flash before you? How did it seem to you in retrospect, the life you were about to depart?” (83). But Paul can only respond that he felt “sad” and “frivolous” (83), which makes Elizabeth feel queasy: “I’ll be with you a while yet,” she tells him as she lies down (84). Paul’s feelings for Marijana are no doubt misplaced; his affliction of desire comes from realizing, too late, that he has lived an unfulfilled life. In his desperation he believes he can find others over whom he can extend his life and legacy. Costello implores him to think more deeply about what this offer will mean for the others involved and the ruin a romantic relationship with Marijana will bring on the family: “The fact that she asks him questions suggests the Socratic didactic method, and her asking him to ‘push’ alludes to her role of Socratic midwife, trying to help Rayment give birth to virtuous ideas, even though he is ‘merely’ a fictional creation” (Northover 55).

When specific discussions about Marijana fail to inspire Paul’s thoughts, Costello turns to the more abstract subject of perception:

It comes at a cost, the simple heart you so desire, the simple way of seeing tworld.

Look at me. What do you see?” [...] An old woman by the side of the river

Torrens feeding the ducks. An old woman who happens to be running out of clean underwear. An old woman who irritates you with what you think of as her sly innuendoes.

‘But the reality is more complicated than that, Paul. In reality you see a great deal more – see it and then block it out. Light of a certain stridency, for instance. A figure trapped by that light beside the softly fluent water. Lances of light that stab at her, threaten to pierce her through.

‘Unnecessary complication? I don’t think so. An expansion. Like breathing. Breathe in, breathe out. Expand, contract. The rhythm of life. (158)

The analogy she offers has many resonances in the novel: Paul collects black and white photographs of Australian immigrants from the twentieth century which he plans to donate to the State Library after his death. He collects them for the purpose of documenting history, having given up his hobby as a photographer after the emergence of colour. Paul prefers the certainty of black and white photographs and his sense that the images are “fixed, immutable” (64), the darkroom process a place of birth: “As the ghostly image emerged beneath the surface of the liquid, as veins of darkness on the paper began to knit together and grow visible, he would sometimes experience a little shiver of ecstasy, as though he were present at the day of creation” (65). He dislikes color photographs because their reproduction is mechanical, “a *techne* of images without substance, images that could flash through the ether without residing anywhere” (65). Like color photographs, Paul distrusts words and stories because they “change shape all the time” (64). His discourses with Elizabeth Costello irritate him because they complicate the narrative that Paul would like to maintain for himself; in this way Costello is not so much an author who invents Paul’s life from the outside but one of his internal, contradicting voices. The

letters that appeared on his eyelids during the accident were part of the life-story that Paul is writing for himself (“F-R-I...”) and which Costello later reads, because, she tells him, “*you came to me*” (81, my italics). For these reasons, Paul’s narrative, and life, is stalled.

Costello, after all, cannot persuade Paul to live the romantic life that she desires for him, either in pursuing the Marijana he loves or the other Marianna or, even, in touring the Australian continent with Costello herself. She implores, “*We only live once*, says Alonso, says Emma [Bovary], *so let’s give it a whirl!*” (229). As Jae Eun Yoo has observed expertly, Paul does not decide for himself on a course of action until he experiences a deeper understanding of what it means to love another: “Only when Paul’s monologue is interrupted through a contact with the Other’s language can he be freed from the incessant yet abortive effort to conceive and present his body as a fertile young man” (244). The novel’s unexpected climax occurs, belatedly, when Paul and Costello visit the house of Marijana Jokić to ask that her son, Drago, return one of Paul’s original photographs, which he had doctored by replacing the face of one of the immigrants with his little sister. Paul is grossly offended by Drago’s behaviour but Marijana dismisses the injury as nothing more than a kid playing: “Is just images. Play with images on computer, what is thief in that? Is modern thing. Images, who they belong to?” (249). When he rejects her offer to show him copies on her son’s computer it becomes clear to her that Paul is merely ignorant of technology, and she smiles: “You a good man, Paul. But you get too lonely in your flat” (250). She tells him that she understands loneliness from when she was in Australia for the first time with her newborn baby and how easy it is for one to become negative. She searches for a word in English to describe this state of mind. “Very gloomy?” Paul asks. She replies, “No, I don’t know how you say it. You grab. Anything come, you grab” (250). Moments later, she tells him: “Gloom. Is funny word. In Croatia we say *ovaj glumi*, doesn’t mean he is gloomy, no,

means he is pretending, he is not real. But you not pretending, eh?" (251). When Paul affirms this, Marijana kisses him once on each cheek.

Two things occur during this exchange that are important to note. First, Marijana realizes Paul's ignorance about the harmlessness in copying photographs and is comforted by the fact that it has merely been a misunderstanding between them; thus she recognizes Paul's difference from her and can appreciate his perspective on its own terms. Secondly, she offers Paul empathy: she, too, has experienced loneliness and forgives him for "grab[bing]," as she puts it, frankly. Her mistranslation of the word *gloomy* reveals her own difference from him and at the same time shows her sincere sympathy for his suffering. The kisses she gives him constitute a moment of shared understanding about this difference: "It is the very difference—the untranslatability of the two languages—that makes their interaction so fruitful" (Yoo 248). After this encounter, Paul is able to dismiss Costello, finally and absolutely: "He puts on his glasses again, turns, takes a good look at her. In the clear late-afternoon light he can see every detail, every hair, every vein. He examines her, then he examines his heart. 'No,' he says at last, 'this is not love. This is something less,'" then kisses her goodbye "in the formal manner he was taught as a child, left right left" (263). The novel ends with Paul bidding Costello farewell, suggesting that his story finishes with the abandonment of love understood narrowly as desire: "The pleasures this path confers appear ultimately to reside in an ethical disposition of renunciation, a disposition brought about through a free act of love for another human being" (Mehigan 205). Paul's interaction with Marijana allows him to respect her as an individual with her own life and needs, moving him to another level of love.

As critics have observed, the novel's intertextual resonances also include philosophical discourses on love from Plato:

A memory comes back to him of the cover of a book he used to own, a popular edition of Plato. It showed a chariot drawn by two steeds, a black steed with flashing eyes and distended nostrils representing the base appetites, and a white steed of calmer mien representing the less easily identifiable nobler passions. Standing in the chariot, gripping the reins, was a young man with a half-bared torso and Grecian nose and a fillet around his brow, representing presumably the self, that which calls itself *I*. (53)

Paul is referring to an image that comes out of *Phaedrus*, in which Socrates describes the soul as a chariot with two winged horses; the souls of the gods have two well-behaved horses, thus making their flight into heaven smooth and effortless, but the souls of men have one unruly horse that weighs them down. The struggle between these two horses is particularly pronounced whenever the soul encounters something it desires, such as a beloved (Plato, *Phaedrus*). The import of Plato's text suggests the metaphor offered by Martha Nussbaum of love's ascent: "The aspiring lover climbs a ladder from the quotidian love from which she began, with all its difficulties, to an allegedly higher and more fulfilling love" (469). Paul Rayment's self-image could not be further from this ideal, however. He imagines his own soul as "seated on a wagon hitched to a mob of nags and drays that huff and puff [...] After sixty years of waking up every blessed morning, munching their ration of oats, pissing and shitting, then being harnessed for the day's haul, Paul Rayment's team will have had enough" (53). The ending of *Slow Man* implies that Paul has indeed ascended to a higher realm of knowledge about others and himself, though that knowledge never forgets the aging body in which it is embodied. In this way, the text does not reject the powers of erotic love but rather shows how it resides on the same continuum as compassion. Unlike *No Country for Old Men*, then, *Slow Man* does not entirely discard its

mythic heritage. Whereas McCarthy's text denies the possibility of heroic action and heroic archetypes, Coetzee's text merely critiques Paul's superficial understanding of love as charity. As I will discuss in the conclusion, Paul could be one more guest at the banquet of Plato's *Symposium*, just another misguided friend among Socrates' company. Nonetheless, both McCarthy and Coetzee hold the ego responsible for such ideals. As Elizabeth Costello tells Paul: "We cannot love by an act of the will, Paul. We have to learn. That is why souls descend from their realm on high and submit to being born again: so that, as they grow up in our company, they can lead us along the hard road of loving" (182). Paul's fall from his bicycle symbolically reinforces what Costello is trying to impart, namely, to embrace this grounding in all its humility (imagery to which I will return in the conclusion). For Coetzee, then, the process of love entails a large degree of selflessness, selflessness that must be distinguished from worship.

LOVE AS SICKNESS: MAKE LOVE

I have suggested that both *No Country for Old Men* and *Slow Man* use the novel form to upend romantic conventions about heroism and sacrifice, respectively, and that this critique revises cultural norms regarding the concept of love using failure as the basis of this revision. I turn, now, to a markedly different critique with Karen Finley's performance piece, *Make Love*. It may seem unusual to juxtapose two well-respected novelists with a performer who has been consistently controversial, having once sued the National Endowment for the Arts for rescinding a grant for political reasons ("Finley, Karen" 195). However, Finley's cabaret-style mourning piece, *Make Love*, offers a parallel critique of worn-out romantic forms while maintaining a

redemptive position through the articulation of love. No doubt borrowing the 1960s hippie mantra, “Make love, not war,” the performance perfectly captures the dynamic I have been exploring throughout this dissertation between cruelty and love. In an interview Finley said, “We’re really scared of our own sexuality[,] which is no longer a sexuality of love but a sexuality of violence” (Schechner 153). Finley’s previous work focused on the perimeters of (mostly male) desire, taking forms of performance such as striptease and adult entertainment to extremes that often provoke discomfort and even disgust. Her decision to use cabaret as the form for her post-9/11 performance series suggests an interest in the underground origins of entertainment pictured in such works as Christopher Isherwood’s *Berlin Stories*, and her use of Liza Minnelli’s persona in the film adaptation *Cabaret* deepens this connection to a tradition of political resistance within American identity.

Unlike the plays I have explored previously, *Make Love* is not a published text intended for reading. Rather, the script to which I refer in these pages as well as the impressions I noted while watching a recorded documentation are only two iterations of the series of performances that took place and evolved over time, the ephemerality of which can hardly be reproduced. For Peggy Phelan, this is the unique nature of performance that scholarship must recognize: “To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology. Performance’s being [...] becomes itself through disappearance” (146). The difficulty of writing about performance, then, as Jill Dolan has suggested, is “to make it live well beyond itself, to hold it visually in memory, to evoke it with words, and to share it widely, so that its effects and potential might be known” (9).

The particular nature of *Make Love* as a performance has much political potential and significance. Dolan writes of performance’s utopian dimension as the ability to form temporary

communities within the audience. She cites anthropologist Victor Turner's notion of "communitas," in which "audiences or participants feel themselves become part of the whole in an organic, spiritual way; spectators' individuality becomes finely attuned to those around them, and a cohesive if fleeting feeling of belonging to the group bathes the audience" (11). Beginning first as *The Distribution of Empathy*, the performances that became known as *Make Love* ran every Tuesday evening after the September 11, 2001 attacks at The Cutting Room in New York City. Amid the raw emotions that resulted from this public massacre, the performance space appeared to Finley as a rich place for individuals to gather and feel: "I would start the performance by walking through the audience and they would give their firsthand accounts of witnessing 9/11. [...] Hearing stories like that, in this small room, was very intimate and close, profound and cathartic" (Finley 52). Eventually, however, Finley realized that her own public persona was getting in the way of her goals for the piece, which were to experience "the emotional power [of] *schadenfreude*, the joy in hearing others' misery":

I decided to use drag, impersonation, and Liza [Minnelli] as a known archetype, a phenomenon. Liza, as an imaginary creature, a goddess, diva to project onto and live through, to experience through her. Liza, as a parody, as an artistic device to make information less threatening. [...] Liza becomes a symbol of a safety zone in between our dangerous feelings and our neurotic defenses; it saves the audience from feeling a hysterical paralysis response. (53)

The persona of Liza Minnelli not only provides a disarming vehicle through which various emotions can be felt and explored; it also calls to mind the psychic fracturing of the American populace and the very public process of rehabilitation associated with this persona. Most of all, she is a perfect symbol of New York City.

Make Love is a narrative about getting on a plane shortly after September 11 which reveals the mental instability of its narrator through digressive vignettes, songs, and poems with a cast of nine, sometimes ten, versions of Liza Minnelli: Palladium Liza, Cabaret Liza, Rehab Liza, Fucked-up Liza, Living-the-Legend-Most-Liza, Hip-Replacement-Liza, and so on. It opens with a piano player “dressed in Bob Mackie drag, in reference to Liza Minnelli” playing lounge music which turns into American war tunes (54). One reviewer reports, “There were men in fishnet stockings (making like Sally Bowles in “Cabaret”) and ashen-faced, pixie-coiffed women in hospital gowns (embodiments of Liza in rehab), and a Liza costumed in skeletal remains, her black-lined eyes now resembling empty sockets (Liza in the afterlife)” (Horwitz 32). The singer appears and begins to sing, followed by the “Liza interpreters,” each of whom says the following line with her own twist: “It was such a beautiful day for a tragedy” (54). After commencing with the song “On a Clear Day,” Karen Finley, dressed as another Liza, begins telling the story about her unusual ride in a taxicab on her way to the airport.

The cab driver tells her that there will be another terrorist attack: “You are going to die when you are going to die. When it’s your turn to die it’s your turn to die. You could be next” (54). Finley takes up this encounter as a distorted attempt to connect with a fellow New Yorker that ultimately fails. In the language that Americans know best, she responds with a flurry of stream-of-conscious prose that mocks the consumerism of many upper class New Yorkers:

I can get myself an appointment for a high colonic to relieve the stress of the tragedy and if there are no appointments available I will settle for a wheat grass enema and if I hurry I will be in time for the organic pumpkins in the open air market. I have my yoga mat under my arm. The yoga mat is in my uterus. I have National Public Radio in my pussy. I have Terry Gross in my vulva. I have my

sea salt mask scrub exfoliate deep tissue acupuncture chiropractic raw food bar
 shiatsu massage and a mani pedi and I will buy a selection of Birkenstocks in teal
 cranberry charcoal and sage and the candles rosemary thyme rose lavender
 marigold of aromatherapy will take the edge off... (55).

Like the incongruent frames of reference that Bell and Paul draw upon, Finley-as-Liza's response to violence is to grasp at something to love. Her panicked response lamentably confirms bell hooks' supposition that "lovelessness is a boon to consumerism" (47). At a safe distance from personal experience, we can laugh at the hyperbolic line "I can settle for a wheat grass enema" and absurdities like "the yoga mat is in my uterus." But when we reach more familiar references such as National Public Radio and Terry Gross, the safe distance begins to shrink and Finley forces us to consider what the difference is, ultimately, between listening to public radio and having a high colonic, for both involve a cycle of consumption that is never satisfied. That is, in Finley's world, the quaint idea of romance has been replaced with the idea of love as a product, what Alain Badiou has characterized as a "safety-first concept," "love comprehensively insured against all risks" (6).

Eventually, Finley-as-Liza acknowledges the uninvited intimacy that this encounter stirs. She says, "The backseat became an analyst couch the backseat became my lover's bed the backseat became nothing but scents of leather ox-blood a giant pair of boots. If you want to fuck me I need a pair of boots size 9 and a leather jacket" (55). Finley's response to the cab driver suggests that he is eroticizing their encounter by invoking death. The connection she makes is reminiscent of the sentiment found in sixteenth-century carpe diem poetry, an exclusively male tradition whose goal is to seduce a young virgin into premarital sex. And her mention of a lover's bed calls attention to the lack of romantic vision that surrounds her. By invoking aggression

rather than love, the cab driver does not inspire what Campbell calls *amor*. All that remains of love is desire: “We all take lovers and we all all all want the desire the sex the heat passion fuckhot heat want no name no name sex” (63). Finley underscores the pure physicality of this kind of sexuality, which stems from, in her own words, a sexuality of violence. Interestingly, the kind of encounter she describes attempts to do away with the faculty of sight that is so important to *amor*. Indeed, it is very far from the vision told by Gottfried in the letters of Abelard and Heloise: “Few are those who have been confirmed in that knowledge of its ubiquity which antiquity called *gnosis* and the Orient calls *bodhi*: full awakening to the crystalline purity of the bed or ground of one’s own and the world’s true being” (Campbell 66). There is no insight to be found in Finley’s “no name sex,” only the expression of raw, overwhelming emotions.

By invoking the relationship between love and war in the title as well as the intertextual reference to *Berlin Stories*, Finley suggests that love’s revival is a necessary antidote to war. In love’s absence she implies that our consumerist fascination with desire and satisfaction has obfuscated its real potential in fighting the grounds for war. In order to overcome this problem, we must look to the source of love’s absence at the end of the twentieth century. In *All About Love*, a book published only a year before the September 11 attacks, bell hooks puts forth a historical hypothesis about the failure of the radical antiwar movement of the 1960s. She writes:

Much has been made of the fact that so many sixties radicals went on to become hardcore capitalists, profiting by the system they once critiqued and wanted to destroy. But no one assumes responsibility for the shift in values that made the peace and love culture turn toward the politics of profit and power. That shift came about because the free love that flourished in utopian communal hippie enclaves, where everyone was young and carefree, did not take root in the daily

lives of ordinary working and retired people. Young progressives committed to social justice who had found it easy to maintain radical politics when they were living on the edge, on the outside, did not want to do the hard work of changing and reorganizing our existing system in ways that would affirm the values of peace and love, or democracy and justice. They fell into despair. And that despair made capitulation to the existing social order the only place of comfort. (121)

It is possible that Finley's self-expressed "nod to queer theory" goes even further than hooks in recalling the free love movement (Calhoun 26). *Make Love* suggests that women's sexual liberation has not been accompanied or sustained by an education in the art of love. That is, by adopting the framework of patriarchal desire, women have not truly liberated sexuality but merely fought to be in positions of domination. A true liberation of love would call for the destruction of the will to power, much like a true internationalist politics, as Moishe Postone says, would need to disavow the logic of supporting counter-hegemons.

Perceptively, Finley observes the absence of love playing out on the wider level of politics, too. In the opening of the piece she hints at the direction the performance will take by asking, "Remember when the problem was who is sucking Clinton's dick!! Would somebody please suck the president's dick for world peace?" (54). The implication is that President Bush's desire to go to war is the result of being sexually frustrated in a patriarchal society whose ideal is power. Thus she pushes the sexual undertones of the sudden changes taking place in the U.S. to their rational extremes: "Security. Oh, I can't wait to be searched. [...] Searching my skin, the folds of my body, under my breasts, up my thighs. In my ass. Up my ass" (57). Many of us will have forgotten what it was like to go through U.S. airport security before September 11, 2001. In

the manner and voice of an evangelical sermon she continues, telling us, “Dick Cheney has a sick, broken heart”:

Our country is a national S and M torture chamber. The heightened alerts—THE HIGH ALERTS. Our president only feels potent when he is on the brink of killing—The tension of the violence—The fear I recognize THE FEAR I SMELL AND RECALL THE FEAR OF BEING KIDNAPPED AND TORTURED THE FEAR OF BEING ON THE BRINK OF DEATH AND EROTICIZED BY MY KIDNAPPER THE FEAR I FELT AS YOU WERE ABOUT TO PUT THE GUN TO MY HEAD THE KNIFE TO MY EYE AND I SEE THE LOOK ON YOUR FACE I KNOW THAT FACE I KNOW THE DELIGHT IN RUMSFELD TOO WELL I KNOW THE LOOK OF TOO HAPPY TOO COCKY OUR LEADERS SEE THE COUNTRY AS THE WET PUSSY READY TO CLAMP DOWN CHAIN CHAIN CHENEY DICK CHENEY ...AND LOSE IDENTITY I SEE THE SEXUAL TRINITY OF BUSH COLIN AND DICK DICK DICK CHAINNNNEY CHANEY WITH THE GIN MILL OF RUM RUM RUM RUMSFELD (60)

Finley’s evangelical sermon is similar in form to the method by which Anton Chigurh kills his victims in *No Country for Old Men*. As one scholar puts it, “When he takes a man’s life by placing his hand on the head as a faith healer would, the invocation suggests a brutal, but comparable, miracle” (Spoden 80). Finley draws on this typical American form but injects its normally purified content with unsayable truths. The words seem prescient in their blend of sexuality and violence, particularly when we consider the human rights violations reports that were to emerge from the military detention camp Abu Ghraib in 2003. The photographs of naked

prisoners formed in “human pyramids” featuring U.S. security guards behind giving the “thumbs up” are perhaps the most startling documents of these abuses, which, we now know, went far beyond the euphemistic category of “enhanced interrogation techniques” and included waterboarding, attacks by dogs, rape, and other forms of psychological torture meant to intimidate and humiliate detainees. But the sermon directly refers to the alarming changes that were taking place within the country itself, such as heightened airport security, the U.S.’s new color-coded system of terror alerts, and the passing of the Patriot Act on October 26, 2001, which authorized the use of invasive domestic security services. Such depths of surveillance and voyeurism are not only evidence of an opportunistic government seizing power but appear to be sadistically erotic. What is it about the nature of terrorism, or the nature of American culture, Finley asks us, that prompts such a sexualized response?

In order to begin to answer this question, Finley wants to examine her life, or her life spoken through the body of Liza Minnelli, on the day of the attacks. She tells us she was working on a book of erotica, and it is there, in the story she relates, that we find the beginning of an answer. The story she recites to us is alike in kind to the romantic fiction Paul Rayment had borrowed and read from his mother’s collection as a child. It involves a student and professor having sex and begins with the student asking her professor, “Teacher, why didn’t you give me an A?” (65). The professor could be taking a sexual bribe in exchange for the student receiving a higher grade, or Finley might be suggesting the implicit power dynamic between them and the student’s desire to be evaluated favourably by the professor. As she continues to tell the story, she begins to chew her hair, pulling the signature red hair of Karen Finley from underneath the Liza wig. Then, the other Lizas begin to surround her and hump her. Her hair continues to fall out from the wig. It becomes clear that the student and the professor are practicing sexual

asphyxiation: “As our student was gasping for air you would presume he would help her in her struggle. But remember what turned him on was the sound of her breath as she orgasmed [...] She would always remember that he didn’t let her die. He had enough practice, control to stop his torture” (65). It seems worth noting that Finley uses the word torture after having talked about the U.S. becoming a sadomasochistic chamber and that she is writing this novella on the day of the attacks. Afterwards, the professor asks the student, “How does it feel to have your pussy turned into a cunt?” and she responds, “Why don’t you bring in the Principal for sloppy seconds?” (65). The lines indicate that no amount of intimacy or vulnerability between them is permissible. Bell hooks observes, “Taught to believe that the mind, not the heart, is the seat of learning, many of us believe that to speak of love with any emotional intensity means we will be perceived as weak and irrational. And it is especially hard to speak of love when what we have to say calls attention to the fact that lovelessness is more common than love” (xxvii). As if to confirm this lovelessness, Finley adds that the professor “noticed her blank stare and wanted to fuck her again,” after which “class was over” (66).

Above all, *Make Love* draws on the power of performance to grieve and point towards the possibility of repairing bonds that were broken long before 9/11. In the scene following the story of erotica Finley takes us back to her experience on the plane, which becomes a kind of sacred suspension of social norms and barriers: “I am on the plane from Australia and I see the Canadian passport. I think, Oh no, I will have 17 hours of explaining American foreign policy. Yes he is Canadian but he is also Palestinian and I do listen to his views about American foreign policy” (66). She does listen to him and is surprised to learn that the man is Palestinian and his wife is Jewish. In a gesture of recognition, she tells him she is sorry. She continues, “I am on the plane from Los Angeles and I sit next to a woman who is emigrating from Vietnam. Her fiancé’s

father is an American soldier. [...] She tells me that I probably know where she is from. Her family lived near the MAI LAI MASSACRE. I JUST LOOK AT HER IN HORROR and tell her I am sorry” (66). By repeating “I’m sorry,” Finley recognizes that as a U.S. citizen she is culpable, too, and not the only victim of political violence. It is not yet a statement of love but it points in this direction. Her recognition is important not only because it supplements the overly simplistic and pedantic governmental response to 9/11 but also because it allows victims to see themselves as past victimizers and potential future ones. Bridging the personal with the political, Finley provides some necessary instruction to citizens as well as politicians of the U.S. on the reciprocal nature of love.

On her return to New York, seated next to a fellow New Yorker, Finley’s memory of September 11 surprises her. This is a story she has been attempting to tell throughout the performance:

All subways are closed. I am standing on the stairs and an old man stands in shock. He is in distress. He keeps saying what should I do?? What should I do? He tells me that he works at a construction site in Brooklyn--the site overlooks Manhattan right over the Brooklyn Bridge. His daughter worked in the World Trade Center and he saw the plane hit the Tower he saw the plane hit the Tower and he tried to jump too. [...] I couldn’t stay for I had a daughter to go to.

Do we need to make the story sadder? How close were you? How close were you? (66-67)

Although the persona of Liza Minnelli has been thoroughly stripped by this point, Finley’s foray into the personal mode is subtle and restrained by the knowledge evoked by the final line. That is, by calling our attention to the pathos of the story, she preemptively acknowledges the

possibility that the emotional impact of the crisis has made audience members vulnerable to manipulation. The deliberate political exploitation of emotions during this time is no doubt a large part of Finley's critique: the President's desire to go to war to eradicate the feeling of impotency, as she puts it. In *Precarious Life*, Butler reflects, "Loss and vulnerability seem to follow from our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure" (20). Skillfully, Finley expresses her fear for herself and her daughter through a stranger who has lost his daughter and, it seems, himself: "The fusion of Finley with Minnelli into Finelli, then, becomes an effective mechanism for gathering, inhabiting as well as defusing the various voices and stories that have been crisscrossing the wound in downtown Manhattan so that they do not build up to mimetic violence" (Saal 370). In the final poem, entitled "Our Unbearable Grief Our Unbearable Sorrow," she advises, "Take her hand and comfort her [...] As two hands clasped together / Were found from two persons / Clasped together" (68).

CONCLUSION: "THE HARD ROAD OF LOVING"

The discussion of love presented in these pages has largely focused on critique: in the first and second parts, I considered how love has been defined through romance conventions that include ideas about heroism and sacrifice. In the third part, I considered how love has been distorted, perhaps even lost, by a legacy of violence. In the following, I shall consider how these critiques offer alternative conceptual frameworks based on the acceptance of failure and vulnerability, and the nobility of struggle itself. In her study Nussbaum writes about a third

tradition after the contemplative and Christian ascents of love. This Romantic tradition is noted for its rejection of “a static telos for ascent, holding that striving itself is love’s transcendence” (469). This tradition is not unlike the *amor* Campbell describes between two lovers and their experience of transcendence. Nussbaum writes, “This world, the suggestion is, will always remain a Hell if we are allowed to aim at redemption from it, rather than at the amelioration of life within it, and led to anticipate the end of striving, rather than to respect the dignity of the striving itself” (607). In what follows, I suggest that the texts under discussion are pushing towards a revision of love as continuous struggle through the use of imagination.

Firstly, Paul Rayment’s self-characterization as a godfather suggests his strong wish to suppress the bodily side of love and therefore ennoble it. In a letter to Marijana’s husband, Miroslav, he writes:

I don’t know whether in Catholic Croatia you have the institution of the godfather. [...] The godfather is the man who stands by the side of the father at the baptismal font, or hovers over his head, giving his blessing to the child and swearing his lifelong support. As the priest in the ritual of baptism is the personification of the Son and intercessor, and the father is of course the Father, so the godfather is the personification of the Holy Ghost. At least that is how I conceive of it. A figure without substance, ghostly, beyond anger and desire.

(224)

While he couches this understanding in Catholic terms, we can also see shades of the Platonic characterization of love as a spiritual mediation between mortal and immortal beings: “He is the mediator who spans the chasm which divides them, and therefore in him all is bound together, and through him the arts of the prophet and the priest, their sacrifices and mysteries and charms,

and all, prophecy and incantation, find their way” (*Symposium* 42). Thus, Paul’s ideas about love have been more or less “textual”: premeditated in the form of letters and largely influenced by other texts—not, significantly, experience. Elizabeth Costello designates this quality in terms of an ideal: “You claim to be a butterfly, you want to be a butterfly; but then one day you have a fall, a calamitous fall, you come crashing down to earth; and when you pick yourself up you find you can no longer fly like an ethereal being, you cannot even walk, you are nothing but a lump of all too solid flesh” (198). Again, this metaphor aligns itself with the soul’s ascent to heaven in the Platonic image of a winged chariot.

Costello’s observation might be expanded by Nussbaum’s helpful critique of Platonic idealism: “Plato’s ascent leaves out of account, and therefore out of love, everything about the person that is not good and fine—the flaws and the faults, the neutral idiosyncrasies, the bodily history. In a very fundamental way it refuses to embrace the very fact of difference” (499). For this reason Paul prefers to stay in his flat and contemplate Marijana’s ideal female form rather than see her in her own house, as she exists for herself and others. When Paul visits her he observes, “Marijana is wearing blue plastic sandals. Blue sandals and purple toenails: he may be an ex-portrait photographer and Marijana may be an ex-picture restorer, but their aesthetics are worlds apart” (244). Nussbaum adds: “Thus the ascent succeeds only by getting so high above real people that the specificity of their human existence cannot be seen. All three of our thinkers seem to believe that only in this way can the terrible excessiveness and ambivalence of love can be cured” (523). In her study Nussbaum designates a philosophical strand in Western conceptions of love based on the writings of Plato, Baruch Spinoza, and Marcel Proust which she calls “the contemplative lover.” The contemplative lover, she contends, resolves the tension between individual desires and the desires of others—including, of course, the pain of rejection

and separation—by contemplating an ideal totality of which we are all part. This totality effectively negates individuality and imperfection:

Rather than learning to love in a world in which every lover must be finite and mortal, the contemplative lover finds marvellously ingenious devices to satisfy the desires of infancy—deploying, to remarkable effect, the wonder and curiosity that are so prominent in a human infant’s initial makeup. Rather than renouncing the wish for totality in favour of a more appropriate human wish, this lover has continued to be motivated by infantile omnipotence and has for this very reason had to depart from a world in which the infant’s wishes can never be satisfied.

(524-25)

Such a description aptly fits Paul Rayment and his insistence in his letter to Marijana’s husband that his generous gift has no “strings attached” (166).

In light of Paul’s accident, which deprives him of the ability to care for himself and understand his place among others, his regression to infantile feelings of omnipotence and the difficulty he has overcoming them is even more likely. As Marijana tells him, “You get too lonely in your flat” (250). That is why the crucial scene in which Marijana appears to Paul as a real person, capable of having bad taste, allows him to see that he, too, does not need to play the role of godfather. When the Jokićs surprise him with a hand-operated recumbent bicycle that the father and son have built, Paul “can feel a blush creeping over him, a blush of shame, starting at his ears and creeping forward over his face” (254). He imagines “how bystanders will smile! Smile and laugh and whistle: *Good on you, grandpa!*” and then considers that they mean to teach him a lesson: “He should give up his solemn airs and become what he rightly is, a figure of fun, an old gent with one leg who when he is not hopping around on his crutches roams the streets on

his home-made tricycle” (257). Afterwards in the taxi, Paul continues to struggle with this new image of himself until Elizabeth points out that he is “the man who doesn’t laugh. The man who can’t take a joke” (259). Indeed, Coetzee’s revision of love includes the integration of humor, which is etymologically related to humility: “We do not laugh *at* the bringing low, the debasement and degradation of the higher [...] We laugh *from* below, in allowing the degrading power of the lower bodily material stratum its full force, recognizing and accepting it for what it is, democratic, final and irrevocable” (Gilbert).

In *Make Love*, Finley explores the complex emotional experience of vulnerability and Americans’ sublimation of these feelings into consumerism and retributive violence. This experience is prompted by a cab driver’s affirmation of Finley’s, and, by implication, America’s, mortality. Such an assertion of individual as well as collective vulnerability is, as Finley shows, traumatic because of the sense of power that Americans have had since at least the end of the Cold War. Indeed, if we recall Francis Fukuyama’s end-of-history thesis and the political omnipotence I discussed in chapter one, we can appreciate just how few were prepared for bloodshed on American ground, with such technological precision, magnitude, and splendour. One wonders if a large part of the emotional baggage that Finley is treating is bound up with the technological brilliance of the attacks and the Frankenstein quality of the moment, an uncanny reflection of American-style violence.

Nonetheless, for Finley and others such an event presented a unique occasion that might transform American culture for the better. Judith Butler envisioned this hope as “a certain ‘loss’ for the country as a whole: the notion of the world itself as a sovereign entitlement of the United States must be given up, lost, and mourned, as narcissistic and grandiose fantasies must be lost and mourned” (40). Finley’s project attempts to mourn this loss as well as discover the

possibilities for making new forms of connection. One way in which *Make Love* does so is through the unique potential of live performance. Perhaps the most affective scene is when Finley asks audience members, “Please can you kiss? Please can you kiss each other? Sometimes all you can do is kiss. (*I ask the audience to kiss. We stop and watch audience members kiss. The Lizas start kissing and hugging the audience.*)” (63). It is difficult to describe in words what kind of effect this scene, which only takes up three lines on the page but which in performance takes a number of minutes, has on the audience.

It no doubt fits what Jill Dolan names a “utopian performative,” those “small but profound moments in which performance calls the attention of the audience in a way that lifts everyone slightly above the present, into a hopeful feeling of what the world might be like if every moment of our lives were as emotionally voluminous, generous, aesthetically striking, and intersubjectively intense” (5). The scene successfully brings a sense of ritual to audience members, which is not unlike the ritual of shaking hands near the end of a Catholic Mass to demonstrate good will towards one’s neighbours: “The collective kiss-in [...] is a powerful assertion of one of theater’s most crucial function [sic] in times of crisis; namely, as Girard has described it, the transformation of conflictual mimesis into ritualistic mimesis, creative and protective rather than destructive in nature” (Saal 371). Finley’s onstage unraveling from the safe projection of Liza to her vulnerable self, expressed by her long red hair emerging from the short, black Minnelli wig, is an enormous, emotionally exhausting gift she offers at each performance. Jean-Luc Nancy observes, “Love is the promise and its keeping, the one independent of the other. How could it be otherwise, since one never knows what must be kept? Perhaps unlike all other promises, one must keep only the promise itself: not its ‘contents’ (‘love’), but its utterance

(‘I love you’)” (100). The fact that she repeated this performance every week for several years is evidence of her commitment to the idea of love as an ongoing process and struggle.²⁵

Finally, in *No Country for Old Men*, Bell’s recollection of the stone water trough suggests a willingness to endure the disappointments of time and the renunciation of ideals. For Bell, however, that lesson comes slowly. Defeat, at first, is more bitter than death. His expectations have been that he should die heroically fighting something even if it cannot be fought, thus atoning for his earlier mistake. The problem with this notion of dying heroically, McCarthy seems to suggest, is that it suffers from the same aspirations that Moss and Chigurh have to be omnipotent. That is the danger of the material world embodied in mammon: it raises humans above other humans, making them feel more powerful than they are. Chigurh acknowledges this danger when he considers that his Houdini trick with the handcuffs was a mistake: “I think I wanted to see if I could extricate myself by an act of will. Because I believe that one can. That such a thing is possible. But it was a foolish thing to do. A vain thing to do” (174-75).

Bell’s decision to retire comes as a surprise to his wife, Loretta, though she accepts it as gracefully as she had accepted his decision to become Sheriff in his older age. Bell’s decision comes, initially, from disillusionment with God and his sense of divine justice:

I’m been asked to stand for somethin that I dont have the same belief in it I once did. That’s the problem. I failed at it even when I did. Now I’ve seen it held to the light. Seen any number of believers fall away. I’ve been forced to look at it again

²⁵ Finley explains in the introduction to *Make Love* that she first wrote the poem “Our Unbearable Grief Our Unbearable Sorrow” on 13 September 2001, after seeing Picasso’s *Guernica* reprinted in the *New York Times*. She then wrote and performed *The Distribution of Empathy* in first-person at The Cutting Room every Tuesday evening starting in June 2002 before it was rewritten and performed with the Lizas as *Make Love* in 2003.

and I've been forced to look at myself. For better or for worse I do not know. I don't know that I would even advise you to throw in with me, and I never had them sorts of doubts before. If I'm wiser in the ways of the world it come at a price. (296)

Such a loss of faith does not come easily. But the real despair arises when Bell considers how he failed even when he was a believer. That knowledge, more than the knowledge of God or goodness, cuts him deeply. Bell resigns, then, not because he does not believe in justice but because he no longer believes himself to be a true executor of justice. In this way, his resignation admits the fact that he, too, cannot make the promises he has, to himself or to others: "I'm not the man of an older time they say I am. I wish I was. I'm a man of this time" (326). Campbell observes: "It is not society that is to guide and save the creative hero, but precisely the reverse. And so every one of us shares the supreme ordeal—carries the cross of the redeemer—not in the bright moments of his tribe's great victories, but in the silences of his personal despair" (*Hero* 362). While many scholars read Bell's resignation negatively, even considering Chigurh's demonization a "fatalism [that] is convenient" (King 19), I believe his resignation needs to be read less idealistically, as one critic observes: "Bell's retirement instead acknowledges Chigurh's reality principle in an acceptance, however grudging, of his own limitations. This recognition, of course, delimits the possibility of the heroic and defines the narrative's generic form" (Jarrett 45).

Instead, the novel points to the love that Loretta offers as a form of hard necessity, a love that has matured beyond the romance of ideals and wish-fulfillment. When Bell discusses his decision to quit, he asks her why she would never tell him when he was wrong: "Well, she said. Whatever it was I expect you'd get it figured out with no help from me. And if it was somethin

we just disagreed about I reckon I'd get over it. Where I might not [Bell replied]. She smiled and put her hand on his. Put it up, she said. It's nice just to be here" (302). Loretta has a sense of gratitude for the present, despite everything, that rises to the level of endurance embodied in the stone water trough. Her comment that "it's just nice to be here" exemplifies an acceptance of Bell's resignation and offers an alternative understanding of his life story to the one he writes in his diaries. As one critic observes, "Hope emerges from Bell's reliance on and reverence for the redemptive power of human relationships and from his vague acknowledgement of mystical transcendence" (Frye 18). Bell confirms the sanctity of this relationship when he describes the gentle act of Loretta putting her arm around him and biting his ear: "*She's a very young woman in a lot of ways. If I didnt have her I dont know what I would have. Well, yes I do. You wouldnt need a box to put it in, neither*" (305). They inhabit what Alain Badiou describes as the world of love: "The fact is she and I are now incorporated into this unique Subject, the Subject of love that views the panorama of the world through the prism of our difference, so this world can be conceived, be born, and not simply represent what fills my own individual gaze. Love is always the possibility of being present at the birth of the world" (25-6).

In conclusion, the three texts under discussion constitute an ethical effort to revise cultural conceptualizations of love and what these writers see as an urgent need to move beyond ideal mythological traditions. In doing so, they reinvigorate a deeper sense of hope within the present time by showing us how quickly we are willing to give up when we fail these ideals. By deploying the conventions of romance in order to upset them, McCarthy and Coetzee attempt to educate their readers, pushing us towards more realistic, livable desires. Finley, on the other hand, invites us to enter our darkest dreams, where we are safe to feel and explore a wider spectrum of experience in our daily encounters with others. Both are integral to a revised ethics

of being in the world and an understanding of intersubjectivity as one that entails much effort and, indeed, struggle. Perhaps the greatest effort required by this rewriting is learning to love without the guidance of those who lived before, whose world no longer bears any resemblance to our own. In the conclusion I shall consider the thematic thread of parental relations that preoccupies many of the texts in this dissertation.

CONCLUSION

One of the challenges and privileges of contemporary literary studies is the fact that formal and thematic patterns have not yet been determined by scholarly consensus. This is a challenge, of course, because it means we are more or less finding our way through the dark, but it also entails a great deal of freedom, which therefore makes it a privilege. In the present study, I have proposed a pattern of thematic interest in the relationship between individuals and history that is interconnected with the rise of neoliberalism and terrorism. This pattern of thematic interest was expressed in the first chapter as the questioning of complicity with the violence of neoliberalism. The first chapter asked whether individuals are capable of recognizing the implied violence of neoliberalism, defined in this study as cruelty. I argued that Caryl Churchill's play attempts to reveal how neoliberal ideology mystifies the relations of capitalism and that Ian McEwan and Tony Kushner's texts show how transformative encounters with others can weaken this ideology.

The bloody outcome of Kushner's play led to the discussion in the second chapter of individuals who recognize the violence of neoliberalism but who lack the power to overcome this cycle of violence. Here the relationship between individuals and history is expressed as a condition of helplessness in the face of cruelty, which in many cases leads to acts of self-annihilation. With Martin Crimp and Richard Flanagan's texts I emphasized that this despair arises from the erosion of individual and collective agency caused by neoliberalism, which has ensured the total penetration of the market. With Pat Barker's text, like Kushner's before it, I suggested that the condition of helplessness, symbolized by her character's struggles with post-traumatic stress disorder, can be overcome by newly formed relationships and by art understood

as an act of love. In the third chapter, I interrogated the possibility of repairing individual agency through social bonds and art as acts of love. Through my investigations of Cormac McCarthy and J.M. Coetzee's texts, I argued that the romance genre, by virtue of its moral simplicity, reinforces the political condition of helplessness and leads to either vigilante forms of justice, as in *Chigurh*, or inaction, as in *Ed Tom Bell* and *Paul Rayment*. With Karen Finley's *Make Love*, I suggested that performance can be considered one example of loving artistic engagement that seeks to repair the cruelty of neoliberalism and terrorism. In this way, I believe *Make Love* confirms Barker's argument that social relations and art based in love can in fact mend us. The focus of the present study took social relations and had to exclude, to some extent, family relations and other forms of love between parents and children and between siblings. Over the course of my research, I have learned that the dynamics of the family play an interesting, even primary, role in these texts. Because the family is the first social experience of individuals, the dynamics set up within it will determine to a large extent how individuals negotiate their relations with others as they enter the world. In reviewing the literature's representation of familial relationships, there appear to be patterns that correlate with the historical crisis of the last twenty years. This pattern moves from authoritarian parental structures (resembling the symbolic marriage of Ronald and Maggie) to absentee fathers and mothers (such as the liberals and the Left), which leads to the nostalgia for originary fathers (such as Jesus and Plato).

In the first chapter, I argued that Joan's relationship with her Aunt Harper could be considered an example of ideological grooming. In the first act, Joan is repeatedly lied to and discouraged from asking questions about the actions of her uncle. Despite the apparent truth of what she witnesses her uncle doing (violently imprisoning and beating people, including children) from the tree outside the bedroom window, she finally accepts what her aunt has told

her, namely that her uncle is helping these people escape and that “he only hits the traitors” (141). She accepts it because Harper convinces her that he is helping, despite the incongruity of his actions. The implication of this lesson, it seems, is that good things may appear on the surface as bad and wrong, and sometimes our gut and common sense betray us. The lesson also suggests that Harper wishes to create a relationship based on dependency, in which Joan’s individual observations and judgment can be questioned, denied, and ultimately overcome by her authorial power.

It is hardly a coincidence that Churchill dramatizes this relationship between two female relatives, which recalls the less than sisterly relationships one finds in her earlier *Top Girls* (1982). A play about the rise of right-wing feminism during Margaret Thatcher’s reign, *Top Girls* ends with another young girl who has woken from a bad dream that is caused by the strained political disagreements her mother and aunt have while she sleeps. The play closes with the child repeating the feeling experienced in her dream, which suggest the girl’s uncertain future: “Frightening” (141). The unequal relationship in *Far Away* between Harper and Joan points to the larger social relations between leadership and the governed. Churchill intimates that such authoritarian forms of leadership create populaces that no longer know how to ask questions, as is clear by the second act. *Far Away* imagines world war as the only possible outcome of such marred relationships. In this imagining, it is only an exaggerated representation of the global situation of its day, a situation that unfortunately continues.

I also discussed the parental relationship between the Homebody and Priscilla at some length in Tony Kushner’s *Homebody/Kabul*. This play, like *Far Away*, is interested in the process of ideological transmission, albeit not through authoritarian structures. Rather, *Homebody/Kabul* focuses on the “touch which does not understand,” “the touch which corrupts”

(28). Where there may be an overly present female authority in *Far Away* (a presence that strikes me as deserving further analysis of the towering figure of Thatcher), there is a deliberately painful absence of the mother (and parenting, in general) in *Homebody/Kabul*. This is because the Homebody feels she has failed not only as a mother but as a figure of authority. She abstains from touching because she believes she has corrupted herself by “succumb[ing] to luxury” (28) and does not wish to corrupt her daughter as well. But the so-called damage has already been done. As one scholar observes, “The word-mad Homebody knowingly chooses the dangerous word ‘corrupt,’ invoking the fear that cultural and tribal superiority will be contaminated by outsiders. But she inverts the loathing associated with the taint of the other: if all is corrupted by touch, all will be mixed and bridged” (Colleran 210).

The Homebody asks, “What after all is a child but the history of all that has befallen her, a succession of displacements, bloody, beautiful?” (27). Therefore, Priscilla must learn to understand the mysteries on her own, as she slowly gives up her solitary home to be, as the Homebody wishes, “out in the world [...] of use” (28). Like *Far Away*, too, *Homebody/Kabul* means for this relationship to have a wider political significance. Kushner’s emphasis on the self-sacrificial mother and the ineffectual, absent father suggests that citizens from countries such as the U.K. and the U.S. must seek understanding and direction not from their leaders but from the experience and knowledge that comes with leaving “home.” The play intimates that the policies of isolated nations, and their people’s longing to shut themselves up within it, does not offer any understanding about the world of which it is an inseparable part.

In my discussion of *Saturday*, I discussed Henry Perowne’s ideal vision of his life, a vision that no doubt encompasses his well-educated and gifted children. But he argues endlessly

with his daughter, Daisy, about the moral justifications for invading the sovereign country of Iraq. In fact, he sees his daughter in the beginning of the novel as impressionable and naïve:

In her second year at Oxford, dazzled by some handsome fool of a teacher, Daisy tried to convince her father that madness was a social construct, a wheeze by means of which the rich—he may have got this wrong—squeezed the poor. Father and daughter engaged in one of their energetic arguments which ended with Henry, in a rhetorical coup, offering her a tour of a closed psychiatric wing. (92)

Given that *Saturday* is a rewriting of a novel wholly consumed with what distinguishes the mad from the sane, it would be simplistic of readers to assume that this passage reflects the author's own position. By the end of the novel, Daisy has single-handedly averted the violent attack Henry's actions have caused not by scientific but literary means. That is, she saves herself and her family by reciting a poem by Matthew Arnold, which provokes a change of mental state in the aggressor, Baxter. This action demonstrates that Daisy's understanding of madness—if we accept that Baxter is in a fit of madness at this moment—may not be so naïve after all.

What is more, Daisy accomplishes her victory while standing in the nude, after ordered by the hijackers to undress and it has become apparent that she is pregnant. Perowne observes her newly discovered maternal body with some ambivalence, maintaining his ideal image of her youth: "Despite the changes [and the fact that she is pregnant], he remembers this body from bath times, and even in his fear, or because of it, it is above all the vulnerable child he sees" (218). Unlike *Far Away* and *Homebody/Kabul*, which show parental relations mainly from the perspective of the children who either accept or learn to live without authority, *Saturday* assumes the perspective of the sanctimonious parent who must confront his sense of rightness. The fact that Daisy saves the day, however contrived the plot device appears to realist readers, suggests

that the novel ultimately shows that Perowne's perspective is deeply limited and problematic. I believe this perspective is worthy of representational attention for one fairly simple reason: the critique of neoliberalism should attempt to reach its most likely adherents, who would be better able to identify with the domestic life of the Perowne's than the life of, say, Baxter and his friends.

There are others who disagree. At this juncture, I would like to address some of the criticism that *Saturday* generated because of its intertextual references to the work of Matthew Arnold. The use of "Dover Beach" has been pointed to by some critics of *Saturday* as an example of McEwan's conservatism in response to the post-9/11 political climate. Lars Eckstein, for instance, observes: "Saturday is replete with references to *Culture and Anarchy*, and it is difficult not to metonymically identify the Perowne family with Arnold's Culture with a capital 'C,' ultimately uniting, in true Arnoldian spirit, the forces of science (Henry) and poetry (Daisy, Grammaticus, Theo) against the forces of anarchic disruption from below (Baxter)" (128). Eckstein reminds us that Arnold wrote *Culture and Anarchy* in response to the Hyde Park Riots of 1866, during which time protestors showed their support of the Reform Bill, a measure that Arnold was against.

But I would offer that McEwan's text, while it does invoke Arnold, does not share the same unequivocal elitism. Rather, it asks questions about the motivations of the anti-war protest movement, which is conspicuously not composed of people like Baxter but the same cultural elites as his daughter:

All this happiness on display is suspect. Everyone is thrilled to be together out on the streets—people are hugging themselves, it seems, as well as each other. If they think—and they could be right—that continued torture and summary

executions, ethnic cleansing, and occasional genocide are preferable to an invasion, they should be somber in their view. (69-70)

This passage offers the strange complexity of the political situation of McEwan's day: by 2003, the Bush government had usurped the concept of human rights for its own murky purposes, leaving the Left in the difficult theoretical position of defending the sovereignty of a dictatorship. What is more, these protestors do not appreciate what this feeble position could mean for future struggles against oppression. That the protestors are happy and self-congratulatory suggests that their demands have little in common with the Hyde Park riots that occurred more than a century earlier. For this reason, I believe that attempts to criticize *Saturday* via Arnold's cultural supremacy are ultimately too superficial and based on association rather than the specific questions and problems raised by the novel. The tendency to censure McEwan's novel by political labeling does a disservice to literature's freedom from politics to represent and question everything.

In the texts of the second chapter, parents are either neglectful or absent. Extending the metaphor of parental relations as political leadership, this neglect and absence suggests the disappearance of authentic sources of power. It also obfuscates the originating political order so that it becomes difficult to articulate the conflict. In my discussion of *The City*, I demonstrated how the conceit of the play suggests a struggling creator whose characters—children, in a sense—simply will not come to life. Within the fiction of this conceit, the stories of children scatter the scenes. First, Clair tells her husband, Chris, that she met a man whose child was being taken from him before he could kiss her goodbye; then, the couple's next door neighbour, Jenny, appears at the door to complain about the noise of their children and how it disturbs her to hear

them playing in the garden while she is trying to sleep. During this scene, Clair and Chris appear to lose the children, who have locked themselves inside their playroom.

Months later, a little girl appears with Chris reciting disturbing poetry; she seems to be his daughter because she calls him “Daddy,” but she also wears the same nurse’s uniform and coat as their neighbour, Jenny. When the girl plays, she pretends to be a nurse, and Chris even worries if she has spilled blood all over the playroom “like last time” (42). While these cryptic details do not lead to clear symbolic referents, they do comprise another leitmotif within the play that goes hand in hand with the inclusion of Schubert. This leitmotif could be summarized as the coming and going of children who resemble, in an imperfect way, the actions and appearances of their parents. For instance, the girl recites a poem that resembles the humorous limericks of Edward Lear with one clear difference:

There once was a child in a drain
 Who longed for the sound of the rain.
 But when the storm broke
 The poor child awoke
 In a stream of unbearable pain. (41-42)

The difference, of course, is that if the limerick is meant to be funny, it is incredibly cruel. Afterwards, her father asks, “Who taught you that?” and she replies, “Mummy did” (42). This leitmotif supports the relationship I drew out in chapter two between art and life. After Clair’s conference in Lisbon, Clair tells Chris that the daughter who had been taken away from the man she had met has died and that he harbours a secret happiness about this tragedy. In her retelling to Chris, the man confesses: “I sent my little girl away. I sent her away because she stopped me writing, because she constantly interrupted my work” (52). When he learns of her

death, he tells Clair, “I experienced a secret exaltation [...] as I realized that what had happened could only enhance my work” (52). The horrific implication of this writer’s sentiment confirms the play’s reference to Ariel Dorfman’s *Death and the Maiden*: artistic expression has been corrupted by violence. It reminds one of Susan Sontag’s observation that

A society which makes it normative to aspire never to experience privation, failure, misery, pain, dread, disease, and in which death itself is regarded not as natural and inevitable but as a cruel, unmerited disaster, creates a tremendous curiosity about these events—a curiosity that is partly satisfied through picture-taking. (*On Photography* 359)

In a world such as this, creators long for death to make their work more real. But, as Thomas Merton instructs, by putting the focus entirely on death, “we are not making death more real but life less real” (qtd. in Hooks 195).

In *The Unknown Terrorist* the Doll’s parents are conspicuously absent. The narrator explains that they divorced when she was young; the father remarried and then abandoned his children while the mother remained but only as a physical presence: “When, a few years later, she heard her mother had been killed in a pile up on the Hume highway she was sad, but not overly. It felt more like the confirmation of a long-standing absence than the beginning of one” (9). Over the course of the novel, two of the Doll’s clients, Richard Cody and Frank Moretti, take on the role of fathers but in ways that prove destructive. Richard Cody represents the Doll’s lowbrow clientele at the Chairman’s Lounge, where “the cheapness and the bad taste was not an error but a precondition,” so that “only the women’s bodies were to be of note and interest” (35). As a failing television anchorman, Cody’s emasculation by the Doll leads him to use her as an opportunity to redeem his fading stardom. When the Doll meets him for the first time, he

provokes her anger by saying, “Isn’t it humiliating?” and she makes the mistake of equating her career with his own: “And your job [...] that’s not humiliating?” (52). After this interaction, Cody frames the Doll as the “unknown terrorist” of Sydney. The events of the novel are thus put in motion. As I discussed at length in the second chapter, Frank’s authority is expressed through his collection of fine art and the fact that he plays recordings of Chopin while the Doll works for him. After she has been framed, the Doll seeks Frank out for help, believing him to possess some sense of humanity. But he deserts her, repeating the actions of her biological father: “Standing in front of Moretti, she was simply aware of suddenly feeling strangely and terribly guilty. Perhaps what was wrong was not the world, she thought, but her in not agreeing with the world, and it was this of which she was guilty” (173).

In *Double Vision*, too, there is an absence of parental sources most likely because years of war have cut traceable lineages. As I discussed in the second chapter, the twin protagonists have suffered great loss: Stephen suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder, which had probably led to his divorce, and Kate has injured herself in a car accident after recently becoming widowed. The novel is full of these kinds of amputations: couplings divided and then reconfigured with visible scars. The result of all this amputation is an autistic child and another adult who committed murder in his youth. What is more, the nature of war does not allow these scars to be seen: “What had been new about Baghdad and later Belgrade was the combination of censorship with massive, one-sided aerial bombardment so that allied casualties were minimal or non-existent and ‘collateral damage’ couldn’t be shown. These were wars designed to ensure that fear and pain never came home” (203). Ironically, fear and pain do in fact come home but in forms more opaque and uncertain for those affected. Because of this prohibition, the country faces a seriously debilitating crisis.

Perhaps the most fatherly figure in *Double Vision* is the Christ that Kate is sculpting. His authority has diminished significantly from a religious icon imbued with mysterious power to a symbolic witness to the horror and cruelty of history. While the spiritual significance of Christ does not weigh upon Kate, the story of His unconditional love seems to be the center of the novel. The same story preoccupies *The Unknown Terrorist* which begins by describing the “innocent heart of Jesus” who “could never have enough of human love. He demanded it, as Nietzsche observed, with hardness, with madness, and had to invent hell as punishment for those who withheld their love from him” (1).

This criterion gave rise to the investigation of love in three contemporary literary pieces explored in the third chapter. There I discussed the revisions of romance in *No Country for Old Men*, *Slow Man*, and *Make Love*. Parents emerge once again in these texts but as distant, nostalgic heroes rather than sources of ideological transmission. As in the second chapter, the generational line seems to have been cut, but the characters’ response to this severing produces a deeper sense that something important has been lost. Unlike the Doll, who does not mourn the death of her mother, both Sheriff Bell and Paul Rayment will not let go of their backward-looking glance. I have already discussed in some length Paul’s belated desire to father children, motivated by the sudden and unpleasant awareness of his mortality. Paul’s love for Marijana arises out of a latent need for maternal care. He observes her with her daughter: “While she is cooking, Marijana helps the child to bake cupcakes or gingerbread biscuits. From the kitchen comes the even murmur of their voices. Mother and daughter: the protocols of womanhood being passed on, generation to generation” (31). A little later on, he thinks she could have given him children, too: “Marijana could mother six, ten, twelve and still have love left over, mother-love. But too late now: how sad, how sorry!” (34).

Paul's slowness, which might be summarized as an inability to move beyond the fantasies of youth, is partly explained by the fact of his immigration to Australia. He feels at home in neither his adopted country nor his mother country, France. In this way, *Slow Man* takes up the notion of nationhood with relation to subjectivity and belonging. While beyond the parameters of this dissertation, the way that love grants national subjectivity in this and other texts would make for interesting further study. Above all, *Slow Man* is about a man who refuses to grow up and accept his fate and his choices as his own. In some crucial way, it points to the predicament of many victims of cruelty. In so doing, it admonishes over-indulgence in the speculation of what could have been in favor of more imaginative alternatives for the present. The Jokićs, with their bad taste, do not match up with Paul's single-minded vision, but they do provide an imaginative alternative by building Paul a special bicycle, a gift that overflows with love.

No Country for Old Men similarly sympathizes with the longings of its protagonist while suggesting the exaggerated nature of his vision of the past, which is encapsulated by the symbol of his father. Bell's desire is caught up with his perceived failing in the shadow of his father, which is evident when Bell confesses to his Uncle Ellis that he deserted his battalion in Germany. Bell believes that "when you go into battle it's a blood oath to look after the men with you" (278). He tells Ellis, "I didnt know you could steal your own life. And I didnt know that it would bring you no more benefit than about anything else you might steal" (278). Ellis sees immediately the comparison Bell is drawing between himself and his father. He responds, "I might could tell you some things about him that would change your mind. [...] But then I might say that he lived in different times. Had Jack of been born fifty years later he might of had a different view of things" (279). Ellis implies that Bell's notion of his father is distorted by what he refuses to believe—that the things Ellis might tell him will not in fact change his mind. His

next comment chimes with a social reading of Bell and the novel at large: his failing is not his alone to bear.

Nonetheless, Bell does not find much comfort in Ellis's words. He finds refuge in his dreams, instead, where his father's essential goodness provides him with guidance. Unlike Churchill's Aunt Harper who "corrects" her niece's innate conscience, Bell's father is a moral statue, holding fire in an urn against the utter darkness. Similar imagery resonates throughout McCarthy's subsequent novel, *The Road*, which in many ways forms a thematic sequel to *No Country* (if we assume that Chigurh symbolizes an apocalyptic reckoning of sorts). In *The Road* the two protagonists after the apocalypse are not a man and woman, as in Adam and Eve, but a father and son. The son is created in the image of his father and the man uses the image of his "fathers" as his judge. The child's way of assessing the good from the bad is by asking strangers if they are "carrying the fire," a metaphor he no doubt learned from his father (283). At the end of *The Road*, after the man has died and the boy has found a family, we are told that the mother "would talk to him sometimes about God. He tried to talk to God but the best thing was to talk to his father and he did talk to him and he didn't forget" (286). Bell does something similar when he measures himself against the standards of his father as a way of resisting the cruelty and violence of his age.

Karen Finley makes great use of parent-child relations by including her own daughter, Violet Overn, as "mini-Liza" in *Make Love*. Finley alludes to the reason for doing so when she describes what was happening to Americans after 9/11: "I was struck by the fragmentation, the splitting of personalities, and the projections of a nation's fears onto New Yorkers. Although the national tragedy was real and the world was made uncertain, this national tragedy became a site for the transference of unresolved childhood losses, fears" (*Make Love* 51-52). By putting her

daughter on stage as a Liza, Finley encourages this transference to occur. Speaking of the surrogate function of the piece, Ann Pellegrini observes, “It is a performance that explicitly invites projection onto Liza’s sequined surface, as this new Lady Liberty says, Give me your fears, your terror, your pain” (14). By putting her daughter on stage, Finley invites a number of associations which audience members might project: Liza Minnelli’s difficulties emerging from the shadow of her mother, Judy Garland, Karen Finley’s autobiographical performances about her father’s suicide, as well as the narrative told by Finley (after her hair has seeped through the Liza wig) of the father she met on the day of September 11 whose son worked in one of the towers. Liza’s trips to rehabilitation clinics repeats the problems her mother had with drug addiction in the public eye; according to this narrative, Garland suffered from insecurities about not meeting Hollywood’s standard of beauty, insecurities that are thought to have passed on to her daughter.

The suicide of Finley’s father has been cited as the reason she started performing (Clements). If the Lizas have not allowed for the audience’s projections of their own fears to occur yet, Finley confesses her personal pain when she says, “When I looked up at the fire the plane the explosion I saw my father’s red head of hair with blood gushing out of brain I saw I saw the suicide bomber as my father [...] when I looked up I saw my father’s head exploding” (59). By envisioning her father as the suicide bomber, Finley shows how traumatic events must be repeated and reimagined through associations that do not always make logical sense. In summary, all of these figures invite the projection of audience members’ *schadenfreude*, but as Pellegrini instructs, “it is in the service of getting them to stop dumping their shit on others. (And war is here imaginable as a dumping unto death)” (14).

Over the course of my research, I have learned that my analysis of family relations could be expanded into a deeper investigation of the relation between the family and domestic policies in Britain and the U.S. This investigation could become an additional chapter of the present investigation in future iterations or it could even develop into an entirely separate analysis. It would consider more deeply the legacy of Reagan and Thatcher on domestic fronts and especially their appraisal of the family unit as the proper basis of society. While my study has largely focused on the violent effects of neoliberal ideology, there are other effects to be noted as well. Specifically, the breaking down of class and other social structures more than likely contributed to the rise of the family in taking on the burden of society. The problem with this isolated form of social organization is only now becoming apparent as another focus of these writers' critique.

Furthermore, the texts chosen for my dissertation were taken from a larger body of writing as representative of the thematic pattern I am proposing. There are many novels and plays that would have served the purposes of my study for their sustained interest in neoliberal ideology and the question of what is to be done. For example, Paul Auster's 1987 novella, *In the Country of Last Things*, is a dystopian palimpsest of layered histories bearing close resemblance to New York City in the late twentieth century. Like Churchill's dystopian *Far Away*, it rejects the futuristic setting of science fiction in favour of present-day occurrences that echo historical events. Auster has acknowledged that the book's material was taken directly from descriptions of the Warsaw ghetto and the siege of Leningrad, while its epistolary form and narrator's name, Anna Blume, share obvious affinities with the diary of Anne Frank (Peacock 84). The novel thus suggests that New York City has become the next country of bare survival, strongly undermining the prevailing sentiment throughout the 1980s that free market capitalism had liberated

individuals from their former serfdom. The striking result is an apocalyptic New York in which inhabitants collect junk to sell, becoming literally tied to the forgotten “last things.” Having come to this country in search of her missing brother, the only reprieve Anna finds from the certainty of death are in the closed walls of the library and the charity house, where she is able to connect, albeit briefly, with what is left of survivors like her.

In a slightly different vein, Don DeLillo’s 1997 novel, *Underworld*, questions whether history, as a neoliberal narrative of emancipation, has indeed reached its conclusion as Francis Fukuyama had predicted. In *Underworld*, the mounting accretion of toxic waste that constitutes the protagonist’s line of work suggests a history of catastrophe that requires vast networks of management and, ultimately, disposal. The novel thus indicates, as Frederic Jameson has written, that rather than having overcome history we are witnessing its wholesale liquidation.²⁶

Underworld attempts to capture the overflowing narratives of American lives from the 1950s to the 1990s while recognizing simultaneously the impossibility of providing a comprehensive history. In a related way, David Edgar’s play *Pentecost* (1998) deals with the consequences of the fall of communism and the subsequent opening of national markets throughout Europe. In taking up this subject matter it concentrates on the role of cultural identity as selling power within the changing global order. Like *Underworld*, it does not focus its perspective on any single individual, preferring a wider view of history unfolding.

Some exceptionally topical novels between the late 1980s and the early 2000s portray how neoliberal ideology affects individual subjectivity and intersubjectivity. These include

²⁶ I refer here to *Postmodernism Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, which maintains, “It is safest to grasp the concept of the postmodern as an attempt to think the present historically in an age that has forgotten how to think historically in the first place” (ix).

Martin Amis's *Money* (1984) and Brett Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* (1991). Perhaps the most incisive critique during this time is Oliver Stone's 1987 film, *Wall Street*, which underscores the dramatic move from collective to individual interests in the conflicted relationship between a father and his son. Still, it would take some time for Reagan and Thatcher's overhaul to become normalized within the political landscape, a feat that involved shifting both the Democrats in the U.S. and the Labour party in Britain to the right.²⁷ The shared vision of these governments

Would not only appear to be justified by the return of economic growth and the taming of inflation by the mid-1980s but would appear to be vindicated in more dramatic fashion at the end of the 1980s, with the collapse of "actually existing socialism" [...] This unexpected result had the effect of ratifying the new framework and making it the starting point for policy after the end of the Cold War (Cronin 97).

It was not until 2007 when the certainty of this vision could again be challenged with some evidentiary authority, when the U.S. housing market crashed and the Bush administration spent \$700 billion to bailout the U.S. financial system. Coincidentally in the same year, Mohsin Hamid published *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist has a deliberately misleading title that encourages readers to associate the word fundamentalist with militant Islam. The novel is written as a dramatic monologue in the voice of Changez, a Pakistani who speaks English and offers to help a male

²⁷ As Colin Hutchinson puts it, "The insistence of the New Right upon the primacy of the market has influenced general assumptions and values to the extent that a significant proportion of the British and American electorate [...] relies for its economic well-being not only on income from employment, but also on such factors as interest rates, the housing market, and the performance of pension funds and share portfolios" (1).

American who seems to be “on a mission” in the Old Anarkali neighbourhood of Lahore, Pakistan. Changez tells the American, who remains unidentified and unvoiced throughout the novel, about his time abroad in New York City as a successful financial analyst and his relationship with an American girl. Over the course of his story, we learn that the kind of fundamentalism to which Changez becomes reluctant is not militant Islam, as the word had been frequently used after the 2001 attacks, but market fundamentalism. He says:

Focus on the fundamentals. This was Underwood Samson’s guiding principle, drilled into us since our first day at work. It mandated a single-minded attention to financial detail, teasing out the true nature of those drivers that determine an asset’s value. And that was precisely what I continued to do, more often than not with both skill and enthusiasm. (98)

Changez is able to maintain this single-minded focus, putting out of his mind the certain lay offs that are the result of his decisions, until he sees the bombing of Afghanistan on television in his New Jersey apartment. This event prompts him to sense a connection between this unyielding, single-minded frame of reality and the growing nationalism of his adopted country.

At the same time, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* tells the story of unrequited love. Changez develops an attachment to a woman named Erica, who, he discovers, is unable to overcome the death of her first love. In Freudian terms, Erica suffers from melancholia. She is so obsessed with her dead boyfriend that Changez asks her to imagine him instead when they make love. When she assents, he describes how “the entrance between her legs was wet and dilated, but was at the same time oddly rigid; it reminded me—unwillingly—of a wound” (106). Erica’s rigidness and melancholia eventually take on greater significance: “It seemed to me that America, too, was increasingly giving itself over to a dangerous nostalgia at that time. There was

something undeniably retro about the flags and uniforms, about generals addressing cameras in war rooms and newspaper headlines featuring such words as *duty* and *honor*” (115). In this way, Changez’s love story with an Erica becomes an unrequited love story with America.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist draws on the theme of neoliberal ideology discussed in chapter one, but it does so from the perspective of an outsider. While the outsider is accepted into the cult of free market capitalism, he gives it up because there is a longing within him that remains unfulfilled. In this sense, the novel suggests that the demands of capitalism cut off the potential for human development—in the most extreme and desperate cases, leading to acts of violence. As I argued previously, this dislocation constitutes a certain form of violence because it so often feels like personal betrayal. Consider the expression, “It’s not personal, it’s just business”: the implication of the statement is that what gets decided in the world of business has no basis in personal responsibility or consequences. When Changez decides to leave his firm and go back to Pakistan, he says, “I had thrown in my lot with the men of Underwood Samson, with the officers of the empire, when all along I was predisposed to feel compassion for those, like Juan-Bautista, whose lives the empire thought nothing of overturning for its own gain” (152). Perhaps because of his outsider status, Changez is never able to accept the fundamentals of neoliberalism.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist does not, however, lead to violence as a solution to the problem. It implies that the reader, in the position of the silent American observer, is the only clear aggressor in the story. The novel is thus at pains to show that the concept of a terrorist is based in false prejudices and paranoia. Readers are encouraged to admire Changez’s political efforts in the university and his desire for Pakistan to wean itself off its dependence on America, as he puts it. In other words, he has hope for the future of Pakistan as a country that can refuse

neoliberal fundamentalism before it settles into mainstream acceptance. The fact that Changez believes in the power of his political voice affirms the argument put forward in chapter two that violence occurs when all faith in the political process has been lost.

There are a number of texts that could have been included in chapter two and that could in future iterations form a larger survey of the pattern I have outlined. Novels that serve a similar purpose as Richard Flanagan's *The Unknown Terrorist* include Hanif Kureishi's *The Black Album* (1993), Philip Roth's *American Pastoral* (1997), Russell Banks's *The Darling* (2005), and Peter Carey's *His Illegal Self* (2008). All of these novels fictionalize accounts based on true historical events of political idealists who turn to violence. Interestingly, too, all of these accounts—save Hanif Kureishi's—take the perspective of female protagonists from terrorist political groups like the Weather Underground. The literary reflection on such groups towards the end of the century and throughout the early twenty-first century suggests an interest in the decline of the Left, and in Roth's case, the decline of America's so-called greatness. These novels attempt to understand what had caused the chasm between the Old and New Left. This chasm might be best characterized by what Tom Hayden, the former president of the Students for a Democratic Society, said in the documentary film about the New York intellectuals, *Arguing the World*: “No younger generation likes to feel that it's been lectured to by their parents—ideological parents and biological parents—especially if they think those parents have a lot to answer for themselves.” What these novels question in particular is the rise of anti-Americanism within the American Left, sometime around the late 1960s, and what Daniel Bell, in the same film, called the young radicals' “inability to translate a moral conception into a political conception.”

Roth's novel condemns this inability most forcefully, and one cannot help but wonder if the choice of putting a female at the center of his critique does not give credence to the original objectors, who felt condescended to by the paternalism of the Old Left. But Roth addresses this paternalism with no lack of authorial irony:

And then the loss of the daughter, the fourth American generation, a daughter on the run who was to have been the perfected image of himself as he had been the perfected image of his father, and his father the perfected image of his father's father [...] the angry, rebarbative spitting-out daughter with no interest whatever in being the next successful Levov, flushing him out of hiding as if he were a fugitive—initiating the Swede into the displacement of another American entirely, the daughter and the decade blasting to smithereens his particular form of utopian thinking, the plague America infiltrating the Swede's castle and there infecting everyone. The daughter who transports him out of the longed-for American pastoral into everything that is its antithesis and its enemy, into the fury, the violence, and the desperation of the counterpastoral—into the indigenous American berserk. (86)

While Roth's vision of an anti-utopian counterpastoral is intriguing, ultimately I believe it underestimates the disappointed romantic idealism of political violence, emphasizing instead a narrative of personal madness and social chaos. By contrast, Hanif Kureishi's *The Black Album* appreciates the contemporary dynamic of identity politics within political movements set against the organized burnings of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. A novel about the split identity of an English-Pakistani college student in London, *The Black Album* represents the turn from political-based to cultural-based communities that Kenan Malik analyzed in *From Fatwa to*

Jihad. Kureishi's protagonist, Shahid Hasan, testifies, "All this believing wasn't so much a matter of truth or falsity, of what could be shown and what not, but of joining. [...] The black kids stuck with each other, the Pakistanis went to one another's houses, the Bengalis knew each other from way back, and the whites, too" (143). While the novel eventually rejects the outrage and literalism of Shahid's ethnic religious community, it shows great sympathy for his dilemma by emphasizing the hollowness of its secular alternative, a sort of English imitation of American culture. In this way, *The Black Album* also interrogates what this brand of capitalism—known somewhat ideologically in this and other novels as Americanism—fails to offer.

In a related way, Wallace Shawn's 1997 play, *The Designated Mourner*, takes up the issue of the culture wars from a more abstract perspective, thereby transforming what might otherwise be topical details into a dystopian narrative of intellectual purging. Though some readers and audience members will identify this narrative with the Stalinist U.S.S.R., China's cultural revolution, or the comparable brutalities that occurred in Latin America, the play's sparse historical details refer to the invention of the terms "highbrow" and "lowbrow" by the *New York Sun* in 1902, which draws attention back to how the cultural wars have played out in the U.S. context (7). Given this distinction, I think the case can be made that the play makes indirect reference to the tide of intellectual suppression that set in over the long Cold War period. *The Designated Mourner* is written as three monologues that weave together a story about the extermination of a group of artists and intellectuals. The structure of the play therefore excludes the possibility of dialogue, reflecting the isolated nature of the characters' worlds. The speakers include Jack, his wife, Judy, and Judy's father, Howard, one of the despised intellectuals. The first act conveys how Jack became involved with Judy and her father and how Jack envies Howard for his ability to understand poetry. In the beginning, Jack's difficulties are relatable,

enticingly so: “I would have humbled myself to any degree in order to learn, as a matter of fact. But he wouldn’t teach me. None of them would. Howard, Judy, Bob, Arthur—the readers of poetry” (28). By the second act, however, he has embraced his philistinism to the point of debauchery, which begins when he puts down a book of John Donne’s poetry in order to listen to another couple make love and leads to his throwing the book in the bathtub and pissing on it. As Howard puts it, “He was so lazy that his favourite foods—I’m not making this up, because I observed it quite carefully—were soup, risotto, mashed potatoes, and ice cream” (28). While we are meant to sympathize with Jack’s aggravations with Howard, Howard nonetheless has a very good point. Jack is especially lazy when he refuses to understand Howard’s empathy with the “dirt eaters”—Howard’s clever name for the enslaved masses—and someone like Martin, a character who is unknown to audience members but for the detail that he made a bad decision. For Jack, Martin is simply an unethical person but for Howard, Martin’s decision is the result of particular social experiences that deserve to be understood.

Eventually, Jack’s sentiment leads him to tacitly approve of the intellectual cleansing that is occurring around him and to believe, finally, that the world is better without people like Howard. It is unclear whether the uprising of the “dirt eaters” or “rats” succeeds or if it is, more likely, stomped out along with the intellectuals. But what is clear is that Jack survives it. At the end of the play, he appoints himself the “designated mourner” of the intellectual clan and burns the paper from a cupcake that he has eaten to commemorate its passing out of existence. He concedes, “We all were simply doing much better in every way without the presence on the earth of our nerve-jangling friends” (102). Like *The City*, *The Designated Mourner* is not a lament for highbrow culture but a warning against the embrace of philistinism as intellectual laziness and class resentment. The play concurs with the critique of late capitalism outlined in chapter two as

the depletion of imaginative experience in consumer society through the figure of Jack. But it also criticizes the division between high and low culture and the unfortunate exclusivity of intellectual development in its society.

Yet the reasons for the isolation and exclusivity of the group appear in the play as a form of survival in response to the threat of extinction. Judy explains:

Well, do you think he [Howard] would have been ‘allowed to exist’ past the age of thirty if he hadn’t completely given up writing prose and devoted himself entirely to the writing of verse? It was just the way his talent developed, but it meant that the charming little gang who led our country never read what he wrote.
(17)

The root cause of this intellectual division, then, is violent suppression. The true philistines are not necessarily the ones who are made to eat dirt but the gang that leads by brute force. Interestingly, the defining feature of a philistine in Shawn’s text is the inability to love. Judy remarks early on in the play that “The one thing he [Jack] never would say—the word he couldn’t stand: love” (9), and Jack himself admits, at the end, “A burden was lightened now that love was gone. It had always been a difficult word for me” (87). As my reading of *Double Vision* suggested, the only criterion for authentic aesthetic experience is the presence of love. If the imaginative faculty of love is absent, in other words, it cannot be art but something less.

In my own research, I have found fewer textual analogues for Chapter three. Christopher Shinn’s 2010 play, *Dying City*, questions whether love existed in a marriage before the husband is killed abroad in the War on Terror. The play investigates the problems festering within individual American lives, suggesting that the nation’s battle cry may be located within such lovelessness. It shares the admonition of many of the works in my study that the pastoral notion

of homecoming—a seeking out of refuge from war—does not and never did quite exist. In a more humorous way, Caryl Churchill’s *Drunk Enough to Say I Love You?* stages a re-encounter between a man and a country who appear to have had a one-night stand some time ago. The country does not immediately recognize the man, who in earlier productions had been called Jack until Churchill changed his name to Guy, which has the effect of personifying the country as a careless, aloof lover. Their dialogue throughout the play reflects Churchill’s later stream-of-conscious speech, with the country, Sam, spouting words such as “freedom,” “Ellis Island,” “democracy,” and “security” and Guy admiring these tactics: “so clever,” “and they vote the way you want, that is so,” “great artwork” (273-74). Unfortunately, the play suffers from oversimplifying a long history of American intervention during the Cold War, which produces a strong didactic tone coupled with an unconvincing moral indignation. However, Churchill’s decision to frame this history in the language of love nicely emphasizes at once the success of American ideology and the credulous persistence of love, if only these two things were not at complete odds (an irony that the play perhaps overstates).

As well, Zadie Smith’s 2005 novel, *On Beauty*, takes up the subject of love through a critique of the beautiful as defined by Kantian aesthetics. It makes intertextual references to E.M. Forster’s *Howards End* and revises the novel’s interest in class division by adding racial and cultural identity to the mix. *On Beauty* retains the structure of *Howards End* by updating the conflict between two divergent families that is eventually resolved by the friendship that develops between the two wives of these families. The novel thus underscores what Forster saw as the role of friendship and marriage in mitigating social tensions. In a different way, Nicole Krauss’s *The History of Love* (2005) also upholds friendship amidst the barbarism of contemporary life in New York City, in this case between an elderly Holocaust survivor and an

emotionally deprived teenage girl. Gary Shteyngart's *Super Sad True Love Story* (2010) is an attempt to find and give love in an absurd, dystopian present and it remains a novel with which I must contend in the future (I simply did not find it in time). Finally, another author who has been left out of this investigation for reasons of timing is Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. In an interview about her novel *Americanah*, she remarked, "Don't we all in the end write about love? All literature is about love" (Brockes).

By way of conclusion, I would like to end with further thoughts on the directions I see emerging from this study. Firstly, in my investigation of romance in the third chapter, I realized that I did not explore in much depth the romantic impulses of terrorism. This lineage is not a new proposal (as some have traced the political concept of terror historically to the French Revolution), but it nonetheless deserves more theoretical space than I have given it. I imagine this analysis to include some of the novels mentioned previously that are not part of this study, namely Philip Roth's *American Pastoral* and Moshin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. I believe that further elaboration on romance as a genre, as a mode, and as a literary historical phenomenon could be productive for my research interests. I would therefore be able to address in greater depth Fredric Jameson's suggestion that the persistence of romance as a narrative has much to do with our grim political reality and a vague, under-articulated sense that something must be done. I do not believe it is productive to evaluate this persistence as politically good or bad but to become more conscious of its existence and of what potential—progressive and regressive—it possesses. I have explored the problems of moral simplicity within the romance genre, but there is much more to be thought about romance's relationship to imaginative exploration and hope.

Secondly and finally, I discovered that there is renewed interest in groups and collective experience in psychology that is worth pursuing in literary analysis. A second direction my future research might take is exploring formal experiments and representations of intersubjective experiences that go beyond the dynamic of two people. The smallest group is defined in psychology as three people; within the primary triad of the family, individuals learn that they are not the sole object of their mothers' attention and love. How individuals negotiate this transformation has a significant impact on how they will fare in subsequent relationships. I would be interested in pursuing literature that explores collective endeavours in greater depth, especially literature from outside the countries represented in this dissertation. I believe literature written in the areas most forcefully opposed by Cold War dogma, such as Latin America, the Middle East, and Asia, will have more developed models of sociality that would be beneficial to bring to discussions in the United States and Britain. This direction would extend what Edward Said advocates in reforming humanities education and overcoming the ideology that has enthralled us for so long. As Spivak remarked in her speech after 9/11, "The humanities must learn to de-trivialize themselves and to stake their suitable place at the university in this troubled century. I am utterly appalled by conservative young colleagues who insist with amazing insularity on teaching 'only literary skills'—what are they?—because the students arrive untrained; as the world breaks around them" (110).

Because this investigation has taken up the particular problem of "lucid" writers at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it has focused on the darkest themes of cruelty, violence, and lovelessness. While there have been humorous moments in texts such as *Far Away*, *The Unknown Terrorist*, *The City*, and *Make Love*, the mood of this study has been overall quite sober, perhaps in direct contrast to the euphoric stupor that marked the 1980s and 1990s.

However, I have tried to show how literary engagements with this reality offer alongside these sobering portraits a sense of the possibility for political regeneration through the unceasing desire for love. In this way, I do not propose a politics of love in my analysis so much as a politics founded in love, a politics that might grow out of individuals that are loved in the widest sense possible. By this I mean exactly what Sherrif Bell had suggested by the loss of manners equalling the collapse of society, that love expressed by the concern for one's neighbour, as Emmanuel Levinas has written. This desire for love is what gave rise to the first international socialist movement, and its meagre flame continues to burn despite the accumulating evidence of its failure.

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