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Reclaimed Experience: Gendering Trauma in Slavery,

Holocaust, and Madness Narratives.

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements

for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in French and Francophone Studies

by

Nathalie Ségeral

2012

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Reclaimed Experience:
Gendering Trauma in Slavery, Holocaust,
and Madness Narratives.

by

Nathalie Ségeral

Doctor of Philosophy in French and Francophone Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2012

Professor Laure Murat, Chair.

How does a woman writer memorialize her own traumatic history, when it happens to be part of a larger History dominated by male narratives (as far as Holocaust and slavery go), or when it is altogether silenced (as is the case for madness and institutionalization)? This work applies interdisciplinary memory studies to the gendering of trauma in eight contemporary historical and (auto) fictional narratives. The common point among these authors lies in their suffering from a triple alienation: as women, as dominated subjects in history, and as writers kept at the margins of the literary canons.

Following Michael Rothberg's concept of "multidirectional memory,"¹ which demonstrates how marginalized collective memories interact productively instead of competing with one another, this study reads in conversation Black women writing about slavery (Maryse Condé and Toni Morrison), Jewish and non-Jewish women writing about the Holocaust (Charlotte Delbo, Sarah Kofman, and Cécile Wajsbrot), and (formerly) mad women writing about madness (Leonora Carrington, Emma Santos, and Unica Zürn). So far, the commonality between women's writings of slavery and of the Holocaust has barely been touched upon in French and Francophone literature, and their potential kinship with texts by mad women has not been studied at all. They resort to a set of shared tropes, in order to reclaim their stories: ghosts, metaphorical and historical infanticidal mothers, distorted lineages, and rewritten fairy tales and myths, which are used – albeit in different ways – by all of them, so as to debunk myths held by male narratives about "femininity."

Thus, in the process of re-appropriating the traumatic history they have inherited, or experienced first-hand, these writers blur gender boundaries by

¹ Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2009).

deconstructing the notion of “motherhood.” If multidirectional memory emphasizes trauma as a link between cultures, it can thereby be furthered by being applied to gender studies, and extended to a realm of literature located outside of history, and yet, anchored in it: the writing of madness. A close study of how the memory of the traumatic past becomes literature in eight texts serves to emphasize how the circulation of recurring tropes among narratives dealing with different time periods and different types of traumas creates a resonance among these writers, allowing them to reclaim agency and giving rise to a transnational literary voice of the gendering of trauma. Ultimately, this project’s aim is to create a multidirectional feminist trauma theory.

The dissertation of Nathalie Ségeral is approved.

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University of California, Los Angeles

2012

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Nathalie Ségeral holds a “licence” (Bachelor’s degree) in Philosophy and English Literature from the University of Burgundy (Dijon, France), as well as a “maîtrise” (Master’s Degree) in Anglo-American Literature from the University of Burgundy. During her M.A., she also studied at the University of Reading (England) through the E.R.A.S.M.U.S. European exchange program.

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She has been able to complete her research in Berlin and at the I.M.E.C. in France thanks to being awarded a UCLA/Mellon Fellowship on Holocaust Studies in American and World Cultures, as well as an Irving and Jean Stone Dissertation Year Fellowship from the UCLA Center for Women’s Studies.

She has published articles on the articulation of desire with madness, femininity, and voyeurism in Marguerite Duras (*Nasledje*, Serbia, and *Écritures*, France), as well as several academic translations (including a collaboration with Dominic Thomas on the translation of an article by Jean-Godefroy Bidima for the *Forum for Modern Language Studies*). She has presented her research at academic conferences in France, England, Spain, Latin America, and the USA.

INTRODUCTION

Following Michael Rothberg's 2009 concept of "multidirectional memory,"² which demonstrates how marginalized collective memories interact productively instead of competing with one another, I propose reading in conversation Black women writing about slavery (Maryse Condé and Toni Morrison), Jewish and non-Jewish women writing about the Holocaust (Sarah Kofman, Charlotte Delbo, and Cécile Wajsbrot), and (formerly) mad women writing about madness (Leonora Carrington, Emma Santos, and Unica Zürn), in order to argue that these authors all use specific tropes, so as to express traumatic (his)story – be it experienced or fictional. In finding their own tropes and voice, these women writers challenge their positions as reified subjects of male historical and psychoanalytical narratives, and are able to reappropriate their stories.

The justification for bringing these three themes (slavery, the Holocaust, and madness) together is strong. The common point between the various female authors that I will be studying lies in their triple exclusion, or triple "alienation": as women, as dominated subjects in history, and as writers kept at the margins of the literary canons.

The overarching question I would like to raise is the following: in order to reclaim their stories, these women writers feel the need to resort to specific tropes and find their own voices. What are these tropes? Are there commonalities between them? My argument is that there actually exists a set of common tropes to which these female writers resort, and that could

² Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2009).

constitute a common voice to women's writings dealing with the sexed subjectivity of trauma: figures of tormented motherhood (be it the staging of the "evil" mother, the infanticidal mother, or fantasies of self-procreation) and rewritten fairy tales, which are used – albeit in different ways – by most of these writers. The *mise en abyme* of rewritten fairy tales, intertextualities, and fairytale-like narratives, all play a central role in these texts, in order for these authors to (re)write themselves into history, and debunk certain myths held by male narratives about "femininity." My position is not that there is such a thing as an innate "écriture féminine" of trauma, but that the writers included in this study intentionally develop specific tropes, so as to reclaim their stories, in a conscious attempt at differentiating themselves from their male counterparts. Thus, I will not be using "gendering" in a genetic sense, but as referring to a political stance.

Michael Rothberg's *Multidirectional Memory* opens with an instance of what he calls "the zero-sum game" of the competition of memories, by drawing the reader's attention to a debate that had stirred the African American community when the federally funded Holocaust Memorial Museum was inaugurated on the Washington Mall, thereby revealing a taboo on comparison in both Holocaust and slavery studies, along with a great inequality in the distribution of "grievability" in the United States. Rothberg quotes an excerpt from an essay written at the time by literary critic Walter Benn Michaels, revealing the seemingly incompatible legacies of slavery and the Nazi genocide in the United States. However, through another example (the emergence of Holocaust testimonies at the time of the "massacre du 17 octobre 1961" in Paris, in a context of decolonization and the Algerian War), Rothberg demonstrates that, to the contrary, memory is always structurally multidirectional, and calls for the urgent development of an ethics of comparison. While equation can become a form of competitive

aggression (as was the case in the recent comparison of Israeli politics with those of Nazis, by American professor Alan Schechner), comparing does not mean equating; in fact, comparing means acknowledging that solidarity is at stake in memory studies, so as to counter the political economy of knowledge and memory, and to avoid limiting the map of possibilities to the map of power.

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* opens with the following incipit: "*Sixty Million and More*," which refers to the number of slaves estimated to have died in the Atlantic Slave Trade. However, the number also calls to mind an implicit comparison with the Holocaust, whose number of victims appears to be multiplied ten-fold. In the light of Rothberg's multidirectional memory, one can wonder whether Morrison was thinking about a competitive type of comparison, or about the idea of a productive solidarity among the various marginalized memories. Among the many embedded stories found in *Beloved*, one of them concerns the memorialization of the genocide of the Cherokees, thus pointing to Morrison's multidirectional frame of mind. The massacre of Native Americans also provides a recurring subtext to Maryse Condé's *Tituba*:

[John Indien] m'apprit que la Traite s'intensifiait. C'est par milliers que les nôtres étaient arrachés d'Afrique. Il m'apprit que nous n'étions pas le seul peuple que les Blancs réduisaient en esclavage mais qu'ils asservissaient aussi les Indiens, premiers habitants de l'Amérique comme de notre chère Barbade (Condé 78).

Later on, *Tituba* is bought by a Jewish man, which allows for a parallel between slavery, racism, and anti-Semitism. Thus, Condé draws recurring parallels among various kinds of oppression, both synchronically and diachronically: the situation of Black slaves in America, the massacre of Indians, and that of the Jews, going so far as to use the phrase "solution finale" at some point in the novel, in reference to *Tituba*'s impending death sentence, but echoing of course the

Holocaust. This intertextuality with other historical traumas, in keeping with Rothberg's concept of "multidirectional memory," is recurring in all of the texts included in this doctoral work: Charlotte Delbo's Holocaust memoirs are triggered by the Algerian War, Cécile Wajsbrot's *Mémorial*'s main character meets a woman from Auschwitz who is trying to set up a twin cities program with Hiroshima and Chernobyl, Unica Zürn's paranoid hallucinations are centered on Nazi crimes for which she needs to be punished, along with her delusions that she is about to give birth to the reunified city of Berlin, while Emma Santos's *La Malcastrée* and Leonora Carrington's *En Bas* use recurring parallels with concentration camps, the Second World War, and slavery.

In the same multidirectional framework as Rothberg, the recent volume of essays edited by Nancy K. Miller and Marianne Hirsch, titled *Rites of Return: Diaspora Poetics and the Politics of Memory*, shares some of the same preoccupations as multidirectional memory, but in a gendered perspective that is absent from Rothberg's essay: "In its concern with justice, ethics, and repair, and the ways in which those domains are shaped by structures of family, generational identity, and home, *Rites of Return* marks a new moment in the field of gender and cultural studies" (Hirsch and Miller 18). Furthermore, Miller and Hirsch place an emphasis on connections rather than comparisons³ in their transnational exploration of diaspora narratives. *Rites of Return* is presented as staging

a dialogue between feminist and diaspora studies, offering a multifaceted paradigm of community that acknowledges longings to belong and to return while remaining critical of a politics of identity and nation. [...] An attention to roots and identity-based origins

³ "In placing their stories alongside each other, we are putting forward a *connective* rather than *comparative* approach that places the claims, responses, and strategies of redress emerging from different contexts in conversation with each other. The performance of return crosses cultural divides and reveals both commonalities and differences among diverse groups with divergent histories" (Hirsch and Miller 8).

does not necessarily mean an appeal to a biological essentialism, shored up and masked by innovative technology. [...] as feminists, we are committed to challenging idealizations of home. We have embraced the commitment to contingent, ambiguous definitions of self. But, [...] throughout this past decade, we have been actively engaged in the emerging fields of memory and trauma studies and particularly have come to appreciate the confluences and the commitments these theoretical projects share with feminism. Indeed, the notion of *postmemory* elaborated by Marianne Hirsch emerges from feminist insights into the mediated structuring of identity and the intersection of private and public forces in its formation (Hirsch and Miller 4).

These attempts at thinking cultural memory and feminism through new paradigms testify to the urgency of not only granting attention to what could be termed “minority” historical narratives, but, also, to reclaim a central position for women writers in cultural memory studies, by studying them in a connective, productive perspective.

Thus, in turn, building on Rothberg’s construction of multidirectional memory as an “echo chamber,” where histories are understood as related to each other, my goal is to closely study how the memory of the traumatic past becomes literature in the eight texts included in this work, and to emphasize how the circulation of recurring tropes among texts dealing with different time periods and different types of traumas creates a dialogue among these women writers. It allows them to reclaim⁴ their experiences, while giving rise to a transnational literary voice of the gendering of trauma, in keeping with Rothberg’s ideal of a “shared memory.”

In the title of this study, I am taking the liberty of paraphrasing trauma theorist Cathy Caruth’s article entitled “Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History,” which deals with the representation of the history of trauma through an analysis of Freud’s *Moses and Monotheism*, arguing that, by shifting the referentiality of history to trauma, we permit “*history*

⁴ By using the phrase “to reclaim one’s experience,” I am paraphrasing trauma theorist Cathy Caruth’s article “Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History,” *Yale French Studies* 79 (1991): 181-192.

to arise where *immediate understanding* may not” (Caruth 182). It seems to me that this is precisely what all of these authors are doing, especially through the use of fairy tale or myths, genres that usually depict dysfunctional family patterns and, therefore, allow for a *mise en scène* of perverted motherhood and distorted lineages as embodiments of traumatized memory. In doing so, these female writers challenge their positions as reified subjects of male historical and psychoanalytical narratives, and are able to reappropriate their stories. So far, the commonality between women’s writings of slavery and of the Holocaust has barely started to be touched upon in French and Francophone literature, and their potential kinship with texts by mentally-ill women has not been studied.

Women (writers) suffering from mental illnesses have all too often suffered from being reified by men’s reductive discourses on the mentally-ill female subject, as can be seen in traditional Freudian psychoanalysis, and in narratives in the vein of André Breton’s *Nadja*, in which the main character Nadja is never given a voice by the narrator. Women writing about historical trauma are faced with similar challenges in finding their own voices, in a field largely dominated by male narratives. Talking about History as the dominant discourse of the West *on* the colonized, Edouard Glissant, in his *Caribbean Discourse*, wants “to show how History (whether we see it as expression or lived reality) and Literature form part of the same problematics: the account, or the frame of reference, of the collective relationships of men with their environment [...]” (Glissant 69-70) and goes on to denounce History as “a highly functional fantasy of the West, originating at precisely the time when it alone ‘made’ the history of the World” (Glissant 64). Thus, “because the Caribbean notion of time was fixed in the void of an imposed nonhistory, the writer must contribute to reconstituting its tormented chronology [...].

As far as we are concerned, history as a consciousness at work and history as lived experience are therefore not the business of historians exclusively” (Glissant 65).

Therefore, Glissant urges the Caribbean writer to act as a historian and repair the omissions of western history. This issue of the writer as historian is precisely what is at stake in my study, since these women write with the intention to repair what has been suppressed from history books or from literary history. Even though Sarah Kofman states, in *Paroles suffoquées*, that “un récit-fiction sur Auschwitz est insoutenable et cet événement ne saurait avoir été ‘anticipé’ par aucune littérature” (PS 22), as time goes by, the issue of what happens to the Holocaust memory when all survivors are dead becomes crucial. Thus, literature can, just as it does for slavery, become a medium of transmission and expression, palliating the shortcomings of history books which do not depict the Holocaust as experienced and which silence its gendered experience. Therefore, the theoretical perspective guiding this study will be a confrontation and combination of Cathy Caruth’s trauma theory, Marianne Hirsch’s concept of postmemory, Michael Rothberg’s multidirectional memory, along with Hirsch and Nancy Miller’s *Rites of Return: Diaspora Poetics and the Politics of Memory*. Ultimately, I would like to be able to demonstrate that multidirectional memory studies should also include, and be enriched, by the “mentally-ill” memory.

According to Michael Rothberg, “postmemory may well constitute a particular version of memory’s multidirectionality” (Rothberg 271). Rothberg sees Marianne Hirsch’s concept of “postmemory” as one of the many occurrences of multidirectional memory, through the staging of the question of transmission in stories of intergenerational conflict. Rothberg argues that coming to terms with the past always happens in comparative contexts; hence, he tries to demonstrate how a countertradition exists, in which remembrance of the Holocaust intersects

with the legacies of colonialism, slavery, and ongoing processes of decolonization. More specifically, he shows how the 1961 Eichmann trial in Jerusalem and the massacre of two hundred Algerians in Paris on October 17, 1961, have allowed for the emergence of Holocaust awareness while, at the same time, through a reciprocal influence, the Holocaust has enabled the articulation of other histories of victimization – even though it had paradoxically been declared “unique.” So, while the remembrance of the Holocaust serves as a paradigm to *Multidirectional Memory*, Rothberg wants to move beyond what he calls the logic of “zero-sum game” (Rothberg 11), which characterizes the present logic of dominant accounts of memory and identity, defined by competition (for instance, competition for victimization in slavery, Native American, and Holocaust traumas, as if there were “winners” and “losers”).

One of the examples of multidirectional memory used by Rothberg is Marguerite Duras’s November 1961 article, entitled “Les Deux Ghettos,” in which she resorts to an aesthetic of juxtaposition by exposing two interconnected interviews: one of an Algerian worker in the Nanterre shantytown, and one of a female Holocaust survivor. She also juxtaposes two photos: one of two male Algerian workers in Nanterre and one of the Warsaw ghetto. According to Rothberg, the very act of comparing, through the figure of the ghetto’s segregated space, “highlights unevenness and difference, and links the contemporary crisis to past events that had not yet received their due” (Rothberg 237). Multidirectional memory is powerfully creative (Rothberg 5) and is both “retrospective and forward-looking” (Rothberg 309).

Now, in which ways is multidirectional memory different from Hirsch’s concept of “postmemory”? We will see that, ultimately, their respective approaches to the past are quite similar, despite their apparent differences. Marianne Hirsch coined the term “postmemory” in

order to express the dilemmas of memory and identity experienced by descendants of Holocaust survivors. In her 2002 article “Marked by Memory: Feminist Reflections on Trauma and Transmission,” published in a book entitled *Extremities: Trauma, Testimony, and Community*, edited by Nancy Miller and Jason Tougaw, Hirsch explains that, for survivors of trauma, the gap between generations is the breach between a traumatic memory located in the body and the mediated knowledge of those who were born after. She writes that “trauma, in its literal meaning, is a *wound* inflicted on the body” (“Marked by Memory”⁵ 72). Hirsch takes as her point of departure an example drawn from Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, in which Sethe tells her daughter Denver about the time when her own mother showed her the mark of slavery on her breast, and told her that Sethe would recognize her thanks to this mark, should she happen to die. Sethe’s anxiety was then about a reciprocal relationship to her mother: “But, Ma’am, how would you recognize *me*?” Hirsch draws a parallel between the mark of slavery and the arm tattoo with which former concentration camp inmates were marked, and she reads the body mark as a sign of trauma’s incommunicability, a figure for “the traumatic real that defines the gap between survivors and their descendants” (“Marked” 72). In this perspective, she focuses her study more on the *visual* discourse of trauma, and of the mark, than on the literary language as the privileged medium for the transmission of trauma.

Hirsch studies the visual medium through various works of art. One of them is a set of photographs made by a male artist, of a female Holocaust survivor with her daughter, both of them holding a picture of the grandmother, who apparently died in Auschwitz. Even though Hirsch emphasizes the specificity of the role of the *daughter* in the transmission of trauma, thanks to the privileged mother/daughter relationship and their bodily closeness, which allows

⁵ Marianne Hirsch’s “Marked by Memory” will be referred to as “Marked” from now on.

for a better transmission of what she calls “sense memory” (“Marked” 73), the male photographer explains that working with these women has allowed him to become a “retrospective witness by adoption” (“Marked” 87), thanks to photography, whereby visuality becomes both a figure and a vehicle for the transmission of sense memory.

For Hirsch, Morrison’s “rememory” and her concept of “postmemory” are the two extremes of a wide range of ways in which trauma is transmitted intergenerationally. Even though, in *Beloved*, the transmission of traumatic memory also occurs within a matrilineal family, “rememory” is a form of omnipresent memory that ends up engulfing both the present and the future, and is characterized by *appropriation*; whereas postmemory is “an identification with the victim or witness of trauma, modulated by an admission of an *unbridgeable* distance” (“Marked” 89). Postmemory is, therefore, characterized by aesthetic strategies of identification, projection, and mourning; if an over-identification occurs, then the danger lies in the possibility for the more distant idioms of postmemory to slide back into the appropriations of rememory. Thus, rememory seems to be characterized by *appropriation* of the inherited traumatic past, without it being modulated by the recognition of distance.

So, whereas Hirsch’s approach to the past appears to be more concerned with coming to terms with trauma, since postmemory seems mostly analeptical, Rothberg’s multidirectional memory is presented as a proleptical process, insofar as the emphasis is on “opening up lines of communication with the past” (Rothberg 10) thanks to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing. Rothberg highlights memory’s anachronistic quality – “its bringing together here and there, now and then” (Rothberg 5) – as the source of its powerful *creativity*. However, contrary to *Beloved*’s story, which is repeatedly said *not* to be “a story to pass on,” Hirsch’s

postmemory serves as a vehicle of transmission without retraumatizing, and can also be *creative*, as can be seen in the example of the photographer and the process of “retrospective witnessing by adoption.”

Besides, through the mother-daughter relationship (which is further described in Hirsch’s article “Mothers and Daughters”), reclaiming traumatic memory through intergenerational transmission is also a way of “reclaiming the mother,” thereby reclaiming *history*, since Holocaust memory has so far been a largely male-dominated field. Thus, postmemory is a form of empowerment, just like Rothberg’s ethical claims for multidirectional memory are a way of giving rise to more empowerment through better justice. Ultimately, both Rothberg and Hirsch see past trauma as a *link*: a link between generations for Hirsch – and even between cultures, through “witnessing by adoption” – and a link between cultures for Rothberg. Though Hirsch’s postmemory is more sensual and related to the body as the site of trauma, whereas Rothberg’s approach is more intellectual, postmemory and multidirectional memory intersect as creative ways of mourning and as what Rothberg describes as “ethical visions based on commitment to uncovering historical relatedness” (Rothberg 10) so as to achieve a “shared memory” (Rothberg 11).

I hope to be able to further Michael Rothberg’s concept of multidirectional memory by examining how it can specifically be applied to gender studies, and by extending it to a realm of literature located outside of history, and yet, anchored in it: the writing of madness. Women’s writings of slavery and of the Holocaust have so far been kept at the margins of what one could call “canonical” historical literature; in a similar manner, women’s writings of madness have been kept at the margins of literature. As I have demonstrated above, Black women writing on

slavery, Jewish and non-Jewish women writing on the Holocaust, and “mad” women writing about madness, all suffer from a double (or triple) alienation: as women writers in a field largely dominated by male writings, and as writers of “subaltern” (his)stories. Thus, in these three cases, writing becomes an act of re-appropriation of one’s story and of history, by gendering their own story through the use of specific tropes. This is why writing becomes an act of subversion and transgression – subverting traditional literary genres and tropes, and transgressing generic boundaries.

Rothberg mentions trying to develop a “multidirectional trauma theory” (Rothberg 67), in the third chapter, entitled “‘Un Choc en Retour’: Aimé Césaire’s Discourses on Colonialism and Genocide,” devoted to the trauma of colonization. Cathy Caruth, in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, calls for the “necessity of this multifaceted approach” (Caruth ix) to trauma, since “the irreducible specificity of traumatic stories requires in its turn the varied responses – responses of knowing and of acting – of literature, film, psychiatry, neurobiology, sociology, and political and social activism” (*Ibid.*) She goes on to declare that “this volume is unique [...] in showing the richness of the many ways in which a variety of disciplines can contribute to the ongoing work on trauma” (*Ibid.*), which is, ultimately, very similar to the approach offered by Rothberg, but with a specific emphasis on trauma. Drawing on their combined approaches, the goal of this study is to sketch a multidirectional feminist trauma theory.

Talking about PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder), Caruth writes that “the pathology consists, rather, solely in *the structure of its experience*⁶ or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the

⁶ Emphasis is the author’s.

one who experiences it. *To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event*⁷” (Caruth 4). The possession by an image or event is exactly what I will be looking for in these texts, by studying the recurring tropes of distorted lineages and perverted motherhood common to the writing of these three different types of trauma, so as to demonstrate that these women writers embody/flesh out this possession in their texts, in an attempt to reclaim and master their stories.

Furthermore, “if PTSD must be understood as a pathological symptom, then it is not so much a symptom of the unconscious, as it is *a symptom of history*.”⁸ The traumatized, we might say, carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess” (Caruth 9). The concept of the traumatized becoming herself a symptom of history will be at the heart of my analysis of the nine texts included in this project. In each one of these texts, we will see that distorted genealogies and tormented motherhood occur, in various ways, as symptoms of the traumatized memory in the process of reclaiming her own history, whereby the female writer/narrator/character ceases to be a passive *symptom* of history and becomes a *subject* of history.

According to Hirsch, the female body is the privileged site for the transmission of trauma – especially the physical closeness existing between the mother and her daughter, which she had already theorized her review “Mothers and Daughters,” in which she summarizes and challenges “the great unwritten story” (“Mothers and Daughters” 200), i.e., the mother-daughter plot. And yet, as I am hoping to show in this project, the mother-daughter relationship, while

⁷ Emphasis is mine.

⁸ My italics.

being central to all of these writings, is, more often than not, used in a distorted way, so as to debunk any idealization of the mother-daughter relationship, which has too often been used as a trope of “innocence” in men’s narratives of traumatic history.

Rothberg sees Hirsch’s – along with the recent trends in memory studies – placing the child figure at the heart of trauma transmission, as very problematic and preoccupying from an ethical standpoint. However, in all of the texts that I will be studying, the child is not depicted as a victim, but rather as the “ghost of memory,” haunting and destructive. Since both Cathy Caruth and Marianne Hirsch point out the centrality of family in the transmission of trauma, the recurring figures of perverted motherhood, found in all of the literary texts included in this corpus, and often expressed through the rewriting of fairy tales, seem particularly relevant in women’s writings of historical and personal trauma. They serve as tools in the gendering of their (his)stories, through the subversion of the very tropes used by male narratives as counterpoints to trauma – i.e., the idealized “mother-daughter” relationship. Thus, the articulation and expression of these tropes are informed by the “mother” tongue, and must be read in relation to it. Following Rothberg’s ideal of a “shared memory,” this is what I am hoping to bring to light by studying the nine texts through the prism of the specific tropes I have just mentioned.

The present work is divided up among three parts, and each of them includes women writers whose common literary goal is to find a new literary voice in order to tell their stories, insofar as traditional literary genres fail to account for the specificity of their “otherness” arising from their gender, race, social status, and mental condition, and for the disruption of traditional chronological narrative brought about by trauma. While contributing to the overarching argument concerning the gendering of traumatic memory and post-traumatic stress disorder, each

part and chapter in this study will raise its own set of questions; thus, various methodological approaches will be required.

The first part of the dissertation deals with the writing of the trauma of slavery. Both Maryse Condé and Toni Morrison feel the need to challenge the white, dominating, phallogentric literary voice of the West, so as to develop a new form of literature that will best render the experience of their characters. In the first chapter, I will investigate the literary representation of the historical trauma of slavery in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Maryse Condé's *Moi Tituba sorcière... Noire de Salem*, so as to demonstrate the at-once similar and contrasted ways in which both women writers use specific devices (ghosts, embedded stories, and the impossibility of motherhood) in reclaiming and gendering traumatic history. While I am aware that much has already been said and written about *Beloved* and *Tituba*, this first part will try to shed new light on the workings of memory in these two texts by studying them in a comparatist way, and by drawing bridges between the ways in which slavery is memorialized in them, and those that are used in the memorialization of other traumas, such as the Holocaust, schizophrenia, and psychiatric institutionalization. This study will also explore the transgenerational transmission of trauma, through the prism of Hirsch's "postmemory." My main focus will be on the gendering of memory and trauma through a study of ghostly lineages, blurred gender roles and boundaries, and a rewriting of several Western master narratives (feminism, Christianity, and fairy tales), so as to demonstrate the pivotal shift from passivity to agency constituted by the re-embodiment and gendering of the female experience through literature.

Maryse Condé's *Moi, Tituba* produces a counter-history, thanks to a reintegration of Tituba into language, literature, and history, who then ceases to be an *object* to be talked and

becomes the *subject* of voiced discourse. This statement could also apply to the women writers of the Holocaust and madness sections. The “mad woman,” as exemplified in narratives like Breton’s *Nadja*, is usually the voiceless object to be talked about in male discourses, and, as Ruth Klüger puts it, the Jewish woman is also confined to silence by “the [Jewish] religion, which reduces its daughters to helpmeets of men and circumscribes their spiritual life within the confines of domestic functions” (Klüger 30), while turning all of its women into “the daughters of the Jewish patriarchy” (*Idem*).

The second part revolves around the gendering of the Holocaust trauma and its transgenerational transmission, and the second chapter will thus turn to the specific voice in which female Jewish and non-Jewish writers express the (post)memory of the Holocaust, so as to re-appropriate the traumatic history they have inherited, or experienced first-hand. Not only is the issue of the gendering of the Holocaust experience and of memory becoming increasingly studied, but historical facts are available to validate the fact that the Holocaust was actually *not* an un-gendered experience. And yet, issues of gender in Holocaust memoirs written in French remain largely under-explored. I will thus focus my attention on three women writers who are either survivors themselves, or children of Holocaust victims, and on three types of narratives: an autobiography by a Jewish woman whose father died in Auschwitz but who was not herself deported (Sarah Kofman’s *Rue Ordener, rue Labat*), a Holocaust memoir by a non-Jewish survivor (Charlotte Delbo’s *Auschwitz et après* trilogy), and a piece of fiction by a Jewish woman whose grandparents survived the Holocaust (Wajsbrot’s *Mémorial*).

More specifically, this chapter will be an attempt at exploring how Cécile Wajsbrot, a female Jewish writer of the “after generation,” expresses the memory of the Holocaust inherited

from her parents and grandparents, and in which ways her novel *Mémorial* differs – or not – from the writings by Charlotte Delbo, who is herself a Holocaust survivor, and from the writings by Sarah Kofman who is both a Holocaust child survivor and a victim’s daughter. Toni Morrison and Maryse Condé felt the need to challenge the white, western, male-dominated narrative of history, and create a new form of literature, in order to re-appropriate History. In the same perspective, do female Holocaust survivors or from the “after generation” feel a need to find their own literary expression? How do they express the gendered memory of the Holocaust? In which ways do their writings differ – or not – from their male counterparts’ writings? Is there a similar sense of a “double alienation” among these women? How do they reclaim their history? I will thus endeavor to show that these women writers mostly use the same tropes as Morrison and Condé, i.e. perverted motherhood, ghosts, distorted lineages, and embedded stories, in order to turn their stories into a rewriting of (his)story. However, despite the fact that all three writers resort to the device of expressing trauma – and the distorted family situations resulting from it – through the use of fairy tales and various intertexts, we will see that they do so in different ways and for different purposes.

Furthermore, does the literary expression of the traumatic history/memory differ, according to whether the author’s “mother” tongue is French or not? Is the issue of the *mother* tongue relevant at all in the way in which (post)memory is expressed? I am proposing to explore these narratives in relation to two main issues: on the one hand, what are the tropes used by these women writers in gendering their story? How do these tropes differ (or not) according to whether one has directly experienced the trauma or has inherited it through postmemory? Thus, in which ways do the tropes used by these authors vary in relation to the immediacy or remoteness of memory? Are memory and postmemory informed by the same tropes? On the other hand –

though in keeping with the first issues – how can these narratives be read in relation to the “mother” tongue? Since both Cathy Caruth and Marianne Hirsch pointed out the centrality of family in the transmission of trauma, these recurring figures of perverted motherhood, often expressed through the rewriting of fairy tales, seem particularly relevant in these women’s writings of historical trauma. They serve as tools in the gendering of their (his) stories. Thus, the articulation and expression of these tropes are informed by the “mother” tongue, and must be read in relation to it. It is especially crucial, insofar as, in Kofman’s case, the mother tongues are Yiddish and Polish, and, in Wajsbrot’s case, it is Polish; furthermore, the Holocaust experience being defined as the “nom hors nomination,” that which cannot be told – “faute d’un mot⁹” – Holocaust narratives pertain to the limits of language and are informed by a desire to find alternative literary techniques, so as to render the “unimaginable” – in the same vein as slavery and madness narratives.

Holocaust testimonies have been extensively studied. However, my focus will not be on the testimonies themselves as pieces of historical “truth” but on the return, insofar as these narratives were all, by definition, written after the events took place. Drawing upon Hirsch and Miller’s *Rites of Return*, I will therefore be focusing on various aspects of the returns: the return of the repressed trauma and the language of return, the physical return to the site of family trauma (returning to her family’s “primal scene”), and the psychological and metaphorical return to trauma.

In the third and last part of this study, the “otherness” of the female authors arises from their mental condition. The final chapter will thus explore the gendering of madness and, more

⁹ Charlotte Delbo, *Auschwitz et après III: Mesure de nos jours*, p.15 ; *Spectres, mes compagnons*, p.7.

specifically, the use of these aforementioned tropes in autofictional narratives of madness, so as to investigate the “language of madness” and its gendering. My study will be centered on Leonora Carrington’s *En Bas*, Unica Zürn’s *L’Homme-Jasmin*, and Emma Santos’s *La Malcastrée*. These three narratives give accounts of personally experienced bouts of madness that resulted in institutionalization, and can be read in conversation in relation to the similar tropes and devices they use. These autofictions can also be termed “psychiatric memoirs”¹⁰ which present themselves as attempts at responding to phallogentric discourses on the “mad woman,” and at empowering the alienated mentally-ill female “subject.”

Both Carrington and Zürn were part of the surrealist movement, and suffered from schizophrenia at some point in their lives. Santos’s case is somewhat different. Even though she was not “officially” a surrealist writer, I will endeavor to show that she uses the same surrealistic style of narrative as the other two authors. One of my aims is to read *L’Homme-Jasmin*, *En Bas*, and *La Malcastrée* as counterpoints (and counter-narratives) to male discourses on the mad woman, such as André Breton’s *Nadja*. The texts by Santos, Carrington, and Zürn rehabilitate the “mad woman” as a speaking subject, and as a writer, through the omnipresence of the theme of the author as (pro)creator, through delusions of maternity and what I call the figure of the “child-mother,” and contribute to a representation of madness that problematizes gender identities.

¹⁰ For a discussion of the “psychiatric memoir” as a literary genre, see Susannah Wilson’s *Voices from the Asylum: Four French Women Writers, 1850-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

p.4: “The research presented here adds to this body of knowledge by bringing to light a fascinating but still largely unacknowledged tradition in the history of women’s writing the ‘psychiatric memoir’. The generic status of each of these writings is far from fixed, however, and each incorporates a number of the above-mentioned forms.”

One of the purposes of a comparison between narratives of madness, of the Holocaust, and of slavery is to underline the similarities that they bear in relation to metaphors of imprisonment, alienation, and dis-possession of one's story and body. The authors included in the madness chapter use recurring allusions to concentration camps when writing about their experience in the psychiatric hospital. My overarching argument is that literary depictions of the space of the plantation, of the space of the Nazi concentration camp, and of the space of the psychiatric hospital bear astonishing similarities that foster an echo chamber in keeping with what Michael Rothberg describes, with the Holocaust as a productive trope serving for the creation of links between traumas and cultures. Furthermore, these madness narratives share, with slavery and Holocaust narratives, a concern with writing the "unwritable"¹¹ and finding narrative techniques that challenge "traditional" narratives, so as to render the specificity of the gendered experience of madness and institutionalization – the "nom inconnu, hors nomination"¹² (ED 180), by which Maurice Blanchot refers to Auschwitz. My intention is of course not to liken the experience of Holocaust survivors with that of "madness survivors," but to underline the meta-narrative concerns shared by these authors with rendering the unspeakable and finding tropes and literary devices that will adequately account for what pertains to the limits of human experience (as Toni Morrison puts it, "to pass on a story that is not a story to pass on").

Stressing these issues seems essential, insofar as, usually, one could object that, in the case of slavery and of the Holocaust, one deals with collective memory, as opposed to the individual memory of madness and institutionalization; that the memory of the Holocaust and of slavery pertains to a shared trauma, whereas madness is an individual one, experienced in

¹¹ "Comment donc raconter ce qui ne peut sans leurre être 'communiqué'? Ce qui manque – ou a trop – de mots pour être dit [...]" (Sarah Kofman, *Paroles Suffoquées*, p.45).

¹² Maurice Blanchot, *L'Écriture du désastre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980).

solitude. However, while it is true that being institutionalized equates being excluded from the community, the same could be said of being sent to a concentration camp or a plantation. Thus, by drawing bridges between these narratives of slavery, Holocaust, and madness trauma, my hope is to demonstrate that madness narratives belong to a community of trauma, and participate in this collective, transnational voice of the gendering of trauma which I am trying to create.

Even though Rothberg and Hirsch focus solely on memory in historical writings, I believe that their respective theories can be relevant to narratives of madness, insofar as memory also plays a crucial role in all of these texts. First of all, in the case of autobiographical accounts of (temporary) madness, the account is written *after* the episode of “madness” has occurred; hence, the narrative is now about the *memory* of madness. Discussing Hirsch’s concept of “postmemory,” Rothberg states that

developed in the context of Holocaust studies, Hirsch’s concept – as she recognizes – is itself susceptible to transmission across fields. [...] The structure of postmemory emphatically manifests itself in postcolonial contexts such as the aftermath of the Algerian War. [...] But what Hirsch does not say – although her account does not exclude the possibility – is that postmemory may well constitute a particular version of memory’s multidirectionality (Rothberg 270-271).

Writing about madness after one has recovered from it amounts to memorializing madness. In so doing, one of the tropes that these women writers share with those used in slavery and Holocaust narratives consists in distorted lineages and the centrality of the child figure and of the mother-daughter as two aspects of the same character.

Besides, one can also benefit from reading these narratives in the light of Caruth’s trauma theory; namely, in all three cases, the episode of madness is triggered by a traumatic event. Then, the “primal” trauma becomes doubled by the second trauma of the episode of

madness and the experience of the psychiatric hospital. Besides, writing about oneself amounts to becoming the historian of oneself. And history is definitely at the core of these madness narratives, be it personal history or larger History. In all three authors, the trigger for the mental illness can be found in the intertwining of traumatic personal and historical events. We will also see how the child figure serves to highlight the suspended time of madness (or the psychiatric hospital as the site of suspended chronology) while challenging dominating male, surrealist narratives – and Rothberg’s multidirectional memory – heralding childhood as a period of innocence and carelessness. Furthermore, the madness narratives included in this study all span from a desire to bear witness to a traumatic life experience and, following Charlotte Delbo’s statement¹³, are animated by the belief that writing is a powerful weapon of defense and contestation.

As Caruth explains in “Unclaimed experience: trauma and the possibility of history,” “the traumatized [...] carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess” (Caruth 9). This seems to me to be all the more relevant to madness narratives, insofar as this “impossible history” is precisely what is at stake here, as madness cannot be “possessed” and has been marginalized as being “outside” of history; as a consequence, it is the act of writing itself which becomes the expression of a *symptom*. These attempts at “reclaiming” their experience through literature also serve as the means for Zürn, Santos, and Carrington to reclaiming a place for the “madwoman,” and to reclaiming and gendering surrealist clichés.

¹³ “je considère le langage de la poésie comme le plus efficace [...] et le plus dangereux pour les ennemis qu’il combat. [...] Je n’écrirais pas si cela me paraissait inutile.” In “Entretien avec Charlotte Delbo,” interview with François Bott, *Le Monde des livres*, 20 juin 1975, p. 15.

The purpose of this chapter will, thus, be two-fold: on the one hand, to explore the continuity and common points between these madness narratives and the slavery and Holocaust narratives studied in the previous two chapters; on the other hand, to highlight the sexed subjectivity of madness and institutionalization, and the gendering of both surrealism and the discourse on madness at stake in these female authors' attempts at reclaiming their story, in the same vein as Morrison, Condé, Wajsbrot, Delbo, and Kofman reclaim their experience through a gendering of History. Ultimately, in what ways do these women writers achieve new gender categories?

In *Multidirectional Memory*, Michael Rothberg emphasizes the echo chamber of the Holocaust as a productive trope serving for the creation of links between traumas and cultures. While Rothberg focuses his study on the correspondences between the Holocaust and the Algerian War, my goal is now to demonstrate that, on the one hand, the madness narratives included in this study constantly resort to historical trauma, so as to anchor themselves within a larger chronology, but, on the other hand, their use of comparisons with other traumas – especially with the Holocaust – allows for the circulation of recurring tropes common to madness, slavery, and Holocaust narratives, thus extracting madness narratives from their historical and literary isolation, and creating a shared female voice of madness. This is all the more so crucial as, historically, madness (and, even more so, the “madwoman”) has been perceived as *a*-historical, whereby narratives of madness have been kept at the margins of literary history and of the literary canon. Thus, multidirectional memory can be read in the echoes that resonate among these texts written at different time periods and dealing with different types of trauma.

Thus, the eight authors included in this work share a common concern with reclaiming agency in a paradoxical context of being dis-membered and dis-possessed of their story, and reading them in conversation allows for a collective empowering giving more weight to each individual story. As Hirsch and Miller remark,

when we examine the detail, the case studies of individual and collective return, attentive to hierarchies of gender and sexuality and the power dynamics of contested histories, we find that hidden within what appears to be a universal narrative of rights are uneven and gendered smaller stories, forgotten and submerged plots of the kind that feminist theory has taught us to bring to light (Hirsch and Miller 7).

It is these “forgotten and submerged plots” that this study hopes to bring forth by granting them justice through a reclaimed position within history and literary canons.

PART I: Gendering Slavery.

Introduction

In *Moi, Tituba, Sorcière... Noire de Salem*, Maryse Condé juxtaposes issues of madness, slavery, and the Holocaust, when the narrator recounts the following episode in her ordeal while in jail after the Salem witch trials:

Mère, notre supplice n’aura-t-il pas de fin? Puisqu’il en est ainsi, je ne viendrai jamais au jour. Je resterai tapie dans ton eau, sourde, muette, aveugle, laminaire sur ta paroi. Je m’y accrocherai si bien que tu ne pourras jamais m’expulser et que je retournerai en terre avec toi sans avoir connu la malédiction du jour. Mère, aide-moi! [...] On m’avait laissé mes chaînes, car on craignait, non pas que j’attente à mes jours, ce qui aurait semblé à tous une heureuse *solution finale*, mais que, dans des accès de violence, j’agresse mes compagnons d’infortune. Un certain docteur Zerobabel vint me voir, car *il étudiait les maladies mentales* et espérait être nommé professeur à l’Université de Harvard. Il recommanda que l’on expérimente sur moi une de ses potions: “Prendre le lait d’une femme qui nourrit un enfant mâle. Prendre aussi un chat et lui couper une

oreille. Laisser le sang s'écouler dans le lait. Faire boire ce mélange à la patiente"¹⁴
(Condé 175).

This single passage, through a non-birth imagery, followed by allusions to the Holocaust's "final solution" and to mental illness, not only summarizes the subsequent themes that I will develop in this study (the circulation of tropes among texts dealing with slavery, the Holocaust, and madness), but also the irony of *Tituba's* narrative, which could actually be read as an ironic counter-point to *Beloved*. I will come back to these themes in close details throughout this study, and we will see that the mixture of blood and milk is a central one to both narratives.

Multidirectional Memory also questions recurring children figures in narratives dealing with trauma and memory, by raising very interesting issues regarding the over-use of children as figures of innocence heightening questions of responsibility. We will see that *Beloved* and *Tituba* both herald children figures as embodiments of trauma, while, at the same time, questioning the very narratives of "innocent childhood." However, Morrison and Condé go further than Rothberg, who does not question the "purity" of the mother-baby/daughter relationship. As a matter of fact, in keeping with most narratives about trauma and, in particular, Holocaust trauma, Rothberg perpetuates this image of the preserved "innocence" of motherhood – an issue to which I will come back at length over the course of this study.

In this first part and chapter, I will investigate historical trauma and the representation of slavery in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Maryse Condé's *Moi Tituba sorcière... Noire de Salem*, so as to demonstrate the at-once similar and contrasted ways in which both women writers use specific devices (ghosts, embedded stories, and the impossibility of motherhood) in

¹⁴ Emphases are mine.

reclaiming and gendering traumatic history. While I am aware that much has already been said and written about *Beloved* and *Tituba*, this first part will try to shed new light on the workings of memory in these two texts by studying them in a comparatist way, and by drawing bridges between the ways in which slavery is memorialized in them, and those that are used in the memorialization of other traumas, such as the Holocaust, schizophrenia, and psychiatric institutionalization. This study will also explore the transgenerational transmission of trauma. My main focus will be on the gendering of memory and trauma in these works, through a study of ghostly lineages, blurred gender roles and boundaries, and a rewriting of several Western master narratives (feminism, Christianity, and fairy tales), so as to demonstrate the pivotal shift from passivity to agency constituted by the re-embodiment and gendering of the female experience through literature.

Edouard Glissant's *Caribbean Discourse* will serve as a starting point to the depiction of the devastating psychological consequences of the alienation created by colonization, and of the position of the colonized subject, for whom history is "a steadily advancing neurosis" (Glissant 65), and who has a duty to resort to literature in order to rewrite himself into history. Going further than Glissant, Cathy Caruth sees history as trauma rather than mere neurosis, and her statement that "to be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event" finds its exact and literal exemplification in these two novels, in which ghosts are the literary embodiments of a traumatic past. In *Rites of Return: Diaspora Poetics and the Politics of Memory*, in an interview by Nancy Miller, Saidiya Hartman remarks that "the reverberations of slavery can be discerned in contemporary forms of dispossession that are so immediate and unceasing that you can't even begin to think about memorialization, because people are still living the dire effects of the disaster" (Hirsch and Miller 111), thus immediately opening up

multidirectional lines of communication between the trauma of slavery and other traumas, through figures and experiences of dispossession – which can be read as the other, ambivalent side of the coin of possession described by Caruth. Thus, I will explore the ways in which, in paradoxical situations of disembodiment, i.e., of dispossession, narratives of possession emerge. Marianne Hirsch’s concept of “postmemory,” and her work on the matrilineal transgenerational transmission of trauma, will also provide a guiding framework for this study.

Chapter 1: Maryse Condé’s *Moi, Tituba sorcière... Noire de Salem* and Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*.

Introduction

Edouard Glissant, in his *Caribbean Discourse*, wants “to show how History (whether we see it as expression or lived reality) and Literature form part of the same problematics: the account, or the frame of reference, of the collective relationships of men with their environment [...]” (Glissant 69-70). He goes on to remark that “we [Caribbeans] can be the victims of History when we submit passively to it” (Glissant 70). According to him, “in our situation, historical consciousness can be (or be lived primarily as) the repertoire of responses of an individual-within-a-country to an Other-Elsewhere that would appear in terms of difference or transcendence” (Glissant 70). Glissant denounces History as “a highly functional fantasy of the West, originating at precisely the time when it alone ‘made’ the history of the World” (Glissant 64). He reproaches Hegel with having relegated African peoples to the ahistorical, and urges the Caribbean writer to “dig deep into his memory [...] because the collective memory was too often wiped out” (Glissant 64). Thus, “because the Caribbean notion of time was fixed in the void of an imposed nonhistory, the writer must contribute to reconstituting its tormented chronology

[...]. As far as we are concerned, history as a consciousness at work and history as lived experience are therefore not the business of historians exclusively” (Glissant 65). Therefore, Glissant urges the Caribbean writer to act as a historian and repair the omissions of western history.

In both Maryse Condé’s *Moi, Tituba sorcière... Noire de Salem* and Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, one can see an attempt at rewriting history without using a traditional white male’s voice or narrative perspective, through the use of literary devices such as the presence of the fantastic, a challenge to the socially-constructed notion of motherhood, and an adaptation/appropriation of the postmodernist style expressed via a rewriting of dominating ideologies. I will therefore show in which ways these two historical novels – or, rather, these heterobiographies¹⁵ – following Glissant’s call for the Caribbean or Black writer to “reconstitute tormented chronology” (Glissant 65), challenge the dominating white, western, linear discourse on history and the traditional western historical novel, first through their use of the fantastic (leading to an analysis of their treatment of memory and, hence, of prolepsis and analepsis), through the staging of ghosts and spirits, then through the role and purpose of figures of infanticidal mothers, and, finally, through a questioning and gendering of Western misogynistic narratives and the blurring of lineages and of gender categories. How do these two narratives try to write the history of the “Other”? How do Morrison and Condé reclaim their experience by gendering trauma?

¹⁵ Here, I use “heterobiography” as referring to fictional (auto)biographies of historical individuals, written by another person.

I *Magical Realism and Ghostly Lineages: Towards a Creolization¹⁶ of History?*

1) Ghosts of Memory:

By using the phrase “to reclaim one’s experience,” I am taking the liberty of paraphrasing trauma theorist Cathy Caruth’s famous article, “Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History.” Going further than Glissant, Cathy Caruth sees history as trauma rather than mere neurosis. Talking about PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder), Caruth writes that “the pathology consists, rather, solely in *the structure of its experience*¹⁷ or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it. *To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event*¹⁸” (Caruth 4). Her statement that “to be traumatized is precisely to be *possessed* by an image or event” finds its exact exemplification in these two novels, in which ghosts are the literary embodiments of a traumatic past. This is all the more obvious in *Beloved*, at the end of which an actual exorcism is required, in order to free Sethe from the ghost of her murdered daughter, i.e. from the burden of memory.

Maryse Condé’s *Moi Tituba sorcière...Noire de Salem* (1986) is the fictive autobiography of Tituba, the only non-white woman to have been judged in the Salem witch trials. Condé revives Tituba in order to give her a voice, so that she can tell her own story from

¹⁶ For a discussion of the creolization of theory, see Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih (ed.)’s *The Creolization of Theory* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), in which the authors, taking up Glissant’s concept of “creolization,” uphold a transnational, transhistorical, and interdisciplinary approach to scholarship, beyond academic and political maps of power.

¹⁷ Emphasis is the author’s.

¹⁸ Emphasis is mine.

the after-world. Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) recounts the story of Sethe, a slave who ran away from a plantation called Sweet Home before the Civil War and who, at the time of the narrative, lives in Cincinnati with her eighteen-year-old daughter Denver. The story takes place in 1874. *Beloved* is also a historical novel, since Morrison wrote it after the historical record of a particular event that happened in 1855, in which a runaway slave named Margaret Garner tried to murder her four children when her former owner tracked her all the way down to Cincinnati – under the Fugitive Bill – where she had found refuge at her mother-in-law's home.

Therefore, both novels originate from the same type of source: a real historical account (in *Tituba*'s case, the mentioning by historical records of the Salem witch trials of "Tituba, une esclave de la Barbade et pratiquant vraisemblablement le vaudou"¹⁹ – Condé 173 – and a newspaper article in *Beloved*'s case). Starting from the historical facts, both Condé and Morrison (re)create a fictional account, or a fictional heterobiography, of the lives of the women involved in these actual events. Numerous other striking similarities between the two novels can be found, be it only that both were published at almost the same time by black women writers. Both novels deal primarily with trauma, i.e., the traumatic history of slavery depicted through the characters' personal stories.

In her article entitled "Material Histories of Transcolonial Loss: Creolizing Psychoanalytic Theories?" Liz Constable argues that expressing the Other's trauma also entails a departure from the traditional psychoanalytical theories of trauma and the elaboration of a new definition of trauma. Quoting Kelly Oliver,²⁰ Constable writes:

¹⁹ "Tituba, a slave originating from the West Indies and probably practicing 'hoodoo'" (*I, Tituba*, p.7)

²⁰ Kelly Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), p.57.

Different from classical psychoanalytic definitions of trauma, trauma develops here when subjects experience ‘the inability to find the social space in which, or language with which, to express one’s own body and meaning.’ In redefining trauma this way, Oliver also departs from the traditional psychoanalytic understanding of sublimation as the process by which an individual converts affects into words and meaning. [...] That process of essential meaning-making is necessarily more accurately understood as *social* sublimation [...] (Constable 32-33).

In the case of historical trauma, the trauma is of a social kind, therefore the trauma is no longer expressed as the movement from one idea to another, as Freud had it, but “from one body to another” (Constable 30). This movement from one body to another is essential to my argument, since these women writers’ endeavor is to precisely *re-embody* their story, which they feel has been silenced and of which they feel dis-possessed by dominating male narratives.

In her novel *Moi, Tituba sorcière... Noire de Salem*, Maryse Condé gives a voice to the “Other” by giving a voice to Tituba, who is “other” in several ways: as a woman, as a slave, and as a black person. Therefore, if women like Tituba are to have a voice, and to cease to be perceived as other, then a new form of literature has to be found. I think that the device of the fantastic in Condé’s narrative of Tituba’s life exemplifies Glissant’s advocacy of the use of magical realism in order to offer an alternative to western realism which, according to him, is not appropriate to the history of African or American peoples.²¹ The same could be said of Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, which uses a similar narrative technique as Condé, with the centrality of the fantastic.

²¹ “Realism, the theory and technique of literal or ‘total’ representation, is not inscribed in the cultural reflex of African or American peoples. [...] Western realism is not a ‘flat’ or shallow technique but becomes so when it is uncritically adopted by our writers. The misery of our lands is not only present, obvious. It contains a historical dimension [...] that realism alone cannot account for” (Glissant 105).

Namely, the presence of the spirits of Tituba's dead mother Abena, her adoptive father Yao and her benefactress Mama Yaya, and Tituba's conversations with them, which she mentions as a matter of fact, subvert the traditional codes of reason, and of the western novel in general. Tituba's story also subverts the codes of the genre of autobiography in several ways, be it only that the story is told by Tituba, i.e., a dead woman, that is to say that she is herself a ghost. *Moi, Tituba's* incipit ironically "legitimizes" Condé's enterprise with the following statement from the author/narrator: "Tituba et moi avons vécu en étroite intimité pendant un an. C'est au cours de nos interminables conversations qu'elle m'a dit ces choses qu'elle n'avait confiées à personne"²² (*Moi Tituba* 9). In *Beloved*, there are at least two instances of the fantastic occurring in the narrative: first, the ghost of Sethe's dead daughter, whom she killed by cutting her throat when she was two years old. The novel starts with the introduction of the ghost before anything else: "124 was spiteful. Full of a baby's venom" (Morrison 3). Then, after the ghost is finally chased away by Paul D's arrival, a young girl named Beloved – which is the only word that Sethe had time and money enough to engrave on her daughter's tomb – comes to 124 and appears to be the incarnation of the grown-up dead baby. In her *Foreword*, Morrison asserts the central place of ghosts in *Beloved*: "To invite readers (and myself) into the repellant landscape (hidden, but not completely; deliberately buried, but not forgotten) was to pitch a tent in a cemetery inhabited by highly vocal *ghosts*" (Morrison xi). From its opening, the narrative of the devastating consequences of the slavery trauma that constitutes *Beloved* is likened to a cemetery inhabited by ghosts, thus granting ghosts a central position within the literary process of memorializing trauma.

²² "Tituba and I lived for a year on the closest of terms. During our endless conversations she told me things she had confided to nobody else" (*I, Tituba* v).

In order to investigate more closely the different purposes of ghosts in relation to memory in both novels, let us turn to the third chapter of Lois Parkinson Zamora's essay *The Usable Past*, entitled "Ancestral Presences: Magical Romance / Magical Realism," in which she studies the nature of literary ghosts as embodiments of the past and, therefore, of history. She sees two main types of ghosts in literature: they are either "carriers of metaphysical truths, as visible or audible signs of atemporal, transhistorical Spirit" or "they may carry historical burdens of tradition and collective memory" (Parkinson Zamora 76). The ghost of the dead baby in *Beloved* definitely belongs to the second category, insofar as it is always threatening and overwhelming. Each family member seems to project onto that ghost what they feel about the past. Namely, before Paul D arrives to "124" and scares the baby ghost away, we are told that Sethe's two sons had left the house forever, because of the malevolence of the ghost. Paradoxically, the two living boys had been "chased off by the dead one" (Morrison 5-6), which is the literal embodiment of the power of memory, which becomes so overwhelming that it literally prevents the present from finding room to exist. Interestingly enough, only Denver perceives the ghost of her dead sister positively; she considers the ghost to be her only company, since she sees Paul D as "the man who had gotten rid of the only other company she had" (Morrison 19) and, repeatedly, after the ghost's departure, we are told that "again she wished for the baby ghost" (Morrison 13). As for Sethe, she gives Paul D the following depiction of the ghost: "It's not evil, just sad" (Morrison 8) whereas Denver perceives it as "not evil. But not sad either" (Morrison 13).

Interpretations differ as to the nature of the young girl named Beloved who arrives to Sethe's house after the vanishing of the ghost: some critics interpret Beloved as a survivor from a slave ship who has escaped from a white man's house where she was being used as a sexual

slave, and they uphold that Sethe's obsession with her past makes her project her memories onto Beloved and mistake her for her dead daughter.²³ In any case, despite these differing interpretations, I definitely see Beloved as the incarnation of the spirit who was previously haunting 124 before Paul D's arrival – be it only that “Beloved [was] so agitated she behaved like a two-year-old” (Morrison 116), which is precisely how old she was when she was killed. Even though Sethe initially believes in the hypothesis that Beloved was being held captive by a white man (“Uh huh,” said Sethe, and told Denver that she believed Beloved had been locked up by some whiteman for his own purposes, and never let out the door” [Morrison 140]), the narrative of the first appearance of the young girl named Beloved unambiguously echoes a narrative of delivery. Namely, the reader is told, about Beloved, that “everything hurt but her lungs most of all” (Morrison 60), which implies images of Beloved's birth and of a newborn's first breath. As soon as Sethe sees Beloved, “her bladder filled to capacity; [...] the water she voided was endless. [...] No, more like flooding the boat when Denver was born. [...] But there was no stopping now” (Morrison 61). At the same time, a parallel is established with Beloved, who drinks “cup after cup of water” (Morrison 61), so that Sethe and Beloved are immediately presented as mirror images of each other, and as complementing each other's *body*. This image of communicating vessels is carried out throughout the narrative, until the mother-daughter relationship becomes completely and visually reversed: “Beloved bending over Sethe looked the mother, Sethe the teething child [...]. The bigger Beloved got, the smaller Sethe became” (Morrison 294).

²³ Elizabeth House, “Toni Morrison's Ghost: The Beloved who is not Beloved,” *Studies in American Fiction* 18.1 (1990): 17-26. p.18.

Besides, it seems obvious that the embodiment of the ghost of Beloved is triggered by the reappearance of Paul D in Sethe's life, which brings back a lot of memories that she was trying hard not to think about, as we are told from the beginning that "she worked hard to remember as close to nothing as was safe" (Morrison 6) and "to Sethe, the future was a matter of keeping the past at bay [...]" (Morrison 42). Therefore, Beloved definitely appears to be the ghost embodying the past and the overwhelming memory of each character. All the more so as, in the end, at the time of the final exorcism, some members of the community fail to see her standing next to Sethe. The fact that Denver is the only one to have a positive relationship with the ghost might be linked with her not having directly experienced slavery and being ultimately depicted as very innocent, since her mother has been sheltering her so much: "as for Denver, the job Sethe had of keeping her from the past that was still waiting for her was all that mattered" (Morrison 42). Early in the novel, we are told that "[Denver] was ten and still mad at Baby Suggs for dying" (Morrison 4). This seems to emphasize Denver's immaturity. The only positive outcome of the story, which, we are told, is "not a story to pass on," lies in Denver's coming of age. Namely, Sethe's obsession with Beloved leads to her losing her job, and it is then Denver who has to take the initiative of going out into the world for the first time since she was six, and to look for a means of subsistence. Earlier on in the novel, Sethe tells Paul D about Denver: "Don't worry about her. She's a charmed child. From the beginning. [...] In jail, rats bit everything but her" (Morrison 41-2). Thus, Denver is the only positive instance of the fantastic in the narrative, because she has never known the condition of slave, so there is no bad memory that can haunt her.

Let us now return to Parkinson Zamora's study of literary ghosts. She argues that certain types of literary ghosts "are often bearers of cultural and historical burdens, for they

represent the dangers, anxieties, and passional forces that civilization banishes. They may signal primal and primordial experience, the return of the repressed, or the externalization of internalized terrors” (Parkinson Zamora 77). In my opinion, this is exactly the message that the literary figure of Beloved as a ghost is meant to embody: namely, even though Sethe’s murder of her daughter is only disclosed half way through the narrative, the trauma experienced by Sethe is hinted at very early on in the novel, when she reflects that “she could not *remember remembering*²⁴ a molly apple or a yellow squash. [...] It was as though one day she saw red baby blood, another day the pink gravestone chips, and that was the last of it” (Morrison 39). Here we see that the trauma of the baby’s murder was so violent that not only has Sethe become unable to see color, but the redundancy “to remember remembering” reveals that she is now twice remote from the traumatic event, through the repression of her senses – i.e., not seeing colors anymore – and she has also become estranged from her own memories. I think this is a really central sentence, since, as the narrative shows, Sethe has definitely not *forgotten* the past. Therefore, the remark that she cannot “remember remembering” also underlines the omnipresence of the past in her present, to the extent that it is not even a memory anymore. As Caruth explains, “[...] the problem of what it means to remember traumatic experience and what it means to know or recognize trauma in others remain complex issues tied to the fact that traumatic recall or reenactment is defined, in part, by the very way that it pushes memory away” (Caruth viii): in *Beloved*, one can see the literary enactment of this pushing away of memory, while being possessed by it at the same time.

Caruth further explains that “the traumatized [...] carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess”

²⁴ Emphasis is mine.

(Caruth 9). This “impossible history” is what is at stake in *Beloved*, in which, paradoxically, Sethe’s impossibility to “reclaim” her experience serves as the means for Morrison to reclaiming African Americans’ traumatic past of slavery through literature.

In his article entitled “Trauma and the Specters of Enslavement in Morrison’s *Beloved*,” Clifton Spargo considers “the explicit tension between trauma as a trope for recovered history and those therapeutic, empiricist-minded narratives that require a subject to progress beyond and locate herself rationally outside the traumatic moment” (Spargo 113). He argues that Morrison resorts to the Gothic tradition of ghosts in order to recover an untold history, so as to criticize what he terms “our conventional historical narratives” (Spargo 113) and to underline the limits of hegemonic, authoritarian systems of knowledge. This is also what Maryse Condé is doing in *Moi, Tituba*, with the difference that the story is told by the ghost herself. Namely, as we have seen previously, Tituba, who is the narrator, is a ghost, since she tells her story after having been long dead. In *Beloved*, the ghost of the dead baby is only occasionally given a voice, the first time being at the end of part two, in the section starting on page 210. However, her voice does not clarify her origins; to the contrary, her monologues are written in such an elliptic and equivocal way that they reinforce the feelings of oppression and of indeterminacy of meaning of the story/history that is being told. The total absence of rationality in *Beloved*’s streams of consciousness can be read as the impossibility to master any historical discourse on slavery and on the traumas resulting from it, which echoes Glissant’s ideas concerning the inadequacy of a rational narrative in telling a traumatic history.

According to Spargo, “the trauma functions rather as a ghost of rationality, that which announces a history haunting the very possibility of history” (Spargo 115). He goes on to argue

that the problem lies in “the peculiar relation an indirect and incapable consciousness – which is to say, a traumatized one – bears to history” (Spargo 116), which points to the ultimate inadequacy of a rational narrative in telling a traumatic history, which, again, echoes Glissant’s argument that magical realism is the privileged means for writing trauma.

Furthermore, if we agree with Parkinson Zamora and consider the ghost to be the embodiment of trauma, then it makes sense that Tituba’s ghosts are, on the other hand, not evil, insofar as, even though Tituba experiences many traumatic events, she never quite appears to be traumatized. She remains optimistic throughout the narrative and throughout her life; one experience just leads to another. Tituba’s story is not based on introspection, but rather on action. Her narrative often seems to be told from an external focalization, rather than relying on interiority and psychological experiences as *Beloved* does. Even though Tituba tells her story in the first person, she is at the same time distant from it, since she has long been dead and has, as a consequence, become a spectator of her own life. Of course, the emotionality of Tituba’s account is undermined by the limit of the “suspension of disbelief” which makes it hard for the reader to really identify with a ghost telling her story. But, also, it is partly due to the more detached tone of voice of the narrator. In that sense, it does seem that Condé’s intent was not, contrary to Morrison’s, to generate emotions and empathy in her readers. Despite her rejection of the traditional narrative along the lines of rationality, Condé’s novel remains very much in the realm of the intellect, due to its ironic tone. Condé herself stated that the character of Tituba was not to be taken seriously, since she is so infused with irony.²⁵

²⁵ Maryse Condé, *I, Tituba...*, Interview with Richard Philcox, p.147.

According to certain critics, such as Carla Peterson, Condé's purpose in writing the story of Tituba was to offer a new, *creolized* version of history. Therefore, Tituba's spirits seem to belong to the second category of ghosts identified by Parkinson Zamora, that is to say "carriers of metaphysical truths, as visible or audible signs of atemporal, transhistorical Spirit" (Zamora 76). Namely, each of these spirits seems to stand for a collective experience pertaining to Tituba's people. Abena and Yao embody the collective memory of slavery and of the African origins of the slaves, while Mama Yaya symbolizes Tituba's Creole roots; Mama Yaya passes on to Tituba the knowledge of her native culture, through the use of medicinal plants or, in a white Puritan perspective, witchcraft. Besides, *Tituba's* spirits are also one of the many proleptic instances in the narrative; namely, Man Yaya is the prophetic voice of the narrative, since she repeatedly tells Tituba: "D'entre eux tous, toi seule survivras" (Condé 86) and Tituba specifies that "Man Yaya m'apportait l'espoir" (Condé 84). In this perspective, Tituba's permanent optimism can be accounted for by these links to her native land, as opposed to Sethe's being entirely absorbed by the destructive past: Tituba always finds comfort in her native culture and the knowledge transmitted by her ancestor's ghost. Tituba's constant longing is for a return to her native Barbados, whereas, in Sethe's case, there is no such thing as a native land.

I would now like to focus on the character of Denver, about whom significantly less has been written than about Sethe and Beloved, since she has been very much dismissed as a secondary character. And yet, I believe that Denver is a central character to *Beloved's* narrative.

Constable asserts that

when communities de-realize the past in order to 'go on,' history remains non-history, and painful affects fill subjects with an un-mourned symbolic loss, a loss of meaning, that carries the potential to re-traumatize all over again, and to be affectively transmitted transgenerationally. Children bear and take on the unresolved affective

states of their parents' generation, and unmourned loss can reverberate as buried affect from generation to generation (Constable 33-34),

which is highly reminiscent of Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory.²⁶ However, in Denver's case, we can see that the transgenerational transmission of trauma does not seem to occur; Denver is healed thanks to the process of story-telling and myth-making, as well as the exorcism of the ghost of Beloved carried out by the community. The "exorcism" acts as an acknowledgement by the community of the trauma itself, whereby the traumatic history ceases to be trapped in the realm of the untold and a-historical. Hirsch takes as her point of departure an example drawn from Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, in which Sethe tells her daughter Denver about the time when her own mother showed her the mark of slavery on her breast, and told her that Sethe would recognize her thanks to this mark, should she happen to die. Sethe's anxiety was then about a reciprocal relationship to her mother: "But, Ma'am, how would you recognize *me*?" Hirsch draws a parallel between the mark of slavery and the arm tattoo with which former concentration camp inmates were marked, and she reads the body mark as a sign of trauma's incommunicability, a figure for "the traumatic real that defines the gap between survivors and their descendants" (Hirsch 72). And yet, quite interestingly, Hirsch does not seem to see in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* a case of postmemory. Instead, she uses the term "rememory" – which is the one coined by Morrison herself to describe her character Sethe's approach to the ever-present traumatic memory of slavery. For Hirsch, "rememory" and "postmemory" are the two extremes of a wide range of ways in which trauma is transmitted intergenerationally. Even though, in *Beloved*, the transmission of traumatic memory also occurs within a matrilineal family,

²⁶ Marianne Hirsch coined the term "postmemory" in order to express the dilemmas of memory and identity experienced by descendants of Holocaust survivors. In her 2002 article "Marked by Memory: Feminist Reflections on Trauma and Transmission," Hirsch explains that, for survivors of trauma, the gap between generations is the breach between a traumatic memory located in the body and the mediated knowledge of those who were born after. She writes that "trauma, in its literal meaning, is a *wound* inflicted on the body" ("Marked" 72).

“rememory” is, according to Hirsch, a form of omnipresent memory that ends up engulfing both the present and the future, and is characterized by *appropriation*; whereas postmemory is “an identification with the victim or witness of trauma, modulated by an admission of an *unbridgeable* distance” (Hirsch 89). Postmemory is, therefore, characterized by aesthetic strategies of identification, projection, and mourning; if an over-identification occurs, then the danger lies in the possibility for the more distant idioms of postmemory to slide back into the appropriations of rememory. Thus, rememory seems to be characterized by *appropriation* of the inherited traumatic past, without it being modulated by the recognition of distance. While it is true that Sethe ends up psychologically devoured by ever-present destructive traumatic memories, I believe that her daughter Denver can be seen as a successful example of “postmemory.”

Furthermore, while Hirsch only focuses on Sethe’s relationship to her own mother, and to the body mark of slavery, Sethe’s adult body is, in turn, marked by the scars from the physical abuse she suffered under schoolteacher’s domination at Sweet Home. Denver is painfully aware of those marks on her mother’s body, which she compares with a tree, talking about its “roots; its wide trunk and intricate branches” (Morrison 20). Denver feels excluded from her own family story, because she is excluded from trauma and its physical marks.

The ghost of *Beloved* serves as a catalyst to the highlighting of blurred lineages brought about by trauma and its transgenerational transmission. Namely, the ghost emphasizes the problems experienced by Denver in finding her position within the (matrilineal) filiation. For instance, when Paul D moves in with Sethe and Denver, Denver feels that “they were a twosome, saying ‘Your daddy’ and ‘Sweet Home’ in a way that made it clear both belonged to them and

not to her. That her own father's absence was not hers. Once the absence had belonged to Grandma Baby – a son, deeply mourned because he was the one who had bought her out of there. Then it was her mother's absent husband. Now it was this hazelnut stranger's absent friend" (Morrison 15). This issue strongly echoes Cécile Wajsbrot's narrator's situation in *Mémorial* and the distorted lineages brought about by postmemory as defined by Hirsch.

The blurred lineages are further emphasized by the introduction of the character of Beloved, whom Denver first calls "this sister-girl" (Morrison 90), whereby her sister becomes just another girl, a friend. The use of the demonstrative article "this," instead of a possessive one, is echoed by the following sentence: "That's were the others was. My brothers and... the baby girl." (Morrison 91). Denver talks about Beloved not as her sister, similarly to the blurred genealogies in *Mémorial*, but as "the" baby girl or "this" sister-girl. However, as the narrative progresses and Denver gradually re-embodies and re-possesses her story, she starts referring to Beloved in the following terms: "'My sister,' said Denver. 'She died in this house'" (Morrison 16), until the possession becomes literal: her sister becomes "*her* Beloved" (Morrison 143). This is a turning-point, since Denver, by appropriating Beloved, also finally re-appropriates her story, which she had felt had been taken away from her earlier on in the novel.

During the first part of the narrative, the natural genealogy even becomes reversed, when Denver becomes a surrogate mother for Beloved, who is her older sister. Denver starts behaving in a very maternal way, for instance when she "hid like a personal blemish Beloved's incontinence" (Morrison 64). Ultimately, Caruth's statement that trauma consists in being *possessed* by one's story, is illustrated literally by *Beloved's* narrative, which is presented as a narrative of possession: not only does Denver want to possess her dead sister Beloved, but, as the

narrative progresses, the three female characters' streams of consciousness increasingly revolve around issues of possession. Here are the very first words uttered by Beloved, and they are about Sethe: "But she is the one I *have to have*" (Morrison 89), whereby possession becomes both literal and metaphorical. And here is what Sethe tells Beloved: "[...] and when I tell you you mine, I also mean I'm yours (Morrison 239)." While, as a slave, Sethe used to be deprived of a life of her own, re-appropriating her story is brought about by ownership: "She come back to me, my daughter, and she is mine" (Morrison). The catharsis fostered by her dead daughter's re-appearance finally enables her to stop calling Beloved "the crawling already? girl" and substitute the article "the" with the possessive pronoun "mine," thereby literally re-appropriating her own story by establishing ownership of another being. As for Denver, the very first time that she is granted a monologue is when she states: "Beloved is *my* sister" (Morrison 242). Thus, the ghost allows her to finally develop her (own) sense of self and of belonging to the family.

However, the narrative quickly becomes a story of obsessive possession:

"I am Beloved and she is mine" (Morrison 253).

"She is mine" (Morrison 254)

"Beloved

You are my sister

You are my daughter"

"You are mine

You are mine

You are mine" (Morrison 255),

which is then repeated again three times, both at the end of the chapter and at the end of the section. This points to the fact that the ghost's embodiment ultimately creates a never-ending narrative of tormented quest for ownership, which can, in turn, be read as revealing the impossibility to "master" the discourse on slavery and to master one's traumatic past.

Coming back to Denver, even though she is recurrently depicted as over-protected by her mother, the narrative alludes to a trauma that she experienced when she was six years old. Namely, we learn that she had lost her ability to hear after hearing something she did not want to hear. Her becoming deaf – or, rather, unable to hear – for a year, after that traumatic utterance (a little boy at her school had told her that her mother had killed her sister) creates an intertextuality with Sigmund Freud’s famous patient, Dora, whose psychoanalysis he recounts in *Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*, since it is thanks to her that he was able to develop his method of the “talking cure.” This intertextuality with psychoanalysis and “hysteria” is a topic to which I will come back later on in this chapter.

Before the reader is told what the actual traumatizing words were, we learn that, for Denver, “anything is better than the original hunger – the time when, after a year of the wonderful little *i*, sentences rolling out like pie dough and the company of other children, there was no sound coming through” (Morrison 143). Denver’s original trauma and suffering seem to have been ignored and minimized by her mother (to whom Denver never told anything about this occurrence), exactly as happens in the case of transgenerational trauma and the impossibility described by Hirsch for survivors’ children to establish a strong emotional bond with their parents, as a consequence of feeling that whatever they experience will always be “less” traumatic than what their parents experienced in the Nazi camps.

The other source of suffering experienced by Denver is the departure of her two brothers. “Waking up to find one brother then another not at the bottom of the bed, his foot jabbing her spine. Sitting at the table eating turnips and saving the liquor for her grandmother to drink; her mother’s hand on the keeping-room door and her voice saying, ‘Baby Suggs is gone,

Denver”” (Morrison 143). In fact, Denver is not immature, despite some critics’ opinion. She has suffered a great deal, but her suffering has been denied and silenced, in comparison to the suffering endured by her mother and other former slaves. Even though Denver’s character is not very developed by Morrison, Denver’s mental suffering and her tormented relationship with her mother Sethe are alluded to once over the course of the narrative: “I love my mother but I know she killed one of her own daughters, and tender as she is with me, I’m scared of her because of it. [...] All the time, I’m afraid the thing that happened that made it all right for my mother to kill my sister could happen again” (Morrison 242). This, again, echoes Caruth’s trauma theory. Using a phrase usually applied to Holocaust survivors, Denver presents the reader with a case of “survivor’s guilt” while also living in fear, as one of her interior monologues reveals that “I spent all of my outside self loving Ma’am so she wouldn’t kill me [...]” (Morrison 245).

Towards the end of the novel, postmemory takes a cathartic turn in Denver’s case. Namely, after talking about her “outside self,” she develops her own “inner” self after an encounter with the same boy who had uttered the traumatizing words ten years before: “It was a new thought, having a self to look out for and preserve. [...] The last time he spoke to her his words blocked up her ears. Now they opened her mind. [...] Why not the third generation as well?” (Morrison 297). This allusion to “the third generation” echoes Hirsch’s postmemory and emphasizes the transgenerational healing of trauma through moving from the status of a victim to that of an agent.

However, as I mentioned before, Denver’s character is the only instance of a successful overcoming of trauma in *Beloved*, and, while *Beloved*’s arrival crystallizes issues of postmemory and transgenerational trauma, making Denver initially feel *dis-possessed* – both as “dis-

possessed of her own story” but, also, “dis-possessed of trauma” (“this is worse than when Paul D came to 124 and she cried helplessly into the stove. This is worse. Then it was *for herself*. Now she is crying because *she has no self*”²⁷ [Morrison 145]), she then goes on to (re)embody her story. On the other hand, *Beloved* – or the ghost – is depicted as *deprived* of memory, contrary to Sethe, who is trapped in an ever-present past. We are told that “they [Paul D, Sethe, and Denver] believed the fever had caused her [Beloved’s] memory to fail just as it kept her slow-moving” (Morrison 66), while Sethe’s “brain was not interested in the future. Loaded with the past and hungry for more, it left her no room to imagine, let alone plan for, the next day. Exactly like that afternoon in the wild onions – when one more step was the most she could see of the future. Other people went crazy, why couldn’t she?” (Morrison 83). Sethe therefore wishes for madness as a refuge from the traumatic memories.

Madness appears preferable to “having no self,” which is a recurring motif in slavery narratives. Before Denver, it was her grandmother Baby Suggs who pondered over the feeling of emptiness that was bred by a lifetime of slavery: “And no matter, for the sadness was at her center, the desolated center where *the self that was no self* made its home” (Morrison 165). In this perspective, it is noteworthy that this sense of selflessness is transmitted from one generation to the third one, in spite of Denver having not known the condition of slavery. This is also an instance of postmemory.

Thus, analyzing memory and analyzing the presence of the fantastic in both novels ultimately amounts to the same, since the spirits or the ghosts are embodiments of the past, i.e., of memory itself. The real subversion of the traditional historical novel by both authors lies in their use of ghosts to express metaphorically the working of memory, and this is especially

²⁷ Emphasis is mine.

visible in *Beloved*. In keeping with postmemory and the matrilineal transmission of trauma, let us now explore the ways in which both Denver and Tituba re-embodiment their story through a reversed fairy-tale-like narrative, and – in Denver’s case – through a rewriting of her mother’s biography, which can be read as a cathartic instance of transgenerational heterobiography.

2) **Re-Staging Traumatic History as a Reversed Fairy Tale:**

The difference in the treatment and purpose of ghosts as vectors of memory or symbols of history in the two novels leads to the consideration of the fundamental role played by memory in both narratives. *A priori*, Toni Morrison’s narrative seems entirely turned towards the past, because of Sethe’s mental imprisonment despite her physical freedom, whereas Condé’s narrative of Tituba is directed to the future. And yet, *Moi, Tituba* also uses memory extensively. How do both novels convey these relationships to the history of slavery? How do both novels depict history as a mental and metaphorical process rather than with facts? We will see that telling tales and stories are pivotal to both *Tituba* and *Beloved*, as a means to both expressing and overcoming trauma.

Elisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi²⁸ argues that Maryse Condé’s novel presents the following paradox: the author and her heroine are positioned in two different cultural and linguistic codes, i.e. oral and Creole on the one hand, and written and French on the other hand. Thus, Condé unveils Tituba’s voice while translating it from oral into written language, and from English into French. In this fictive autobiography, Condé becomes Tituba’s interpreter, translator, and

²⁸ Elisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi, “Giving a Voice to Tituba: The Death of the Author?” *World Literature Today* 67.4 (1993): 751-56.

mediator. By subverting all the codes, the author manages to reverse the power relationships represented by that double chiasma, and the intertextuality between these two codes creates what Pierre Nora calls a “lieu de mémoire,” since he argues that “in fact, memory has never known more than two forms of legitimacy: historical and literary” (Nora 24).

Namely, Pierre Nora argues that memory and history are two very different phenomena, and distinguishes memory as living, “natural,” and genuine, whereas history is artificial, past, and necessarily incomplete.²⁹ However, both *Tituba* and *Beloved* use memory in order to render history or to create a metaphorical discourse on history. Even though memory is considered by historians to be an unreliable source of knowledge, it is ultimately history at the personal level. Therefore, if the historical novel is to provide an alternative discourse on history, then it could be that the extensive use of memory could serve that purpose.

Quite interestingly, James Mandrell³⁰ - among others – refers to memory and analepsis as the traditional ingredients of the male historical novel, which he describes as traditionally linear, while, according to him, women tend to write proleptical historical novels. He argues that “one significant way in which a woman’s historical novel differs from the traditional – and traditionally male – model of the nineteenth century [...]” (Mandrell 230) is that, in women’s historical novels, “the dominant narrative mode is one of prophecy, which in rhetorical terms is the trope of prolepsis” (Mandrell 231). He goes on to explain that the narrative mode frequently associated with the historical novel is that of memory, i.e., “the classical historical novel is profoundly analeptic” (Mandrell 231), therefore “the historical novel is *his* story” (Mandrell

²⁹ Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de mémoire,” *Representations* 26 (1989): p.24.

³⁰ James Mandrell, “The Prophetic Voice in Garro, Morante, and Allende,” *Comparative Literature* 42.3 (1990). 227-46.

231). This can indeed apply to the narration of *Moi, Tituba*, which definitely conveys a prophetic message, one of the numerous instances being Tituba's proleptic remark that "l'Amérique se préparait à dominer le monde, grâce au produit de notre sueur" (Condé 260). She clearly states that the reach of her narrative is towards the future, when she opens the *Epilogue* with these words: "Voilà l'histoire de ma vie. Amère. Si amère. Ma véritable histoire commence où celle-là finit et n'aura pas de fin" (Condé 267). Tituba herself has become the shadow that comes back after her death in order to prophesize; her very figure becomes a manifestation of the future, since the purpose of her autobiographical narrative appears to be telling the past so as to free herself and her people, and then imagine a happier future. Namely, even though the entire story of her life took place at a time of slavery, and ended with an aborted slave rebellion, she foresees the abolition of slavery: "Oui, à présent je suis heureuse. Je comprends le passé. Je lis le présent. Je connais l'avenir. A présent, je sais pourquoi il y a tant de souffrances, pourquoi les yeux de nos nègres et négresses sont brillants d'eau et de sel. Mais je sais aussi que tout cela aura une fin"³¹ (*Moi Tituba* 271). Tituba has come back to deliver a message of hope, which is something opposite to Morrison's *Beloved*, in which the past, i.e., the ghost, only comes back as a "rememory," in order to revive the traumatic past without any hope for the future. The past comes back to engulf the present and the future. In that respect, *Beloved* limits Mandrell's argument insofar as, even though his initial intention is to show how women writers subvert the tradition of the historical novel in order to appropriate it, his argument unfortunately ends up sounding quite essentialist, as his conclusion turns out to be a generalization of what women's historical novels are like, as opposed to what men's ones are like.

³¹ "Yes, I'm happy now. I can understand the past, read the present, and look into the future. Now I know why there is so much suffering and why the eyes of our people are brimming with water and salt. But I know, too, that there will be an end to all this" (*I, Tituba* 178).

And yet, though Morrison makes extensive use of this so-called “male” tool of memory, the absence of linear chronology constitutes another way in which she challenges the traditional white, western, male historical novel. So, she writes a narrative based on memory, albeit in a post-modernist, anachronistic, and chaotic way, thereby mimicking the atemporality of the human unconscious. She does this by using a narrative strategy which is much like the structure of psychoanalysis, that is to say that her narrative offers a multiplicity of possible interpretations. Morrison’s project can be seen as one of historical myth-making, insofar as she writes a novel which incorporates techniques of mythical story-telling – of “African story-telling” according to some critics, so as to provoke the possibility of these different interpretations, much like, in psychoanalysis, the hypothesis of the unconscious is that it is made up of various “master narratives” or founding myths from childhood.

In an article entitled “Is Morrison also among the prophets?: ‘psychoanalytic’ strategies in *Beloved*,” Iyunolu Osagie analyzes the structure of what Sethe calls “rememories” and demonstrates that Morrison creates a narrative that explores “the psychic dimensions of American slavery” by “reinventing the slave past because the facts of slavery are elided, suppressed, and even forgotten in many recorded accounts” (Osagie 424). Indeed, the narration of *Beloved* functions as a (subverted) fairy-tale, insofar as there is no linear time but only an ever-present past, which is a suspension of time, just like in a fairy tale or in a myth. Osagie argues that this reveals the African-American subject as a fundamentally split subject. I would like to add that this also subverts traditional historical narratives, by creating a mythical narrative of history. This can be seen as constituting an example of what both Glissant and Constable advocate as the “vernacular creolization and theorizing of psychoanalytic perspectives [...] on

unmourned loss” (Constable 33) through new meaning-making, “social sublimation” and the generation of “new critical, creolized literacies” (*Ibid.*).

The same goes for *Tituba*, as Elisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi explains: according to her, *Moi, Tituba* produces a counter-history, “a victory over voicelessness and erasure, over effacement and exclusion” (Mudimbe-Boyi 756) thanks to a reintegration into language, literature, and history. She presents Tituba as the embodiment of marginality and of the “voiceless exotic other,” i.e. an *object* to be talked about but never the *subject* of voiced discourse. Therefore, it does not matter if Condé’s Tituba is not historically accurate, since “myths often become more powerful than history” (*Ibid.*). For Mudimbe-Boyi, Condé’s intention was ultimately to create a founding myth for the Creole civilization.

The myth-making at work throughout *Beloved*’s narrative finds its most telling exemplification in the mise en abyme of the story of Denver’s birth. We are told that, paradoxically, Sethe’s words “made Denver *remember* the details of her birth” (Morrison 29), whereby the story becomes both Denver’s memory and her history. Then, the process of Denver’s appropriation of her story/history is described metaphorically: “Easily she stepped into the old story that lay before her eyes on the path she followed away from the window. [...] And to get to the part of the story she liked best, she had to start way back [...]” (Morrison 29). Her mother’s memory and story-telling become her own history, which also provides a meta-discourse on the process of myth-making and the shaping of memory. For Denver, the narrative becomes memory. She later has to literally step out of the story, to be excluded from it, in order to grow up and come of age. Indeed, when her mother Sethe becomes entirely absorbed by *Beloved*, Denver becomes excluded of their story and has to start creating her own, i.e. live her

own life. This is, indeed, a successful instance of Hirsch's concept of "postmemory," as defined by "an identification with the victim or witness of trauma, modulated by an admission of an *unbridgeable* distance" ("Marked" 89).

The intertextuality of fairy tales becomes explicit when, early on in the novel, Beloved is described as a "sleepy beauty" (Morrison 63), which immediately calls to mind *Sleeping Beauty's* story – an intertextuality to which I will come back shortly. Furthermore, the centrality of embedded stories is underlined by the way in which the relationship that develops between Sethe and her resurrected daughter is based on story-telling, which echoes the relationship of a mother with her two-year-old daughter, but, also, which establishes a parallel with Tituba, who is constantly asked by the Parris children and their friends to tell stories. In Beloved's case, "it became a way to feed her. Just as Denver discovered and relied on the delightful effect sweet things had on Beloved, Sethe learned the profound satisfaction Beloved got from storytelling" (Morrison 69). The way in which food is replaced with words in the first part of the relationship between Sethe and Beloved evokes, once more, the Freudian "talking cure" and a form of catharsis through story-telling. Thanks to Beloved's presence, Sethe is finally able to talk about her past. The discourse on past trauma becomes a fiction / a tale. Denver reappropriates her story by turning her mother into a novel character with whom she can identify, thereby bridging the distance brought about by the transgenerational transmission of trauma emphasized by Hirsch. Here is how Denver talks about her mother's story: "there is this nineteen-year-old slavegirl – a year older than herself" (Morrison 91), as if Sethe were a character from a story to which Denver could easily relate. The character of Sethe's character – since Sethe has now become twice fictional and, therefore, twice removed from her historical self – is depicted as "a pretty little slavegirl [who] had recognized a hat, and split to the woodshed to kill her children" (Morrison

186). Thus, the account of Sethe's murdering of her daughter is presented like a tale, a kind of parable. As the narrative progresses, history increasingly gives way to fiction, so much so that Paul D eventually finds that Sethe's house is "like a child's house; the house of a very tall child" (Morrison 318).

The healing power of story-telling is made obvious in many ways, be it only that, after being compared to *Sleeping Beauty*, Morrison reclaims the traditional western fairy tale by rewriting its narrative and having Beloved become the one who seduces Paul D – thus rewriting her story. This could be read as a transnational instance of story-telling, in which Morrison rewrites the traditional fairy tale ending, thus creating a pivotal shift from passivity to agency through literature. Furthermore, we are told that "Denver spoke, Beloved listened, and the two did the best they could *to create what really happened*, [...]" (Morrison 92). Creating what happened further underlines the story re-embodiment at stake in the narrative. Re-empowerment comes from rewriting one's history, so as to reclaim agency and move beyond victimology. The story-telling serves as a metaphor for the transgenerational continuity of history, in which the fairy-tale-like language of the mother's story provides a means to redeeming the same story twenty years later, by re-inventing its ending.

In *Tituba*, Condé also uses the intertwining of myth, fiction, and history, especially through the occurrence, in the narrative, of the fictional character of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, Hester Prynne. As critic Lillian Manzor-Coats remarks,³² the Parris children and their friends always ask Tituba for stories, as does Hester, and Tituba always tells tales about her native Barbados. On that issue, Manzor-Coats has an interesting remark: even though Condé is

³² Lillian Manzor-Coats, "Of Witches and Other Things: Maryse Condé's Challenge to Feminist Discourse."

trying to position herself outside of the realm of the dominant white western narrative, she told one of her interviewers (Ann Armstrong Scarborough) that she wrote *Moi, Tituba* at the request of Mme Gallimard (from the Paris-based Gallimard publishing house) for a story about a woman from the Caribbean. Namely, the systematic footnoting of every Creole term in the French version also attests to the white target audience of *Moi, Tituba*. Therefore, as Manzor-Coats argues, ultimately Maryse Condé puts herself in the position of an entertaining storyteller for a white woman (Mme Gallimard), just like Tituba was asked to tell stories to Reverend Parris's daughters and to Hester Prynne – which, ironically, still positions the black woman in relationship to the dominating, white, patriarchal world.

However, *Tituba's* narrative can also be read as a reversed fairy tale. First, the narrator/Tituba begins her story much like the opening of a fairy tale: “les premières années de ma vie furent sans histoires. Je fus un beau bébé, joufflu, car le lait de ma mère me réussissait bien. Puis j'appris à parler, à marcher” (Condé 17). This over-emphasis of the “innocence” of childhood, along with the phrase “sans histoires” – which conveys a double meaning, since Tituba then grows up to become a “professional” story-teller – are contradicted only a few pages later, when Tituba states: “Je n'ai pas eu d'enfance. L'ombre de la potence de ma mère a assombri toutes les années qui auraient dû être consacrées à l'insouciance et aux jeux. Pour des raisons sans nul doute différentes des miennes, je devinais que Betsey Parris et Abigail Williams étaient, elles aussi, dépossédées à jamais de ce capital de légèreté et de douceur” (Condé 67). Not only does the fairy tale turn into a tragic nightmare, but, also, the centrality of the theme of “dépossession” (being dispossessed from one's story) echoes *Beloved*, while, as always, Condé's narrative also provides a kind of ironic distance that is never possible in *Beloved*: namely, she uses anachronistic phrases – such as “ce capital de légèreté” – apparently borrowed from

contemporary discourses on child psychology, the whole idea of childhood being an innocent and privileged time in life being itself a very contemporary one.

However, Tituba is depicted as very resilient throughout the narrative and, after having been dispossessed from her childhood and from her story, develops an outstanding ability to tell stories. This skillfulness at story-telling, including telling her own story, allows her to move from passivity to agency, and definitely accounts for the proleptic aspect of her narrative, and for the lesser degree of emotion arising from her “autobiography,” insofar as, since Tituba is capable of hope, she is also capable of the necessary detachment from the past, allowing her to take enough distance in order to tell her autobiography in her own voice. In *Beloved*, no detachment seems possible. The memory, or “rememory” in Sethe’s terms, is ever-present. The reason for this is that, in the case of *Beloved*, dealing with the *memory* of slavery, as opposed to “objective,” historical facts linked with it, is a way of reenacting the trauma; hence, no narratorial distance is possible.

As mentioned in the introduction, pervasive themes in both *Tituba* and *Beloved* are those of the juxtaposition of milk and blood, albeit for different purposes. In both cases, they serve as a symbol for the mother-daughter transmission and bonding, as described by Hirsch. However, in *Beloved*’s case, the transmission is that of trauma, as can be gathered from the scene following Beloved’s murder by Sethe: “Sethe was aiming a bloody nipple into the baby’s [Denver’s] mouth. [...] So Denver took her mother’s milk right along with the blood of her sister” (Morrison 179). In *Tituba*, the mixture of blood and milk, i.e. the juxtaposition of nursing/motherhood with the suffering and death brought about by slavery, also constitute a recurring motif; however, they do not stand for the transmission of trauma, but for that of

healing. As early as the first chapter, Tituba is taught witchcraft by Man Yaya in those terms: “Elle m’apprit surtout les sacrifices. Le sang, le lait, liquides essentiels” (Condé 23). This mixture of blood and milk sealing the sisterhood of Denver and Beloved, and the roots of Tituba within her native culture, bear great similarities with fairy-tale themes, such as the drop of blood shed by *Sleeping Beauty*’s Aurora when she pricks her finger on the spindle upon reaching adulthood. Psychoanalytical readings of the fairy tale – including Bruno Bettelheim’s – have interpreted the blood as a metaphor for menstrual blood and the discovery of sexuality. Namely, in Condé and Morrison’s narratives, blood and milk are intrinsically linked with the (re)embodiment of one’s story and coming of age. Indeed, toward the end of *Beloved*, as Denver is forced to go into the world, out of the house which she had never left, and find a job, she explains her employer that her grandmother told her “that I should always listen to my body and love it. That I was charmed. My birth was and I got saved all the time. And that I shouldn’t be afraid of the ghost. It wouldn’t harm me because *I tasted its blood* when Ma’am nursed me” (Morrison 247).

The milk also becomes a recurring symbol for Sethe’s obsession with her failure to be a “good” mother, through the following leitmotiv: “she had the milk all the time” (Morrison 284), as Sethe is trying to explain Beloved that, even though she killed her, she always had milk for her while she was running away. And yet, tragically, the more Sethe is striving to justify to her resurrected daughter why she had to kill her, and why she had to cause “the *perfect death* of her crawling-already? baby” (Morrison 116), the more her obsession with proving that she was a “good” mother (“You remember that, don’t you; that I did? That when I got here I had milk enough for all?” [Morrison 233]), and the more she loses her position as a mother: “When once

or twice Sethe tried to assert herself – be the unquestioned mother whose word was law and who knew what was best – Beloved slammed things” (Morrison 284).

However, because *Beloved*'s narrative is a reversed fairy tale, Sethe, Beloved, and Denver end up enacting a kind of love triangle, instead of building a family. The three of them are said to be “locked in a love that wore everybody out. [...] The job [Denver] started out with, protecting Beloved from Sethe, changed to protecting her mother from Beloved” (Morrison 286). Again, typical family relationships are altered, and the reader is also told that “Denver [was] nursing Beloved's interest like a lover whose pleasure was to overfeed the loved” (Morrison 92). As the three of them refer to each other as “mine,” Caruth's conception of trauma as possession becomes explicitly staged, and the reversed fairy tale eventually becomes a “huis clos,” from which Denver has to escape in order to survive and come of age – much like the ending of a fairy tale, in which the heroine typically has to overcome a certain number of obstacles on the way to adulthood.

Thus, I have first shown that the relationship between Sethe and Denver, albeit overshadowed by that between Sethe and her dead daughter, is central to the narrative, and exemplifies the concept of “postmemory” developed by Hirsch in the Holocaust context and applied here to a context of slavery and to the transgenerational transmission of this particular trauma. Morrison unconsciously (or not?) perpetuates the suffering of the “second generation” or the “after generation,” as described by Hirsch and others, by silencing Denver's story and suffering. Then, I have explored the ways in which various intertextualities and levels of embedded stories serve to create both a creolization of history and a re-embodiment of a transgenerational narrative, through a re-writing of passivity into agency. Since literature and

history books can both be seen as powerful tools of oppression and domination, rewriting the history of slavery and gendering its narrative enable Morrison and Condé to subvert “objectivity,” move beyond victimology, and reclaim Caribbean and African-American traumatic pasts.

II. *Murdered Babies, Silenced Histories:*

1) Rewriting the “Mother-Daughter Plot”:

If ghosts and spirits play a fundamental part in these two narratives, it is no coincidence that, in both cases, the ghosts embody some of the characters’ relatives, thereby creating ghostly lineages. In *Beloved*’s case, the ghost is that of Sethe’s daughter; in *Tituba*, the spirits are those of her mother, and adoptive father and mother. A study of a figure common to both novels – the figure of the infanticidal mother – will shed more light on the literary role and meaning of these ghostly lineages.

In her *Foreword to Beloved*, Morrison starts out by articulating issues of feminism with motherhood and freedom: “I think now it was the shock of liberation that drew my thoughts to what ‘free’ could possibly mean to women [...] Inevitably these thoughts led me to the different history of black women in this country – a history in which marriage was discouraged, impossible, or illegal; in which birthing children was required, but ‘having’ them, being responsible for them – being, in other words, their parent – was as out of the question as freedom. Assertions of parenthood under conditions peculiar to the logic of institutional enslavement were criminal” (Morrison x). Motherhood – defined by being a mother to one’s

child, as opposed to just giving birth to them – therefore appears, from the opening, to be a core issue in the gendering of slavery narratives. As Morrison explains, the experience of slavery and freedom differs between men and women, since, for a female slave, being a mother entails being free, that is to say, being free to be a mother.

Further down the page, Morrison clearly states her feminist intentions and her goal to relate her characters' experiences with contemporary issues about the condition of black woman in the United States, that still need to be addressed: "So I would invent [Sethe's] thoughts, plumb them for a subtext that was historically true in essence, but not strictly factual, in order to relate her history to contemporary issues about freedom, responsibility, and women's 'place.' The heroine would represent the unapologetic acceptance of shame and terror; *assume the consequences of choosing infanticide*;³³ claim her own freedom" (Morrison xi). Thus, not only is Sethe here presented as choosing infanticide deliberately (which creates a discrepancy with the narrative depicting her as having temporarily sunk into madness), but infanticide becomes the paradoxical condition for claiming one's freedom.

In a parallel manner, Tituba's story starts out with a rape that brings about Tituba's birth. While Sethe chooses to be a mother, Tituba's mother does not and is raped by a British soldier on a slave ship. The theme of infanticide is, of course, apparently much more prevalent in *Beloved*, since the entire narrative revolves around the destructive psychological consequences of Sethe's murdering of her two-year-old daughter. In *Tituba*, while this theme does not seem, *a priori*, to be so pervasive, a close reading of the novel reveals recurring metaphors of birth,

³³ Emphasis is mine.

childlessness, and motherhood, of which Tituba's calling her abortion a "murder" is only a small instance. I will come back to this issue shortly.

In her article entitled "Fantasy Echo: History and the Construction of Identity," Joan Scott writes that "the maternal fantasy offered by Pethick Lawrence restores the social role of mothers, for they are responsible for life, while men wage war and cause death" (Scott 299). In *Beloved*, Sethe kills her baby daughter, so that she will not have to endure a life of slavery. This emphasizes the perversion brought about by slavery, insofar as all values become reversed and perverted by it; the mother becomes the one who causes death. This theme also appears in *Tituba*, who decides to have an abortion since "pour une esclave, la maternité n'est pas un bonheur"³⁴ (*Moi, Tituba* 83). Subsequently, Tituba alludes to this event a few times, but only thirteen pages later, when she gives Betsey Parris the "bain magique," and she comments: "Je me purifiais du *meurtre*"³⁵ de mon enfant ³⁶ " (*Moi, Tituba* 100). While the use of the word "meurtre" to refer to the abortion emphasizes Tituba's strong feelings of guilt, it is counter-balanced by the verb "purifier," which implies the notion that the past can somehow be *physically* erased. Once again, Tituba shows optimism and forgetfulness, thanks to her practice of witchcraft, which is her symbolic link to her roots. Tituba's constant longing is for a return to her native Barbados, whereas, in Sethe's case, there is no such thing as a native land.

However, even though *Tituba's* narrative is not about the psychological trauma of being forced to kill one's child, as the result of the condition of slavery, several instances in the novel underline the fact that Tituba considers herself to be an infanticidal mother. The episode of her

³⁴ "there is no happiness in motherhood for a slave" (*I, Tituba...* 50).

³⁵ Emphasis is mine.

³⁶ "I was purifying myself of the *murder* of my child" (*I, Tituba* 63).

encounter with Hester Prynne (from *The Scarlet Letter*) in jail is the occasion for both a feminist rewriting of Hawthorne's novel and a meta-narrative on the socially-constructed notion of motherhood. Immediately, Tituba tells Hester: "Moi aussi, j'ai dû tuer mon enfant!" (Condé 154), thereby revealing her feelings toward her abortion. Then, Hester's choice of hanging herself, thus killing the baby she is expecting, presents the reader with a counter-narrative to *The Scarlet Letter*, which can be read as a reply to Hawthorne, who seems to see motherhood as the ultimate fulfillment – a notion that Condé chooses here to challenge. This infanticidal rewriting of *The Scarlet Letter* creates a "sisterhood" between the fictional character of Hester and Tituba's historical persona, as Tituba/narrator writes: Souvent je pense à l'enfant d'Hester et au mien. Enfants non nés. Enfants à qui, pour leur bien, nous avons refusé la lumière et le goût salé du soleil. Enfants que nous avons graciés, mais que, paradoxalement, je plains. Filles ou garçons, qu'importe? (Condé 178). This rewriting of Hawthorne's novel chooses to do away with the character of little Pearl, who was the only instance of hope in the original narrative. These murdered babies stand for the silenced histories of marginalized women, whereby Condé creates an echo chamber linking the oppression of female slaves with that of white women in the context of American Puritanism.

Furthermore, even though *Tituba* was written one year before *Beloved*, a striking intertextuality seems to occur between the two texts in Chapter 8, entitled "Complainte pour mon enfant perdu." In this chapter, while Tituba is – oddly enough – teaching Betsey Parris a poem in which she regrets her decision to abort, she suddenly hears Abigail (Betsey's cousin, who will turn out to be the main accuser in the Salem witch trials) singing the same song. Abigail appears to Tituba under threatening features. The chapter is only a page long, and one cannot help noticing that it opens with the phrase "complainte pour mon enfant perdu" and closes with the

following sentences: “Abigail n’était-elle pas une enfant? Une enfant ne peut être dangereuse” (Condé 89-90). The juxtaposition of these sentences creates a physical closeness between the murdered baby and Abigail, hinting at Abigail as an evil child figure that would, somehow, have come back to take her revenge on Tituba for murdering her. Thus, Abigail, at times, appears to be a kind of ghostly figure, much like an embodiment of Tituba’s trauma and feelings of guilt, thereby echoing the ghostly figure of Beloved.

However, the reasons for Tituba’s childlessness can also be found in her own complicated relationship with motherhood. There are several instances in the novel in which she explains that she still feels like a very young girl, despite her advancing age, and metaphors of maternity and birth abound. Namely, while in jail, Tituba is said to be “comme un enfant dans le ventre de sa mère” (Condé 106). Later on, when she hears of Hester’s suicide, she comments: “Je fracturai en hurlant la porte du ventre de ma mère. Je défonçai de mon poing rageur et désespéré la poche de ses eaux. Je haletai et suffoquai dans ce noir liquide. Je voulus m’y noyer” (Condé 174). Tituba is recurrently referred to as a child-woman, striving to give birth to herself and to stop feeling “étrangère à [elle]-même” (Condé 123). Ultimately, toward the end of the novel, she is pregnant again, which gives Condé another opportunity to deconstruct the idealized notion of motherhood, by stating that “on doit s’y résigner: un enfant n’est pas le fruit de l’amour, mais du hasard” (Condé 242). Condé pushes the irony so far as to have Tituba parody the very discourses of slavery abolition by extending the notion of freedom to a vindication of a baby’s rights to choose his own biological mother, in the following diatribe:

La vie ne serait un don que si chacun d’entre nous pouvait choisir le ventre qui le porterait. Or, être précipité dans les chairs d’une misérable, d’une égoïste, d’une garce qui se vengera sur nous des déboires de sa propre vie, faire partie de la cohorte des exploités, des humiliés, de ceux à qui on impose un nom, une langue, des croyances, ah,

quel calvaire! Si je dois renaître un jour, que ce soit dans l'armée d'acier des conquérants! (Condé 187).

A few lines down the chapter, Tituba says: "Je souhaitai rentrer dans le ventre de ma mère. Mais à ce moment précis, ma fille bougea comme pour se rappeler à mon affection" (Condé 261). Again, one can notice a tension between childhood and motherhood, all the more so as Tituba's story is also a quest for her murdered mother's love. In *Beloved*, infanticide is unambiguously depicted as the desperate act of madness brought about by the trauma of slavery, whereas, in *Tituba*, the issue of motherhood is linked to issues of tormented lineages: indeed, Tituba's impossibility to have a descendance seems to arise from her lack of ascendance. The main trauma, in Tituba's case, is that of the hanging of her mother, which is – in my opinion – why the ghosts are those of her parents, as an embodiment of this particular trauma, hence positioning Tituba as a child figure; on the other hand, in *Beloved*, the ghost is that of the baby, i.e., the descendant part of Sethe's lineage, which, paradoxically, emphasizes the maternal aspect of Sethe's character.

In *Beloved*, the final scenes are a kind of exorcism of the ghost by the community in which Sethe and Denver live. After the intervention, the ghost disappears and it seems afterwards that everybody can recover a certain peace of mind. In Condé's novel, on the other hand, the ghost of Tituba has to recover a voice and to reappear, in order to repair what has been omitted in history. There is no question of exorcizing the ghosts of Tituba herself, or of her parents. To the contrary, these spirits, who follow her throughout her life, are her guidance and the source of her constant optimism. They are the proleptic voices of the narrative.

This consequently points to another major difference between *Beloved* and *Tituba*, as far as the representation of history goes: the recovery of history is presented in *Tituba* as a voluntary act, whereas, in *Beloved*, it seems entirely passive, insofar as Sethe and Paul D are both depicted as being psychologically enslaved by their memories (or “rememories” as Sethe puts it), which invade their present up to the point of destroying it. Sethe ends up losing her job because of her obsessional love for Beloved. Many critics read the end of *Beloved* as an achievement of the overcoming of trauma. However, Sethe is depicted, at the end of the novel, as devastated by the loss of Beloved (“She left me. [...] She was my best thing” Morrison 272). Paul D is willing to look toward the future, as he suggests to Sethe: “Me and you, we got more yesterday than anybody. We need some kind of tomorrow” (Morrison 273). However, the last thing we hear about Sethe is her incapacity to grasp the meaning of Paul D’s words. Therefore, if there is a catharsis at the end of the narrative, Sethe is excluded from it. Indeed, we are told of the other members of the community that, regarding the ghost of Beloved, “they forgot her like a bad dream. After they made up their tales, shaped and decorated them, those that saw her that day on the porch quickly and deliberately forgot her. [...] *Remembering seemed unwise*”³⁷ (Morrison 274). There, we can see the process of myth-making at work again, insofar as they “made up their tales, shaped and decorated them,” which enables them to distance themselves from past traumatic events, by creating their own memories through a transformation of history. Besides, there is a progression in the memory process since, after the whole novel having been based on memory, we are told that “remembering seemed unwise” and, further down in the closing chapter, one of the last sentences of the novel alludes to “the breath of the *disremembered*”³⁸ and unaccounted for [...]” (Morrison 275). “Disremembered” provides a

³⁷ My italics.

³⁸ Idem.

counterpoint to Sethe's "rememory," while also evoking metaphors of "dismembering." Being "dismembered" had been Beloved's fear throughout the novel, from the time when she lost her tooth, thus foreboding being "disremembered" or forgotten as one of the many sacrificial victims of slavery.

The neologism "disremember" actually serves as a kind of motto, similar to a (dark) magic formula, throughout the narrative. Its first occurrence is when Sethe asks Beloved: "You disremember everything? I never knew my mother neither, but I saw her a couple of times. Did you never see yours?" (Morrison 140). From the beginning, "disremembering" is presented as intrinsically linked to a sense of self-dismembering brought about by the absence of the mother-daughter relationship caused by the condition of slavery. Ultimately, "disremembered" becomes a synonym for "dis-membered," when, at the end of the novel, after Beloved's vanishing, Sethe starts thinking in the same terms as Beloved used to: "And if he [Paul D] bathes her in sections, will the parts hold?" (Morrison 321). Beloved's appearance and disappearance serve as triggers to Sethe's anger at her own mother – which is another untold story of the narrative. This embedded narrative is only hinted at, during the final dialogue between Sethe and Paul D. Sethe assumes that

[...] Amy was scared to stay with her because her feet were ugly and her back looked so bad; that her ma'am had hurt her feelings and she couldn't find her hat anywhere and
'Paul D?'
'What, baby?'
'She left me.'
'Aw, girl. Don't cry.'
'She was my best *thing*³⁹' (Morrison 322).

To my reading, this dialogue constitutes a turning point in the narrative of trauma, since, when Sethe suddenly says "she left me," it is impossible to know for sure whether she is talking about

³⁹ Emphasis is mine.

Beloved or about her own mother. The juxtaposition of allusions to her own mother (her “ma’am”) who had “hurt her feelings” and the sentences “she left me/she was my best thing” seem to reveal what Freud would have termed a “primal scene,” or what Parkinson Zamora terms a “primal experience,” in which Sethe’s initial trauma had been the fact that her own mother had abandoned her. Much like in a fairy tale, genealogies and chronologies are blurred, so that Beloved becomes both an embodiment of Sethe’s (hanged) mother and of her resurrected daughter. So much so that when Sethe finally explains her gesture (i.e., her killing her daughter), her justification to Beloved as to why she had to kill her becomes interspersed and blurred with her own feelings of lack as an orphan abandoned by her mother. Ultimately, Beloved also comes to embody the ghost of Sethe as a child:

My plan was to take us all to the other side where my own ma’am is. They stopped me from getting us there, but they didn’t stop you from getting there. Ha ha. You came right on back like a good girl, *like a daughter, which is what I wanted to be and would have been if my ma’am had been able to get out of the rice long enough before they hanged her and let me be one.* [...] Running, you think? No. Not that. *Because she was my ma’am and nobody’s ma’am would run off and leave her daughter, would she? Would she, now?* (Morrison 240).

It is worth noting that, in the same manner as Tituba’s mother, Sethe’s mother was hanged. The reader subsequently learns that Sethe’s mother killed all of her babies, except Sethe, because Sethe was the only one that she had with a black man, and not as a consequence of rape by white men (Morrison 74). On the other hand, Tituba was born from the rape of her mother by a white shipman, which provides a reason for her being rejected by her mother: “des larmes [...] de honte et de douleur jaillirent des yeux d’Abena: - C’est quand même l’enfant d’un Blanc” (Condé 15), then, further down the chapter, Tituba wonders: “Quand découvris-je que ma mère ne m’aimait pas?” (Condé 18).

In fact, throughout both *Tituba* and *Beloved*, a parallel story seems to be told – that of the (failed) mother/daughter relationship – centered on metaphors of “dis-(re)membering,” thereby echoing attempts at re-embodiment of one’s story. Namely, the first time that the reader is given access to *Beloved*’s “interiority” is when she loses a tooth: “*Beloved* looked at the tooth and thought, This is it. Next would be her arm, her hand, a toe. Pieces of her would drop maybe one at a time, maybe all at once. [...] She had two dreams: exploding, and being swallowed” (Morrison 157). Having been “disremembered” could also be applied to the character of *Tituba*, who has to symbolically and figuratively inhabit her own story both by haunting it as a ghost and by telling it in her own voice. In this respect, she reappropriates her story which she claims has been erased from history books. According to Spargo, overcoming trauma means becoming able to “inhabit one’s history rather than be inhabited by it” (Spargo 118). There again, memory and history are intertwined, since *Tituba* is shown, as we have seen previously, to make a conscious effort of memory every time she is asked to tell a story, whereas, in *Sethe*’s case, it seems that her memory is telling her an unwanted story. Not only does *Sethe*’s overwhelming and omnipresent process of memory reveal the return of the repressed traumas, but also – as can be seen through many instances in the novel – her own memory is betraying her by altering and minimizing the horror of what led to her murdering her daughter. I think that the following passage illustrates this process very well:

Unfortunately [*Sethe*’s] brain was devious. [...] and suddenly there was Sweet Home rolling, rolling, rolling out before her eyes, and although there was not a leaf on that farm that did not make her want to scream, it rolled itself out before her in shameless beauty. It never looked as terrible as it was and it made her wonder if hell was a pretty place too. [...] Try as she might to make it otherwise, the sycamores beat out the children every time and she could not forgive her memory for that (Morrison 6).

This is an excellent rendering of the way in which memory transforms everything – and, especially, “objective” history – in a perverse and treacherous way. Not only does *Sethe*’s

overwhelming and omnipresent process of memory reveal the return of the repressed traumas, but also her own memory is betraying her by altering the origins of her trauma.

Thus, the treatment of the theme of the “infanticidal” mother in both novels mirrors, and deepens, the overall approaches to history and memory used by both authors: in Morrison’s case, an analeptic narrative, in which the narrator telling her story is being retraumatized by the all-engulfing past, and a proleptic, prophetic one in Condé’s case. Morrison’s narrative seems entirely turned towards the past, because of Sethe’s mental imprisonment despite her physical freedom, whereas Condé’s narrative of Tituba is directed to the future.

2) **Rewriting Gender: Trauma and (De-)gendering:**

Thus, the themes of motherhood and infanticide allow for a rewriting of gender as a means to reappropriating one’s story and to overcoming trauma, by emphasizing its gendered experience and the mother-daughter story, which leads to another central issue to both novels: the de-gendering effect of trauma. We will come back thoroughly to this question with Holocaust trauma, since commentators and critics usually talk of the “de-gendered” body of the Holocaust victim. However, Morrison and Condé both point out issues of (de)gendering as far as slavery trauma is concerned. Interestingly enough, while the ultimate de-gendering for a female slave is depicted in both novels through the figure of the infanticidal mother – i.e., the “bad” mother or the childless woman, which is also a recurring theme in Holocaust narratives – these women writers also choose to emphasize issues of masculinities and transgressed gender “boundaries,” both as a consequence of slavery trauma and as a means to overcoming it.

Beloved's Foreword ends with the following statement by Morrison: "To render enslavement as a personal experience, language must get out of the way. I *husband*⁴⁰ that moment on the pier, the deceptive river, the instant awareness of possibility, the loud heart kicking, the solitude, the danger. And the girl with the nice hat. Then the focus" (Morrison xiii). The very choice of the verb "to husband" by Morrison highlights the gendering issues at stake throughout the narrative. Now, the black woman writer is no longer defined as a "good" or "bad" mother, or even as a wife, but as a husband, as the creator, author, and master of her life.

Issues of blurred traditional gender boundaries and roles are definitely at stake in *Beloved*, first of all through recurring depictions of Sethe as a female body, or, rather, the sum of her body parts – which, again, echoes metaphors of "dis-(re)membering"/ "dis-embodiment," as a consequence of the dehumanizing effects of slavery. Thus, when Baby Suggs is trying to help Sethe recover her self-esteem, she tells her: "More than your life-holding womb and your life-giving private parts, hear me now, love your heart" (Morrison 104). The blurred lineages previously mentioned are further amplified by the "denaturation" at stake in trauma, insofar as even the baby loses the usual characteristics of a baby: "Who would have thought that a little old baby could harbor so much rage?" (Morrison 5). The oxymoron "a little old baby" underlines the blurred genealogies, blurred gender categories, and the reversal of "traditional" family roles, identities, and values.

In Paul D's discourse, Sethe is defined by her sex, as a wife and as a mother: "Halle's woman. Pregnant every year including the year she sat by the fire telling him she was going to run" (Morrison 10). Ultimately, Sethe was beaten up, while pregnant, by schoolteacher's pupils,

⁴⁰ My italics.

and her milk was taken away from her under her husband's eyes; not only did he not help her, but he stopped loving her as a consequence, and went on to lose his mind. Men are depicted as disappointing, and the reader is led to understand that, despite being reduced to her female body parts in some aspects of the narrative, Sethe believes that she is stronger than any man: "she didn't believe any of them – over the long haul – could measure up" (Morrison 150). And, indeed, male figures fall short of the traditional gender categories and characteristics assigned to them. This is a recurring theme as far as John Indien (Tituba's first husband) is concerned. In *Beloved*, Sethe is the one who acts and saves her children and family: "I couldn't let her nor any of 'em live under schoolteacher. That was out" (Morrison 192). Besides, "she had run off with no one's help" (Morrison 265), which points to Sethe's self-sufficiency in needing nobody (no man) so as to free herself. This is an important aspect of the narrative, insofar as the reader is later on led to understand that Sethe feels that her being tracked down by her former owner and her killing her daughter are a form of punishment for this self-sufficiency, or for what Baby Suggs terms "arrogance" – and, thus, for transgressing gender boundaries. Sethe's self-sufficiency is boundless, as she is depicted as the sole master of her life: "I birthed [my children] and I got em out and it wasn't no accident. I did that" (Morrison 190). This allusion to authorship and (pro)creation as a means to power echoes Morrison's statement in the *Foreword*: "I husband that moment," which creates a sub-text in which literary creation/authorship and emancipation from slavery mirror each other in the gendering of the reclaimed traumatic past.

The ghost of *Beloved* serves another purpose than that of highlighting trauma and memory. Its arrival crystallizes issues of masculinities and questions traditional gender roles. Paul D recurrently feels that his "masculinity" is threatened by *Beloved*'s presence. First, he tries "to avoid the confusion *Beloved*'s shining caused him" (Morrison 135). Then, coming back to

the *mise en abyme* of the rewritten fairy tale *Sleeping Beauty*, Beloved is depicted as the “sleepy beauty” who awakens on her own and goes on to dominate a man, whom she seduces and demasculinizes. Namely, Paul D’s “demasculinization” seems to be initiated by Beloved’s arrival, who causes him “to tremble like Lot’s wife and feel some womanish need” (Morrison 137). His comparing himself with a biblical female character highlights Beloved’s power, as she now replaces him as the “head” of the family (which I will describe in more details further down).

Beloved acts as a threat to Paul D’s masculinity, and to his perception of traditional gender roles and categories, in various ways, one of which being that, in his eyes, she has no mother. He repeatedly calls her a “motherless gal” (Morrison 152); her being impossible to situate within a genealogy makes her threatening. Unlike Sethe and Denver, she holds no biological position in relation to a man, which could give her an “essence;” she does not have any biological position as a wife or as a daughter.

While, for Sethe, freedom seems to be defined by successful “femininity,” i.e., being a “good” mother, for Paul D freedom lies in desire, as exemplified by the following description of freedom he gives: “to get to a place where you could love anything you chose – not to need permission for desire – well now, *that* was freedom” (Morrison 191), whereby freedom equates desire, as well as the re-empowerment through naming (“Was that it? Is that where the *manhood* lay? In the naming done by a whiteman who was supposed to know?” [Morrison 147]).

Motherhood/fatherhood are also at stake in Paul D’s overcoming of trauma, albeit for other reasons: as a way to “document his manhood.” Namely, he tells Sethe: “‘I am not a man.’ [...] ‘I want you pregnant, Sethe. Would you do that for me?’ [...] And suddenly it was a

solution: a way to hold on to her, document his *manhood* [...]" (Morrison 151). In all three instances (Sethe, Beloved, and Paul D), history is literally re-embodied through a body "mark" that would act as a counter-point to the physical marks of slavery (of torture and of tattooing): the scar of the knife on Beloved's throat, and, for Paul D and Sethe, pregnancy and the free decision to give birth to a child that one would "own" – which echoes Rothberg's preoccupation with the child heralded as a figure of innocence and redemption, and a site of memory. Is it not paradoxical that, for former slaves, asserting one's freedom means "owning" a child? Of course, the issue at stake here is that of having a family, and, hence, that of the traditional gender roles within a family. Namely, Sethe interprets Paul D's desire to have a child with her in the following manner: "she was frightened by the thought of having a baby once more. [...] Unless carefree, *motherlove was a killer*.⁴¹ What did he want her pregnant for? To hold on to her? Have a *sign* that he passed this way? He probably had children everywhere anyway. Eighteen years of roaming, he would have to have dropped a few. No. He resented the children she had, that's what. Child, she corrected herself. Child plus Beloved whom she thought of as her own, and that is what he resented. [...] *They were a family somehow and he was not the head of it*"⁴² (Morrison 155). Ultimately, for Paul D, who has gradually become "resigned to life without aunts, cousins, children. Even a woman, until Sethe," (Morrison 261) "owning" a family would symbolize overcoming trauma, thus ceasing to be mere "property that reproduced itself without cost" (Morrison 269) and forgetting "his price. The dollar value of his weight, his strength, his heart, his brain, his penis, and his future" (Morrison 267). So, for Paul D, overcoming trauma also means literally re-embodiment his story, and reclaiming ownership of his body. This quest for re-embodiment translates into an obsession with "masculinity": "It troubled him that, concerning

⁴¹ My italics.

⁴² Emphasis is mine.

his own manhood, he could not satisfy himself on that point. Oh, he did manly things, but was that Garner's gift or his own will? What would he have been anyway – before Sweet Home – without Garner? [...] Loving small and in secret" (Morrison 260).

Ultimately, he falls in love with Sethe because she does not deprive him of his "manhood"; despite her self-sufficiency, she does not transgress gender boundaries in his eyes: "How she never mentioned or looked at it, so he did not have to feel the shame of being collared like a beast. Only this woman Sethe could have left him his manhood like that. He wants to put his story next to hers" (Morrison 322) – the word "collared" echoes "colored" and the demasculinization of black men by the situation of slavery. On the other hand, his sexual relationship with Beloved leaves him with a feeling of further enslavement, as he feels that she causes him to do something he does not want to. Perhaps this could be read as another manifestation of slavery trauma through the ghosts, which appears under the guise of *enslaved desire* in Paul D's case – in keeping with his obsession with "the freedom to desire" as a proof of both his masculinity and his freedom from slavery. Furthermore, we are told that "*Beloved invented desire*" (Morrison 283). Since, for Paul D, desire is the very definition of freedom, Beloved embodies absolute freedom, insofar as she "invents desire." Again, Beloved is depicted as being "de-gendered" and "de-gendering" in Paul D's eyes, because she possesses the very attribute that he has been longing for: freedom to desire and the freedom to create desire.

Back to the central theme of the body mark, a turning point in *Beloved's* narrative occurs when Sethe finally sees the scar on Beloved's neck ("But once Sethe had seen the scar..." [Morrison 281]). The mark acts as the confirmation that Beloved is Sethe's dead daughter, and, from that point on, the narrative takes on a tragic tone, as Sethe's enslavement to her own

daughter and her sinking into madness gradually take over all the rest. As I have previously explained, in Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory in the transgenerational transmission of Holocaust trauma the body mark plays a central role. In Morrison's novel, I read a reversal of the transgenerational transmission, insofar as, while Sethe was initially worried that her own mother would not recognize her, since she did not bear the same mark of slavery as her – and, as a consequence, Sethe was worried about a lack of reciprocity with her mother – Sethe then recognizes her own daughter thanks to another bodily mark of trauma. However, this mark is the one that the mother (Sethe) has herself inflicted upon her daughter when she killed her. *Beloved* can therefore be read not only as the story of Sethe's dead daughter but, also, as the untold but implicit story of Sethe's own mother and of the devastating psychological consequences of her having been deprived from the mother-daughter relationship – which strongly echoes *Tituba*. However, Tituba's character, contrary to *Beloved's* Sethe, strongly rejects motherhood altogether. Body marks are also omnipresent in Condé's novel, albeit as a symbol of one's roots. For instance, Tituba's mother, Abena, is described in the opening sentences of the novel as “belle avec son teint d'un noir de jais et, sur ses hautes pommettes, le dessin subtil des *cicatrices* tribales” (Condé 13). Thus, Tituba, much like Sethe, identifies her mother thanks to body marks; however, Abena's scars are not those of slavery but, on the other hand, they stand for freedom and for her native Barbados. The theme of a native land for which one is longing is a recurring one in *Tituba*, which points, again, to a major difference in the depiction of slavery trauma between African American and Caribbean people.

3) Towards a Black Feminist Rewriting of Western Master Narratives:

Ultimately, *Beloved*'s narrative can be read as a feminist rewriting of the Bible, as well as a re-appropriation of the western master discourse of Christianity, while Condé's *Tituba* offers a feminist rewriting of the canons of American literature and of feminism. By resorting to these narrative devices, both authors achieve a gendered writing of the trauma of slavery while also reinscribing their marginalized story within larger Western master narratives, thanks to what Rothberg terms the "echo chamber" of memory. I have so far shown that the gendering of trauma is made possible through a re-embodiment of one's story, first with the use of ghosts (thereby serving as a *literal* embodiment), then through rewritten fairy tales and myths, through narratives revolving around body marks, through a deconstruction of the notion of "motherhood," and, finally, through issues of blurred gender categories and the "de-gendering" effects of trauma. Now, my last point will focus on the rewriting of several "master" western narratives in both novels.

The three parts that constitute *Beloved*'s narrative mirror the dominating discourse of Western philosophy provided by Hegel's thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, and these three parts create a progression in the narrative. The first part starts with "124 was spiteful," the second one opens with "124 WAS LOUD" (Morrison 199), and the third one with "124 was quiet" (Morrison 281). The fact that the opening of part II is written in upper-case letters points to the fact that this constitutes the climax of the story. These three parallel openings tell the story of the ghost – and, therefore, of traumatized memory – and this Hegelian construction also resembles a Greek tragedy, in which the last part offers a final resolution and a catharsis for the community. This three-part narrative also echoes the love triangle in which Denver, Sethe, and Beloved are

entangled, which is both cathartic and destructive: “Whatever was happening, it only worked with three – not two” (Morrison 286).

Throughout *Beloved*, “twenty-eight days” is used as a temporal leitmotiv, whereby the cycle of the woman’s body becomes the temporality of trauma and history. History is literally *re-embodied* through the female body. The symbolism of the twenty-eight days constitutes a recurring motif in the narrative: “Her faith, her love, her imagination and her great big old heart began to collapse *twenty-eight days*⁴³ after her daughter-in-law arrived” (Morrison 105); “Sethe had had twenty-eight days – the travel of one whole moon – of unslaved life. From the pure clear stream of spit that the little girl dribbled into her face to her oily blood was twenty-eight days. [...] *she had claimed herself*. Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another” (Morrison 111-112). The twenty-eight days of the female body cycle have enabled Sethe to reclaim her experience. These twenty-eight days echo the intertextuality of the fairy tale alluded to earlier on, as they constitute a kind of “enchanted” parenthesis – the only happy time in Sethe’s life: “The *twenty-eight days* of having women friends, a mother-in-law, and all her children together [...]. Those *twenty-eight happy days* were followed by eighteen years of disapproval and a solitary life” (Morrison 204). The twenty-eight days provide a sub-temporality within historical time, in which the “prophecy” can be inscribed, as we will see now.

As we have already seen, Tituba comes back from the afterworld to tell her story in her own words, and to literally re-inhabit her history, which is why her narrative takes on a prophetic tone, while the ghosts of her mother Abena, of her adoptive father Yao, and of her adoptive mother Man Yaya embody prophetic voices, recurrently telling her: “De tous, tu seras la seule à

⁴³ My italics.

survivre.” Tituba foresees massacres that will come after the Atlantic Slave Trade, including the Holocaust, which allows her to draw parallels among the various genocides and to re-inscribe her story within a larger diachronic, synchronic, and transnational framework.

Whereas Condé’s novel is explicit in its reclaiming of agency, both through the purpose of the narrative (i.e. to repair the omissions of history books) and through Tituba’s character as a modern, “proactive” woman, *Beloved* also provides a shift from passivity to agency, albeit in a more subtle way. Even though *Beloved*’s narrative appears to be entirely turned toward the past, leaving no room for the future and for any kind of “prophecy,” the intertextuality with the Gospel is pervasive throughout the novel, be it only that Baby Suggs preaches in the forest and performs exorcisms of trauma. In the *Foreword*, Morrison states that “the figure most central to the story would have to be her, *the murdered*, not the murderer, the one who lost everything and had no say in any of it” (Morrison xii), thereby introducing *Beloved*’s character as epitomizing victimhood and sacrifice. Early on in the narrative, *Beloved* is hinted at as a Christ-like figure, when Denver talks about “[...] the miraculous resurrection of *Beloved*” (Morrison 123). One could read here a feminist rewriting of Christianity, in which Christ/the prophet comes back in a woman’s body, which provides a response to phallogocentric monotheistic narratives always having prophets be men. The imagery is even more obvious in Jonathan Demme’s 1998 movie adaptation of the novel, in which he changed Morrison’s text, so that, instead of being sitting on a stone in front of Sethe’s house, *Beloved*’s first apparition is in a position of crucifixion, leaning against the bare trunk of a “beheaded” tree. Interestingly enough, the film has not been classified in the historical genre, but under the categories of “horror” and “mystery.”

In the eyes of the community, “Sethe’s dead daughter, the one whose throat she cut, had come back to fix her. Sethe was worn out, speckled, dying, spinning, changing shapes and generally *bedeviled*” (Morrison 300). Here, we can see the counter-narrative of the Bible provided by *Beloved*’s story, insofar as the counter-prophet, i.e. the resurrected victim, turns out to be evil. Sethe is depicted as “bedeviled” by a revengeful ghost. In other words, she is possessed, hence providing a literary exemplification of Caruth’s trauma theory, in which being traumatized consists in being possessed by an event or a memory. Therefore, Morrison creates a feminist rewriting of the Bible by changing its fundamental message from one of passivity and sacrifice to one of agency and re-appropriation. The sacrificial victim has been resurrected, so as to deliver a message of hopelessness and destruction, and literally re-possess her story by possessing her murderer. The ghost-prophetess has come back in order to re-traumatize again. There is no redemption at the end of the history of slavery.

In this same perspective, an interesting remark made by Spargo is that the innovative narrative of *Beloved* reveals Morrison’s “reluctance to insert this recovered history into the myths of progress that inform American storytelling. It is an attempt to describe her characters’ minds realistically [...]. Morrison brings us to the brink of an unspoken history, which should return, if it is to return at all, only as a rupture of rationality, voice, and ordinarily conceived intentions” (Spargo 120). He goes on to mention Morrison’s description, in a 1988 interview, of the myth of America as a land that cancels all debts in the name of freedom and its imagined privileges, yielding to the past only what it will give back to an understanding that will allow future freedom. Maryse Condé, on the other hand, by using a proleptic narrative to tell Tituba’s story, and by turning her historical character into an indomitably optimistic woman, displays many of the typically American characteristics of novel writing and frame of mind. And these

differences can be observed at all levels, throughout both novels; namely, whereas Sethe recurrently thinks that “being alive was the hard part” (Morrison 7), Tituba is comforted by Mama Yaya’s prophecy that “de tout cela tu sortiras vivante” (Condé 181), and John Indian’s leitmotiv is that “l’essentiel, c’est de survivre” (Condé 145-6).

While most critics have noted this prevalence of Christian themes in *Beloved*, and of the murdered baby as a sacrificial victim, few have looked in depth as to what it implies that a girl is depicted as a Christ-like figure, and then turns into a pregnant “woman-Devil,” or a “Devil-Child.” Namely, *Beloved*’s end is very enigmatic and, just like religious texts tend to be, open to many levels of interpretation. As Sethe is gradually losing everything because of her obsession with Beloved, we are told that “Beloved ate up her life [...], her belly protruding like a winning watermelon” (Morrison 295). What does this image of pregnancy mean? A practical interpretation given by many commentators is that Beloved became pregnant with Paul D. However, to my reading, this re-embodiment of the murdered two-year-old daughter under the guise of a pregnant woman means that the literal “re-embodiment” is now completely achieved. Beloved has become a mirror image of Sethe, and the story repeats itself, in a Sisyphean manner. Furthermore, the ultimate reversal of genealogies has occurred, since Sethe now looks “like a little girl” standing next to her daughter, in the eyes of the beholders of the exorcism: “She say they [Sethe and Beloved] was holding hands and Sethe looked like a little girl beside it” (Morrison 312) – “it” referring to Beloved.

The third part of *Beloved* can therefore be read as counter-biblical narrative, insofar as Beloved has been resurrected in order to bring the tidings that “life was dead” (Morrison 129).

Beloved is then depicted as the antichrist, the “devil-child”, which is both reminiscent of Tituba’s Abigail, but also different, in that *Beloved* offers a kind of parable:

The singing women recognized Sethe at once and surprised themselves by their absence of fear when they saw *what*⁴⁴ stood next to her. The *devil-child* was clever, they thought. And beautiful. *It had taken the shape of a pregnant woman*, naked and smiling in the heat of the afternoon sun. Thunder-black and glistening, she stood on long straight legs, her belly big and tight. Vines of hair twisted all over her head. Jesus. Her smile was dazzling. Sethe feels her eyes burn [...] (Morrison 308).

The sudden switch to the present tense, for the first time in the narrative (“Sethe feels her eyes burn”), highlights the cathartic process at work within the community. Suddenly, the past disappears and one can start living in the present again. This could be read as a projection of everyone’s trauma onto Beloved, as she is perceived differently by every single one of the spectators during the final “exorcism.” As a metaphor for religion and God, Beloved is perceived in various ways and needs to be *interpreted*: “They fell into three groups: those that believed the worst; those that believed none of it; and those, like Ella, who thought it through” (Morrison 300-301). Among the people present during the closing scene, some are not sure that Beloved existed, while others “claim she never existed.” Thus, this echoes the myth-making at stake in the narrative, previously alluded to.

In my opinion, the novel’s closing lines liken historical narratives to religious ones:

Everybody knew what she was called, but nobody anywhere knew her name. Disremembered and unaccounted for, she cannot be lost because no one is looking for her, and even if they were, how can they call her if they don’t know her name? Although she has claim, she is not claimed. In the place where long grass opens, *the girl who waited to be loved*⁴⁵ and cry shame erupts into her separate parts, to make it easy for the chewing laughter to swallow her all away.

It was not a story to pass on.

⁴⁴ My emphasis.

⁴⁵ Emphasis is mine.

They forgot her like a bad dream. After they made up their tales, shaped and decorated them, those that saw her that day on the porch quickly and deliberately forgot her. [...] So, in the end, they forgot her too. Remembering seemed unwise. [...]

It was not a story to pass on.

So they forgot her. Like an unpleasant dream during a troubling sleep.

[...] This is not a story to pass on. [...]

By and by all trace is gone. [...] Not the breath of the disremembered and unaccounted for, but wind in the eaves, or spring ice thawing too quickly. Just weather. Certainly no clamor for a kiss.

Beloved (Morrison 323).

Here, being “disremembered” is echoed by “the girl who waited to *be loved*”: Beloved’s very name is dis(re)membered and dislocated by oblivion; eventually, she symbolically “erupts into her separate parts,” which had been her fear throughout the narrative. As Paul D remarks, earlier on in the novel, that “definitions belonged to the definers – not the defined” (Morrison 225), Beloved’s ultimate disrememberment is achieved when the community chooses to forget “her like a bad dream.” Beloved is deprived of her name, therefore she can no longer be named, i.e. defined. She obviously stands for History’s unaccounted-for people (“the breath of the disremembered and unaccounted for”), whose story is untold and silenced, despite their having been sacrificed.

Furthermore, *Beloved*’s ending with the repetition that “It was not a story to pass on. [...] It was not a story to pass on. [...] This is not a story to pass on” (Morrison 274-5), is the antithesis to the Gospel, and also the exact opposite of Tituba’s purpose in writing “her” story. Tituba wants to pass on her story and repair the gaps and omissions of history with a hope to change the present and the future. Metaphorically, the story of her birth, after her mother’s rape on the slave ship, mirrors the birth of this story: “C’est de cette agression que je suis née. De cet

acte de haine et de mépris⁴⁶” (*Moi, Tituba* 13) – since the novel itself originates from a desire to reply to the act of hatred and contempt committed by racist historians who dismissed Tituba from their records. As we will see in the next chapter, unlike slavery, the Holocaust *is* definitely presented as “a story to pass on.” And yet, in writing their story, Holocaust writers share similar intentions to those of Condé and Morrison: to commemorate and give a voice to the “unaccounted for,” thereby repairing the gaps of history books.

Towards the end of *Beloved*, as Sethe is trying to retrospectively justify her failure to recognize her resurrected daughter immediately, she comes to perceive Paul D as a *screen*: “I would have known at once when my water broke. The minute I saw you sitting on the stump, it broke. [...] I would have known right off, but Paul D distracted me. [...] I would have recognized you right off, except for Paul D” (Morrison 239). This passage calls to mind Freud’s notion of the “screen memory,” which consists in replacing a disturbing memory with a more comforting, everyday scene. In this perspective, Paul D would have served as a protective screen between Sethe and her trauma; however, she ends up seeing the man as a screen – a screen between herself and her possessive relationship to her dead daughter, on which she has the sole right of life or death. As a consequence, Paul D needs to be excluded, precisely because he could have provided Sethe with the cathartic relief which she rejects, insofar as her traumatic memory has become her sole identity. Namely, “it was as though Sethe didn’t really want forgiveness given; she wanted it refused. And *Beloved* helped her out” (Morrison 297), which renders the repetitive aspects of post-traumatic stress disorder as described by Freud and Caruth, among others.

⁴⁶ “I was born from this act of aggression. From this act of hatred and contempt” (*I, Tituba* 3).

Once Paul D's exclusion from the matrilineal family is finally achieved, the reader is told that "when Sethe locked the door, the women inside were free at last to be what they liked, see whatever they saw and say whatever was on their minds. Almost. Mixed in with the voices surrounding the house, recognizable but undecipherable to Stamp Paid, were the thoughts of the women of 124, unspeakable thoughts, unspoken" (Morrison 235). This community of women, depicted as being "free at last to be what they liked," implies, on the one hand, that freedom, for former female slaves, is truly achieved by getting rid of both the white masters and the black ones, but it also echoes *Tituba* and its intertextuality with theories of black feminism, through the concept of "sisterhood." "Sisterhood" was upheld by Black feminists such as Hazel Carby⁴⁷ and bell hooks⁴⁸ in the eighties – that is to say, exactly at the time when both novels were written. In *Tituba*, the concept of "sisterhood" is brought about by the character of Hester Prynne. Among the many intertextualities that can be found in *Tituba*, the most prevalent ones – apart from *The Scarlet Letter* – are Frantz Fanon's concept of "négritude," feminism, and psychoanalysis, which all contribute to the creation of a hybrid narrative, both anachronistic, ironic, and infused with pastiche. Namely, John Indien reproaches Tituba with developing a friendship with their white mistress in the following terms: "Mes amis diront que ta peau est noire, mais que par-dessus tu portes un masque blanc" (Condé 56). The rewritten Hester Prynne's character is depicted as a parody of extreme feminism, dreaming of a "société gouvernée, administrée par les femmes! Nous donnerions notre nom à nos enfants, nous les élèverions seules..." (Condé 160). Hester keeps telling Tituba that "Blancs ou Noirs, la vie sert trop bien les hommes!" (Condé 158, 160, 172). Tituba's narrative even takes on a comical tone when Condé includes references to contemporary American popular culture, with Benjamin Cohen d'Azevedo calling Tituba "ma

⁴⁷ Hazel Carby, "White Woman Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood" (London: Routledge, 1982).

⁴⁸ bell hooks, "Sisterhood: Political Solidarity Between Women" (*Feminist Review*, 1986).

sorcière bien-aimée” (Condé 204). These many ironic embedded references effectively replace slavery, Puritanism, and the Salem witch trials within a larger historical and transnational framework, thereby implying that, two or three centuries later, history somewhat repeats itself, while also offering a subtle criticism of contemporary American society and obsessions.

Thus, Morrison and Condé clearly write with an intention to re-inscribe their novels within the feminist discourse of the time, and to contribute to it. Thanks to a narrative technique resorting to the intertwining of history, fiction, and master narratives such as feminism and psychoanalysis, both authors create a gendered account of the trauma of slavery, by re-embodiment history through their main female characters, by subverting “traditional” fictional and historical time with the insertion of the cyclical time of the female body, and by deconstructing the notion of motherhood. These attempts at challenging the dominating white, western, male narrative of slavery allow for a pivotal shift from passivity to agency through the means of literature, and are further carried out thanks to underlying intertextualities with theories of black feminism. In turn, the various female characters in both narratives serve as tools in the literary embodiment of feminist concepts.

Conclusion

Thus, through a detailed study of the themes developed above, I have shown how Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and Maryse Condé’s *Moi, Tituba* both challenge the dominating white, western, phallogocentric historical discourse in various ways by producing a counter-history, and, therefore, answer Glissant’s call for a new approach to history. Though the fantastic and, more specifically, ghosts, are present in both novels, they embody collective memory and native

culture in *Tituba*, while they symbolize personal past traumatic events in *Beloved*. Therefore, *Tituba*'s ghosts are benevolent, and complement her proleptic narrative with their prophetic voices, whereas *Beloved*'s ghosts are depicted as destructive, since they are the incarnation of an overwhelming past that cannot be dealt with, and ends up denying the future and destroying the present. *Beloved* ends with a scene of exorcism, whereas there is no question of exorcizing the ghosts of Tituba herself, or of the spirits that follow her throughout her life, since they are her guidance and the source of her constant optimism. They are the proleptic voices of the narrative.

Both novels make extensive use of memory, but, again, in very different ways, since, in *Tituba*, memory serves for the creation of a myth, a creolized version of history, and a discourse on the present and the future, whereas in *Beloved* memory makes for an entirely analeptic, inward-looking narrative, through the re-enactment of the traumatic past over and over again, as the same story being told in circles. In this respect, Morrison's novel exemplifies Glissant's theory of history "as a steadily advancing neurosis" (Glissant 65) for former slaves and their descendants. Both female authors succeed in creating a subversive type of narrative in order to account for the "otherness" arising from their main character's race, gender, and social status, and, thus, to create an alternative type of historical novel, while creating a counter-discourse on the socially-constructed notion of "motherhood."

The treatment of the theme of the "infanticidal" mother in these two novels mirrors, and deepens, the overall approaches to history and memory used by both authors: in Morrison's case, an analeptic narrative, in which the narrator telling her story is being re-traumatized by the all-engulfing past, and a proleptic, prophetic one in Condé's case. Morrison's narrative seems entirely turned towards the past, because of Sethe's mental imprisonment despite her physical

freedom, whereas Condé's narrative of *Tituba* is directed to the future. And yet, *Moi, Tituba* also uses memory extensively. This extensive use of memory enables both novels to depict history as a mental and metaphorical process rather than with facts, and to use embedded stories and the *mise en abyme* of fairy tales and myths, so as to reclaim authorship and agency of their traumatic past.

However, ultimately, Maryse Condé still offers her readers a very American narrative, insofar as she makes of *Tituba* an extremely optimistic character and yields to the prevalent ideology by delivering a message of hope as most American novels do; Spargo describes the process in which the American novel only uses the past as long as it can “provide the condition for moral decisions and actions in the present; once our understanding makes the past serve a present course of action, it puts to rest and, for all intents and purposes, contains the past of which it speaks” (Spargo 114). Also, as we have seen before, the past is only evoked in order to come to terms with it and “cancel a debt,” which is exactly what *Tituba* is doing. Besides, as noted previously, Condé, by writing the novel upon the request of Mme Gallimard, puts herself in the position of *Tituba* telling stories to her white mistresses.

I do find that, ultimately, Morrison's historical novel is more successful at appropriating the post-modernist genre while subverting all the codes. As Kimberly Chabot Davis⁴⁹ puts it, *Beloved* “exhibits a postmodern skepticism of sweeping historical narratives, of ‘Truth,’ and of Marxist teleological notions of time as diachronic, while also retaining an African-American and modernist political commitment to the crucial importance of deep cultural memory” (Chabot Davis 45). According to Chabot Davis, Morrison succeeds in creating a black

⁴⁹ Kimberly Chabot Davis, “‘Postmodern Blackness’: Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and the end of history.”

form of postmodernism as well as a black form of historical novel. And Morrison ultimately proves James Mandrell wrong by her omnipresent and central use of memory, since he claims that “memory begins to play a less crucial role in contemporary historical novels by women” (Mandrell 231). However, I have argued that Morrison’s novel is neither analeptic nor proleptic, since, more often than not, there is no distinction between past and present, and, as we have seen before, the narration takes place at the psychological level of the (un)conscious, which is actually the place of a-temporality. As Glissant puts it, “the past, to which we were subjected, which has not yet emerged as history for us, is, however, obsessively present. The duty of the writer is to explore this obsession [...]” (Glissant 63-4), which Morrison renders perfectly in her novel.

The re-inscription of the tragedy of slavery in Western master discourses is achieved through a gendering of trauma in both novels, created by a rewriting of the “mother-daughter plot” (quoting Marianne Hirsch) and a “corporal” type of writing, in which the female body is granted a central position in various ways. Besides, *Beloved* opens with a claim to feminism, and ultimately offers a feminist rewriting of the Bible. On the other hand, *Tituba* also offers a feminist rewriting of the trauma of slavery, albeit in a more ironic manner: Condé subverts both the codes of the various genres and the canons of American literature, by proposing a rewriting of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* and of third-wave American and Black feminism. These subtexts can be read on two levels: on the one hand, the shift from passivity to agency, whereby both Tituba and Hester Prynne move beyond the status of victims, so as to reclaim their story and become the authors of their lives; on the other hand, the anachronistic and ironic inscription of feminist themes of “sisterhood” and “power” within a narrative of slavery, hence creating a multidirectional resonance among slavery, American Puritanism, the Holocaust, the genocide of Native Americans, and the contemporary condition of women.

One of the reasons why Condé's novel does not achieve such an emotionally powerful effect as Morrison's could arise from the differences in historical circumstances between both types of slaveries. In *Beloved*, the evilness of the spirits symbolizes the complete destruction of the U.S. slaves' African roots, whereas, in *Tituba*, the spirits are benevolent because, in the Caribbean, the cultural uprootedness was not so radical. So, a fundamental difference between these two narratives, which could be worth taking into account, concerns the central question as to whether one stands *inside* or *outside* of traumatic history. In Condé's case, the author and the historical character both stand outside of the traumatic history, therefore the narrative uses the trope of prolepsis and has a more detached tone, closer to an academic historical account, since the gap between historical experience and history is not so wide as it is in Morrison's case. Nevertheless, both Morrison and Condé succeed in achieving a form of creolization of theory and history as upheld by both Glissant and Constable, through "the reclamation of the power of naming and of language itself as the primary mediator to bring empirical phenomena into a sphere of legibility" (Constable 36), whereby rewriting (her)story becomes an act of re-empowerment and of re-embodiment.

As I have mentioned before, *Tituba* embodies the "voiceless exotic other," an object to be talked about but never the subject of voiced discourse. We will see below that this statement can also be applied to the women writers of the next two sections and chapters. The "mad woman," as exemplified in narratives like Breton's *Nadja*, is usually the voiceless object to be talked about in male discourses, and, as Ruth Klüger puts it, the Jewish woman is also confined to silence by "the [Jewish] religion, which reduces its daughters to helpmeets of men and

circumscribes their spiritual life within the confines of domestic functions” (Klüger 30), while turning all of its women into “the daughters of the Jewish patriarchy” (*Idem*).

PART II: Gendering the Holocaust: Memory, Postmemory, and the “Mother” Tongue.

Introduction

Écrire est un acte qui engage tout l’être. C’est un acte grave, dangereux. Il y faut du courage. On y risque parfois sa vie et sa liberté (qu’on songe aux écrivains dans les régimes totalitaires), toujours sa réputation, son nom, sa conviction, sa tranquillité, quelquefois sa situation, souvent ses amitiés. On met en jeu sa sensibilité, ce qu’il y a de plus profond en soi. On s’arrache la peau. On se met à vif.⁵⁰

As we have seen, Maryse Condé’s *Moi, Tituba* produces a counter-history, “a victory over voicelessness and erasure, over effacement and exclusion” (Mudimbe-Boyi 756) thanks to a reintegration into language, literature, and history. Mudimbe-Boyi therefore presents *Tituba* as the embodiment of marginality and of the “voiceless exotic other,” i.e. an *object* to be talked about but never the *subject* of voiced discourse. This statement could also apply to the women writers of the next two sections. The “mad woman,” as exemplified in narratives like Breton’s *Nadja*, is usually the voiceless object to be talked about in male discourses, and, as Ruth Klüger puts it, the Jewish woman is also confined to silence by “the [Jewish] religion, which reduces its daughters to helpmeets of men and circumscribes their spiritual life within the confines of

⁵⁰ Charlotte Delbo, “Chronique,” *Le Monde*, 11 Septembre 1981.

domestic functions” (Klüger 30), while turning all of its women into “the daughters of the Jewish patriarchy” (*Idem*).

This second chapter thus turns to the specific voice in which female Jewish and non-Jewish writers express the (post)memory of the Holocaust, so as to re-appropriate the traumatic history they have inherited, or experienced first-hand. I am well-aware that gendered studies of the Holocaust remain a controversial area. As Elizabeth Baer and Myrna Goldenberg remind us, in their 2003 collection of essays entitled *Experience and Expression: Women, the Nazis, and the Holocaust*, it is only recently that academic attention has started to be granted to the specificity of the female experience during the Holocaust itself, but, also, to the specificity of the female experience after the Holocaust and, as such, to the specificity of Holocaust memoirs written by women survivors and to gendered memory. The very first scholarly inquiry into a combined interest in feminist and Holocaust studies happened in 1983, with a conference on women and the Holocaust organized by Joan Ringelheim and Esther Katz. Ringelheim and Katz “challenged the received body of knowledge about the Holocaust, which, they quickly discovered, was as male-centered as the body of knowledge in history and other subjects and disciplines” (Baer and Goldenberg xvii). This conference paved the way for gender studies of the Holocaust, until Carol Rittner and John K. Roth’s 1993 seminal essay *Different Voices: Women and the Holocaust*, which is widely considered to have legitimized the academic study of women and the Holocaust, followed by Dalia Ofer and Lenore Weitzman’s 1998 *Women in the Holocaust*, an anthology of essays by scholars and survivors, organized chronologically and informed by a historical approach. While the emphasis on gender differences is still highly controversial, and, as John K. Roth emphasizes, there is “no doubt that race relations had priority over gender relations in Nazi ideology” (Baer and Goldenberg 9), Roth also states that “scholarship had proceeded as if neither

the writers, nor their texts, nor their readers were gendered [...], [whereas] it was in fact not the case at all and it could even be argued that the gender ‘neutrality’ was not quite what it appeared because most of the Holocaust scholarship was being written by men, and it is probably not accidental that the canon of Holocaust literature – its chief authors include Elie Wiesel, Primo Levi, and Jean Améry, to mention only a few – was implicitly, if not explicitly, influenced by gendered perspectives” (Baer and Goldenberg 10).

This is precisely the stance adopted by Jewish Austrian writer Ruth Klüger, who remarks, in *Weiter Leben: Eine Jugend*, her 1992 Holocaust memoir – which she herself translated into English as *Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered*: “wars, and hence the memories of wars, are owned by the male of the species. And fascism is a decidedly male property, whether you were for or against it. Besides, women have no past, or aren’t supposed to have one. A man can have an interesting past, a woman only an indecent one. And my stories aren’t even sexy” (Klüger 18). This statement echoes feminist critic Joan Scott’s, in her article entitled “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” that “because war, diplomacy, and high politics have not been explicitly concerned about the relationships between the sexes, gender seems not to apply and so continues to be irrelevant to the thinking of historians concerned with issues of politics and power” (Scott 156-157). Klüger’s *Weiter Leben* is, consequently, one of the only attempts made by a Holocaust survivor at explicitly reappropriating her story in a gendered perspective, by narrating it through her all-too-often silenced female voice.

Not only is the issue of the gendering of the Holocaust experience and of memory becoming increasingly studied, but historical facts are available to corroborate the postulate that

the Holocaust was actually *not* an un-gendered experience. Above all, Jewish women were specifically targeted by Nazis because they were viewed as threatening in their capacity to bear children. Contrary to slavery, in which the female slave was viewed by the plantation owner as reproductive property, and had to suffer from repeated rapes by her owner, and, consequently, from unwanted pregnancies, Jewish women were victimized precisely for their reproductive capacity, were sterilized when not gassed immediately, and mothers and children were always killed first. “Racial” laws implemented by the Nazi government strictly forbade sexual intercourse between a Jewish person and a non-Jew.

Issues of gender in Holocaust memoirs written in French remain largely under-explored. Namely, while camp inmates were treated equally, regardless of gender, when women write about the Holocaust they are faced with their otherness as women writers in a field largely dominated by men. Joan Scott remarks that “gender [...] seems to have been a persistent and recurring way of enabling the signification of power in the West, in the Judeo-Christian tradition” (Scott 169) and subsequently calls for “a new history” in which “gender must be redefined and restructured in conjunction with a vision of political and social equality that includes not only sex but class and race” (Scott 175). This strongly echoes Glissant’s call for a new history made by the Caribbean writer in order to repair the omissions of western history. In Holocaust memoirs written in French, the *gendering* of the Holocaust trauma has only barely been touched upon. I will thus now focus my attention on three women writers who are either survivors themselves, or children of Holocaust victims: Charlotte Delbo, Cécile Wajsbrot, and Sarah Kofman.

In Europe in general, the *gendering* of the Holocaust trauma has only barely been touched upon and, in fact, it has proven impossible so far to find a historical novel written by a French woman, that takes place during the Holocaust, in the same vein as Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Maryse Condé's *Moi, Tituba sorcière...Noire de Salem* did for slavery. Perhaps this historical event is still too close in time. However, I will now focus my attention on the three female writers aforementioned, who are either survivors themselves, or children of survivors. Using some of Marianne Hirsch's theories about mother and daughter relationships and postmemory, as well as Cathy Caruth's writings on history and trauma, I would like to study the figures of ghosts and motherhood in these women's writings, in keeping with my study of the tropes used by women writers in gendering trauma in slavery and madness narratives as well. More specifically, this chapter is an attempt at exploring how Cécile Wajsbrot, a female Jewish writer of the "after generation," expresses the memory of the Holocaust inherited from her parents and grandparents, and in which ways her novel *Mémorial* differs – or not – from the writings by Charlotte Delbo, who is herself a Holocaust survivor, and from the writings by Sarah Kofman who is both a Holocaust child survivor and a victim's daughter. African-American author Toni Morrison and French-Caribbean author Maryse Condé felt the need to challenge the white, western, male-dominated narrative of history, and create a new form of post-modernism, in order to re-appropriate History. In so doing, they used the tropes of perverted motherhood (through infanticidal mothers) and ghosts. In the same perspective, do female Holocaust survivors or from the "after generation" feel a need to find their own literary expression, so as to re-appropriate the traumatic history they have inherited or experienced first hand? How do they express the gendered memory of the Holocaust? In which ways do their writings differ – or not – from their male counterparts' writings? Is there a similar sense of a "double alienation" among these women? How do they reclaim their history? I will endeavor to show that these women

writers mostly use the same tropes as Morrison and Condé, i.e. perverted motherhood, ghosts, distorted lineages, and embedded stories, in order to turn their stories into a rewriting of (his)story. However, despite the fact that all three writers resort to the device of expressing trauma – and the distorted family situations resulting from it – through the use of fairy tales and various intertexts, we will see that they do so in different ways and for different purposes.

I shall try to answer the following questions: is there such a thing as a distinct female voice as far as the literature written by Holocaust survivors' female descendants is concerned? Is there a specificity of the female Jewish voice as far as "postmemory" literature goes? Furthermore, does the literary expression of the traumatic history/memory differ, according to whether the author's "mother" tongue is French or not? Is the issue of the *mother* tongue relevant at all in the way in which (post)memory is expressed?

Chapter 2: "La notion même de famille est empoisonnée": Cécile Wajsbrot, Sarah Kofman, and Charlotte Delbo.

My study will focus on three types of narratives: an autobiography by a Jewish woman whose father died in Auschwitz but who was not herself deported (Sarah Kofman's *Rue Ordener, rue Labat*), a Holocaust memoir by a non-Jewish survivor (Charlotte Delbo's *Auschwitz et après* trilogy), and a piece of fiction by a Jewish woman whose grandparents survived the Holocaust (Wajsbrot's *Mémorial*). African American feminist poet Audree Lorde stated that "there is no hierarchy of oppression" and, consequently, I do not intend to compare

“degrees” of suffering or of victimhood. Though I am aware that the position of the non-Jewish Holocaust victim is controversial as well in Holocaust studies, I have decided to include Charlotte Delbo in this study. Delbo was a “résistante” and she was deported to Auschwitz on January 24, 1943. Out of the 230 French women in her convoy, only 49 of them survived. She herself seemed aware of the delicate way in which any discourse on the Holocaust should be handled, insofar as she explicitly states that her experience, albeit horrible, was nowhere near as horrible as that of Jewish female inmates.

Going further than Baer and Goldenberg, who include Charlotte Delbo in their study, but conclude that her narratives simply testify to the gender difference in the Holocaust experience, but not to a difference in the *expression* of that experience, I would like to demonstrate that Delbo also uses gender as a means of highlighting difference in expressing her experience and as a means of reclaiming it. While Delbo herself insists on the fact that there is no room left for the individual in the space of the Nazi concentration camp, I will read her narratives through the prism of gender studies, and will show that, despite their claim at transcending gender boundaries, what is at stake in Delbo’s narratives is not only the memorialization of trauma, but, also, a gendered staging of the Holocaust narrative. Namely, the *Auschwitz et après* trilogy, by using recurring tropes of fragmented female bodies, reversed lineages, and deconstructed notions of “motherhood,” enables Delbo to flesh out the possession described by Cathy Caruth as the expression of trauma, in an attempt at re-embodiment her story. In so doing, she subverts the very tropes used by male narratives as counterpoints to trauma – i.e., the idealized mother-daughter relationship as the last vestige of humanity in Auschwitz. In Delbo’s narratives, the site of memory is literally embodied and re-gendered, whereby writing becomes an act of symbolical empowerment and healing. I am proposing to explore these

narratives in relation to two main issues: on the one hand, what are the tropes used by these women writers in gendering their story? How do these tropes differ (or not) according to whether one has directly experienced the trauma or has inherited it through postmemory? Thus, in which ways do the tropes used by these authors vary in relation to the immediacy or remoteness of memory? Are memory and postmemory informed by the same tropes? On the other hand – though in keeping with the first issues – how can these narratives be read in relation to the “mother” tongue? Since both Cathy Caruth and Marianne Hirsch pointed out the centrality of family in the transmission of trauma, these recurring figures of perverted motherhood, often expressed through the rewriting of fairytales, seem particularly relevant in these women’s writings of historical trauma. They serve as tools in the gendering of their (his)stories. Thus, the articulation and expression of these tropes are informed by the “mother” tongue, and must be read in relation to it. It is especially crucial, insofar as, in Kofman’s case, the mother tongues are Yiddish and Polish, and, in Wajsbrot’s case, it is Polish; furthermore, the Holocaust experience being defined as the “nom hors nomination,” that which cannot be told – “faute d’un mot⁵¹” – Holocaust narratives pertain to the limits of language and are informed by a desire to find alternative literary techniques, so as to render the “unimaginable” – in the same vein as slavery and madness narratives. This aspect manifests itself in the tensions between showing and not showing, telling and not telling, knowing and not knowing, seeing and not seeing, at stake in all three writers, and in the dialectic they create with the reader’s implication and their concern with showing. Thus, the main concerns in these three narratives could roughly be summarized as follows: in Kofman, telling what can only be imagined but has not been seen; in Delbo, telling what has been seen and showing what cannot be imagined. In Wajsbrot, seeing what has been told.

⁵¹ Charlotte Delbo, *Auschwitz et après III: Mesure de nos jours*, p.15; *Spectres, mes compagnons*, p.7.

Holocaust testimonies have been extensively studied. However, my focus will not be on the testimonies as pieces of historical “truth” – which has been challenged in recent years – but on the return, insofar as these narratives were all, by definition, written after the events took place. Drawing upon Marianne Hirsch and Nancy Miller’s edited volume of essays, titled *Rites of Return: Diaspora Poetics and the Politics of Memory*, I will therefore be focusing on various aspects of the returns: the return of the repressed trauma and the language of return in Charlotte Delbo’s narratives of life after Auschwitz in *Auschwitz et après III: Mesure de nos jours* and *Spectres mes compagnons*; Cécile Wajsbrot’s narrative of physically returning to the site of family trauma in *Mémorial* (returning to her family’s “primal scene”), and Sarah Kofman’s narrative of a psychological and metaphorical return to trauma in *Rue Ordener, rue Labat*. In *Mesure de nos jours* and *Le Convoi du 24 janvier*, Delbo denounces, through several instances, the injustice of the returning female survivor’s situation, so as to underline the lack of acknowledgement and the double alienation of the “résistante”: “Henriette a été homologuée soldat dans la R.I.F., mais ses ayants-cause n’ont obtenu qu’une carte de déportée politique. Et parce qu’elle était la femme trahie d’un traître, tout juste si l’on cite encore son nom. Tout le monde l’aimait” (Convoi⁵² 265) and “il suffisait d’être insolente avec les occupants pour être déportée à Auschwitz. Il ne suffit pas d’être allée à Auschwitz pour être une résistante” (Convoi 233). As Hirsch and Miller remark, “rites of return always invoke the question of *rights*, and [...] ‘Rights of Return’ explicitly examines the fundamental tensions between acts and claims” (Hirsch and Miller 7). This aspect of return is crucial to Delbo’s narratives. Quoting Simone Weil’s statement, in her 1949 essay titled *The Need for Roots*, that “to be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul; [...] every human being needs

⁵² Charlotte Delbo, *Le Convoi du 24 janvier* (Paris: Minuit, 1965).

multiple roots,” Hirsch and Miller thus introduce their edited volume of essays on displacement and dispossession in a combined diasporic and gendered perspective, in the context of transnational feminism. “*Rites of Return* offers a set of critical approaches to our contemporary obsession with the past that entails a simultaneous commitment to acknowledgment and repair” (Hirsch and Miller xii). “Acknowledgment and repair” are the main triggers of Delbo’s narratives and, to a lesser, extent, in Kofman’s and Wajsbrot’s texts – though, in Kofman, the desire to repair or to bear witness is ambivalent.

I. *Ghosts of Memory:*

1) Ghosts and Fairy Tales: Returning to Spectral Roots:

The space of the concentration camp and, by extension, of trauma, is depicted as spectral on two levels: the ghost and the spectrality of the landscape, and the spectrality of the narrative itself. First, in which ways are the landscape and the chronology of trauma conveyed through a suspension of time and the metaphor of an in-between world?

In *Spectres, mes compagnons*, Charlotte Delbo recounts her experience in Auschwitz, which she had already told in the trilogy *Auschwitz et après* and in *Le Convoi du 24 janvier*. However, in *Spectres*, she focuses on how theater and fictional characters have helped her survive in Auschwitz. *Spectres, mes compagnons* takes the shape of a letter which she addresses to Louis Jouvet, whose assistant she had been in 1937 and 1945-47 at the Théâtre de l’Athénée. The letter opens as follows: “Si Eurydice revenait et vous demandait un rendez-vous, sans doute

le lui accorderiez-vous, surtout si elle vous disait que c'est pour parler du théâtre. Son voyage auprès du mien n'était qu'une plaisante excursion. J'ai vu son enfer à Drottningholm. Qu'il est joli!" (SC⁵³ 7). This establishes a parallel with Cécile Wajsbrot's *Mémorial*, in which an extended comparison is drawn between the narrator's journey back to her origins in Kielce and Orpheus's journey to the underworld. However, while Delbo compares herself with Eurydice, so as to emphasize that her own journey in the underworld of Auschwitz was a lot worse than the one described in the Greek tragedy, *Mémorial's* narrator compares herself to Orpheus. This immediately problematizes issues of gender and agency, and, also, sheds a puzzling light on these two narratives. In *Mémorial*, the narrator's comparison with Orpheus makes sense, insofar as the narrator does come back from her journey in the underworld, i.e., in the traumatic past; in Delbo's case, the comparison with Eurydice, who, eventually, did not come back from the underworld, foreshadows the rest of the narrative, while echoing Delbo's other narratives on life after Auschwitz: unlike Eurydice, she did return from the underworld; and yet, she is herself a "specter" – the ghost of herself, une "morte vivante" as she states recurrently in *Auschwitz et après* and in *Le Convoi du 24 janvier*. Those who return from Auschwitz are called "revenants" ("Elles espéraient voir leur mère parmi les revenants" – Convoi 241) which, in French, bears the double meaning of those who return and the ghosts. More precisely, Delbo describes herself as a specter because she has lost her ability to dream and imagine, her capacity to be tricked into believing appearances:

Tout était faux, visages et livres, tout me montrait sa fausseté et j'étais désespérée d'avoir perdu toute capacité d'illusion et de rêve, toute perméabilité à l'imagination, à l'explication. Voilà ce qui, de moi, est mort à Auschwitz. Voilà ce qui fait de moi un spectre (AA III 17).

⁵³ Charlotte Delbo, *Spectres, mes compagnons* (Paris: Berg International, 1995).

This statement, along with a large part of what she writes in *Spectres, mes compagnons*, is borrowed, word for word, from her former books, *Auschwitz et après* and *Le Convoi*, beginning with the *Spectres*'s incipit, in which she quotes herself. The narrative describes how Delbo and her female companions turned into ghosts during the journey back from the camps to Paris:

Je les [mes camarades] regardais se transformer sous mes yeux, devenir transparentes, devenir floues, devenir spectres. Je les entendais encore, je commençais à ne plus comprendre ce qu'elles disaient. A l'arrivée, je ne les reconnaissais plus. [...] Elles avaient bien perdu de leur réalité pendant le voyage au long duquel je les avais vues se métamorphoser de minute en minute, s'effacer lentement, imperceptiblement, inexorablement – devenir spectres, que je ne me suis pas aperçue tout de suite de leur disparition. Sans doute parce que j'étais aussi transparente, aussi irréaliste, aussi fluide qu'elles (SC 42 and AIII⁵⁴ 9-10).

The spectrality of the Holocaust survivors appears as a continuation of the spectrality of the landscape of the camps, which is the most pervasive theme in Delbo's narratives. *Aucun de nous ne reviendra*, the first volume of *Auschwitz et après*, opens with a poem, which is reminiscent of the literary form of the Greek tragedy:

Tous ont emporté leur vie, c'était surtout
Sa vie qu'il fallait prendre avec soi.
Et quand ils arrivent
ils croient qu'ils sont arrivés
en enfer
possible. Pourtant ils n'y croyaient pas (AA I⁵⁵ 10).

The spectrality of the Auschwitz landscape is further emphasized in the first prose sentence of the narrative: "Le matin la brume leur cache les marais" (AA I 11), in which the absence of punctuation marks highlights the absence of temporal or geographical marks in Auschwitz. The swamp (les marais) and the fog are also central to Wajsbrot's depiction of the Polish landscape as she makes her way to Kielce with the train from Paris, and the landscape becomes explicitly likened to a rewritten version of Orpheus:

⁵⁴ Charlotte Delbo, *Auschwitz et après III, Mesure de nos jours* (Paris: Minuit, 1971).

⁵⁵ Charlotte Delbo, *Auschwitz et après I: Aucun de nous ne reviendra* (Paris: Minuit, 1970).

Comment ne pas remarquer la proximité de ces mots, stryx et styx, et de ce qu'ils appellent... Styx – détesté – le nom d'un fleuve des Enfers, celui qu'il faut passer, la frontière distinguant les vivants et les morts. [...] Il n'y a pas de retour, [...] déjà les vivants sont destinés à devenir des morts, dans l'entre-deux où ils se trouvent, ils n'essaient pas de revenir [...]. Le mouvement a commencé, ils sont descendus aux Enfers – d'autres cours ont été traversés, d'autres cours attendent, le Léthé, fleuve de l'oubli, l'Achéron, fleuve du malheur, et ils restent sur la rive, déjà ombres, et plus tout à fait hommes, et rien ne les retient plus à la vie sinon un vague regret, quelques attaches vouées à disparaître dans le fleuve de l'oubli (*Mémorial* 67-68).

As a common feature to *Mémorial* and to Delbo's Holocaust memoirs, the fairy tale – or, rather, the reversed fairy tale – serves as a vector and mise en abyme of the Shoah experience, following Bruno Bettelheim's notion of the fairy tale as a way of working through trauma.⁵⁶ In *Mémorial*, the motif of the swamp serves to foreshadow the tragedy of the brother's drowning. In her article entitled "Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History," trauma theorist Cathy Caruth deals with the representation of the history of trauma through an analysis of Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*, arguing that, by shifting the referentiality of history to trauma, we permit "history to arise where immediate understanding may not" (Caruth 182). It seems to me that this is precisely what these authors are doing, especially through the use of the fairy tale and the Greek tragedy, genres that usually depict dysfunctional family patterns. As a common feature to *Mémorial*, *Auschwitz et après*, and *Rue Ordener, rue Labat*, the (fairy) tale – or, rather, the nightmarish fairy tale – serves as a vector and mise en abyme of the Shoah experience⁵⁷. In

⁵⁶ Bruno Bettelheim, *Psychanalyse des contes de fées*, Paris : Robert Laffont, 1976. Trans. Théo Carlier.

⁵⁷ It is also a central device in Ruth Klüger's *Still Alive*, in which she mostly uses the story of *Snow White*, as well as in Chava Rosenfarb's short story "Little Red Bird," which refers to the *Little Red Riding Hood*. Chava Rosenfarb, a Jewish-Canadian author who writes in Yiddish, and a Holocaust survivor herself, uses the combined themes of a perverted form of maternity and of the ghost in her short story *Little Red Bird*, in which an Auschwitz survivor suffers from an obsession with her inability to have a child, which she attributes to the ghost of her five-year-old daughter, killed in Auschwitz, who haunts her. She eventually steals a baby from a maternity ward. Rosenfarb's narrative bears astonishing similarities to *Beloved*. However, the overall tone is quite different, in that *Beloved*'s ghost is "spiteful" and makes the house "full of a baby's venom," (Morrison 4-5) whereas little Faygele's ghost is depicted as an innocent, harmless victim. It is rather the ghost of Faygele's father who "will not permit her [Manya] to become pregnant. He considers her a traitor" (Rosenfarb 172). The innocence of the little victim is heralded in the recurring depictions of her "among the mounds of snow [...] wearing a red coat and red hat, just like Little Red Riding Hood, the child whom the wolf tried to devour in the story. [...] Manya's child was in fact devoured by the wolf" (Rosenfarb 165). The heroine Manya's obsession with motherhood pushes her to kidnap a newborn baby from

Wajsbrot's case, though no specific tale is named, the depiction of Poland bears great likeness to that of a fairy tale country. Namely, as soon as the narrator crosses the Polish border, she loses track of time and space, and feels transposed in a kind of nightmarish landscape: "cette ville inconnue ressemblait tout à coup à ce qu'on en racontait, noire et effrayante, cette ville où je venais pour la première fois semblait tout à coup d'une puissance terrible et maléfique, brusquement, je ne savais plus où j'étais ni dans quel temps" (*Mémorial* 13). The effects of (post)memory are, also, likened to a nightmarish tale: "j'étais [...] condamnée à suivre les rails d'un train fantôme d'une fête foraine lugubre, happée par les monstres, parcourant les horreurs d'un monde que je ne soupçonnais pas" (*Mémorial* 130).

In Delbo, Auschwitz is presented as a dream-like landscape – or, rather, again, as a nightmarish one – infused by "le silence du rêve" (AAI 48). It is also a space outside of time, escaping any "normal" chronology: "Nous sommes dans un milieu où le temps est aboli. [...] La matinée s'écoule – du temps en dehors du temps" (AAI 53). Not only is the landscape reminiscent of the underworld, but the values of the "upper world" are also reversed: "Car on fait passer en premier les femmes et les enfants" (AAI 12). "Il y a une petite fille qui tient sa poupée sur son cœur, on asphyxie aussi les poupées" (AA I 16). Highlighting even more the dehumanization of the Auschwitz landscape, both authors underscore that this landscape does not pertain to a world created by any religion's god. In Delbo, we are told that "ici, en dehors du temps, *sous le soleil d'avant la création*,⁵⁸ les yeux pâlisent. Les yeux s'éteignent. Les lèvres pâlisent. Les lèvres meurent. Toutes les paroles sont depuis longtemps flétries. Tous les mots

a hospital. From then on, the narrative takes on a surrealistic tone, making it unclear to the reader whether the rest of the story is a projection of Manya's obsessions and gradual sinking into madness, or if it actually happens, which is quite reminiscent of *Beloved* in this respect, as well as *Mémorial*, whose narrative increasingly oscillates between historical fiction and surrealism as the narrator progresses in her journey back to her origins, i.e. back to Kielce in Poland.

⁵⁸ Emphasis is mine.

sont depuis longtemps décolorés” (AAI 180), while Wajsbrot describes the area surrounding Auschwitz as “un monde d’avant la Genèse” (*Mémorial* 96).

In Delbo, the extended metaphor of the underworld turns the female SS into “furies”: “Les yeux étaient muets. Les furies s’acharnaient sur les deux femmes qui ne remuaient plus” (AAI 128). This staging of Auschwitz as the underworld and as a *mise en scène* of Orpheus’s story can be read as a process of resilience, and testifies to the cathartic aspect of the narrative, since the author proves to be, despite her claims, still able to “imagine.” Furthermore, she did come back from the underworld: “Pourtant, j’en reviens. L’enfer d’où je reviens n’était guère favorable au rêve. Quel rapport pouvait-il avoir avec le théâtre? Cependant... Était-ce rêve, cette patiente et difficile élaboration de l’imagination?” (SC 7). Thus, she becomes able to fictionalize her memoir: “Je ne savais pas encore combien extraordinaire devait être le destin qui m’attendait au sortir du wagon. Et puis, lorsque je l’ai su, je me suis demandé s’il valait la peine de courir un tel risque, accepter de descendre aux enfers avec seulement une chance sur mille d’en remonter” (SC 30).

In *Mémorial*, the narrative is explicitly presented as a rewriting of Orpheus’s story, with the leitmotiv not to look back: “Ne pas se retourner, ne pas regarder en arrière” (*Mémorial* 108), “Ne pas se retourner – regarder en arrière – c’est contraire à la vie” (*Mémorial* 122), “Ne vous retournez pas” (*Mémorial* 143), and “[...] j’accomplis les gestes simplement, ouvrir, refermer, *sans me retourner*,⁵⁹ me dirigeant vers la maison de cette femme [...]” (*Mémorial* 150). This intertextuality with Orpheus and Eurydice’s story challenges the very title of the novel, *Mémorial*, and questions the dangers of memorialization and of a memoir as a genre. Thus, an

⁵⁹ Emphasis is mine.

analogy is drawn between the narrator's desperate attempts to escape the entrapment of the traumatic postmemory, and Orpheus's story. "Ne vous retournez pas, à cette condition, vous remonterez des Enfers" (Wajsbrot 14), whereby the Underworld is not the Holocaust itself, but the destructive postmemory that her family has imposed on her: "Eurydice représentait le passé, la vie d'avant, et pour réussir à vivre et à la faire revivre, il fallait renoncer à l'Eurydice d'avant pour posséder celle de maintenant. Ainsi y avait-il tout de même un renoncement nécessaire, mais Orphée ne pouvait pas renoncer [...]" (*Mémorial* 45). This reflection on the Greek myth provides a *mise en abyme* of the narrator's situation, caught between her longing for oblivion and her clinging to a past that she feels she cannot renounce, for fear of losing her identity. The female narrator identifies with Orpheus himself, which allows her to reclaim agency and reappropriate her story, by coming back alive from the underworld of traumatic postmemory where she had to go down to, before she can start living her own life. Thus, the narrative of loss – Orpheus losing Eurydice a second time because he looked back – is suppressed and *Mémorial* offers a rewriting of Orpheus's story as a "success" story.

The image of the ghost is also crucial to *Mémorial*'s plot, but it is not the narrator who is herself a ghost. The ghost stands for postmemory, for the trauma which the narrator has inherited from her family history. In the French language, the narrative aspect of history is made obvious by the fact that the word "histoire" means both "history" and a "story," and this "double entendre" is at the heart of *Mémorial*, published in 2005. *Mémorial*'s female narrator is, just like its author, Jewish, and her father, aunt, and grandmother left Poland after the Second World War, following the pogrom that killed forty-two Jews in their home town of Kielce, and that took place one year after the end of the war. This narrator, who is a Parisian woman in her fifties, tells her story in the first person and undertakes a journey back to Kielce, in order to finally see the

places which her family has told her so much about. From the opening of the novel, she presents her journey as a “journey backward”: “j’allais refaire le chemin de leur départ en sens inverse, exactement” (*Mémorial* 16).

The style of the narrative is very similar to the one used by Morrison in *Beloved*, insofar as it is written in the mode of a long interior monologue, or, at times, a dialogue between various intertwined and unidentified voices. During the first half of the novel, the reader does not really know the nature of the traumatic event around which the novel is constructed. It is only in the second half of the novel that the pogrom and the circumstances of the death of the father’s elder brother are finally brought to light. The drowning of the beloved brother is, however, foreshadowed throughout the first half of the novel by recurring metaphors of water, flooding, and swamps (“marécages” – *Mémorial* 22). Marianne Hirsch’s concept of “postmemory” aims at describing the dilemmas of memory and identity experienced by children of survivors of trauma. In her 1996 article entitled “Past Lives: Postmemories in Exile,” she explains:

Children of survivors live at a further temporal and spatial remove from the decimated world of their parents. [...] Postmemory is a powerful form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation. Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation, shaped by traumatic events that can be neither fully understood nor re-created (“Past Lives” 676).

Wajsbrot’s novel revolves around this very theme, as can be seen through obsessive motifs of entrapment, and the metaphors of stifling and drowning. Indeed, the narrator often feels as if she were drowning, just like her father’s elder brother did, and her inability to forget the omnipresent traumatic memory that she has inherited from her family prevents her from living her own life: “je restais prisonnière d’un récit qui pénétrait en moi comme un lent poison” (*Mémorial* 83); “le

souvenir, me disais-je, est le pire poison, il nous fait vivre dans d'autres temps, mais [...] les ramifications du passé nous enserrant comme les lianes d'une forêt vierge" (*Mémorial* 79).

Hirsch describes the position of the children of survivors as a kind of in-betweenness, trapped between knowing and not knowing, fully understanding or not understanding, which is echoed in the first lines of *Mémorial*, as the narrator evokes her ambivalent state of mind at the beginning of her journey: "Voulant – comme souvent – à la fois partir et ne pas partir, découvrir et ne pas découvrir, et surtout, *savoir et ne pas savoir*"⁶⁰ (*Mémorial* 11). Thus, the in-betweenness experienced by Delbo in Auschwitz is metaphorically experienced by *Mémorial's* narrator through transmission, which echoes Hirsch's very definition of postmemory.

Mémorial's ghost further emphasizes the perverted family relationships and the blurring of generations brought about by postmemory, insofar as the narrator meets the ghost of her father's dead brother in Kielce. He died at the age of thirteen, and is still this age when she meets him sixty years later, and engages in a long dialogue with him, whereby her uncle becomes her brother as well ("ce frère d'âme" *Mémorial* 39). First, the narrator hints at the fact that her journey is also a quest for the drowned brother: "Et moi, inlassablement, j'avais cherché un frère – au début sans le savoir [...]" (*Mémorial* 62); then, when she finally meets his ghost, she addresses him in these terms: "Tu es le frère. [...] Quand reviens-tu à la maison? Quand rentres-tu? [...] La notion même de famille est empoisonnée" (*Mémorial* 152). The last ambivalent remark, stating that the very notion of family is poisoned while having finally found the purpose of her quest, i.e. her brother, exemplifies the destructive effect of the Holocaust on the survivors' genealogy, through inherited trauma. Her brother's physical drowning is paralleled

⁶⁰ My italics.

by her feeling of psychological drowning: “sous l’emprise du silence [...] j’essayais d’échapper à la noyade, aux eaux profondes qui venaient me submerger [...]” (*Mémorial* 80). In this instance, it is actually difficult to talk about “postmemory” per se, since the narrative does not present the distance described by Hirsch in cases of postmemory, characterized by “an identification with the victim or witness of trauma, modulated by an admission of an *unbridgeable* distance” (“Marked” 89). There is no such distance in *Mémorial*, which makes the narrative much closer to *Beloved*’s “rememory.”

Stifling is also a central theme in Kofman’s texts, and it is striking that Kofman recurrently presents her need to talk about the Shoah as a defense against suffocating: “Face à l’absolu du pouvoir, les mots peuvent seulement vous rester dans la gorge, y être tenus en réserve pour y être préservés. Et pourtant il faut parler, sous peine de suffoquer, d’étouffer” (PS⁶¹ 31). It is striking, because her father precisely died from suffocation: “Un boucher juif, devenu kapo (revenu du camp de la mort, il a rouvert boutique rue des Rosiers) l’aurait abattu à coups de pioche et enterré vivant” (*Rue Ordener* 16). In *Rites of Return*, Hirsch and Miller describe in the following terms the child’s return to the family site of trauma: “The return to family through acts of memory is a journey in place and time. In the most common form of the genre, the returning son or daughter seeks connection to a parent or more distant ancestor and thereby to a culture and a physical site that has been transformed by the effects of distance and the ravages of political violence” (Hirsch and Miller 10). In Kofman’s case, the return is metaphorical, through memory; it is a return to a psychological trauma, but not to a given culture or physical site. Thus, the site of memory becomes the intertextuality with the Greek tragedy, to which Kofman compares the episode of her father’s arrest by the French police on July 16th, 1942: “En lisant la

⁶¹ Sarah Kofman, *Paroles suffoquées* (Paris: Galilée, 1987).

première fois dans une tragédie grecque les lamentations bien connues ‘ô popoï, popoï, popoï’ je ne puis m’empêcher de penser à cette scène de mon enfance où six enfants, abandonnés de leur père, purent seulement crier en suffoquant, et avec la certitude qu’ils ne le reverraient jamais plus: ‘ô papa, papa, papa’” (*Rue Ordener* 14). This sentence foreshadows all the recurring themes in both of Kofman’s Holocaust Narratives (*Rue Ordener*, *rue Labat*, and *Paroles suffoquées*): the children were suffocating as they felt “abandonnés” by their father, and the site of co-memoration becomes fiction (Greek tragedy), while, at the same time, the traumatic memory itself is somehow fictionalized and fixed in motionlessness as a “scène” of the narrator’s childhood – which calls to mind both the “primal scene” of psychoanalysis and the theater stage.

Coming back to the figure of the ghosts is central to many Holocaust memoirs and, in Klüger’s memoir, the ghost is that of the dead elder brother, in the same vein as in *Mémorial*. At times, the ghost of the dead brother actually seems to replace the parental figures. Fifty years later, Klüger as an author/narrator is still in the process of mourning her half-brother, who disappeared in Hungary during the war, and she evokes his ghost at various points in the narrative: “We who escaped do not belong to the community of those victims, my brother among them, whose ghosts are unforgiving” (Klüger 138). Here, the ghost belongs to a community from which the narrator is excluded, which metaphorically expresses the experience of the survivor’s guilt. In order to reappropriate her history, it seems that Klüger needs to vehemently reject the mother/daughter relationship and the traditional image of the woman as mother; however, she does not seem to be as successful in coming to terms with the mental ghosts of her brother and father, who still haunt her. Whereas Wajsbrot’s narrative reaches its climax with the encounter of the brother’s ghost on the Oder banks, and their subsequent dialogue about memory, which then allows the narrator to return to France, freed from the weight of (post)memory, and to finally

start living, for Klüger the ghosts are “unredeemed” and “unforgiving,” very much like the ghost of the murdered baby in *Beloved*. For Delbo, the ghosts of her dead “camarades” are visions that remind her of the Holocaust trauma. In the chapter titled “La Mort de Germaine,” as Delbo is standing beside Germaine’s death bed, she suddenly has a vision of the ghosts of Carmen and Lulu, two of her “camarades” who died in Auschwitz. She writes: “j’ai été saisie de terreur” (AIII 143). These ghosts are reminders of a shameful experience, during which Delbo refused to kiss another dying companion, Sylviane, out of disgust. This points to a fundamental difference in the expression of traumatic memory between survivors and survivors’ children. In Delbo’s narrative, belonging to the community of ghosts is a constant reminder of the traumatic memories embodied by the specters that haunt her. This exclusion from the “ghostly” community, i.e., from the violent death brought about by the Nazi genocide, is also at the heart of Sarah Kofman’s autobiography, *Rue Ordener, rue Labat*, as well as of her essay *Paroles suffoquées*. In this respect, Kofman arguably constitutes a counter-example of postmemory or, rather, a failed instance of postmemory, in which the inherited trauma proves fatal. However, Kofman is herself a Holocaust child survivor, even though she was “cachée” and avoided deportation, which places her in a complex situation regarding trauma.⁶²

⁶² The metaphorical ghost is a recurrent theme in many Holocaust narratives. “Little Red Bird,” a short story by Chava Rosenfarb, an Auschwitz survivor suffers from an obsession with her inability to have a child, which she attributes to the ghost of her five-year-old daughter, killed in Auschwitz, who haunts her. She eventually steals a baby from a maternity ward. Rosenfarb’s narrative bears astonishing similarities to *Beloved*. However, the overall tone is quite different, in that *Beloved*’s ghost is “spiteful” and makes the house “full of a baby’s venom” (Morrison 4-5), whereas little Faygele’s ghost is depicted as an innocent, harmless victim. It is rather the ghost of Faygele’s father who “will not permit her [Manya] to become pregnant. He considers her a traitor” (Rosenfarb 172). The innocence of the little victim is heralded in the recurring depictions of her “among the mounds of snow [...] wearing a red coat and red hat, just like Little Red Riding Hood, the child whom the wolf tried to devour in the story. [...] Manya’s child was in fact devoured by the wolf” (Rosenfarb 165). Manya’s obsession with motherhood pushes her to kidnap a newborn baby from a hospital. From then on, the narrative takes on a surrealist tone, making it unclear to the reader whether the remainder of the story is a projection of Manya’s obsessions and gradual sinking into madness, or if it actually happens, which is quite reminiscent of *Beloved* in this respect, as well as *Mémorial*, whose narrative increasingly oscillates between historical fiction and surrealism as the narrator progresses in her journey back to her origins. In “Little Red Bird,” the fairy tale only serves as a repetition of the trauma: Little Red Riding Hood is “in fact devoured by the wolf” (Rosenfarb 165). Thus, the traumatic memory is so powerful that the fairy

In Kofman, the trauma of the Holocaust and of the father's assassination is overshadowed and overwritten by the trauma of the narrator's forced separation from "mémé" and by her "evil" mother. Namely, the narrative is written in a deceitfully simple form, resembling a fairy tale, with short chapters, and with the figure of the "evil mother" calling to mind *Snow White*. Thus, the narrator describes how her mother, who was jealous of her attachment to mémé, used to lock her up in a dark walk-in closet or in the toilets, in order to punish her: "Et elle m'enferme plusieurs heures (ou jours?) dans les cabinets. (Rue Ordener, quand elle ne pouvait pas venir à bout de nos cris, de nos pleurs ou de nos disputes, elle nous enfermait dans une chambre noire qui servait de débarras, nous menaçant de la venue de 'Maredewitchale.' Cette figure fantomatique et terrifiante de mon enfance, je me la représentais sous la forme d'une très vieille femme qui devait venir me punir en m'emportant loin de la maison)" (*Rue Ordener* 85-86). And, in a footnote, she explains that the name of this figure of Jewish folklore is derived from the indo-European root "mer," which gave rise to all sorts of nouns evoking death, and, more precisely, a slow death by stifling or by being eaten alive. Here, we have the opposite instance of Hirsch's postmemory and of the mother-daughter transmission, whereby roots, in Kofman's case, mean terror, and Kofman's narrative can be read as an attempt not at returning to her roots, but at escaping from them and freeing herself. The staging of the "evil mother" echoes the inclusion of *Snow White* in Klüger's *Weiter Leben*. Namely, in Ruth Klüger's memoir, the figure of the mother is also omnipresent, as the narrative revolves around her (ambivalent) relationship to her mother, with the central knot of her autobiography being her confession that the most traumatic part of her stay in Auschwitz was when her mother offered to

tale cannot allow for a cathartic rewriting of history, but history perverts the fairy tale itself – and the world of childhood - by having Little Red Riding Hood die.

kill her – which is not without any similarity with Kofman’s autobiography, which depicts Holocaust trauma through her destructive relationship to her mother. Written fifty years after the actual events, the narrative is, *a priori*, aimed at being a response to the patriarchal ownership of Holocaust memoirs⁶³ - which Klüger keeps alluding to, in her constant concern that only women will read her narrative “since males, on the whole, tend to prefer books written by fellow males” (Klüger 71) – as well as her desire to add to Holocaust narratives “what men have omitted” (Klüger 119) – for instance, that “no one menstruated” in the camps (Klüger 119). However, as the narrative unfolds, the author makes a point to show her readers that her mother’s failure to be a “good mother” proved more traumatic than the concentration camps; namely, she welcomes her deportation to Theresienstadt with her mother as a relief from the prison of their confined lives in Vienna.⁶⁴

Of course, Klüger’s goal is to debunk all of the current myths about life during the Holocaust, and, in so doing, to overturn the traditional male literary depictions of the mother/daughter relationship as the epitome of purity within the corruption of concentrationary life. The author’s anger at the alienation of women perpetuated by Judaism provides another subtext to her narrative, in which all women become the daughters of the Jewish patriarchy: “My mother [accepted] the humiliation like a good Jewish girl. [...] If it were different, I’d have a friendlier attitude towards this religion, which reduces its daughters to helpmeets of men and circumscribes their spiritual life within the confines of domestic functions” (Klüger 30). And yet,

⁶³ Ruth Klüger, *Still Alive*: “Wars, and hence the memories of wars, are owned by the male of the species. And fascism is a decidedly male property, whether you were for or against it. Besides, women have no past, or aren’t supposed to have one. A man can have an interesting past, a woman only an indecent one. And my stories aren’t even sexy” (Klüger 18).

⁶⁴ “I loved Theresienstadt, for the nineteen or twenty months which I spent there made me into a social animal. In Vienna I suffered from neurotic compulsions and had tics; in Theresienstadt I overcame my obsessions by means of human contacts, friendships, conversations” (Klüger 86).

despite her asserted desire to show that, thanks to deportation, the destructive and exclusive relationship that she had with her mother was put to an end, and to show that she does not idealize the mother/daughter relationship at all – “I wouldn’t have sacrificed myself for my mother, though I would have considered it natural if *she* had sacrificed for *me*. [...] I detest any intimacy with my mother” (Klüger 110) and “I didn’t become an overtly affectionate mother” (Klüger 53) – her narrative keeps coming back to this one fundamental trauma, which is only fully disclosed half way through the narrative: “I was twelve years old, and the thought of dying, now, in contortions, by running into electrically charged metal on the advice of my very own mother, whom God had created to protect me, [...] made me flee into the comfort of believing that she could not have meant it” (Klüger 96). And, three lines down the page, the author mentions her mother’s “death at ninety-seven,” the juxtaposition of these two assertions implying the persistence of resentment, as well as trauma produced by the mother figure suddenly becoming a figure of death.

Thus, Delbo’s, Wajsbrot’s, and Kofman’s narratives all grant a central position to ghostly figures, albeit in different ways, as well as to intertextualities with Greek tragedy (Orpheus’s story in Delbo and Wajsbrot) and fairy tales (Marede witchale in Kofman); however, though these narratives make extensive use of stories-within-the story, they do so for different purposes, and the tales are rewritten and undermined in different ways. In *Rue Ordener, rue Labat*’s case, the tale seems to allow for a rewriting and new understanding of the past in which the child overcomes obstacles in order to survive, much like Snow White/Ruth Klüger survived in spite of her mother’s attempt to kill her, and just like *Mémorial*’s narrator, often compared to Orpheus, comes back from the underworld. However, in light of Sarah Kofman’s committing suicide shortly after finishing *Rue Ordener, rue Labat*, it is hard to perceive any kind of catharsis

in her narrative, and the *mise en abyme* of the fairy tale eventually seems to re-traumatize. In *Mémorial*, on the other hand, rewriting Orpheus's story into a success story in which the hero comes back from the underworld liberated from the burden of the past serves as a metaphor of the narrator's journey back to her origins so as to free herself from the traumatic past which she has inherited through postmemory.

Discussing Hirsch's concept of "postmemory," Rothberg writes:

By staging the question of transmission through stories of intergenerational conflict [these texts] ask us to reflect on the relation between multidirectional memory and what Marianne Hirsch has called 'postmemory.' Hirsch's term is meant to capture the specific relation of children to the traumatic events experienced by their parents – a relation that echoes through the texts explored here and that cannot be captured definitively by the concepts of either an impersonal history or uniquely personal memory. Although rooted in intimate, familiar experience, postmemory has important implications for collective memory in an age of mass mediation and obsession with unresolved histories of violence. Analogizing her neologism to other recent 'post' terms, such as postcolonial, postsecular, and postmodern, Hirsch writes:

'Postmemory shares the layering of these other 'posts,' and their belatedness, aligning itself with the practice[s] of citation and mediation that characterize them, marking a particular end-of-century/turn-of-century moment of looking backward rather than ahead, and of defining the present in relation to a troubled past, rather than initiating new paradigms. Like them, it reflects an uneasy oscillation between continuity and rupture. And yet, postmemory is not a movement, method or idea; I see it, rather, as a *structure* of inter- and trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience. It is a *consequence* of traumatic recall but (unlike post-traumatic stress disorder) at a generational remove.'

Developed in the context of Holocaust studies, Hirsch's concept – as she recognizes – is itself susceptible to transmission across fields. [...] The structure of postmemory emphatically manifests itself in postcolonial contexts such as the aftermath of the Algerian War. [...] But what Hirsch does not say – although her account does not exclude the possibility – is that postmemory may well constitute a particular version of memory's multidirectionality (Rothberg 270-271).

The multidirectionality of postmemory is, in fact, a central theme to *Mémorial*, in which another type of intertextuality occurs: the historical intertextuality. Namely, an important, extended *mise en abyme* happens with the narrative told by the Polish woman that the narrator

(whose name we are never told) meets on the night train to Warsaw. This fellow traveler lives in Oswiecim, which is the Polish name for Auschwitz (“L’endroit où elle allait, c’était le nom polonais d’Auschwitz” – *Mémorial* 71). As the woman from Oswiecim tells her own story of growing up as a non-Jewish Polish girl in a city marked by silence and such traumatic historical events, her narrative, which first starts out as embedded in the story, gradually becomes entangled with the narrator’s, until they become blurred in a dialogue that leaves no indication to the reader for knowing who is telling what. This very powerful device emphasizes the similarity between the traumatic postmemories and the weight of the past experienced by both women – the Jewish one and the non-Jew. Furthermore, this device enables Wajsbrot to insist on the fact that the Holocaust is not a unique historical event, but can be compared to other historical traumas, whereby the intertextuality of the fairy tale and of Greek tragedy is mirrored by the historical intertextuality, whereby three historical catastrophes are put on an equal footing: “Auschwitz, Hiroshima, Tchernobyl” (*Mémorial* 148)⁶⁵. In Delbo, the context of the Algerian War serves as a catalyst to the Holocaust narratives, and to her companions’ testimonies, as they recurrently compare torture during the Algerian War to what they experienced during the Holocaust. Also, in the middle of the chapter called “Le Voyage,” recounting the narrator’s transportation from Auschwitz to Ravensbrück, in Delbo’s *Une Connaissance inutile*, an excerpt from a November 28th, 1969 *New York Post* article dealing with the Vietnam War is suddenly inserted, without any comment from the author:

‘Le lieutenant William L. Calley, qui a assassiné cent neuf Vietnamiens du Sud et doit passer en jugement, avait recueilli une petite Vietnamiennne. Une petite fille perdue,

⁶⁵ This multidirectional framework is also central to Klüger’s memoir, in which recurring comparisons with slavery can be found, for instance in the following parenthesis: “(This part of my story coincides with what older blacks will tell me, and with what black writers such as James Baldwin have poignantly described: a child facing a sea of hostile white faces. No white can understand, they say. I do, I say. But no, you have white skin, they counter. But I wore a *Judenstern* to alert other pedestrians that I wasn’t really white)” (Klüger 23).

affamée, en loques. Voir des enfants nus et affamés errer dans les rues déchirait le cœur du lieutenant William L. Calley [...]’ (AAII 111).

This same process is used at the end of the chapter titled “La Marseillaise le cou coupé,” when an excerpt from *L’Express*, from August 4th, 1960, is inserted, dealing with the Algerian War:

‘...La semaine dernière, un acte d’une même incohérence, suivi aussitôt de plusieurs autres, fut décidé par le nouveau pouvoir: l’exécution dans la cour de la sinistre forteresse de Montluc, à Lyon, du patriote algérien Abderahmane Laklifi. Samedi à l’aube, il eut la tête tranchée, accompagné jusqu’à l’échafaud par le chant de tous ses camarades, derrière les barreaux de leurs cellules’ (AAII 32).

Again, the author does not comment in any way this excerpt, so that the reader is left to ponder on the tragic parallels between the execution of “résistants” at the Prison de la Santé in the summer of 1942 and the execution of Algerian patriots by the French government almost twenty years later. If, in Kofman’s Holocaust texts, there is no such comparison, no such connection to a larger historical framework, could it be linked to her complex position as a child survivor and as a Holocaust victim’s daughter, which seems to place her in a kind of impossibility to distance herself from the traumatic event? Thus, in *Mémorial*, issues of postmemory are tied to those of multidirectional memory, thus providing a subtext reinscribing the Holocaust within a larger context of historical traumas, while Delbo’s narratives are triggered by a parallel established between the narrator’s Auschwitz experience and the Algerian War, during which she wrote most of her Holocaust memoirs. On the other hand, in Kofman’s autobiography, the Holocaust remains a unique event, unlike any other historical trauma; *Paroles suffoquées* opens with a quote from Maurice Blanchot: “Que le fait concentrationnaire, l’extermination des juifs et les camps de la mort où la mort continue son œuvre, soient pour l’histoire un absolu qui a interrompu l’histoire, on *doit* le dire sans cependant pouvoir rien dire d’autre [...]” (PS 11). In

Kofman, there is no returning as there was, literally, no leaving: the trauma is omnipresent, without any possible mediation.

2) **Spectral Writing: A Narrative of Possession:**

Pourquoi, soudain, ce que j'écris revêt la forme d'un poème ? Pourquoi soudain, je vois un personnage se dessiner et se mouvoir ? Je ne sais pas. [...] Chez moi, c'est le sujet qui impose la forme (Charlotte Delbo, *Interview with François Bott*, 1975).

The ghost is not only central to Holocaust narratives as a figure of trauma, cristallizing issues of memory and postmemory, but it also stands for the Holocaust narrative itself, as a genre: namely, how can one find a narrative form appropriate to the rendering of that which cannot be talked about? Quoting Blanchot's *L'Écriture du désastre*, the opening of Sarah Kofman's *Paroles Suffoquées* thus problematizes the intrinsic discrepancies at stake in any discourse on the Holocaust: "Le nom inconnu, hors nomination. L'holocauste, événement *absolu* de l'histoire, historiquement daté, cette toute-brûlure où toute l'histoire s'est embrasée, où le mouvement du sens s'est abîmé, où le don, sans pardon, sans consentement, s'est ruiné sans *donner* lieu à rien qui puisse s'affirmer, se nier, don de la passivité même [...]. Dans l'Intensité mortelle, le silence fuyant du cri innombrable" (*L'Écriture du désastre* 180).

Both of Kofman's texts devoted to the Holocaust revolve around the tension between saying and not saying, talking without being able to, and around the issue as to which form of fiction/discourse is most appropriate for rendering this unprecedented trauma: "*L'Espèce*

humaine [...] souligne la nécessité de passer par la fabulation, le choix des événements et donc l'écriture pour tenter de faire entendre des vérités insupportables" (PS⁶⁶ 44). "Dire et ne pas dire," "parler sans pouvoir" – these tensions emphasize the need for alternative discourses, alternative narrative techniques, that would be more appropriate for writing trauma. Thus, in which ways does this tension between "dire et ne pas dire" express itself in Kofman's, Wajsbrot's, and Delbo's Holocaust narratives? How does the spectrality of the Holocaust experience translate into spectral writing?

The issue of the "adequate" narrative is addressed in *Rites of Return* by Saidiya Hartman, in an interview with Nancy Miller: "All of these concerns about time, eventfulness, the life world of the human commodity required a hybrid form, a personal narrative, a historical meditation, and a metadiscourse on history" (Hirsch and Miller 111). Both Kofman's and Delbo's narratives achieve this hybridity, in various ways. First of all, Kofman's two Holocaust narratives are characterized by an over-abundance of signs that disrupt the continuity of the narrative: dashes, commas, brackets, quotation marks. The fragmentation of the narrative thus echoes the fragmentation of the Holocaust victim's body which, in Delbo, is also emphasized, at the structural level, by blanks – especially in the many poems inserted into the prose narrative, which also serve to disrupt the continuity of the narrative:

Ma mère
c'était des mains un visage
Ils ont mis nos mères nues devant nous

Ici les mères ne sont plus mères à leurs enfants (AAI 23)

Tous étaient marqués au bras d'un numéro
Indélébile
Tous devaient mourir nus

⁶⁶ Sarah Kofman, *Paroles suffoquées* (Paris: Galilée, 1987).

Le tatouage identifiait les morts et les mortes (AAI 24)

Thus, in these two poems, the blank line before the final one, along with the absence of punctuation, serves to translate the trauma; in both cases, the final line expresses the reversed values and the destruction at stake in the Holocaust: mothers were no longer their children's mothers, and the dead had to be identified by the tattooed number on their forearms. Thus, these poems also underline the loss of meaning of words: in the same manner as a "mother" stops meaning anything in Auschwitz, and in the same manner as the dead have no name, words sound empty and lose their usual meaning when one attempts to write about Auschwitz. The blank line is the textual embodiment of the ghost, creating a spectral type of writing.

Throughout *Aucun de nous ne reviendra*, she purposely uses general nouns and pronouns, such as "les gens" and "on." However, this vagueness of pronouns also serves to emphasize the dehumanization and depersonalization of the camp inmates, who have become, as Delbo recurrently puts it, "spectres." Thus, the choice of impersonal pronouns contributes to transferring the spectrality of the prisoners onto the text itself. This spectrality, or disembodiment, of the narrative is further conveyed by the chapter titles: "Les mannequins," "Les hommes," "L'appel," "Un jour," "Le même jour," "Le jour," "L'adieu," "L'appel," "La nuit," "Le matin," "La soif," "Le soir," "Auschwitz" (1^{er} poème), "Le mannequin" (2^{ème} poème), "Dimanche," "Les hommes," "L'appel," "Le printemps"... These general headlines, all reduced to the grammatical minimum of a noun and an article, and introduced by "le," "la," or "les," generate an impression of disembodiment and timelessness, highlighted by the circular repetitions, while also echoing the deprivation of life in Auschwitz. The disembodiment of

language is paralleled by the Shoah victims' desire not to mean anything, not to signify: "Involontairement, chacune baisse la tête, voudrait se fondre dans la masse, ne pas être remarquée, *ne pas faire signe*" (AAI 128).

The over-use of intertextuality also serves a two-fold purpose: on the one hand, highlighting the discontinuity of the Holocaust narrative; on the other hand, increasing the testimonial aspect of it. In Delbo, three types of intertextuality can be found: the intertextuality with herself, the insertion of newspaper excerpts, and the mise en abyme of her companions' testimonies – especially in *Mesure de nos jours*, solely composed of her "camarades"'s stories of life during and after Auschwitz. The pervasive intertextuality with herself mimics the closed circuit of traumatized memory. The opening pages of *Mesure de nos jours* are repeated word for word in *Spectres mes compagnons*, in which the specters are then no longer her female companions from deportation, but fictional characters.

These narrative techniques render the paradox of bearing witness to a story which, much like *Beloved*'s conclusion, is "not a story to pass on." Thus, the poem "Ainsi vous croyiez": "et elles comptaient si peu qu'une seule survécût qu'elles n'ont rien confié qui pût être message" (AAI 173). There is no message to pass on, nothing to communicate. Resorting to poetry appears as the only narrative technique, so as to account for this discrepancy between History and life:

Sortir de l'histoire
pour entrer dans la vie
essayez donc vous autres et vous verrez (AA III 82).

Trying to link her experience in Auschwitz with her childhood memory of first encountering death, Delbo underlines the inadequacy of any translation of her Holocaust experience into “real” life: “Les yeux font des plaies sales. ‘Toutes ces mortes qui ne me regardent plus.’ Maman, Flac est mort” (AAI 49). This insertion of the death of her dog Flac, juxtaposed with the piles of dead bodies in the camp, highlights the condition of the camp inmates, reduced to animals, but, also, reveals the shortcoming of any comparison with “normal” life.

These hybrid narratives constitute attempts at overcoming the fundamental obstacle of a trauma that happened outside of language: “C’est presque impossible, plus tard, d’expliquer avec des mots ce qui est arrivé à l’époque où il n’y avait pas de mots” (AA III 13). “Je dis désespérée faute d’un mot qui donnerait l’idée de ce que je veux dire. Je n’étais pas désespérée, j’étais absente” (AA III 15-16). Furthermore, the narrator effaces herself as a witness: “Comment réfléchir quand on ne possède plus un mot, quand on a oublié tous les mots ? J’étais trop absente pour être désespérée. J’étais là... Comment? Je ne sais. Mais étais-je là? Étais-je moi?” (AA III 12). “Je ne sentais rien, je ne me sentais pas exister, je n’existais pas. Combien de temps suis-je restée ainsi en suspension d’existence? [...] J’ai gardé de ce temps des images brumeuses où pas une tache claire ne permet de distinguer le sommeil de la veille. Longtemps.” (AA III 12-13).

In *Mémorial*, the narrative is also hybridized through embedded stories (Orpheus’s, as well as those of other historical traumas). Namely, the *mise en abyme* occurring with the narrative told by the Polish woman from Auschwitz met by the narrator on the night train to Warsaw can be read as a literary exemplification of Rothberg’s notion of multidirectional memory. The woman from Oswiecim is trying to set up a twin city program between the former Auschwitz, Tchernobyl, and Hiroshima, thereby adding one more layer to the multidirectionality

of trauma. In Kofman, besides the textual discontinuities created by the inserted signs (dashes, commas, quotation marks, and brackets), the hybridity comes from the resort to intertexts and to literal quotes (from Blanchot, Antelme, Nietzsche...) that end up taking more space than the author's voice itself.

Thus, in Kofman, the return is not direct, but mediated by several detours, the main ones being the intertextuality with Blanchot and Antelme, which creates a form of heterobiography and a mediation between the author and the unbearable traumatic event. As Rachel Rosenblum⁶⁷ remarks, Kofman's memories of the Holocaust can be seen as screen memories, or a "destin écran," insofar as what *cannot* be said is, indeed, not so much her father's assassination in Auschwitz, as it is the narrator's own traumatic childhood and tormented relationship with her mother. This hybridization, as a consequence of Kofman's double trauma, and double return, is explicated in *Rites of Return*: "The trauma of the daughter's return remains doubly layered: a daughter's loss of her father, a daughter, who is also a writer, for whom the father's past continues to be a brutal present. The doubleness of inherited trauma as it is expressed in the act of return haunts memoirs, as does, in fact, the double frame of return itself" (Hirsch and Miller 12).

Unlike Kofman, in which no opening, and, therefore, no catharsis, occurs, a further commonality between Wajsbrot and Delbo is, as I have mentioned earlier, their insistence on the fact that the Holocaust is not a unique historical event, but can be compared to other historical traumas, whereby the intertextuality of the fairy tale is mirrored by the historical intertextuality.

⁶⁷ Rachel Rosenblum, "Peut-on mourir de dire? Sarah Kofman, Primo Levi," *Revue française de psychanalyse* 64.1 (2000): 113-138.

II. *Memory, Postmemory, and the “Mother” Tongue: When (Re)Telling Becomes Surviving.*

“Et celui qui a survécu, il faut qu’il entreprenne de reconquérir sa mémoire” (AA III 44). This sentence from Delbo’s *Mesure de nos jours* epitomizes the dilemma experienced by Holocaust survivors, whom she calls the “revenants”: how does one reconquer one’s traumatized memory? How can one express and bear witness to a trauma which is, by definition, beyond words? How does one reconquer language and, thus, one’s “mother” tongue, after living through a trauma that occurred outside of the realm of language?

1) (Re-)embodying memory: “Ne regardez pas”: Gendering the Holocaust through Staging the Obscene.

As we have just seen, the intertextuality with Greek tragedies and, more precisely, with Orpheus’s story, allows for the staging of the Holocaust trauma in a re-appropriating and cathartic manner in *Mémorial* and *Spectres, mes compagnons*, and, to a lesser extent, in *Rue Ordener, rue Labat* as well. Returning to the stage of trauma, in Delbo, Kofman, and Wajsbrot, is not only motivated by a desire to bear witness but, also, I will argue that, in these three women writers, what is at stake is also a cathartic attempt at reclaiming agency over their story by gendering them, and, thus, by moving beyond the status of victims – albeit this purpose is not made explicit and occurs differently in the three authors’ texts. While literary and historical texts on the Holocaust usually emphasize the un-gendered body of the Holocaust victim, and while Charlotte Delbo herself insists on the fact that there is no room left for the individual in the space

of the Nazi concentration camp, the recurring incentives for the reader *not to look* (“Ne regardez pas”⁶⁸) in *Aucun de nous ne reviendra* highlight the obscene – both in its etymological meaning of being “off stage” and in its everyday sense of being “offensive” to the eye. Thus, I argue that, despite their claim at transcending gender boundaries, what is at stake in Delbo’s narratives is not only the memorialization of trauma, but, also, a gendered staging of the Holocaust narrative – albeit not voiced explicitly as in Ruth Klüger’s *Weiter Leben: Eine Jugend*, in which the author poses her Holocaust memoir as a means to reappropriating her story by narrating it through her all-too-often silenced female Jewish voice.

By revealing “obscene⁶⁹” physical and psychological dimensions of life in the Nazi camps that are silenced or suppressed in “official” texts, Delbo also reclaims her experience as a woman in the camps, in keeping with Klüger’s argument that the female experience of the Holocaust is not accounted for (Klüger regrets, for instance, that nowhere in history books is it mentioned that women did not menstruate in the camps). By using the phrase “to reclaim her experience,” I am, again, paraphrasing Cathy Caruth’s article “Reclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History.” In *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Caruth, talking about post-traumatic stress disorder, writes that

the pathology consists [...] in *the structure of its experience*⁷⁰ or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it. *To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event*^{71 72}.

⁶⁸ Charlotte Delbo, *Aucun de nous ne reviendra* (Paris: Minuit, 1970), p.170.

⁶⁹ “Obscene” is here used in its etymological meaning of what is usually left “off stage.”

⁷⁰ Emphasis is the author’s.

⁷¹ Emphasis is mine.

⁷² Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), p.4.

This “possession by an image” can be found in the figure of the ghost that I have just explored, as well as in the spectrality of the narratives themselves. What I will now be exploring is the recurring tropes of fragmented female bodies, mirroring the fragmentation of the self in the concentrationary universe, along with the reversed lineages, and deconstructed notion of “motherhood” brought about by trauma, in *Aucun de nous ne reviendra*, *Mesure de nos jours*, *Rue Ordener, rue Labat*, and *Mémorial*, so as to demonstrate that Delbo, Wajsbrot, and Kofman flesh out this possession in their texts, in an attempt at re-embodiment of their story in various ways. In so doing, they subvert the very tropes used by male narratives as counterpoints to trauma – i.e., the idealized mother-daughter relationship as the last vestige of humanity during the Shoah.

As Hirsch and Miller explain, in *Rites of Return*, “in the literature of return, a painful past can sometimes be reframed through writing. When suffering is translated into fictional narrative and art, it becomes a way to counter the history of violence through an aesthetics of reattachment” (Hirsch and Miller 9). This is precisely what is at the core of these narratives. Miller and Hirsch quote Adrienne Rich’s theory of “re-vision” as being “more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival” (Hirsch and Miller 10). In Delbo and Kofman, writing trauma literally equates re-vising it, insofar as it brings them back to what they have experienced, while, in *Mémorial*, the narrator is going to a site of family trauma which she will be seeing for the first time. Nevertheless, in all three women writers, writing serves as a means of re-vision, to the extent that re-embodiment of their memory enables them to re-write the past and turn it into a narrative. In Delbo, a dialectic is created with the reader, who is constantly asked not to look or not to listen at the same time as the text is revealing the obscene (the off-stage, what the reader who has not been to Auschwitz cannot know), which the reader, precisely, cannot avoid seeing. First, the narrator dares the reader to look at the obscene: “Un cadavre. L’œil gauche mangé par

un rat. L'autre œil ouvert avec sa frange de cils. Essayez de regarder. Essayez pour voir" (AAI 137)The blank line between the scene of horror and the address to the reader emphasizes, this time, the distance between the scene of trauma and the reader herself. A parallel is further established with Orpheus's story, with the recurring injunction "ne regarde pas," echoing the gods' injunction to Orpheus not to look back at Eurydice. The poem "Le Mannequin" revolves around this staging of the reader as Orpheus: "Ne regarde pas. Ne regarde pas ce mannequin qui traîne par terre. Ne te regarde pas" (AAI 142). The reader is cast within the Holocaust memoir and placed in Orpheus's position: if he reads/looks, he risks being traumatized as well. However, the poem could also be read as the narrator's monologue with herself.

Then, the reader is forbidden to listen, and even to think: "Ne regardez pas, n'écoutez pas [...]. Ne regardez pas l'orchestre qui joue 'La Veuve joyeuse'. N'écoutez pas [...]. Ne regardez pas [...]. Ne regardez pas [...]. Ne regardez pas, n'écoutez pas. Ne pensez pas à tous les Yehudis qui avaient emporté leur violon" (AAI 170), which serves to further underscore this staging of memory in the theater of horror. Again, the same technique of revealing the obscene is staged through the mise en abyme of the dialectic reader-narrator-scene: "On marche dans un brouillard où on ne voit rien. Il n'y a rien à voir" (AAI 75). The reader thus finds himself becoming somehow invisible – "il n'y a rien à voir" – and forced into the position of a voyeur of the obscenity of the Holocaust, as the women in Auschwitz do not see him but he is hushed into the privacy of the concealed horror of the camp.

As we have seen, the narrative of life during the Holocaust reflects the de-gendering of the inmates' bodies at stake in the fragmentation of the bodies, which is expressed through the fragmentation of the narrative. Thus, the staging of memory also takes the aspect of, initially,

reproducing the fragmented bodies. Talking about her fellow camp inmates' corpses, Delbo's description initially re-enacts the fragmentation and de-gendering at stake in Auschwitz: "D'abord, on doute de *ce* qu'on voit. Il faut les distinguer de la neige. Il y en a plein la cour. Nus. Rangés les uns contre les autres. Blancs, d'un blanc qui fait bleuté sur la neige. Les têtes sont rasées, les poils du pubis droits, raides. Les cadavres sont gelés. Blancs avec les ongles marron" (AAI 29). This fragmentation is then symbolized by Alice's artificial leg, which survives Alice's death: "Alice était morte depuis des semaines que la jambe artificielle gisait encore sur la neige" (AAI 68).

When describing the struggle for survival in the camp, Delbo seems to make it a point to only quote un-gendered body parts: "Quand viendra le jour où cessera cette commande à un cœur, à des poumons, à des muscles ? Le jour où finira cette solidarité obligée du cerveau, des nerfs, des os et de tous ces organes qu'on a dans le ventre ? Quand viendra le jour où nous ne nous connaissons plus, mon cœur et moi ?" (AAI 110). As the inmates' bodies have lost their humanity, words have also lost their meaning: "Nous étions statufiées par le froid [...]. Tous les gestes s'étaient abolis. Se gratter le nez ou souffler dans ses mains relevait du fantastique comme d'un fantôme qui se gratterait le nez ou soufflerait dans ses mains. [...] Nous étions mortes à nous-mêmes. [...] Nos corps marchaient en dehors de nous. *Possédées, dépossédées*. Abstraites. [...] Des automates marchaient. Des statues de froid marchaient. Des femmes épuisées marchaient" (AAI 58-59). "Et à leur regard, on voyait qu'elles ne voyaient rien, rien de ce qui les entourait, rien de la cour, rien des moribondes et des mortes, rien d'elles-mêmes. [...] Ce n'étaient plus que des yeux creux. Un parterre d'yeux creux" (AAI 80-81). The fragmentation of the women's bodies is underlined by their eyes that are deprived of a gaze, reduced to the status of mere objects, and by the repetition of "rien." A shift in meaning then occurs, when "rien"

progresses from meaning “nothing” to being displaced to the women themselves; namely, when the SS fills the truck with women that have been selected to go to the gas chamber, Delbo writes: “Quand il ne peut vraiment rien ajouter...” (AAI 84), whereby “rien” now refers to “les femmes.” The dehumanization of the landscape is then completed in the following sentence: “Rien n’entendait ces appels du bord de l’épouvante” (AAI 81), in which “rien” is used instead of “personne.” The alienation is complete.

However, as Hirsch and Miller state, “to some extent the desire for return always arises from a need to redress an injustice, one often inflicted upon an entire group of people caused by displacement or dispossession, the loss of home and of family autonomy [...]” (Hirsch and Miller 7). Thus, my argument is that to re-possess one’s body and text through authorship is one of the stakes of Delbo’s *Auschwitz et après* trilogy, despite her claim at universalism in the opening sentence of *Aucun de nous ne reviendra*, which highlights the voiced universal reach of her Holocaust memoir: “Il y a *les gens* qui arrivent” (AA I 9). Actually, the cathartic effect of telling is literally mirrored by re-possessing her body: “Je reprends possession de moi, je reprends possession de mon corps” (AAI 106). Even when she chooses to emphasize the de-gendered bodies in the poem titled “Le Printemps,” the narrative bearing witness to dis-possession also allows for a re-possession:

Toutes ces chairs qui avaient perdu la carnation et la vie de la chair s’étaient étalées dans la boue séchée en poussière [...] – elles se confondaient si bien avec le sol de poussière qu’il fallait faire effort pour distinguer là des femmes, pour distinguer dans ces peaux plissées qui pendaient des seins de femmes – des seins vides (AAI 174).

“Les seins vides” stand in implicit contrast with the arrival of spring and the season of fertility/reproduction, when these women could be nursing their babies – which is used as a

motto in *Mesure de nos jours*, in which what most female survivors regret, in their testimonies, is the fact that their companions who died in Auschwitz never experienced the joys of motherhood.

In *Rue Ordener, rue Labat*, the author's shattered identity is expressed metonymically through her father's pen as an embodiment of himself, in the opening lines of the text: "De lui, il me reste seulement le stylo. [...] Je le *possède*⁷³ toujours, rafistolé avec du scotch, il est devant mes yeux sur ma table de travail et il me contraint à écrire" (*Rue Ordener* 9). This establishes a direct connection between language (writing) and her father who was killed in Auschwitz. In Kofman, re-possessing memory amounts to physically possessing objects that belonged to her father, which is made explicit in the episode of the postcard he sent from Drancy: "A la mort de ma mère, il fut impossible de retrouver cette carte que j'avais relue si souvent et que j'aurais voulu conserver à mon tour. *C'était comme si j'avais perdu mon père une seconde fois*" (*Rue Ordener* 16). Not only does losing the object equate her father dying a second time, but, also, what is implied is a feeling of resentment towards her mother who, by displacement, caused her father to die by losing the postcard.

According to Hirsch, "memory is necessarily an act not only of recall but also of mourning, mourning often inflicted by anger, rage, and despair" ("Past Lives" 659). In this perspective, a Holocaust memoir such as Ruth Klüger's *Still Alive* serves as a vector of mourning, in its attempt at coming to terms with the trauma and resentment. The author/narrator remarks that "only when I had children did I understand that it is justifiable to kill your own children in Auschwitz rather than to wait" (Klüger 113-114). Hence, *Weiter Leben* could also be read as a performative narrative of forgiveness and coming to terms with rage and despair.

⁷³ Emphasis is mine.

Mémorial also perfectly exemplifies Hirsch's theory, in its circular construction and spiraling narrative, constantly coming back to the same motifs and metaphors in order to express the impossibility of coming to terms with the burden of the transgenerational trauma. The narrator is angry at her father and his sister for suffering from Alzheimer's disease: "Je descendis dans la gare souterraine et ils m'accompagnaient, moi qui, pour le moment, n'oubliais rien, qui me sentais *condamnée à la mémoire*,⁷⁴ l'éternel souvenir, et leur oubli et ma mémoire se rejoignaient [...] L'oubli ne m'était pas donné" (Wajsbrot 148). The powerful phrase "condemned to memory," contrasted with "their oblivion," not only emphasizes the narrator's anger at her parents for forgetting now that they have literally poisoned her existence with their imposed memories, but also the reversed family structure, whereby the narrator loses her former position of a daughter receiving the postmemory, and becomes, against her will, the only one possessing the traumatic memory – she is now the parent of her father and aunt.

The fragmentation of the self brought about by an unsuccessful instance of postmemory is conveyed in *Mémorial* through the unusual family structure within which the narrator has grown up, from which the mother figure is entirely absent. Namely, the reader is told from the beginning that the narrator's mother died when she was very little. Here is how the narrator introduces her family:

Ils étaient trois, une mère et deux enfants, un frère et une soeur, le père était mort depuis longtemps, et si je pensais à eux au pluriel, c'est qu'ils étaient inséparables, indissociables, qu'ils se ressemblaient trop et qu'ils appartenaient les uns aux autres, et moi j'avais grandi parmi eux, esseulée, étrangère – ce frère était pourtant mon père – abandonnée par une mère qui, n'ayant pas supporté cette densité trop forte, avait laissé la vie, vaincue [...]. Ils étaient trois et semblaient former une famille, une sorte d'identité monstrueuse, une hydre à trois têtes, une trinité, une chimère silencieuse qui m'avait agrippée et refusait de me lâcher (*Mémorial* 17).

⁷⁴ My italics.

The use of the pronoun “ils” (“Ils étaient trois”) and the indefinite articles “un” (“un frère”) and “une” (“une sœur”), along with “le père,” instead of the expected “nous” or possessive adjectives, underlines the alienation that the narrator feels from her family, and the skewed family positions, since her father remains “the brother” and her aunt “the sister.” Each family member has retained his position in the family at the time of the traumatic event, leaving no room for the narrator as a daughter, i.e., for a new generation.

Interestingly, though she is a Jewish writer, Wajsbrot also makes extensive use of biblical references to the Holy Trinity in her narrative, in order to describe the unusual family circumstances in which she grew up, and in which she is still entangled: first, the grandmother and her son and daughter; and then, after the grandmother’s death, herself living with her father and her aunt. She names this family situation the “triad” of the father, his sister and the father’s daughter, whereby the aunt replaces the mother. However, the narrator never calls her father’s sister her “aunt,” which creates a distance between herself and this aunt, whom she calls “the sister” (“La soeur”), thereby emphasizing her father and his sister as a couple, and herself as both excluded and negated in her existence by this subversive couple whose past is engulfing her. In *Rue Ordener, rue Labat*, Kofman also stages the “love triangle” within which she is caught up as a child of two mothers through a Christian imagery: “Sur la couverture de mon premier livre *L’Enfance de l’art*, j’ai choisi de mettre un Léonard de Vinci, le fameux ‘carton de Londres.’ Deux femmes, la Vierge et sainte Anne, étroitement accolées, se penchent avec un ‘bienheureux sourire’ sur l’Enfant Jésus qui joue avec saint Jean-Baptiste” (*Rue Ordener* 73).

On the other hand, in Kofman’s narrative no mourning seems possible. To the contrary, because writing is so central to her survival, losing the postcard that bore her father’s

handwriting, as a metonymy of himself, amounts to losing him again, and the narrative thus revolves around the issue of the mother and the mother tongue as problematizing the narrator's trauma, which we are now going to explore.

In Delbo's narratives, the site of memory is literally embodied and re-gendered, whereby writing becomes an act of symbolical empowerment and healing. The fragmentation imposed on the prisoner's self eventually allows for survival, through the motif of the doubling, as a recurring motif in most of the female survivors' testimonies that constitute *Mesure de nos jours*. Thus, Poupette: "J'ai eu pendant vingt ans cette providentielle faculté qui m'a aidée à sortir d'Auschwitz : me dédoubler, ne pas être là" (AA III 75). Then, Ida: "J'avais l'impression d'être double" (AA III 119) and "j'étais double et je ne parvenais pas à réunir mes doubles. Il y avait moi et un spectre de moi qui voulait coller à son double et n'y arrivait jamais" (AA III 120). Interestingly, these testimonies seem to undermine Delbo's initial statement, upon arriving in Auschwitz: "aucun dédoublement n'était permis" (Convoi 231). Also, after describing the de-gendered and fragmented body parts, this very fragmentation is presented as a tool for survival: "dos contre poitrine, nous nous tenons serrées, et tout en établissant ainsi pour toutes une même circulation, un même réseau sanguin, nous sommes toutes glacées" (AAI 103). Thus, Delbo and her "camarades" are able to create a form of sisterhood, precisely through their dissolved self-boundaries, that allow for the creation of a new body made up of all their body parts used to shelter each other. This aspect of survival is entirely absent from Holocaust memoirs written by men, such as Primo Levi's *Si c'est un homme* or Robert Antelme's *L'Espèce humaine*. The sisterhood becomes so strong that, when Gilberte talks about one of her dead "camarades," she refers to her in those terms: "il me manquait tout à coup un membre, un organe essentiel. [...] J'étais désespérée, aussi perdue qu'un enfant qui a perdu sa mère dans la foule" (AA III 22-24).

Thus, not only does the women's community reclaim each fragmented body part into one large body, i.e., one single body for them all, but, in this sisterhood, each "camarade" also becomes the others' mother – which brings me to the following part.

2) **Translating Trauma: the "Mother" Tongue and the Dissolved Boundaries of the Self:**

In Delbo's and Wajsbrot's case, (re)telling trauma eventually becomes a means to surviving, and a means to reclaiming one's story, in order to "move on," whereas, in Kofman's case, much like Scheherazade could only stay alive as long as she was telling stories, telling is presented as a defense mechanism against stifling ("suffoquer") and yet, as soon as what cannot be told has been told, the author dies – insofar as Kofman committed suicide in October 1994, shortly after finishing writing her autobiographical narrative *Rue Ordener, rue Labat*.

Thus, in Delbo's and Wajsbrot's case, it appears that telling the trauma allows for a re-embodiment and re-gendering of the authors' memories and bodies. (Re)telling provides a cathartic process, whereby telling not only serves the purpose of bearing witness to what happened but, also, of reclaiming one's story and of reclaiming agency within a story of passivity and victimhood. This process is achieved in Delbo thanks to this "suspension d'existence" which she extensively describes, this "dédoublement," this feeling to be "absente," trapped "entre rêve et réalité." This process of distancing allows for survival. Despite the impression given by her various narratives of echoing each other through a circulation of repetitions and intertextualities, a progression occurs in which the author-narrator re-genders her story so as to recover the integrity of her self and, as a consequence, gendering becomes healing.

To the contrary, in Kofman's case, no progression and no distancing seems possible, despite the attempts at implementing defense mechanisms within her texts, through the over-use of dashes, quotation marks, and brackets. Kofman's two Holocaust narratives, *Paroles suffoquées* and *Rue Ordener, rue Labat*, also echo each other through repetitions, much like Delbo's texts; however, in Kofman's case, no progression and no healing seems to occur. The narrator's stance seems to be characterized by a constant hyper-consciousness of trauma, unable to become "absente" or "de se dédoubler," despite the defenses which she creates through the structural fragmentation of her narratives. Mastering and re-embodying her story proves impossible.

While *Rue Ordener, rue Labat* appears to be a deceptively simple text, almost like a fairy tale itself, in its uncomplicated sentence structures and very brief chapters, it deals with complicated issues. The Holocaust and, more precisely, the death of the narrator's father in Auschwitz, are presented as central issues, as that which literally cannot be told. Thus, "la rafle" is first referred to as "cela": "'Cela' ne tarda pas à arriver" (*Rue Ordener* 38). As the narrative progresses, the use of brackets, dashes, and quotation marks increases, exemplifying the author's difficulty in telling her story. Rachel Rosenblum devoted an article to Kofman and Primo Levi, titled "Peut-on mourir de dire? Sarah Kofman, Primo Levi," in the *Revue française de psychanalyse*, in which she highlights the fact that, as far as the Holocaust trauma is concerned, telling directly, without any mediation, can prove fatal, contrary to the traditional psychoanalytic approach, in which telling is supposed to be liberating.

Namely, Kofman voices her psychological dilemma upon writing her autobiography: "Mes nombreux livres ont peut-être été des voies de traverse obligées pour parvenir à raconter 'ça'." (*Rue Ordener* 9). But what does "ça" refer to, really? We will see that it is somewhat more

complicated than the Holocaust trauma. As I have mentioned earlier, Kofman makes extensive use of brackets, which seem to signify unpleasant, repressed emotions, as in the following passage: “Elle [sa mère] tolérait surtout très mal la tendresse que me manifestait mémé, qu’elle estimait excessive. Elle savait bien que cette femme adorait les enfants (elle gardait d’ailleurs dans la journée une autre petite fille, Jeanine, dont je devins vite jalouse) ” (*Rue Ordener* 49). Interestingly, the narrator’s jealous feelings towards the other little girl that mémé is taking care of are parenthesized.

In Kofman, the trauma of the father’s assassination is further complicated by the tormented mother-daughter relationship around which the narrator’s life revolved during the war. Namely, from 1942 until the Liberation, Kofman and her mother had to leave their rue Ordener apartment and were hidden by “mémé,” a former neighbor and friend who lived on rue Labat. As the narrative unfolds, the narrator grows from not being able to stand separation from her mother for one day to developing a very strong attachment to mémé, culminating in a complete rejection of her mother.

In her article entitled “Mothers and Daughters,” Marianne Hirsch uses Adrienne Rich’s phrases, for whom the mother/daughter relationship is “the essential female tragedy” (“Mothers and Daughters” 202) and “the great unwritten story” (“Mothers and Daughters” 200). The three texts included in this chapter all revolve around an attempt at (re)writing this unwritten story through the prism of the Holocaust trauma. Summarizing Rich’s argument, Hirsch reminds her reader of “every woman’s participation in the experience and institution of motherhood; the ‘childless’ woman and the ‘mother’ are a false polarity, which has served the institutions both of motherhood and heterosexuality” (202). This statement sheds light on a parallel between

Mémorial's female narrator and Delbo's narratives, since both fall under the category of the "childless" woman – albeit for different reasons. *Mémorial*'s narrator explains her childlessness as a result of the burden of an omnipresent past that engulfs both her present and future, and prevents her from positioning herself as a mother, instead of as a child. In Delbo's case, the issue is different, since Delbo explains that she chose not to remarry after her husband Georges Dudach had been executed by the Gestapo in 1942: "Refaire sa vie, quelle expression... S'il y a une chose qu'on ne puisse refaire, une chose qu'on ne puisse recommencer, c'est bien sa vie. On pourrait effacer et recommencer... Effacer et réécrire par-dessus... Mon cœur ne bat plus que forcé. Il ne retrouvera jamais le battement de l'amour, le battement vivant de l'amour" (AIII 205-206) and "au début, c'était trop près, après c'était trop tard" (AIII 193). Thus, both the Holocaust survivor and the survivors' descendent suffer from the same inability to continue their lineage as an expression of trauma. However, toward the end of her journey, Wajsbrot's narrator experiences her childlessness and motherlessness as a form of freedom: "je ne possédais rien, pourtant, ni lignée à détruire, ni lignée à construire" (*Mémorial* 142). On the other hand, most of the women survivors whose testimonies are included in Delbo's *Mesure de nos jours* voice a desire to forget and go on living, and, for them, a return to some form of "normalcy" can only be achieved through motherhood – which can be understood as a desire to repair the Nazi policy of compulsory sterilization.

In *Rue Ordener, rue Labat*, on the other hand, Kofman does not mention her adult life, but the entire narrative is centered on the mother-daughter relationship. Initially, the narrative is presented as an attempt at resolving the dilemma and the ambivalence that Kofman experiences as a Holocaust victim's daughter and as a child survivor:

Parce qu'il était juif, mon père est mort à Auschwitz: comment ne pas le dire? Et comment le dire? Comment parler de ce devant quoi cesse toute possibilité de parler? De cet événement, mon absolu, qui communique avec l'absolu de l'histoire – intéressant seulement à ce titre ? Parler – il le faut – *sans pouvoir*: sans que le langage trop puissant, souverain, ne vienne maîtriser la situation la plus aporétique, l'impouvoir absolu et la détresse même, ne vienne l'enfermer dans la clarté et le bonheur du jour? Et comment ne pas en parler, alors que le vœu de tous ceux qui sont revenus – et il n'est pas revenu – a été de raconter, raconter sans fin, comme si seul un “entretien infini” pouvait être à la mesure du dénuement infini? [...] Cette voix laisse sans voix, vous fait douter de votre bon sens et de tout sens, vous fait suffoquer en silence (PS 16-17).

Thus, she feels invested with the mission to tell her father's story because he was not able to return from Auschwitz in order to tell his own story. This further complicates the issue of gendering, since Kofman, as a daughter, has to tell her father's story. Actually, issues of gender are almost absent in Kofman's Holocaust narratives – to the extent that the author never mentions herself as an adult woman. However, what is at stake is her situation as a daughter, and the mother-daughter relationship is at the core of her autobiographical narrative. Adrienne Rich, in her 1984 “Notes Toward a Politics of Location,” reflects that “I've been thinking a lot about the obsession with origins. It seems a way of stopping time in its tracks.” In this perspective, Kofman's narrative could be read as such attempt. Stuck in timelessness as a daughter – i.e., the family position that the narrator occupied at the time of the Holocaust, trauma is staged through the “tale of two mother,” which is also symbolized by the issue of the mother tongue.

Indeed, the narrator's growing attachment to mémé is paralleled by her relationship to her mother tongue – which has, in her case, a literal meaning. Namely, the narrator explains that her mother tongue is not French, i.e. the language in which she is now writing her autobiography: “Émigrés en France depuis 1929, mes parents n'étaient guère ‘assimilés’ et nous tous, nés en France, et naturalisés français, apprîmes le français à l'école” (*Rue Ordener* 15). She has been “naturalisée” – a phrase in which the word “naturalisation” itself raises issues of

renouncement and “integration,” since, literally, it implies both accepting French citizenship as a second or new “nature,” while remaining forever different from citizens who were “born” French and with French roots. We then learn that the “father” tongues are yiddish and Polish, but, when he writes from Drancy, the postcard is in French: “Sans doute lui avait-il été interdit d’écrire en yiddish ou en polonais, langues dans lesquelles il communiquait ordinairement avec nous” (*Rue Ordener* 15). During her time of hiding at mémé’s place, the narrator teaches her mother how to read and write in French (*Rue Ordener* 34) and, as she gradually rejects Judaism, she also grows estranged from her father and, consequently, from yiddish: “J’avais, semble-t-il, enterré tout le passé : je me mis à adorer les beefsteaks saignants au beurre et au persil. Je ne pensais plus du tout à mon père, je ne pouvais plus prononcer un seul mot en yiddish tout en continuant à comprendre parfaitement la langue de mon enfance” (*Rue Ordener* 67). Interestingly, she does not write “ma langue maternelle” but “la langue de mon enfance,” which echoes the tormented mother-daughter relationship. In *Rue Ordener, rue Labat*, the Holocaust is, in fact, exclusively experienced through the mother-daughter relationship, whereby the mothers become the greatest danger for the daughters. Thus, Kofman recounts the death of her classmate Mathilde Klaperman as the only instance of a classmate dying during the Holocaust: “Sa mère, désespérée, ne supportant pas la déportation de son mari, avait ouvert le gaz pendant la nuit” (*Rue Ordener* 24-25). Mathilde was killed by her mother, and it is striking that Kofman chooses to tell this story instead of that of other classmates who were probably deported after the Rafle du Vel’ d’Hiv’.

As the narrator detaches herself from her mother and develops an attachment to “la dame de la rue Labat” (*Rue Ordener* 26), this process is mirrored by the evolution of the way in which their benefactress is referred to. From “la dame de la rue Labat” (*Rue Ordener* 39), she then gradually becomes “la ‘dame’” (*Rue Ordener* 43 and 44), then “la dame” (*Rue Ordener* 46)

without quotation marks, then “cette femme qui se fit désormais appelée [sic] par moi ‘mémé,’ tandis qu’elle me baptisait ‘Suzanne’ parce que c’était le prénom le plus voisin du sien (Claire) sur le calendrier” (*Rue Ordener* 47); eventually, she becomes “mémé” (*Rue Ordener* 48) without quotation marks, and, lastly, “ma mémé” (*Rue Ordener* 79). Simultaneously, from not being to spend a moment away from her mother (“Le vrai danger: être séparée de ma mère. Entre deux et trois ans, dans le jardin du Sacré-Coeur près du grand bassin, je la perdis de vue quelques instants et me mis à hurler” – *Rue Ordener* 33), the narrator-Kofman grows to refer to her mother in the same manner as she does to the “dame de la rue Labat” (“les deux femmes sont à mon chevet” – *Rue Ordener* 52), before eventually choosing mémé over her mother:

Jour de la fête des Mères : je prends l’argent de ma “tirelire,” et pars seule rue Custine acheter des cadeaux pour les deux femmes : une ‘résille’ et un peigne, je crois ; je prends aussi deux cartes postales. L’une d’elles représente un visage féminin tout sourire, l’autre, une femme assise, accompagnée d’un garçonnet debout. J’hésite un moment et je choisis pour mémé la première, celle des deux que je trouve la plus belle. J’ai honte et je me sens rougir dans la boutique. Mon choix vient bel et bien d’être fait, ma préférence déclarée (*Rue Ordener* 55).

Ultimately, she forgets her mother, as she writes, talking about her mother: “Je l’avais complètement oubliée. J’étais tout simplement heureuse” (*Rue Ordener* 66). The Greek tragedy with which Kofman compares her father’s deportation in the opening chapter of her autobiography eventually appears to be staged through the triangle among herself and her two mothers, which points, again, to her father’s assassination as a sort of “screen trauma” or “screen memory,” aimed at concealing the even more deeper tragedy of her childhood: her feelings of guilt at having rejected her biological mother and her mother tongue (Yiddish) in the specific context of the Nazi racist politics in which mothers were deprived of their children and women were targeted for compulsory sterilization. One could read *Rue Ordener, rue Labat* as, on the one hand, revealing the ultimate perversion of the Nazi racist policy that perverts even the mother-daughter relationship but, on the other hand, as the very anti-Semitic propaganda being

internalized by the daughter, who ends up excluding her own mother and, thus, depriving her of her child by reproducing the Nazi politics, after listening to mémé's biased words about Jews ("A son insu ou non, mémé avait réussi ce tour de force: en présence de ma mère, me détacher d'elle. Et aussi du judaïsme. [...] Elle me disait aussi: 'La nourriture juive est nocive pour la santé; les Juifs ont crucifié Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ ; ils sont tous avares et n'aiment que le pognon [...]'" – *Rue Ordener* 57).

The autobiographical narrative subsequently unfolds as a Greek tragedy, with the three characters being caught up in a cycle of violence and passions:

C'était la libération de Paris. Et celle de ma mère. [...] Ma mère n'avait plus que haine et mépris pour celle qui nous avait sauvé la vie. [...] Ce fut un véritable déchirement. Du jour au lendemain, je dus me séparer de celle que j'aimais maintenant plus que ma propre mère. [...] Je refusais de manger et passais mon temps à pleurer jusqu'à ce que ma mère consentît à me laisser retourner voir mémé. [...] Si je prolongeais de quelques minutes, j'étais accueillie à coups de martinet. [...] Je fus très vite couverte de bleus et me mis à détester ma mère (*Rue Ordener* 68-69).

The tragedy is further entangled in the fact that the issue of the mothers-daughter relationship also casts the child-narrator in gender issues of the sexualization of the mother-daughter relationship, and in a narrative of possession – in keeping with the first part of this chapter. Thus, the reader is not told explicitly whether mémé abused the narrator or not; we are only told what the narrator heard and thought as a child. The focalization is entirely internal: "Aussi [ma mère] intenta-t-elle un procès à mémé qui se déroula devant un tribunal F.F.I., improvisé dans le préau d'une école. Mémé y fut accusée d'avoir tenté d'abuser de moi, et d'avoir maltraité ma mère. Je ne comprenais pas très bien ce que celle-ci voulait dire par le terme 'abuser,' mais j'étais persuadée qu'elle mentait" (*Rue Ordener* 70). In the narrative, a turning-point occurs when the narrator sees mémé in her bathrobe: "Elle était en peignoir, je la trouvai très belle, douce et affectueuse. J'en oubliais presque ce qui nous avait conduit chez elle, ce soir-là" (*Rue Ordener*

40). She *almost* forgets the Holocaust. Over the next few pages, she even comes to forget that she has just lost her father and focuses on mémé’s mourning for her sister: “‘La dame’ venait de perdre sa sœur et portait le ‘grand deuil.’ Elle était vêtue de noir et j’étais frappée par la blondeur de ses cheveux et la douceur mélancolique de ses yeux bleus” (*Rue Ordener* 44). Again, the reader is not given access to the author’s thinking or interpretation process as an adult; what she felt as a child is rendered without any mediation or distance: “Je sentais vaguement que se trouvait en jeu, cette fois, autre chose que la simple séparation d’avec ma mère” (*Rue Ordener* 45) ; “je ressens vaguement ce jour-là que je me détache de ma mère et m’attache de plus en plus à l’autre femme” (*Rue Ordener* 53). Ultimately, here is the last description that the reader is given of the narrator’s time spent with mémé: “nos retrouvailles furent idylliques. [...] Je me souviens surtout de la première nuit où mon émotion et mon excitation étaient très fortes. Me sentir simplement si près d’elle me mettait dans un ‘drôle’ d’état. J’avais chaud, j’avais soif, je rougissais. Je n’en dis mot et j’aurais bien eu de la peine à dire quelque chose car je ne comprenais pas du tout ce qui m’arrivait” (*Rue Ordener* 80).

The narrative of possession that I mentioned earlier is staged through the mother’s perception of her daughter as belonging to her: “Ma mère me frappait, hurlant en yiddish: ‘Je suis ta mère! je suis ta mère! je me fiche de ce qu’a décrété le tribunal, tu m’appartiens!’ ” (*Rue Ordener* 71). Here, yiddish, or the “mother” tongue, is explicitly identified to the mother figure, which explains that, whenever the child-narrator is upset, she stops talking, thus rejecting the mother tongue: “Je pouvais rester ainsi très longtemps, prostrée, refusant de parler et de manger” (*Rue Ordener* 58). However, again, her “mother” tongue is also her “father” tongue, which

creates a sort of double bind⁷⁵ in which the narrator is trapped, as rejecting the mother tongue also entails rejecting the memory of her father.

Towards the end of the narrative, Kofman presents the reader with a mise en abyme of the dilemma of her situation as a child torn between two mother figures – the “good” mother and the “bad” one, through the story of Hitchcock’s *The Lady Vanishes*:

L’intolérable, pour moi, est toujours d’apercevoir brutalement [dans *The Lady Vanishes*] à la place du bon visage ‘maternel’ de la vieille (tout dans le film suggère qu’elle est l’image d’une bonne mère: elle appelle les montagnes de la petite station de ski ‘les bonnets de bébé’; elle a toujours sur elle des réserves de nourriture ; quand on ne trouve plus assez à manger à l’auberge, elle procure du fromage aux autres hôtes, aux Anglais en particulier; dans le train, elle invite Iris à partager son thé ‘spécial’ au wagon restaurant; elle s’occupe d’elle, lui conseille de dormir, enfin, elle se fait passer pour une gouvernante d’enfants, professeur de musique), l’intolérable, c’est d’apercevoir brusquement le visage de sa remplaçante (elle a revêtu les vêtements de la bonne vieille, en réalité un agent secret de l’Intelligence Service, bâillonnée et ligotée par des espions dans un autre compartiment); visage effroyablement dur, faux, fuyant, menaçant, en lieu et place de celui si doux et si souriant de la bonne dame, au moment même où l’on s’attendait à le retrouver. *Le mauvais sein à la place du bon sein, l’un parfaitement clivé de l’autre, l’un se transformant en l’autre* (Rue Ordener 76-77).

And here is how Jean Maurel, a friend of Kofman’s, interprets this passage, in an article titled “Enfances de Sarah”⁷⁶:

Et pourtant quelle force d’enfance, d’enfantement force cet impossible! L’enfance n’est pas simplement tragique, contrariée, retournée sur elle-même, mais aussi, incroyablement traversée, répétée : diverse, polymorphe, elle n’en finit pas de revenir

⁷⁵ According to Bateson’s theory of the “double bind” as the cause of schizophrenia (Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of the Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology*, London and Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson Inc., 1972), a double bind is a dilemma in communication in which an individual (or group) receives two or more conflicting messages, with one message negating the other. This creates a situation in which a successful response to one message results in a failed response to the other, so that the person will be automatically wrong regardless of response. The nature of a double bind is that the person cannot confront the inherent dilemma, and therefore can neither comment on the conflict, nor resolve it, nor opt out of the situation. A double bind generally includes different levels of abstraction in orders of messages, and these messages can be stated or implicit within the context of the situation, or conveyed by tone of voice or body language. Further complications arise when frequent double binds are part of an ongoing relationship to which the person or group is committed.

⁷⁶ Jean Maurel, “Enfances de Sarah,” *Les Cahiers du GRIF* 3 (1997): 55-70.

autre, avec chaque livre, chaque enfant-livre. [...] ‘Couper le cordon ombilical,’ vouloir naître, ce sera écrire, enfanter des livres dans lesquels jouent deux génies rivaux: Freud et Nietzsche. Enfanter des doubles, de multiples enfants démultipliés. [...] A cette enfance-souffrance de l’imposture insupportable réplique l’énergique reprise d’*Une Femme disparaît* d’Hitchcock qui clôt le dernier livre et l’ouvre sur la revanche de l’illusion cathartique et du rire. Et pourtant, c’est bien une *angoisse viscérale* qui est avouée accompagner chaque vision du film. Ce qui disparaît, avec cette femme, pendant le sommeil de l’héroïne, à son insu et par l’inconsciente négligence qui la culpabilise, c’est bien la belle figure de la mère. L’expérience vécue comme *intolérable* est celle d’une enfant qui a perdu sa mère et la chambre du bonheur de son enfance, et s’en accuse (Maurel 57).

As Maurel remarks, it is true that the narrative indeed closes on an “illusion cathartique,” since the narrator goes to university and reconciliates herself with her “Jewishness”: “Je réappris l’hébreu, faisais toutes les prières et respectais les trois jeûnes annuels : j’obéissais de nouveau à tous les interdits religieux de mon enfance” (*Rue Ordener* 94). However, it is worth noting that she does not start speaking Yiddish again, but Hebrew – which is not the “mother” tongue. Furthermore, I do not quite agree with Maurel that “l’expérience vécue comme *intolérable* est celle d’une enfant qui a perdu sa mère et la chambre du bonheur de son enfance, et s’en accuse,” insofar as the trauma is not so much the loss of the mother as that of the father, for which a subtext in her narrative reveals that she used to foster some resentment towards her mother or herself while, also, nourishing ambivalent feelings towards that father. From the opening of the novel, the memory she retains of her father is evocative of Isaac’s sacrifice, which points to the fact that, unlike Abraham, her father did not decide to sacrifice her, but sacrificed himself : “Dans un coin de la pièce (la chambre de mon père, la plus grande et la plus belle de l’appartement, lambrissée et tapissée, la mieux meublée, mystérieuse et revêtue d’un caractère sacré car mon père y accomplissait des cérémonies religieuses diverses, mariages, divorces, circoncisions), j’observais ses moindres gestes, fascinée. *Le souvenir du sacrifice d’Isaac (dont une reproduction dans une bible illustrée où j’avais appris à lire très jeune l’hébreu m’avait*

souvent inquiétée) effleura mon esprit” (*Rue Ordener* 12). Perhaps the narrator’s subsequent rejection of the Jewish laws during the Occupation could be read as her anger and disappointment that, ultimately, no miracle happened and her father was not changed into a lamb so as to escape deportation.

In *Mémorial*, the issue of the mother tongue is present, though as a less charged one, since the narrator confesses that she is unable to learn her parents’ language, which is Polish: “Il y avait ce groupe de lycéens qui semblait rentrer d’un échange entre deux classes et parlait sans effort cette langue que je cherchais vainement à apprendre [...]” (*Mémorial* 42). This symbolizes the situation of the second-generation, as described by Hirsch and Miller: “while the idea of postmemory can account for the lure of second-generation ‘return,’ it also underscores the radical distance that separates the past from the present and the risks of projection, appropriation, and overidentification occasioned by second- and third-generation desires and needs” (Hirsch and Miller 4-5). *Mémorial*’s narrator’s inability to learn the “mother” tongue stands for the “radical distance that separates the past from the present” – or, as the narrator notices, towards the end of her journey backwards: “la distance entre un événement et un autre, entre un être et un autre, est incommensurable” (*Mémorial* 104). Free from the burden of postmemory, she can now go on with her adult life.

In Delbo’s narratives, the mother tongue is French, so there is no ambivalence in this respect. However, what is recurrently highlighted is the foreignness of the Nazis’ language: “Ils attendent le pire – ils n’attendent pas l’inconcevable. Et quand on leur crie de se ranger par cinq, hommes d’un côté, femmes et enfants de l’autre, *dans une langue qu’ils ne comprennent pas*, ils comprennent aux coups de bâton et se rangent par cinq puisqu’ils s’attendent à tout” (AA I 11).

The universal language in Auschwitz thus becomes that of violence and of death, and the following poem provides a sarcastic counterpoint to the present European ideal:

Et tout le jour et toute la nuit
tous les jours et toutes les nuits
les cheminées fument avec ce combustible de tous les pays d'Europe (AAI 18).

The mother tongue proves inefficient in rendering the Holocaust experience: “Je n’ai pas le mot qu’il faudrait” (AA III 52). And yet, fiction is presented as central to survival in Auschwitz, in that fiction becomes both reality and a survival tool: “Chacun a raconté sa vie mille et mille fois, a ressuscité son enfance, le temps de la liberté et du bonheur pour s’assurer qu’il l’avait vécu, qu’il avait bien été celui qui racontait” (AA III 50). This function of telling has been given increased attention recently, as gendered Holocaust studies started to investigate the differences between women and men’s experiences in the camps. Unlike Delbo’s testimony, Robert Antelme, in *L’Espèce humaine*, emphasizes that nobody talked in the camps, as talking was perceived as bearing the risk of dying: “Le langage était une sorcellerie. La mer, l’eau, le soleil, quand le corps pourrissait, vous faisaient suffoquer. C’était avec ces mots-là [...] qu’on risquait de ne plus vouloir faire un pas ni se lever. [...] Tant que l’avenir était possible il fallait se taire” (Antelme 177).

After returning to “normal” life, in Delbo’s narratives telling remains used much like a survival tool – still a survival tool *against* reality, this time around. Interestingly, the function of telling, while allowing for a catharsis, also becomes displaced as both a way of bearing witness and a way of (re)creating the past, i.e., a way of repeating the trauma by returning to it through language, in an obsessive manner, via testimonies that echo each other through repetition. Much like Chava Rosenfarb’s short story “Little Red Bird,” revolving around motherhood as a cathartic

process for a female Holocaust survivor, in Delbo's *Mesure de nos jours* the issue of having a child is a recurring one throughout most of the testimonies of life after Auschwitz which she collects. For most survivors, having a family becomes a way of proving that they have returned to "normalcy"; for some, motherhood even becomes invested with a symbolic reach: "Mon fils est leur fils à toutes. Il est l'enfant qu'elles n'auront pas eu. Leurs traits se dessinent par-dessus les siens, parfois s'y confondent. Comment être vivante au milieu de ce peuple de mortes?" (AA III 56). In this respect, for Delbo-narrator, who found herself unable to get married again and have a child after Auschwitz, the narrative serves the purpose of (pro)creating,⁷⁷ so as to return to "normalcy."

On the other hand, the issue of motherhood is also used as a trope highlighting trauma and the distortion it causes to "normal" lineages, as can be seen in Ida's testimony: "Maman aujourd'hui est plus jeune que moi. C'est extraordinaire, quand on s'y arrête : avoir sa maman plus jeune que soi" (AA III 121). Ida does not use the conditional mode in order to tell that her mother would be younger than herself, had she not died in Auschwitz. Instead, she uses the present tense throughout, as if her mother being younger than herself was a fact, which further emphasizes the suspended time and distorted genealogy brought about by trauma, whereby the daughter becomes older than her mother. This is also a theme in Mado's testimony: "Je n'ai pas changé d'âge, je n'ai pas vieilli. Le temps ne passe pas. Le temps s'est arrêté" (AA III 52). Mado then mentions a woman who had been killed while giving birth in Auschwitz: "Je revoyais cette

⁷⁷ For a discussion of writing as procreation, see Béatrice Didier's *L'Écriture-femme*. Didier arguably bases her study of "écriture féminine" on a parallel between the desire for literary creation and the desire for procreation: "le désir d'écrire, aussi fondamental peut-être que le désir d'enfanter, et qui probablement répond à la même pulsion [...]: faire des enfants plutôt que des livres" (Didier 11).

femme – tu te souviens, cette paysanne, couchée dans la neige, morte, avec son nouveau-né mort, gelé entre ses cuisses” (AA III 55-56), which further emphasized the suspension of time.

Ida’s testimony is fascinating in several ways, as it cristallizes issues of gender and family. As she was only fourteen years old at the time of her deportation, she recounts her time in Auschwitz as a reversed coming-of-age narrative, explaining that time stopped going by and, after her two years in Auschwitz, she was still the same age as when she was deported, because she had not learned anything and had not had a chance to grow. On the way from Drancy to Auschwitz, she finds herself among mothers and children and, thus, describes the exclusive effect of family: “Aucune d’elles [les femmes qui avaient des enfants] n’a eu un mot, un regard pour moi. Je n’étais pas de leur famille” (AIII 101). Then, her depiction of the destructive effects of the Holocaust culminates as she suddenly sees her father among a group of prisoner and he does not recognize her: “Mon père ne m’a pas reconnue au milieu des autres” (AIII 117). Ultimately, after she returns from Auschwitz, the only survivor in her entire family, she thinks, like most of the other female survivors included in *Mesure de nos jours*, that quickly getting married and having a child will restore her to “normalcy.” However, when her daughter is born, she suddenly feels overwhelmed by anxiety and tries to commit suicide.

Ultimately, Delbo’s poems best summarize her gendered experience of the return and of trauma:

et je suis là devant la vie
comme devant une robe
qu’on ne peut plus mettre (AA III 19).

Thus, the issue of gender as tied to family issues, and to that of the mother tongue, allows for the staging of gender through the mother-daughter relationship in various ways. However, re-staging this destructive “tale of two mothers” in *Rue Ordener, rue Labat* does not

allow for a re-embodiment and reclaiming of the author's traumatic past. Gender is not used as a means to re-empowering; to the contrary, gender issues are depicted as helplessly experienced and are not clarified, in which case telling seems to prevent survival.

Conclusion

Thus, in Delbo, the de-gendered Holocaust body is re-gendered through narration. Telling becomes a way of re-appropriating one's story and body. In the camps, telling was a matter of survival. After the camps, telling serves the dual purpose of transmitting and of healing – unlike Kofman, for whom telling seems to have equated dying, because no “*dédoublement*,” no distance was possible, despite the structural attempts at distancing herself through the narrative. Returning to the site of trauma, in Kofman, equates the return of the “ça,” of the repressed trauma, and proved fatal. Unlike Wajsbrot and Delbo, for whom returning has a geographical meaning, for Kofman there is no physical returning, which stands for the psychological immediacy of trauma. The dialectic of showing/not showing/seeing that informs *Mémorial* and *Mesure de nos jours* establishes a defense against immediacy.

Delbo's Holocaust memoirs also serve the purpose of repairing rights, as she depicts the devastating consequences of her occasional lack of memory concerning some of the women from the “convoi du 24 janvier”:

AUCUN TEMOIGNAGE

Les parents de nos camarades mortes à Birkenau, leurs fils et leurs filles surtout, sont atteints comme d'une blessure seconde parce que nous, les survivantes, ne pouvons leur dire comment elles sont mortes. Ils attendent un témoignage, plus que cela : une parole dernière (Convoi 185).

Thus, telling means not only surviving but, also, facilitating mourning. As Hirsch and Miller state, “memoir, a literary genre reinvigorated and reinvented in the 1990s, has become an increasingly productive form [...] for researching a past marked by historical calamity – the losses caused by the vicissitudes of violence, war, and genocide. The success of the memoirs of return [...] attests to the power of the personal voice and of the family as vehicle in the

transpersonal writing of historical return” (Hirsch and Miller 10). In Delbo’s case, remembering the circumstances of the death of every single one of her companions who did not return is especially important to the victims’ families, as they can then create their own narratives and start mourning.

The three texts also revolve around an attempt at (re)writing this mother-daughter story through the prism of the Holocaust trauma. Summarizing Adrienne Rich’s argument, Hirsch reminds her reader of “every woman’s participation in the experience and institution of motherhood; the ‘childless’ woman and the ‘mother’ are a false polarity, which has served the institutions both of motherhood and heterosexuality” (Mothers and daughters 202). This statement creates a conversation among the female narrator of *Mémorial*, Kofman’s texts, and Delbo’s Holocaust memoir, since the three women fall under the category of the “childless” woman. Thus, both the Holocaust survivor and the survivors’ descendent suffer from the same inability to continue their lineage. Wajsbrot’s character/narrator’s rejection of the mother tongue, by not resisting learning it, is doubled by the fact that she does not voice any desire of becoming a mother, as her present identity is entirely engulfed by her father and aunt’s past, making her unable to live in the present. Furthermore, towards the end of her journey, she experiences her childlessness and motherlessness as a form of freedom: “je ne possédais rien, pourtant, ni lignée à détruire, ni lignée à construire” (*Mémorial* 142). Here, the absence of lineage means freedom from postmemory and from the anxiety for posterity, as if time could stand still – which, ironically, echoes statements from the beginning of the novel, when she voiced her suffering from the arrested time imposed on her by her father and aunt: “J’étais seule, seule représentante de cette génération, seule à porter leur poids dans d’autres temps, comme si ma mission était de conserver [...] leur désir que plus rien ne bouge, que la vie s’arrête enfin, ce désir de repos, [et]

tout cela s'était transformé en stagnation, en marais" (*Mémorial* 51). On the other hand, several of the female survivors whose testimony is included in *Mesure de nos jours* want to forget and go on living, and, for them, a return to some form of "normalcy" can only be achieved through motherhood.

In these three authors' writings, an emphasis is therefore put on a kind of *hyper-femininity* of the narrator, either as a daughter or as a mother, i.e., in a biological role that will counter the destructive, de-gendering effects of the Holocaust. This obsession is voiced through the obsessive motif of motherhood as the ultimate fulfillment, or through recurring images of the absent mother figure or of the "bad" mother or the "two mothers" (Kofman), and metaphors of distorted lineages. In each story, the mother/daughter relationship is depicted as skewed or tormented in some way, and as an embodiment of trauma. Ghosts are also present throughout these stories, albeit in a different way from *Beloved* and *Tituba*, insofar as it is usually clear that these ghosts only exist in the narrator's mind. Thus, by rewriting and combining the two silenced stories, i.e. the mother/daughter relationship and the history of women in the Holocaust, these writers manage to reclaim their own historical experience, in a field still largely dominated by male narratives.

These women writers use specific tropes, such as that of ghosts and the challenge of the notion of "motherhood" as socially constructed, in order to reclaim and gender the history of the Holocaust, sometimes in a subtle way, as in Delbo's narratives, or in a more challenging way, as in Kofman and Wajsbrot. Of course, the main differences between these three texts could be accounted for by their different natures and origins: Wajsbrot is a survivor's descendent who writes fiction, Kofman's text is autobiographical, and Delbo's texts are a hybridization between a

memoir and a poetic fiction. However, it is worth noting that Kofman and Wajsbrot, who write in French, i.e., in a language different from their “mother” tongue, present us with very subversive narratives and perverted images of motherhood, that undermine the myth of family as the last haven against “Nazi evil,” while Delbo, whose mother tongue is French and who is not Jewish, retains a relatively traditional vision of a woman whose fulfillment and redemption can only occur through successful motherhood. And yet, one can nevertheless see in *Mesure de nos jours* and *Spectres, mes compagnons* an attempt at re-appropriating history through fiction, through a re-appropriation of the female body and through a fictionalization of the traumatic past into a rewriting of Eurydice’s story who, this time, does return from the underworld.

Hirsch and Miller note, regarding memoirs written by Korean daughters adopted by American families: “This dilemma, and the powerful forces of family and the maternal, emerge most clearly in a distinctly contemporary roots-seeking phenomenon, [...] even beyond language. In their memoirs the adopted daughters convert their suffering into a document through which their stories are preserved as history, and the ‘ambiguous maternal legacies’ become ‘strong assertions of creative futures.’ As home becomes a textual effect of the journey and a figure of writing, the memoirists reverse the traditional sequence between roots and routes [...]” (Hirsch and Miller 9). Thus, in Wajsbrot and Delbo, this re-vising of suffering by converting it into fiction and into a historical document allows for the “assertion of creative futures.” This same process failed to happen in Kofman’s *Rue Ordener, rue Labat*. The hybridity of the narratives is fostered by various intertexts, mises en abyme, and structural devices aimed at conveying the spectrality of any discourse on trauma. In Wajsbrot and Delbo, this hybridity serves to open up the scope to other historical traumas (Chernobyl, Hiroshima, the Algerian War), in a cathartic perspective that replaces the “nom hors nomination” of the Shoah in a larger

framework, thereby creating bridges through healing and fictionalization of what has, initially, no meaning. On the other hand, in Kofman, the structural attempts at distancing and the intertexts only seem to be able to re-traumatize the narrator, and do not allow for a broadening of the spectrum or a cathartic reworking of trauma through fiction. The closing lines of *Rue Ordener, rue Labat* take on a poignant meaning, when one knows that Kofman committed suicide shortly after finishing the book: “Je n’ai pu me rendre à ses obsèques. Mais je sais que le prêtre a rappelé devant sa tombe qu’elle avait sauvé une petite fille juive pendant la guerre” (Rue Ordener 99). So, maybe the little Jewish girl was temporarily saved, but returning to the metaphorical site of trauma eventually proved fatal, as no catharsis and no mourning seemed possible. “[...] the family becomes not only the site of memorial transmission and continuity across generations but also a trope of loss, longing, and the desire for home” (Hirsch and Miller 8).

PART III: Gendering Madness.

This final part is devoted to autofictional narratives of madness, so as to investigate the “language of madness” and its gendering. My study is centered on Leonora Carrington’s *En Bas* (1945), Unica Zürn’s *L’Homme-Jasmin* (1970), and Emma Santos’s *La Malcastrée* (1976) and *L’Itinéraire psychiatrique* (1977). All four narratives give accounts of personally experienced bouts of madness that resulted in institutionalization, and can be read in conversation in relation to the similar tropes they use. While Carrington and Zürn were part of the surrealist movement, and were diagnosed with schizophrenia at some point in their lives, Santos’s case is somewhat

different. However, even though she was not “officially” a surrealist writer, I will endeavor to show that she uses the same surrealistic style of narrative as the other two authors. One of my aims is to read *L’Homme-Jasmin*, *En Bas*, and *La Malcastrée* as counterpoints (and counter-narratives) to male discourses on the mad woman, such as André Breton’s *Nadja*. Paraphrasing the title of Sharon Larson’s essay “Quand la folle se tait⁷⁸,” what happens when the mad woman stops being quiet and reclaims a voice? The four texts by Santos, Carrington, and Zürn rehabilitate the “mad woman” as a speaking subject, and as a writer, through specific tropes. The theme of the author as (pro)creator is omnipresent throughout these narratives, through delusions of maternity and what I call the figure of the “child-mother,” and contribute to a representation of madness that problematizes gender identities.

Chapter 3: Gendering Madness in Leonora Carrington, Unica Zürn, and Emma Santos: Surrealist Lineages, Hyperbolic Femininity, and the Figure of the Child-(M)other.

Introduction

While Surrealism started out as an exclusively masculine artistic movement – no woman signed any of the various manifestos, and no woman is mentioned among the official members of the original surrealist movement – the movement nevertheless gave great importance to women from the outset. However, it is only during the 1930’s that a few women started to be granted a more prevalent role than that of dactyl-stenographers or muses within the movement.

⁷⁸ Larson, Sharon. “Quand la folle se tait: la psychanalyse et la construction de la voix féminine dans *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein*.” *Thirdspace* 4.2 (2005). [http://www.thirdspace.ca/vol4/4_2_Larson.htm]

Some surrealist women were “discovered” by men belonging to the group – such as Gisèle Prassinos and Meret Oppenheim – while other women joined the movement through personal relationships with men belonging to surrealism. Leonora Carrington was among the latter, as she entered the movement when she became Max Ernst’s partner, and so did Unica Zürn through her relationship with Hans Bellmer.

Leonora Carrington was born in England in 1917 and died last year (2011) in Mexico City. She grew up in a well-off Catholic family. At nine, she was sent to a convent, and then introduced to the Court of England at seventeen. She recounts this episode in her short story “The Debutante.” In 1936, she saw Max Ernst’s paintings for the first time, at the “International Surrealist Exhibition” in London. She later on declared that she had immediately felt attracted to him, even before meeting him. In 1937, she finally met him at a party in London, and they went back to Paris together, where Ernst quickly left his wife. It is during her stay in Paris that Carrington met the members of the surrealist circle, such as Breton, Arp, Dali, Picasso, and Man Ray.

In 1938, Ernst and Carrington left Paris to go to Saint-Martin-d’Ardèche, in the South of France. Shortly after the outset of the Second World War, Ernst was arrested for being German, and sent to a camp. Later on, he managed to escape and to flee to America thanks to Peggy Guggenheim’s help – who became his new partner. As for Leonora, she fled to Spain with two friends, but her descent into “madness” had already started, apparently as a consequence of her separation from Ernst. Leonora’s parents had her institutionalized in Santander, where she was given three Cardiazol injections – a powerful drug that induces a state of shock close to

epilepsy. It is worth noting that Cardiazol was only administered to female patients in Spain in those days, as they were still being diagnosed as “hysterics.”

When Leonora was finally allowed to leave the psychiatric hospital, she was taken to Lisbon under the care of a nurse. From there, her father was planning to send her to a sanatorium in South Africa. However, Leonora managed to escape her nurse’s attention and found shelter in the Mexican embassy with Renato Leduc, a Mexican diplomat and a friend of Picasso’s, whom she had met in Madrid. They left Lisbon together and went to Mexico, where they got married. Later on, in 1946, Carrington married a Hungarian photographer, Chiqui Weisz, and had two sons. The first major exhibition of her paintings took place at the Pierre Matisse Gallery in New York City in 1947.

In her narrative entitled *En Bas*, Carrington tells the story of her descent into madness following Ernst’s deportation in May 1940. Carrington dictated, in French, the text that constitutes *En Bas* from August 23 to August 25 1943 to Jeanne Mégnen, Doctor Pierre Mabile’s wife. Carrington had a lot of admiration for Mabile’s philosophy as he describes it in *Le Miroir du merveilleux*. *En Bas* was then translated into English and edited by Carrington herself.

Unica Zürn (1916-1970) was a German Surrealist known for her anagrams, and she was also Hans Bellmer’s partner. She lived with him in Paris for almost twenty years, until she committed suicide by jumping out of the window of their rue Mouffetard apartment in 1970.

*L'Homme-Jasmin: impressions d'une malade mentale*⁷⁹ was written by Zürn between 1962 and 1966, but was only published in 1970, shortly after her death. It was first published in France, in translation, then in its original version, in Germany, in 1977.

The book recounts three outbreaks of schizophrenia followed by severe depression, which resulted in Zürn being institutionalized successively in Berlin-Wittenau, Sainte-Anne (Paris), and La Fond (La Rochelle). Each one of the three outbreaks starts in the same manner: the narrator suddenly feels the urge to isolate herself, and, as a consequence, she leaves Paris and Bellmer in order to go back to her native Berlin, or, alternately, she leaves the flat she shares with Bellmer on rue Mouffetard and decides to rent a hotel room in Paris.

“L’Homme-Jasmin” is also the title of the first short story in the book – which contains two other shorter autobiographical narratives: “Notes concernant la dernière (?) crise” and “La Maison des maladies,” as well as a short piece titled “Les Jeux à deux,” which Zürn wrote after Bellini’s opera, *La Norma*. In “Notes concernant la dernière (?) crise,” on the symbolic date of 6-6-66, Zürn decides to live on her own again; however, this time around, her obsessions are centered on the idea that “l’homme blanc” (the white man) – i.e., the Jasmine Man – is after her in order to torture her, so that she can be punished for crimes committed by the Nazis; this obsession led her to ask to be admitted to the Maison Blanche hospital. After staying there, she wrote her last autobiographical piece, published posthumously, and ironically entitled *Vacances à Maison Blanche*.

⁷⁹ Translated into English as *The Man of Jasmine: Impressions from a Mental Illness* (trans. Malcolm Green, 1994). However, the French title literally translates into “The Jasmine Man: Impressions from a Mentally-Ill Woman.”

Pervasive themes in *L'Homme-Jasmin* are the narrator's obsession with the Jasmine Man, who subsequently becomes the "white man," for which her narrative can be read as an unrelenting quest, thus providing a counterpoint to Nerval's *Aurélia* and its quest for the lost object of desire; the recurrent staging of the narrator as a little girl, through references to fairy tales in which she acts as the young heroine who has lost her way home; and, finally, obsessions with mothers and daughters, whereby she fantasizes herself giving birth to the reunified city of Berlin, and also to "l'Homme Blanc," while becoming her son Christian's daughter.

In Zürn's text, the Jasmine Man inspires and triggers the narrative. Namely, the narrator explains that "beaucoup plus tard [...] elle restera fidèle à ses noces d'enfant [...] et le cherchera partout où elle ira"⁸⁰ (Zürn 24-26). However, unlike *Aurélia*, the irruption of dream in reality proves so traumatic for the narrator that she decides, from then on, to call the Jasmine Man "l'Homme Blanc." This parallel between the two narratives of madness probably accounts for the comparison made by André Pieyre de Mandiargues, a friend of Zürn's and Bellmer's, in his *Préface à L'Homme-Jasmin*, in which he replaces Zürn's text in the lineage of a literary tradition going from *Aurélia* to André Breton's *Nadja*.

As for Emma Santos, whose real name was Marie-Annick Le Goff, little is known about her, except that she came from a Catholic family from Brittany, was born in 1946, and committed suicide in 1983. She moved to Paris when she was a teenager, started working as an elementary school teacher, and met a painter with whom she started living. It is worth noting

⁸⁰ I will be referring to the French version here, both because Zürn herself – who was fluent in French – actively collaborated with the translators, and because the book was quite successful in France, as opposed to Germany, where it remains largely unknown and has been out of print since 1987.

that, just like Carrington and Zürn, she was living with an artist who was considerably older than herself. And, exactly like Carrington, she attributes the onset of her descent into madness to her separation from her lover. After he left her, she spent ten years in psychiatric hospitals, on and off, from 1967 onwards. However, as can be seen through a recurring motif throughout her eight novels and plays, at the age of twelve she had experienced the trauma of a car accident in which her throat was cut open and which left her with a big scar. Later on, she developed a goiter and thyroid problems at the very spot where the scar was located.

In his introduction to *La Malcastrée*, embedded by Santos in her autobiographical narrative, *L'Itinéraire psychiatrique*, Doctor Roger Gentsis wrote: “Ne dites pas bien sûr: ‘avez-vous lu Delay ? Avez-vous lu Baruk ? – dites plutôt (vous disiez déjà peut-être: ‘Avez-vous lu Nerval ? Avez-vous lu Artaud ?’), dites maintenant: avez-vous lu Unica Zürn, avez-vous lu Emma Santos?” (IP 79). This introduction replaces Santos within a larger context of madness narratives, granting legitimacy and authority to her text as being on a par and a continuum with Zürn’s narratives of madness – but, also, somehow relegating her texts to the category of “female madness” narratives. By textually quoting this sentence in her autobiography, Santos reiterates the legitimacy of her own work, by self-proclaiming her belonging to a literary tradition and lineage.

It is amazing that, so far, virtually no critical literature has been devoted to Emma Santos. Her narratives do bear a lot of similarities with those by surrealist female authors such as Carrington and Zürn. Just like surrealist women writers, Santos uses recurring allusions to dreams and childhood, and places great emphasis on language itself, while resorting to images of dis-membered body parts and highlighting body parts other than those usually heralded by men

in their sexualized depictions of the female body. Both of Santos's narratives of madness (*La Malcastrée* and *L'Itinéraire psychiatrique*) revolve around the trauma of the car accident that left her with a scar on her throat, but, most of the time, this original trauma is concealed by the author's other traumatic experience with repeated abortions, which she puts forward as the central theme in all of her texts: "*Première obsession: la littérature. Je veux publier mes textes, tous ces textes que j'ai écrits sur l'enfance, l'adolescence et la vie d'une femme qui se retrouve seule devant l'avortement*" (IP⁸¹ 46). Throughout *La Malcastrée* and *L'Itinéraire psychiatrique*, the image of the scar coalesces with that of the labia, which she refers to as her "other scar." This imagery emphasizes the blurring of both traumas into one main obsession with the woman as a "pondeuse universelle" – a chain procreator.

Even though Rothberg and Hirsch focus solely on memory in historical writings, I believe that their respective theories can be relevant to narratives of madness, insofar as memory also plays a crucial role in all of these texts. First of all, in the case of autobiographical accounts of (temporary) madness, the account is written *after* the episode of "madness" has occurred; hence, the narrative is now about the *memory* of madness. Discussing Hirsch's concept of "postmemory," Rothberg states that

developed in the context of Holocaust studies, Hirsch's concept – as she recognizes – is itself susceptible to transmission across fields. [...] The structure of postmemory emphatically manifests itself in postcolonial contexts such as the aftermath of the Algerian War. [...] But what Hirsch does not say – although her account does not exclude the possibility – is that postmemory may well constitute a particular version of memory's multidirectionality (Rothberg 270-271).

Writing about madness after one has recovered from it amounts to memorializing madness. In so doing, one of the tropes that these women writers share with those used in slavery and Holocaust

⁸¹ From this point on, *L'Itinéraire psychiatrique* will be referred to as "IP."

narratives consists in distorted lineages and the centrality of the child figure and of the mother-daughter as two aspects of the same character.

Besides, one can also benefit from reading these narratives in the light of Caruth's trauma theory; namely, in all three cases, the episode of madness is triggered by a traumatic event. Then, the "primal" trauma becomes doubled by the second trauma of the episode of madness and the experience of the psychiatric hospital. Finally, as Marguerite Duras stated in a 1967 interview with Jean Schuster (to whom she dedicated *L'Amante anglaise*) for the surrealist journal *L'Archibras*, in all autobiographical narratives "je vois la personne s'écrire, donc *historienne d'elle-même*" – that is to say that writing about oneself amounts to becoming the historian of oneself. And, as I am going to demonstrate, history is definitely at the core of these madness narratives, be it personal history or larger History. In all three authors, the trigger of the mental illness can be found in the intertwining of traumatic personal and historical events. We will also see how the child figure serves to highlight the suspended time of madness (or the psychiatric hospital as the site of suspended chronology) while challenging dominating male, surrealist narratives heralding childhood as a period of innocence and carelessness. Furthermore, the four narratives included in this chapter span from a desire to bear witness to a traumatic life experience and, following Charlotte Delbo's statement, are animated by the belief that writing is a powerful weapon of defense and contestation: "je considère le langage de la poésie comme le plus efficace [...] et le plus dangereux pour les ennemis qu'il combat. [...] Je n'écrirais pas si cela me paraissait inutile."⁸²

⁸² "Entretien avec Charlotte Delbo," Interview with François Bott, *Le Monde des livres*, 20 juin 1975, p. 15.

The purpose of this chapter is, thus, two-fold: on the one hand, to explore the continuity and common points between these madness narratives and the slavery and Holocaust narratives studied in the previous two chapters; on the other hand, to highlight the sexed subjectivity of madness and institutionalization, and the gendering of both surrealism and the discourse on madness at stake in these female authors' attempts at reclaiming their story, in the same vein as Morrison, Condé, Wajsbrot, Delbo, and Kofman reclaim their experience through a gendering of History. First, I will focus on the similarities among the literary depictions of the space of the plantation, the space of the concentration camp, and the space of the psychiatric hospital, through the echo chamber of recurring metaphors previously mentioned, including a discussion of the central role played by the scar in the embodiment of madness – as was also the case for slavery and Holocaust narratives. This parallel among depictions of the space of the plantation, of the Nazi concentration camp, and of the psychiatric hospital, is further emphasized in the French language, in which “internement” refers both to being sent to a concentration camp and to a psychiatric hospital.

From this link between History and madness, I will move on to a study of dream highlighting the conveyed impression of timelessness of the space of madness, as opposed to the chronology of history, through an analysis of the *mise en abyme* of subverted fairy tales and various intertextualities. Namely, how do these madness narratives at once rewrite history and reinscribe the psychiatric experience within a historical framework while challenging traditional chronology?

Then, the study of the subverted lineages intrinsic to fairy tales will lead to an exploration of maternal delusions as central images used by these three writers in reclaiming

their experience – albeit in different ways. To what extent does creating one’s story become expressed through narratives of procreation, and how is the socially constructed notion of motherhood challenged by these authors? How do they precisely use maternity as a means to re-embodiment their stories in paradoxical situations of dis-embodiment? In what ways do they achieve a new gender category, that is to say, the figure of what I call the “child-mother,” which is crucial to these four narratives?

Finally, if madness is re-embodied by these female authors through surrealist lineages and delusions of maternity, how do they ultimately offer counterpoints to surrealist narratives of madness that reify the mad woman, such as *Nadja*? To what extent can these texts be read as counter-narratives to *Nadja*, first through a re-embodiment of the “mad woman,” then through a reversal of the objectifying gaze and through a feminist rewriting of surrealist clichés such as the Immaculate Conception? Even though Emma Santos was not officially part of the surrealist movement, I will aim to demonstrate that, just like Carrington and Zürn, her narratives constitute a gendering of surrealist concepts, a feminist rewriting of surrealism, and, ultimately, embrace madness as a new essence replacing “femininity.”

I) *Body, Time, and the Space of Madness:*

Santos wrote *La Malcastrée* in 1971, almost at the same time as Zürn wrote *L’Homme-Jasmin*. The manuscript was rejected by many publishers because it contained allusions to her abortions. She was asked to delete these passages, but always refused to. Finally, in 1976, she managed to have her manuscript published by les éditions des femmes in Paris. Here is how she describes *La Malcastrée* upon its publication:

La Malcastrée a été écrite moitié dehors, moitié dedans, entre deux opérations, entre les rues de Paris et les hôpitaux, dans le silence, demi-honteuse, toujours triomphante, entre la réalité et le rêve. Les mots sont étroitement liés à mon corps, à ma maladie. [...] Un geste, ce geste, l'acte, rejeter. Il n'y avait pas cette tentative littéraire. Cette tentative exhibitionniste. Se reconstruire avec des mots. Se reconstruire en espérant surtout ne jamais y arriver. *La Malcastrée*, c'est déjà si vieux. 1971. La recherche du comment. Le système des mots, comment on y entre. Ecrire comme on meurt ou écrire quand on ne meurt pas. Ecrire comme on se suicide. Le suicide est préparé, la cérémonie va se dérouler en ordre sans faute. Tout est prêt. J'ai envie de mourir. J'ai envie d'écrire. [...] Ecrire mon suicide. Je me dédouble. J'ai envie d'écrire de décrire ma mort. Et écrire aussi pour ne pas mourir. Je suis soulagée. C'est comme si je m'étais suicidée. La lutte entre le mot et la mort. On ne peut faire les deux. [...] Construire une machine vie. Moi. C'est une période d'exaltation. Je reconstitue mes morts ratées, mes morts mortes. Un désir de construire des morts vivantes. Un rythme, un souffle. Retrouver dans des petits cris de douleur, la douleur, le cri. Après, c'est la douce folie. Folle douce, névrotique travail de Pénélope. Je fais, je défais, je refais pareil. Taper, retaper le manuscrit. Faire le même travail. Changer un mot, reprendre ce mot, le rechercher, le retrouver, le rejeter jusqu'à l'angoisse. La musique de la machine, le tape-tape, moi folle douce je souris. La machine tape. Je figne l'enfant, je cisèle, je tricote. Changer un mot, une virgule remettre. Délire. Délire. Délire. Détruire. Délirer vers quelqu'un. Délirer jusqu'à quelqu'un qui dit oui. On n'existe pas sans les autres (Emma Santos, 1976, édition des femmes).

La Malcastrée, *L'Itinéraire psychiatrique*, *L'Homme-Jasmin*, and *En Bas* all recount their narrators' stay in a psychiatric hospital: in Santander, Spain, during the Second World War, in Carrington's case, in Sainte-Anne (Paris) and Wittenau (Berlin) in Zürn's case, and in Paris in the late sixties and seventies in Santos' case.

Central to these four texts are pervasive delusions of motherhood and childhood, and of the blurring of genealogies, which can be read as a reaction against the reduction of patients to children by the hospital staff, to which these narratives testify. Metaphors of distorted genealogies abound, as do blurred boundaries between generations, through an extensive use of fairy tales and myths, which serve to convey the memorialization of the timelessness and surrealism of the (non)space of madness, and of the psychiatric hospital. Thus, in which ways do these narratives stage the tensions intrinsic to madness between dream and reality, through a

combination of dream and historical references? To what extent and through what means do they create double-layered narratives motivated by the simultaneous desire to reinscribe madness within a historical and literary framework, while rendering its dream-like and fairy-tale-like qualities?

1) **Re-inscribing Madness in History:**

a) Historicizing Madness:

In *Multidirectional Memory*, Michael Rothberg emphasizes the echo chamber of the Holocaust as a productive trope serving for the creation of links between traumas and cultures. More precisely, he emphasizes that “coming to terms with the past always happens in comparative contexts and via the circulation of memories linked to what are only apparently separate histories and national or ethnic constituencies” (Rothberg 272). While Rothberg focuses his study on the correspondences between the Holocaust and the Algerian War, my goal is now to demonstrate that, on the one hand, the madness narratives included in this chapter constantly resort to historical trauma, so as to anchor themselves within a larger chronology, but, on the other hand, their use of comparisons with other traumas – especially with the Holocaust – allows for the circulation of recurring tropes common to madness, slavery, and Holocaust narratives, thus extracting madness narratives from their historical and literary isolation, and creating a shared female voice of madness.

Historically, madness (and, even more so, the “madwoman”) has been perceived as *a-*historical, whereby narratives of madness have been kept at the margins of literary history and of

the literary canon. The “mad woman” has been further marginalized than her male counterparts, when not confined to a metaphorical “attic” due to her having transgressed the gender boundaries imposed upon her sex, and having become a “monster” – a topic which has been thoroughly addressed in Gubar and Gilbert’s seminal work *The Madwoman in the Attic*.⁸³ Laure Murat, in her recent essay *L’Homme qui se prenait pour Napoléon. Pour une histoire politique de la folie*, uses archives from psychiatric hospitals in order to reveal the intrinsic connections between historical and political events and the mad’s delusions. Building on her findings, I would now like to start out by exploring the intertwining of historical causes and personal history in these four texts, so as to demonstrate that these madness narratives are in continuity with the slavery and Holocaust narratives previously analyzed, by being grounded in history, and influenced by it, and by also being attempts at re-embodiment of one’s story and at gendering traumatic history.

Yannick Ripa, in her study of nineteenth-century female madness and internment, titled *La Ronde des folles: Femme, folie et enfermement au XIXème siècle*, talks about “l’internationalisme du vécu asilaire” (Ripa 55) as she notices the parallels between the cases of two women – American Elizabeth Packard and French Hersilie Rouy – who had both filed a complaint after being institutionalized for “refus de soumission” and who had both protested against the harsh conditions of treatment within the asylum. I would now like to explore the “internationalisme” of the madness narratives included here and taking place in France, Germany, and Spain, along with the “echo chamber” of the tropes of trauma and alienation. Emma Santos recurrently describes her madness as a feeling of being “à la limite de la vie [...],

⁸³ In *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), Gilbert and Gubar pave the way for an understanding of the specific challenges faced by women writers and denounce the patriarchal dichotomy established by male authors between the female “angel” and the “monster,” thus giving rise to an inner conflict – or double bind – between creativity and “femininity” in the nineteenth-century female author.

une fausse vivante, une fausse morte” (IP 96), which strangely resonates with the exact same words used by Charlotte Delbo in a different context, when describing her life as an Auschwitz survivor, in *Mesure de nos jours*. Again, not that the two types of traumas bear any similarity, but what creates a connection among the two is the feeling of estrangement at the heart of both narratives.

First of all, *En Bas*, *L’Homme-Jasmin*, and *La Malcastrée* revolve around the Second World War and Nazism imagery, even though Santos and Zürn both wrote some twenty or thirty years after the war was over. Only Carrington’s narrative (written in 1943 and dealing with a bout of schizophrenia that took place in 1940) is contemporary with the war. In this respect, it is interesting to see that, in *La Malcastrée* and *L’Homme-Jasmin*, the Second World War and the Holocaust are granted such a predominant place.

The parallel between Carrington’s descent into madness and the contemporary historical events (i.e., Germany’s attack on France and Max Ernst’s deportation) is explicit throughout *En Bas*, culminating in the narrator’s confusion when she no longer knows whether she is in a concentration camp or in the mental hospital in Spain: “Hôpital ou camp de concentration?” (Carrington 35).

Her narrative and her madness are both triggered by the loss of her partner, Max Ernst, who is arrested by the French police as an “enemy,” for being German: “Je commence donc au moment où Max fut emmené pour la deuxième fois dans un camp de concentration, les fers aux poignets, à côté d’un gendarme armé d’un fusil (mai 1940)” (Carrington 8). This parallel, with the loss of the loved one acting as a trigger for the narrative and for the onset of madness, is

reminiscent of Gérard de Nerval's *Aurélia* – which is another common point among *En Bas*, *La Malcastrée*, and *L'Homme-Jasmin*. Namely, Nerval contextualizes the beginning of his descent into madness as follows: “Une dame que j’avais aimée longtemps et que j’appellerai du nom d’Aurélia, était perdue pour moi. Peu important les circonstances de cet événement qui devait avoir une si grande influence sur ma vie” (Nerval 4).

The first few pages of *En Bas* reveal a recurring concern with establishing the narrator's story of madness within the larger historical context:

24 août: Je crains de me laisser aller à la fiction, véridique, mais incomplète, par manque de quelques détails qui ne me viennent pas aujourd’hui à la mémoire et qui devraient nous apporter plus de lumière. Ce matin, l’idée de l’oeuf me hante et je pense l’employer comme un cristal où je verrais Madrid en juillet-août 1940; pourquoi ne refléterait-il pas ma propre expérience aussi bien que l’histoire passée et future de l’Univers ? L’oeuf est le macrocosme et le microcosme, la ligne de partage entre le Grand et le Petit, qui rend impossible la vision du tout (Carrington 30).

While Carrington's madness seems to be informed by the historical circumstances, a form of reciprocity is established, insofar as she also, in turn, rewrites history through her fantasies:

Notant une certaine extravagance chez ces messieurs, j’en déduisais qu’ils étaient tous sous l’influence hypnotique de la bande de Van Ghent, et que cet endroit était par conséquent une sorte de prison pour ceux qui avaient menacé la puissance de ce groupe, que moi, la plus menaçante de tous, je devais subir une torture plus terrible encore, afin de mieux être réduite et de devenir gâteuse comme mes compagnons de détresse. Je croyais les Moralès maîtres de l’univers et puissants magiciens qui se servaient de leur pouvoir pour semer l’horreur et la terreur (Carrington 48).

The Second World War is transformed into an aesthetics of re-interpretation of the space of the psychiatric hospital, staging the psychiatrists as both wizards and masters of the universe, and the narrator as playing a central part in the historical play, as a threat to the psychiatrists.

Even though Carrington was not Jewish, nor was Max Ernst, and even though she left France before the Occupation started, and wrote her account of her stay at the Santander hospital in 1943, that is to say, before the end of the Second World War and before the “final solution” was supposedly known, it is extremely interesting to note that her narrative revolves around obsessions with Judaism. Here is how she describes the content of her table in the hospital room: “Deux bouteilles d’eau de Cologne, l’une de forme plate: les Juifs, l’autre de forme cylindrique: les non-Juifs. [...] Deux pots de crème dont l’un avait un couvercle noir : la nuit, le côté gauche, la lune, la femme, la destruction ; l’autre, un couvercle vert : l’homme, le frère, les yeux verts, le soleil la construction” (Carrington 65). As the narrative unfolds, her obsession with Judaism becomes increasingly prevalent, and manifests itself in her delusion that she is the incarnation of the Hebrew people and that *En Bas* – the hospital ward into which she aspires to be admitted – stands for Jerusalem. In this respect, the mysticism that runs throughout *En Bas*, and which then went on to characterize Carrington’s literary and artistic creation until the end of her life, actually endows her narrative with a visionary tone.

Images of the war, of torture, and of the Holocaust serve as bridges among the four narratives of madness studied here, and as a bridge between historical time and the space of madness, thus reinscribing these madness narratives into history. In *En Bas*, the omnipresence of allusions to Nazism is presented through the narrator’s delusions that she is related to a German host in her hotel in Madrid, and that she is, as a consequence, invested with a mission to defeat him:

Van Ghent était mon père, mon ennemi et l’ennemi des hommes; j’étais seule à pouvoir le vaincre; pour le vaincre, il me fallait le comprendre. [...] Je tentai de convaincre celui-ci que la guerre mondiale était faite à base d’hypnotisme par un groupe de gens, Hitler et Cie., représentés en Espagne par Van Ghent, qu’il suffisait de prendre

conscience de ce pouvoir hypnotique pour le vaincre, pour arrêter la guerre et délivrer le monde coincé comme moi [...] (Carrington 26-27).

The narrator thus likens her madness to being “stuck” (“coincée”) and to the situation in which the world finds itself during the war. The theme of torture, and the comparison with torture within Nazi camps, focuses especially on Cardiazol, the medication that she is forcefully injected at the psychiatric hospital: “Tout cela me pénétrait comme un corps étranger et cette torture était au-delà de tout pouvoir de description” (Carrington 49). In *En Bas*, the treatment of the patients by the psychiatrists is described as being beyond words, in the same manner as Holocaust survivors recurrently describe the concentration camp experience as being impossible to accurately describe.

The voiced purpose of a narrative like *En Bas* is actually for Carrington to free herself from the traumatic memory of her stay at the psychiatric hospital in Santander. Writing – or, rather, dictating her account to Jeanne Mégnen – becomes a form of talking cure, in an attempt at liberating herself from the trauma of having been repeatedly treated with Cardiazol injections:

Une nouvelle époque commence alors avec la journée la plus terrible et la plus noire de ma vie entière. Comment pourrai-je écrire cela quand j’ai peur, seulement, d’y penser ? Je suis terriblement angoissée et pourtant je ne peux pas continuer à vivre seule avec ce souvenir... Je sais que lorsque je l’aurai écrit, je serai *délivrée*.⁸⁴ Vous *devez* savoir, ou bien je serai persécutée jusqu’à la fin de mon existence. Mais pourquoi exprimer l’horreur de cette journée par de simples paroles? (Carrington 55).

She then goes on to liken Cardiazol injections to “torture” (Carrington 58). However, as Carrington dictates her narrative, she finds herself re-experiencing the trauma that she was hoping to exorcize: “*Mercredi 25 Août*. Voilà le troisième jour que j’écris, et je pensais me délivrer en quelques heures; c’est dur, parce que je revis cette époque et je dors mal, troublée et inquiète de l’utilité de ce que je fais. Je suis bien obligée cependant de terminer mon récit afin de

⁸⁴ My italics.

sortir de cette angoisse” (Carrington 46). Telling and writing become a kind of psychoanalysis which, much like the Freudian “talking cure,” must be carried out and completed in order for the patient to be cured. Thus, whereas writing madness, in Santos and Zürn’s case, is a way of channeling suffering into literature, i.e., of turning the sterility of madness into literary creation, for Carrington it is more of a means towards a goal – freeing herself and moving beyond the traumatic experience. *En Bas* also starts out as a quest for the narrator’s lover, just like *La Malcastrée* and *L’Homme-Jasmin*, but quickly turns into a quest for the narrator’s self. In this respect, *En Bas* could also be read as a coming-of-age narrative through madness, all the more so as the author was very young at the time of her bout of schizophrenia.

In *La Malcastrée*, the public and the private spheres overlap, as the narrator transfers her personal history of having been kept at the margins of her own family, as a child, into fantasies of having been kept at the margins of History (that of the Second World War), as Hitler’s natural daughter: “je me croyais fille d’un sadique, d’un Allemand qui violenta ma mère. Dans la ville on regardait en biais les enfants blonds aux yeux bleus nés pendant la guerre ou neuf mois après, on les appelait les petits S.S. [...] *Je suis la fille naturelle d’Hitler*⁸⁵” (LM 98).

Even though Santos was born after the Second World War, “juste après la Libération” in her own words, *La Malcastrée* is saturated with obsessions with the war and Nazism, as a metaphor for the psychiatric hospital: “L’adulte étrangle sans remords l’enfant qu’il était. L’adulte c’est un criminel. [...] Les enfants aux yeux de porcelaine bleue, les cheveux rasés jusqu’à l’os déguisés en petits S.S. vont vers l’asile en chantant” (LM 82).

⁸⁵ My italics.

Further down the text, she presents madness as a journey backwards, reminiscent of *Mémorial*'s narrator's journey backwards imposed on her by postmemory – back to her origins, or, rather, the origins of her parents' trauma in Poland, where their older brother died during a pogrom: “Tout ce chemin parcouru dans un asile pour retrouver l'enfance. [...] Je jette l'enfance qu'ils me refaisaient, le certificat d'asile précisant que je vais mieux, [...]. *Holocauste*⁸⁶. [...] Mon chemin c'est la folie” (LM 60). Madness is a journey back to childhood, i.e., a journey back in time – which also creates an intertextuality with *L'Homme-Jasmin*, in which the narrator embraces madness as her true “nature.” For Santos, “mon chemin c'est la folie,” that is to say, madness becomes a way of life; chronology is subverted, since madness substitutes itself to the “normal” development of a person from childhood to adulthood. In *La Malcastrée*, one goes from childhood to madness, then back to childhood. Historical and social times are, thus, challenged from within by madness.

The space of the psychiatric hospital is depicted in contrast with an increasingly fantasized outside world, as a carceral world defined by silence and nothingness: “Je suis définitivement entrée au pays du silence. Rien de dehors. Toujours rien. Je me sens *prisonnière* dans cet hôpital” (IP 26). The parallel between the hospital, a prison, and a concentration camp is deepened by the narrator's suffering, as she is prevented from writing: “Ici tout est interdit. Feuilles, crayons, papiers, ils ont tout enlevé” (IP 29). Since she has been defining herself through her ability to write, and, thus, her ability to express her suffering into words, she perceives her institutionalization as the ultimate stage in a reifying process: “Maintenant, *objet*, j'attends dans l'entrée qu'on s'occupe de moi” (IP 30). Reified and de-gendered, reduced to the condition of an object, the madwoman's body echoes depictions of the female slave body and of

⁸⁶ Emphasis is mine.

the concentration camp inmate body. Writing is presented, from the outset, as a rampart against madness; as a way of bearing witness and of resistance against madness as a blank page – madness as the death of language: “La folie, c’est une page blanche” (LM 107). In Zürn, it is quite the opposite: madness is presented as the *condition* for literary creation, and the narrator confesses that “elle espère continuer à être folle pour pouvoir continuer à écrire” (Zürn 71).

La Malcastrée’s narrator presents her family history both in contrast and in keeping with her current imprisonment:

C’était une famille avec un enfant de moins. On a pris l’habitude de m’oublier parce que je ne voulais pas dire bonjour. On a pris l’habitude de me porter absente sur le registre de la famille. [...] Je suis née de l’après-guerre, de la libération. J’étais venue trop tard. Le monde avait pris des accords et il n’y aurait plus de catastrophe sur la vieille Europe (IP 40).

Already “absente” as a child, she suddenly switches to a third-person narrative when talking about herself as a missing family member, so as to underline her alienation from herself, from both the private and the public sphere. Her imprisonment and alienation stand in stark contrast with the context of “libération” in which she had been born. She describes the asylum as an in-between-ness, a space located between life and death, a life without life: “A l’asile, vivante sans vie, je me souviens avant l’internement. Tout devient clair et net quand mon corps attaché ne vit plus. Je fais, je refais la vie avec des petits souvenirs ramassés dans l’enfance [...]” (LM 101).

Whereas *L’Homme-Jasmin* opens with a playful mise en abyme of history within personal story, and a depiction of madness as a wandering experience (“errance”) through Paris and Berlin, as the narrative progresses the narrator seems to feel increasingly trapped and oppressed; namely, “L’Homme-Jasmin” ends with the following lines: “Je me sens en prison,”

a-t-elle dit un jour à un psychiatre qui lui a répondu: ‘C’est vous-même qui êtes votre propre prison’” (Zürn 170) and the next short story, “Notes concernant la dernière (?) crise,” opens with visions of these “Juifs torturés à mort au temps des nazis” (173) and herself “dans une attitude de crucifiée enchaînée à son lit. [...] Christian [her son] semble devenir le Christ et l’Homme Blanc devient Dieu. Mais cela n’a rien à voir avec une extase religieuse. [...] La maison tout entière est devenue une clinique psychiatrique” (Zürn 177). Thus, the figure of l’Homme Blanc, which embodies love at the beginning of “L’Homme-Jasmin,” has become a figure of oppression, in the patriarchal meaning of a revengeful and repressive divinity, since this apparition is far from being a benevolent one. The marvelous (“le merveilleux”) provided by the intertextuality of fairy tales is being replaced with the threatening aspect of History, and, hence, of reality, that confronts the narrator with her apparently unbearable status as a woman.

In this respect, “Notes concernant...” is a narrative with a much darker tone than the preceding one (“L’Homme-Jasmin”), not only because images of torture and crucifixion abound, but also because the narrator’s hallucinations seem to reach their climax and are no longer linked with the marvelous aspect of fairy tales as they are in “L’Homme-Jasmin.” Now, History seems to blend in with the narrator’s personal history, and her attempts at escaping her own story through seeking shelter in the world of childhood, so as to remain a little six-year-old girl or a princess, fail in the culmination of her delusions of persecution in which the “S.S. et hauts dignitaires nazis [...] ont envie de la soumettre à la torture sur le lit, parce qu’elle est issue de ce peuple qui a installé les camps de concentration” (Zürn 186) and the psychiatrist who exactly resembles “une apparition qu’elle a vue dans les nuages le 6-6-66: l’âme blanche, plastique, d’un Juif que les nazis ont fait mourir dans la chambre à gaz d’un camp de concentration. [...] Elle

éprouve de l'angoisse à la vue de cette âme juive qui s'est de nouveau changée en un corps” (Zürn 185).

While most historical references in *En Bas* pertain to the Second World War and the persecutions of the Jews, Carrington also alludes to slavery, thereby explicitly likening the space of the city (Madrid) and the space of the psychiatric hospital to the space of the plantation, but also to a fictional space (since patients and city-dwellers are turned into “zombies” by the psychiatrist): “J’étais toujours convaincue que Van Ghent était celui qui hypnotisait Madrid, ses hommes et sa circulation, lui qui rendait les gens *zombies* et distribuait l’angoisse comme des bonbons afin de faire de tous des *esclaves*⁸⁷” (Carrington 24-25).

Yannick Ripa, in *La Ronde des folles*, remarks a fundamental difference between female and male madness; namely, whereas madness expresses itself through political and historical delusions in men, in women it is reduced to a biological stage of life (“le portrait-robot de la folle est [...] une femme à un tournant de sa vie biologique et donc sociale,” Ripa 88), from which she concludes that:

la folie féminine naît et se vit *hors* du siècle, dans le foyer auquel la femme est ancrée comme une religieuse à sa communauté; différence essentielle avec son compagnon d’infortune – sa folie, l’homme la vit *dans* le siècle (Ripa 89).⁸⁸

The narratives of madness included here demonstrate that, if Ripa’s findings were maybe true for nineteenth-century female madness, they no longer hold in the twentieth century, as these

⁸⁷ Emphasis is mine.

⁸⁸ However, it is worth noting that it is only in the alienists’ eyes that female madness is experienced as a-historical. Namely, as Laure Murat demonstrates in *L’Homme qui se prenait pour Napoléon* (Paris: Gallimard, 2011), there are numerous archival evidences of female psychiatric patients whose delusions were closely linked to political events. For a detailed study, see “Républicaines mélancoliques et communistes entêtées” in *L’Homme qui se prenait pour Napoléon*, p.254 onwards.

narratives of female madness are definitely anchored in history, in the century (“dans le siècle”). A recurring obsession in Emma Santos’s narratives (both *La Malcastrée* and *L’Itinéraire psychiatrique*) is that of the mark – the mark of madness, which echoes both the Holocaust survivor’s tattoo and the slave’s tattoo: “Répertoriée, casée nette comme mon numéro de Sécurité sociale [...]” (*La Malcastrée*⁸⁹ 58). The narrator perceives the numbers to which her identity is reduced as emphasizing her feeling of being reified by the psychiatric institution. Throughout *La Malcastrée*, a direct connection is established among the mad woman, the slave, and the Holocaust survivor, through the theme of the mark, or the scar: “Expier ma faute. Avoir fait l’asile. Impression que c’est écrit sur ma tête, *une sorte de tampon la marque, le fer*⁹⁰ (LM 51),” whereby madness is expressed through a metaphorical mark. Thus, in the following part, I would like to further develop this theme, so as to demonstrate this circulation of recurring tropes among narratives of madness, slavery, and the Holocaust.

b) Embodying Madness Through the Scar:

At the heart of the discourse on trauma is the figure of the traumatized body, marked by physical or mental scars imprinted on the body as well as on the mind. The scar is, thus, a central key to understanding the construction of traumatized subjectivities.

As is the case in *Beloved* and *Tituba*, traumatic memory is centered on the body scar of trauma, which echoes Marianne Hirsch’s discussion of postmemory in Holocaust narratives, as being at once triggered and expressed through the mark (the tattooed numbers on the Holocaust survivor’s forearm). Going further than Hirsch, in her article “Marked by Memory: Feminist

⁸⁹ From now on, *La Malcastrée* will be referred to as “LM.”

⁹⁰ Emphasis is mine.

Reflections on Trauma and Transmission,” in which she draws a parallel between the scar as a vector of transgenerational transmission of trauma between Sethe and her mother in *Beloved*, and between Holocaust survivors and their children, I also see this recurring theme of the scar in the narratives of madness included in this chapter – albeit the scar is a metaphorical, imagined one.

In some respects, *La Malcastrée* could be read not only as a counterpoint to *Nadja*, as we will see later, but also as a counterpoint to *Beloved*, insofar as the narrator presents herself as the victim of her mother’s violence, as “[...] l’enfant égorgée par sa mère [...]. Ma maman voulait me tuer. Les mains criminelles de ma mère m’ont castrée. Je me débats encore entortillée, étranglée par les dentelles ombilicales. [...] Ce n’est pas la vie aujourd’hui qui me fait mal mais celle avant la naissance, *une cicatrice*⁹¹” (LM 52-53).

In *L’Itinéraire psychiatrique*, the narrator-Emma Santos presents the psychiatrist’s attention to her scar as a turning-point in the therapeutic relationship: “Sa question: qu’est-ce que c’est cette cicatrice au cou?” (IP 43) becomes the point at which the narrator starts talking about the trauma that she underwent at the age of twelve, when she had a car accident and her throat was cut open – which strongly echoes *Beloved*, all the more so as the narrator then goes on to intertwine and superpose the scar she kept from the accident with a second scar on her throat that she gets as a consequence from surgery to remove a goiter: “J’ai une deuxième blessure au cou juste en dessous de la première” (IP 67). Both scars overlap as the narrative recurrently likens the goiter to a pregnancy in the throat, which is made explicit by the narrator herself when she mentions “mes fœtus que j’oubliais dans ma gorge” (IP 65). The goiter as pregnancy in the throat is a central theme to both of Santos’s narratives of madness, as if talking and words (which also

⁹¹ My italics.

come from the throat) were directly linked to procreating. Furthermore, in the chapter called “*Interruption de grossesse*,” in *L’Itinéraire psychiatrique*, Santos welcomes the news of her pregnancy as the displacement of her goiter to her stomach: “[...] j’étais enceinte. Je traîne le goître au ventre maintenant. [...]” (IP 68).

In *En Bas*, while there is no allusion to a scar, madness revolves around the body in general, in a more metaphorical way, but is also centered on the narrator’s stomach as the site of cristallization of H/history: “C’était, pour employer votre image, le *miroir* de la terre, dont la réflexion contient la même réalité que le reflété. Ce miroir – mon estomac – a dû être lavé des épais couches de crasse [...]” (Carrington 9). The image of the stomach is used at various points in the narrative, with the narrator being at times the embodiment of history itself, through her stomach which she purifies by forcing herself to vomit, and, at other times, the city of Madrid is depicted as the stomach of the world: “Je me convainquis que Madrid était l’estomac du monde et que moi j’étais chargée de guérir cet appareil digestif” (Carrington 21). In this second case, the narrator fantasizes herself as the savior, invested with the mission to cure the world’s digestive tract – whereby the Second World War becomes embodied through the organs of digestion and Madrid is granted the central position that it did not have during the war.

As is the case in *En Bas*, in Santos’s texts psychological pain is also located in the stomach: “Je réponds malgré une douleur à l’estomac, cet estomac qui va s’expulser de mon corps” (IP 11) – with the difference that, as always in Santos, the pain is sexualized and the stomach itself becomes an echo of the fetus about to be “expulsé” from the narrator’s body. Madness is not only spatialized, through its embodiment, but the time of madness is also embodied in the female cyclical time. Namely, because the madness of the narrator of *La Malcastrée* and *L’Itinéraire psychiatrique* revolves around her obsession with the trauma of

abortion and of being childless, the timeframe of nine months becomes a leitmotiv: “Je ne parle que de l’avortement. Il me laisse jouer ma ‘folie’. ... Je me présentais avec une valise de paille à la main. Neuf poupées alignées, neuf mois de vie, neuf mois de pré-vie, neuf poupées rangées de la plus petite à la plus grande, enfermées, sans liberté [...]” (IP 89). At other times, the narrator projects her fantasy onto her psychiatrist and stages herself as the psychiatrist’s unborn, unwanted fetus: “La Dame Psychiatre est enceinte. Cet enfant n’est pas moi. C’est un autre, tous les autres, eux. Elle ne m’a pas donné un paysage secret, une halte reposante, un voyage de neuf mois en son ventre” (LM 38). The “paysage secret, halte reposante, voyage de neuf mois en son ventre” are what the narrator aspires to, i.e., her longing is not for death itself, but for being “un-born” – which is the most pervasive motif throughout both of her texts.

In *En Bas*, just like in Santos’s texts, spatiality is not only embodied, but also gendered. While sinking into madness, Carrington develops a growing feeling of unreality, which manifests itself as being outside of history and outside of the female cyclical time: “Mes règles s’arrêtèrent à cette époque, pour ne reparaître que trois mois plus tard, à Santander. Je transformais ce sang en énergie compréhensive, masculine et féminine, mirocosmique ou macrocosmique et aussi en vin que buvaient la lune et le soleil” (Carrington 33). This is very different from *La Malcastrée* and *L’Homme-Jasmin*, in that, in *En Bas*, entering the space of the psychiatric hospital allows for the re-appearance of the narrator’s “femininity,” insofar as her menstruation had stopped while she was suffering from a bout of schizophrenia, but it then reappears as she arrives in the hospital in Santander. While in Madrid, she describes her delusions of being responsible for stopping the war in terms of a communion between the male and female genders (“Je transformais ce sang en énergie compréhensive, masculine et féminine”), and this new way of being – i.e., of being male and female at once – can only happen as a result of a transformation of the blood shed during the

female period. When the narrator is institutionalized, she is suddenly restored to her “female” self, and, therefore, starts bleeding again.

While the trope of the scar is not obvious in *L'Homme-Jasmin*, the body and the bodily expressions of madness are omnipresent. Jennifer Cizik Marshall, in an article entitled “The Semiotics of Schizophrenia: Unica Zürn’s Artistry and Illness,”⁹² reminds us of a little-known event regarding Zürn’s personal history: namely, Unica “suffered from a badly executed surgical procedure to repair a genital tear incurred during childbirth” (Cizik Marshall 21). After conducting thorough biographical research on Zürn, the author of the article attributes the origin of Unica’s mental illness to a combination of traumatic factors: being the victim of a sexually violent brother and of a predatory mother, losing custody of her two children as a consequence of her lack of money, suffering from the genital tear mentioned above – which left her somewhat crippled for the rest of her life – and, lastly, “during her later extra-marital relationship with Hans Bellmer [...] she suffered through a number of back-alley abortions, merely because Bellmer hated to use condoms” (Cizik Marshall 21). Thus, Cizik Marshall interprets Unica’s suicide as the culmination of these traumatic events, and criticizes previous studies conducted on *L'Homme-Jasmin* for having left out any psychobiographical reading of her work. While Cizik Marshall’s over-reliance on the American *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* in her “diagnosis” of Zürn’s schizophrenia and in her interpretation of her novel through the prism of schizophrenia, reduces – to my mind – the literary scope of Zürn’s narrative to a mere “symptom,” it is nevertheless valuable to note that, just like Emma Santos, Zürn

⁹² Jennifer Cizik Marshall, “The Semiotics of Schizophrenia: Unica Zürn’s Artistry and Illness,” *Modern Language Studies* 30.2 (2000), p.21-31.

suffered from the trauma of forced abortions – which anchors her narrative in her time, i.e., the condition of women in the 1960's and 1970's in France and Germany.

In *La Malcastrée*, the scar is the topos of the blurring of the female sex, of procreation, and of trauma: “Le précipice fascinant, déchirure du début des temps, cicatrice. La Dame Psychiatre les jambes écartées a joui pour faire son enfant” (LM 37). Explaining the title of her novel, Santos goes on to offer a subversive rewriting of phallogentric psychoanalytic theories, which can be read on several levels, with the “cicatrice cachée dedans” referring both to a physical and a mental scar: “Ils m’ont châtrée, moi aussi, mais ils l’ont mal fait, incomplet, pas assez ou de trop pour être comme il faut. Ils se sont trompés. Ni dehors, ni dedans. Je suis maladroitement châtrée, la Malcastrée. J’ai caché la cicatrice dedans” (LM 82-83). The concealed scar, besides challenging psychoanalytic notions of the little girl’s “penis envy” and the little boy’s “castration complex,” can also be read as the psychological trauma (“caché dedans”) of the scar that has been left on her throat and on her mind by the car accident, and of the “scar” of madness – since the pronoun “they,” in the quote, refers to the psychiatrists, who have failed to castrate her properly (i.e., as we will see later on, they have failed to de-objectify her and to re-gender her).

In Santos’s narratives, the separation between the space of the psychiatric hospital and that of “reality” is marked by its irrevocable character. Namely, once one has been marked by the stamp of madness, there is no going back to “normalcy” ever: “C’est difficile d’annoncer à quelqu’un, comme ça, tout d’un coup, qu’il est passé de l’autre côté. Qu’à partir de maintenant, il ne sera plus comme les autres. *Qu’il portera pour toujours la marque des aliénés comme les esclaves d’antan portaient leur tatouage*” (IP 18). Thus, madness becomes embodied through a

metaphorical tattoo that cannot be erased. Madness can even be proved by biology: “C’était des fous, des vrais. La preuve, *c’était écrit sur leur corps*. On ne trompe pas. Il n’y a qu’à lire, qu’à regarder les tests” (IP 20). So, unlike *En Bas*, in *La Malcastrée* there is no going back from madness.

Thus, we have seen that madness and history are depicted as intrinsically linked in these four narratives – be it actual or fantasized history – and that the figure of the scar creates an echo chamber among narratives of madness, of the Holocaust, and of slavery. Using the literary devices of cross-referencing and borrowing, to which Rothberg attributes the quality of multidirectional memory as a creative process, these four narratives “open up lines of communication with the past [...] and bring together here and there, now and then” (Rothberg 10) by creating a conversation among other narratives of marginalization. However, the specificity of these narratives of madness is that, while being preoccupied with rewriting history, they also resort to the *mise en abyme* of subverted fairy tales, so as to challenge traditional chronology. Thus, how does the temporality of the dream and of the tale create a sub-temporality where madness can be written – thereby also echoing chapters one and two?

2) **Dream and Timelessness:**

In her book entitled *Écriture et folie*, Monique Plaza describes madness as follows:

[...] la folie est perçue comme non-lieu, atopie; le fou est hors du sens, il est différent dans un sens absolu, une présence troublante qui signale finalement une absence encore plus troublante : une Altérité aussi irréductible qu’inaccessible⁹³ (Monique Plaza 200).

⁹³ Monique Plaza, *Écriture et folie* (Paris: PUF, 1986), p.200.

While she refers to madness in general, this description is all the more relevant to female madness and, more precisely, to the way in which women are perceived by Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis. Namely, both Lacan and Freud characterize women in terms of alterity and lack: according to Freud, all aspects of everyday life revolve around the penis as a symbol for masculinity.⁹⁴ As a consequence, if “madness” is defined, in Plaza’s terms, as “non-lieu” and “absence,” then could we say that, throughout the four texts included here, an abundance of metaphors can be found in this respect?

The Freudian and Lacanian phallogocentric perceptions of femininity, verging on the exclusion of women from the psychoanalytic theory, have been violently criticized by French feminists Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, and Julia Kristeva. In her book *Le Temps de la différence*, Luce Irigaray – who is a former student of Jacques Lacan’s – remind us, regarding the position of women within psychoanalysis, that the contemporary cultural model of psychoanalysis referred to “l’irrésolu du côté des femmes. Freud a avoué son incompétence finale concernant ce ‘continent noir’ [...]”⁹⁵ (*Temps* 73) and, in *Speculum. De l’autre femme*, she vehemently criticizes Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis which, while using analysis in order to reveal female subjectivity, reinforces and perpetuates women’s exclusion and alienation, by

⁹⁴ In this perspective, Freud developed his theory of the “penis envy,” which the little girl is supposed to experience around the age of four, along with his theories on the Oedipus complex and the Electra complex, the first one referring to a crucial stage of development for the little boy, and the second one referring to the equivalent stage in the little girl’s development and leading the little girl to “prefer” to endorse a passive sexual role and vaginal penetration. In his essay titled “L’Organisation sexuelle infantile” (1932), Freud states that “au stade de l’organisation pré-génitale sadique-anale, il n’est pas encore question de masculin et de féminin, l’opposition entre actif et passif est celle qui domine. Au stade suivant, celui de l’organisation génitale infantile, il y a bien un masculin, mais pas de féminin; *l’opposition s’énonce ici: organe génital masculin ou châtré*. C’est seulement quand le développement, à l’époque de la puberté, s’achève, que la polarité sexuelle coïncide avec masculin et féminin. *Le masculin rassemble le sujet, l’activité et la possession du pénis; le féminin perpétue l’objet et la passivité*”⁹⁴. Le vagin prend maintenant valeur comme logis du pénis, il recueille l’héritage du sein maternel. ” (Sigmund Freud, “L’Organisation sexuelle infantile,” in *La Vie sexuelle*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1970 [1932]: 116).

⁹⁵ Luce Irigaray, *Le Temps de la différence. Pour une révolution pacifique*, (Paris: Poche, 1989), p.73.

interpreting it as “une version déformée ou insuffisamment développée”⁹⁶ (*Speculum* 57) of masculine subjectivity.

Insofar as desire is characterized by lack, and as women have recurrently been described by psychoanalysis as quintessential lack, it is then “logical” that desire, madness, and femininity are intrinsically linked, since desire is, by definition, impossible to quench, and, consequently, if women embody pure desire, then they find themselves swallowed up in the spiral of endless desire. Besides, one could even say that women, in the masculine psychoanalytical discourse, occupy the same position as the unconscious, insofar as femininity, just like the unconscious, is characterized by alterity. Thus, for Jacques Lacan, following Rimbaud, “je est un autre” in a literal meaning since, according to his essay *Écrits: le séminaire sur “La Lettre volée,”* “l’inconscient est le discours de l’Autre en moi”⁹⁷ (*Lettre volée* 28).

Feminine absence is also a characteristic of Michel Foucault’s *Histoire de la folie*, insofar as, in his ambitious endeavor to rehabilitate the figure of the mad person in the wake of the damage created by Descartes’ “cogito ergo sum,” he does not mention any mad female artist figure. The only female figure included is that of Ophelia, a traditional instance of a female character who became mad as a consequence of unrequited love. In this perspective, Foucault himself perpetuates woman’s alienation, by refusing to grant her a position in the history of madness.

⁹⁶ Luce Irigaray, *Speculum. De l’autre femme*, (Paris: Minuit, 1974), p.57.

⁹⁷ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: le séminaire sur la lettre volée*, (Paris: Seuil, 1966), p.28.

The narrators of the four texts included here embody alterity through their writing, and their depersonalization and the “discours de l’Autre en moi” are staged through the various characters which they impersonate and the theme of the doppelgänger. The timelessness, or a-temporality, of the space of the psychiatric hospital and of madness itself is conveyed in three main ways: through recurring intertextualities (mostly with fairy tales), through the mise en abyme of a (de)idealized state of childhood - and, at times, through images of being un-born – and through a fictionalization of oneself by all three authors as characters in their autofictions of madness. Allusions to childhood, and the three narrators’ fictionalizations of themselves as children, underline the de-gendering at stake in madness. However, whereas the de-gendered Holocaust survivor’s body or the de-gendered slave’s body are tropes for the destructive, alienating effects of these traumas, in madness narratives it seems to me that the de-gendered mad woman’s body, through the omnipresence of the figure of the child, rather serves to highlight the timelessness of madness and institutionalization, insofar as the child’s body is, by definition, un-gendered and, as such, the site of suspended time.

a) Intertextualities:

First of all, in all four narratives, allusions to various intertexts constitute a major device, and serve a double purpose: emphasizing the a-historical aspect of madness, by drawing parallels with fairy tales and other works of fiction, while, at the same time, anchoring these madness narratives in literary history, thus granting legitimacy to these marginalized discourses.

In Carrington’s text, recurring allusions to “en bas” (the ward where the narrator aspires to being admitted at the clinic) as “paradise“ emphasize madness as the site of reversed concepts

and values, whereby “down below” becomes “paradise” (contrary to the usual references to paradise as being “up,” or “above”): “Je croyais que Don Luis et son père, voyant les problèmes résolus dans mon assiette, me permettraient d’aller “En Bas,” au paradis” (Carrington 62). *En Bas* often reads like a reversed fairy tale, in the same vein as Santos and Zürn’s narratives, but also as a detective novel, while being interspersed with biblical allusions and obsessions, in which the narrator is, at times, Mary, and, at other times, the Holy Ghost; at times androgynous and, at other times, a woman:

Je pensais que l’on me faisait subir les tortures de purification pour me faire atteindre la Connaissance Absolue et qu’alors je pourrais vivre ‘En Bas.’ Ce pavillon était pour moi la Terre, le Monde Réel, le Paradis – l’Eden – et aussi Jérusalem. Don Luis et Don Mariano étaient, eux, Dieu et son fils. Je les croyais juifs et pensais que moi, aryenne, celtique et saxonne, je subissais ces souffrances pour venger les Juifs des persécutions qu’ils subissaient. Par la suite, en pleine lucidité, j’irais ‘En Bas’, comme troisième personne de la Trinité. Je sentais que, par le soleil, j’étais androgyne, la lune, le Saint-Esprit, une gitane, une acrobate, Leonora Carrington et une femme. Je devais être aussi, plus tard, Elisabeth d’Angleterre. J’étais la personne qui révélait les religions et portait sur ses épaules la liberté et les péchés de la terre mués en connaissance, l’union de l’homme et de la femme avec Dieu et le Cosmos, tous égaux entre eux (Carrington 62-63).

In Santos’s texts, a similar process is at stake to that which I have mentioned in Charlotte Delbo’s narratives; this process consists in an intertextuality with herself, since Santos keeps quoting her own works – especially in *L’Itinéraire psychiatrique*, whose narrative is mostly made up of the mise en abyme of other works of fiction by Santos herself. This creates a stifling feeling of enclosure, with words and sentences circulating within a closed system, and echoing each other, thus mimicking the enclosed space of the mental hospital and madness. This might point to reiterating oneself as the only possible discourse on madness, since, according to Santos, “*La maladie... Ce n’est pas ça ça ça, la maladie, rien rien rien*” (IP 9) – ultimately, mental illness is nothing, it is not this or that. As is the case for narratives of slavery and the Holocaust, words are not adequate to an accurate rendering of madness.

Santos obviously alludes to Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *A Hundred Years of Solitude* in the following phrase: "Dix mille ans de solitude" (LM 49), thus likening madness and institutionalization to a solitude that feels like a hundred times longer than Garcia Marquez's novel title, and, again, to a time beyond "normal" time, but also re-inscribing her narrative of madness within a larger literary canon, as she does as well with allusions to Antonin Artaud ("On l'a suicidée" - LM 121) and to other madness narratives ("J'achète le *Journal d'une schizophrène*" - IP 15). Santos even offers an ironic rewriting of the history of psychiatry and of Foucault's *Histoire de la folie*: "Nous libérons les psychiatres pour libérer les fous" (LM 41). This allusion to Pinel turns *La Malcastrée*'s narrator and her partner into the all-mighty agents of the liberation of psychiatrists, which will then allow for the liberation of the mad.

b) (De)Idealizing Childhood:

Childhood is another recurring theme intrinsically linked to madness in all four texts, at times idealized in the surrealist tradition, but, most of the time, de-idealized, as a counter-discourse to Surrealism and popular notions that herald childhood as a time of carelessness and happiness. While the figure of the child is commonly heralded as a trope of innocence, children become "evil" as "les petits S.S." in *La Malcastrée*, and they kidnap and rape blond dolls ("on enlevait, violait les poupées blondes" – LM 16). Children are depicted under threatening features as an embodiment of the childhood from which the narrator is striving to free herself through her journey in the realm of madness and literature. However, the tension between childhood as a time of oppression and childhood as a kind of wonderland appears in sentences such as the following: "Etre fou, c'est préserver l'enfance, c'est vivre l'imaginaire" (LM 45).

Overall, *La Malcastrée* reads like a dark fairy tale, in which what first appears to be a children's tale is then tinted with the narrator's obsession with issues of sexuality: "Je te ferai croire n'importe quoi. Il y aura cinq printemps chaque année. Nous danserons nues les hanches ceintes de pénis en carton" (LM 43).

L'Homme-Jasmin – which was, interestingly, published in the Gallimard collection entitled "Imaginaire," despite its being autobiographical – is mainly written in the third person narrative, which turns the narrator herself into a fairy tale character. It opens with the account of a dream that Unica made when she was six years old:

une nuit, au cours de sa sixième année, un rêve l'emmène derrière un haut miroir, pendu dans son cadre d'acajou au mur de sa chambre. Ce miroir devient une porte ouverte qu'elle franchit pour parvenir à une longue allée [...]. C'est alors que pour la première fois elle a la vision de l'Homme-Jasmin ! [...] Cet homme devient pour elle l'image de l'amour. Plus beaux que tous ceux qu'elle a jamais vus, *ces yeux-là*⁹⁸ sont bleus. Elle se marie avec lui (Zürn 15-16).

The use of the dream as a guiding thread for the narrative instantly calls to mind the opening of Gérard de Nerval's *Aurélia*: "Le rêve est une seconde vie. [...] Les premiers instants du sommeil sont l'image de la mort; un engourdissement nébuleux saisit notre pensée, et nous ne pouvons déterminer l'instant précis où le *moi*, sous une autre forme, continue l'œuvre de l'existence" (Nerval 3). Then, Nerval begins his account of what he also terms this "vita nuova" (Nerval 3), in reference to Dante, with the loss of Aurélia: "une dame que j'avais aimée longtemps et que j'appellerai du nom d'Aurélia était perdue pour moi" (Nerval 4).

In the same manner, in Zürn's narrative, *l'Homme-Jasmin* is used as a source of inspiration and as a trigger for the narrative. Namely, the narrator tells the reader that "beaucoup

⁹⁸ Italics are the author's.

plus tard [...] elle restera fidèle à ses noces d'enfant [...] et le cherchera partout où elle ira" (Zürn 24-26). However, unlike *Aurélia*, the disruption of reality by dream creates such a powerful trauma for the narrator that she decides, from then on, to re-name "l'homme-jasmin" "l'homme blanc":

dans une chambre à Paris, elle se trouve en face de l'Homme-Jasmin. Le choc qu'elle éprouve à cette rencontre est si violent qu'elle ne le surmontera pas. De ce jour, lentement, très lentement, elle commence à perdre la raison (Zürn 18).

Katharine Conley, in the chapter titled "Unica Zürn's vision of madness" of her book *Automatic Woman: the Representation of Woman in Surrealism*, discusses the intertextuality between the novel's opening and Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, thanks to the part played by the mirror as a gateway to the world of the marvelous – which also echoes *En Bas* and its being addressed to Pierre Mabilie, the author of *Le Miroir du merveilleux*. I would like to add that Lewis Carroll's heroine was also six years old, just like the narrator-Zürn. Furthermore, the narrative's first words, "une nuit," are actually "ein mal" in the original version, which is the short form of "es war einmal," meaning "once upon a time" – which opens the narrative with the tone and temporality of a fairy tale.

The theme of the dream is also pervasive to both of Santos's autofictional narratives. As Santos herself stated upon the publication of *La Malcastrée* by l'Édition des femmes, "*La Malcastrée* a été écrite moitié dehors, moitié dedans, [...] entre la réalité et le rêve." The dream serves, once more, to sexualize childhood: "La nuit je fais mon premier rêve. Ai-je déjà rêvé ? Je ne m'en souviens pas. Je dors avec mon père, il me chasse du lit parce que je saigne de mes premières règles... Il y a un enfant à tuer en moi, notre première mort" (IP 131).

The dream is also central to *En Bas*, and the sentence below clearly evokes a parallel between dream and madness:

Une nuit, tout éveillée, je fis ce rêve : une chambre à coucher immense comme la scène d'un théâtre, un plafond voûté peint comme un ciel, le tout très délabré mais luxueux, un lit d'autrefois garni de rideaux déchirés et de cupidons peints, ou réels... je ne sais plus ; un jardin assez semblable à celui dans lequel je m'étais promenée la veille: il était entouré de fils de fer barbelés entre lesquels mes mains avaient le pouvoir de faire pousser les plantes qui s'enlaçaient autour d'eux et, les recouvrant, les rendaient invisibles (Carrington 44).

These passages call to mind André Breton's famous statement, in the *Premier Manifeste du Surréalisme*: "Je crois à la résolution future de ces deux états, en apparence si contradictoires, que sont le rêve et la réalité, en une sorte de réalité absolue, de *surréalité*, si l'on peut ainsi dire" (*Manifeste* 319). The central role played by dreams in these narratives of madness underlines madness as a dream-like state and as embodying this "surréalité."

A major difference between Emma Santos and Unica Zürn's narratives and Leonora Carrington's lies in the narrative mode, insofar as Carrington addresses her narrative to Pierre Mabille, and uses the pronoun "je" when she refers to herself, whereas Santos, in *La Malcastrée*, uses a narrative which she presents as a fiction, in which the "je," her staged persona, is a mirror version of herself, sometimes shifting to the third person narrative, in the same manner as Zürn does in *L'Homme-Jasmin*. Besides, Carrington's narrative is oral, and it is being transcribed by Pierre Mabille's wife. In Carrington, the narrator's persona, when she is suffering from madness, is usually an animal – which is a recurring theme throughout Carrington's drawings, paintings, and short stories, the most famous of which being her autoportrait titled "L'Auberge du cheval de l'aube." On that painting, she appears sitting next to a hyena, with a white wood horse above her head, and a white horse can be seen through the open window. It is interesting that one of the

white horse's first apparitions is in *En Bas*, as an impersonation of Leonora herself: "C'est, j'en suis à peu près certaine, dans la nuit qui précéda ma piqûre de Cardiazol, que j'eus cette vision: [...]. *J'étais moi-même le poulain blanc*" (Carrington 60-61). Later on, being restored to mental "health" entails losing her animality: "Lorsque je devins tristement raisonnable, on me raconta que, les premiers jours, je m'étais conduite comme divers animaux, que je sautais avec l'agilité d'un singe sur l'armoire, que je griffais et rugissais comme un lion, que je hennissais, aboyais, etc..." (Carrington 35).

c) The Mother, the Little Girl and the Princess: Dramatizing Madness Through the Double:

What is at stake in the staging of these narrators as fairy-tale characters is the figure of the double, or doppelgänger. In her 1976 presentation of *La Malcastrée*, Santos emphasized this "dédoublément," whereby she is torn between the instinct to write and the death instinct, and, by fictionalizing herself, she can die without dying:

J'ai envie de mourir. J'ai envie d'écrire. [...] Ecrire mon suicide. *Je me dédouble*. J'ai envie d'écrire de décrire ma mort. Et écrire aussi pour ne pas mourir. Je suis soulagée. C'est comme si je m'étais suicidée. La lutte entre le mot et la mort. On ne peut faire les deux. [...] Je reconstitue mes morts ratées, mes morts mortes. Un désir de construire des morts vivantes. Un rythme, un souffle.

The double personality – or "split personality" – is a major symptom of a psychiatric disorder – but not necessarily of schizophrenia; it is rather observed in dissociated behavior disorders. And yet, both Zürn and Carrington were diagnosed with schizophrenia. Santos suffered from severe depression. This highlights the fluctuating definition of schizophrenia, which is still subject to heated debates among psychiatrists, and can be confused with bipolar

disorders and even autism.⁹⁹ Namely, in the light of Zürn’s accounts of her oscillations between periods of euphoria and exaltation and periods of severe depression, she would be likely to receive a diagnosis of bipolar disorder, were she to enter Sainte Anne today. However, the figure of the double can also be read as a literary expression of the depersonalization experienced by the three authors over the course of their stay in the psychiatric clinic. In a literary perspective, the doppelgänger is a familiar trope of narratives of madness, as is the case in Nerval’s *Aurélia*, in which the narrator starts out by referring to a German belief according to which “chaque homme a un *double*,¹⁰⁰ et que, lorsqu’il le voit, la mort est proche” (Nerval 13); the narrator then goes on to dream that his double is about to marry his beloved: “J’imaginai que celui qu’on attendait était mon double qui devait épouser Aurélia” (Nerval 46). Ultimately, the doppelgänger appears as evil and threatening. However, in *La Malcastrée*, *En Bas*, and *L’Homme-Jasmin*, the figure of the doppelgänger is not a sign of imminent death, but, rather, raises issues of gender. For instance, Carrington recounts the following fantasy: “Je sentais que, par le soleil, j’étais androgyne, la lune, le Saint-Esprit, une gitane, une acrobate, Leonora Carrington et une femme. Je devais être aussi, plus tard, Elisabeth d’Angleterre” (*En Bas* 62-63). Thus, “j’étais [...] Leonora Carrington et une femme” questions the narrator’s gender identity, through a mise-en-abyme of her name as different from a woman. What is the narrator, then? Being a woman is only one identity among many others.

She repeatedly imagines that she is the incarnation of the Hebrew people as a whole: “J’expiais ainsi mon exil du reste du monde ; c’était le signe de ma sortie de Covadonga (qui était pour moi l’Egypte) et de ma rentrée “En Bas” (à Jérusalem) où je devais porter la

⁹⁹ For a discussion and a history of “schizophrenia,” see Richard Noll’s *American Madness: The Rise and Fall of Dementia Praecox* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

¹⁰⁰ Author’s emphasis.

connaissance” (Carrington 66-67). Eventually, she decides to rid herself from the many characters that inhabit her, so as to recover “lucidity”: “Dans un instant de lucidité, je compris la nécessité d’extraire de moi les personnages qui m’habitaient” (Carrington 79).

The cryptic incipit to *La Malcastrée* seems to immediately cast the figure of the double as a central one:

A elle, la fille morte. Elle et moi avons fui l’asile ensemble. Nous avons fui l’asile et le silence, une nuit, un début de matin dans la neige. Nous voulions retrouver les autres, les autres et les mots. Dehors, arrivées à la gare, nous avons eu peur. Nous n’étions pas habituées. Nous regrettions déjà, nous voulions retourner dedans...
Elle s’est jetée sous le train.
Moi, j’ai continué. J’ai cherché les mots. Un mot pas encore inventé... (LM *Incipit*).

Contrary to Nerval’s narrative, here the double is not the bearer of deadly tidings, but the double actually has to die, so that the narrator can find the adequate words for her story of madness.

The first part of Santos’s *La Malcastrée*, titled “L’Enfant, la fille et la dame” (LM 7), opens as a fairy tale, while blurring traditional genealogies in the same vein as Zürn and Carrington’s narratives. Santos often depicts herself as a character in a fairy tale, at times tragic as in Barbe-Bleue’s wife: “Je suis la femme de Barbe-Bleue, j’aime bien mourir dans le jeu, je prends le rôle de la morte, 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8, ciel, 8,7,6,5,4,3,2,1, terre” (LM 124). At other times in the narrative, she is the Sleeping Beauty: “[...] m’engloutir sous les médicaments que je réclamais encore et encore, *princesse au bois dormant* pour attendre son retour” (IP 120). More precisely, she offers a reversed version of *Sleeping Beauty*, in which the princess does not fall asleep for a hundred years after pricking her finger on the verge of entering puberty and sexuality (as explained in *The Madwoman in the Attic*), but she sleeps from the artificial sleep of

psychiatric medications, *after* experiencing sexuality and abortion – waiting for the “prince” who has left her.

Yet, at other times, Santos resorts to rewritten fairy tales in order to depict the many obstacles she has to overcome during her institutionalization, whereby the hospital is presented as a “no woman’s land” (“Voilà mon no woman’s land” – LM 95), and the outside world becomes the “pays des gens normaux” (LM 94) or the “Pays des Indifférents” (“Je traverse décidée le Pays des Indifférents” – LM 81). The narrator re-enacts *Alice in Wonderland* and, like Alice, she falls through a rabbit hole and enters a world of fantasy. In this rewriting of Lewis Carroll’s tale, the White Rabbit is the female psychiatrist, Elisabeth: “*Elisabeth* [...] C’est elle qui me conduira au pays de la psychiatrie” (IP 60). Recreating her life story through psychoanalysis is figured as the creation of a tale – the tale of psychiatry, in which the narrator and her psychiatrist/psychotherapist are the two heroines that, together, give birth to a new little girl: “[...] Elles sont deux petites filles de 27 et 23 ans, Elisabeth et Emma. [...] Elles sont une petite fille Elisabemma” (IP 64). Alternately, Santos presents her fictional self as Snow White,¹⁰¹ when she is confronted with other patients in the hospital ward: “La pomme empoisonnée de la sorcière. Ne pas blesser la vieille dame; prendre la moitié et la jeter dans le W.C.” (IP 37). All of these devices further emphasize the suspension of time fostered by madness and the need to resort to a non-realistic narrative so as to attempt at rendering what Plaza describes as “non-lieu, atopie; [...] hors du sens, [...] une Altérité aussi irréductible qu’inaccessible” (Monique Plaza 200).

In Carrington’s narrative, “En Bas” goes on to become a mythical place:

¹⁰¹ The story of Snow White is also the symbol of the infanticidal mother, or “evil mother,” which is a subtext not only in *La Malcastrée*, but, also, in most of the texts included in this work.

- D'où venez-vous ?
- D'“En Bas”? –
- Délicieux. Tout le monde y est heureux.
- Emmenez-moi.
- Non.
- Pourquoi ?
- Parce que vous n'êtes pas assez bien pour y aller (*En Bas* 54).

This echoes the narrative technique used in *Mémorial* and in Delbo's narratives, likening the space of the concentration camp to a descent into Orpheus's inferno – except that, in *En Bas*, the space located down below becomes paradise, thus underlining once more the space of madness as a world located on the other side of the looking glass, where all values are reversed.

At times, Carrington also resorts to a comparison with a foreign country, in order to describe her experience at the clinic:

[...] seeing later the strange morality and conduct of the people who surrounded me, I felt still more at sea, and ended up believing that I was in another world, another epoch, another civilisation, perhaps on another planet containing the past and the future and, simultaneously, the present¹⁰² (*Down Below* 180).

In *En Bas*, the stay in the psychiatric hospital is depicted as a kind of Bildungsroman, in which the narrator is cast in a fantastic world in which she must overcome many obstacles on the way to reaching her goal – i.e., coming of age. However, in *En Bas*, traditional tropes of the fairy tale are reversed and what the narrator-heroine is aspiring to reach is not “adulthood” but the mythical place which she calls “En Bas,” which is the ward reserved for the least ill patients. Thus, the narrator's adventures lead her on a journey towards recovered mental health: “Don Mariano me donna l'autorisation de déménager et c'est ainsi que je fus admise ‘En Bas’. Nanny, effrayée d'aller habiter dans le grand jardin, où elle craignait de rencontrer les fous, essaya de me

¹⁰² I sometimes prefer to use the English version, *Down Below*, because it is more complete than the French version, some passages of which have been censored, and entire passages have been removed or omitted. For instance, the episode in which Carrington is raped by several soldiers in a Madrid hotel room is not included in the French version.

dissuader de m'installer 'En Bas'. C'était, disait-elle, un endroit dangereux et *maléfique*.¹⁰³ J'insistai tellement qu'elle céda" (Carrington 82). "Je me disais: 'J'ai résolu les problèmes qu'il m'a posés, je serai certainement conduite *En Bas*.'" (Carrington 66).

As for Zürn, she alludes to herself as being "pareille à la princesse du conte d'Andersen [...] qui attend dans la solitude" (Zürn 45) – maybe is she referring here to *Sleeping Beauty*? – or as Gretchen, followed by a quote from the *Arabian Nights*, which turns out to be "la phrase la plus *fertile*¹⁰⁴ qu'elle ait jamais trouvée et travaillée pour en faire des anagrammes" (Zürn 45). In a fairy tale, the princess is, by definition, the young girl, that is to say, the king and queen's daughter, but also the young virgin. However, this juxtaposition of virginity and fertility underlines the tensions experienced by the narrator regarding her femininity, especially within the surrealist movement.

In the cab driving her to the airport, when she abruptly decides to leave Paris and to return to Berlin, "elle jette par la portière son étui à lunettes rouge (comme dans ce conte de fées où les enfants jettent du pain derrière eux afin de retrouver, grâce à cette trace, leur chemin pour sortir du labyrinthe de la forêt où on les a amenés)" (Zürn 38). In the same manner, she had previously thrown her red slippers out of her hotel room window; it seems to me that the red slippers definitely call to mind Dorothy's ruby slippers in *The Wizard of Oz* and, as a consequence, just like the previous reference to *Hansel and Gretel*, the desire to find her way back home. The fact that she throws her passport into a mailbox, and, then, leaves her *carte de séjour* on the table of a Parisian café, emphasizes her "errance."

¹⁰³ My emphasis.

¹⁰⁴ Italics are mine.

Thus, the intertextuality of fairy tales and other works of fiction, the fictionalization of the author's self, and the rewriting of childhood, all create a subversion of traditional chronology and lineages, allowing for the inscription of madness narratives within a new fictional framework and canon, echoing the narrative technique used by Charlotte Delbo in her Holocaust memoirs, for whom drama and poetry are the only appropriate narrative form for fictionalizing Auschwitz, since traditional prose is not adequate. As I have shown in the previous chapter, in Delbo's Holocaust narratives the figure of the double is central to the staging of trauma, so as to account for the feeling of depersonalization brought about by the dehumanizing life in the camps. For Delbo, Pirandello's theater is the most accurate representation of fear and trauma: "le théâtre pirandellien n'est-il pas fondé sur la peur, sur la peur qu'on porte en soi – celui qu'on pourrait être, qu'on redoute d'être, qui peut devenir fou – sur le mystère du dédoublement?" (SC 22).

The leitmotiv of childhood provides a counterpoint to coming-of-age narratives, by depicting the "journey" through the space of madness and the psychiatric hospital as a journey backwards, in a world where time is suspended, and even reversed – especially in Santos's texts, in which the journey through madness is a quest for a repressed, traumatic childhood. In *L'Homme-Jasmin*, the narrator is more concerned about depicting herself as a child so as to subvert traditional chronology and lineages, and the same goes for *En Bas*. In *Beloved*, I have emphasized how madness is presented as preferable to "having no self," which is a recurring motif in slavery narratives. This was a leitmotiv in Denver's grandmother Baby Suggs' discourse, who pondered over the feeling of emptiness that resulted from a lifetime of slavery: "And no matter, for the sadness was at her center, the desolated center where *the self that was no self* made its home" (Morrison 165). In this perspective, it is noteworthy that, in madness

narratives, the sense of selflessness that could arise from what I have presented before – i.e., woman as “absence” in psychoanalytic discourse, and the feeling of depersonalization – actually seems to be over-compensated by the sense of having “two selves” or multiple selves – which, ultimately, still amounts to having no self.

At this point, I hope to have shown that none of the four texts included in this chapter can be reduced to the sole, specific context of madness and of the space of the psychiatric hospital. Each one of them bears a complex, at times enigmatic, relation to a larger context, which reveals the “promise for thinking about an ethics of multidirectional remembrance in an age of postmemory” (Rothberg 272), and demonstrates that madness narratives deserve an inclusion in a theory of multidirectional memory and in literary canons. Thus, these madness narratives can be seen as narratives of countermemory, as counterforces in the face of culturally-dominant memories and histories that still relegate the “mad” woman’s narrative to a lesser rank than her male counterparts’ productions. This obsession with inclusion in a “legitimate” canon expresses itself through delusions of motherhood and reversed genealogies.

II *Surrealist Lineages:*

In the previous two chapters, I have explored the ways in which the subversion of traditional lineages constitutes a central theme to narratives of slavery and of the Holocaust, as a means to expressing the disruption to psychological continuity of the self that trauma entails. In this perspective, how are madness and institutionalization depicted as challenging traditional lineages as well but, also, how do these three female authors use literature as a way to

reappropriate their madness through two main devices: maternal delusions and the image of the “child-mother”? Namely, the figure of motherhood is as crucial to these madness narratives as it is to slavery and Holocaust narratives, albeit in a different manner and for different purposes. This is why I would now like to explore the ways in which these two tropes allow these authors to (pro)create their own stories. While it may, *a priori*, seem “reductive” to discuss maternity as a way for these women writers to reclaim their experiences, the biology of the female body is actually fundamental to a study of “female madness,” as it lies at the core of the marginalization and reification that the “madwoman” has undergone. Namely, as Yannick Ripa explains, in *La Ronde des folles*, according to nineteenth-century alienists “il existe des âges propices à l’explosion des troubles mentaux féminins: 15 ans (la puberté et les premières règles), 30-35 ans (l’accouchement) et 50 ans (la ménopause). [...] Changer de tranche d’âge sans adopter la condition familiale correspondante est en soi une anomalie” (Ripa 68). Thus, contrary to male madness, female madness is presented as intrinsically linked to physicality and to a bodily “norm” in the male-dominated psychiatric master discourse. Consequently, the omnipresence of physicality and of the gendered female body constitutes a powerful way of challenging these traditional notions of “female madness” and of creating a counter-discourse.

1) **Maternal Delusions (re-creating one’s story):**

In *L’Homme-Jasmin*, the recurring theme of motherhood serves to emphasize what the narrator perceives as her second birth in madness, but, also, to subvert masculine surrealist concepts, as we will see in the third part of this chapter. When Zürn mentions Bellmer’s obsession with the creation of dolls, Conley remarks:

creating the doll was also an appropriative gesture. [...] By conceiving and bringing into the world his doll, Bellmer was exemplifying *the Surrealist identification of art and procreation*.¹⁰⁵ [...] Bellmer's act in making was a symbolic usurpation by a male artist of the unique life-bearing powers of woman (Conley 84).

In this perspective, Zürn's recurring obsession with images of motherhood and delivery appears to be a counterpoint to the usurpation described by Conley; indeed, the four narratives that make up *L'Homme-Jasmin* have in common the blurring of genealogical lineages, expressed through History and fairy tales, that allow for a suspension of the historical continuity, while subverting genealogical bonds, and mixing the various levels of narrative. For instance, Zürn imagines that she is giving birth to the reunified city of Berlin, while wishing for her children to become her parents, and dreaming about herself as a princess coming from a fairy tale by Andersen, or as Gretchen, *Dr. Faustus*'s heroine embodying betrayed innocence and virtue. Thus,

elle sait: cette ville est partagée en deux. Situation inquiétante pour une ville. Et elle décide secrètement de la faire renaître dans sa parfaite unité. Et *c'est elle* qui va enfanter cette ville. Ce désir devient si excessif qu'elle éprouve les douleurs de l'enfantement, les mêmes symptômes qu'à la naissance de ses enfants. Elle ne sait pas comment il est possible de se sentir enceinte d'une ville tout entière. Mais depuis quelques jours elle a vécu des événements tellement incroyables que ce *nouvel état*¹⁰⁶ lui paraît presque naturel (Zürn 43).

Following this excerpt, Unica seems to be running into children everywhere in the city, which she interprets as a sign of her being expected there and that "cette ville se prépare déjà à sa nouvelle naissance" (Zürn 43). Through this image, not only does Zürn reappropriate the symbolical usurpation of the power of feminine procreation by the male surrealist artists, but she also stages herself as an all-mighty (pro)creator, insofar as she alone is going to give birth to the reunified city of Berlin, without any masculine intervention. However, as soon as the theme of motherhood reaches its culmination, it is immediately followed by a reference to a fairy tale,

¹⁰⁵ My emphasis.

¹⁰⁶ Author's emphasis.

which replaces the narrator in the part of the young girl “naïve et romantique comme elle l’a toujours été” (Zürn 60), thereby emphasizing the constant tensions between what she stages as her conflicting identities as a mother and as a child.

In Santos’s narratives, maternity reads as an obsession that triggers both the episodes of madness and the narrative itself, which bears similarities with the free associations heralded by Freudian psychoanalysis and the automatic writing that the Surrealists derived from them. In *La Malcastrée*, maternity is presented as hyperbolic, from the opening onwards, but also as metaphorically empowering:

Un petit fou, cinquante petits fous sont nés de mon ventre. Je leur ai donné vie. [...] Joie. *J’enfante, je materne*. Je suis la grande pondeuse universelle. [...] A la fin, les cinquante petits fous, les cinquante petits martyrs, les petits crucifiés se sont jetés sur moi. Ils m’arrachaient les cheveux, griffaient mes mains, tentaient de me percer les yeux, ils me giflaient à leur tour, giclaient de partout, déchiraient et mangeaient mes vêtements. [...] Vous vengerez mon enfance, vous *libérerez* toutes les enfances meurtries (LM 10).

Maternity becomes a nightmarish vision; madness only seems to be able to breed madness. Maternity is depicted as threatening, and the narrative often gives the impression that the narrator’s madness consists in being absolutely reduced to her female procreative body. However, the aborted fetuses become invested with an empowering mission, as they conquer the outside world (outside of the psychiatric hospital): “Mes avortons envahissent la ville dehors, des millions d’embryons échappés, la terre recouverte de mes germes...” (IP 73). Paradoxically, the narrator’s children are the vehicles of liberation from her traumatic childhood but, also, the cause of her dis-membering.

Santos's texts often play with the homophony between "mer" (the sea) and "mère" (the mother): "Je devenais sa mère. Je ne savais plus qui avait besoin de l'autre. [...] Mon ventre s'est ouvert grand. L'enfant est sorti, puis entré à nouveau. La matrice avale l'enfant que je n'ai pas fait, engloutisseuse. Je marcherai le ventre rempli toute ma vie. Femme enceinte dans la lumière entre la terre et la mer" (LM 12). Again, it seems that her "femininity" can only be expressed through maternity, and is reduced to it. Then, maternity itself becomes reduced to mere physical fullness. The loss of the meaning of "enceinte" echoes and stands for the loss of the meaning of words in general, which is the privileged means of expressing madness in *La Malcastrée*:

- Vous êtes enceinte, avouez, vous ne pouvez plus le cacher, vous êtes enceinte, n'est-ce pas ?
- Non, j'ai un enfant dans le ventre, c'est différent. Je ne suis pas enceinte. J'ai un enfant. Je ne suis plus seule. [...]
- Il faut être responsable prendre ses responsabilités, quand on veut procréer. Vous n'êtes pas capable...
- Si si si je veux, je veux un enfant, un vrai je sais, un qui remplit mon ventre [...] (LM 111).

Santos endeavors to show that madness arises where words become meaningless and empty, reduced to mere signifiers, mere sounds, deprived of their signified. The empty-sounding words, in turn, seem to mimic the emptiness felt by the narrator from her repeated abortions and her childlessness. The psychiatrist and the hospital, instead of sheltering the narrator against the trauma experienced in the "outside" world, only repeat them, by forcing her to abort again in the hospital: "Vous avez eu des médicaments, la maladie... Le fœtus se développe mal... Nous ne voulons pas de scandale dans l'hôpital. L'enfant sera anormal..." (LM 112). However, these obsessive images of hyperbolic pregnancies also seem to embody what Cathy Caruth sees at the core of trauma:

the pathology consists, rather, solely in the structure of its experience or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its

repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event (Caruth 4).

Santos' writing appears, indeed, to be literally possessed by these images on two levels: the narrator's metaphorical longing for the physical fullness of pregnancy without the fetuses ever becoming born babies echoes the author's obsessive quest for the adequate words in a context (madness and institutionalization) in which words have lost their meaning, whereby writing also becomes a pregnancy without delivery, since no word is satisfactory.

Ironically subverting Freudian discourse again, the narrator intrinsically links her life drive with fertility – and not with the death drive or/and the sex drive: “désir de vivre, fécondité...” (LM 119). Santos rewrites psychoanalysis: “[...] l'inconscient blanc comme les rêves d'un fœtus” (LM 15); “moi je devenais une affreuse mère tyrannique castratrice” (LM 19). The Freudian “penis envy” is then replaced with what could be termed the “abortion complex”: “J'avais mal, affreusement mal à l'enfant qu'ils m'avaient enlevé. Je souffrais du trou laissé béant” (LM 22). The quest for maternity clearly equates the quest for language, i.e., the quest for the re-appropriation of one's alienated story: “Les pompiers casqués d'or et gantés de noir ont ramassé des débris de femme, une femme arrogante sur les rails. Mille femmes éclatées qui cherchaient un langage” (LM 122), which echoes Santos' presentation of her text upon its publication in 1976:

Les mots sont étroitement liés à mon corps, à ma maladie. [...] Un geste, ce geste, l'acte, rejeter. Il n'y avait pas cette tentative littéraire. Cette tentative exhibitionniste. Se reconstruire avec des mots. Se reconstruire en espérant surtout ne jamais y arriver. *La Malcastrée*, c'est déjà si vieux. 1971. La recherche du comment. Le système des mots, comment on y entre. Ecrire comme on meurt ou écrire quand on ne meurt pas. Ecrire comme on se suicide.

Writing clearly becomes an act not only of re-appropriation of one's story, but also of survival.¹⁰⁷

Santos's narrative takes, at times, the tone of a *Manifesto*, as if she were somehow ironically replying to the Surrealists' Manifestos from the standpoint of the "mad woman": "Nous, folles, nous ne savons faire qu'une chose, ovuler, couvrir nos œufs chauds sous le derrière et *enfanter la folie*" (LM 123). In the same manner as *L'Homme-Jasmin*'s narrator "a besoin d'un homme," *La Malcastrée*'s narrator needs a child: "Je veux un enfant. Il me faut un enfant" (LM 25). Just like Zürn, Santos depicts herself as an all-mighty procreator:

On est bien avec un enfant dans le ventre. Je porte un enfant. Non pas faire un enfant avec un homme, mais porter l'enfant, j'insiste sur les mots porter l'enfant. Faire un enfant jamais, le lendemain c'est triste, on oublie comment on a fait avec qui. L'homme n'existe pas, on ne le reconnaît pas dans la rue, on lui tourne la tête dans le couloir de l'hôpital. L'homme qui ne participe pas à la fête fertile n'est qu'un saint Joseph cocu, condamné à faire l'argent pour les gosses. La femme trompe l'homme avec son propre corps. Il ne reste que l'enfant. J'existe maintenant, j'existe. *L'enfant a fécondé la femme*. [...] L'enfant jaillit vivant. C'était beau la naissance de l'enfant, la création du langage (LM 113).

Madness is presented as at-once fertile and as a condition escaping any "logical" discourse: "J'arrache du *trou de folie* un fœtus, cent fœtus idiots, des fœtus encore... [...] Ce n'est pas l'histoire de *l'enfant-langage* que j'ai fait, mais celle du silence. J'ai accouché de mes milliers de solitudes dans un asile" (LM 115). The repetition of "fœtus" translates the fertility of madness as allowing literary creation, but it also echoes the following passage from *L'Itinéraire psychiatrique*'s section titled "Interruption de grossesse," in which the narrator emphasizes her obsession with motherhood by presenting the reader with an enumeration of various descriptions

¹⁰⁷ Sarah-Anaïs Crevier Goulet, "'Malcastrée' et 'médiquée': Emma Santos entre folie et dépression," *Frontières* 21.2 (2009): 32-40.

of women in relation to motherhood, whereby the woman is only a mother or a potential mother or childless, but, also, words end up losing their meaning through obsessive repetition, in the same manner as the narrator is losing her body and becomes “non-corporisée”: “Aimer la femme, celle qui attend un enfant, celle qui désire un enfant, celle qui a fait un enfant, celle qui espère un enfant, celle qui n’aura pas d’enfant jamais, toutes les femmes avec un corps de femme pour l’enfant” (IP 68). These repetitions highlight the emptiness of words, and, consequently, the emptiness of the discourse on madness. Maternity thus appears to be both impossible and the only means to physical presence. When the narrator imagines herself as a pregnant woman, she is suddenly no longer absent, alienated from her own body. She is no longer “absente de [s]on corps” (LM 72) but, as stated above, “j’existe maintenant, j’existe. *L’enfant a fécondé la femme.* [...] L’enfant jaillit vivant. C’était beau la naissance de l’enfant, la création du langage” (LM 113). Thus, it is the child who fertilizes its mother – lineages are perfectly reversed, in the climax of an extended imagery. Namely, traditional lineages are constantly reversed and the narrator is also, at times, her father’s mother: “Le chirurgien était le S.S. qui viola ma mère. Mon père qui vivait tranquille sous une fausse identité, a retrouvé la mémoire en perforant mon ventre” (LM 116).

Furthermore, madness is constantly equated to being un-born: “Je ferai ce qu’il faut faire pour qu’ils m’aient un peu les gens, tous ces gens dehors, les gens nés” (LM 74). This echoes a central imagery in *Tituba*, pertaining to a form of non-birth: “Mère, notre supplice n’aura-t-il pas de fin? Puisqu’il en est ainsi, je ne viendrai jamais au jour. Je resterai tapie dans ton eau, sourde, muette, aveugle, laminaire sur ta paroi. Je m’y accrocherai si bien que tu ne pourras jamais m’expulser et que je retournerai en terre avec toi sans avoir connu la malédiction du jour. Mère, aide-moi! [...]” (Condé 175). *La Malcastrée*’s narrator then goes on to describe metaphorically her re-embodiment and re-birth thanks to her female psychiatrist: “J’ai

l'impression de sortir de ton ventre. J'enfonce deux doigts tachés dedans. J'extirpe l'amour du fond, une main brillante, un enfant. Moi. Reposant sur toi collée à toi notre blessure unique se referme, cicatrice s'apaise. [...] Nous sommes vivantes, maternité triomphante. [...]" (LM 23).

In *En Bas*, maternity is also present throughout the text, but in a more covert way, with the narrator's mystical obsession with the juxtaposition of milk and blood – creating a resonance with *Tituba* and *Beloved*, in which I have shown that this imagery was prevalent, albeit for various purposes. This also echoes *L'Homme-Jasmin* and its narrator's obsession with the colors white and red. If, in *Beloved*, the omnipresent theme of milk more specifically stands for her obsession with failing to be a “good” mother, in both *Tituba* and *Beloved* the two elements serve as a symbol for the mother-daughter transmission and bonding, as described by Hirsch. However, in *Beloved*, this bonding results in the transmission of trauma, while, in *Tituba*, the mixture of blood and milk, i.e., the juxtaposition of nursing/motherhood with the suffering and death brought about by slavery, stands for healing through witchcraft. I have also shown that this mixture of blood and milk sealing the sisterhood of Denver and Beloved, and the roots of Tituba within her native culture, bears great similarities with fairy-tale themes, such as the drop of blood shed by *Sleeping Beauty*'s Aurora when she pricks her finger on the spindle upon reaching adulthood. Psychoanalytical readings of the fairy tale have interpreted the blood as a metaphor for menstrual blood and the discovery of sexuality. Namely, in Condé and Morrison's narratives, blood and milk are intrinsically linked with the (re)embodiment of one's story and coming of age. In the four madness narratives studied here, the motif of milk and blood, of white and red, hardly stands for coming of age, apart from *En Bas*, in which the narrator reaches adulthood and recovers “sanity” through a reconciliation between her various selves and genders. Thanks to

witchcraft, also consisting in mixing milk and blood, *En Bas*'s narrator eventually recovers her "femininity" and her period comes back.

However, in *L'Homme-Jasmin*, images of white and red serve to stage the narrator's inner tensions between virginity (i.e., childhood) and maternity, culminating in her feeling that being a woman is the one unbearable position and that it is better to be mad. In *La Malcastrée*, the two colors are also recurrently mentioned, through the omnipresence of blood and the white of the psychiatrists' clothes. Blood is always linked to a biological form of femininity: the blood of delivery and the blood of menstruation. And yet, the "primal scene" being that of the blood coming out of the narrator's throat when it was cut during a car accident when she was twelve years old, it seems to me that a subtext to *La Malcastrée* hints at the fact that, instead of the usual puberty experienced by other girls, the narrator's bleeding throat somehow initiated her accession to sexuality, whereby words (coming from the throat) and sexuality became intrinsically linked. Ultimately, does not her madness consist in wanting to write and to find adequate words for her experience, according to her doctors? Thus, it is only logical that the narrator eventually becomes pregnant in her throat: "[...] les deux mains posées sur mon goître comme une femme enceinte" (IP 42). Psychiatry, by forbidding her to write, has completed her de-gendering: "Je suis bien morte tout en continuant vivante. La psychiatrie a dévoré le morceau. Reste un corps sans organes, *une femme glacée*" (IP 41).

Thus, the theme of maternity is central to the four texts included in this chapter, both as giving birth to one's story and as being re-born in madness. Metaphors of being dis-membered and dis-possessed of one's body/story are countered by images of "hyper-femininity" through pervasive delusions of motherhood, pregnancy, and procreation.

2) The Child-(M)other, the “Pseudogyne,” and the Mother Tongue:

While I have so far, in the previous two chapters, investigated postmemory through the feminine (mother-daughter) transmission of trauma, building on Marianne Hirsch’s concept, I am now going to study the centrality of the child figure in the four madness narratives included here, albeit through a different prism. Namely, in *L’Homme-Jasmin*, *En Bas*, *La Malcastrée*, and *L’Itinéraire psychiatrique*, children do occupy a crucial place, as they do in *Beloved*, *Tituba*, *Mémorial*, *Still Alive*, and *Auschwitz et après*. And yet, the specificity of these child figures is that they stand for the narrator herself, whereby the narrator is, at once, the mother and the child. This is what I call the “child-mother” and it offers, to my reading, a fascinating twist of postmemory, insofar as the child embodies the traumatic memory but not through its transgenerational transmission, since the child and the mother are the same person (or two embodiments of the same person, like two sides of the same coin). More precisely, we have here a third case of postmemory: in *Beloved*, in the relationship between Sethe and her own mother, Hirsch sees a case of “rememory,” located at the opposite end of the spectrum of transgenerational trauma – an instance in which there is no possible distance between the mother’s trauma and the daughter’s experience of the trauma. I have shown that the only positive instance of postmemory could be found in the relationship between Sethe and her own daughter, Denver. Now, in all three authors included in this chapter, I would like to venture to say that one can see an extreme case of “postmemory,” in which the distance with the traumatic event is so impossible that no “postmemory” *per se* can occur, as generation (reproduction) is prevented. There is no distance between the mother and the daughter; they become one, with the narrator

playing both parts, which highlights both the metaphorical sterility of madness, the disruption it causes to chronology, and the impossibility for madness to really become “history” by becoming a memory (the omnipresence of memory). The question of transgenerational transmission disappears, because there can be no generation – only self-generation after madness. The figure of madness is that of the orphan – and the child becomes the embodiment of otherness, of the alterity of madness.

In these four texts, the theme of motherhood is the privileged vehicle for rendering the experience of madness, albeit in different ways. Whereas Santos recurrently perceives her madness as being linked to being childless and to having been traumatized by repeated abortions, Carrington expresses delusions of giving birth to Jerusalem, and, when entering a room in which a pregnant woman is standing, she fantasizes herself as the unborn child: “J’entrai chez une jeune dame enceinte et je pensais que j’étais moi-même l’enfant qu’elle portait. [...] J’étais le Saint-Esprit” (*En Bas* 83) – which is also a recurring theme in Zürn, who has delusions of being pregnant with the reunified city of Berlin. These examples of blurred genealogies, through the mad woman’s fantasy of being at once the child and the mother, are further emphasized by the many instances of embedded fairy tales and myths: *The Sleeping Beauty*, *Hansel and Gretel*, *Snow White*, and *Alice in Wonderland* in Zürn and Santos’s case, and biblical tales and *Alice* in Carrington’s case. All three authors describe the space of the mental hospital as “the other side of the mirror,” a kind of in-between world, between life and death, between dream and reality, thus providing a rewritten version of *Alice in Wonderland*, and echoing each other.

In *En Bas*, the relationship between madness and motherhood is, at first glance, not as explicit as in the other three narratives; however, the narrator seems to project onto the landscape

her concerns with fertility: “Ceci est le sens exact de mes paroles. Pourtant, lorsqu’on me permit de sortir par la suite, je ne trouvai aucun temple et le paysage était tout à fait *fertile*¹⁰⁸” (Carrington 46), and metaphors of birth and motherhood pertain to her quest for knowledge (knowledge of what can be found on the other side of the mirror of “reason”): “Ce n’était qu’un *embryon* de connaissance que je vais essayer d’exprimer ici avec la plus précise fidélité” (Carrington 8). These concerns then express themselves through the narrator’s delusions, one of them being quite similar to Zürn’s fantasy of being pregnant with the reunified city of Berlin:

J’entrai avec lui [Don Luis] chez une jeune dame enceinte à qui il devait faire une piqûre (je pensais qu’il s’agissait de Cardiazol et que *j’étais moi-même l’enfant qu’elle portait*). [...] Je me précipitai sur la bibliothèque et choisis une bible que j’ouvris au hasard. Je tombai sur le passage où le Saint-Esprit, descendant sur les apôtres, leur donne le pouvoir de parler *toutes les langues*. *J’étais le Saint-Esprit* et me croyais dans les limbes, les limbes – ma chambre – où la lune et le soleil se rencontrent à l’aube et au crépuscule (Carrington 83).

The obsession with language (“parler toutes les langues”) is common to the three authors included here. In *L’Homme-Jasmin*, anagrams occupy a central position in the narrative, while, in *La Malcastrée*, the narrator stages a parallel between pregnancy and authorship, in her quest for the “perfect” language in which to render her experience of madness. In *En Bas*, the issue of language and motherhood is further complicated by the author’s decision to reject her “mother” tongue (English) and to choose a foreign language (French) for her madness narrative. It is the only instance of using French in her work. This problematic echoes Shoshana Felman’s *Writing and Madness (Literature / Philosophy / Psychoanalysis)*,¹⁰⁹ in which she raises the issue that

¹⁰⁸ Emphasis is mine.

¹⁰⁹ Though Felman solely focuses her analysis on male writers, philosophers, and psychoanalysts, she argues that modernity and postmodernity “can only be defined by their relation to the age of psychiatry” (Felman 22), and tries to demonstrate that it is the irreducibility of the relation between the readable and the unreadable that constitutes what she calls *la chose littéraire*—the literary thing, as a reference to Lacanian psychoanalysis.

the very essence of repression is defined by Freud as a ‘failure of translation,’ that is, precisely as the barrier which separates us from a foreign language. If madness and literature are both ruled by the very thing that represses them, by the very thing that censors them in language, if they both – each in its own way – proceed from a ‘failure of translation,’ the attempt to read them will necessitate a crossing of the borders between languages. [...] Wouldn’t the attempt to ‘break out of metaphysics’ necessarily entail a break, first of all, with the *physics* of a mother tongue? [...] If the ‘failure of translation’ between languages is in some sense radically irreducible, what is at stake in the passage from one language to another is less translation in itself than the translation *of oneself* – into the otherness of languages. To speak about madness is to speak about the difference between languages: to import into one language the strangeness of another (Felman 19).

Thus, Felman rejects Foucault’s claim that madness is, primarily, an “absence d’oeuvre” (absence of production), a lack of language, and she sees writing as the point of convergence between writing madness and writing *about* madness. This is precisely what Santos, Carrington, and Zürn’s madness narratives are striving to do: to “translate” the language of madness into literature, and, thus, to translate oneself into the otherness of language. This is why the issue of the “mother” tongue is so crucial here, even more so as in Holocaust narratives. Namely, these four narratives revolve around the very problematic of motherhood as a tongue, as Santos puts it explicitly: “Elle maltraite sa langue maternelle, elle a eu envie de maltraiter sa mère. Il faut changer de langue pour se libérer de son enfance” (LM 124). “Changer de langue,” so as to free oneself from childhood, but also to translate the experience of madness into literature. This issue takes on several aspects throughout the narratives included here: from the play with words through anagrams and the delusions of motherhood and girlhood in *L’Homme-Jasmin*, to a rejection of the “mother” tongue and images of delusional maternity in *En Bas*, to the creation of a new language anchored in the female body as procreator in *La Malcastrée*. In all three authors, language issues express themselves through gender issues, as if transcending the mother tongue entailed transcending gender boundaries.

In *En Bas*, the extended metaphor of the father figure serves to further underline the narrator's "gender trouble" at stake in her madness. Namely, according to her friend Catherine, the origin of the narrator's illness lies in her submission to Max Ernst as a substitute father from whom she needs to free herself: "Un jour, cependant, Catherine, qui depuis longtemps était entre les mains des psychanalystes, me persuada que mon attitude trahissait un désir inconscient de me délivrer, pour la deuxième fois, de mon 'père': Max, que je devais pouvoir supprimer afin de pouvoir chercher un autre amant" (Carrington 11). It then comes as no surprise that she fantasizes the psychiatrist in the Santander clinic as "Dieu le Père" (Carrington 71), which also calls to mind Yannick Ripa's *La Ronde des folles*, in which she emphasizes both the God-like position of the alienist in the "hôpital spécial" and the misogynistic perception of female madness within a biological set of values established by men, and for men: "La normalité féminine est fixée par l'homme et même pour l'homme. [La femme est définie en tant que] femme de, mère de, fille de, veuve de..." (Ripa 43). While all the narratives included here take place almost a century after the era described by Ripa, it is striking that the problematic seems to have remained largely unchanged. Namely, *En Bas*'s subtext seems to entirely revolve around the narrator's tormented position within a patriarchal lineage, in which she fantasizes herself as the psychiatrist's daughter, but also, at other times, as the reincarnation of psychiatrist Don Mariano's dead daughter, Covadonga, who is also Don Luis's dead sister (the psychiatrist's son):

Je rentrai en Egypte, assez dégoûtée de la *Sainte Famille*... J'appris par Asegurada que Covadonga (la fille de Don Mariano) était enterrée dans ce cimetière. [...] je pensais que c'était Don Luis qui l'avait tuée en la torturant comme moi pour la rendre parfaite. Je croyais que Don Luis cherchait en moi une autre soeur qui, plus forte, résisterait à ses épreuves et atteindrait avec lui le *Sommet* (Carrington 72).

Thus, genealogical issues contribute to the staging of the gender issues at stake in these madness narratives. Again, when Carrington meets a random man in Madrid, she imagines the following scenario: “[...] je me disais: ‘Voilà mon frère qui vient me délivrer des pères’” (Carrington 28), and, later on, interprets the Cardiazol injections that she is forced to receive by the psychiatrist as an attempt by the psychiatrist to turn her into a reincarnation of his dead sister: “Je me résignai à prendre la place de sa sœur et à subir la dernière épreuve qui lui rendrait Covadonga dans ma propre personne” (Carrington 86).

Ultimately, it is revealing that the narrator has to “extraire les personnages qui m’habitaient” so as to recover and accept her “femininity” – albeit no longer as a man’s daughter or sister. In this respect, whereas in Ripa’s study of nineteenth-century female madness, being restored to “sanity” equated, for a woman, recovering a traditional biological role appropriate to her age (“changer de tranche d’âge sans adopter la condition familiale correspondante est en soi une anormalité” – Ripa 68), *En Bas*’s narrator is eventually “cured” when she no longer defines herself in relation to a man. Her split “gender personality” seems to have started after she was raped by several soldiers in her Madrid hotel room. However, this episode is left entirely unmentioned in the French text. It is only in the 1944 English version of the text that Carrington chose to include this passage, as if it could only be accounted for in her mother tongue.

In “L’Homme-Jasmin,” a prominent role is granted to the tormented relationship that the narrator bears to her position as a daughter and as a mother, and to the tensions she experiences between these two biological roles. “L’Homme-Jasmin” starts with the account of a dream that the narrator made when she was six years old. This account is immediately followed by a brief depiction of her mother:

Prise d'un inexplicable sentiment de solitude, elle se rend, le matin même, dans la chambre de sa mère – comme s'il était possible de retourner dans ce lit-là d'où elle était venue – pour ne plus rien voir. Une montagne de chair tiède, où l'*esprit impur* de *cette femme* est enfermé, s'abat sur l'enfant épouvantée. Elle s'enfuit, abandonnant à *tout jamais la mère, la femme, l'araignée*¹¹⁰! Elle est profondément blessée (Zürn 15-16).

Even though it is the only direct allusion to her own mother in the entire novel, and even though she claims to turn her back to the mother “à tout jamais,” the theme of motherhood is omnipresent throughout the novel, as a privileged expression of her madness. Besides, the sentence “comme s'il était possible de retourner dans ce lit-là d'où elle était venue” can be read, in my opinion, as the key to the narrator's *errance* (wandering) throughout the narrative: at once condemned to be a woman, and bound to a relentless quest for eternal childhood. For Zürn, the quintessential, unbearable role seems to be that of the mother; nevertheless, her narrative is articulated around images of motherhood.

Throughout *L'Homme-Jasmin*, Zürn subverts traditional chronology, playing, at times, the part of a little girl, and, at other times, that of a mother. She seems to only be able to define herself through a biological role, through her position within a family, as a daughter, as a wife, or as a mother: she is the white man's wife, her son Christian's mother – Christian who is the topic of many of her hallucinations, while her daughter is never once mentioned – and she is herself the daughter of a father whom she seems to have adored, and of a mother whom she hates. The dreamlike narrative allows for this collusion of various times and eras, which overlap thanks to the intertextuality of fairy tales. The narrator's madness seems to be revolving around this ambivalent relation to her gender, and this tension between the mother part and the little girl part

¹¹⁰ Emphasis is mine.

can be found in all four pieces contained in *L'Homme-Jasmin*. This is what I call the “child-mother” – which is a pun on the French popular phrase of “femme-enfant.”

In *La Malcastrée*, the tensions between adulthood and childhood are also omnipresent, from the opening on: “Je rêve de retourner dedans, redevenir enfant” (LM 52). Actually, what the narrator is longing for is not even childhood, but “fetus-hood” – a fantasized life before birth. Throughout the narrative, the narrator stages herself as a child both in her family and in her relationship with the lover with whom she becomes obsessed after he leaves her. Much like the loss of Aurélia is presented as constituting the onset of madness in Nerval’s narrative, Santos recurrently attributes the origin of her madness to the loss of her lover. And yet, the obsessive images of maternity, fetuses, and birth that punctuate her account of madness point to the trauma of her repeated abortions, and, also, to the initial trauma of the car accident, as the causes of her mental illness. Her lover becomes “un enfant un amant un père” (IP 95), which further emphasizes the kind of hyper-femininity through which the narrator presents herself, by only existing in traditional, biological roles in relation to men: as a mother, as a wife, and as a daughter. This sub-text is a major one in *La Malcastrée* and *L’Itinéraire psychiatrique*, and serves both as a tool for staging the narrator’s obsession with being a “failure” for not having had a child, and as a denunciation of the alienation of women which she experiences in the 1970’s in France. “N’est-il pas bizarre qu’une jeune fille marche seule encadrée de valises, n’a-t-elle pas un frère, un père, un ami ? [...] Une petite fille. [...] Je suis sur le rebord, entre vie et mort” (LM 53-54).

It is interesting to note that the narrator switches to a third-person narrative when recounting her childhood and talking about herself as a child, therefore emphasizing her situation

as an outcast within her own family. Also, her present obsession with femininity and maternity stands in stark contrast with her desire to be “non-corporisée.” And yet, madness is somehow presented as an achievement: “Je suis comme je me voulais enfant, *non corporisée*” (IP 130). She has completed the dis-embodiment that she was aspiring to as a child. However, this dis-embodiment comes with the high price of madness and institutionalization, and the hospital stay is then depicted as a process of re-embodiment: “*Je me corporise. [...] C’est pour accoucher de moi* que je suis venue dans cet hôpital où j’ai tant pleuré, accoucher devant cet homme de cinquante ans recroquevillé toute la journée contre le radiateur, les poings serrés, me montrer qu’un jour on peut *redevenir une*” (IP 116). This fantasy of “becoming one again” echoes Zürn’s and Carrington’s desire to, respectively, give birth to the reunified city of Berlin and to the state of Israel – and, also, to the holy family, in Carrington’s case.

The parallel between procreation and literary creation is explicit in the way Santos presents *La Malcastrée* upon its publication: “Je figrole l'enfant, je cisèle, je tricote. Changer un mot, une virgule remettre. Délire. Délire. Délire. Détruire. Délirer vers quelqu'un. Délirer jusqu'à quelqu'un qui dit oui. On n'existe pas sans les autres.” Then, in *L’Itinéraire psychiatrique*, as she is released from the hospital, she considers herself to be temporarily “cured” as she states: “J’ai publié. Je n’ai pas envie d’avoir un enfant” (IP 92). In *La Malcastrée*, the narrator, while looking at a group of mad women, as if she were herself an outsider, reflects that “elles ont oublié la langue de toutes les femmes la langue d’une fissure, brisure” (LM 32). Thus, madness is presented as forgetting the language of a community of women – a gendered language, in close relation to the female body. This is why motherhood is such a pervasive image throughout the text, since “c’est miracle l’enfant, il découvre le langage. Le secret des mots est dans un ventre

de femme” (LM 33). In the world of madness and psychiatry, where women are objectified, the mad woman retains “the secret of words” in her faculty to procreate.

Through the *mise en abyme* of an excerpt from a science textbook, describing an insect called the “loméchuse,” Santos stages herself as both the mother and the child: “J’ai lu dans un livre de Sciences que la fourmi sanguine se drogue au sperme d’un insecte parasite, la loméchuse. Ma larve au lit, mon insecte nuisible. Femme utile. Toi loméchuse tu dévorais mes œufs, mes larves et mes fœtus que j’oubliais dans ma gorge et moi fourmi rouge je me nourrissais à tes seins” (IP 65). Again, talking and words are linked to procreating, as the narrator is pregnant in her throat (“mes œufs, mes larves et mes fœtus que j’oubliais dans ma gorge”); at the same time, the narrator is also a breast-fed infant (“je me nourrissais à tes seins”). Besides, this scientific intertext serves to further problematize the gender issues involved in madness and institutionalization, as the complete, scientific description of the “loméchuse” (not included in Santos’ text) reads as follows:

Perdant tout sens de la communauté, les fourmis se réorganisent pour se dédier entièrement à cet hôte pourvoyeur de drogue et à ses larves, qui, à peine en vie, dévorent à leur tour d’énormes quantités de couvains (larves de fourmis). Dans ces circonstances, les scientifiques ont observé une modification des comportements portant les fourmis à privilégier et à protéger les larves de la loméchuse au détriment de leurs propres larves et à *ne plus mettre au monde que des formes d’individus abortifs, ni mâles ni femelles, ni ouvrières ni reines, les pseudogynes*.¹¹¹ On a vu des fourmis continuer à sucer avidement le suc sécrété par Loméchuse alors même que cette dernière les dévorait (<http://membres.lycos.fr/dmouli/drogue.html>).

This description echoes the narrator’s obsessive discourse about aborted fetuses, which also points to her narrative as giving birth to another figure, beyond that of the “child-mother”: the figure of the “pseudogyne.”

¹¹¹ Emphasis is mine.

Marie-France Rouart, in her study of figures of alienated men in twentieth-century novels, and titled *Les Structures de l'aliénation*, argues that:

Les spécialistes des sciences humaines et les critiques littéraires ont établi que les relations binaires sont toujours d'essence instable et que la plus petite 'molécule' de n'importe quel système relationnel en termes de sentiments est formée par le groupe de trois personnes; ce triangle est caractérisé par une interaction constante entre ses éléments constitutifs. Or, si nous appliquons ce triangle intersubjectif à la littérature, nous verrons que toute triade illustre cette loi, et que, par conséquent, le mouvement intérieur du triangle est représenté par celui des triades symboliques; objets ou êtres humains, l'observation de ces triades est libératrice. Car elle induit en effet l'annexion d'un tiers qui caractérise une personne faisant partie d'une relation binaire. [...] Il ne s'agit pas seulement de confirmer la relation symbiotique binaire, satisfaisante mais instable, par l'annexion d'un tiers dans le rôle de spectateur; il s'agit aussi de la possibilité pour chaque membre du couple de prendre momentanément la place du tiers pour reprendre souffle. Dans cette configuration ternaire peut donc être suggérée la relation excessivement symbiotique si souvent à l'origine de la schizophrénie. [...] Dans cette tension constitutive de l'écriture de soi, l'on peut alors lire l'échec du sujet à tisser de lui-même une relation avec le monde extérieur (Rouart 52-53).

Rouart applies this critical perspective to a reading of the narrator of Proust's *Du Côté de chez Swann* as suffering from schizophrenia as a consequence of a diadic relation to his mother. *L'Homme-Jasmin*, *En Bas*, and *La Malcastrée* have in common the absence of the conventional family triad constituted by the father, the mother, and the child, insofar as the narrator-mother stages herself through fantasies of "immaculate conception" or "self-procreation," without the intervention of a man. In *L'Homme-Jasmin*, the man is still present as a third element of the relation, but he is himself a figment of the narrator's imagination ("l'homme blanc"). However, since the narrator plays both the part of the mother and the part of the child, "la relation excessivement symbiotique si souvent à l'origine de la schizophrénie" is preserved, and is pushed to the extreme of identity – there is no "relation" between two elements, since they are the two sides of the same coin. In *La Malcastrée*, not only is the narrator "self-fertilizing" ("s'auto-féconde") but she is also at once the child and the mother, whereby not even the diadic,

schizophrenic relation is present, but only a relationship with oneself – a closed circuit, a solipsistic situation of the narrator. This absence of mediation is reflected in the narrative structure, with both texts (*La Malcastrée* and *L'Itinéraire psychiatrique*) being constructed as long monologues, in which the only dialogue is the intertextuality with the author's other texts. In Zürn, the third-person narrative echoes the narrator's schizophrenia, as she becomes, as an author, the spectator of a dual relationship between herself as a character and as a narrator – there, we have Rouart's triad, but in a distorted, schizophrenic adaptation. Only in *En Bas*'s narrative structure can the perfect triad guaranteeing “sanity” be found, in that Carrington-author-narrator dictates to Jeanne Mégnen her narrative addressed to Jeanne's husband, Pierre Mabile. Then, again, as I have already mentioned, *En Bas* is the only one of the four narratives offering a resolution, or “narrative closure” – as well as a “happy ending” in non-fictional life.

Thus, what is at stake for Santos, Carrington, and Zürn is a re-appropriation of one's alienated self, i.e., a re-embodiment of one's story. This re-embodiment is achieved through various means: the metaphorical scar of madness, maternal delusions, and the subversion of traditional lineages. However, these three narratives can also be read as not only memorializing and re-appropriating madness, but, also, as a subversion of dominant male discourses on madness and the mad woman, and on surrealism itself. Embodying madness amounts to gendering it through the female body, so as to reclaim the sexed subjectivity of the experience of madness and institutionalization, but, also, so as to move beyond victimology and reclaim agency through creating a new form of literature appropriate to rendering the specificity of these experiences. This empowering through literature also takes the form of the subversion of the discourse on both madness and surrealism, which I am now going to investigate.

III *Gendering Madness through Surrealism:*

Thus, we have seen that Zürn, Santos, and Carrington use tropes that enable them to reclaim their story, while differentiating their madness narratives from those by Nerval and Breton – even though Zürn writes that “les chimères des fous se ressemblent toutes” (Zürn 206). Furthermore, the narratives included here can all be read as a counterpoint to *Nadja*, whereby madness is now described from the madwoman’s viewpoint, as she is finally granted a voice. In *Nadja*, the reader has no direct access to the female character’s speech, but only receives her words as they are reported by the narrator, and Nadja’s character serves as a means in a narrative ultimately aimed at another woman, the narrator’s new lover – “Toi, bien sûr, idéalement belle” (Breton 158); thus, Nadja is a mere token in the narrator’s fulfillment of his fantasies of “amour fou.”

This part will, therefore, examine in which ways *L’Homme-Jasmin*, *En Bas*, and *La Malcastrée* constitute counter-discourses to narratives of madness that reify the mad woman, such as *Nadja*, insofar as the female narrator can be seen as Nadja herself, aka the mad woman, recovering a voice. In order to reappropriate their story, these three women writers takes up many of the phallogentric surrealist clichés on femininity, dream, and childhood, so as the better to subvert them, and to rewrite them into a feminist version of surrealism, thus giving rise to an “écriture féminine” of madness, and allowing for the creation of innovative narratives. Indeed, these texts also provide a parody of male narratives of madness, insofar as their narrators often seem to embrace madness as their new “essence,” and as a substitute for their femininity which is repeatedly described as the true “otherness.” *La Malcastrée* emphasizes this aspect by calling

the psychiatrist “la Dame Psychiatre” (LM 80), thus echoing the French phrase “Dame Nature” and pointing to madness as a new “nature.”

1) **Rewriting Nadja:**

In which ways can *En Bas*, *L’Homme-Jasmin*, and *La Malcastrée* be read as counterpoints to André Breton’s *Nadja* – and, to a lesser extent, to Nerval’s *Aurélia*? In Santos’s texts, the desire to reply to Breton’s *Nadja* is actually voiced by the author herself, and further developed in a manuscript that was found by her sister twenty-five years after her suicide and which was published in 2006 with the title *Effraction au réel*.

André Pieyre de Mandiargues, in his *Préface* to the French edition of *L’Homme-Jasmin*, replaces Zürn’s narrative in the lineage of a literary tradition starting with *Aurélia* and going all the way to André Breton’s *Nadja*. However, I would now like to make a few comments regarding certain translation choices, especially as far as the subtitle is concerned. In German, “Eindrücke aus einer Geisteskrankheit” means “impressions d’une *maladie* mentale.” It is quite surprising that the French translators, Ruth Henry and Robert Valançay, chose to replace “maladie” with “malade,” insofar as Zürn, just like Nerval, wrote at a time when she believed that she was – at least temporarily – cured, as can be seen in the title of the manuscript “Notes concernant la dernière (?) crise.” Zürn was very close to Ruth Henry and collaborated with her on the translation. However, since the French translation of *L’Homme-Jasmin* was only published after Zürn’s death, it is hard to know what she would have thought of this translation choice regarding its title.

The essentializing character of the term “malade mentale” is what allows André Pieyre de Mandiargues, in his *Préface*, to compare *L’Homme-Jasmin*’s female *narrator* with the *character* of Nadja, who is the *object* of Breton-narrator’s discourse. Such a comparison calls to mind the following sentence, which constitutes a turning point in Breton’s novel: “On est venu, il y a quelques mois, m’apprendre que Nadja était folle” (Breton 136). Breton does not write that “Nadja était *devenue* folle” but he chooses to use the verb “to be,” which turns Nadja’s character into the very embodiment of madness. Thus, in his *Préface*, Pieyre de Mandiargues perpetuates the reification of the mad woman, as the Surrealist movement had initiated it, by reducing the *Jasmine Man*’s author to her mental illness. And yet, I would like to demonstrate that Zürn uses tropes that enable her to re-appropriate her story, while differentiating it from Breton and Nerval’s narratives of madness, and that her narrative can be seen as a counterpoint to *Nadja*: this time, madness is, indeed, described from the madwoman’s viewpoint, who is finally allowed to speak up. In *Nadja*, the reader is only granted access to Nadja’s words through the mediation of the narrator’s discourse, and Nadja’s character is used as a trigger for a narrative ultimately aimed at another woman, the narrator’s new lover – “Toi, bien sûr, idéalement belle” (Breton 158); thus, for the narrator, Nadja is only a means toward the accomplishment of his fantasy of “amour fou.” In this respect, *L’Homme-Jasmin* finally allows for the madwoman’s voice to be heard – the madwoman who was so idealized by the Surrealists – and Zürn’s voice uses many of the Surrealists’ favorite themes, while skillfully subverting them, thereby subverting the numerous articles – among which can be found those by Ruth Henry and Jean-François Rabain – who, instead of paying her the announced tribute upon her death, perpetuate her Hans Bellmer’s shadow over her work. Namely, Bellmer’s influence had already loomed over her artistic

production during her lifetime, and yet, these tributes devote several pages to his work, in order to demonstrate how much she owes him, since, according to them, he taught her everything.

a) Returning the Gaze through the Medusa figure:

Central to all four texts studied here is the image of the gaze, which echoes Michel Foucault's *Histoire de la folie*, but, also, *Nadja*, in which Breton places great emphasis on Nadja's eyes – the first thing he notices about Nadja is indeed her eyes: “Je n'avais jamais vu de tels yeux” (*Nadja* 64). However, Nadja's eyes are devoid of a gaze, since Nadja is actually the *object* of the narrator's gaze throughout the novel, reified as the “madwoman” by his pseudo-scientific approach¹¹². In *Histoire de la folie*, talking about the invention of psychoanalysis, Foucault writes that “la folie n'existe plus que comme être vu” (Foucault 507), which seems to exemplify what is at stake in *Nadja* as well as in *La Malcastrée*, *En Bas*, and *L'Homme-Jasmin*, whose female narrators are constantly being gazed at. In Carrington and Santos's narratives, the gaze is the objectifying one cast by male psychiatrists on the “mad woman.”

Santos juxtaposes her eyes with her scars in the following depiction of her face: “Electricité ma face usée déjà, rides mélancoliques, commissures des lèvres, sillons de myope autour des yeux, mes cicatrices. [...] Rien. J'ai perdu mon visage sans m'en rendre compte. Je ne peux revenir en arrière et reprendre le regard fœtal” (LM 69). “Reprendre le regard fœtal” could be read both as the non-gaze, i.e., the inability to see oneself, and as the object being gazed at

¹¹² “[...] le ton adopté pour le récit se calque sur celui de l'observation médicale, entre toutes neuropsychiatrique, qui tend à garder trace de tout ce qu'examen et interrogatoire peuvent livrer, sans s'embarrasser en le rapportant du moindre apprêt quant au style” (*Nadja* 8).

without being able to return the gaze. Since Santos often subverts psychoanalytical concepts throughout her texts, the gaze calls to mind Lacan's "stade du miroir," all the more so as, in all four texts studied here, the mirror is a recurring, allegorical motif.

The motif of the eyes – and, more precisely, of the blue or green eyes – constitutes a common thread to the four narratives. Towards the end of *La Malcastrée*, the narrator suddenly remarks: "Omission que j'ai faite: la Dame Psychiatre avait les yeux bleus" (LM 80), as if it were a major piece of information crucial to the plot development. In *L'Homme-Jasmin*, the jasmine-man (or white man) is characterized by his blue eyes, which serve as a link between the realms of reality and of dream/madness, since the narrator suddenly realizes that her son has blue eyes because the jasmine-man is his father.

In *En Bas*, the green eyes are the guiding thread imagined by the narrator, so as to establish a continuity between the outside world and the space of the psychiatric hospital:

A ce moment-là, on chantait dans la ville 'Los Ojos Verdes', d'après un poème de Garcia Lorca. Les yeux verts avaient toujours été pour moi ceux de mon frère, et maintenant c'étaient ceux de Michel, d'Alberto et d'un jeune homme de Buenos Aires que j'avais rencontré dans le train entre Barcelone et Madrid... Les yeux verts, les yeux de mes frères qui me délivreraient enfin de mon père (Carrington 32-33).

However, these men's eyes are not mere objects to be looked at, as are "les yeux de fougère de Nadja," but they pose a threat to the female narrator's very identity. Thus, in *En Bas*, the narrator acknowledges the powerful influence exerted over herself by the psychiatrist Don Mariano Moralès in the following terms: "[...] je reconnus un *maître* parce que, de la minuscule pupille de ses yeux clairs, jaillissaient les *rayons* roux qui m'avaient hypnotisée déjà dans les regards de Van Ghent et de Don Luis. Celui-ci était Don Mariano Moralès" (Carrington 59). This

echoes “les insoutenables *rayons* de l’inquiétante blancheur émis par l’Homme Blanc” (Zürn 143) in *L’Homme-Jasmin*. In both cases, the male gaze is viewed as threatening, all the more so as, in *En Bas*, a comparison is established between the psychiatrist’s eyes and those of a Nazi whom the narrator had met before being institutionalized. She then presents green eyes and lemon as the “key” to her story, which, again, reads like a detective novel: “Je lis, page 341 du *Miroir du Merveilleux*, ce passage de Jarry : ‘O, la lubricité de leurs yeux verts et le givre de leur regard de marronnier.’ Les yeux verts et le citron sont, je crois, les clés de cette histoire” (Carrington 70-71). It is striking that, in *La Malcastrée*, the only instance of a non-threatening gaze is that of the female psychiatrist’s blue eyes. However, the psychiatrist/psychoanalyst’s gaze is subverted, since the three narrators are able to gaze back through literature – i.e., through turning these men into characters within their stories.

In *L’Homme-Jasmin*, one of the central figures of the narrative is that of the Medusa, first alluded to with the hotel’s name, “Minerva” – Minerva being the goddess of wisdom, carrying a shield ornate with a representation of the Gorgon’s head, and having been, according to mythology, directly conceived from her father’s head, without any maternal intervention. Then, just after the narrator’s mother has appeared to her as a giant spider, the narrator recounts the following nightmare:

pendant la nuit, elle rêve d’une créature belle et dangereuse. Tout à la fois fille et serpent – aux longs cheveux. Cette créature médite la destruction du monde qui l’entoure. Alors, au cours d’une opération effectuée avec le plus grand soin, on lui ôte tout ce qui pourrait lui permettre de préparer cette destruction. On lui enlève le cerveau, le cœur, le sang et la langue. En tout premier lieu on lui enlève les yeux, mais on oublie de lui enlever les cheveux. C’est là l’erreur (Zürn 17).

Ruth Henry and Katharine Conley both comment that the fragmentation of this Medusa figure's body is evocative of Bellmer's dolls and of the fragmentation of the woman's body. And yet, insofar as this episode – or, rather, this vision – occurs following her perception of her mother as “impure” and spider-like, it seems to me that it corroborates the ambivalence experienced by the narrator toward the biological aspect of the woman as mother.

As Vanda Zajko and Miriam Leonard remark, in their edited volume of essays entitled *Laughing with Medusa: Classical Myth and Feminist Thought*, the figure of the Medusa has been “adopted as a sign of powerful womanhood by feminists” (Zajko and Leonard 9). These two authors build on Hélène Cixous's text, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” which is regarded as one of the foundational texts of the movement known as “écriture féminine,” and explore the centrality of classical myth in the development of feminist thought. In this perspective, it is noteworthy that the Medusa figure evoked by Zürn is endowed with shifted power – thus providing a re-interpretation of the myth. Namely, her power no longer lies in her gaze, but in her hair. Ultimately, “on oublie de lui enlever les cheveux. C'est là l'erreur” points to the image of an invincible woman-figure, which contradicts Henry and Conley's interpretation of the image as evocative of Bellmer's dismembered dolls. If it is, then it is rewritten in an appropriative, triumphant version.

The theme of fragmentation and dis-membering of the woman's body echoes being “dis-(re)membered” by history and embodies the fragmentation of the Self that occurs in madness. It is also at stake in the depictions of *La Malcastrée*'s narrator's fragmented body: “Mes ovaires seront des cerises fanées... [...] Les adultes me volent. Je m'arrache les seins, je les mets sur un plateau. J'ôte mes ovaires, je les laisse rouler sur le trottoir. Je suis pure, je ne suis pas femme. Je

n'ai pas encore grandi. [...] Je veux me maintenir dans l'enfance. Je meurs à vingt ans trois quarts, jamais je ne serai adulte. Je meurs à vingt heures trois quarts, jamais je ne serai la nuit" (LM 84). Time is, again, suspended, and the narrator clearly voices her desire to stop the course of "natural" time. The dis-membered body parts are the signifiers of her femininity – which parallels Zürn's "child-mother" figure.

The French translation of *L'Homme-Jasmin* has kept the German anagrams, which mirror the fragmentation of the female body in the fragmentation of words. These anagrams rely a lot on the double entendre of the term "Irre," as in "Ich bin eine Irre" and "Ist es eine Irre?" (Zürn 32 and 40): "I am mad" or "I am mistaken"; "Is she a madwoman?" or "Is she a mistake?" The narrator seems, indeed, to take the wrong way on several occasions throughout the narrative, until, finally, she reaches Sainte Anne and comments: "Elle se sent chez elle à Sainte Anne. Elle ne se fait aucun souci. Elle est arrivée au bout de son voyage" (Zürn 197). She also recurrently mentions that the psychiatric hospital is a shelter ("un refuge" – Zürn 169) and talks about "la vieille tentation qui la reprend: n'est-il pas plus simple pour elle de finir sa vie dans une clinique psychiatrique?" (Zürn 160). The anagrams inserted in the text take on the aspect of magical formulas, allowing for a cynical, subverted rewriting of the *Wizard of Oz*: namely, whereas Dorothy succeeds in going back to Kansas thanks to the ruby slippers, after uttering the required magical formula, and after overcoming many obstacles through initiatic adventures that have enabled her to find her room in society, *L'Homme-Jasmin*'s narrator does not find any room for herself in society, or in reality, as a woman. She reaches the end of her adventures upon entering the psychiatric hospital. Thus, traditional social values are reversed, in that madness becomes synonymous with freedom and creativity – "elle espère continuer à être folle pour pouvoir continuer à écrire" (Zürn 71) – and superiority: "De quels dons la folie n'a-t-elle pas le pouvoir

de la doter! Elle lui apparaît comme un état d'élection" (Zürn 119). Carrington also initially embraces madness as her new "essence," in a kind of self-reification: "Ce bon bourgeois britannique constata immédiatement que j'étais folle [...]" (Carrington 27). However, this is only at the beginning of the narrative. As her account of madness unfolds, she increasingly rejects madness – characterized by blurred gender definitions – and eventually refers to herself as a woman when she is restored to "mental health" – which could be read as the resolution of the plot.

For Santos, the diagnosis of madness is experienced as a sentence of non-existence and as the punishment of no longer seeing oneself: "Tu n'existes pas, tu es folle [...]. La plus dure des punitions de ne pas se voir" (LM 96). Being condemned to not seeing oneself evokes both the Medusa and Lacan's stade du miroir. Perhaps this is where the most fundamental difference between madness narratives "officially" pertaining to surrealism, such as *En Bas* and *L'Homme-Jasmin*, and madness narratives that do not belong to the movement, such as Santos's, could be found. Contrary to Santos, surrealist female authors welcome madness, not as an illness inflicted upon them, but as a "gift." For Zürn, madness itself is presented as the source of inspiration for the narrative ("continuer à être folle pour pouvoir continuer à écrire"). However, for Carrington, writing is presented as a means towards an end: exorcising the traumatic memory of her time in the clinic in Santander. Thus, madness is not heralded as the *sine qua non* condition for writing; to the contrary, *En Bas* starts with a warning that retaining mental and physical health is essential to literary creation.

b) Nadja talks back:

Carrington's choice to address her narrative to an absent interlocutor calls to mind *Nadja*, a narrative that André Breton addresses – as we have seen – to his new love interest. The same can be said of *L'Homme-Jasmin* and *La Malcastrée*, the first narrative being triggered by the quest for the jasmine-man, while the second one is a quest for the lost lover. This brings up another interesting aspect of Carrington and Zürn's work, pertaining to their status as women within the surrealist movement. Namely, Conley extensively compares *En Bas* with *Nadja*, arguing that Carrington's autobiographical narrative can be read as a version of *Nadja* as seen from inside, from Nadja's viewpoint – her viewpoint being completely absent from Breton's narrative.

However, is it really possible to consider *En Bas* to be a counterpoint to *Nadja*? The character of Nadja is, by definition, deprived of a voice, as an object of the narrator's desire. As for Carrington, she achieves a type of artistic and intellectual independence *after* mourning the loss of her mentor, Max Ernst. In this perspective, it seems worth noting that Leonora Carrington insists on attributing the cause for her descent into madness to her separation from Max Ernst, whereas, from a psychiatric standpoint, it is somewhat rare that such an event could be considered to be the sole trigger to so radical a nervous breakdown. The loss of the loved one only constitutes a trigger, revealing deeper issues (one of them being the rape she underwent in the Madrid hotel room). And yet, Carrington does not seem to be trying to understand the actual origin of her illness, and prefers a romantic approach, perhaps in keeping with the “amour fou” heralded by André Breton.

Ironically, Carrington thus chooses the version that corroborates Michel Foucault's misogynistic "theory" of female madness, according to which female madness is traditionally caused by deceived passion or the loss of the beloved, which he demonstrates by referring to the example of Ophelia, Shakespeare's character. It is quite striking that, in a study aimed at rehabilitating the figure of the "mad" and at demonstrating the culturally-determined notion of a "norm," Foucault reproduces the alienation of the mad woman that Yannick Ripa denounces in his study of female madness in the nineteenth century¹¹³ as the main cause of female madness. *A priori*, Carrington and Santos seem to adopt this male-dominated, reductive vision of female madness, as a consequence of passion and disappointed love. However, as Katharine Conley remarks, Carrington's obsession with a father figure embodying an all-mighty authority most likely also constitutes a source of Carrington's problems – which points to the inner tensions she experiences within the misogynistic surrealist movement, just like Zürn – this situation being doubled by the male-dominated world of the psychiatric clinic.

In the same manner as Tituba willingly enters slavery, out of love for John Indien, *L'Itinéraire psychiatrique's* narrator declares that she entered what she calls "le système psychiatrique" out of love: "Je suis folle... folle... folle... peut-être que je le suis après tout... n'importe comment je suis bizarre... [...] Avant j'étais anonyme. J'existe aux yeux de la société comme folle. Par amour, j'entre dans le système psychiatrique" (IP 16). Santos poses her madness narrative as a challenge to narratives in the vein of *Nadja*: "La folle hurle. Le fou se tait sauf les homosexuels. Le fou montre sa coupure avec le monde dans un grand silence. L'homme a eu la parole avant sa naissance. La femme doit la conquérir en passant souvent par les chemins

¹¹³ "la démesure amoureuse est mise au pilori" (Ripa 145) and "dès 1842 le Dr Dulaure désigne l'amour comme une des causes de la folie" (Ripa 71).

de la folie et le cri” (IP 127). “La folle hurle” is of course reminiscent of female hysteria. The second sentence, “le fou se tait sauf les homosexuels,” probably refers to the growing homosexual liberation movements in France, with the creation of the FHAR (Front Homosexuel d’Action Révolutionnaire) in 1971.¹¹⁴ The rest of the passage clearly poses female madness as a re-appropriation of language, i.e., of one’s story. “La femme doit conquérir [la parole] en passant souvent par les chemins de la folie” gives a new turn to madness, as a means to reclaiming agency, precisely by using the path traced by men – i.e., the “madwoman” as the object of male discourse, deprived of a voice of her own as in *Nadja* – that is to say, that becoming mad allows for the liberation of language.

Throughout both of Santos’s texts, this correspondence between language and physicality – with “mots” calling to mind the homophony with “maux” – is explicitly highlighted in the many allusions to madness as being dis-embodied, and to writing as becoming a means to finding the body again: “J’écris au lit avec une machine. *J’ai définitivement perdu le corps. J’espère le retrouver par les mots*” (IP 56). The narrator oscillates between elated depictions of her relationship with “l’amant” or “l’homme” in the lineage of the surrealist “amour fou” and harsh criticism of the way in which her lover treated her: “*Ma vie avec C [...] En réalité il m’a violée mise enceinte à 17 ans*” (IP 57). “En réalité” seems to question the status of both *La Malcastrée* and *L’Itinéraire psychiatrique* as autobiographical texts, by revealing that even the romanticized description of the narrator’s love affair pertains to the dreamlike narrative that she announces in the Incipit as the preferred tone for her madness narrative. This raises the issue of the reliability of the “mad” narrator, and this is why I prefer to call both texts “autofictions,”

¹¹⁴ It is worth noting that, in the 1970’s, homosexuality was still considered to be a psychiatric disorder by the DSM.

insofar as, by re-appropriating her story of madness through literature, the narrator also seems to rewrite her life into fiction, thereby turning sexism and alienation into re-empowerment through fiction. By fictionalizing her love affair into romanticism, Santos literally re-writes her story into a new, more satisfactory version, while also skillfully rewriting dominating male romantic clichés about love, such as “vivre d’amour et d’eau fraîche,” into a more corporal and gendered version: “[...] Les dimanches où l’on vivait d’huîtres et de sperme” (IP 58), which I also read in a surrealist interpretation framework.

En Bas also echoes *Nadja* in the treatment of the narrator by her male Psychiatrists, which is reminiscent of the way in which Breton-narrator treats Nadja:

Il me prit par le bras et m’emmena dans un pavillon désaffecté:

- Je suis le maître, ici.
- Je ne suis pas propriété publique de la maison. J’ai, moi aussi, des pensées et une valeur privée. Je ne vous appartiens pas (Carrington 86).

However, Carrington-narrator rejects manipulation and domination, and, throughout her narrative, she actually depicts herself as an empowered version of Nadja, up to the point where she actually escapes the hospital. The account of her internment reads as a sequel to *Nadja*, who would have managed to come back from “la première frontière de la connaissance,” i.e., madness, so as to tell the story: “*Le 23 Août 1943*. Il y a maintenant exactement trois ans, j’étais internée dans la clinique du Dr. Moralès, à Santander (Espagne), considérée par le Dr. Pardo, de Madrid, et le consul britannique, comme folle incurable. Depuis ma rencontre fortuite avec vous, que je considère comme le plus clairvoyant, je me suis mise, il y a une semaine, à réunir les fils qui auraient pu m’amener à traverser la première frontière de la connaissance” (Carrington 7). Even Carrington’s foreword to her narrative takes on undertones of Breton’s *Nadja*, while also

acknowledging her episode of madness as a learning experience: “Avant d’aborder les faits de cette expérience, je tiens à dire que l’arrêt prononcé contre moi par la société à ce moment-là était probablement, et même sûrement, un bien car j’ignorais l’importance de la santé, c’est-à-dire la nécessité absolue d’avoir un corps bien portant pour éviter le désastre dans la libération de l’esprit” (Carrington 8). Thus, *En Bas* definitely mixes several genres, by being presented as a detective novel, as a madness narrative, as an autofiction, and as a Bildungsroman, in which the young narrator comes out of the psychiatric hospital strengthened and wiser, after having had to overcome many obstacles.

On the other hand, Santos’s psychological suffering seems to be doubled and aggravated while at the hospital, as she has internalized the reifying gaze of the psychiatrist on the mad woman: “Je voudrais tenter d’expliquer mon entrée en psychiatrie, 8 années en psychiatrie en commettant les mêmes erreurs que les psychiatres, en chosifiant la malade, en me chosifiant, oublier le milieu qui m’entoure, c’est-à-dire l’amour qui a fui, mes romans, mon métier d’enseignante qui a déterminé le choix des médecins. Je sais que je ne parlerai que de l’amant qui m’a dévorée, que de la littérature qui m’a détruite” (IP). This passage could also have been written by Nadja after being institutionalized, with the “amant qui m’a dévorée” calling to mind Breton-narrator using Nadja towards his selfish goals, and the “amour-fou” being only “fou” for the manipulated woman, reified as an object of study by the narrator’s cold gaze.

La Malcastrée transcends the genre of autofiction by also claiming to be a manifesto – a sort of counterpoint to the *Manifeste du surréalisme* and a feminist manifesto: “Nous rédigerons notre manifeste. Nous inventerons la parole. [...] Nous cultiverons le délire. Nous mordrons les testicules de ton mari et nous les recracherons, des fruits pourris. Nous

l'empoisonnerons. Nous nous échapperons de la prison des hommes. Nous ne serons plus martyrisées. Nous serons femmes à vulve volcanique. Nous nous ouvrirons comme terre trop chaude et délivrerons l'enfant. [...] Nous refuserons de grandir" (*La Malcastrée* 44). "La prison des hommes" echoes both gender discrimination and "le carcan de la logique" mentioned by Breton in *Nadja*, from which madness constitutes a liberation. Here, the narrator of *La Malcastrée* becomes Nadja vindicating her madness and claiming it as her new freedom.

2) Gendering Surrealism:

a) Surrealist Madness:

The justification for proposing a joint study of Emma Santos with Leonora Carrington and Unica Zürn is strong. Not only is it because the four texts included here are accounts of madness and institutionalization, but, also, even though Emma Santos was not officially part of the surrealist movement, the literary style that she uses in *La Malcastrée* and *L'Itinéraire psychiatrique* is extremely similar to what would be termed surrealism (extensive use of the fantastic and of dreams, references to childhood, and emphasis on language). These four narratives of madness can be read in conversation, insofar as they offer a rewriting and gendering of surrealist concepts. As we have seen previously, they do so by resorting to the marvelous, to surrealist lineages, to childhood, and to a subversion of traditional chronology. But they also do so by gendering these traditionally misogynistic surrealist concepts and by constantly blurring gender categories. In the previous part, I have shown how *L'Homme-Jasmin*, *En Bas*, and *La Malcastrée* could be read as counterpoints to Breton's *Nadja*, by reversing the reifying narrator's

gaze on the mad woman, and by giving a voice to the mad woman, who is thus no longer an object to be talked about, but becomes the subject of the narrative and the author of her story. Now, I am proposing to explore how Zürn, Santos, and Carrington go further than male surrealists have gone, by embracing madness as their new “essence” replacing femininity. Unlike their male counterparts, they do not use madness as a trope of discourse, as a mere *pretext* to a self-centered text, but they (re)appropriate male discourses on the madwoman, so as to move beyond victimology, and become *agents* of the discourse on (female) madness, at the same time reclaiming surrealist clichés on women, love, and madness. Thus, let us now explore *En Bas*, *L’Homme-Jasmin*, and *La Malcastrée* in a surrealist perspective, so as to find out if Santos’s narrative of madness is colored or not through the prism of surrealism, and to study the relationship between surrealism and mental illness/madness.

Katharine Conley, in *Automatic Woman: the Representation of Woman in Surrealism*, devotes a chapter to Leonora Carrington: “Beyond the Border: Leonora Carrington’s Terrible Journey.” According to Conley, *En Bas* can be read as a surrealist art work thanks to two characteristics:

- 1- “the tale is fantastic, colored by dream and drug experiences, describing a genuinely alternative mental state”
- 2- “the narrative’s structure and metanarrational component (it reads like a mystery tale in which Carrington plays both the roles of victim and sleuth) highlight the role of language itself” (Conley 63).

First of all, the criteria used by Conley so as to decide that *En Bas* is a surrealist narrative are a little disturbing, insofar as anybody who spends time in a mental hospital is bound to have to take “drugs”; does this imply that anybody who has been institutionalized could be considered a “surrealist”? This is why I would like to study more closely *En Bas* and *L’Homme-Jasmin*, so as

to explore the influence of surrealism on these narratives, and, in so doing, to try to define the “nature” of surrealism, by reading them against the two narratives by Emma Santos devoted to her stays in mental hospitals: *La Malcastrée* and *L’Itinéraire psychiatrique*.

Let us now look more closely at the opening lines of *En Bas*:

Il y a maintenant exactement trois ans, j’étais internée dans la clinique du Dr. Moralès, à Santander (Espagne), considérée par le Dr. Pardo, de Madrid, et le consul britannique, comme folle incurable. Depuis ma rencontre fortuite avec vous, que je considère comme le plus clairvoyant, je me suis mise, il y a une semaine, à réunir les fils qui auraient pu m’amener à *traverser la première frontière de la connaissance*. Je dois revivre cette expérience, parce que je crois vous être utile en le faisant, et je crois aussi que vous m’aidez à *voyager de l’autre côté de cette frontière en me conservant lucide, et en me permettant de mettre et de retirer à volonté le masque qui me préservera contre l’hostilité du conformisme*.¹¹⁵ Avant d’aborder les faits de cette expérience, je tiens à dire que l’arrêt prononcé contre moi par la société à ce moment-là était probablement, et même sûrement, un bien car j’ignorais l’importance de la santé, c’est-à-dire *la nécessité absolue* d’avoir un corps bien portant pour éviter le désastre dans la libération de l’esprit (*En Bas* 7-8).

This introduction raises the issue of the relationship between surrealism and madness, and of the very fine line that, according to Carrington, sets one apart from the other. This echoes Breton who, in *Nadja*, reverses the values of his time by stating that it is the “carcan,” the prison of logic that causes madness: “et aussi, mais beaucoup plus dangereusement, en passant la tête, puis un bras entre les barreaux ainsi écartés de la logique, c’est-à-dire de la plus haïssable des prisons” (*Nadja* 143). The rest of the paragraph reveals that, for Breton, the most important thing is the art of preserving appearances, that is to say, to retain the image of “mental health.” *Nadja*’s mistake was to exhibit her madness.

¹¹⁵ Italics are mine.

Thus, Nadja failed to remain “in control” of her madness. Santos echoes *Nadja* when she states that “je suis tombée dans le suicide, le vrai sans jeu, [...]” (IP 99); just like Nadja, Santos, Zürn, and Carrington were unable to *simulate* madness. So, the madness upheld by surrealists is a calculated and controlled form of madness – which ultimately corroborates Foucault’s theory, according to which real madness results in an “absence d’œuvre”¹¹⁶. Foucault explains that Nietzsche, Nerval, Artaud or Van Gogh are only productive as long as their “madness” remains limited in its scope. But one can then raise the hypothesis that it is maybe that pre-existing “faillie,” that predisposition to madness, which allows for an increased artistic production.

However, Santos and Zürn seem to contradict Foucault, in that they explicitly link literary creation/production to madness: “Les mots sont étroitement liés à mon corps, à ma maladie. [...] Se reconstruire avec des mots. Se reconstruire en espérant surtout ne jamais y arriver. *La Malcastrée*, c’est déjà si vieux. 1971. La recherche du comment. Le système des mots, comment on y entre. Ecrire comme on meurt ou écrire quand on ne meurt pas. Ecrire comme on se suicide.” “Se reconstruire en espérant surtout ne jamais y arriver” echoes Zürn’s “rester folle pour continuer à écrire.” In *Histoire de la folie à l’âge classique*, Michel Foucault devotes several chapters to the study of the relationship between “madness” and artistic creation. According to him, the period of time that precedes the total collapse of one’s personality and the fall into madness is characterized by hyper-productivity, as he demonstrates through examples of artists who happened to produce their greatest work just before sinking into madness. In Foucault’s view, the madness of Artaud, of Nietzsche, of Hölderlin or of Nerval reveals itself through an “absence d’œuvre”: “ne nous y trompons pas: entre la folie et l’œuvre, il n’y a pas eu

¹¹⁶ Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la folie*, (Paris : Gallimard, 1972) 555.

accommodement. [...] La folie est absolue rupture de l'œuvre" (Foucault 555-6). In Foucault's analysis, only the period preceding madness is a source of creativity, but madness itself is characterized by "l'absence d'œuvre" in all of the male artists he mentions. Foucault does not mention a single instance of a mad female artist. His examples are confined to men. In this perspective, in *Nadja*, one could say that, borrowing Foucault's phrase, madness becomes "précisément l'absence d'œuvre,"¹¹⁷ since *Nadja* is even deprived of a voice – by Breton – at the very moment when she is institutionalized. The turning point in the narrative is, to my reading, the narrator's strange statement that "on est venu, il y a quelques mois, m'apprendre que Nadja était folle" (*Nadja* 136). Not only does the use of the verb "être" suddenly reify Nadja, but, from then on, Nadja disappears from the narrative, which becomes, as I have said, addressed to Breton's current love interest.

Carrington's choice to address her narrative to an interlocutor can be accounted for by the fact that *En Bas*'s voiced purpose is to pass on a message regarding the potential "threat" to mental health raised by surrealism, insofar as Carrington seems to have written *En Bas* as a warning aimed at the surrealists, and, according to Conley, more precisely to women belonging to the surrealist movement, in order to remind them that they are earthly creatures, and not ethereal muses,¹¹⁸ and that contact with the world of surrealism can turn out to be destructive, in that it promotes an in-between mental state – between dream and reality, between lucidity and madness. The line is blurred and thin between "mental health," as Carrington reminds us in the opening of *En Bas*, and the loss of a sense of reality leading to madness. In this perspective, Breton appears to be manipulative, insofar as he manipulates women and madness, while

¹¹⁷ Michel Foucault, *op.cit.*, 555.

¹¹⁸ Katharine Conley, *Automatic Woman* (Lincoln and London: The University of Nebraska Press, 1996): 77.

keeping the stance of an outside observer, as *Nadja*'s narrator, just like a psychoanalyst would observe his patient from a distance. Nadja has indeed been compared with Dora, Freud's famous patient.¹¹⁹

In this respect, if we accept Conley's definition, according to which a "good" surrealist book must be written in an "alternative mental state," and if we acknowledge that the experience of madness is what allows authors such as Emma Santos and Unica Zürn to create a surrealist literary work, is it then possible to reverse the question and to wonder whether male surrealists, such as Breton himself, are at all capable of producing genuinely authentic surrealist works, in keeping with the criteria set forth in the *Manifeste*?

Namely, Breton has never experienced mental illness; and yet, in *L'Immaculée Conception*, a collection of poems composed in 1930, Eluard and Breton *simulate* mental illness, hoping to render a verbal impression from various types of psychiatric disorders. However, many critics, including Conley, have reproached *L'Immaculée Conception* with "ringing false" ("sonner faux"). According to Conley, Leonora Carrington and Unica Zürn's narratives are a lot more powerful and authentic than those by Breton, Soupault, and Eluard, because these women have directly experienced madness, whereas these male authors have only mimicked mental illness.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ See Susan Rubin Suleiman, "Nadja, Dora, Lol V. Stein: Women, Madness and Narrative." (In *Discourse on Psychoanalysis and Literature*. London: Methuen, 1988). 124-151. Suleiman compares Nadja with Dora, Freud's patient whom he describes in his essay "Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria" (1905).

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* p.58.

Indeed, only madness seems to correspond to “la résolution future de ces deux états, en apparence si contradictoires, que sont le rêve et la réalité” mentioned by Breton. In this perspective, can madness be ultimately considered, in practice, to be this “surréalité,” this “réalité absolue,” described by Breton in the *Premier Manifeste*? On this topic, it is interesting to read a few lines from Henri Pastoureau’s¹²¹ autobiography, bearing the promising title of *Ma Vie surréaliste: André Breton, les femmes et l’amour*. Pastoureau was a friend of Breton’s and here is what he writes, regarding *Nadja*, whom he calls “la fille”:

On y voit un personnage nommé Breton conduit comme un chien en laisse à travers les rues de Paris par *une folle*,¹²² au demeurant prostituée. [...] c’est une pauvre fille. [...] Son discours traduit la confusion des idées si ce n’est la débilité mentale. [...] Ses dessins – elle dessine beaucoup, par exemple sur les nappes de papier des restaurants bon marché – sont *les dessins d’une folle ou d’une surréaliste, ce qui, pour Breton, pour Freud, et pour moi-même est la même chose*¹²³ (Pastoureau 327-9).

Beyond the misogyny of this so-called friend of Breton’s, and the extremely offensive vocabulary he uses, the absolute correspondence between madness and surrealism is thereby established. However, since Pastoureau does not dwell on this topic, and since all nouns are feminine, the ambiguity remains, and it seems that the traditional discourse on madness as reification of the individual, which the surrealists rejected,¹²⁴ has only been partly overcome by these men, who, even though they like to think of themselves as “libérateurs” of the mad person’s speech, paradoxically maintain the women they mention in the status of objects of an excluding male gaze.

Thus, Breton, in the *Premier Manifeste*, writes:

¹²¹ Henri Pastoureau, *Ma Vie surréaliste: André Breton, les femmes et l’amour* (Paris: Maurice Nadeau, 1992).

¹²² My italics.

¹²³ My italics.

¹²⁴ André Breton, *Premier Manifeste du surréalisme*, p.313.

Reste la folie, la folie qu'on enferme [...]. Celle-là ou l'autre... Chacun sait, en effet, que les fous ne doivent leur internement qu'à un petit nombre d'actes légalement répréhensibles, et que, faute de ces actes, leur liberté ne saurait être en jeu. Qu'ils soient, dans une mesure quelconque, victimes de leur imagination, je suis prêt à l'accorder [...]. Mais le profond détachement qu'ils témoignent à l'égard de la critique [...] permet de supposer qu'ils puisent un grand réconfort dans leur imagination [...]. Et, de ce fait, les hallucinations, les illusions, etc, ne sont pas une source de jouissance négligeable. [...] *Les confidences des fous, je passerais ma vie à les provoquer.*¹²⁵ Ce sont gens d'une honnêteté scrupuleuse, et dont l'innocence n'a d'égale que la mienne. [...] Ce n'est pas la crainte de la folie qui nous forcera à laisser en berne le drapeau de l'imagination (*Manifeste* 313).

In this passage, the idealization and the simplification of madness clearly appear, and, in this perspective, it is striking that women and madness are referred to in the same at-once infantilizing and idealizing, albeit reifying and demeaning overtone.

Thus, both *En Bas* and *L'Homme-Jasmin* use most of the recurring themes of surrealism, such as the marvelous, dream, and imagination – but, then again, *La Malcastrée* also corresponds to these criteria. As Conley remarks, the fact that *En Bas* recounts a mental experience undergone under the influence of a drug – in this instance, Cardiazol – adds up to the surrealist aspect of the narrative. However, if we accept these criteria, is not any narrative of madness tinted with surrealism? Upon reading Emma Santos's madness narratives, the same stylistic processes and tropes can be found – including the obsession with childhood and the parallel between dream and madness – except for the address to another person used by Carrington. This raises the issue of the relationship between surrealism and madness: is it at all possible to sustain the state upheld by Breton, which reconciliates dream and reality, without sinking into madness? Is it at all possible to be “authentically” surrealist while retaining mental “balance”?

¹²⁵ This remark seems to foreshadow *Nadja*.

As Foucault demonstrated, madness is only a vector for artistic and literary creation outside of the “crise” itself: namely, Zürn, Santos, and Carrington are only able to give a literary account of their experience some time after experiencing it, and Nadja no longer produces anything after being institutionalized and is no longer granted a voice in Breton’s novel. The “crise” itself can then be considered, in this respect, characterized by “l’absence d’œuvre” mentioned by Foucault.

While Santos was not part of the surrealist movement, I would argue for an a-posteriori inclusion of her madness narratives in the “movement,” be it only because she keeps playing with a reversal of “traditional” logical values and concepts, thus exemplifying Breton’s manifesto and the “résolution future de ces deux états, en apparence si contradictoires, que sont le rêve et la réalité”: “A l’époque de *La Malcastrée*, je vivais la folie, j’écrivais la folie souvent à l’hôpital entre dedans et dehors, le réel et le rêvé, le vécu et l’imaginaire, action et passion étroitement mêlées. Les fantasmes, ils étaient bien la seule possibilité de réaccorder le corps et l’idée” (IP 84). Fantasies become the means to reuniting the body and the mind. Thus, Santos seems to offer a rewriting of the *Premier Manifeste* and of *Nadja*, from the madwoman’s viewpoint and from within the psychiatric hospital.

Now, here is one of Carrington’s hallucinations which Conley quotes as a typical “surrealist” example:

I knew that Christ was dead and done for, and that I had to take His place, because the Trinity, minus a woman and microscopic knowledge, had become dry and incomplete.

Christ was replaced by the Sun. I was Christ on earth in the person of the Holy Ghost¹²⁶
(*Down Below* 195).

This strongly echoes *Beloved* as a Christ-like figure, and could even be read as a counter-point to *Beloved*'s narrative, insofar as Carrington reclaims agency through becoming Christ herself and speaking up – which is not the case for *Beloved*, who, just like Nadja, is ultimately not given a voice. This vision of Christ, or God, as woman, is also present in *La Malcastrée*: “Dieu, s’il revient, il sera bien obligé de prendre forme de femme. Ce n’est plus le bonhomme prêchant dans le désert mais une femme hurlant dans l’asile des cafards grouillant autour d’elle. Le silence ou le cri” (LM 100). The mad woman is thus depicted as the true prophet, which allows for a feminist rewriting of biblical texts and of surrealism, further developed in the figure of the Immaculate Conception which I am about to explore, but, also, this points to a new feminist interpretation of the Bible: ultimately, is not the New Testament a testimony to woman as the all-mighty procreator, to whom Carrington, Zürn, and Santos are hinting at, in various ways? Namely, the Virgin Mary’s story amounts to being the story of reproduction without a man’s help and embodies the “pure” maternity alluded to by all three narrators. In *La Malcastrée*, as in *L’Homme-Jasmin* and *En Bas*, images of crucifixion hint at *cruci-fiction*, as images of crucified men seem to liberate the female narrator’s voice and to trigger the narrative: “Nous irons voir l’homme. *Il est couché sur la croix*. Il est tout nu. Il saigne, il souffre comme les malades. Nous rirons, nous le mépriserons. Nous nous masturberons sous son nez” (LM 23).

¹²⁶ “Je savais que le Christ était mort et achevé, que je devais prendre sa place, parce que la Trinité, privée de femme et de connaissance microscopique, était devenue sèche et incomplète. Le Christ était remplacé par le Soleil. J’étais le Christ sur la terre dans la personne du Saint-Esprit” (Carrington 64).

b) The Virgin as (Pro)Creator: Rewriting the Surrealist Concept of the Immaculate Conception:

Throughout Emma Santos's texts – both her autofiction *La Malcastrée* and her autobiographical text *L'Itinéraire psychiatrique* – madness and psychiatry are strongly gendered. Madness is alluded to as “la Femme-Folie” (LM 48) – with an upper-case “F” – and what is presented as being at stake in madness and institutionalization is the questioning of sexuality and gender. Thus, Santos offers both a rewriting of surrealism and of psychoanalytic concepts. Gender issues are at stake in the three madness narratives included here.

The ambivalence that *L'Homme-Jasmin*'s narrator feels toward her sex is clearly expressed when she states, as she is about to set the Minerva Hotel on fire, in Paris, that “elle a besoin d'un homme” (Zürn 64). A few pages later, she strongly rejects her female condition: “Et elle sent douloureusement les limites, l'étroitesse, la monotonie qui sont celles de la vie d'une femme” (Zürn 89). As Katharine Conley remarks,

to the reader, Zürn seems to have limitless access to the looking-glass world of her imagination. In fact, the overriding question is not merely whether she can, but whether she wants to, return from it, because the mechanics of being an Automatic Woman for oneself, as much as for a male surrealist partner – Hans Bellmer, in the case of Zürn – involves *an acceptance of Otherness in oneself* as a boon to creativity that endangers the facility to live anything akin to a normal life (Conley 79).

However, my argument is that the Otherness, for Zürn, is not so much madness as it is femininity. To the contrary, Zürn seems to accept madness as the privileged access to the realm of the supernatural and of creativity, as a shelter against an otherwise unbearable reality. The narrator wishes to accept madness as her essence, not only in order to go on writing and creating,

but also, perhaps, in order to escape her feminine condition, which she experiences as unlivable and unsustainable (“in(sou)tenable”); madness is presented as a kind of new biological nature replacing her preexisting condition as a woman. Thus, she suddenly recognizes that “il était nécessaire de devenir folle [...]”(Zürn 37) and she goes on to tell the policemen and the judge: “Mais *je suis folle*” (Zürn 68). She experiences her condition (her madness) as a liberation, which is why she does not understand the other inmates at Wittenau, who “n’ont d’autre idée en tête que de recouvrer la liberté et qui qualifieront de période cruelle de leur vie celle de leur séjour à Wittenau, comme si elles l’avaient passée en prison” (Zürn 86). In this self-assertion of her madness, one can also see the reappropriation of her condition as a subject, unlike Nadja, who remains trapped within the narrator’s masculine discourse and sentenced to madness by somebody else’s words.

Besides, Zürn, while seeming, *a priori*, to adopt the literary and surrealist clichés on the young woman who lost her mind out of disappointed passion, in resorting to allusions to Gretchen (Zürn 138 and 193) and Ophelia (Zürn 138), skillfully subverts them by relegating Bellmer and her ex-husband to mere “accessories,” which she uses as a pretext to her madness, and by depriving them of any power – including their “masculine” power of procreation, since she states that l’Homme Blanc is her son Christian’s father :

Et maintenant elle comprend tout d’un coup le secret de l’étonnante couleur bleue des yeux de son fils. Elle se rappelle la soirée d’hiver où elle éprouva le sentiment d’un vide étrange [...], et tomba dans un état de profonde absence dans le bureau de son mari. [...] Cette nuit-là où elle n’a pas senti que son mari l’ait touchée, l’Homme-Blanc a donné la vie à son fils, qui neuf mois plus tard est né avec ces yeux bleus (Zürn 50).

These lines call to mind Breton and Eluard's *Immaculée Conception*, since, further down the page, the narrator describes l'Homme-Blanc under the features of a "Saint" (Zürn 88 and 145), then as "Dieu" (Zürn 177).

Whereas, in *L'Homme-Jasmin*, the source of the narrator's inner struggle seems to find its origin in her impossibility to accept her feminine condition, in Santos, femininity is, at times, presented as the "ideal" that the narrator aspires to. First, madness is depicted as the loss of femininity through reification: "Je suis un tas effondré, tout sauf une femme" (LM 66). Unlike Zürn, Santos initially resists the reification of the mad woman, whereby madness would become her new "essence," substituting itself to her other "essence" - that of a school teacher: "*Entrée en psychiatrie* - Je ne suis pas une folle, une dingue... [...] Je suis institutrice" (IP 12). And, two pages later: "Je suis absente. Folle, je ne veux pas" (IP 14). Then, as the narrative unfolds, the narrator's fragmented body becomes a source of comfort, with each body part being reunited to the whole through maternity – in keeping with the narrator's central obsession: "Je m'aperçois que j'ai des seins, des genoux, un ventre, un enfant bientôt. Je me sens bien. Je me sens corps. Je répète le mot corps" (LM 86). Through literature, through giving birth to the narrative of her story, the narrator has literally managed to re-embody herself – "se corporiser." However, *La Malcastrée* is not deprived of the same ambivalence as that experienced by *L'Homme-Jasmin*'s narrator towards her sex: "Je te préfère à l'Homme parce que tu es mon double. Je veux des êtres qui me ressemblent. L'être opposé m'angoisse. [...] Deux folles en mal d'enfants, malades parce que nous ne pourrions jamais nous faire un enfant, refaire l'enfant" (LM 24).

Unlike Santos and Zürn, as Carrington's narrative progresses, she increasingly embraces her femininity, and no longer depicts fantasies of being androgynous or an animal: "Je

me mis à sauter de joie parmi les pommiers, sentant de nouveau la force, la souplesse et la beauté de mon corps” (Carrington 40). This points to a fundamental difference between *En Bas* and the other three narratives, in that Zürn and Santos never really “recovered” mental sanity and eventually committed suicide, whereas Carrington never suffered from any other bout of schizophrenia after her institutionalization in Santander, and went on to lead a long, productive life.

So, a priori, *L’Homme-Jasmin* seems to exemplify Breton and Eluard’s concept of the Virgin’s body as a liminal space between different temporalities, spaces, and realities, as Conley reminds us: “In *L’Immaculée Conception* André Breton and Paul Eluard implicitly metaphorize the automatic text as the Virgin’s body, occupying, as it does in Western cultural consciousness, a liminal space between apparently separate dimensions of time, space, and perceived reality” (Conley 79-80). Zürn seems to have internalized, and even pushed to the extreme, this male surrealist vision of the virgin’s body as identified to the automatic text, as we have seen. And yet, Unica manages to poke fun at the Surrealists’ exaltation of the concept of “Immaculée Conception” through recurring references to the color white throughout her narrative, starting with *l’Homme-Jasmin*, whom she can only call “*l’Homme Blanc*” once she realizes that the world of her dreams has invaded that of her reality. This recurring motif of the color white, especially through “les insoutenables rayons de l’inquiétante blancheur émis par *l’Homme Blanc*” (Zürn 143), parallels Zürn’s other obsession, concerning the color red; this motif of white and red, noticed by many critics¹²⁷ as being reminiscent of Antonin Artaud, whose favorite colors were those two, seems to me to be contributing to a reinforcement of the ambiguity established by the author between images of virginity and images of motherhood, and

¹²⁷ Katharine Conley, “Unica Zürn’s Vision of Madness,” p.94-95.

to subvert the phallogentric surrealist vision of the Virgin's body as a metaphor for automatic writing. Besides, Zürn's fits of madness are all triggered by the same element: "Elle déclare vouloir vivre seule. Ce désir qui chaque fois la conduit à la catastrophe, elle en connaît les conséquences, mais elle les oublie toujours au moment critique" (Zürn 158), which, once more, underlines the tension she experiences between her desire for freedom and her condition as a woman.

In "Notes concernant la dernière (?) crise," images of torture and crucifixion abound, and overlap with her delusions that Bellmer is going to visit her and that psychiatrists are going to give him an injection which "va lui permettre de se transformer lentement en femme [...]. Elle éprouve un certain mépris pour lui et se met à l'insulter, à l'avilir" (Zürn 178). Santos's narrative often also seems to echo Zürn's in its preoccupation with the blurring of gender categories brought about by the parallel world of the psychiatric hospital:

- Y a plein de machines, y a plein de manèges comme à la fête foraine avec des tas de lumières et du bruit. On va dans les machines et puis les filles se transforment en garçons et les garçons en filles, et puis on revit. C'est comme ça, la mort, pourquoi tu me demandes.
- Et si la machine se trompe et si la machine transforme tout en fille? (LM 92).

As Zürn describes another patient with whom she is sharing her room in Sainte Anne, and who is suffering from a "délire érotique," she writes:

Dans les attitudes qu'elle prend (au moment de la jouissance), cette malade ressemble à un de ces étonnants céphalopodes tels que Bellmer en a souvent dessinés: la femme faite de tête et de bas-ventre, les bras remplacés par des jambes, ce qui signifie qu'elle n'a plus de bras. Il ne lui manque même pas la langue que tirent les céphalopodes de Bellmer et qui a quelque chose de révoltant (Zürn 197).

These few lines go against Ruth Henry and Jean-François Rabain's remarks, for whom "au contact de Bellmer, Zürn put créer une œuvre personnelle" (Rabain 235) and "l'amour fou pour

Bellmer [...] la conduisit à la transgression de sa propre passivité” (Henry 231). Her depiction of this fellow inmate, and of her similarities with Bellmer’s cephalopods, echoes the opening depiction of the dismembering of the Medusa-Mother; thus, these images seem to highlight the culmination of the narrator’s rejection of a certain form of femininity – the femininity exalted by Surrealists. It seems surprising that critics have failed to notice this subversive aspect of Zürn’s writing of madness, through which everything pertaining to the female body ends up distorted by language – including by anagrams, whenever resorting to the mediation and sublimation of the *merveilleux* of fairy tales has become impossible.

The narrator herself remarks that “[...] elle éprouve de la honte à être elle-même une femme. Elle n’est rien qu’obscène. Elle est maigre et elle transpire” (Zürn 196). This disgust with the female body is also a recurring theme in Santos, who states, as soon as she enters the hospital and feels objectified by what she calls the “système”: “j’eus honte de mon corps” (LM 97). Contrary to Breton and to the other Surrealists who, while exalting the muse-woman as a tool for artistic creation, reify her by refusing her the status of subject, Zürn despises what she terms “l’homme normal” and relegates him to a subaltern status. She creates from scratch the ideal and “perfect” man, to whom she gives birth in her imagination, as l’Homme Blanc (or Homme-Jasmin):

Il est remarquable qu’elle se soit si peu intéressée à “l’homme normal.” Ses caresses, ses paroles lui semblaient sans charme, sans surprise. Qu’a-t-elle donc si obstinément espéré toute sa vie? Qu’a-t-elle attendu? Mais ils se ressemblaient tous et seule parfois l’intelligence les différenciait (Zürn 88).

The theme of the Immaculate Conception is just as pervasive in Santos’s texts – which, again, points to her proximity with Surrealism, of which *La Malcastrée* definitely offers an ironic

rewriting, as well as a feminist rewriting of Christianity: “La vierge fertile entrait en scène et récitait une prière. Elle se battait avec la Cantatrice voulant être la seule vedette. La vierge Immaculée Conception les mains retenant son ventre gonflé comme un ballon. Le ballon s’envole, elle court après la matrice sacrée. L’utérus monte au ciel” (LM 56). Pushing the irony further than Zürn-narrator, who imagines that it is the white man who is her son’s father, Santos-narrator establishes herself as an all-mighty procreator in her manifesto: “On se féconde nous-mêmes” (LM 108).

Towards the end of the narrative, *En Bas*’s narrator states that “[...] ayant terminé l’Oeuvre, je descendis l’escalier et retournai “en Egypte”” (Carrington 70). Carrington thus becomes God, which is unusual for a mad woman – as demonstrated by both Yannick Ripa and Laure Murat. God being personified as a man in Western culture, mad women tend to have delusions of being other biblical characters rather than God himself. Having delusions of herself as a God-like figure (“ayant terminé l’Œuvre”) further establishes *En Bas* as a narrative of reappropriation of madness – in which “l’Œuvre” can be read on several levels.

Thus, this study raises the issue of the “status” of surrealism: was Santos, who was writing at the same time as Zürn, not “officially” part of the surrealist movement because she was not “authorized” as such by a male surrealist, as was the case for Carrington and Zürn? I have now shown that her madness narratives resort to the very same techniques as those by Carrington and Zürn, despite her not being part of the surrealist movement. The four madness narratives included here all fill the criteria set forth by Katharine Conley for inclusion in surrealism, and question the elusive idealized notion of madness heralded by surrealists. They also subvert surrealist clichés in various ways, offer a rewriting of *Nadja* through a reversal of

the gaze, and challenge traditional gender notions through the surrealist concept of the Immaculate Conception.

Conclusion

Thus, *L'Homme-Jasmin*, *En Bas*, *L'Itinéraire psychiatrique*, and *La Malcastrée* constitute acts of empowerment through literature, by granting the “madwoman” a position within literary history and canons, within the history of madness, within psychoanalysis, within history itself, and within the surrealist movement. I have also argued for a posthumous inclusion of Emma Santos’s narratives of madness in the surrealist movement, even though she was not “validated” by being legitimized by a male surrealist partner – which questions both the status of madness within surrealism, and the very definition of surrealism.

Throughout the four narratives, the various levels of history and story become intrinsically linked: the narrators’ illusions of grandeur and paranoid delusions of persecution are linked to History with an upper-case “H,” which breaks into their personal story, interspersed with fictional intertextualities. Resorting to the *mise en abyme* of various fairy tales, along with biblical allusions and the embedding of History within personal story, enables Zürn, Carrington, and Santos to subvert chronology and genealogy, while inserting, in their narratives, surrealist maternal figures in various forms, so as to give rise to a feminine/feminist writing of madness (and a rewriting of the male discourse *on* female madness). Throughout the narratives, motherhood is depicted both as threatening and destructive, but also as all-mighty. One could see in this aspect a kind of “hyper-femininity” used by these authors in order to reappropriate the discourse on madness. In so doing, they exacerbate to their paroxysm phallogocentric, surrealist clichés on women, and, more specifically, on the madwoman, as an exaltation of literary creation, so as the better to subvert them.

Zürn goes so far as to endorse madness as her new, desired “nature” – more desirable than her biological female condition that brings her back to an unbearable reality. Trapped in the double bind of the surrealists’ fantasies of “Immaculée Conception,” oscillating between the Virgin and the mother figures, femininity ultimately appears to be the essential Otherness for the narrator, who is literally alienated from herself, whereas madness feels more familiar and allows for a re-empowerment and re-embodiment: namely, the narrator gives birth to the white man (l’homme-blanc), a “Saint,” which turns *L’Homme-Jasmin* into a counter-narrative of *Nadja*, whereby the power relationship between Nadja and the narrator, whose gaze is objectifying and cold, finds itself reversed in favor of the madwoman’s literary and fantasmatic creation. Besides, at the time when she committed suicide, Zürn was preparing a sequel to *L’Homme-Jasmin*, which she had entitled *L’Homme-Poubelle* (the “garbage man”) – which hints at the fact that the very figure of the jasmine-man as a saint had eventually proved insufficient and disappointing.

I would like to conclude with an excerpt from Zürn’s diary, entitled *Notes d’une anémique*, which has recently been translated into French by Ruth Henry:

Combien de fois ai-je souhaité que mon fils soit mon père, que ma fille soit ma mère! Souvent – souvent! [...] Je ne peux pas changer cette attente, ma folle, éternelle attente de la venue du miracle. Le miracle que je ne saurais décrire, oui, le miracle auquel sont dédiées ces pages (Henry 231).

This sentence at once summarizes and epitomizes the issues raised by *L’Homme-Jasmin*, but also by *En Bas* and *La Malcastrée*, that is to say, the issue of the “tragédie féminine essentielle”¹²⁸ as Marianne Hirsch described it, which characterizes a woman’s condition as a permanent state of loss. The madness of *L’Homme-Jasmin*’s narrator consists of a quest for an idealized, lost, and unachievable state of unity, as was the case for the city of Berlin at that time, through the

¹²⁸ “The loss of the daughter to the mother, the mother to the daughter, is the essential female tragedy”: Marianne Hirsch, “Mothers and Daughters.” *Signs* 7.1 (1981): 202.

impossible and tragic figure of the child-mother. This loss, or lack, and this blurring of genealogical and gender categories, metaphorize and characterize the madness narratives included here, whereby the meta-discourse on (pro)creation becomes a way of reclaiming one's story through words.

What makes Santos, Carrington and Zürn's narratives "surrealist" is not their official inclusion in the movement or not, but it is their writing about a state close to that of the "résolution entre rêve et réalité," in other words madness. In this perspective, the "authentic" surrealist narrative could be assimilated with writing madness. Furthermore, beyond the issue of the fine line between mental "health" and madness, dream and reality, it appears, upon reading *Nadja*, *En Bas*, *L'Homme-Jasmin*, and Henri Pastoureau's autobiography, that madness and femininity have been perceived by surrealists in a similar manner, that is to say, in a paternalistic and simplified perspective, at the same time idealized. Writing madness therefore appears to be the narrow margin of freedom left to women so as to escape such reification and to reappropriate both madness and surrealism – insofar as they avoid the pitfall of the no-return fall into madness, which was eventually the case for Unica Zürn and Emma Santos.

While I have shown that the slavery and Holocaust narratives included in the previous two chapters exemplify Cathy Caruth's statement that "to be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event" (Caruth 4) through the literal figure of the ghost – the specter of traumatized memory, in the madness narratives studied here the possession is obvious through obsessive imageries that keep possessing the text, in a rather unconscious way, since *En Bas* and *L'Homme-Jasmin* both claim to use a form of automatic writing in the surrealist tradition, thus resorting to free associations in their rendering of the experience of madness. The figure of the

double also stands for this possession by trauma and its repetition in all four narratives. However, whereas even such an inward-looking narrative as *Beloved* ends with an exorcism, only *En Bas* takes on a cathartic tone, since the very purpose of the narrative is to help her author move on – which she did. In Santos and Zürn’s case, there is no way out of the possession of trauma and madness. As the four narratives constituting *L’Homme-Jasmin* progress, their tone becomes darker and darker, foreshadowing *Vacances à Maison-Blanche* and *Sombre Printemps*, Zürn’s last texts, dealing mostly with obsessions of sexual abuse and violence. As for Santos, the motif of obsessive aborted and monstrous maternity is so pervasive that it creates a stifling, oppressive impression of a closed circuit in which the same obsessions recur again and again, from one text to the next, without any progression or resolution.

In these four texts, madness is presented as intrinsically linked to the female body, thereby apparently validating the dominating male discourse on female madness as exposed by Yannick Ripa in *La Ronde des folles*, that is to say, that madness is linked to biological and social stages in a woman’s life: puberty, child birth, and menopause. However, the women writers studied here adopt this male discourse so as the better to subvert it. In all three cases, madness is triggered by a form of gendered violence: rape in Carrington’s case, sexual abuse and abortion in Zürn and Santos’s case. This does not contribute to showing that female madness is definitely tied to the body but, to the contrary, that it is women’s condition as victims of gendered violence and gender injustice that is the cause of madness. By making their narratives revolve around a kind of “hyper-femininity,” these three authors skillfully re-embody their stories of madness, and participate in a discourse that challenges dominating male narratives on female madness and on surrealism. This “hyper-femininity” symbolizes the hyperbole as the preferred narrative mode in these accounts of madness: hyperbolic maternity (giving birth to the

reunified city of Berlin in *L'Homme-Jasmin*, and to Jerusalem in *En Bas*, while *La Malcastrée*'s "pondeuse universelle" conquers the outside world with hundreds of aborted fetuses), hyperbolic descents (the Holy Family). This hyper-femininity and this hyper-feminization of the narratives act as a reaction against the reification of the "mad woman," at-once reduced to her biological self and de-gendered by madness and the male-dominated discourse on it. Santos, Zürn, and Carrington embrace both madness and femininity, thus pushing their attached clichés to the extreme, while subverting them and re-appropriating them through literature.

Lastly, these madness narratives inscribe themselves in a multidirectional memory framework, insofar as they resort to the processes of "negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing" described by Rothberg as tools for highlighting memory's anachronistic quality as the source of its powerful creativity, thereby "opening up lines of communication with the past" (Rothberg 10). These madness narratives use these tools so as to re-inscribe themselves within the larger historical context and within the literary canon, thus creating an echo chamber with Holocaust and slavery narratives written by the women authors previously studied. As a consequence, reading in conversation these literary expressions of the gendering of traumatized memory sheds more light on the workings of each one of them, while giving rise to a shared, transnational voice of the gendering of trauma, through the study of tropes that recur across borders, across traumas, across genres, and across historical periods.

Conclusion

Using as a starting point a confrontation and combination of both Michael Rothberg's "multidirectional memory" and Marianne Hirsch's "postmemory," along with Cathy Caruth's trauma theory, I have argued that women writing about slavery, the Holocaust, and madness can be read *in conversation*, insofar as they all resort – albeit in different ways – to a common set of tropes: tormented motherhood, ghostly lineages, and the *mise en abyme* of subverted fairy tales and myths, so as to rewrite themselves into master narratives dominated by men (from history to psychoanalysis and literary canons). Far from trying to essentialize women's writings by centering my study on the female body, and, more specifically, on issues of motherhood, I have, to the contrary, demonstrated that all of these texts use this issue intentionally, in an endeavor to subjectivate their own stories and to challenge the socially-constructed notion of "motherhood."

So far, women's writings of slavery and the Holocaust have been kept at the margins of the canon of historical literature, in the same way as women's writings of madness have been kept at the margins of an already marginalized literature – literary accounts of madness. This study has thus contributed to a furthering of Rothberg's concept of multidirectional memory, by extending it to the literary memorialization of madness. My aim has been to show that, if multidirectional memory can emphasize trauma as a link between cultures, it can also be enriched by an inclusion of narratives of madness, through common tropes used both by women writers memorializing historical trauma and by women writers recording memories of mental illness and institutionalization. A close study of how the memory of the traumatic past becomes literature in these eight texts has served to emphasize how the circulation of recurring metaphors

and tropes between texts dealing with different time periods and different types of traumas creates a resonance among these women writers, allowing them to reclaim their experiences, while giving rise to a common literary voice on the gendering of trauma, in keeping with Rothberg's ideal of a "shared memory." This research has, therefore, been conducted along three main axes: interdisciplinary memory studies; the pivotal shift from passivity to agency fostered by literature, as a means to moving beyond victimology and to reclaiming marginalized history/ies; reading sexed subjectivity in trauma narratives.

Thus, in the first chapter, devoted to the gendering of slavery, I have shown how Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Maryse Condé's *Moi, Tituba* both challenge the dominating white, western, phallogentric historical discourse in various ways, by producing a counter-history, and, therefore, answer Glissant's call for a new approach to history. Though the fantastic and, more specifically, ghosts, are present in both novels, they embody collective memory and native culture in *Tituba*, while they symbolize personal past traumatic events in *Beloved*. Therefore, *Tituba*'s ghosts are benevolent, and complement her proleptic narrative with their prophetic voices, whereas *Beloved*'s ghosts are depicted as destructive, since they are the incarnation of an overwhelming past that cannot be dealt with, and ends up denying the future and destroying the present.

Both novels make extensive use of memory, but, again, in very different ways, since, in *Tituba*, memory serves for the creation of a myth, a creolized version of history, and a discourse on the present and the future, whereas in *Beloved* memory makes for an entirely analeptic, inward-looking narrative, through the re-enactment of the traumatic past over and over again, as the same story being told in circles through "rememory" – the other end of the spectrum established by Hirsch with postmemory. In this respect, Morrison's novel exemplifies Glissant's

theory of history “as a steadily advancing neurosis” (Glissant 65) for former slaves and their descendants. Both female authors succeed in creating a subversive type of narrative in order to account for the “otherness” arising from their main character’s race, gender, and social status, and, thus, to create an alternative type of historical novel, while creating a counter-discourse on the socially-constructed notion of “motherhood.”

The treatment of the theme of the “infanticidal” mother in these two novels mirrors, and deepens, the overall approaches to history and memory used by both authors: in Morrison’s case, an analeptic narrative, in which the narrator telling her story is being retraumatized by the all-engulfing past, and a proleptic, prophetic one in Condé’s case. The extensive use of memory enables both novels to depict history as a mental and metaphorical process rather than with facts, and to use embedded stories and the *mise en abyme* of fairy tales and myths, so as to reclaim authorship and agency of their traumatic past. The re-inscription of the tragedy of slavery in Western master discourses is achieved through a gendering of trauma in both novels, created by a rewriting of the “mother-daughter plot” (quoting Marianne Hirsch) and a “corporal” type of writing, in which the female body is granted a central position in various ways. Besides, *Beloved* opens with a claim to feminism, and ultimately offers a feminist rewriting of the Bible. On the other hand, *Tituba* also offers a feminist rewriting of the trauma of slavery, albeit in a more ironic manner: Condé subverts both the codes of the various genres and the canons of American literature, by proposing a rewriting of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* and of third-wave American and Black feminism. These subtexts can be read on two levels: on the one hand, the shift from passivity to agency, whereby both *Tituba* and Hester Prynne move beyond the status of victims, so as to reclaim their story and become the authors of their lives; on the other hand, the anachronistic and ironic inscription of feminist themes of “sisterhood” and “power”

within a narrative of slavery, hence creating a multidirectional resonance among slavery, American Puritanism, the Holocaust, the genocide of Native Americans, and the contemporary condition of women.

In the second chapter, I have explored the gendering of the Holocaust trauma through the issue of the mother tongue, the *mise en abyme* of Greek mythology and tragedy, and various narrative techniques expressing the return to the physical and metaphorical site of trauma, in the light of Hirsch and Miller's *Rites of Return*. We have seen that, in Charlotte Delbo's memoirs, the de-gendered Holocaust body is re-gendered through narration. Telling becomes a way of re-appropriating one's story and body. In the camps, telling was a matter of survival. After the camps, telling serves the dual purpose of transmitting and of healing – unlike Sarah Kofman, for whom telling seems to have equated dying, because no doubling was possible, despite the structural attempts at distancing herself through the narrative. In Kofman's *Rue Ordener, rue Labat*, returning to the site of trauma allows for the return of the “ça,” of the repressed trauma, and proved fatal. Unlike Cécile Wajsbrot and Delbo, for whom returning has a geographical meaning, for Kofman there is no physical returning, which stands for the psychological immediacy of trauma.

In and of itself, the figure of the doubling stands as a distinctive feature of Holocaust narratives by women, as opposed to those written by men, but, also, as a recurring, central trope of the gendering of trauma in all texts included in this work. In these Holocaust narratives, the doubling is staged through double consciousness in Delbo (the specter being the narrator's double), the doubling and polarization of the mother figure as “bad” or “good” in Kofman, and the male double of *Mémorial*'s narrator through the character of Orpheus. This doubling

technique testifies to the ability for these writers to fictionalize trauma, and, consequently, to detach themselves from it, and it is entirely absent from Holocaust memoirs by men.

Delbo's Holocaust memoirs and Kofman's autobiographical narrative also serve the purpose of repairing rights. Thus, telling means not only surviving but, also, facilitating (or attempting) mourning and reclaiming agency over one's story. This mourning is staged through a gendering of Greek mythology – especially the tragedy of Orpheus and Eurydice, embedded in both *Mémorial* and Delbo's narratives. The three texts also problematize gender issue by revolving around an attempt at (re)writing the mother-daughter story through the prism of the Holocaust trauma. These texts present us with three women characters falling under the category of the “childless” woman. Thus, both the Holocaust survivor and the survivors' descendent stage trauma through suffering from an inability to continue their lineage. Wajsbrot's character/narrator's rejection of the mother tongue is doubled by the fact that she does not voice any desire of becoming a mother, as her present identity is entirely engulfed by her father and aunt's past, making her unable to live in the present. Furthermore, towards the end of her journey, she experiences her childlessness and motherlessness as a form of freedom. The absence of lineage thus means freedom from postmemory and from the anxiety for posterity, as if time could stand still. On the other hand, several of the female survivors whose testimony is included in *Mesure de nos jours* want to forget and go on living, and, for them, a return to some form of “normalcy” can only be achieved through motherhood.

In these three authors' writings, an emphasis is therefore put on a kind of *hyper-femininity* of the narrator, either as a daughter or as a mother, i.e., in a biological role that will counter the destructive, de-gendering effects of the Holocaust. This obsession is voiced through

the omnipresence of the motif of motherhood as the ultimate fulfillment, or through recurring images of the absent mother figure or of the “bad” mother or the “two mothers” (Kofman), and metaphors of distorted lineages. In each story, the mother/daughter relationship is depicted as skewed or tormented in some way, and as an embodiment of trauma. Ghosts are also present throughout these stories, albeit in a different way from *Beloved* and *Tituba*. Thus, by rewriting and combining the two silenced stories, i.e. the mother/daughter relationship and the history of women in the Holocaust, these writers manage to reclaim their own historical experience, in a field still largely dominated by male narratives.

The main differences between these three texts could be accounted for by their different natures and origins: Wajsbrot is a survivor’s descendent who writes fiction, Kofman’s text is autobiographical, and Delbo’s texts are a hybridization between a memoir and a poetic fiction. However, it is worth noting that Kofman and Wajsbrot, who write in French, i.e., in a language different from their “mother” tongue, present us with very subversive narratives and perverted images of motherhood, that undermine the myth of family as the last haven against “Nazi evil,” while Delbo, whose mother tongue is French and who is not Jewish, retains a relatively traditional vision of a woman whose fulfillment and redemption can only occur through successful motherhood. And yet, one can nevertheless see in *Mesure de nos jours* and *Spectres, mes compagnons* an attempt at re-appropriating history through fiction, through a re-appropriation of the female body and through a fictionalization of the traumatic past into a rewriting of Eurydice’s story who, this time, does return from the underworld.

In Wajsbrot and Delbo, the hybridity of the narrative serves to open up the scope to other historical traumas (Chernobyl, Hiroshima, the Algerian War), in a multidirectional and cathartic

perspective that replaces the “nom hors nomination” of the Shoah in a larger framework, thereby creating bridges through healing and fictionalization of what has, initially, no meaning. On the other hand, in Kofman, the structural attempts at distancing and the many intertexts only seem to be able to re-traumatize the narrator, and do not allow for a broadening of the spectrum or a cathartic reworking of trauma through fiction.

In the third chapter, I have investigated the gendering of madness in Unica Zürn’s *L’Homme-Jasmin*, Leonora Carrington’s *En Bas*, and Emma Santos’s *L’Itinéraire psychiatrique* and *La Malcastrée*, and have shown that these psychiatric memoirs constitute acts of empowerment through literature, by granting the “madwoman” a voice and a position within literary history and canons, within the history of madness, within psychoanalysis, within history itself, and within the surrealist movement.

Throughout the four narratives, the various levels of history and story become entangled: the narrators’ illusions of grandeur and paranoid delusions of persecution are linked to History with an upper-case “H,” which breaks into their personal story, interspersed with fictional intertextualities. Resorting to the *mise en abyme* of various fairy tales, along with biblical allusions and the embedding of History within personal story, enables Zürn, Carrington, and Santos to subvert chronology and genealogy, and echoes the technique of doubling to which Holocaust survivors resort, while inserting in their narratives surrealist maternal figures in various forms, so as to give rise to a feminine/feminist writing of madness (and a rewriting of the male discourse *on* female madness). Throughout the narratives, motherhood is depicted both as threatening and destructive, but also as a form of empowering. One can see in this aspect the same “hyper-femininity” as in slavery and Holocaust narratives – a hyper-femininity used by

these authors in order to reappropriate the discourse on madness. In so doing, they exacerbate to their paroxysm phallogocentric, surrealist clichés on women, and, more specifically, on the madwoman, so as the better to subvert them.

The issues raised by *L'Homme-Jasmin*, *En Bas* and *La Malcastrée* are epitomized by the “tragédie féminine essentielle”¹²⁹ as Marianne Hirsch described it, which characterizes a woman’s condition as a permanent state of loss. This loss, or lack, and this blurring of genealogical and gender categories, metaphorize and characterize these madness narratives, whereby the meta-discourse on (pro)creation becomes a way of reclaiming one’s story through words. Thus, madness is depicted as not only blurring gender categories, but as giving birth to new gender categories, through the figure of the androgyn in Carrington, the pseudogyn in Santos, and the child-mother in Zürn. These figures stand for the mad woman’s re-embodiment of her silenced story.

While I have shown that the slavery and Holocaust narratives included here exemplify Cathy Caruth’s statement that “to be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event” (Caruth 4) through the literal figure of the ghost – the specter of traumatized memory – in these madness narratives the possession is obvious through obsessive imageries that keep possessing the text, in a rather unconscious way, since *En Bas* and *L'Homme-Jasmin* both claim to use a form of automatic writing in the surrealist tradition, thus resorting to free associations in their rendering of the experience of madness. The figure of the double also stands for this possession by trauma and its repetition in all four narratives. However, whereas even such an

¹²⁹ “The loss of the daughter to the mother, the mother to the daughter, is the essential female tragedy”: Marianne Hirsch, “Mothers and Daughters.” *Signs* 7.1 (1981): 202.

inward-looking narrative as *Beloved* ends with an exorcism, only *En Bas* takes on a cathartic tone, since the very purpose of the narrative is to help her author move on – which she did. In Santos and Zürn’s case, there is no way out of the possession of trauma and madness, despite the attempts at reclaiming one’s story and agency.

In these four texts, madness is presented as intrinsically linked to the female body, thereby apparently validating the dominating male discourse on female madness. However, the women writers studied here adopt this male discourse so as the better to subvert it. By making their narratives revolve around a kind of “hyper-femininity,” these three authors skillfully re-embody their stories of madness, and participate in a discourse that challenges dominating male narratives on female madness and on surrealism. This “hyper-femininity” symbolizes the hyperbole as the preferred narrative mode in these accounts of madness: hyperbolic maternity, hyperbolic descents. This hyper-femininity and this hyper-feminization of the narratives act as a reaction against the reification of the “mad woman,” at-once reduced to her biological self and de-gendered by madness and the male-dominated discourse on it. Santos, Zürn, and Carrington embrace both madness and femininity, thus pushing their attached clichés to the extreme, while subverting them and re-appropriating them through literature.

Finally, these madness narratives inscribe themselves in a multidirectional memory framework, insofar as they resort to the processes of “negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing” described by Rothberg as tools for highlighting memory’s anachronistic quality as the source of its powerful creativity, thereby “opening up lines of communication with the past” (Rothberg 10). These madness narratives use these tools so as to re-inscribe themselves within the larger historical context and within the literary canon, thus creating an echo chamber with

Holocaust and slavery narratives written by the women authors previously studied. As a consequence, reading in conversation these literary expressions of the gendering of traumatized memory sheds more light on the workings of each one of them, while giving rise to a shared, transnational voice of the gendering of trauma, through the study of tropes that recur across borders, across traumas, across genres, and across historical periods.

Thus, I have established a transnational and transhistorical conversation among Black women writing about slavery, Jewish and non-Jewish women writing about the Holocaust, and mad woman writing about madness, by exploring specific tropes that are shared by all these narratives. These tropes are used by these women writers as a means to reclaiming their story, which has been silenced or suppressed in dominating discourses, and as a means to gendering these stories belonging to male-dominated areas of knowledge. These shared tropes are the ghost, the infanticidal mother, the subversion of traditional lineages, the criticism of the socially-constructed notion of “motherhood,” and the blurring of gender categories, which provide a feminist rewriting of master discourses such as the Bible, psychoanalysis, Greek mythology, and surrealism, while debunking myths held by male narratives about “femininity.” These narratives challenge current politics of procreation and channel it into an aesthetics of representation and resistance.

Thus, I propose a reading of slavery, Holocaust, and madness narratives as no longer located within a closed circuit of approach, but as conversing with each other in a productive and mutual enrichment of resonating tropes, in the light of Marianne Hirsch and Nancy Miller’s *Rites of Return*, for whom “such *connective* work in memory studies is meant as a corrective to the nationalist and identity-based tendencies at work in some of the memorial projects described in the volume” (Hirsch and Miller 8).

This study, far from being exhaustive, hopes to pave the way for new perspectives of investigation. Namely, this transnational and transhistorical voice of the gendering of trauma would benefit from being extended to other historical traumas and other areas of the world. In the light of the increasing attention given to Mauritian women writers¹³⁰ and to comparative Caribbean and Mauritian studies,¹³¹ striking narrative and thematic similarities can indeed be observed between Mauritian writers Ananda Devi's *Ève de ses Décombres* and Nathacha Appanah's *Le Dernier Frère*. How do the tropes used by these women in reclaiming and re-embodiment their story relate to those studied in this doctoral work? Reading Devi and Appanah with Guadeloupean Gisèle Pineau's *Mes Quatre Femmes*, how do these writers reclaim alternative histories by producing narratives of counter-memories and by creating bridges between Western and non-Western traumas? Thus, this multidirectional feminist trauma theory of the exploration of the interplay of the memory of the Holocaust, slavery, madness, and (post)colonization, could be extended to the creation of a dialogue among Caribbean and Mauritian female authors, and among various traumas. Female authors from Sub-Saharan Africa could also be included – such as Congolese Bestine Kazadi's *Congo, mots pour maux* and *Infir(n)iment femme*, which both revolve around issues of history, trauma, and gender, and Rwandese Annick Kayitesi's *Nous existons encore*, dealing with the 1994 genocide while creating a resonance with the Chechen war. What are the literary devices used by these African authors in reclaiming their marginalized history through literature, so as to establish a conversation among these emerging narratives of gender and trauma, and those produced by

¹³⁰ Véronique Bragard, Srilata Ravi, *Écritures mauriciennes au féminin: penser l'altérité* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2011).

¹³¹ Marc Gastaldi, *Littérature des mondes insulaires créoles francophones en émergence dans l'espace transculturel: Antilles et Océan Indien* (Lille: Atelier National de Reproduction des Thèses, 2008).

Devi, Appanah, and Pineau? How do the narrative techniques used by Kayitesi and Kazadi contribute to (re)inscribing the Rwanda genocide and the violent Congolese history within a transnational framework? How do these narratives differ (or not) according to whether one stands inside or “outside” of the geographic site of trauma, and whether one has experienced the trauma directly or through transgenerational transmission? How do these narratives enrich the multidirectional feminist trauma theory developed here? Ultimately, this study of minority literary discourses across national boundaries aims at defining a transnational (trans-insular) gendered voice of trauma in Francophone literature.

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