

The Corporeal Trauma Narratives of Gayl Jones's *Corregidora*, Phyllis Alesia Perry's
Stigmata and Luisa Valenzuela's *Cambio de armas*

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ABSTRACT

Camille Terese Passalacqua: The Corporeal Trauma Narratives of Gayl Jones's *Corregidora*,
Phyllis Alesia Perry's *Stigmata* and Luisa Valenzuela's *Cambio de armas*
(Under the direction of Professor Trudier Harris)

All of the conflicts and ensuing traumas examined in these literary narratives address the suppression of a national consciousness about the severity of the crimes committed against certain groups of individuals in the Americas—against Africans forced into slavery and the descendants of these enslaved individuals, and against the victims of Argentina's recent national conflict. This dissertation investigates the wounded and violated female body as the site for healing from and integration of individual and collective traumatic experiences. This four-chapter investigation draws from trauma theorists working in various disciplines, such as Cathy Caruth, Dori Laub, Shoshana Felman, Dominick LaCapra, Judith Lewis Herman, and Elaine Scarry, in order to establish the theoretical approaches to traumatic memory, testimony, and witnessing. Any theoretical exploration into the representation and articulation of trauma must include a return to the body as not just the site for pain, wounding, and separation of self from body and soul. I suggest the body is more than merely an instrument or animated canvas that the mind and soul use. Rather, the body is essential to how the person is made present and expresses herself in the world. Therefore, violently inflicted trauma fractures and separates this intimate relationship between the body, mind, and soul.

Whereas previous studies of the wounded body discuss the ways in which violence on the body determines identity and functions as another form of text and witnessing, I reposition the critical lens to examine how the wounded body tells a different story. My project suggests that the female protagonists find ways to reconstruct themselves in light of their individual trauma by resorting to languages not only verbal to tell their stories. Through the very encounter with their physical and psychological wounding, the female characters individually access and come to know their traumas, and they also transmit their stories to another individual, which is essential for integration of the past with the present self.

To my beloved family

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER

I. Embodied Memories of Trauma	1
II. Making Witness by “Making Generations” in Gayl Jones’s <i>Corregidora</i>	29
Entrapped in a Legacy of Trauma	30
A Way Out of Trauma	51
A Path to Healing	68
III. Righting/Writing the Past in Phyllis Alesia Perry’s <i>Stigmata</i>	74
The Inheritance and Traces of Trauma	77
The Language of the Body	89
Recuperative Confrontation and Integration	96
IV. Imaginative Bodies in Luisa Valenzuela’s <i>Cambio de armas</i>	116
La Guerra sucia	117
The Question of Genre	122
“Cuarta versión”	126
“De noche soy tu cabello”	138
“Cambio de armas”	142
CONCLUSION: The Reader’s Response in an Era of Trauma	161
BIBLIOGRAPHY	172

CHAPTER I

Embodied Memories of Trauma

The wounded body is sacred in some deep level of its existence; it is a body specialized and formed by experience; in its new way of being present to the world, the wounded body gains something not possessed before.

Dennis Patrick Slattery

Literature becomes a witness, and perhaps the only witness, to the crisis within history which precisely cannot be articulated.

Shoshana Felman

In light of the numerous and devastating wars, genocides, terrorist attacks, and state-sponsored terror campaigns that plagued the twentieth century and continue into the twenty-first century, it becomes increasingly vital to address the lasting psychological and often physical effects such events have on individuals as well as humanity collectively. The proliferation of literary narratives relating the impact of trauma emerging especially as a result of the Holocaust attests to trauma's forceful effects on survivors, communities, nations, and culture.¹ The articulation of trauma through literary art has become a significant way to

¹The traumatic events of the Holocaust and the consequent literary narratives, testimonies, and critical analyses about this period of inhumanity have significantly informed my reading and analyses of the texts by the African American and Latin American writers I examine in this dissertation. The Holocaust and its aftermath raise significant issues regarding the recovery, representation, and transmission of traumatic memory. As a focal point for trauma studies, the Holocaust helps inform my understanding of institutionalized violence and oppression. For literary narratives and testimonies about the Holocaust see Elie Wiesel's *Night* (1960), Simon Wiesenthal's *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness* (1969), Bogdan Wojdowski's *Bread for the Departed* (1971), Danilo Kis's *Hourglass* (1972), Janusz Korczak's *Ghetto Diary* (1978), Sara Nomberg-Przytyk's *Auschwitz: True Tales from A Grotesque Land* (1985), Art Spiegelman's *Maus: A Survivor's Tale, My Father Bleeds History* (1986), and Primo Levi's *The Drowned and The Saved* (1986), and *If This Is a Man* and *The Truce* (1987). For critical analyses about the Holocaust and the subsequent difficulties in remembering, representing, and transmitting the experience and effects from it, see Lawrence Langer's *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (1991), Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's *Testimony: The Crises*

confront the lasting consequences of violent past experiences. As the manifestations of such trauma continue to unsettle and disturb society, it becomes necessary to understand how survivors and, by extension, nations cope and survive.

The African American and Latin American texts that I examine in this dissertation directly confront the psychological, emotional, and physical trauma resulting from racial slavery in the United States and Brazil and state-sponsored terror in Argentina. All of the conflicts and the ensuing traumas I examine in these texts address the suppression of a national consciousness about the severity of the crimes committed against certain groups and individuals in the Americas—against Africans forced into slavery and the descendents of those enslaved, and against the victims of Argentina’s national conflict during *la Guerra sucia* (the Dirty War). By examining the role of the wounded and violated female bodies in the texts *Corregidora* (1975) by Gayl Jones, *Stigmata* (1998) by Phyllis Alesia Perry, and *Cambio de armas* (1982) by Luisa Valenzuela, I argue that these same bodies become the sites for healing from and integration of individual and collective traumatic experiences. The particular expressions of physical and psychological pain in these narratives simultaneously draw attention to the suffering individual that either inherits or directly lives through traumatic events and to the actual experience of such pain. Through the very encounter with their physical and psychological wounding, some of the female protagonists not only individually access and come to know their traumas, but they also transmit their stories to another, which is essential for integration of the past with the present self. Destruction and survival collide and begin to resolve the consequent tension between life and death.

of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History (1992), Dominick LaCapra’s *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (1998) and *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (1994), and Theodor Adorno’s *Can One Live After Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader* (2003). This is not meant to be an exhaustive list.

All three authors address the complicated problem of articulating traumatic experiences. How does one communicate and “share the burden of narrating the extreme, of giving shape to what once seemed overwhelming, incomprehensible, and formless?” (Miller 7). What does the individual lose after such experiences? What form does the story of loss create in order to narrate it? How does it become possible for the wounded body and, consequently, the ruptured soul, to find healing from the violence done to it? What do the wounded and, at times, dead bodies of the past have to do with the living bodies of the present? These questions guide my reading and critical analyses of these corporeal trauma narratives.

For Jones, Perry, and Valenzuela, the human body helps answer these questions as well as accesses a violent past that leaves gaping physical and psychological injuries. The wounded bodies of their female protagonists not only offer an authenticity to the stories the authors tell in the pages of *Corregidora*, *Stigmata*, and *Cambio de armas*, but bodily harm contains a story within it—a story surfacing on the pages of the narratives. These authors forge a path through an intimate territory where wounding on the body’s surface is also an exploration of the damaged souls and minds affected by history and memory. In addition, the authors probe spaces of terror, horror, and violence by bringing light into these dark events and periods in history. In these trauma narratives, the personal, familial, and collective remembrances of violent histories collide, and Jones, Perry, and Valenzuela articulate the female bodies as a way of recalling, remembering, and entering into the tragic past that their characters feel in real and tangible ways.

To understand the various and nuanced ways in which these writers translate and transmit traumatic memory and its effects, it is essential to begin to understand the nature of

trauma and its potential effects on the victim. Trauma, originating from a Greek word for wound, is a sudden and unexpected physical, emotional, and/or psychological injury potentially creating significant physical, emotional, and/or psychological damage. Exceeding one's ability to meet its demands, the traumatic experience severely disturbs the mind, impedes one's memory, contaminates one's abilities to express verbally the event and disrupts one's sense of self. Thus, the shock of the experience(s) can exceed the human being's capability to process and assimilate the injury.

Even though the individual may survive the trauma, the indelible effect of trauma significantly alters the person's psychological and physical life. Psychoanalyst Judith Lewis Herman explains: "Traumatic events generally involve threats to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death. They confront human beings with the extremities of helplessness and terror, and evoke the responses of catastrophe" (Herman 44). This leads to a fragmentation in the survivor's perception of self, reality, emotions, and memories. Herman observes that the kind of fragmentation trauma causes "tears apart a complex system of self-protection that normally functions in an integrated fashion" (34).

When attempting to narrate the experience, the retelling of the event "may be repetitious, stereotyped, and emotionless" (174), a kind of wordless and static memory because "it does not develop or progress in time, and it does not reveal the storyteller's feelings and interpretations of the events" (174). The narrative structures as well as the characters' states of mind in *Corregidora*, *Stigmata*, and *Cambio de armas* reflect this tearing apart and static sense of self. The instability of narrative voices, collapse of time, and violently charged language are some ways in which these authors transmit the fractured minds of their characters.

Trauma narratives extend beyond trauma as the subject of the book or as character studies about traumatized individuals. Instead, they express the processes, obstacles, and instabilities of living with and communicating trauma within the narratives' structures and approaches. Also, the experiential means of narration present material that may be potentially alienating for readers due to its frequently disturbing content. Characters attempt to remember their traumas filtered through battered, broken, and uncertain memories reflected in narrative disorientations, ruptures, and distresses. Trauma narratives are the outward expression of an inward conflict. By referring to the texts in this study as corporeal trauma narratives I mean to suggest that these authors highlight the body as the main referent. These narratives depict violence that runs counter to life, survival, and psychic wholeness through the mind's repression of and dissociation from the body. The undeniable materiality of the body assumes a privileged position in the texts even when it is the body that violently inflicted trauma attempts to erase. The body becomes an essential site for addressing and recuperating from extreme wrongs committed against individuals through its fragile and vulnerable position within the context of violent experiences. More than a visible reminder of what occurred, the body works in complicated and complex ways in reconnecting the survivor's body to her mind.

Throughout this project, I have been aware of the unlikely positioning of these texts side by side—*Corregidora* and *Stigmata* depict the inheritance of trauma from racial slavery, and *Cambio de armas* focuses on directly experienced trauma caused by Argentina's oppressive military junta during *la Guerra sucia*. The geographical, socio-historical, and cultural differences between the texts make such a comparison seemingly dubious. Nonetheless, the intersections of the works reveal that grave historical crises cause profound

damage and leave residual effects that contaminate and thwart the psychological and physical lives of the female protagonists. The authors show that healing from and integration with the painful past, no matter the context or location, involves breaking through the horrible memories that haunt their characters, confronting the consequent harmful behaviors that have allowed them to survive, and seeking new and imaginative ways to recuperate a healthy self-identity and an increased awareness of the impact of such a past. Each author addresses the overlapping between the personal and the collective accumulation of traumatic memory and how their women characters become survivors of legally sanctioned systems of oppression. Not only do they call attention to the detailed and pervasive influence of trauma on the female characters, but Jones and Perry especially complicate the notion of the witness, since their main characters are neither directly victimized by the violence of slavery nor passively observing the results; still, they are intimately engaged in the consequences of racial slavery.

My choice to examine the narratives written by women writers is not meant to eclipse or exclude from the discussion literary works by male writers dealing with trauma and its legacy. There exists a rich body of literature by Latin American and African American male writers addressing issues of traumatic memory, state-sponsored violence, and the legacies of such events.² This project's emphasis on women writers exploring violence done to women positions the female body as the site of ultimate domination by the perpetrators of systematic violence. The feminization of traumatic memory in *Corregidora*, *Stigmata*, and *Cambio de armas* reveals the patriarchal structure of authoritarianism that unleashes its power on women

²For examples among African American writers, see Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940), Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1947), William Melvin Kelley's *A Different Drummer* (1959), John Edgar Wideman's *The Lynchers* (1979), David Bradley's *The Chaneyville Incident* (1981), Charles Johnson's *Middle Passage* (1990), Edward P. Jones's *The Known World* (2003). For examples of Latin American writers, see Ricardo Piglia's *Respiración artificial* (1980), Carlos Martínez Moreno's *El infierno* (1988), Ariel Dorfman's *Death and the Maiden* (1991), Roberto Bolaño's *Estrella distante* (1996), and Carlos Fuentes' *Los años con Laura Díaz* (1999). This is not an exhaustive list.

and their bodies. Man's physical strength over woman not only enacts experiences of physically inflicted violence, but also these acts of domination attempt to erase and (re)create female identity to reflect what those in power want it to be.

Relations between men and women in these systems of oppression and violence dominate the discourse of the texts, yet there are numerous paradigms of torture that could be examined beyond the scope of this project. Violence against African American men certainly did not cease with the abolishment of slavery evident with the vicious and numerous crimes of lynching that became spectacles of white domination over black bodies. In Argentina, men were not spared from horrible violence and torture during *la Guerra sucia*. In fact, in a society privileging the masculine image their domination by another male further compounded the lack of power they held over their own fate.

Jones, Perry, and Valenzuela speak about various forms of enslavement in their stories—sexual, physical, and psychological enslavement—all of which carry terrifying realities and after effects for the victim-survivor. The female protagonists are women whose past violates them. However, this power paradigm shifts as each narrative progresses because the characters eventually move to positions of power that allow for their self-empowerment. The past of American slavery is remote for Jones and Perry's characters, nonetheless, they feel it just as acutely as the suffering women in *Cambio de armas*. As a result, these writers turn to the body to reveal how the history of slavery and violence is indeed a living memory for their characters. Canonical trauma theorist Cathy Caruth suggests in her introduction to *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995): "in a catastrophic age ... trauma itself may provide the very link between cultures: not as a simple understanding of the pasts of others but rather, within

the traumas of contemporary history, as our ability to listen through the departures we have all taken from ourselves” (Caruth, *Trauma* 11).

The authors utilize their creative imaginations as well as fictional narrative techniques to insert the muted voices and ignored bodies of those excluded from official historical accounts about grave oppression in the United States, Brazil, and Argentina. Jones, Perry, and Valenzuela guide readers through the intersections of traumatic memory, history, and its effects on an individual’s physical and psychological life. Each writer reveals the deleterious consequences of traumatic experiences by conceiving of stories that rupture linear and cohesive narration. Shifting time, space, and narrative voices all cause textual disorder, which beckon readers to work at piecing together the memories of these protagonists’ past while the characters do the same. They place the wounded body in a tangle of difficult, disturbing, and fragmented episodes that recall the trauma and dehumanization.

The configurations of the injured female bodies permeate and saturate the texts with violence. This architecture of degradation reveals the penetration of trauma at the most personal level. In *Corregidora*, sexual enslavement comes in the form of prostitution that leads to a repetitive manifestation of sexual dysfunction for these survivors and their progeny. The bodies of the women in *Cambio de armas*, tortured and some repeatedly raped, become the vortex for the state’s assertion of power and domination. The sexual denigration of the women in these two texts leads to a sexual servility toward the men who harm them. Their aggressors sexualize them and attempt to turn their bodies into sites for their wanton and perverse acts. These forms of sexual domination and violation become another layer of trauma thickening the harm enveloping Jones and Valenzuela’s protagonists. In *Stigmata*, physical violence done to the body comes through savage beatings, shackles, and manacles.

A total disregard for the body is enacted on enslaved individuals. Instead, functionalism defines the body's worth for the white slave masters and the concern for the black body operates in an economy of producing monetary value, which is also evident in *Corregidora*.

This dissertation forges a working relationship between traumatic memory and theory and literary representations of them. In addition to traumatic experiences being at the core of these stories, I also argue that embedded in the structures and narrative approaches of the works are the pervasive influences of trauma on individuals. My investigation draws from a variety of trauma theorists working in various disciplines, including Cathy Caruth, Dori Laub, Shoshana Felman, Dominick LaCapra, Elaine Scarry, and Judith Lewis Hartman, to establish the theoretical approaches to and representations of traumatic memory, testimony, and witnessing. At this point, I offer an overview of these theories on trauma with which to understand my approaches to the texts in this dissertation.

Historian Dominick LaCapra, in *Writing Trauma, Writing History* (2001), addresses the significant connection between writing and trauma. LaCapra asserts that fictional trauma narratives may offer valuable contributions to conveying to readers the emotional and psychological effects of these experiences on individuals. He distinguishes two ways in which writing about trauma surfaces in a text, which he terms as the “acting out” and the “working through” of trauma (LaCapra, *Writing* 21-2).³ Texts may present a “working through” process, which entails the survivor attempting to deal with the traumatic experience(s) and its effects on her. For LaCapra, “working through” leads the person to recognize that she lived through an incomprehensible event that irrevocably altered who she was and now she is reemerging from the traumatic experience a changed person and

³The “acting out” process of trauma is the survivor's inability to deal with the traumatic event(s), which results in a repetitive reliving of the past traumatic event. LaCapra does not view the “acting out” and “working through” of trauma as oppositional or mutually exclusive (LaCapra, *Holocaust* 223). “Acting out” may be part of the process of “working through” for some survivors.

reengaging with life. “Working through” does not necessarily mean closure for the survivor, but rather it consists of mourning and a post-traumatic reengagement with life. He explains:

Working through is an articulatory practice: to the extent one works through trauma ... one is able to distinguish between past and present and to recall in memory that something happened to one back then while realizing that one is living here and now with openings to the future. (22)

The survivor’s ability to recognize that she survived the traumatic event offers hope for her.

LaCapra’s articulatory practice of working through trauma by writing attends to what Jones, Perry, and Valenzuela accomplish in their narratives. They use the materiality and corporeality of their characters’ bodies to approach therapeutically the memories of racial slavery and *la Guerra sucia* so that personal and psychological healing and reengagement with the world may begin for the protagonists. In addition, LaCapra asserts that although “working through” involves repetition, this repetition is significantly different from the compulsive repetition occurring during the “acting out” process of remembering trauma.

LaCapra differentiates:

In acting out, one relives the past as if one *were* the other, including oneself as another in the past—one is fully possessed by the other or the other’s ghost; and in working through, one tries to acquire some critical distance that allows one to engage in life in the present, to assume responsibility—but that doesn’t mean that you utterly transcend the past. It means that you come to terms with it in a different way related to what you judge to be desirable possibilities that may now be created ... (148)

The characters in *Corregidora*, *Stigmata*, and *Cambio de armas* attempt to move beyond the cycle of “acting out” into the process of “working through” their trauma that simultaneously acknowledges and mourns what was physically, psychologically, and emotionally lost, thus directing them towards the possibility of a future not overshadowed by the past. The challenge to reconstruct the past, connect the fragments of their individual stories, and bring

meaning to their present situations in light of this past includes the “working through” process.

By recognizing the trauma to the human body in these trauma narratives, it becomes apparent that the suffering of one body implies the multiplication of suffering among numerous bodies. In *Corregidora* and *Stigmata*, the two female protagonists are the inheritors of a matrilineal legacy of slavery. The proliferation of their ancestors’ suffering from enslavement radiates into the present for the twentieth century women at the center of these texts. The familial and painful memories of trauma come through the injured bodies, which consequently access a past that often exceeds language’s ability to articulate such experiences of severe violation. Traumatic memories become quite literally encoded on the body, and, consequently, the wounds become the physical identifying indication of a larger story where its physical and psychological effects are felt and viewed on the skin.⁴

In another country, the collection of short stories in Luisa Valenzuela’s *Cambio de armas* masterfully blends fiction and history to reveal a period of terror and violence in Argentina’s past. By involving and inserting her fictional characters into real historical events, Valenzuela exposes the lies of a repressive political regime and the personal and national trauma resulting from wide-scale brutality. The stories in this collection specifically engage the female protagonists in political struggles against Argentina’s oppressive military junta’s government during the 1970s and the early 1980s. In *Cambio de armas*, the women are not the inheritors of a violent legacy but rather the direct recipients of dehumanizing and

⁴For example, see Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* (1987), whose female protagonist Sethe, a former slave woman, carries scars on her back from her white master’s savage whipping of her. Dana, the female protagonist in Octavia Butler’s *Kindred* (1979), time travels back to the antebellum South from the late Twentieth Century and meets her enslaved ancestors. She receives beatings and whippings while there, which leave scars on her body that stay with her after she returns to the 1970s. Dessa Rose, in Sherley Anne Williams’s *Dessa Rose* (1986), is a freed slave woman carrying scars all over her genitals and buttocks where she was whipped so that the marks would remain hidden, as hidden scars would not depreciate her monetary worth when sold.

brutal experiences. Nonetheless, the multiplication and proliferation of suffering bodies in Valenzuela's text speak for the thousands of Argentines who became known as *desaparecidos* (disappeared) during this dark period in Argentina.

My interdisciplinary approach to the study of trauma, its effects, and how to communicate that which is oftentimes difficult points to the necessity for new ways of conveying an experience that in its wake often leaves the victim-survivor without the adequate verbal language to narrate and thus share the experience. Therefore, new ways of expressing such experiences turn to the human body as that which remembers what the post-traumatic mind cannot. Julie Kristeva, in her essay "The Pain of Sorrow in the Modern World: The Works of Marguerite Duras" (1987), addresses the difficulty in coherently representing violent historical events. Although Kristeva discusses the unique event of the Holocaust, she raises important issues of silence and communication surrounding it, which help me think through further the traumatic events of racial slavery and Argentina's violent *la Guerra sucia*. According to Kristeva, in the aftermath of the Holocaust "a monumental crisis in thought and word, a crisis in representation, has occurred" (Kristeva 138). The testimonies of extreme human suffering from the trauma of the Holocaust become "monstrous and painful spectacles" that not only "disturb mechanisms of perception" and challenge representation of it but also propagate a complicated silence:

... symbolic modes are emptied, petrified, nearly annihilated as if they were overwhelmed or destroyed by an all too powerful force. At the edge of silence, the word *nothing* emerges, a prudish defense in the face of such incommensurable, internal and external disorder. Never has a cataclysm been so apocalyptically exorbitant. Never has its representation been relegated to such inadequate symbolic modes. (139; italics in the original)

The "word *nothing*" corresponds to what Kristeva describes as a withholding of the word—a resistance and inability to articulate trauma through language. Yet, she argues that

“to bring the vision of ... this blinding and silencing monstrosity, into being” (139) there must be an uncovering of the extreme events of the Holocaust, which also requires a “profusion of images” (139). Rather than the silencing of the word and the proliferation of violent images depicting the horror of the Holocaust working in opposition to one another, Kristeva suggests that these “often complement each other” (139). The chasm between silence and image becomes necessary as a result of the unspeakable realities of Auschwitz. In *Corregidora*, *Stigmata*, and *Cambio de armas* the articulation of the written word functions in complex ways that convey a tactile quality to each story, thus making known the wounded body. The female bodies offer their own language with which to tell the story—a language of the body that involves the senses of sight and touch.

The corporeal trauma narratives of Perry, Jones, and Valenzuela demonstrate with a visceral and textual focus this “withholding of the word” and “profusion of images” and the tension that exists between them. The inherited and/or felt private traumatic experiences of the female protagonists intensify by the authors’ textual attention to a reality defined by the physical suffering of the human body and ruptured mind. These narratives of horrible physical and psychic suffering communicate through the violated body “a visual discourse of trauma” (Hirsch 72). Critic Marianne Hirsch suggests that the human body “speaks louder” than the “simple scar or wound” (73) when communicating individual bodily experiences. Hirsch further asserts: “the wound inflicted on the skin can be read as a sign of trauma’s incommunicability, a figure for the traumatic real” (72). The transmission of bodily images in *Corregidora*, *Stigmata*, and *Cambio de armas* establishes a corporeal translation of trauma through the written word; however, paradoxically, these texts also attest to the difficulty in rendering through the written word the catastrophic outcomes of racial slavery, state-

sponsored terror, torture, and sexual violation. Jones, Perry, and Valenzuela explore what it means to survive after the loss of one's humanity and use the site of the wounded human body to reveal the deleterious consequences of surviving trauma. Their characters know well the truth of the past, if not in words then in their bodies.

Trauma narratives such as these challenge the absences and silences within the representation of trauma by placing the body at the center of their texts. The materiality of the body directly addresses the issues of violence and pain, both physical and psychological. It is precisely in the representation of the traumatized body that Jones, Perry, and Valenzuela reveal the split between mind and body as the natural reaction to traumatic experiences. The victim-survivor is denied power and ownership over her body. The fundamental violation captured in these texts is the objectification of the characters and their bodies. Rather than being treated as subjects, who are active and choosing human beings, the slave masters and torturers reduce their victims to objects that can be beaten, raped, tormented, and discarded. However, by writing these bodies and voices back into their stories, the authors confront the representational limits of articulating trauma, which ultimately allow them to access ways in which their characters re-appropriate and transform their bodies into spaces for survival and healing.

Theorist Cathy Caruth delineates the trajectory of traumatic symptoms for survivors of trauma in her important work *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996). Caruth's outline of traumatic symptoms also informs my analytical approach to the traumatic effects evident in the bodies and minds of the female protagonists. She explains that the traumatic event can cause a rupture in the victim's "experience of time, self, and world" (Caruth 4), which leads to a "belatedness" (92) of the memories of the event because

it is not fully experienced at the time it occurs. This delay in remembering the moment of the trauma isolates it from other normal memories and leads to a trajectory of repetition. The repetition manifests in flashbacks to the experience that may appear at any time “as an interruption—as something with a disrupting force or impact” (115). The unassimilated nature of the traumatic event returns to haunt the survivor and even though she may physically survive, the trauma can severely and permanently alter her physical, emotional, and psychological life. The characteristic delay or “belatedness” of trauma demonstrates that traumatic events do not fit into the structure of time. Instead, they are frozen or isolated moments from normal memories. These moments emerge into consciousness at any point, bringing the power of the event with them. Remembering these types of events presents monumental obstacles for the victim-survivor since the reality of the experience often exceeds her ability to communicate or symbolize the experience. Caruth explains that the survivor’s response is often manifested in a “delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (11).⁵ Therefore, only in retrospect can the victim decode the memory of the trauma and begin to find ways of reconstructing, revealing, and communicating the experience(s). This haunting, as part of the belated nature of trauma and manifested in the narrative structures of all three texts, destabilizes and blurs distinctions between past and present, which, in turn, leads to time as a continuum with no distinct beginning, middle, or end.

Prolonged and severe trauma frequently leads to a psychologically dissociative state for the survivor. Especially apparent in individuals forced into prolonged periods of

⁵Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) became more widely known and discussed after the Vietnam War. However, the idea of PTSD was known before the Vietnam era, under different names, such as shell shock, which was used to describe the traumatic symptoms World War I veterans experienced. A “core experience (that includes) intense fear, helplessness, loss of control, and threat of annihilation” (Farrell 5) can precipitate the symptoms of PTSD. Some symptoms of PTSD are: dissociative disorders, depression, repetitive flashbacks, nightmares, or disturbing thoughts, panic reactions, trouble with memory, and mental confusion (6).

confinement and isolation (such as prisoners), they experience alterations in time. Herman suggests:

... as coercion becomes more extreme and resistance crumbles, prisoners lose the sense of continuity with their past. The past, like the future, becomes too painful to bear, for memory, like hope, brings back the yearning for all that has been lost. Thus, prisoners are eventually reduced to living in the endless present ... This rupture in the continuity between present and past frequently persists even after the prisoner is released. (Herman 89)

The “chronic trauma” (89) leads to what Herman names as “doublethink” (90)—when the survivor exists “simultaneously in two realities, two points in time. The experience of the present is often hazy and dulled, while the intrusive memories of the past are intense and clear” (90). Traces of this “doublethink” state of mind are evident with all the protagonists encountered in the narratives. Although each woman may not necessarily conform to all aspects of these dissociative symptoms, each in her own way suffers with a rupture in time. Valenzuela’s characters live in the present in a psychological haze of dissociation during and after an extended period of torture and rape. Jones and Perry’s female protagonists also live in a continuum of time complicated by unexpected intersections of the past and present.

Caruth also discusses this distinctive element of trauma that follows the haunting of the event and terms it “double telling” (Caruth, *Unclaimed* 7). She explains that the survivor moves from a period of compulsive repetition and reliving of past events to a moment when the individual’s reliving and repetition now exist in a space between life and death. She terms this suspension between life and death as “a kind of double telling” (7) where the survivor traverses between the story of the event (her past) and the story of her survival (her present). When the survivor of trauma fails to recognize the continuation of her life after the moment of crisis another feature of trauma emerges, which Caruth calls “an enigma of survival” (58). Caruth explains:

What is enigmatically suggested, that is, is that the trauma consists not only in having confronted death but *having survived, precisely, without knowing it*. What one returns to in the flashback is not the incomprehensibility of one's near death, but the very incomprehensibility of one's own survival. Repetition, in other words, is not simply the attempt to grasp that one has almost died but, more fundamentally and enigmatically, the very attempt *to claim one's own survival*. If history is to be understood as the history of trauma, it is a history that is experienced as the endless attempt to assume one's survival as one's own. (64; italics in the original)

In addition to the trauma of the unbelievable past events, the victim must now struggle with facing her own survival. It is through the process of coming to terms with her survival that the survivor experiences an awakening, which may result in reconciling her present self in light of the traumatic event.

All the female protagonists in *Corregidora*, *Stigmata*, and *Cambio de armas* grapple with this confrontation between survival and near-death, whether it is a psychological or physical death. They struggle with facing the survival of their bodies as well as the continuation of their lives after confronting the painful past. Each character experiences an erosion of self manifested in the body before "awakening" (100) and emerging from the cycle of trauma. Eventually, the female protagonists move away from the geography of memory where the wounds on the body and soul dominate the story. Instead, their bodily wounds and violations become part of a much larger landscape that now can include healing. Consequently, the female characters begin to live in the world in a new way where their bodies become a force of memory that help them to confront and eventually begin to embrace their now-altered experience of the world.

It is important to distinguish that these characters do not necessarily achieve by each story's end a complete recuperation from what was lost and ruined from the traumatic event, but rather they experience steps towards healing from and integration of the past with their now-altered selves. To speak of their recovery implies that they return to a pre-traumatized

self, which I believe neither appropriately nor accurately addresses the enormity of trauma's effects on the individual. The very nature of trauma's impact on a person prohibits the survivor from returning to a pre-violated state of mind and body. Psychologist Robert Jay Lifton further delineates one of the lasting consequences of trauma in his discussion of the "second self." (Lifton 137).⁶ Lifton addresses the complexity of the altered psychological state of the post-traumatic individual:

... extreme trauma creates a second self ... in extreme involvements, as in extreme trauma, one's sense of self is radically altered. And there is a traumatized self that is created. Of course it's not a totally new self, it's what one brought into the trauma as affected significantly and painfully, confusedly, but in a very primal way, by that trauma. And recovery from post-traumatic effects, or from survivor conflicts cannot really occur until that traumatized self is reintegrated. It's a form of doubling in the traumatized person. (137)

Lifton's discussion crystallizes for me the struggles confronted by the women in these texts confront whose identities are altered due to the traumatic physical and psychological violence each one experiences. This transformation is not only evident in their resulting psychological difficulties; the change is also felt in their bodies. Now, their challenge is learning how to achieve integration with the memories and legacies of violence carved onto their bodies and psyches. As a result, the body becomes not only a visual marker and reminder of these histories, but also the way in which the memories are voiced and expressed through the body. Memories become imprisoned in, yet, paradoxically disclosed through the body. Due to the nature of traumatic memories bound up in the body "ordinary narrative is simply inadequate" (Culbertson 171) for the survivor. As a result, corporeal trauma narratives, such as *Corregidora*, *Stigmata*, and *Cambio de armas*, which depart from conventional and logical

⁶Lifton's work includes extensive research about and interviews with survivors of the Holocaust, Hiroshima, and the Vietnam War.

forms of storytelling, attend to the ways in which traumatic memory can be expressed through the body.

Rendering past historical traumas into fiction offers numerous narrative possibilities, which is essential for conveying stories of traumatic experiences and survival. In their work, *Testimony: Crises of History* (1992), Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub suggest that “art inscribes (artistically bears witness to) *what we do not yet know of our lived historical relation to events of our times*” (Felman xx; italics in the original). Using the Holocaust as their historical paradigm, they analyze literature, film, and survivor testimony to investigate how these art forms, especially literature, become witnesses “... and perhaps the only witnesses, to the crisis within history which precisely cannot be articulated, witnesses in the given categories of history itself” (xviii). Felman and Laub’s assertion reinforces the direction of my project and my analyses of how the literary and corporeal trauma narratives of *Corregidora*, *Stigmata*, and *Cambio de armas* help us know the unofficial stories left outside the frame of nationally sanctioned accounts of these historical events.

These authors tell readers how racial slavery and state-sanctioned terror in Argentina isolated and terrorized the individuals caught in these machinations of dehumanization. The fictional rendering of the historical and traumatic events reveals the ways in which trauma radiates and proliferates into the present and future. Although the abolishment of slavery in the United States occurred over one hundred years ago, the latency and force of this national trauma is evident in the surge of novels dealing with the effects of slavery.⁷ Readers enter

⁷Recent fictional works about slavery and/or its effects have been termed neoslave narratives. Bernard W. Bell defines such texts as “residually oral, modern narratives of escape from bondage to freedom” (Bell 289). Neoslave narratives also refer to novels written by African American writers who locate their stories in slavery or immediately following slavery and the effects of such experiences on the characters. Novels that attend to this include Margaret Walker’s *Jubilee* (1966), Paule Marshall’s *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* (1969), Ernest Gaines’s *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pitman* (1971), Octavia Butler’s *Kindred* (1979), David Bradley’s *The Chaneysville Incident* (1981), Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* (1982), Charles Johnson’s *Oxherding Tale* (1982) and *Middle Passage* (1990), Sherley Anne Williams’s *Dessa Rose* (1986), Toni

into the lives of these female characters as they attempt to address, understand, and survive their particular traumatic memories and experiences.

The authors use similar narrative approaches to address historic events significantly damaging to the tissues of society. They personalize collective historical trauma through the bodily, sexual, and psychological violations the characters experience. The living memory felt in the bodies of each character offers an alternative to the transcriptions of factually historical accounts of *la Guerra sucia* and racial slavery. By doing this, the interstitial space between fiction and history offers the place for the missing, forgotten, and silenced voices harmed by these horrible historical periods. These trauma narratives become carriers of cultural memory that may facilitate in a non-threatening way the inclusion of the lost voices into a larger cultural imagination concerning these historical events.

In her seminal work, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (1985), Elaine Scarry establishes that the voice and the body are integral to the infliction and expression of pain torture causes. In Scarry's detailed analyses of the damage that torture does to the victim's body and mind, as well as to the relationship it establishes between the torturer and the tortured, she argues that pain resulting from such violence potentially inhibits the victim-survivor from making her story accessible to others. Scarry asserts that physical pain has a quality of separation, in so far as the person in the state of pain is separated from the person witnessing someone else in pain (Scarry 37). Since the physical pain the torturer produces is felt only by the receiver, it becomes increasingly difficult, if not impossible at times, for the tortured person to communicate through verbal language this one-sided experience of pain. Scarry suggests that this invisible quality of pain actively destroys language because it "bring[s] about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to

Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) and *A Mercy* (2008), and Edward P. Jones's *The Known World* (2003).

the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned” (4), which is the only form of expressing such pain in the moment. Since torture so profoundly impacts the individual person and her body, sharing this experience with others presents monumental difficulties. And it is precisely the victim’s difficulty in articulating her inflicted pain that allows for those in positions of power to continue causing harm to the person. Scarry explains:

... the difficulty of articulating physical pain permits political and perceptual complications of the most serious kind. The failure to express pain—whether the failure to objectify its attributes or instead the failure, once those attributes are objectified, to refer them to their original site in the human body—will always work to allow its appropriation and conflation with debased forms of power ... (14).

The separation from verbal language and by extension the story of what happened is especially evident in the short stories in *Cambio de armas*. Many of the tales contain a subtext of violence, brutality, and dead bodies. Not only are there different versions of the truth behind what happens to some characters in each story based on who is recreating and retelling past events, but there is also an obvious separation from language, especially in the title story “*Cambio de armas*.” In it, Valenzuela reveals the effects of torture on the main character Laura. A torture survivor and now-imprisoned sex slave for the military colonel who tortured her at one time, Laura has lost her memory and identity. The torture and its residual effects have led to a profound rupture between her body, mind, and memory. She cannot recall the names for objects and she even has forgotten her name. This reality betrays her dissociation from memory, self, and world. In *Stigmata*, after the protagonist Lizzie is committed to various psychiatric hospitals for what appears to be insanity, she lives in a self-imposed two-year silence where she confronts the horrible physical realities of slavery. Lizzie’s physical body experiences and lives what language cannot express about her

inheritance of enslavement. Similarly, *Corregidora's* Ursa contends with the mysterious and frightening past of her female matriarch's encounter with sexual and physical slavery, which wreaks havoc on her psychological well-being. These characters as well as others that readers meet in the narratives must deal with the complexities of how to salvage their stories from silence and consequently unveil the painful past to themselves and to a wider audience of other characters in and readers of these narratives.

Scarry offers a way for victims of torture to make known and share their stories of degradation, thus stripping away the invisibility of their pain. Her assertion that physically inflicted pain divorces the victim's voice from her body and heightens the separation of the individual from the witness or others who have not experienced such pain raises the important and obvious issue of how to communicate such painful experiences to a wider audience. This becomes an urgent issue for writers of trauma narratives like Jones, Perry, and Valenzuela. Scarry argues that the communication of pain lies in the act of imagining. She writes: "the imagination is ... the only state that is wholly without objects. There is in imagining no activity, no 'state,' no experienceable condition or felt-occurrence separate from the objects: the only evidence that one is 'imagining' is that the imaginary objects appear in the mind" (Scarry 162). In other words, it is through the images the imagination produces that the imagination can be experienced.

In examining the complex relationship between the dual notions of pain and imagining, she writes: "... one can say that pain only becomes an intentional state once it is brought into relation with the objectifying power of the imagination: through that relation, pain will be transformed from a wholly passive and helpless occurrence into a self-modifying, and when most successful, self-eliminating one" (164). Rather than seeing pain

and imagining as each other's missing counterparts, Scarry considers a more elaborate situation to be occurring:

... 'pain' and 'imagining' constitute extreme conditions of, on the one hand, intentionality as a state and on the other, intentionality as self-objectification; and that between these two boundary conditions all the other more familiar, binary acts-and-objects are located. That is, pain and imagining are the "framing events" within whose boundaries all other perceptual, somatic, and emotional events occur; thus, between the two extremes can be mapped the whole terrain of the human psyche. (165)

For example, if one is experiencing acute hunger or thirst, she can imagine grain or berries or a glass of water to turn this adverse experience into one that is "potentially positive" (166).

The more the imagined object "fits or expresses the state, the more precise a projection of the state it is, the more will it seem to have been generated by the interior state and it will be considered a visionary solution" (168). In *Corregidora*, *Stigmata*, and *Cambio de armas* the characters in various ways imagine into narrative their physical and psychological pain. Ursa creates her own blues songs, which tell about her family's past of enslavement; Lizzie creates a quilt and painting retelling the story of her ancestors' affliction of enslavement; and Valenzuela's female protagonists use their imaginations to escape the pain of torture and excavate their fragmented self-perception as a way to find relief from the pain of the present. These creative attempts to express and alleviate the psychic and physical injuries all point to the characters' active use of their imaginations to emerge from their unique and individual traumas. The movement of these private experiences into the external world allows them to be shared, and when physical pain "at last finds a voice, it begins to tell a story" (3).

The characters' use of their imaginations as ways to communicate their trauma also involves an affirmation of their survival. Returning to Caruth's explanation of the traumatic symptoms, she terms the individual's affirmation of her survival as an "awakening" (Caruth,

Unclaimed 100). The individual's awakening entails the recognition of her survival and begins the process of reconciliation and integration with the pre- and post-traumatized self into a larger community of listeners. The awakening sets in motion the transmission of this past on to others and the survivor's connection to the external world. I argue in the succeeding chapters that the female protagonists experience an "awakening" through various modes of storytelling as well as the recognition of their identity and humanity through a meditation on their wounded, scarred, and used bodies. The tactile, visual, and oral forms of communication found in these texts "embod[y] an appointment with the real" (105), and when the protagonists begin to face their survival in light of the trauma it is "a revelationlike opening of [their] own eyes" (110).

Traumatic events call into "question basic human relationships ... breach the attachments of family, friendship, love, and community ... [and] shatter the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others" (Herman 51). As Judith Lewis Herman's experiences with treating trauma survivors suggest, the presence of another individual and/or a larger community to receive the survivor's story is vital for the survivor's reconnection to others and the external world. Herman explains:

Traumatic events destroy the sustaining bonds between individual and community. Those who have survived learn that their sense of self, of worth, of humanity, depends upon a feeling of connection to others. The solidarity of a group provides the strongest protection against terror and despair, and the strongest antidote to traumatic experience. Trauma isolates; the group re-creates a sense of belonging. Trauma shames and stigmatizes; the group bears witness and affirms. Trauma degrades the victim; the group exalts her. Trauma dehumanizes the victim; the group restores her humanity. (Herman 214)

There must come a moment when the survivor perceives a connection with and by another person's communication of generosity, kindness, and decency. Reestablishing this connection with another who recognizes the survivor's humanity that was so thoroughly

negated during the traumatic experience helps the survivor begin to reconnect with the external world.

Chapter II examines Gayl Jones's *Corregidora* in its depiction of the inheritance of traumatic memories by future generations of family members whose ancestors survived racial slavery. Using Cathy Caruth's discussion of traumatic symptoms delineated earlier in this chapter, I analyze how the compulsive repetition of traumatic memories passes down to other family members the trauma that consequently leads to a continuation of damaging and repetitive behavior. The transgenerational transfer of trauma contaminates and profoundly alters the next generation's emotional and psychological health, making evident the high cost of leaving trauma unresolved. In addition, using Marianne Hirsch's theory of postmemory, which she explains as the succeeding generation's response to the previous generation's trauma, I show how Jones's female protagonist, Ursa Corregidora, uncovers and discovers that her inherited trauma contaminated her self-perception and worth. Ursa's recuperation from the damage this family legacy causes to her psychological well-being entails an arduous hollowing out of the past. Ultimately, this becomes an essential component for her sharing the familial legacy with others but also not allowing it to determine and dominate her present life and identity. I argue that Ursa's creative act of singing the blues helps alleviate the legacy of pain and offers a way to transcend the psychological and emotional trauma by reconnecting with others outside the family circle and cycle of traumatic memories.

Chapter III focuses on Phyllis Alesia Perry's novel *Stigmata*. The inheritance of trauma surfaces in elaborate and terrifying ways for the narrative's main protagonist, Lizzie DuBose. Perry's protagonist embodies the inheritance of trauma in a personal and tangible way by living the consequences of slavery. Through examining the split between mind and

body that trauma causes for survivors, as delineated by theorist Elaine Scarry, I argue that Lizzie's recuperation from and integration of her ancestor's encounter with racial slavery depends, in part, on the various ways she tells the story. Also, her psychological healing entails the acceptance of her now-changed body. This requires a connection with someone willing to listen and believe her seemingly unbelievable experience and knowledge of the past. Perry merges prominent issues regarding the trauma of racial slavery, including separation of family members, physical and psychological isolation, and the literal wounding of bodies that become sites for the oppositional forces of destruction and survival.

Chapter IV analyzes Luisa Valenzuela's short story collection *Cambio de armas*. Valenzuela's stories masterfully reveal the scarring of a national identity and consciousness manifested in the missing, wounded, and dead bodies encountered in the stories. The materiality of the body functions as another form of storytelling intimately bound to the articulation of a verbal language of violence that represents this period of violence in Argentina. Valenzuela's work illustrates the enormous losses that come from the extreme traumas of torture and tyranny, which include the loss of identity, memory, stability of voice and time, and the ability to articulate coherently experiences of trauma. Returning to Elaine Scarry's discussion of the profound ramifications torture has on an individual, I show that this collection of stories simultaneously addresses the personal and national trauma caused by torture and the ceaseless terror. In addition, I suggest that recuperation of the self necessitates an intimate reconnection between the separated body and mind that pain and torture caused. *Cambio de armas* is timelessly relevant and important because many of the bodies of those disappeared by the government are still missing, which makes the metaphysical scars on the nation's identity even more apparent.

This dissertation began as an examination of representations of psychological and physical trauma at the intersections between history and fiction, and personal and collective memory. Central to my project is the analysis of trauma, its effects, and the representation of trauma within the limitations that it imposes. In examining narratives that focus on the indissoluble connection between the body and storytelling my analyses suggest that the trauma theory discussed earlier in this chapter could be expanded to include the body as essential to the recuperation and healing from trauma.

Any theoretical exploration into the representation and articulation of trauma must include a return to the body as not just the site for the pain, wounding, and separation of self from body and soul. Also, and what my project offers to the field of trauma studies is that the body is more than merely an instrument or animated canvas that the mind and soul use. Rather, the body is essential to how the person is made present and expresses herself in the world. I suggest that there exists a profound and significant relationship at work between the body and soul, which trauma fractures and separates. Violent trauma attempts to damage deeply the human being, as evident in *Corregidora*, *Stigmata*, and *Cambio de armas*. As a result, these experiences profoundly dissociate the body from the mind and soul. For the survivor's healing to begin, there must be a re-valorization of the flesh that recognizes and allows for a reunification or reassociation of the body and soul expressed through a language of the body. This begins with a recuperation of the direct relationship between the body and soul as it attends to the painful memories bound up in both, as well as accepting the body in its new form—one that carries scars and memories of violence in the body's flesh.

Corregidora and *Stigmata* show that the horrors wrought by unresolved and ongoing legacies of pain damage future generations in ways similar to the first-hand experiences of

violent trauma as depicted in *Cambio de armas*. Engaging these texts in conversation with theories about witnessing, traumatic memory recall, articulation, and representation, I show that the inheritance of trauma can, in its own way, be as fiercely destructive as the direct experience and survival of it. Although I am cautious not to collapse these two distinct experiences of trauma into one, I, nonetheless, suggest that the narratives expand a knowledge about trauma—they bring to light a sociocultural perspective of how legally sanctioned and violent ideologies permeate the private lives of individuals, and, by extension, the tissues of family and culture. For the survivor, bearing the weight of the violation is compounded when the state/government legally permits or actively covers up the human rights violations. Even when the original event of trauma is long past, the results proliferate in ways that destabilize and obstruct its inclusion into the cultural imagination. The Holocaust and consequent post-Holocaust literature opened wide trauma studies and has been a leading focus in contemporary trauma studies. Exploring African American and Latin American texts dealing with trauma broadens the focus of trauma studies, thus emphasizing the necessity for including such stories and their related historical events as part of the broader narrative of the Americas.

CHAPTER II

Making Witnesses by “Making Generations” in Gayl Jones’s *Corregidora*

...we got to keep what we need to bear witness. That scar that's left to bear witness. We got to keep it as visible as our blood.

Gayl Jones, *Corregidora*

In the illuminating work, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), Susan Sontag examines the representations of atrocity and the uses and meanings of images that depict such cruelty. Sontag makes a vital distinction between individual and collective memory. She writes: “All memory is individual, unreproducible—it dies with each person. What is called collective memory is not a remembering but a stipulating: that *this* is important, and this is the story about how it happened ... ” (Sontag 86). Rather than naming this collective memory she recasts it as “collective instruction” (85). Sontag’s discussion of collective (instruction) and individual memory is particularly useful in beginning my analysis of Gayl Jones’s *Corregidora* (1975). In her novel, Jones creates a family legacy of remembering trauma determined and perpetuated by the family members’ collective instruction about the past. Remembering becomes a collective and selective mediation for passing down the family’s legacy. The Corregidora family matriarchs carry a history of brutality and slavery in their minds and bodies. The weight of this past exploitation bears down on the future generations and remembering and witnessing become another trauma-producing experience.

Entrapped in a Legacy of Trauma

Jones's protagonist, Ursa, recalls that beginning at the age of five her Great Gram and Gram shared their experiences as enslaved prostitutes owned by the Portuguese slave owner Corregidora. Ursa remembers being told: “ ... *They burned all the documents, Ursa, but they didn't burn what they put in their minds. We got to burn out what they put in our minds, like you burn out a wound. Except we got to keep what we need to bear witness. That scar that's left to bear witness. We got to keep it as visible as our blood*” (Jones 72). Ironically, the order the family matriarchs issue to Ursa and her mother entraps them deeper into the psychological wounds from this past. To speak of burning out the wound left by enslavement exposes the complexity of integrating the past with the present for the Corregidora women. Rather than burning out what is in their memories, Great Gram and Gram solidify their trauma by reliving it through the repetition of the story. Ursa's female ancestors vow that it is through the biological perpetuation of the female line, as well as oral storytelling of the past, that they will pass down the family story of sexual and psychological violation.

In a flashback to a conversation with Great Gram when Ursa is a child, she remembers Great Gram saying:

... they didn't want to leave no evidence of what they done—so it couldn't be held against them. And I'm leaving evidence. And you got to leave evidence too. And your children got to leave evidence ... *The important thing is making generations. They can burn the papers but they can't burn conscious, Ursa. And that what makes evidence. And that's what makes the verdict.* (14 & 22)

Thus, the body becomes the only evidence of this past, and the family matriarchs place the female body at the center of how to keep their story from disappearing in the wreckage of history. Yet, as the novel progresses, Jones reveals that this act of subversion becomes a

source for more wounding. In a system that successfully robbed them of control over their bodies, Great Gram's mandate radically attempts to claim ownership over her own body as well as over the subsequent generations of Corregidora women. Great Gram's means for remembering and transmitting the story reside in the Corregidora bloodline, yet ultimately, this vehicle for controlling and transmitting the story neither ensures Great Gram freedom from the trauma nor any form of healing from it. Great Gram does not become the final authority over her story. In fact, it will be Ursa's responsibility to engage in a recuperative and authorial control over the past, but this can only happen once she confronts her family's bitter narrative of enslavement. Moreover, making generations as a way to tell the story will not undo the horror done to them or establish a sense of safety that they have never known. Although Corregidora can no longer be punished for his brutality, by giving voice to their story the Corregidora women constitute a vital act of transfer—transmitting knowledge from one generation to another about their survival in a system designed to destroy their humanity while inadvertently keeping the evil alive as well.

My analysis and interpretation of the profound psychological effects this family edict has on Ursa elicit an examination of the psychological symptoms of trauma. The repetition compulsion, a hallmark symptom of trauma, to tell of a traumatic slave past leads to another form of enslavement for the Corregidora women, from which Ursa will try to extract herself as a way to find psychic wholeness. Returning to Cathy Caruth's discussion of traumatic symptoms sheds light on why Great Gram continually engages in this form of repetition. Caruth asserts that the traumatic experience carries a characteristic "belatedness" (Caruth, *Unclaimed*, 92), meaning that it is not fully experienced at the time it occurs. This delay in remembering the moment of the trauma isolates it from other normal memories, thus leading

to a trajectory of repetition. Flashbacks to the trauma can appear at any time “as an interruption—as something with a disrupting force or impact” (115). In addition, “trauma is not locatable in the simple violent and original event in an individual’s past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on” (4; italics in the original). Although the victim-survivor may adapt and physically survive the traumatic event, it can severely and permanently alter her physical, emotional, and psychological life, in turn tainting the survivor’s present life. *Corregidora* reveals these symptoms and structure of traumatic experience and its aftermath, and more significantly, it lays bare Ursa’s confrontation with and integration of this inheritance with her present self. Literary critic Deborah E. McDowell points out that black women write the majority of contemporary novels about slavery. She argues that “these novels posit a female-gendered subjectivity, more complex in dimension, that dramatizes not what was *done* to slave women, but what they *did* with what was done to them” (McDowell, “Negotiating” 146). Although McDowell’s conclusion applies to Jones’s creative project, *Corregidora* complicates the ways in which the Corregidora women attempt to recuperate their subjectivity, which reveals slavery’s catastrophic effects on an individual. In her text, Jones convincingly demonstrates what critic Hazel Carby concludes regarding the impact of slavery on the literary imagination: “The economic and social system of slavery is thus a prehistory ... a past social condition that can explain contemporary phenomena” (Carby 126). For Jones, the history of slavery is a dynamic presence in its very absence because it continues to shape identities, as well as the course of one’s life, as is evident in Ursa’s life.

The history of Ursa's family legacy of enslavement provides the background for the novel's violent opening scene. One night, after Ursa performs at her job as a blues singer for Happy's Café in post-segregation Kentucky, her husband, Mutt Thomas, throws her down stairs in a fit of drunken jealous rage. As a result, Ursa must have a hysterectomy, thus setting her on a collision course with the family's burdensome edict and her inability to fulfill this responsibility. After waking from surgery, Ursa reflects on what this means for her: "I lay on my back, feeling as if something more than the womb had been taken out" (6). Indeed, she later learns that she was pregnant with Mutt's child. Ironically, Mutt gives Ursa the child she needs to perpetuate the family story while taking from her the same child and any future generations through his violent actions. Unintentionally, Mutt propels Ursa onto a difficult path to self-awareness of the physical and psychological ramifications the haunting family legacy has on her. Ursa's hysterectomy destabilizes the anchor of Great Gram's ideological obsession to reproduce other female children. Now, the psychologically and physically damaged Ursa faces an identity crisis once she can no longer physically "leave evidence" (14) of this slave past.

In one moment, the reason for Ursa's creation and her purpose in life is lost. The oral storytelling of this past, as well as the family edict that all female members must "make generations" (10), construct a framework for how to preserve their tragic history. The familial matriarchs decide what parts of the story will be remembered, retold, and memorialized. Intricately bound to the family's complicated structure and instruction of remembering is the female body. The bodies of the Corregidora women become not only the site of memory for their past but the very way in which they subvert the silencing of their slave past and share a story that involved the destruction of their humanity.

Great Gram's instruction for remembering and witnessing to the past is at once mysterious and terrifying for the child Ursa. This is evident in the following passage as Ursa recalls listening to Great Gram's story:

Great Gram sat in the rocker. I was on her lap. She told the same story over and over again. She had her hands around my waist, and I had my back to her. While she talked, I'd stare down at her hands. She would fold them and then unfold them. She didn't need her hands around me to keep me in her lap, and sometimes I'd see the sweat in her palms ... Her hands had lines all over them. It was as if the words were helping her, as if the words repeated again and again could be a substitute for memory, were somehow more than the memory. As if it were only the words that kept her anger. Once when she was talking, she started rubbing my thighs with her hands, and I could feel the sweat on my legs. Then she caught herself, and stopped, and held my waist again. (11)

Ursa recognizes at a young age—although she cannot articulate it until years later—that Great Gram's incessant repetition of the story has lost some of its emotional poignancy and meaning and it is the sounds of the words she speaks that retain her anger. Great Gram's stories have become repetitive remembrances of her past, and the child-witness, Ursa, intuitively knows the impact of this past evident in the fact that Great Gram continues retelling the story. Great Gram's engagement in the compulsive repetition of these memories is symptomatic of her psychological trauma and further evidence of her lack of mastery over the past and what she remembers about it. What she believes to be her revenge by exposing Corregidora's monstrous acts eventually becomes counterproductive for her future lineage.

In the above passage, Ursa focuses on her and Great Gram's hands and the sweat on her thighs. The narrative focus on this aspect of the scene reveals that Great Gram's hand-rubbing of Ursa's thighs frightens the child. At the same time, Great Gram's trance-like state of mind while she remembers Corregidora and rubs Ursa's thighs reveals the shroud of mystery, which blankets the child's full understanding of what happened in Brazil. In addition, the thigh rubbing and sweaty hands suggest a sexual connotation connected with

remembering Corregidora. This repetition of language, body movements as well as the back and forth motion of the rocking chair show how Great Gram recalls and passes down memory. This transference of knowledge is not only through verbal transmission but also through the connection of bodies between family members.

The critical role Great Gram plays in identity formation as mediator and companion for Ursa cannot be underestimated because this edict to procreate shapes Ursa's self-identity from an early age. Great Gram turns the functionality of Ursa's body into one that should procreate, and this becomes a central force as part of Ursa's traumatic inheritance. Her encounters with Great Gram place Ursa in a position of subjugation because she cannot choose how this legacy will configure her identity and purpose in life. Great Gram's cyclic repetition of her enslavement as a way of remembering and a means for her survival illustrates another distinctive symptom of trauma, which Caruth calls "double telling" (Caruth, *Unclaimed* 7). She explains that the compulsive repetition and reliving of past events exists in a space between life and death. Caruth suggests that this is "a kind of double telling, the oscillation between a *crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis of life*: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival" (7). At this point, the victim is stuck, suspended between living and dying. For example, Great Gram's memories of life during and after enslavement, in so far as they are connected to her liberation from Corregidora, are the only aspects of Great Gram's past about which readers learn. Her intricate involvement with violence does not lead to a physical death, but rather to a suspended space between the past and present. She lived through the trauma of slavery's brutality, yet the resulting psychological effect is her dissociative state of being, evident in the constant repetition of stories about Brazil and Corregidora. Even

though Great Gram is physically present with her family, she nonetheless continually looks back to Brazil and her enslavement.

The symptoms of trauma surface throughout the pages of *Corregidora*, as Ursa, too, oscillates between past and present. This part of Great Gram's legacy finds residency in Ursa's life as reflected in her narration of the story. Jones creates a narrative structure reflective of the long-term and on-going consequences of Ursa's family legacy of enslavement. Throughout the narrative, Jones blurs the lines of demarcation between past and present with Ursa's fragmented memories of her maternal relatives' oral stories told to her when she is a child. These remembrances interrupt Ursa's own narrative after Mutt's violent act, her hysterectomy, and consequent loss of her unborn child. The continual return of these flashbacks results in the collapse of time and reality in the text, which in turn indicates the disrupting force of these memories, and their endless impact on Ursa's life. Throughout the novel, the stories Ursa's ancestors tell are identified by the use of italics. Yet, many of Ursa's memories and emotions about Mutt also appear in italics. By doing this, Jones conflates Mutt's treatment of Ursa with Corregidora's treatment of his enslaved female prostitutes. Both men engage in abusive and despicable attacks on the women in their lives, further emphasizing for Ursa that men hurt and perpetuate these legacies of violence.

The result of Jones's narrative structure conveys how the memories and legacy of slavery haunt Ursa and her family members. Consequently, much of the literary criticism on *Corregidora* addresses the haunting nature of slavery for the Corregidora women.¹ At times, this past possesses Ursa as well as her Great Gram and Gram. To understand how Jones

¹See Claudia Tate's "*Corregidora*: Ursa's Blues Medley," Melvin Dixon's "Singing a Deep song: Language as Evidence in the Novels of Gayl Jones," Ann deCille's "Phallus(ies) of Interpretation: Toward Engendering the Black Critical 'I,'" and Madhu Dubey's "Gayl Jones and the Matrilineal Metaphor of Tradition."

portrays this possession and haunting in the text's structure, Caruth's definition of trauma proves helpful:

To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event. And thus the traumatic symptom cannot be interpreted, simply, as a distortion of reality, nor as a lending of unconscious meaning to a reality it wishes to ignore, nor as the repression of what once was wished for ... it is a peculiar kind of historical phenomenon ... in which the overwhelming events of the past repeatedly possess in intrusive images and thoughts, the one who has lived through them. (Caruth, *Trauma*, 4-5)

Although Ursa did not live through slavery, she nonetheless experiences its residual effects through the relationships with her female family members. As the novel progresses, Jones reveals that Ursa indeed suffers from a traumatic inheritance of Great Gram and Gram's nightmare of enslavement. Trauma scholar and psychiatrist Dori Laub argues that the trauma survivor must have someone willing to listen to her story to begin to bridge the chasm between the traumatic past and her survival in the present.² Laub explains the listener's role:

The listener to trauma comes to be a participant and co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening, he comes to partially experience trauma in himself. The relation of the victim to the event, therefore, impacts on the relation of the listener to it, and the latter comes to feel the bewilderment, injury, confusion, dread and conflicts that the trauma victim feels. He has to address all these, if he is to carry out his function as a listener, and if trauma is to emerge, so that its henceforth impossible witnessing can indeed take place ... The listener has to feel the victim's victories, defeats and silences, know them from within, so that they can assume the form of testimony. (Laub 58)

Indeed, Ursa internalizes Great Gram's stories and becomes deeply entrenched in the family paradigm of witnessing. As a result, Ursa experiences traumatic symptoms that Caruth elucidates in her discussion of post-traumatic stress disorder. Caruth writes:

... there is a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event, along with the numbing that may have begun during or

²Dori Laub, a Holocaust survivor and psychoanalyst, as well as the cofounder of the Fortunoff Video Archives for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University, bases his theories of witnessing to and recovery from trauma on extensive work with Holocaust survivors. Although his work focuses on the Holocaust, his theory on witnessing provides an essential framework for my reading of how witnessing functions in *Corregidora*.

after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimulants recalling the event. (Caruth, *Trauma*, 4)

The italicized portions of *Corregidora* interrupt Ursa's present day narration of her life. In addition, throughout Ursa's narration she refers to her many dreams about the family stories. These sections of the story constitute memories of her childhood and Great Gram and Gram's stories of Corregidora, in addition to hallucinations of imaginary conversations with her estranged husband Mutt. This creates a circular structure to the text, which carries Ursa back to the past of Corregidora's despicable acts of violence and abuse. The persistent instability of time and narrative voices reflects the disorder and disorientation of Ursa's consciousness as she attempts to find a secure self-identity beyond Great Gram's "*crisis of death* and ... *crisis of life*" (Caruth, *Unclaimed*, 7). Great Gram and Gram's memories constantly intrude on Ursa's attempt to redefine her role as witness to the family legacy of slavery and survival once she can no longer physically produce other witnesses to pass on the story.

While in the hospital recovering from the fall and operation, Ursa recalls the family's story to her friend Tadpole, who will later be her husband for a brief period of time. Although the adult Ursa recounts the story, she tells it with a child's voice:

My great-grandma told my grandmamma the part she lived through that my grandmamma didn't live through and my grandmamma told my mama what they both lived through and my mama told me what they all lived through and we were suppose to pass it down like that from generation to generation so we'd never forget. Even though they'd burned everything to play like it didn't never happen. Yeah, and where's the next generation? (Jones 9)

Haunted by this question throughout the text, Ursa understands that the hysterectomy has taken more from her than just a physical womb. As instituted by Great Gram, the fundamental act of remembrance through procreation results in the female body as never her

own. Ursa tells Tadpole that even her mother always told her “you got to make generations” (10).

Furthermore, to give a physical image to the name and legacy of Corregidora, Ursa inherits a photo of him from Great Gram with the instruction that this photo will help them “know who to hate” (10). Great Gram explains: “I stole it because I said whenever afterward when evil come I wanted something to point to and say, ‘That’s what evil look like’” (12). Ursa admits that she takes it out “every now and then so [she] won’t forget what he looked like” (10). The Corregidora women offer another way to re-manufacture their hatred for Corregidora by passing down the photo of him, which consequently infects and affects the photo’s carriers. Inadvertently, they create a shrine to the man they want to denigrate with the way they pass down the photo from one generation to the next as if it is a valuable family heirloom to be treasured and revered. Viewing the photo fills in the gaps of lost memory that Great Gram may have about Corregidora. With each viewing of the photo, Great Gram recalls her rage and hate for this man. Ursa tells her friend Tadpole that even now she looks at the photo from time to time so as to remember what Corregidora looks like—he is the manifestation of evil for her family. And since these memories are not her memories of a first-hand experience, she uses this photograph as a means for remembering whom she should hate and why she should procreate. The photo links Ursa to a man she never met and only knows through the filter of the family’s memories. It is really the only evidence other than the female bodies that points to Corregidora’s existence—he is not myth or fiction.

Ursa’s female ancestors ultimately traumatize her more than does the memory of Corregidora. Ursa recognizes that her memories are “always their memories and never [her] own” (101) and that extricating herself from them will be difficult, if not impossible. In an

interior monologue, Ursa concludes: “Shit, we’re all consequences of something. Stained with another’s past as well as our own. Their past in my blood” (45). Great Gram’s memories have shaped and directed Ursa’s life until now. She is not only marked by the acts of Corregidora, in that his memory dominates the family narrative and by extension hers, but it is his cruel acts such as rape, incest, verbal abuse, and prostituting them that linger in the stories Great Gram insists on sharing with Ursa. The constraints of their demands imprison Ursa in a trajectory of always remembering brutality.

Critic Missy Dehn Kubitschek explains what this bearing witness means for the subsequent generations of Corregidora women: “In their world, ‘bearing witness’ becomes literal—their function. Ursa’s mother’s function, Ursa’s function, lies in producing daughters to chant the story anew and ensure its survival” (Kubitschek 146). Yet, ensuring its survival through the female body’s ability to procreate other female bodies only further entraps Ursa and her mother in a cycle of trauma, which results in a new form of enslavement in and entanglement with the past. Ursa becomes ensnared in the extreme events she hears from her family members, meaning that she is deeply engaged and intimately implicated in the unfolding of events, which she is to keep literally alive. In addition, Ursa functions as a witness who is both actively and passively linked to acts of brutality and sexual violation. Ursa’s proximity to Corregidora’s direct victims, both spatially and psychologically, qualifies her position as another witness to this past. She does not add new facts to the family’s story, yet signals of traumatic memory—repetitions, confusion, merging of time—surfacing in Ursa’s narration point to her position as an entangled witness to these stories of violence.

To think this through further, critic Marianne Hirsch’s discussion of “postmemory” (Hirsch, *Surviving* 9) helps explain the transgenerational memory of trauma that Ursa

internalizes. Hirsch explains: “Postmemory most specifically describes the relationship of children of survivors of cultural and collective trauma to the experiences of their parents, experiences that they ‘remember’ only as the narratives and images with which they grew up, but they are so powerful, so monumental, as to constitute memories of their own right” (9).³ Postmemory is a form of memory not only mediated through recollection “but through representation, projection, and creation ...” (9). Postmemory is the future generation’s response to the traumatic experiences of the first generation. Hirsch further explains that postmemory offers a model for reading the compulsive and traumatic repetition of the story and its connected images, which link the future generation to the first. Whereas Great Gram’s memory of slavery is chronologically connected to the past, Ursa’s memory of the stories are linked to her through what Great Gram chooses to tell her. Ursa’s body represents a legacy of this trauma since she later learns from her mother that she was created for the sole purpose of passing down the family story. Ursa and her mother’s bodies offer the (pro)creative spaces for the mediation of Great Gram’s memories in the family’s master narrative. In addition, Ursa experiences the effects of this multi-generational trauma in that the edict to leave evidence defines and consumes her identity. The violence done to the preceding generations of Corregidora women continues to inflict itself on the future generations of Ursa and her mother with each retelling of the past. Although Great Gram passes her trauma down to future generations, it is inappropriate to equate Great Gram to Corregidora’s brutal violations. Yet, the end result is psychological trauma to those connected to them. Hirsch suggests: “... compulsive and traumatic repetition connects the

³Hirsch does not limit her definition of postmemory to include only the family inheritance of trauma. She recognizes that “this form of remembrance need not be restricted to the family, or even to a group that shares an ethnic or national identity marking: through particular forms of identification, adoption, and projection, it can be more broadly available ... Postmemory thus would be *retrospective witnessing by adoption*” (italics in the original 9-10).

second generation to the first, *producing* rather than *screening* the effect of trauma that was lived so much more directly *as compulsive repetition* by survivors and contemporary witnesses” (8-9; italics in the original).

Great Gram and Gram attempt to recover their narrative of enslavement through the biological production of bodies while the repetitive retelling of events produces for the second, third, and fourth generations traumatic anxiety for witnessing to an inherited trauma. The work of Dori Laub with Holocaust survivors informs my reading of Great Gram’s compulsion to tell her story. Laub explains the drive for survivors to tell their stories:

... survivors did not only need to survive so that they could tell their stories; they also needed to tell their stories in order to survive. There is, in each survivor, an imperative to *tell* and thus come to *know* one’s story, unimpeded by ghosts from the past against which one has to protect oneself. One has to know one’s buried truth in order to be able to live one’s life.

This imperative to tell and be heard can become itself an all-consuming life task. Yet no amount of telling seems ever to do justice to this inner compulsion. There are never enough words or the right words, there is never enough time or the right time, and never enough listening or the right listening to articulate the story that cannot be fully captured in *thought*, *memory*, and *speech*. The pressure thus continues unremittingly, and if words are not trustworthy or adequate, the life that is chosen can become the vehicle by which the struggle to tell continues. (Laub, *Truth* 63)

Great Gram’s preoccupation to testify about the past to other family members never allows her to reconcile two worlds—the realm of the trauma and the realm of her current, ordinary life.⁴ The consuming nature of the compulsion orally and physically to pass down the story reveals the tremendous pressure with which Great Gram lives. Her traumatic experiences and memories of slavery cannot be transformed into a story with a beginning, middle and end. Trauma’s psychological force on the victim-survivor (like that which Great Gram

⁴Lawrence Langer, in his study on oral testimonies of Holocaust survivors delineated in *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (1991), discusses the phenomenon of survivors that cannot link their existence in the death camps with their lives before and after the experience. Langer states: “This suggests a permanent duality, not exactly a split or a doubling but a parallel existence. [The witness] switches from one to the other without synchronization because he is reporting not a *sequence* but a *simultaneity*” (Langer 95).

experiences) is insightfully explained by trauma theorist Lawrence Langer: “Trauma stops the chronological clock and fixes the moment permanently in memory and imagination, immune to the vicissitudes of time. The unfolding story brings relief, while the unfolding plot induces pain” (Langer 174-75). Great Gram’s retelling of the past to the young Ursa functions as more of a re-experience of this past, rather than memories distinct from the life she now lives.⁵

It is important to clarify that distinction does not imply separation. Great Gram’s memories are distinct from the reality in which she lives, yet her past is bound to her present life and identity, thus culminating in significant psychological tension that she passes on to her granddaughter and great-granddaughter. Great Gram’s situation reveals the magnitude and utter complexity of the trauma permeating her psychological state—she alternates between silence and pressing repetition of her past. And Ursa knows that “*still there was what they never spoke ... what even they wouldn’t tell me*” (Jones 103). Memory, speech, and storytelling will not crystallize this past, so Great Gram turns to the body as the tangible and permanent way to transgress the silence caused by the burning of the paper evidence and the unspeakable horrors of her enslavement. The body becomes “the vehicle by which the struggle to tell continues” (Laub 63). For her, the story of enslavement and emancipation is unchanging and repeated to the exclusion of how her survival can offer hope or healing for future generations of Corregidora women.

Ultimately, Great Gram’s project to counter the erasure of the official records fails in a significant way. Although Corregidora’s acts of violence, rape, and cruelty are exposed long after the abolition of slavery and his death, Great Gram’s reproductive ideology and the

⁵This is evident in the passage I quote on page 6 of this chapter when Great Gram tells the child Ursa about her enslavement while rubbing the child’s thighs with sweaty hands.

preoccupation thereof obstructs Ursa's and her mother's healthy psychological development. Her insistence on sexual intercourse for reproduction replicates Corregidora's repressive control over her body and soul and now the future generations. Ursa comments, "He [Corregidora] made them make love to anyone, so they couldn't love anyone" (Jones 104). The indirect result of Great Gram's influence on her progeny and its failure to provide healing from such trauma resonates in Audre Lorde's famous statement, "For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change" (Lorde 112).

In this family, the black female body is used as a means for economic and biological production, as well as an outlet for Corregidora's desire. The female body, subjugated and objectified for exploitative purposes, converges in a political and economic vortex. To understand this relationship, I turn to Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish, The Birth of the Prison* (1977). In it he discusses the body's involvement in what he terms as the "political field" (Foucault 25). Foucault explains that in the political space:

... power relations have an immediate hold upon it (the body); they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs. This political investment of the body is bound up, in accordance with the complex reciprocal relations, with its economic use; it is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination; but, on the other hand, its constitution as labour power is possible only if it is caught up in a system of subjection ... the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body. (25-6)

Although Foucault centers his discussion on the body of the condemned prisoner/criminal, his argument of the body's relation to political and economic power helps clarify how Corregidora views the female bodies of his women. Their biological output is intimately linked to the economic worth their bodies generate for him. They not only become free labor for him, but he profits triply from their enslavement by prostituting them as well as using

them for his own sexual desire and gratification. In another flashback to one of Great Gram's stories, Ursa remembers:

... he took her out of the field when she was still a child and put her to work in a whorehouse while she was a child. She was to go out or he would bring the men in and the money they gave her she was to turn over to him. There were other women he used like that. She was the pretty little one with the almond eyes and coffee-bean skin, his favorite. "A good little piece. My best. Dorita. Little gold piece." (Jones 10-11)

He reduces her to the status of an object and, even worse, he remakes her worth through his verbal language to use her as a means to exercise his agency as slave owner, rapist, and brutalizer. Later, readers learn that before Corregidora began bringing men to her, "he would take [her] for himself first and said he was breaking [her] in" (11). As a result, Corregidora fathers Great Gram's daughter and her granddaughter (Ursa's mother). Their sexuality is commodified into a product to be temporarily, but repeatedly, bought and sold. Not only are the bodies of Great Gram and Gram turned into sites for economic productivity, but the result of rape and sexual enslavement produces other children that Corregidora sells off for more profit. In every way, Great Gram and Gram's bodies become sources of production from which he profits monetarily.

The Corregidora family matriarchs are not the only victims of his perversions. In a particularly harrowing recollection of how he would decide to buy other female slaves, Corregidora's first concern focused on their bodies and by extension their sexuality. Ursa recalls Gram's memory of Great Gram's story:

Yeah, Mama told me how in the old days he was just buying up women. They'd have to raise up their dresses so he could see what they had down there, and he feel all around down there, and then he feel their bellies to see if they had solid bellies. And they had to be pretty. He wasn't buying up them fancy mulatta womens though. They had to be black and pretty. They had to be the color of his coffee beans. That's why he said he always liked my mama better than me. (173)

Corregidora's obsession with the bodies of his female slaves eventually becomes Great Gram's obsession too, although her fixation on the female body functions in a new and subversive way. Rather than exploiting the female body for economic production and sexual gratification, Great Gram converts it into the production of witnesses to Corregidora's cruelty and acts of rape and violence to the female body.

The Corregidora women do not abandon the objectification of the body, but rather continue its use in a paradigm of production and power. Now the female body's output becomes the source for historical preservation of the family story, a thoroughly utilitarian use. However, while their bodies are sites for transmission of the past, they further confine themselves and future generations to a history imposed on them. In other words, the history they possess and which possesses them is a story of their disempowerment. Although they reveal the absolute control Corregidora wielded over them, Great Gram, in turn, accepts nothing less than a complete surrender to the veracity of her claims evident when she slaps young Ursa for questioning the truthfulness of her stories. Great Gram instructs:

When I'm telling you something don't ever ask if I'm lying. Because they didn't want to leave no evidence of what they done- so it couldn't be held against them. And I'm leaving evidence. And you got to leave evidence too. And your children got to leave evidence. And when it come time to hold up the evidence, we got to have the evidence to hold up. That's why they burned all the paper so there wouldn't be no evidence to hold up against them. (Jones 14)

At a young age, Ursa learns that there is no space for interpretation or exploration of the past beyond what Great Gram and Gram decide to tell. Ursa and her mother must accept the story of the past, how they are implicated in it and how they will transmit the family trauma to future female generations. Psychologically, this family paradigm wreaks havoc on the grown up Ursa, especially evident when she loses her physical ability to have children. Great Gram decides for her daughter and granddaughter that their bodies and life's purpose will be to

witness to the trauma of physical and sexual enslavement, yet their bodies transgress merely witnessing and further perpetuate the source of the suffering—memories of Corregidora and his deplorable acts of violation.

Once this period of enslavement ends, these women survivors continue to use their bodies and their sexuality as a form of power. The master of this power shifts from Corregidora to them, but their bodies are, nonetheless, used in ways that deny them an authentic release from their personal and collective trauma. As a result, they continue to define the black woman's body as an agent for production—the production of a historical and familial narrative. To achieve this end, they exclude the possibilities for these same bodies to contravene the traumatic and recognize the black female body's capability for a bodily language rooted in dignity, individualism, and agency. They also deny themselves the pleasure of the body because of the obsession to leave witnesses, which will expose Corregidora's brutality. The female body is still owned by another, but now it is the Corregidora women who own these bodies. Ursa and her mother, caught in a web of inherited psychological trauma, do not easily extract themselves from such disempowerment. Indeed, Ursa's mother never successfully finds freedom from the family legacy. Ursa's mother is the product of incest—the result of Corregidora's rape of his own daughter (Gram). Indeed, the generations of Corregidora are all warped emotionally.

Reflective of this brutality is the verbal language of abuse born from his sexual exploitation and savage behavior towards Great Gram, which is poignantly portrayed in the following passage. Corregidora did not allow black men to have sexual intercourse with Great Gram:

He didn't send nothing but rich mens in there to me, cause he said I was his little gold pussy, his little gold piece ... But he said he didn't wont no waste on nothing black

... some of us he called hisself cultivating us, and then didn't send nothing but cultivated mens to us, and we had these private rooms, you know. But some of these others, they had been three or four or five whores fucking in the same room. But then if we did something he didn't like he might put us in there and send trash into us, and then we be catching everything then. So after that, first time he just talked to me real hard, said he didn't wont no black bastard fucking me ... He was real mad. He grabbed hold of me down between my legs and said he didn't wont nothing black down there. He said if he just catch me fucking something black, they wouldn't have no pussy, and he wouldn't have none either. And then he was squeezing me all up on my pussy and then digging his hands up in there ... he was just digging all up in me till he got me where he wonted me and then he just laid me down on that big bed of his and started fucking me ... (124-125)⁶

It is important to note that Ursa's mother tells this story as she heard it from Great Gram.

Ursa notices that as her mother retells the story "it wasn't her that was talking, but Great Gram" (124), revealing that the family narrative of trauma dominates the family members' identities whether or not they experienced slavery. The retelling of Great Gram's words used to express this extreme abuse incarnates trauma's effect on language and her physical vulnerability to Corregidora's will. Great Gram's repetitions of vulgar words and phrases reveal an affected understanding and inability to control the intrusion of horrific memories. Overwhelmed by the extremity of such circumstances beyond her control, Great Gram remains transfixed by this tragedy that haunts her. The abundance of profane and visceral language in this passage reflects her need to communicate these memories, thus further emphasizing the survival of the body in a context where a corporeal form of language equates sex with violence, disease, and subjugation. Trauma's effects are recognizable in her reconstruction of the episode through the use of a coarse narration and the compulsive repetition of images and words. Focusing on Corregidora's acts of digging, squeezing, and

⁶On March 3, 2009, I delivered a portion of this chapter during a talk at the Lilian R. Furst Forum of Comparative Literature at UNC-CH. It is interesting to note that as I read this passage aloud my level of discomfort increased. This is a noticeable contrast to my experience of silently reading the scene, which did not provoke the same type of response in me. Attendees of the talk commented on the level of discomfort they experienced listening to me read the passage. This suggests that trauma narratives and the language used to tell these stories are not just words on a page but rather have the power to impact the sensibilities and emotions of readers and listeners beyond what appears in the text.

“fucking” strewn throughout this passage convey the displacement of Great Gram’s dignity and agency as another source for the trauma she endures. By reliving this grueling scene, as well as many others throughout Jones’s text, Jones transmits a deeper understanding of how Great Gram’s language can only be one of rage and hatred. Indeed, how does one get on with life after such experiences?

The Corregidora women’s language of rage and vengeance surfaces in the text in complicated ways. Their drive to reproduce biologically simultaneously spawns with each successive generation the rage, anger, and pain from their sexual and psychological violations. The repeated imagery of the female body’s reproductive and life-sustaining abilities reveals an expression of trauma that concurrently resists and acquiesces to verbal language. The repetition of these images reveals the difficulty of verbally articulating the all-encompassing and annihilating nature of the slave experience. Ursa remembers her mother’s order not to “bruise any of your seeds” (41). For the Corregidora women, the womb and its seeds become sacred. Great Gram and Gram tell Ursa’s mom to watch over her seeds, which she in turn instructs Ursa to do, and, yet, this proves to be out of Ursa’s control.

The implications of using the word seed to refer to a child further convey the ways in which biological production has become another form of producing witnesses. Referring to the potentiality for life as seeds also reveals how Great Gram views a child in her family—as one whose function will be to preserve the traumatic memories of her encounter with slavery. The child becomes a means to an end. After the fall and hysterectomy, Ursa, during an imagined dialogue with Mutt, makes reference to her seeds that are now wounded. Ursa comments: “... I have a birthmark between my legs ... But it’s your fault all my seeds are wounded forever. No warm ones, only bruised ones, not even bruised ones. No seeds” (45).

The dialogue with Mutt shows Ursa's psychic and now physical wounding from a lifetime enmeshed with traumatic memories, which dominate the family discourse. Ursa proves powerless to protect her sacred reproductive seeds. During this imaginary conversation with Mutt, the reconstitution of the female body's life-giving abilities into images of destruction and death reveal that "in trauma ... the outside has gone inside" (Caruth, *Unclaimed* 59). The severing of Ursa's procreative ability from her body is initially a catastrophic event for her, which is evident in this textually confusing conversation with Mutt: "Sperm to bruise me. Wash it away. Vinegar and water. Barbed wire where a womb should be. Curdled milk" (Jones 76). She further describes her loss as "Silence in my womb. My breasts quiver like old apples," and "The space between my thighs. A well that never bleeds" (99). The unnatural and violent images of barbed wire replacing the womb, soured mother's milk, and breasts resembling old apples express the deeply embedded trauma with which Ursa lives. Images of life are transformed into a lethal vision and association with death. This reflects the lasting legacy of Corregidora's practice of rape and incest and its generational ramifications on Ursa's perception of her self worth and body. Ursa's erosion of self manifests at the level of language and in her psychological state. Curdled milk, bruised seeds, and barbed wire evoke a mixture of endangerment and death for the future generations of Corregidora women, as well as for Ursa's psychological well-being. Ironically, Ursa's existence gives evidence of Corregidora's existence rather than offering proof of her female ancestors' survival. Corregidora is the only story Ursa knows regarding the history of slavery.

The magnitude of this history bears down on Ursa even in her dreams. She recalls a dream of Corregidora, which is significant and thematically complicated:

I dreamed that my belly was swollen and restless, and I lay without moving, gave birth without struggle, without feeling. But my eyes never turned to my feet. I never saw what squatted between my knees. But I felt humming and beating of wings and claws in my thighs. And I felt a stiff penis inside me. "Those who have fucked their daughter would not hesitate to fuck their mothers." Who are you? Who have I born? His hair was like white wings, and we were united at birth. (76-77)

The unnatural and impossible image of a newborn child clawing its mother's thighs during birth reveals not only the deviancy of Corregidora, but how the trauma of slavery contaminated every aspect of the lives of the Corregidora women, which is passed on to Ursa in the violence surfacing in this passage. In the dream, Ursa gives birth to a new version of the monstrous Corregidora while he simultaneously sexually violates her. Ursa's dream infers endangerment and fear that her body will produce the source of its suffering. She gives birth "without feeling," thus marking a dissociative state of mind brought on by her inherited trauma. The perversion of the mother-child relationship and the narrative fragmentation convey that Ursa's engagement with the traumatic is psychological as well as physical. The mixture of violence and incest with childbirth illuminates the absence of humanity in Corregidora.

A Way Out of Trauma

In Ursa's search for knowledge about her own biological father, she travels home to visit her mother. During this visit, her mother's own traumatic encounter with the edict to procreate is revealed in the story she recounts to Ursa about her conception and birth. For years, Ursa's mother explained away any questions about Ursa's father by describing her relationship with him as a casual affair resulting in the conception of Ursa. Now, Ursa wants the truth. More importantly, this visit with her mother is a crucial catalyst for their awakening to and acknowledgement of the heavy burden their female ancestors' memories

placed on them. For Ursa's mother, the birth of her daughter only further entrapped her in a cycle of traumatic repetition and pain. She does not experience the offering of hope a new life can bring into the world and to the parents.

Critic Kai Erikson discusses trauma and its effects on a community of people sharing the trauma. He explains:

... trauma becomes so widely shared an experience within an already existing collection of people that supplies its mood and temper of the group—dominates its imagery, governs the way members relate to one another. The point to be made here is not that calamity acts to strengthen the bonds linking people together—it does not, most of the time—but that the shared experience becomes almost like a common culture, a common language, a kinship among those who have come to see themselves as different. (Erikson, "Notes," 461)

Erikson crystallizes the peripheral result of trauma's isolating nature—those who experience trauma frequently experience the world in ways distinct from the accepted moods and understanding that govern life. Indeed, this is most clearly evident with Ursa and her mother. The violence done to Great Gram and Gram acts as concentric circles with infinite ripples affecting Ursa and her mother. Their mother-daughter relationship is not necessarily rooted in love but rather from an unconscious drive to produce witnesses. During the return home, what Ursa learns about her mother finally illuminates how Corregidora and the legacy of his brutality continues to corrupt and contaminate their lives. Literary critic Deborah M. Horvitz appropriately explains the ultimate result of the Corregidora women's edict to procreate: "Over the generations, this high-minded edict has deteriorated into robotic procreation devoid of sexual pleasure, and lost is the wish to preserve the past" (Horvitz 40). Critic Missy Dehn Kubitschek further explains: "In Gram's and Great Gram's mouths, history has become a vampire depriving present generations of sexual and emotional intensity and

intimacy” (Kubitschek 147). This deprivation begins with Ursa’s mother as her life’s trajectory reveals the destructive force of the family’s order.

At the beginning of their conversation, Ursa’s mother intuits her daughter’s need to know about this past so that Ursa’s language for witnessing to the past will be one of self-awareness rather than rage and resentment. She asks Ursa: “Corregidora’s never been enough for you, has it”? (Jones 111). Ursa responds that he has never been reason enough for the now unbearable and impossible familial responsibility to reproduce. Ursa’s life must include the history of her mother and ancestors, but the family narrative also needs to accommodate her experiences as well—experiences that do not revolve around the legacy of Brazilian slavery and its aftereffects. As Ursa’s mother penetrates deeper into her past with Ursa’s father Martin, her emotional pain and vulnerability are revealed through the admission of the absolute control Corregidora’s legacy wields over her: “Corregidora is responsible for that part of my life. If Corregidora hadn’t happened that part of my life never would have happened” (111).

During their visit, Ursa, at last, realizes that her identity and sexuality have been determined by slavery just as her mother’s has too. During Ursa’s marriages to Mutt and later to Tadpole, she feels neither a physical nor emotional connection with them, which is symptomatic of her inability to connect sexual union with pleasure and love. Ursa recognizes that her fundamental mistrust of men is linked to the stories of Corregidora. His influence, passed down by Great Gram and Gram, must be broken if she is to recover a more holistic view of herself, men, and sexual intercourse that moves beyond the rigidity of intercourse for reproduction only. Before going back to her family home, Ursa engages in an

imaginary conversation with Mutt in which she attempts to understand confusing childhood memories of her mother. Ursa remembers:

I never saw my mama with a man, never ever saw her with a man. But she wasn't a virgin because of me ... when I look back, that's all I see. Desire, and loneliness. A man that left her. Still she carried their evidence, screaming, fury in her eyes, but she wouldn't give me that, not that one. Not her private memory ... She was closed up like a fist. It was her very own memory, not theirs, her very own real and terrible and lonely and dark memory. And I never saw her with a man because she wouldn't give them anything else. Nothing. And still she told me what I should do, that I should make generations. But it was almost as if she'd left him too, as if she wanted only the memory to keep for her own but not his fussy body, not the man himself. Almost as if she'd gone out to get that man to have me and then didn't need him, because they'd been telling her so often what to do. (Jones 101)

These clouded memories filled with gaps propel Ursa to return to her childhood home. With Tadpole, Ursa responds to his verbal gestures of love with silence and reflects: "I was thinking I'd only wanted him to love me without saying anything about it" (55). The verbal and/or physical expression of love is difficult, if not impossible, for Ursa to accept because her education about men is that they are to be used for the practical purpose of reproduction, and love has no bearing on whether or not this happens.

During Ursa's marriage to Mutt, their sexual intimacy eventually deteriorates into another forum for manipulation and abuse by a man. Jealous of Ursa when other men watch her perform at Happy's Café, Mutt instructs her to give up singing. He bases his demand on the fact that he is her husband. When Ursa refuses to acquiesce to his demands, Mutt sexually manipulates Ursa by refusing to make love with her when she desires it and calling her "my pussy" (156). Ursa's already inherited distortion of sexual intimacy is only solidified with Mutt's domineering behavior and language towards her. Mutt frequently refers to her genitalia as "my pussy" (156), thereby instituting ownership over her sexuality and body. One day when Ursa is on her way to work, Mutt threatens to stand up and pretend

to sell her on an auction block while she sings. Mutt's exchange with Ursa is cruelly insensitive given the fact that he knows the Corregidora family history as well as his own: "He was standing with his arms all up in the air. I was on my way to work. 'One a y'all wont to bid for her? Piece a ass for sale. I got me a piece a ass for sale. That's what y'all wont, ain't it? Piece a ass. I said I got a piece a ass for sale, anybody wont to bid on it?'" (159).

These negative experiences with men and marriage only compound her skewed perspective of sexuality taught to her by the female family members. In addition, Tadpole, Ursa's second husband, eventually betrays her by having an affair with a young teenage girl. After Ursa discovers this and rejects him, Tadpole blames his betrayal on Ursa's sexual dysfunction. He accuses: "You can't even *come* with me. You don't even know what to do with a *real* man ... A man wants a woman that can do something for him" (88). Again, men use women, and their motivation is one of self-interest and selfishness. Rather than taking responsibility for his despicable and degrading language and behavior towards Ursa, Tadpole attempts to blame Ursa for his affair, which further solidifies for her the experiential reality for the Corregidora women that men hurt women.

One of the primary revelations from Ursa's visit with her mother is that the indoctrination of the family mandate to reproduce leads to procreation as an intuitive drive, which is more primordial than psychological. Embedded in her mother's recollection of meeting Martin is the once-uncontrollable drive to conceive and give birth to a female child. After meeting Martin, she recalls how her body responded to him: "... it was like something had got into me. Like my body or something knew what it wanted even if I didn't want no man. Cause I knew I wasn't looking for none. But it was like it knew it wanted you, and

knew it would have you, and knew you'd be a girl ... It was like my whole body knew. Just knew what it wanted ..." (114-15), "... I know it was something my body wanted, just something my body wanted" (116), "It was like my whole body wanted you, Ursa ..." (117), and "I knew my body would have a girl" (117). Ursa learns that her conception was driven by the familial compulsion to "make generations" (10).

Another distinctive element of her story, which reveals the family structure for reproduction as traumatic, is the assumption that all subsequent Corregidora generations will be female. Curiously, in her narration Ursa does not address the possibility that a male child could one day emerge from the family line. Great Gram provides the prototype for ways of remembering and witnessing, which includes the foreclosure on the possibility of a male child entering the family tree. Men are predators and abusers, as all of the Corregidora women experience. Yet, Ursa's loss of her womb provides for new possibilities to enter the family's structure for remembering.

Ursa learns that after her birth and parents' marriage, Martin and her mother continue to live in the same house as the Corregidora women. Once Martin moves in, Great Gram never speaks again about making generations. Indeed, the command is fulfilled, at least until the next generation. Martin's new presence in the family home does not bring about any positive change among the Corregidora women. Great Gram and Gram still speak of their enslavement and Martin and his new bride frequently overhear their stories of Brazil. Surrounded by this past on a daily basis ultimately proves destructive for Martin's relationship with Ursa's mother. She is unable to enjoy sexual intimacy with Martin while living in the same house with her grandmother and mother. Eventually, Martin realizes that they see him as merely a breeder: "I lived in that house long enough to know I helped you.

How long was it? Almost two years, wasn't it? That's long enough for any man to know if he's helped. How could I have missed. I mean, the first time. The other times were all miss, weren't they, baby" (119).

In a rage over this revelation, Martin leaves Ursa's mother after physically abusing her and making her walk down the street looking like a prostitute. Martin's frustrated expression of his anger only confirms for Ursa's mother that men abuse and exploit women. As Ursa's mother penetrates deeper into her memories of Martin and this period of her life, the extent of her trauma is revealed. Ursa recalls: "Mama kept talking until it wasn't her that was talking, but Great Gram. I stared at her because she wasn't Mama now, she was Great Gram" (124). The revelation of her mother's sexual dysfunction gives Ursa validation for why she, too, does not experience enjoyment during sexual intercourse. Great Gram and Gram teach their progeny well that males are intruders and agents of violence. This is repeatedly confirmed with Martin, Mutt, and Tadpole.

Ursa's knowledge of Martin and her mother's past helps Ursa begin to resist the compulsion to perpetuate the family's trauma. In one way, Ursa cannot physically continue the trauma of giving birth to a child yet the psychological stranglehold rooted in the family mandate still possesses power over her. The visit with her mother is Ursa's first conscious encounter with the past and the desire for knowledge of it. This triggers a new desire in Ursa to reconnect with the exterior world and herself in a way that positively affirms the continuation of her life beyond the unfulfilled familial ideology of reproduction. Again, Deborah M. Horvitz offers insightful analysis of the profound impact this truth resonates in Ursa's life: "By salvaging her voice from silence, Ursa is the first Corregidora woman to disrupt Gram's prescription for her body—to 'make generations'—thus, to render the flesh

made word, reversing the pattern of her foremothers ... When the silences speak, the inner world becomes a source of power” (Horvitz 53). Ursa’s visit home is an attempt to rescue herself and her family’s history from the violent objectification of the female body and psyche. With this knowledge, she wishes to construct an alternative family story allowing for a distinct differentiation between the female body’s function in a larger narrative of trauma and the body’s experience of the traumatic event. For Ursa, her position is complicated in numerous ways because as an inheritor of Corregidora’s legacy of violence she experiences a different kind of violence with Mutt’s domestic abuse. The shadow of Corregidora’s abuse and Mutt’s verbal and physical assaults place Ursa in a position of defense rather than offense.

Four generations of Corregidora women are physically abused by the men closest to them. The cycle of repetitive behavior is startling as each generation of women is treated as prostitutes and objects. In ways similar to Corregidora, Mutt considers Ursa his property because she is *his* wife. This claim of ownership over her surfaces numerous times in Ursa’s flashbacks to their marriage and the days leading up to his violent outburst of pushing her down the stairs. Mutt becomes increasingly jealous when Ursa performs at Happy’s Café. The novel’s opening scene and conversations between Mutt and Ursa replicate what readers later learn of Corregidora’s obsessive ownership over his slave women. Jones writes: “I don’t like those mens messing with you, he [Mutt] said. Don’t nobody mess with me [Ursa]. Mess with they eyes [Mutt]” (3). Although Mutt’s ownership is not literal and legally binding, his psychological approach to their marriage is one of appropriation and subjugation over Ursa’s sexuality and body. Mutt’s family legacy also includes slavery and ownership, which he clearly cannot break from during his marriage with Ursa. Mutt’s great-grandfather

bought his freedom from slavery while working as a blacksmith, thus enabling him to buy the freedom of his wife. After he becomes financially indebted to some men and unable to pay them back, they take his wife as payment for the debt. The courts allowed this to stand because it determined that since he bought his wife she was his property and, therefore, his slave. Mutt recalls “his great-grandfather had just gone crazy after that” (151). After hearing this story, Ursa is silent and Mutt tries to reassure her that, “Whichever way you look at it, we ain’t them” (151). Yet, Mutt’s behavior in many ways exhibits behaviors of ownership, especially at the level of language he uses towards Ursa.

Ursa recognizes that before her loss, she was like her maternal ancestors even though she always thought she was different because she did not directly experience slavery.

However, Ursa learns that as long as she had a womb with which to bear children she was like them. After examining a photo of herself and Mutt, the reality of this legacy strikes

Ursa:

... I realized for the first time I had what all those women had. I’d always thought I was different. *Their* daughter, but somehow different. Maybe less Corregidora. I don’t know. But when I saw that picture, I knew I had it. What my mother and my mother’s mother had before her ... But I *am* different now, I was thinking. I have everything they had, except the generations. I can’t make generations. And even if I still had my womb, even if the first baby *had* come-what would I have done then? Would I have kept up? Would I have been like *her*, or *them*? (60)

This marks the first time Ursa dares to imagine her life beyond the family responsibility to procreate. She recognizes that what she carries from them is the trauma of the family story and the obsessive drive to procreate. At one time, Ursa believes her distance from Corregidora makes her distinct from Great Gram and Gram. Yet, the loss of her baby and womb awakens Ursa to her sameness with the female family members and now her difference from them. As an adult, Ursa questions the impact of the family members on her

and her mother. Only this time the questions move from the truthfulness of the story to imagining what life looks like beyond the stagnation of psychological trauma and pain, evident in her questioning whether or not she would force this past onto her own child.

The catalyst for this self-exploration begins after the loss of her womb, which initiates Ursa's search for a self-identity not determined by the family narrative of reproduction. She turns to artistic expression, the blues in particular, as her way of retelling this history. Although the psychological aspects of *Corregidora* are central to the novel, Ursa's development as an artist provides one of the most significant ways for healing from her upbringing. The connection between Ursa's blues songs and survival cannot be overstated. The blues offer Ursa a means for mourning and remembering the loss of her womb and unborn child, in addition to the painful trauma of her family's past. But they also allow Ursa a way to create a self-identity integrating her inheritance of slavery's trauma, Mutt's domestic abuse, and the loss of her womb and child with a present self not solely determined by these devastating experiences. Returning to Marianne Hirsch's discussion of postmemory, she also addresses the potentiality of artistic expression to offer the proceeding generations an antidote to the repetition compulsion. The artist can transgress the imposed limits of traumatic repetition by "displacing and recontextualizing these well-known images in their artistic work," thus using repetition for the production of new expressions for storytelling that can be "*a mostly helpful vehicle of working through a traumatic past*" rather than using repetition as "an instrument of fixity or paralysis or simple retraumatization" (Hirsch, "Surviving" 9), which only further compounds the trauma for the individual.

Shortly after the accident, Ursa asks herself in an imaginary dialogue with herself: "What do the blues do for you" (Jones 56), to which she responds: "It helps me to explain

what I can't explain" (56). As a blues singer, Ursa turns to the creation of her own songs rather than singing the songs written by others, as a way to express this painful legacy, felt acutely in her body. She expresses her desire: "I wanted a song that would touch me, touch my life *and* theirs. A Portuguese song, but not a Portuguese song. A new world song. A song branded with the new world" (Jones 59; italics in the original). Ursa's desire is not to relinquish and permanently cast away the family legacy, but rather to transform it into part of a larger narrative of movement that does not stop at enslavement and witnessing. This past leaves an indelible marking on her body and psyche, but it will no longer determine her identity and present life. She explains to her mother: "Yes, if you understood me, Mama, you'd see I was trying to explain it, in blues, without words, the explanation somewhere behind the words"(66). Her blues songs convey the pain of the past in which Corregidora was the owner, father, grandfather, and rapist of her female ancestors, yet her songs offer resistance to his domination and sexual exploitation of them. Ursa recognizes that the blues are her response to the family's traumatic past: "They squeezed Corregidora into me, and I sung back in return" (103). These songs provide a therapeutic and cathartic paradigm for which Ursa confronts and begins to integrate her inherited trauma into her present life.⁷ Ursa redefines how her family's story will be told and how the female body will recuperate its integrity and dignity. The music insinuates a desire to end the psychological suffering passed down to her from the other family members. The blues are her attempt to rescue herself, her body, and her memories from the oppressive act of resistance through reproduction. Since she can no longer witness by having a child, Ursa testifies to the pain of her life in her own way: "Then let me give witness the only way I can. I'll make a fetus out

⁷In his book, *Stomping the Blues* (1976), Albert Murray argues that blues music is neither negative nor sentimental. Instead, it reflects a disposition to encounter numerous obstacles in an individual's life. Murray believes that blues music is not merely a respite from suffering but rather signals the transcendence of pain and tragedy.

of grounds of coffee to rub inside my eyes. When it's time to give witness, I'll make a fetus out of grounds of coffee. I'll stain their hands" (54). Incorporating the fragments of coffee grounds into her new blues song references Corregidora's Brazilian coffee plantation where the crisis of slavery occurred for Ursa's female ancestors. Ursa reappropriates the familiar product of coffee and its association to violence and brutality by allowing it to resurface in a new way in her song. Although coffee is linked to painful memories and images, Ursa does not allow the last image of coffee grounds to stay on Corregidora's plantation. She subverts Corregidora's appropriation of this product and its associations by claiming it in a space and context of her choosing.

Ursa now conceives of songs that help her move beyond the tragedy of slavery and its ensuing trauma: "I am Ursa Corregidora. I have tears for eyes. I was made to touch my past at an early age. I found it on my mother's tiddies. In her milk. Let no one pollute my music. I will dig out their temples. I will pluck out their eyes" (77). Ursa will not render Corregidora irrelevant because it is this story of enslavement and survival that constitutes part of her history. The family trauma propels Ursa to sing the blues yet the blues and her artistic expression through these "new world songs" offer the space to confront and heal from the inherited trauma. The blues provide a way to mingle the pleasure and pain that she experiences in her life, especially exemplified in the relationship with Mutt. Early in their relationship, Ursa recalls that she indulged Mutt by singing all the songs he requested: "I sang to you out of my whole body" (46), yet this is never enough for him. Now, Ursa admits: "Every time I want to cry, I sing the blues" (46). The songs replace her tears and provide a cathartic outlet for her sadness, despair, and confusion. While she creates new songs she simultaneously resumes agency for conceptualizing her identity and a story including, but

also emerging from, the edict to witness to the family's encounter with slavery and violence. Ursa becomes the speaking/singing subject of her art rather than its object. By doing this, Jones exposes the potentiality for verbal language to liberate Ursa from a physical and psychological enslavement. In her music, Ursa re-imagines what life never offered her female matriarchs. Ursa sings:

*While mama be sleeping, the ole man he crawl into bed
While mama be sleeping, the ole man he crawl into bed
When mama wake up, he shaking his nasty old head
Don't come here to my house, don't come here to my house I said
Don't come here to my house, don't come here to my house I said
Fore you get any this booty, you gon have to lay down dead
Fore you get any this booty, you gon have to lay down dead
(67)*

Memory, language, and imagination converge in Ursa's song. The first three lines depict Corregidora raping *Mama* (a term that can refer to Great Gram and Gram) evident in the phrase "*he shaking his nasty old head*" (67). They express the violations with which her maternal ancestors lived. Yet, the song's next four lines resist Corregidora's brutality and allow *Mama* to oppose submitting to Corregidora's brutality. In this song, the unthinkable happens—Great Gram's voice becomes powerful enough to stop Corregidora's tyrannical power over her.

The Corregidora women literally created their audience in the form of their own children to pass on the story, but, now, Ursa takes the family tradition of orally and physically passing on the story, and she chooses whom the audience will be and how they will be formed. The new Corregidora generation will not be male or female, but rather will be the creation of music, for which male and female gather to listen. These women have been witnesses to an internal world until Ursa begins singing about the past. She shares her inherited past, but now the audience is wider, which ultimately moves her story from

individual memory to a new form of collective memory—one in which she participates as family member and entertainer of a larger community of listeners. Consequently, Jones's novel now becomes a piece of the collective memory because, as readers, we too enter into the story. Jones leaves Ursa's potential healing ambiguous by novel's end, yet there are clues to indicate that Ursa's search for a self-identity not solely rooted in her now barren body is taking form.

Although the hysterectomy precipitates an erosion of self for Ursa, she experiences an awakening after visiting with her mother to find out her mother's "private memory" of her conception, birth, and father (104). Ursa reflects: "I was thinking that now that Mama had gotten it all out, her own memory—at least to me anyway—maybe she and some man ... But then, I was thinking, what had I done about my *own* life?" (132). The very fact that Ursa calls her life her *own* signals a significant recognition that she must reconcile the traumatic events of her violent fall and the family legacy of bodily and psychological violation with her life now, which includes a reality of no longer bearing biological children. Ursa's readiness to connect with something and/or someone exterior (her audience, for example) is a positive and regenerative act, which communicates Ursa's emergence from a past that binds her to violence. Ursa's return to her mother's past helps her grasp the impact of her family's memories and her inability to procreate through what Caruth calls an "awakening" (Caruth, *Unclaimed* 100). This "awakening embodies an appointment with the real" (105), when the victim-survivor, in facing her survival, attempts to connect to the external world. The "awakening" is the process through which the individual not only gains affirmation of her survival, but also begins to reconcile herself in light of the traumatic experience(s). For Caruth, the "awakening" offers hope to the survivor in that her life will go on after the

trauma. The act of the person's "awakening" is also a "transmission" (106) of "words that are *passed on* as an act that does not precisely awaken the self, but, rather, *passes the awakening on to others*" (107). Part of the survivor's connection to the external world is an "awakening" to others outside the traumatic experience. This awakening for Ursa occurs with the blues songs she shares with her audience. The songs express the emotions emerging from the language of her music. The audience provides a way for her to connect to something external, thus allowing her to share the Corregidora familial experience while simultaneously affirming Ursa's existence and integration as a woman no longer defined by the family model of trauma.

Throughout Ursa's narrative, a central aspect of Great Gram's story goes unanswered until the novel's closing chapter. After the abolishment of slavery, Great Gram does something to Corregidora that forces her to run away from the plantation and leave her daughter with him. Gram explains what happens to her after Great Gram flees:

Mama stayed there with him even after it ended, until she did something that made him want to kill her, and then she run off and had to leave me. Then he was raising me and doing you know I said what he did. But then sometime after that when she got settled here, she came back for me ... I was eighteen by then ... when she come back for me, I was so happy I didn't know what to do, and was glad to get away from there. But by then I was big with your mama. (Jones 79)

Even Gram never knows what transpired between her rapist father and her sister/mother. Yet, this temporary departure from the plantation leaves the young Gram to be raped and impregnated by Corregidora. Great Gram's act of wounding and fleeing inadvertently leads to the perpetuation of the female line because Gram gives birth to Ursa's mother. Towards the novel's ending, Ursa raises the question again as she performs one of her blues songs about the family's history: "*What is it a woman can do to a man that make him hate her so bad he want to kill her one minute and keep thinking about her and can't get her out of his*

mind the next?” (173). Twenty-two years later, when Ursa, now forty-seven, reunites with Mutt at the Hotel Drake where they lived together before their divorce, this question is finally answered. As Ursa performs oral sex on Mutt, she reflects:

It had to be sexual, I was thinking, it had to be something sexual that Great Gram did to Corregidora. I knew it had to be sexual: “What is it a woman can do to a man that make him hate her so bad and can’t get her out of his mind the next?” In a split second I knew what it was, in a split second of hate and love I knew what it was ... A moment of pleasure and excruciating pain at the same time, a moment of broken skin but not sexlessness, a moment just before sexlessness, a moment that stops just before sexlessness, a moment that stops before it breaks the skin ... (184)

Ursa’s epiphany that Great Gram broke the skin on Corregidora’s penis while performing oral sex fills the last missing piece of Great Gram’s past with Corregidora. Great Gram attempts to assert her agency and power during a position of vulnerability for Corregidora. Amazingly, this is an act of bold resistance by Great Gram, especially in light of her knowledge of the potential consequences she could suffer for such behavior.

Earlier in the novel, Great Gram tells Ursa the story of an enslaved woman on a neighboring plantation that cut off her slave owner’s penis with a razor before he could rape her, thus causing him to bleed to death. In retribution for such a forbidden act towards a white slave master, the woman’s husband is taken, his penis cut off and stuffed into the woman’s mouth. They hang her and let the husband bleed to death. The consequences of such resistance to submission ultimately prove fatal and explain why Great Gram flees Corregidora’s plantation after wounding him during sex. Great Gram understood that in the system of slavery: “... *There were two alternatives, you either took one or you didn’t. And if you didn’t you had to suffer the consequences of not taking it*” (67). Great Gram acknowledges that Corregidora could rape any of his slave women because “what happened over on that other plantation ... served as a warning” (125). Gram concludes: “... they

might want your pussy, but if you do anything to get back at them, it'll be your life they be wanting, and then they make even that some kind of sex show, all them beatings and killings wasn't nothing but sex circuses, and all them white peoples, mens, womens, and childrens crowding around to see ... ” (125). The institutional and legal construct of slavery empowers and safeguards Corregidora even during moments of sexual vulnerability. The system of slavery oppresses black sexuality in numerous ways. Slave masters are free to rape their black slave women and, also, turn the punishment of slave resistance into a spectacle of black sexuality. In addition, these same masters determine who their slaves may sexually desire, which is evident when Corregidora forbids Great Gram to have sexual relations with a black man. Threatening to castrate Corregidora is an astounding act of Great Gram's will against Corregidora's sexual oppression of her. Her body counters the ravishment of rape even though she knows that these actions may not necessarily change her reality. Nonetheless, this act of resistance and infliction of physical pain subverts her forced submission to the man that consistently and horribly harms her. Great Gram's act threatens Corregidora's authority over her precisely because she exercises her will.

This part of Great Gram's story and the events on the neighboring plantation reveal the damage inflicted on relations between black males and females. In addition to telling Ursa how the slave masters censored the desires and romantic relations between their enslaved men and women, Ursa's mother includes the story of a young black man who escapes Corregidora's plantation in search of Palmares in Pernambuco, Brazil, the most famous Brazilian *quilombo* during the seventeenth century.⁸ By the time of its destruction in the late seventeenth century, Palmares had grown to a population of approximately 20,000

⁸*Quilombo* is the Brazilian term given for the communities of runaway slaves in Brazil.

fugitive slave men and women. Great Gram recalls the young man telling her “that was what his big dream was, to go up there and join all these other black mens up there, and have him a woman, and then come back and get his woman and take her up there” (126). For this man, Palmares represents a free state where black desire is not policed by white masters as well as a symbol of resistance against their enslavement. It offers a vision of life beyond the plantation and its oppressive, violent conditions. Palmares stands as a beacon of hope where the destructive presence of men like Corregidora no longer reign. Although the young man talking to Great Gram is told that Palmares existed two hundred years ago, he does not relinquish his dream of going there. Jones’s insertion of this cultural memory of resistance and autonomy at a point in the text when Ursa is searching for answers to her mother’s past provides the opening for the possibility of healthy romantic relations between black men and women. Palmares resurrects the memory of a place “where these black mens had started their own town, escaped and banded together” (126) and offers the antidote to the perversions taking place on the plantation. Palmares creates a space for autonomy and freedom to love without censorship and, by extension, this *quilombo* offers Mutt and Ursa a legacy of such a possibility between black men and women.⁹

A Path to Healing

Critical responses to the ending of *Corregidora* are numerous and contradictory; they argue whether or not Ursa finally finds physical and psychological healing. These varying interpretations of the novel’s ending reinforce the open-ended and complex possibilities of

⁹Jones revisits the idea of Palmares in her epic poem *Song for Anninho* (1981). It begins with the destruction of the rebel settlement and tells the story of Almeyda, the speaker of the poem. She escapes with her lover Anninho during the final battle for Palmares, but is separated from him, then caught by Portuguese soldiers who cut off her breasts and leave her for dead. Zibatra, a conjure woman, rescues Almeyda and saves her life. Almeyda’s poem laments the loss of her lover and Palmares.

how to read the final scene between Mutt and Ursa. Melvin Dixon considers Ursa's decision to reunite sexually with Mutt as a "metaphorical return that allows Ursa to go forward," and he argues that Ursa "is no longer a passive victim of abuse nor is she a solo blues singer ... Ursa thus exchanges her role as blues singer ... into an instrument of direct sexual power ..." (Dixon 111). Bruce Simon argues, "Ursa's return to Mutt is itself a traumatic repetition—Ursa experiences Great Gram's literal return and possession of her" and "Ursa's return to Mutt is a literal return of the history of slavery" (Simon 101-102). Amy Gottfried interprets the closing scene as one where Ursa realizes that victims can become abusers too, and the recognition of this possibility rather than suppression of it allows Ursa to break from a destructive pattern of abuse, thus choosing pleasure over pain (Gottfried 566). Madhu Dubey considers the ending differently: "The act of fellatio enables Ursa not only to exercise her sexual power over Mutt but also to recapture the source of Great Gram's mysterious sexual power over Corregidora" (Dubey 257). She further suggests that the "maternal discourse so fully permeates the daughter's language of heterosexual love that the daughter ultimately merges into her maternal ancestor" (258). Yet, my reading of the novel's final episode significantly departs from the above interpretations.

Ursa understands the high cost of sexual resistance because Great Gram tells her about it. She also knows the exacting force the cycle of violence wreaks on one's identity and body because she lives with the results. Indeed, she carries the physical mark of her forced hysterectomy and knows that the surgery is "going to leave a bad" scar (Jones 17). The trajectory of Ursa's narrative traverses a pattern of shifting between past and present, which culminates in the novel's last scene where past and present converge. Mutt confides, during their reunion, that after the divorce he tried to forget Ursa by reenacting what his

grandfather did when he lost his wife. After his grandfather's loss, he went crazy and would only eat onions in order to keep people away and then eat peppermints so they would come to him. For Mutt, this does nothing but make him sick. It is vital that this conversation chronologically occurs before Ursa's epiphany about the missing family secret and their sexual reunion. Mutt's acknowledgement of his failed and repetitive response to dealing with losing Ursa shows Mutt that such repetitive patterns of dealing with trauma did not work in the past and certainly do not provide a model for working through grief and loss now. In fact, the manifestation of this failure occurs in his body's reaction to the onions and peppermint. The physical sickness that ensues further signifies the need for new ways of confronting and dealing with traumatic experiences—old family structures no longer work for a newer generation. His body rejects what his mind also repudiates.

For Ursa, her moment of decision to discontinue the perpetuation of the family's traumatic memory and behavior comes in a different way. After Ursa imagines what Great Gram did to make Corregidora simultaneously hate and love her, Ursa acknowledges the gradations of choices she has in deciding whether or not to bite Mutt: "... a moment of broken skin but not sexlessness, a moment just before sexlessness, a moment that stops just before sexlessness, a moment that stops before it breaks the skin" (184). All of Ursa's choices are laid bare as she reflects on the many ways she could harm Mutt when he is in this vulnerable position. Immediately after this recognition she states: "I could kill you" (184). Then, Ursa sees the connections between her actions and those of all her female ancestors, which leads to her decision to rupture the repetitive cycle of pain and violence inflicted on men and women by the same men and women. This marks a dramatic and critical point in Ursa's developing consciousness of and emergence from the family's obsession with

remembering and witnessing to slavery. The inherited history of pain evident in the cycle of violent behavior between the men and women of her family at last converges and finds resolution in this scene: “But was what Corregidora had done to *her*, to *them*, any worse than what Mutt had done to me, than what we had done to each other, than what Mama had done to Daddy, or what he had done to her in return, making her walk down the street looking like a whore?” (184; italics in the original). Ursa then repeats to Mutt, “I could kill you” (184).

Ursa, indeed, bites Mutt’s penis while performing oral sex but the very fact that she identifies the destructive patterns of relational behavior between the men and women of her family before doing this signals a heightened self-awareness that she achieves at last. The long and arduous confrontation with the Corregidora family’s past, her hysterectomy, as well as admission to the traumatic and tragic consequences of Great Gram’s mandate to procreate, lead her to this moment where her choice to bite Mutt is not just one of sexual reclamation and empowerment. Although Ursa physically harms Mutt, she begins to move away from dysfunctional relations with men. This becomes most evident in the last lines of the novel when Mutt and Ursa engage in a call and response pattern of conversation rejecting physical violence as an acceptable pattern of behavior.

I don’t want a kind of woman that hurt you, he said.
Then you don’t want me.
I don’t want a kind of woman that hurt you.
Then you don’t want me.
I don’t want a kind of woman that hurt you.
Then you don’t want me.
He shook me till I fell against him crying. I don’t want a kind of man that’ll hurt me
neither, I said.
He held me tight. (Jones 185)

The repetitions of the lines do not indicate a compulsive return to traumatic memory or Ursa’s act as mimetic of Great Gram’s actions against Corregidora, but rather they point to a

different reality. The expressed desire to not engage in violation anymore in the form of a blues song responds to their subjectivity as complex thinking, feeling individuals accepting their traumatic legacies but choosing to no longer allow them to direct their lives. Unlike the long line of men and women in her family's past, Mutt and Ursa finally attempt to make a decision to love one another and no longer engage in behaviors of destruction. This is the first time they relate to each other aware of the sexual and psychological manipulation they have enacted on one another. Now, they both know that old behavioral patterns will no longer work, and, more importantly, they are no longer desired.

The admission and recognition of wanting something different for their relationship breaks the hold of the traumatic past on them. Sexual empowerment over a man is not going to give Ursa the healing she searches for throughout the novel because it only replicates another form of exploitation. She acknowledges that the past will always be present yet she wants more than robotic sexual contact aimed at producing more witnesses. Rather than a return to traumatic repetition, the final scene marks a new beginning of physical and psychological health for Ursa and Mutt most evident in the novel's last lines as Mutt holds Ursa tight. This suggests their transcendence from the past as they both express a desire to be a man and woman that do not hurt one another.

Although the same issues of sexuality, control, and violence are still central to Mutt and Ursa, now they confront these issues with a heightened self-awareness of the past's influence on them and the genuine desire for a relationship not physically and psychologically destructive. Ursa charts new territory for a Corregidora woman—one where men do not prowl around them ready to be violent exploiters and intruders of their private selves. There exists a meaningful exchange between Mutt and Ursa that conveys the

affirmation of their lives through an encounter with the truth of the past and with one another. Ursa's admission and knowledge of all parts of the family history sets in motion the process of integrating her reconstructed self into a larger community of understanding. It is at once a community of listeners to her music and one she and Mutt now create with their reunion. The signs of trauma that infiltrate Ursa's life make her story even more authentic and powerful about the force of inherited traumatic memory on the receiver. The psychic and bodily pain that permeates the narrative of *Corregidora* finds rest, at last—and, indeed, so does Ursa as Mutt holds her tight.

CHAPTER III

Righting/Writing the Past in Phyllis Alesia Perry's *Stigmata*

The past ... is a circle. If you walk long enough, you catch up with yourself.

Phyllis Alesia Perry, *Stigmata*

In Toni Morrison's literary masterpiece *Beloved* (1982), Baby Suggs, preacher and familial matriarch, delivers a sermon to her community of once-enslaved believers encouraging them to reclaim the beauty and dignity of their black bodies. Baby Suggs declares:

Here ... in this place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard ... Love your hands! Love them. Raise them up and kiss them. Touch others with them, pat them together, stroke them on your face ... *You* got to love it, *you!* *You* got to love it. This is flesh I'm talking about here. Flesh that needs to be loved. Feet that need to rest and to dance; backs that need support; shoulders that need arms, strong arms ... love your neck; put a hand on it, grace it stroke it and hold it up. And all your inside parts that they'd just as soon slop for hogs, you got to love them. The dark, dark liver—love it, love it, and the beat and beating heart, love that too. More than eyes or feet. More than lungs that have yet to draw free air. More than your life-holding womb and your life-giving private parts, hear me now, love your heart. (Morrison, *Beloved* 93)

Baby Suggs exhorts her flock to recognize always, even after the darkest days of slavery, that they are human beings and to resist the objectification they received from their slave masters and felt in their bodies. She demands them to embrace their once-violated bodies and carve their humanity into their wounded souls through a reclamation and recognition of

these same bodies. Their bodies possess the shattered identities slavery caused and for a recuperation of their human dignity they must establish the connection between body and mind through a re-identification with their bodies. Baby Suggs knows that to reappropriate their bodies from the racial trauma of slavery they must embrace the “flesh that weeps, laughs.” For psychic healing to occur it must happen within their bodies and minds. Baby Suggs’ sermon elucidates the ways in which Phyllis Alesia Perry uses the violated black female body in her novel *Stigmata*. Perry’s female protagonists will recuperate their identities and human dignity ruptured by slavery and the inheritance of it only after they confront the psychological and physical manifestations of the trauma converging in their bodies.

Perry individualizes the pain and trauma precipitated by slavery through her protagonist Elizabeth “Lizzie” DuBose. Only fourteen years old when she inherits a quilt from her dead maternal grandmother and a diary written by her great-grandmother Joy retelling the story of her great-great-grandmother’s enslavement, Lizzie becomes haunted by this legacy of slavery. During dream-like episodes, Lizzie begins initial contact with her grandmother Grace and great-great-grandmother Ayo (Bessie), the African originator of her maternal familial line.¹ Without explanation, Lizzie physically inherits Ayo’s wounds, not simply scars, from beatings she received when enslaved. Mysteriously, these same physical wounds and memories surface in every other generation of female family members. For her generation, Lizzie becomes the inheritor of the diary, quilt, wounds, and memories. These are tangible links to a silent past and the physical wounds of these memories incarnate in her body introduce Lizzie to Ayo’s encounter with slavery. *Stigmata* is as much about Lizzie’s

¹Once enslaved in the New World, Ayo’s name becomes Bessie.

rite of initiation into the family story of slavery and survival as it is about their past.

Although instruction for remembering the past arrives in an inexplicable and frightening way, Lizzie, nonetheless, must attend to how she will shape the family's narrative of slavery as well as her own identity. Perry's oral and visual dialectic comes in the form of diaries, quilts, and paintings, which lead Lizzie to ultimately accept and integrate the familial, communal, and national memory of slavery into her life.

Unlike Ursa Corregidora, readers meet Lizzie at the end of her ordeal. As the narrator of her story, Lizzie reveals at the novel's beginning: "I'm acutely aware of having made it to the end. I'm at the end of the pain and the yelling, the crying and the cringing. The voices no longer hound me. My world is neat and unstained. There is no more blood, but there are the scars" (Perry 2). Lizzie's body is the locus where the memories sewn onto the quilt and recorded in Joy's diary pages now reside. As Lizzie's body tells a story through her physical wounds, Perry's novel uniquely delineates the trauma of slavery in the bodily merging of certain characters and voices as the story unfolds. Not understanding what is happening to her, Lizzie cannot defend herself when her parents, in their desperate attempt to save their child, commit her, at the age of twenty, to various psychiatric hospitals where she stays for a total of fourteen years. In ways similar to Ursa, Lizzie inherits terrible memories as well as instruction for how to remember these same memories. This past influences and complicates Lizzie's existence and shapes her present life. For this late twentieth-century modern woman, Lizzie lives the black experience in America from abduction in Africa through slavery and emancipation.²

²Before the beginning of *Stigmata*, Perry includes Lizzie's family tree beginning with Ayo/Bessie and her husband Samuel Ward. The family tree authenticates the nearly unbelievable story that follows and establishes Lizzie's generational connection to her female ancestors from the beginning. Gloria Naylor's novel *Mama Day* also includes a family tree at the book's beginning. This, too, establishes the accuracy of the story as well as the existence of Willow Springs (even though this place is Naylor's fictional creation) where much of the story takes place.

The Inheritance and Traces of Trauma

The narrative structure of *Stigmata* blurs the lines between personal memory, present reality, and historical events. The chapters of the novel shift between three decades, 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, as well as include the diary pages Joy recorded in the 1890s of Ayo's story of slavery. In Perry's work, physical and psychological pain is translated into the written word as well as into the visual art forms of painting and quilting. These narrative forms become what Pierre Nora terms as *lieux de mémoire*, or sites of memory, "where memory crystallizes and secretes itself" (Nora 7). The text's structural fragmentation and various narrative voices express Lizzie's, as well as her female ancestors', traumatized physical and interior state. The haunting of the trauma resonates in this aspect of *Stigmata*. For instance, the constant shifting between time periods with each new chapter destabilizes readers' expectations of having a linear plot and cause-and-effect explanations for events in the story. The lack of consistency in linear time creates a textual instability, thus establishing the problematic communication of a traumatic experience as well as making a material connection to the past. Each chapter begins with the date and Lizzie's geographic location. As she traverses time and space between Montgomery, Tuskegee, and Johnson Creek, Alabama, and Atlanta, Georgia, readers are offered a sense of Lizzie's nomadic existence, which also mirrors Ayo's and Grace's geographic displacement. By placing Lizzie's thoughts before, during, and after her hospitalization, Perry communicates the initial confusion and disorientation Lizzie must have experienced when these events began occurring. While in the hospital talking with her therapist, Lizzie can no longer distinguish her dreams from reality: "I didn't know where I was—inside a dream or outside" (Perry 105). Also, Lizzie's first person narration makes it difficult for readers to believe that she is crazy as the doctors

in the mental hospitals suggest. Paradoxically, Lizzie's story requires readers' trust because what she tells us defies logic.

The physical and psychological pain of Ayo, Lizzie's grandmother Grace, her mother Sarah, and Lizzie provides the coherence in the novel. Pain links and binds the characters to one another amidst the confusion and haunting of slavery's legacy as well as offers cohesion to the structure and polyphony of narrative voices in the text. In *Stigmata*, the past and present occur simultaneously, which suggests that history for Lizzie is a dynamic yet dangerous presence. She cannot escape the past; even the remnants of Ayo's Middle Passage voyage cling to her—she feels “the chains go on over [her] skin” and realizes that she cannot “stop the sea rolling beneath” and she cannot “stop the fear” (57). As a young teenager who has yet to confront what all this means, Lizzie's ancestor literally begins to haunt her physically and psychologically. Lizzie describes the encounters with Ayo's presence in her mind and body: “... she walks with me, so close behind that it's as if she steps on the backs of my shoes. I often turn to look over my shoulder, but she is not flesh; she's a shadow on my heart” (141). At another point in her narrative Lizzie expresses the mental exhaustion of her ancestors' voices in her head: “*Ayo-Bessie. Grace. Y'all just trying to confuse me.* Grace speaks loudly, her memories hissing insistently inside my head. And behind her are the dream-like tangles of Ayo's life. More distant but also more painful. I shiver wanting it all to go away immediately” (87-88). These encounters with her female ancestors are out of Lizzie's control just as her movement through time is inexplicable and mysterious. Even after two years of strange and paranormal encounters with what Lizzie describes as dreams, she still is unable to determine what is happening to her: “Then an eerily familiar sensation brushes across my skin, the soft opening and closing of a door between adjacent worlds. I

have been moving in and out of mental landscapes with increasing frequency in the past two years, waking dreams constructed of strange vague memories. Often I find scratches and small raw scars on my body” (54). The evidence of her movement between the past and present resides in her marked flesh, which presents the impossibility of dismissing these visions and experiences as a purely psychological encounter or affliction.

Before Lizzie’s institutionalization, disorder penetrates the text’s chapters and thus delineates the first contact with her maternal ancestors. As the distinctions and barriers between Lizzie, Grace and Ayo collapse so, too, does Lizzie’s psychological state. Initially, the “dreams come soft” (24), but as the novel progresses, Lizzie admits that “the line between dreaming and waking has become hard to see with the naked eye” (89). When speaking with her Aunt Eva, Grace’s sister, Lizzie laments that she cannot get away from the past because it follows her wherever she goes. Lizzie explains:

There is no merging, just an awareness of Grace, off to one side, doing the same things, sensing the same things I do ... I keep looking over my shoulder, almost expecting to find her standing there with me. But she nudges me from the inside and I try to resist, to listen to her without becoming her ... A spasm of pain sears my back. I gasp, trying to keep my focus, and in that moment Grace steps forward and takes the blow. We stand there together in her battered body, bent double with pain. (123)

Grace and by extension Lizzie receive a beating that Ayo experienced while enslaved. The transgenerational reception of this physical abuse from white slave masters displays Lizzie’s increasing familiarity with her ancestors’ past as well as her inability to escape from it. Grace and Ayo cease to belong to the past and Lizzie no longer belongs solely to the present. The persistent traces of the traumatic past reside corporeally in the “battered” bodies of all three women, which collapse into the single body of Lizzie. Lizzie’s world is invaded literally by the memories and bodies of Ayo and Grace turning Ayo’s story into collective

memory—memory that insists on assuming a physical presence while dislocating this same physicality across time.

Perry offers remnants of the family trauma through Joy's diary pages of Ayo's oral account of her capture in Africa and enslavement in the New World. The diary pages do not depict detailed and linear descriptions of Ayo's experiences but rather particular events or episodes of her life embedded within the context of slavery. Joy's diary functions as an illuminated transcript offering clues to what is happening to Lizzie. The diary's material connection to the past in the form of written words fills in the gaps left by Lizzie's muddled knowledge about the family history and intertwines the past with Lizzie's current experiences. It also provides the means to develop the characters of Lizzie's ancestors in a way that is not possible with only Lizzie's first-hand and brief encounters with the past and these deceased relatives. In addition, the diary entries become a marker for the trauma with which Ayo must live once emancipated from slavery. The pages make known what theorist Cathy Caruth explains regarding the belated nature of traumatic memories. Caruth concludes:

Traumatic experience ... suggests a certain paradox: that the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it; that immediacy, paradoxically, may take the form of belatedness. The repetitions of the traumatic event—which remain unavailable to consciousness but intrude repeatedly on sight—thus suggest a larger relation to the event that extends beyond what can simply be seen or what can be known, and is inextricably tied up with the belatedness and incomprehensibility that remain at the heart of this repetitive seeing. (Caruth, *Unclaimed* 91-92)

For Ayo, the urgency to tell her story illustrates the persistent impact of her encounter with ubiquitous dehumanization, which emanates into the future with Grace and Lizzie. Ayo and Grace never find peace from these memories; therefore, they persist in their present and into the future with Lizzie's life. Even Lizzie experiences the haunting nature of these memories.

When in the hospital talking to her therapist she tries to describe what happens to her:

“ ... sometimes it’s like I get drowsy. Other times I’m just doing something else and I have a flashback of some moment or some place. I remember something that I know can’t be true” (Perry 100). Reminiscent of what Toni Morrison’s character Sethe calls “rememory” (Morrison 38) in *Beloved*, Lizzie reveals that these are uncontrollable interruptions in her present life.³

Ayo’s compulsion to share her story is in part compelled by the desire to remember those who perished during the Middle Passage. Ayo admits: “*This is for those whose bones lay sleepin in the heart of mother ocean for those who tomorrows I never knew who groaned and died in that dark damp aside a me. You rite this daughter for me and for them*” (Perry 7). Joy notices the physical transformation that her mother undergoes as she begins to narrate her story: “*Bessie aint my name she said. My name Ayo. Soon as she said that her voice fell low. She stop and look way over my shoulder like she weren’t even in the same room*” (7). Since the entries do not appear in chronological order, readers must actively participate in piecing together Ayo’s story. Rather, they live with her in the present intruding on her post-slavery life in real and tangible ways. The traumatic memories disrupt Ayo’s life at unexpected moments. For instance, Joy recalls one night:

Mama be moanin in her sleep. She says its only old memory comin to visit. Last night she be in the next room moanin like that and cryin ... I went in and Mama just layin there in the moon beams kickin the covers ... Then she sit up in bed sudden and stare at me with sweat comin down her cheeks and forehead. For a while its like she don’t no me then she grab my hand and yell rite this down ... It too bad to tell more than once. (71)

³Morrison’s female protagonist, Sethe, is unable to separate her experience of slavery from her present life. The shade of Sethe’s past follows her at times. When speaking with her daughter, Denver, she describes this traumatic crisis and haunting: “Someday you be walking down the road and you hear something or see something going on ... And you think it’s you thinking it up ... But no. It’s when you bump into a rememory that belongs to somebody else. Where I was before I came here, that place is real” (Morrison, *Beloved* 38).

What follows this passage are Ayo's horrible memories of her kidnapping from Africa and the Middle Passage. She is a young girl when this happens and Ayo remembers these events with a childlike perspective—confused at why the “*ghost with hair like fire and no color eyes*” (72) hits her after she screams out her mother's name. The intensity of Ayo's scream makes her nose bleed. Despite her cry for help, the white slave trafficker dismisses the young girl's distraught screams. In another diary entry, her screams resurface in the context of being inspected physically before her sale into slavery. Ayo recalls:

He pulls my lips back and points to my mouth. My eyes open and I see all those ghosties looking and pointing and talking. I start to cry. Then he lifts the skirt of my dress ... He lift it up up up and points. He say something but I cant understand it I cant even hear. Just see his lips moving. I start cryin and moanin. I cant tell you the fear ... Fear ... And I scream and turn round and round in the same spot looking for somewheres to go. But there aint none. I had a scream in me that go on for a hundred years. (133)

Once again, the inadequacy of words to capture the inhumanity and extremity of the situation results in her screams that convey the bestiality of the experience. The traumatic memory incarnate in the spectacle of her female body violated in this way emphasizes the reason for Ayo's trauma. Although the young Ayo is keenly aware of her violent surroundings, the only verbal articulation she can muster is the cry “a human being makes before language is learned” (Scarry 4). During Ayo's first brutal whipping by her white mistress, she recalls that her “*hollerin could be heard from here all the way to Afraca*” (Perry 173). Ayo's screams are a call for help and an attempt to articulate her humanity as she is chained to other Africans on the ship or savagely whipped. Perry uses Ayo's screams as a way to decry the shameful scene of the white slave master's dismissal and neglect of her human dignity.

Although Ayo's insistence on the verbal articulation of her enslavement results in Joy's diary, silence also permeates these same pages, thus conveying the incommunicable

aspects of trauma as well as revealing that silence itself is part of her testimony. Joy describes her mother's narration of the stories: "... *her voice got deep and low and words roll off her tongue like water falling from a high place*" (7). Yet from the beginning, Ayo tells Joy that she will only tell her these stories one time because they are too painful to repeat. Nonetheless, when Joy asks her mother what being sold is like Ayo responds: "*I aint gon tell you that ... I cant stand to tell you that*" (80). When the experience of inflicted violence exceeds verbal articulation and representation, Ayo's screams and silences configured in the diary entries replace coherent and spoken forms of communication. The resulting textual ambiguity beckons readers to rely on the various clues offered in *Stigmata* to learn more about Ayo's bitter past.

To understand more thoroughly Ayo's need to transmit her story to Joy, psychoanalyst Dori Laub's theory of witnessing to trauma proves helpful. Laub suggests that until trauma survivors construct a narrative that reconstructs the past they risk remaining suspended between the core experience of the trauma and the lack of closure from it. Retelling the story is a process that includes a listener and involves a re-externalizing of the traumatic experience, which "can occur and take effect only when one can articulate and transmit the story, literally transfer it to another outside oneself and then take it back again, inside. Telling thus entails a reassertion of the hegemony of reality and a re-externalization of the evil that affected and contaminated the trauma victim" (Felman and Laub 69). Although Joy records and receives Ayo's narrative, Ayo does not achieve what Laub asserts is needed for the integration of the trauma experience with the survivor's present life. This is evident in the last diary entry dated July 23, 1900, when Joy writes about Ayo's death. Ayo gives Joy a piece of blue cloth that Ayo meant to add to the baby quilt she made for her future grandchild

although it is unclear whether or not Joy is pregnant when Ayo dies. Ayo has possessed this blue cloth since her kidnapping from Africa. It is significant that this tangible connection to Africa does not find a resting place in the baby quilt that will swaddle a new generation of family members. The blue cloth is a last remnant of her story that does not find inclusion in the frame of the quilt. The lack of the cloth's integration into the baby blanket speaks to a larger reality of Ayo's lack of integration of her memories of slavery with life after her enslavement. Although Ayo externalizes her traumatic story to Joy, she remains unable to "take it back again, inside" (69). The intrusive memories of the past haunt Ayo until her death and beyond the grave evident in her reappearances in Grace and Lizzie's bodies and minds.

Ayo's trauma reverberates in the subsequent generations. Her granddaughter, Grace, inherits Ayo's memories and physical scars as a young wife and mother of three children. Grace leaves her family because she mistakes this inheritance of Ayo's wounds and memories as a form of insanity. By leaving her family, she believes she will spare them from tremendous sorrow. However, Lizzie's mother Sarah (Grace's daughter) lives with feelings of abandonment due to her mother's departure. Grace's decision to leave only further compounds and complicates the family trauma. Like Ayo, who is ripped from her mother after being kidnapped from Africa, Sarah is forced to grow up without the presence and guidance of her mother. This leaves lasting emotional effects on Sarah. When Lizzie inherits Grace's quilt and Joy's diary, Sarah cannot understand why they were not left to her. Lizzie explains that perhaps Grace wanted her to be safe from the past to which Sarah responds with "a tiny bitterness ... Safe from what? Having a mother?" (Perry 20). The subtext of Sarah's emotional injuries that Grace's abandonment caused provides another thread thickening the

family trauma. The consequences of slavery come in unforeseen ways and lasting forms. And, Lizzie will learn that trauma “is not, like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event” (Caruth, *Unclaimed* 4). The burden of this bears down on Lizzie for years until she can confront these memories of the past.

Grace’s flight from her family to the north, eventually settling in Detroit, proves futile in eluding the mysterious past that follows her. In a letter Grace sends to her sister, Mary Nell, along with her finished quilt telling Ayo’s story and Joy’s diary pages, Grace admits: “*I thought getting all that down on the quilt in front of me out of me would get rid of it somehow. I don’t know about that*” (15). The paradox of Grace’s departure is that it simultaneously is forced and chosen in an attempt to spare her husband and children the pain of thinking her insane. The perpetuation of Ayo’s displacement from Africa continues with Grace’s migration north and then Lizzie’s forced hospitalization. The slave trade removes Ayo from Africa, the haunting memories of the past lead Grace away from her family, and Lizzie’s parents send her to various mental hospitals to cure her of what psychologically and physically threatens her life. The memories of slavery radiate across four generations of women offering an unusual historical lucidity, an awareness of how the racial trauma of slavery haunts the individual characters and the collective memory they constitute as members of a family. Perry concretizes the overwhelming emotional and psychological burdens of the past with recurring images connected to life and death.

In *Stigmata*, the repetitive use of the visual image of blood expresses the verbal difficulty of communicating Ayo’s trauma and its ensuing effects on other female family members. By textually highlighting blood, Perry uses it as a trace of and trigger for traumatic memory. Blood points to the unhealed psychological wounds as well as to the

traumatic history embodied in the physical wounds of these women. Simultaneously an image of life and death, blood foreshadows the impending danger of death Ayo constantly lived under during the Middle Passage and slavery. Blood becomes a mark of Lizzie's rite of passage into a new life that calls for an acknowledgement of and confrontation with this inheritance of traumatic memory. Lizzie concludes that "Blood binds three lives" (61) but also it connects individual history and heritage to the larger community of those forgotten and lost during the Middle Passage and dispersion in the New World.

The blood that comes from Ayo's nose after screaming once she is on the slave ship is a way of expelling the evil that has already been forced upon her. She will be compelled to ingest more dehumanization during the Middle Passage as well as during the ensuing years of enslavement.⁴ Once on the slave ship, chains around Ayo's wrists and ankles keep her anchored to the ship as well as connected to other Africans; they result in deep and bloody wounds. She recalls: "*... the sores on my wrists open up again and I watched the blood run down onto the wood planks that soaked it up like the ship was thirsty. Drank it up. Drank it right up*" (98). A white man on the ship approaches her, steps in the blood and leaves a bloody footprint as he walks away. The branding of the ship with Ayo's blood leaves indelible evidence of her presence there as well as her survival of the Middle Passage. The metaphysical violations occurring on the ship manifest in the physical reality of human blood

⁴The Middle Passage, a brutal voyage from Africa to the New World, involved the tight packing of slave ships with kidnapped Africans, which led to unhygienic conditions, improper diet, as well as inhuman treatment they suffered while at the mercy of their white captors. These realities lay bare the reason for the textual and continual return to Ayo's experience of the Middle Passage. In *Stigmata*, the Middle Passage becomes a spatial and temporal continuum evident in Lizzie's numerous returns to the ship on which Ayo traveled to the New World. On this ship, Ayo's dissolution of body, mind, and self occurs as she endures physical beatings, emotional pain from the separation from her African parents, and the loss of identity as Ayo, the young African girl. Herbert S. Klein's book *The Middle Passage: Comparative Studies in the Atlantic Slave Trade* (1978) offers a comprehensive study of the Atlantic slave trade primarily from 1700 to the mid-19th century.

marking the ship. Blood simultaneously directs attention to the injured body and the ship as receptacles for the human degradation occurring there.

Blood becomes a significant link between Lizzie and Ayo once Lizzie inherits the quilt and diary. The increasing intensity of the memories culminates one night as Lizzie lies on Grace's quilt. Psychologically and physically traversing between present and past in a trance-like state, Lizzie listens to Grace's plans to leave her family while witnessing a scene of Ayo during the Middle Passage. This textually vital episode uses blood as a way of transmitting Ayo and Grace's traumatic past to Lizzie. Her body begins to feel "raw, unapologetic pain" (145) as "Blood drowns everything. Blood and water and brown bodies falling down and never landing" (145). Upon finding her, Lizzie's parents panic and call the ambulance thinking their daughter hurt herself. Her mother's "pale yellow, satin nightgown is soaked, red and wet" (145). Blood covers Sarah's hands and Lizzie's "torn flesh ... leaves a smear of blood on her cheek" (145). Lizzie describes her bodily sensations:

All the aches and mysterious stabs of pain now have their corresponding wounds. Raggedy, ugly, familiar skin openings and welted patterns. I put my right hand to the opposite wrist and try to put the skin back together, twisting my body so as not to stain anything further ... There is an already-drying pool of blood on the quilt, right across, soaking into, Ayo's face. Round, red patches careened across the carpet like drunken stepping stones. (146)

The saturation of blood on people, clothing, and objects bridges the gap in time and space that separates Lizzie from Grace and Ayo. Not only is blood a significant factor in that it is the bloodline connecting the three women, but more importantly, blood functions as a tangible conduit with which to pass down the traumatic family memories. Lizzie remembers this night as "the night the blood came" (157), a curious way to refer to the memories that invade her psyche and with which she must now live. Yet, the blood this night opens the floodgates of Ayo's memories onto and into Lizzie. The transmission of memories takes the

form of bloody wounds and violated bodies littered throughout the text eliciting an image of death as well.

Dust becomes another vestige of Lizzie's encounter with the past. Shortly after receiving the diary and quilt, Lizzie dreams of a young girl with her mother speaking in a strange language—this is Ayo in Africa before her capture and sale into slavery. When Lizzie awakens the next morning in Alabama, there is dust around her feet. Again, references to blood mixing with the Alabama dirt recur in episodes when Ayo's white mistress whips her and when Lizzie is in a psychiatric hospital and feels Ayo's "blood, the stuff running down [her] back and legs and into the rich Alabama dirt" (175). The appearance of dust in Lizzie's life further authenticates her story and by extension the story Perry creates in *Stigmata*. If Lizzie dismisses the first encounter with Ayo in Africa as merely a dream, the dust complicates such a denial as valid. Dust becomes a remnant of the past that invades Lizzie's life. She reflects: "I'm always surrounded by dust, made of it, always caught up in it as it swirls and resettles and rises again and again worrying the living" (129). As her involvement with history intensifies so too does the battle for psychological and physical survival that "rises again and again" and will not find rest until Lizzie is self-aware of her connection to the past. During one of her oral dictations to Joy, Ayo advises her daughter to "*learn to watch the trails in the dust left by the feet of yo children*" (50). This trail follows Ayo through the Middle Passage into the New World and into the twentieth-century as Lizzie must now attend to the significance behind the dust and blood invading her life. Blood and dust offer tactile transcriptions of the literally painful encounter with memory and history also revealed in the novel's wounded bodies.

The Language of the Body

The figurations of the female body in *Stigmata* offer what Ayo's trauma erased—a corporeal language of dignity and vulnerability that must be recuperated out of the violated, wounded, scarred, discarded, suffering, and sometimes dead, black female bodies. Perry returns the bodies of her female characters to the original sites of wounding and trauma—Africa, the Middle Passage, the sale block, and the Southern plantation—and to the center of the traumatic experiences—kidnappings, beatings, and whippings. The text's corporeality also draws attention to the psychological ramifications of such bodily violations. In *Stigmata*, the body becomes more than another form of witnessing to human rights violations. Rather, the body assumes a recuperative role in connecting the wounded body with the source of the violation and the associated memories. Ultimately, this calls for a reunion between the mind and body, which trauma separates in the victim-survivor.

Theorist Elaine Scarry in her groundbreaking book, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, addresses the rupture between body and mind that the trauma of inflicted, acute, physical pain causes. Scarry explains the complicated way in which torture separates the victim's voice from her body:

For what the process of torture does is to split the human being into two, to make emphatic the ever present but ... only latent distinction between a self and a body, between a "me" and "my body" ... The goal of the torturer is to make the one, the body, emphatically and crushingly *present* by destroying it, and to make the other, the voice, *absent* by destroying it. It is in part this combination that makes torture, like any experience of great physical pain, mimetic of death; for in death the body is emphatically present while that more elusive part represented by the voice so alarmingly absent that heavens are created to explain its whereabouts. (Scarry 49)

Perry's narrative addresses this separation by relocating Ayo's story and voice to the twentieth-century and in her great-great-granddaughter's body. The past literally and figuratively comes to reside in Lizzie and she must seek a way to re-appropriate her body and

the bodies of Grace and Ayo to transform their scarred selves into sites for healing. Ayo's physical pain exacerbates her separation between voice and body—she becomes a vulnerable body for violent dehumanization. Her ability to express the pain is erased, evident in the numerous descriptions of her reactionary screams to fear and beatings, as these events run counter to survival. Paradoxically, Ayo's literal and figurative assertion into Grace's and then Lizzie's life narratives dramatizes the way in which she re-appropriates her voice and violated body into a means for witnessing and healing. Perry pushes her narrative to address the obstacles to representing the racial trauma of slavery while simultaneously facing the ways in which integration of the past and present may occur in the bodies of her female characters.

The return of Ayo and Grace is at once private and public, which further illustrates Scarry's conclusion that the pain from extreme physical torture blurs the lines between the public and the private. Scarry writes:

The dissolution of the boundary between inside and outside gives rise to ... the felt experience of physical pain, an almost obscene conflation of private and public. It brings with it all the solitude of absolute privacy with none of its safety, all the self-exposure of the utterly public with none of its possibility for camaraderie or shared experience. (53)

This process adds to the humiliation of the torture victim in that she cannot control the public aspect of being vulnerable to pain in front of the torturer while the interior realm of agency over her body is annihilated. Joy's diary entry about Ayo's whipping by her white mistress illustrates Scarry's discussion of the tension and erasure between the private and public self during the infliction of extreme pain. After being sold to Mr. Ward as a lady maid for his seventeen-year-old wife, Ayo is taught English by another slave woman named Mary. Ayo has a difficult time learning English, which causes the fateful encounter with "Miz Ward."

Not understanding what Miz Ward is instructing Ayo to do, Miz Ward, in a frenzy of frustration, viciously whips Ayo while she is held down by two men on the plantation. Ayo recalls the memory with language that reveals the humiliation of the experience:

... them two mens hold my arms while she whip me cross the back. Oh daughter she was laughin while she done it and them mens wouldn't look at me while I buck and try to get away. My dress fell away in big pieces and the blood run down in the dirt and her pink dress was all splattered ... I looked up into one of them mens face and his grip slipped or maybe he let it slip and I ran I ran until I fell in the chicken yard with my face in the dirt ... I wanted so much to die. (Perry 173)

The spectacle of Ayo's wounded, bleeding, and naked body effaces her power to stop this treatment. Ayo's public degradation becomes a private and isolating reality, which she receives and feels in the pain of her beaten and bloodied back. The materiality of Ayo's bruised body and ripped dress attests to her profound lack of voice in the face of a publicly visible experience. Ayo's testimony to Joy transcribed in the diary leaves the trace of the experience while orally sharing this at once public and private experience allows Ayo to insert a narrative voice where she was once denied one.

Ayo and Grace's return to Lizzie enact the compulsive repetition and belatedness of a traumatic experience. As delineated in Chapter II, trauma theorist Cathy Caruth argues that the belatedness of a traumatic memory, not experiencing the event at the time it occurs, may lead to compulsive repetition of the memory manifested in symptoms such as depression, repetitive flashbacks, nightmares, hallucinations, trouble with memory, and mental confusion. Caruth illustrates this belatedness of trauma with the example from Freud's discussion of a train accident survivor in his work *Moses and Monotheism* (1939).⁵ The survivor of the train accident gets away unscathed; however, over the course of a few weeks

⁵In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Cathy Caruth engages Freud's theory of trauma delineated in *Moses and Monotheism* (1939). She argues that the nature of traumatic experiences and the widespread experiences of trauma in the twentieth-century force us to recognize the possibility of a history that cannot be conveyed by conventional models of straightforward experiences and references.

the survivor develops various motor and psychic symptoms. Freud argues that he has developed a traumatic neurosis: “The time that elapsed between the accident and the first appearance of the symptoms is called the ‘incubation period,’ a transparent allusion to the pathology of infectious disease ... It is the feature one might term latency” (Caruth, *Trauma*, 7). Caruth emphasizes that what is compelling about Freud’s example is “the fact that the victim of the crash was never fully conscious during the accident itself: the person gets away ... apparently unharmed” (7). Caruth concludes that this displays an “inherent latency” within the traumatic experience more than that the survivor forgets the traumatic experience altogether. She argues: “ ... it is this inherent latency of the event that paradoxically explains the peculiar, temporal structure, the belatedness, of historical experience: since the traumatic event is not experienced as it occurs, it is fully evident only in connection with another place, and in another time” (8). The temporal delay of remembering the trauma creates the force with which the memory impacts the survivor. Caruth summarizes this characteristic of trauma’s latency: “It is the fundamental dislocation implied by all traumatic experience that is both its testimony to the event and to the impossibility of its direct access” (9). Ayo’s return to Grace and then their return to Lizzie in the late twentieth-century reveals that Ayo’s experience with enslavement emanating from the past into the present has yet to find resolution or peace. The latency of Ayo’s trauma literally returns in the wounds surfacing on the bodies of Grace and Lizzie. Lizzie’s discourse of the body will lead to a reunion of what slavery deconstructed and separated—the mind from the body.

The echoes of the past reverberate in Lizzie long before she consciously articulates what is happening to her—her body knows the truth before her mind possesses it. Shortly after inheriting Grace’s quilt, Lizzie’s body reacts to the stories on it: “My skin tingles just

below the surface. My arms ache and I massage one and then the other, gently” (Perry 23). The increasing frequency of confusing encounters with her ancestors psychologically destabilizes the teenage Lizzie, which is manifested in her body’s reaction to the growing physical pain and the separation between her mind and body. Lizzie observes: “I don’t feel at all grounded. It is as if I’m floating a little above the scene, and I put my hand on top of my head, trying to hold it on my shoulders” (38). The psychological confusion associated with these corporeal sensations is compounded further by the fact that Lizzie is unaware of this part of her family’s history. It is unclear if her mother, Sarah, even knows about Ayo’s past, especially because her own mother, Grace, left the family when Sarah was a young girl. Lizzie becomes the medium for what Grace did not understand about her inheritance and for what Ayo refused to articulate verbally to her daughter, Joy, especially regarding the experience of being sold into slavery.

To further understand how the body expresses what the mind does not know, psychiatrists B.A. van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart in their article “The Intrusive Past” (1995) offer a lucid explanation: “... psychiatry is beginning to re-discover the reality of trauma in people’s lives, and the fact that actual experiences can be so overwhelming that they cannot be integrated into existing mental frameworks, and instead, are dissociated, later to return intrusively as fragmented sensory or motoric experiences” (van der Kolk 176). Again, they address not only the latent nature of trauma but also the ways in which the traumatic memory may return as manifestations in the body. The body’s senses and movements become the vortex for knowledge and engagement with the traumatic memory. Readers learn from Joy’s diary the horrors of the Middle Passage for Africans and for the young Ayo—bodies are chained together and held down by iron shackles around their arms

and feet that cut deep gashes into them. During one of Lizzie's trances, she is on the ship with Ayo. Lizzie describes the horror:

I smell—taste—sweat and blood and months of misery. The scent knocks me dizzy for a moment and I stumble forward. Then I am pulled, jerked. I open my eyes, but there is a void in front of me. Light, gray and weak, filters in slowly from the left side of my vision, and I see the deck, the water beyond and the line of dark bodies going jerkily forward into ghost-land ... A gurgling sound reaches me. Mine ... The rail is under my palm, the weight of another person dangles from my wrist. The bottom of my foot scrapes the top of the rail; I try to ignore the sound of the chain dragging along the wooden deck. (Perry 87)

Trapped in a space saturated with searing violence and the shadow of death, Lizzie's body reacts in a sentient way. Her engagement with all bodily senses attests to the uncertainty of her physical survival when confronted with such violence. The coarse language articulates the grueling context in which Ayo's body, and by extension Lizzie's body, must survive. This vision of the Middle Passage becomes an essential site for Ayo's trauma. The physical space of the ship is naturally bound with the body because there the body is shackled, bloodied, falling, and violated. This textual profusion of bodily senses reveals with a crude and cruel clarity the psychological trauma that radiates from there into Lizzie's present.

The body transmits Ayo and Grace's stories to Lizzie during her initial contact with them. Lizzie's mental confusion about these corporeal experiences addresses her initial ignorance about Ayo's enslavement, which now she physically confronts. To help explain the complicated ways in which Lizzie's body knows first what her mind will come to understand years later, I borrow from critic Roberta Culbertson her term "body memory" (Culbertson 178). Culbertson suggests that it is vital for a trauma survivor to narrate her story even though in doing this the survivor faces a monumental obstacle in verbally transmitting the experience because "It is not known in words, but in the body" (170). She explains:

These memories of the body's response to events are primary, prior to any narrative, and they may well surpass the victim's narrative ability because they pass beyond his knowledge ... They obey none of the standard rules of discourse; they are the self's discourse with itself and so occupy that channel between the conscious and unconscious that speaks a body language. (178)

Culbertson's concept of "body language" helps address the dichotomy between the past manifested in Lizzie's body and the absence of a coherent narrative accompanying her physical wounds. Ayo's trauma materializes before Lizzie's very eyes with the incarnation of the wounds. As the frequency and intensity of Ayo and Grace's interior visits to Lizzie increase so too does Lizzie's physical reaction to them. Her skin begins to feel raw and their "pain finds every part of [her]" (Perry 56). Lizzie describes her body as heavy, every part of her body hurts and Ayo and Grace have "etched pain all over [her] body" (126).

Ayo's psychological trauma assumes an external form in Lizzie's physical wounds. These bodily marks create a space for the narrative presence of other voices, which Lizzie is not fully conscious of until her hospitalization. Shortly after inheriting the trunk with the family artifacts, Lizzie is with her cousin Ruth discussing Ruth's boyfriend. During their conversation, someone else speaks through Lizzie. Lizzie, as medium for Ayo's voice, scolds Ruth but calls her Joy. Ruth becomes startled after being called this name and runs to alert Sarah. This textually confusing scene exposes Lizzie's dissociation from reality. When Sarah and Ruth return, Lizzie is on the floor but does not remember how she landed there and cannot recall what day of the week it is. Lizzie reflects: "I am aware that the woman sits on the floor with me, and my head is in her lap, but I can't see her anymore. I only feel her bones beneath my bones, holding me up. I strain to see, even though I feel the sun on my skin, coming through that window" (39). Ayo's insertion into another generation of female family members enacts not only the compulsive return of the traumatic memory of slavery

but also a convincing presence in Lizzie's life. The affirmation of her presence comes in the form of the corporeal wounds from slavery carved onto Lizzie's body.

Lizzie's corporeal self and the dead bodies of Grace and Ayo complicate the notions of absence and presence associated with trauma. In the absence of their physical bodies, Lizzie's body becomes the conduit for release from the trauma Ayo and Grace never integrated into their lives. The erasure of the black female body during slavery involved not just the literal marking and, at times, destruction of the human body but also a reconstruction of the individual's identity. In one of her diary entries, Joy records Ayo's discussion of her name: "*... when she talk about her childhood and the bad times it seem like she really was Ayo and not Bessie after all. She once told me that Ayo got los when she crossed the water. Bessie kinda took over. She had to think like her not like Ayo from Afraca*" (50). The young Ayo learns quickly that survival for her means the Ayo from Africa must retreat into the recesses of her mind—psychological survival means an erasure of self. The physical and psychological accumulation of slavery's horrors burst forth in Lizzie's bodily and psychic confrontation with these memories.

Recuperative Confrontation and Integration

Lizzie is thrust into an intense encounter with the past by her confinement to various mental institutions. It is in one of the hospitals that Lizzie, during a self-imposed two-year silence, enters into and confronts the history manifested on her body. Thus begins her acceptance of this inherited traumatic past marked by blood, violence, and horror. During her two years of silence, Lizzie's nightly dreams of Africa result in mornings consumed by fiery pain and scars that burn. What her corporeal self experiences cannot be communicated

through verbal language, and this further emphasizes the dissociation from her mind and body with which she temporarily lives. Lizzie reflects: “Surely, if they knew, if they heard and smelled and saw all, they’d understand how speech, for me, has become inadequate” (157). Lizzie’s silent internal retreat is the beginning of her way back, but to a reality and a life that will acknowledge, accept, and eventually embrace her connection to the terrible past.

During this silence, Lizzie forcefully examines the pain of Ayo’s life. To understand how her silent repetitive return to the memories operates as an integral aspect of Lizzie’s healing, I turn to Dominick LaCapra’s discussion of accessing and addressing traumatic memory. Although LaCapra’s specific focus is the Holocaust, his theories of witnessing and healing can be applied to survivors of other catastrophic experiences, including racial slavery. LaCapra identifies two types of memory in trauma victims, an “acting out” and “working through” that are not necessarily oppositional. He explains: “In acting out one has a mimetic relation to the past which is regenerated or relived as if it were fully present rather than represented in memory or inscription. In psychoanalytic terms, the acted-out past is incorporated rather than introjected, and it returns as the repressed” (LaCapra, *History* 45). “Acting out” may indicate the survivor’s inability to come to terms with a traumatic event, resulting in the compulsive repetition or reliving of the past experience, which Caruth also discusses in her text *Unclaimed Experiences*.

LaCapra’s concept of “acting out” the trauma takes place for Lizzie once she is hospitalized. Ironically, Lizzie’s forced exile into the hospitals is her salvation from permanent psychological damage. Even though Lizzie laments that “no one here understands the necessity of silence” (Perry 158) she, nonetheless, intuitively recognizes that allowing the past to wash through her mind and body is leading somewhere. She reflects: “I lie immersed

in some mental state that only I, in time, will ever understand” (157). This admission is significant in that it signals Lizzie’s acknowledgement that this will not last forever. These periods of “acting out” by a repetitive return to Ayo’s past are renewed continually because “dawn always brings [her] back” (157) only to begin again the following night. During this period, the physical wounds on her back, arms and wrists bleed, further confusing the doctors since they have taken any objects away from her with which she can harm herself. Her excessive closeness to the past manifests in the persistent gaping and bloody wounds.

Lizzie’s continual return to the past is not just symptomatic of being suspended in a state of “acting out” the trauma. Rather, it is part of a larger therapeutic paradigm in which she operates while in the hospital. In LaCapra’s discussion of “working through,” he argues that this is an essential aspect of the survivor’s process of coming to terms with the past trauma through critical memory work. During this process, the trauma survivor is no longer suspended in a phase of “acting out.” This distinction between these two processes further explains how Lizzie begins to assimilate and integrate Ayo’s past. LaCapra notes that “working through” does not necessarily achieve closure, but rather is a way of mourning and a reengaging with life. LaCapra explains:

... to the extent one works through trauma ... one is able to distinguish between past and present and to recall in memory that something happened to one (or one’s people) back then while realizing that one is living here and now with openings to the future. This does not imply either that there is pure opposition between past and present or that acting out—whether for the traumatized or for those emphatically relating to them—can be fully transcended toward a state of full closure ... But it does mean that processes of working through may counteract the force of acting out and the repetition compulsion. These processes of working through, including mourning and critical modes of thought and practice, involve the possibility of making distinctions or developing articulations that are recognized as problematic but still functioning as limits and as possibly desirable resistances to undecidability, particularly when the latter is tantamount to confusion and the obliteration of blurring of all distinctions (states that may indeed occur in trauma and in acting out post-traumatic conditions). (LaCapra, *Writing* 22)

After the two-year silence is over, Lizzie describes her now-healed wounds: “They leave ugly marks that I will carry with me forever, but the grim wounds have closed over” (Perry 177). Similarly, the rupture of her mind before and during her hospitalization finds significant healing while in the hospitals. Conversely, the doctors do not acknowledge this as acceptable psychological recuperation, which accounts for the lapse in time between her ability to explain to doctors what has happened to her and when they release her from the hospital. By the time of her departure from the mental institutions, the physical marks no longer sear with pain and exude blood, which reflect that she now possesses the knowledge of her family’s history in a way that no longer hounds and hurts her. Lizzie reveals:

I am free, I remember. These things can’t hurt me anymore. The story on those diary pages belongs to me, but they don’t own me. My memories live somewhere spacious now; the airless chamber of horrors has melted into the ground. I guess psychotherapy, psychiatry and long-term residential treatment really cured me of something. Cured me of fear. Made me live with every part of my self every day. Cured me of the certainty that I was lost. (46-47)

Unlike her grandmother Grace, who left her beloved husband and children after inheriting Ayo’s memories and wounds, Lizzie discovers that freedom from the fear and horrors of the past is psychologically and physically liberating for her. It is the liberation from fear, not from forgetting what was happening to her, that emancipates her from the grip of the past and is integral to her “working through” the traumatic inheritance. Rather than escaping from her familial legacy of slavery, Lizzie creates a way to merge and integrate this history with her present self by establishing a connection between her and something/someone exterior to her wounded self. Cathy Caruth identifies this as an affirmation or “awakening” (Caruth, *Unclaimed* 100) that reconnects the traumatized body and mind to the exterior world. It is a site of transmission of understanding where “words are

passed on as an act that ... passes on the awakening to others" (100, 106-7). If Lizzie is to grasp her survival, she must establish a connection or association to a person or persons, even an event that brings the mind and body impacted by trauma into a sharper connection. Caruth further explains that for the victim-survivor this is an awakening that engages less the past than the unknown future (110).

Lizzie's first step towards awakening and connecting with someone outside her world is when she meets Mrs. Corday in 1980, supposedly another crazy woman also in the same mental hospital as Lizzie in Montgomery, Alabama. Mrs. Corday, a white, jazz music-loving woman, asks Lizzie: "What in the world are you?" (Perry 162). Lizzie, dazed from having just witnessed an episode of Grace moving into her new room in Detroit after leaving George and the children, does not answer Mrs. Corday. Therefore, Mrs. Corday invites Lizzie into her room and explains:

"Now," she says, after taking a sip and settling into an old easy chair near the window. "I won't tell anybody. And I ain't afraid. I've heard about these things." She leans forward, whispering, "But I did see you, you can't deny that. First you were taller. Darker. Wearing a hat and gloves and carrying a suitcase. Pretty nigger girl. I saw her. Smiling and talking. Couldn't hear what she was saying, but saw her clear as day." (163)

Mrs. Corday's affirmation further authenticates Lizzie's story especially because right before talking with this woman Lizzie thinks to herself: "*I'm crazy ... I'm so crazy. I want to weep*" (162). The significance of this encounter with Mrs. Corday cannot be underestimated because their exchange marks the first encounter, while in the hospital, of someone who believes Lizzie's situation.

Six years later, in 1986, during her stay at a mental institution in Birmingham, Alabama, Lizzie meets the Catholic priest, Father Tom Jay, while he visits other patients there. The encounter with this man of faith offers Lizzie, for the first time, a new and

potentially positive understanding of her physical wounds. Father Jay refuses to accept the explanation that she is crazy, and his validation is paramount in helping her establish and affirm the authenticity of her reality. During the fourteen years in hospitals, doctors examine Lizzie and attempt to cure her with medication and psychotherapy, with no noticeable result. These same doctors refuse to admit the mystery behind wounds that do not heal and do not appear to be self-inflicted, and their denial of Lizzie's reality makes Father Jay's recognition of and belief in Lizzie's situation all the more important. Lizzie, at last, learns that if she wants to be discharged from these hospitals she must lie about her situation to the doctors: "I've polished my story of redemption and restored mental health—the one responsible for my impending freedom—to such a high shine that I've dazzled Harper and everyone else" (5). Also, she admits: "Don't talk to invisible people while the visible people are looking" (211). Conversely, Father Jay encourages her to tell the truth. After hearing Lizzie's story, he shares with her the story of a Catholic monk: "Years ago ... a devoted monk ... became so fixated on the passion and crucifixion of Christ that he was stricken with wounds on his body that corresponded to the Savior's torture and death. It's called stigmata, child. That's what you have" (213).⁶ In addition, the priest validates that her wounds are not self-inflicted but rather compares them to the stigmata, or wounds of Christ, and explains that they are a marking of her merging with the spirits of her ancestors. He further affirms for Lizzie: "Maybe you're marked so you won't forget this time, so you will remember and move on. And Lizzie, I don't think you're meant to rot in a mental hospital" (213). Finally, Lizzie

⁶Stigmata refers to the spontaneously duplicated wounds of Christ's crucifixion on the body of an individual (wounds in the hand, feet, side and brow). It is equated with the person's sanctity. The Catholic Church, slow to approve the validity of the stigmata on an individual, does so after careful and rigorous medical, scientific, and psychological examinations of the person. St. Francis of Assisi, the founder of the Franciscan Order, is said to be the first historically recorded stigmatic (Nickell 219-225 and Wilson 124-148). More recently, the Italian monk Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, who died in 1968, is widely thought to have carried the stigmata. He was canonized a saint in 2002. Other phenomena associated with the stigmatic include bilocation, miraculous cures, emission of perfumery scents, and prophetic insights.

interprets her wounds as an act of remembering, “remembering something unbelievably traumatic” (214). This crucial encounter with the priest gives Lizzie a new way of explaining her scars and repetitive memories of the past. Thus begins her connection to the outside world. Lizzie’s movement from a private space to a more public one involves relinquishing the fear of what happened to her body and mind and discovering her identity in light of who and what she now carries in her body.

Perry’s reference to stigmata in the narrative as well as in the title *Stigmata* suggests a reworking of the religious discourse of forgiveness and redemption in the text. Although the title evokes the Christian notions of sainthood, suffering, redemption, and forgiveness, the purpose of Lizzie’s suffering is not for salvation, redemption, or deliverance for herself or her female ancestors.⁷ Rather, Perry’s use of a Christian discourse illuminates the ways in which a return to Ayo’s original site of wounding facilitates a transgenerational path to psychic healing from the past. The religious references authenticate Lizzie’s paranormal experiences because her reality requires belief in the seemingly unbelievable and mysterious events that defy rational explanations for Lizzie’s wounding. Lizzie does not possess sanctity of sainthood in the religious and redemptive sense, but rather her body becomes a sacred space for remembrance, acceptance, and integration of a tragic history. Although Lizzie’s institutionalization forces her to sacrifice her teenage and young adult years, this sacrifice is not for redemption—indeed, she does not need to be redeemed for what is imposed on her and out of her control. Instead, her forced hospitalization becomes the catalyst for a reengagement with the external world. Paradoxically, Lizzie’s solitary existence in the institutions will allow her to share with others her story.

⁷Critics Corinne Duboin and Stefanie Sievers suggest that the religious connotations in the text lead to the interpretation of Lizzie as a Christ-like figure whose wounds are imposed, thus leading to some kind of deliverance and recovery.

The names of Perry's protagonists necessitate an examination in light of the text's religious connotations. Critic Corinne Duboin suggests that the names of Joy and Grace evoke references to the gifts of joy and grace given by the Holy Spirit. Duboin asserts that joy implies happiness and grace is a gift received in suffering. Although these interpretations seem plausible, the names and relationships between the women call for a more pointed reading of them. The Christian tradition to which Perry's religious references point teach that grace is a gift from the Holy Spirit, which enables one to collaborate in the salvation of others as well as to grow in faith of the Divine. Grace is a form of help from the Divine leading to an intimacy with the Trinity and a uniting of the faithful to Christ in active love. Perry's female protagonist, Grace, is vital to not only a deepening of Lizzie's involvement with and understanding of the past, but she also bridges the generation gap between Ayo and Lizzie. Grace is a collaborator in rendering Ayo's story visible to Lizzie.

Upon her release from the hospital, Lizzie returns to her parents' home where she immediately begins making a new quilt telling her grandmother Grace's life story. In order to reassure her mother, Sarah, that she is not relapsing into what her parents once thought was madness, Lizzie confirms: "It's a project, not a relapse" (60). For Lizzie, the quilt is "a link to the past" and "That's what this quilt is about. The past. And putting the past aside ..." (228). Lizzie's engagement with a pictorial narrative of Grace's story constitutes what critic Susan J. Brison terms "speech acts of memory" (Brison 39). Brison explains:

... remastering traumatic memory (in the case of human-inflicted trauma) involves a shift from being the object or medium of someone else's (the perpetrator's) speech (or other expressive behavior) to being the subject of one's own. The act of bearing witness to the trauma facilitates this shift, not only transforming traumatic memory into a coherent narrative that can then be integrated into the survivor's sense of self and view of the world, but also by reintegrating the survivor into a community reestablishing connections essential to selfhood. (Brison 39-40)

With her return home and the creative act of quilt making, Lizzie uses her voice to determine how the story will be presented on her quilt. For the first time in years, Lizzie's decisions are not thwarted and controlled by another (although initially her mother tries to discourage her from making the quilt). The creative act of sketching the pictures that will appear on the quilt functions as a regenerative movement towards including in the familial communal space the hidden aspects of Grace's story. Lizzie's decision of where to place the images on the quilt unsettles Sarah. Sarah complains: "You could tell better what was going on if the pictures were in a row ... This is hopelessly jumbled" (Perry 93). The quilt's nonlinear narrative attests to the literal and metaphorical complex weaving of the past, present, and future on the quilt. Lizzie's quilt offers alternative ways to interpret her experiences that are separate from empirical facts. Rather than merely a chronicle of her ancestors' past, the quilt is another concrete link between Ayo, Grace, and Lizzie. Lizzie explains the trajectory of the quilt's story:

I have decided that this is the day. The quilt pieces are all sketched out in colored pencil. After breakfast I very deliberately lay all nine drawings out on the dining room table for Mother to see, from the first circle—a picture of Grace in her house packing her trunk—to the last—a glorious funeral with the woman's spirit hovering nearby. (151)

Lizzie's choice to depict Grace's story in this manner further reveals the ways in which she interiorizes and merges Ayo's past with her present self. She interprets the pictures' layout as reflecting her view that "the world seems to move in cycles" (93). Echoing Ayo's view that "*We are forever. Here at the bottom of heaven we live in the circle. We back and gone and back again*" (7), Lizzie develops a vision of history that cannot be expressed in a linear narrative precisely because this story involves traumatic memory. Rather, the seemingly "jumbled" story on the quilt makes perfect sense to Lizzie because she merges on it the real

and supernatural, past and present, pain and joy, and individual and collective memories as they happen simultaneously for her. Lizzie admits: “Those scenes have come to me from deep-buried, but ever-present memory. Treasures from a vault” (69). Whereas Lizzie refers to Grace’s quilt as “Grace’s mourning cloth” (71), Lizzie’s quilt incorporates Grace’s loss and mourning with a celebration of Grace’s return to her daughter Sarah through Lizzie.

Lizzie’s quilt illustrates a different story—one of healing from all of the pain and terror of Ayo’s past. Even Lizzie’s father recognizes the importance of this creative project by buying her “a large wooden quilt frame” (195), although Dr. DuBose does not fully comprehend its significance for his wife and daughter. On her quilt, Lizzie at last incorporates Ayo’s blue scrap of cloth on the quilt’s Grace figure. Ayo carried this piece of cloth from Africa to the New World after her abduction from there. During this complicated narrative scene between Lizzie and Sarah, voices and characters coexist in and speak through Lizzie. Ayo and Grace literally now reside with Lizzie in her body and mind. In a seamless transition between voices and personalities, Grace begins speaking through Lizzie to explain to her daughter, Sarah, why she left the family so many years ago. Grace reflects: “I close my eyes and gather my fortitude. The moment is before us, and I think about all I’m risking. But it’s not like it was then. I’m strong and I know who I am. I know” (226). Undoubtedly, Lizzie also knows well who she is evident in the ease with which she allows Grace to speak through her.

Earlier in the narrative, Lizzie admits shortly after her release from the hospital: “And Bessie became Grace, and Grace became me. Me, Lizzie” (47). At last, Lizzie embraces this part of her identity and reality. Upon completion of the quilt, Grace recognizes: “The circle is complete and my daughter sits across from me with the gap finally closed” (230).

Speaking through and with Lizzie, they tell Sarah about the day Grace left for the north, the memories, and the pain. The repetitive nature of the family's memories and the cycle of trauma, which affected Ayo, Grace, and Lizzie, at last find a resting place through the completion of the quilt and Grace's oral articulation and explanation of why she left Sarah. As a result, the acuteness of the family pain subsides by novel's end. Lizzie's awakening to and release from the fear of her family's past allows her to offer Sarah the knowledge of why her own mother Grace abandoned the family years earlier. The story, and by extension Lizzie's awakening to her role as witness to the family narrative, is passed on to Sarah. In the text's last conversation between Grace and Sarah, Sarah admits: "I used to beg God to send you back to me ..." (230), and indeed, Grace and Lizzie both return to her.

Lizzie's quilt tells the story of the past uninterrupted by confusion and mystery. Shortly after inheriting Grace's quilt when she was still a young teenager, Lizzie recalls numerous times wrapping herself in it as she dreamt of Africa and Ayo. She describes the quilt as a "cloth womb" (39)—connecting it to new life and protection. Indeed, the quilt eventually precipitates the emergence of Ayo's past in Lizzie's mind and on her body. She becomes literally and figuratively tangled in the stories on Grace's quilt the deeper she penetrates into the past. As she retreats into the folds of the quilt and its stories, Lizzie becomes "well-cocooned inside" (54) them. Grace's quilt offers her the space for initial contact with the past. Conversely, Lizzie's quilt tells a story but it no longer entangles her in the family trauma as Grace's quilt once did. Rather, it helps express that which Lizzie now accepts and understands—and her quilt offers Grace a voice to at last reconcile and reclaim her daughter Sarah.

Although the completion of the quilt allows Lizzie to claim a space in her present life, which acknowledges and integrates Ayo's past as well as its impact on her, the interpersonal encounter with a man named Anthony Paul, a printer and artist, is an essential part of Lizzie's psychological and physical healing. They meet in 1995 after her return home from the hospital, and shortly thereafter they enter into a romantically intimate relationship. Even before Lizzie shares with him her story, during their first time making love he appears to intuitively know Lizzie. Upon seeing his bed, Lizzie/Grace remembers the bed she shared with George. As they lie on the bed, Anthony Paul explains that his Grandmother made the quilt on his bed. Right before they begin making love, Lizzie explains to him: "... things happen to people when they make love. You gotta realize that you'll begin to know me, and I'm not talking about just in the biblical sense" (130). Anthony Paul's response is startling to Lizzie and readers when he responds: "I already know you, old woman" (130). When Lizzie asks him "Who are you," he replies, "I'm just someone who loves you" (131). During their sexual encounter, Lizzie is "more sure than ever that [she has] loved him before" (132) and this is confirmed when he instructs Lizzie: "Don't ever leave me again" (132). This narrative episode and exchange between them implies that Anthony Paul and Lizzie already know one another. After Lizzie shares with Anthony Paul the reason for her hospitalization and that she believes Ayo and Grace are reincarnated in her, she asserts: "We've met before ... I don't know where, I don't know how" (183). This (re)union between Anthony Paul and Lizzie is at once mysterious and familiar. Perry leaves Anthony Paul's possible alternate identity ambiguous. It is not clear if his connection to the past is with George or perhaps even further back to someone who loved Ayo long ago. Nonetheless, this voice comes deep from the past.

The relationship offers affirmation and corroboration for Lizzie's past and present. Anthony Paul recognizes the dignity and beauty of Lizzie, Grace, and Ayo's humanity by touching the scars on Lizzie's back. As he "follows the raised pattern on [her] back with his fingertips like a blind man trying to read a horror story" (147) he reflects: "There's something beautiful about it ... Gut-wrenching to look at. But so beautiful it's hard to stop looking" (147). Also, during love making, he "runs his tongue over the scars on [her] back" (131).⁸ Anthony Paul inexplicably intuits the degree of degradation Ayo suffered intimately evident on Lizzie's body. In addition, his close proximity to Lizzie's body and scars enables him to communicate the vision of injustice and trauma the healed wounds represent when he says they are "Gut-wrenching to look at" (147). Although the textual attention on Lizzie's scars relate the physical traces and indelible memory of the dehumanization caused by slavery, Anthony Paul's sensory perception of touch, feel, and sight recognizes Lizzie's human dignity and inherent beauty as contextualized and captured in the "raised pattern" on her back. His touch and gaze carve her humanity, and by extension Ayo's humanity, back

⁸In Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, the female protagonist Sethe carries horrible scars on her back from a brutal whipping she received after a failed escape attempt from slavery. The story's narrator describes the scarring on her back looking "like the decorative work of an ironsmith too passionate for display" (Morrison 18) and "the skin buckle[s] like a washboard" (6). Sethe's scars are repeatedly referred to as resembling a chokecherry tree. After the abolishment of slavery, Sethe reunites with Paul D, another individual once enslaved with her on the Sweet Home plantation. During their initial reunion, Paul D examines Sethe's back and touches "every ridge and leaf of it with his mouth" (18). The similarities between this scene and the one between Anthony Paul and Lizzie attest to the importance of touch in recognizing and reinscribing one's human dignity back onto the violated body.

Sylvia Karcher, a psychotherapist and physical therapist for Concentrative Movement Therapy (CMT) at the Treatment Center for Torture Victims in Berlin, Germany works with torture survivors in order to help them find integration with their painful experiences through body work. She explains CMT as body-related psychotherapy that "proceeds from the assumption that both mental experience and events experienced physically are stored in the body" (Karcher 79). During CMT, the torture survivor is invited to observe and interact with her body in various ways including using different positions of the body to counter the position(s) of the body during torture, massaging, breathing exercises, touching, and play, which encourages the patient to relate to herself, her body, and feelings. For example, Karcher addresses the importance of the therapist's touch on the survivor's body. She writes: "Sometimes the feet were so badly wounded that patients could only crawl for weeks on end and had to be carried ... What remains is a feeling of feet that are unloved, that would be better off not being felt, at all, as well as the experience of not being able to walk properly anymore. Taking the feet into one's hands consciously, and perhaps even lovingly, or feeling them through the therapist's hands, can be a first step toward ceasing to reject them and slowly coming to accept them instead, as something belonging to the patient and deserving to be integrated into the life of the body" (91-93).

onto Lizzie's body. The verbal and physical exchange between Lizzie and Anthony Paul counters the spectacle over one hundred years earlier when Ayo's mistress savagely whipped her as others watched. Anthony Paul sees them (Lizzie and Ayo) as fully human in their nakedness and rather than a source for humiliation Lizzie's body becomes a physical space for the translation of the black female body as deserving of love. Lizzie's body and its scars, more than just a symbol of traumatic memory, is a concrete being that is "flesh that weeps, laughs" (Morrison *Beloved* 93). This is evident again in the evocative description of their sexual union:

I gasp a little as he opens his mouth, the soft skin of his inner lips damp against my breast, and sucks gently. I roll over on top of him, drawing the quilt up and covering us. I slide my hand between us and sink onto him, more sure than ever that I've loved him before. He lifts us both upward in one motion, his large hands digging into my skin, his mouth covering mine ... (132)

The tracing of the corporeal possesses a creative expression in that Anthony Paul's touching of her scars and the communication between their bodies takes up Baby Suggs's command to "Love it. Love it hard" (93). Perry's visual articulation of the bodies counteracts the erasure of the black female body by placing them in a space of intimacy that acknowledges the painful past while recognizing that this past does not possess Lizzie. The return of Lizzie's body to the world outside the confines of mental institutions marks the emergence of the once-erased black female body.

The gap between the unspeakable nature of Lizzie's trauma and the expression of it is slowly bridged over time with Anthony Paul. The visual image of Lizzie's humanity bound to Ayo's humanity involves a delicate process of re-inscription and translation of bodies back into the narrative frame of *Stigmata*, as well as into other narrative forms encountered in the text. Integral to this process is recalling the familiarity of Lizzie's humanity. After their first

time making love, Lizzie takes the cover off a canvas painting Anthony Paul created in 1982, fourteen years before he meets Lizzie. Shocked by what she sees, Lizzie describes the figure in the painting:

She steps out of a swirl of water—the ocean, obviously, in the midst of a storm. A girl-woman walking into the unknown. In the distance, the waves toss a ship. She is obviously nude underneath a cloth that is wrapped around the waist of her slight body. She has her back to us—a back crisscrossed with a lacy pattern of scars—but looks over her shoulder directly into my eyes. (148)

Anthony Paul concludes that the woman in his painting is Lizzie and admits that he does not remember from where the image of the woman came. The focus of the portrait establishes a common point of reference with the assertion and reassurance of Lizzie's continued existence outside the portrait. The painting literally identifies the core of Lizzie's/Ayo's struggle—a battle for life against death. The imminent reality of death for the girl-woman “with a lacy pattern of scars” on a ship tossed by the ocean's waves also points to Lizzie's fight for her sanity while in the hospital at the same time Anthony Paul was creating the painting. Lizzie concludes to Anthony Paul: “It's a picture of Ayo. It's me, but it's Ayo ... these scars, the ones that bled, are the marks of that woman” (183). During this conversation, Lizzie does not retreat into dream-like trances but remains psychologically lucid and present, which emphasize again the ease with which Lizzie now lives with Ayo and Grace.

Perry continues a visual rendering of trauma through Lizzie's own painting while hospitalized in Birmingham in 1988. As part of an art class, she creates a painting of Ayo during the Middle Passage. In another textually complicated scene, Perry merges Ayo, Grace, and Lizzie's voices and consciousnesses. Grace's narration, indicated by italicized sections, tells of her presence during the Middle Passage while witnessing a young boy thrown overboard into the ocean. As Grace narrates, Lizzie simultaneously paints the scene

but in a visually obscure way. Lizzie describes: “On the white-primed canvas, I draw a swirl of red, a hurricane with a small dark eye, a doorway ... A dark naked shape drifts toward the vortex. The red spiral moves, rises to meet it. Small legs and arms fly out in a confused jumble, needing something solid but finding nothing to cling to” (234). The figure of the boy, which readers can infer based on Grace’s oral transmission of the scene, is not clearly depicted in Lizzie’s painting. The need for Grace’s explanation of the scene that Lizzie paints reveals the dependency of each woman on one another. Although Ayo and Grace rise up from the past, they need Lizzie’s body and voice to share their stories. For this to occur, Lizzie must come to understand and accept the reality of their coexistence in her body.

Given the religious references to Christianity in *Stigmata*, the relationship between and coexistence of these three women evident in the novel’s last chapter necessitates further examination of the text’s religious dimension. Ayo, Grace, and Lizzie, three women living in one body, evoke a reference to the central mystery of Christianity—the Trinity as three persons in one God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each person of the Trinity is distinct from one another yet they coexist together in one God—the Holy Spirit works with the Father and Son in the completion of humankind’s salvation. The relationship between Ayo, Grace, and Lizzie leads to a communal rendering of the past in which Lizzie comes to terms and peace with the past and her participation in it. Each woman addresses the transmission of the story in an individual and unique way—Ayo through oral dictations to Joy, Grace through her quilt and Lizzie through the (re)creation of a quilt, diary, and a painting as other narratives of the story. The religious inferences also suggest the symbiotic relationship between the three women. In Christianity, the teaching is that the Father’s love begets the Son and their love

produces the Holy Spirit. Ayo's trauma begets Grace's trauma and together their pain leads to the proliferation of more wounding in Lizzie's body and psyche.

Initially, the coexistence of these three women in Lizzie's body is anything but peaceful for Lizzie. However, through her confrontation with them and the pain of their past, their presence no longer detrimentally destabilizes and disrupts her psychological and physical well-being. Perry's rewriting of the Christian belief in the mystery of a Trinitarian God expresses the profound mystery surrounding how Lizzie can literally suffer the tragedy of slavery as a modern, late twentieth-century woman. Lizzie's psychological survival entails an acceptance of Ayo and Grace's coexistence with and in her even though it defies rational constructs of explanation. Similarly, proof of concrete evidence of the existence of a triune God ultimately calls for faith in what seems impossible and unbelievable. Once Lizzie accepts that her reality is not a mark of insanity but rather exemplifies how traumatic memory affects her, the triune relationship of Ayo, Grace, and Lizzie offers her a way to emerge from despair and isolation.

Perry's choice to end the novel with Lizzie's painting in 1988, approximately half way through her hospitalization, emphasizes the direction of Lizzie's healing over the next several years. Rendering her story through a visual and oral dialectic becomes vital for an acceptance of the past. While in the hospital, she keeps a journal, which Lizzie admits helps her deal with the isolation she feels: "The journal eases my mental pain and illuminates it, makes everything swimming through my head touchable" (219). It offers Lizzie a physical narrative space to place the painful memories that flood her psyche while also leading to a cathartic purging of the painful past. By literally translating her anguish into the written word, Lizzie becomes a ghostwriter for the multiple traumas invading her body and mind.

She speaks for Ayo and Grace and ultimately “*for those whose bones lay sleepin in the heart of mother ocean*” (7). Her journal entries also carry the weight of silence—a silence caused by the complications of how to render her psychic and bodily pain believable to an outsider.

The fluidity between the oral and visual transmission of Lizzie’s encounter with the past further reveals the necessity for a multidirectional narrative approach for recalling traumatic memory. The encoding of trauma through quilts, paintings, journals, and the wounded bodies refashion the relationship between an oral and visual form of dialogue. Lizzie’s body literally becomes the carrier for the family’s private memory, but the other narrative objects help her transmit an (un)believable knowledge to an audience outside of herself and the walls of the hospitals. Lizzie comes from a female tradition that possesses a memory of antecedents in the form of Joy’s diary and Grace’s quilt, which empower Lizzie to share her inclusion in this painful past. Although untangling the meaning behind the events proves psychologically and physically dangerous, Lizzie learns how to survive through these various modes of storytelling. By employing these narrative approaches in *Stigmata*, Perry privileges personal memory over a rendering of factual history. Each narrative creation tells a different part of the story—one that depends on who the storyteller is, where she has been, and where she is going.

To further examine the ways in which narrating traumatic memory operates in the text, I turn to Pierre Nora’s discussion of the differences between history and memory in his “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux Mémoire” (1989).

Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long-dormant and periodically revived. History on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal

present; history is a representation of the past. Memory, insofar as it is affective and magical, only accommodates those facts that suit it; it nourishes recollections that may be out of focus or telescopic, global or detached, particular or symbolic—responsive to each avenue of conveyance or phenomenal screen, to every censorship or projection. History, because it is an intellectual and secular production, calls for analysis and criticism. Memory installs remembrance within the sacred; history, always prosaic, releases it again. Memory is blind to all but the group it binds—which is to say ... that there are as many memories as there are groups, that memory is by nature multiple yet specific; collective, plural, and yet individual. History on the other hand, belongs to everyone and to no one, whence its claim to universal authority. Memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects; history binds itself strictly to temporal continuities, to progressions and to relations between things. (Nora 8-9)

Nora's distinctions between the creation and functionality of memory and history point to the heart of how Perry's innovative narrative techniques attend to the need for ways to intertwine the wounded emotions, bodies, and minds of the survivors in the text. Her narrative strategies investigate how personal and collective memory collide with grave historical crises. Memory becomes an event in that it perpetually influences communities and individuals as is evident throughout *Stigmata*. Although Perry foregrounds her story in an historical awareness of racial slavery, the Middle Passage, and the dehumanization of a group of people, her preoccupation is not with rendering an accurately historical account, but rather with an excavation of the ways in which individual witnesses/survivors confront the past and transmit their memories to a larger community of listeners. The veracity of Nora's assertion that memory rises in "the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images and objects" (9) is most apparent in the multifarious narratives Perry employs in *Stigmata*. Nora's discussion reveals that the links between history and memory appear multiple and indissoluble because both individual and collective memories are an important part of (re)writing history. The problems and contradictions that oppose memory and history do not prevent the possibility of dialogue between these two forms that evoke the past, but it is necessary to understand

Stigmata as a product of the literary imagination. The hybridity of Perry's text in the ways she allows Lizzie to transmit the memories of Ayo's past materializes the unseen qualities of a traumatic experience—the emotional pain of separation from her mother when kidnapped from Africa, the psychological terror of the Middle Passage, and the incessant humiliation and dehumanization as an enslaved woman.

Ayo's terror finds peace at last with Lizzie's psychological healing. The various narrative forms in *Stigmata* offer coherence and meaning to the family trauma. Perry's literary engagement with the unbelievable, inaccessible, and mysterious aspects of trauma attests to the complexities of living with memories of a catastrophic experience. By viscerally rendering Lizzie's encounter with her ancestors' traumatic past through an immersion into the corporeal experiences of Ayo and Grace, Perry forges an intimate relationship between Lizzie and her ancestors as well as between Lizzie and readers. The bodily absorption of the experience of racial slavery passes on the pain of enduring and surviving such trauma. Lizzie's confrontation with death and survival brings her to the end of an arduous journey where she, also speaking for Ayo and Grace, can say at last: "I am the woman I should have been ... the woman I was meant to be" (Perry 153).

CHAPTER IV

Imaginative Bodies in Luisa Valenzuela's *Cambio de armas*

The body as the place where the soul resides is significantly injured and violated by torture. The body's boundaries, which are simultaneously the boundaries of the ego, are no longer respected. Torturers forced their way into the innermost recesses of the human being, not just at a symbolic level, but in a completely real sense, too ...

Sylvia Karcher

Luisa Valenzuela's collection of short stories, *Cambio de armas*, reveals how the abuse of power and the structures of domination intimately involve the body, especially the female body. Valenzuela positions her text to explore the relationship among body, violence, and language during a period of intense political and cultural repression in Argentina. The body's physical and psychological responses to violence become a central preoccupation in *Cambio de armas*. History and fiction meet in the stories as Valenzuela's literary creations expose Argentina's violent and abusive past. By doing this, she denounces the oppressive system of power that gripped the country in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Valenzuela constructs five short stories involving characters living during this violent reign of terror and its aftermath.¹ The stories in *Cambio de armas* follow characters as they attempt to evade and survive the violence inflicted on them. The body becomes the site where coercive and authoritarian structures of power and domination exert control.

¹In this study, I examine three of the five stories, "Cuarta versión," "De noche soy tu cabello," and "Cambio de armas." I believe that these three stories emphasize most prominently the problematic relationship between the violated female body and the women themselves as well as the connection between their physical and psychological conditions and the repressive ideologies that attempt to shape their identities.

Although Valenzuela reveals the devastating effects of violent acts done to the body and thus the psyche, she nonetheless offers a way for the protagonists to subvert the silence surrounding the violence done to them by privileging the body and the mind's imagination as a space for truth telling and survival.

La Guerra sucia

It is essential to understand the historical context that provided the catalyst for the creation of *Cambio de armas*. Marguerite Feitlowitz's work, *A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the Legacies of Torture* (1998), offers a comprehensive explication of the period of Argentina's history known as *la Guerra sucia* (the Dirty War). In the early 1970s, Argentina was plagued with high unemployment and a devalued peso, as well as guerilla warfare between the armies of the ultra-right and the ultra-left. During this period of unrest and uncertainty, Argentina's President General Juan Domingo Perón died, and was succeeded by his wife Isabel. In response to political threats from the leftist groups, the Peronist government formed death squads under the title of the "Argentine Anti-Communist Alliance, or Triple A" (Feitlowitz 6). The mission of these death squads was to eradicate any subversive elements threatening the government.

On March 24, 1976, amidst rising inflation and a staggering deficit of \$1 billion, Isabel Perón was overthrown in a coup, which made General Jorge Rafael Videla Argentina's president. The commanders of this military junta's government were President Videla, Admiral Emilio E. Massera, and Brigadier General Orlando R. Agosti. This governmental change was called "The Gentlemen's Coup." The policies of the junta's government would become known as *la Guerra sucia*.

The new government came to power with a plan euphemistically called the *Proceso de re-organización nacional* (Process for National Reorganization). The plan's stated purpose was to save not only Argentina, but also Western civilization, from the elements of subversion. General Jorge Rafael Videla stated: "The aim of the Process is the profound transformation of consciousness" (19). Feitlowitz writes:

Argentina was the theater for "World War III," which had to be fought against those whose activities—and thoughts—were deemed "subversive." Intellectual, writer, journalist, trade unionist, psychologist, social worker became "categories of guilt" ... Labor unions, professional guilds, teachers' associations, even student councils were specifically targeted in new statutes ... The junta was particularly obsessed with the hidden enemy. Suspects were "disappeared" in order to be exposed (and then annihilated) within a network of some 340 secret torture centers and concentration camps. (7)

This enemy of Argentina had no face, and an individual was suspect if her/his "appearance, actions, and presence seemed inappropriate" (23), which meant anyone, proven guilty or not. The most brutal years of *la Guerra sucia* were 1976-79, when the majority of kidnappings occurred. Although the exact number is unknown even today, it is estimated that almost 30,000 Argentines disappeared during this time into concentration camps, detention centers, and ultimately to their death. For women, imprisonment also meant rape as well as other human rights violations. Once people became a *desaparecido* (disappeared), which denotes an illegally taken human body subsequently tortured and disposed off, many were never to be heard from again. Before death, they were denied access to and communication with the outside world, and they experienced the trauma of torture at the hands of the military rulers and the enforcers of their political will. Many victims were dispatched during weekly execution flights, in which prisoners were administered a tranquilizer, boarded onto a Navy aircraft and systematically thrown from the plane to their death (196-7).² For the military

²Retired Navy Officer Francisco Scilingo openly confessed to his participation in these weekly flights in a series of interviews with Argentina's renowned investigative journalist Horacio Verbitsky. Scilingo's story, as told to

junta's government, an eliminated body erased evidence of any crime. Consequently, if there was no evidence then the government's denial of violence and repression could continue. In her stories, Valenzuela subverts this denial of death and destruction by writing the bodies of her characters into this awful period in Argentina. By doing this, she simultaneously exposes the regime's crimes against humanity and damages its credibility.

Nunca Más: The Report of the Argentine National Commission of the Disappeared (1986) describes what it meant for an individual to enter one of these clandestine places: "To be admitted to one of these centers meant to cease to exist.³ In order to achieve this end, attempts were made to break down the captives' identity; their spatio-temporal points of reference were disrupted, and their minds and bodies tortured beyond imagination" (*Nunca Más* 52). One way of doing this was that the military hooded and/or blindfolded the prisoners. These hoods, or *las capuchas*, covered their heads, faces, and necks, and they had to wear them for the duration of their imprisonment. During his testimony to the Commission on the Disappeared, one survivor describes the psychological effect the hood had on him:

With the hood on, I became fully aware of my complete lack of contact with the outside world. There was nothing to protect you, you were completely alone ... The mere inability to see gradually undermines your morale, diminishing your resistance ...

The "hood" became unbearable, so much so that one Wednesday, transfer day, I shouted for them to have me transferred: 'Me...me...571.' The hood had achieved its aim, I was no longer Lisandro Raúl Cubas, I was a number. (57)

Verbitsky, appears in the book *El Vuelo* (1995).

³After assuming the presidency of Argentina in 1983, Raúl Alfonsín (who himself had been a political prisoner of *La Guerra Sucia*) set up an independent commission to investigate the numerous claims about the disappeared. *Nunca Más: The Report of the Argentine National Commission on the Disappeared* is the report of the commission's findings. In this report, survivors recount their agonizing experiences at the detention centers, concentration camps, and prisons. Ernesto Sabato, one of Argentina's most well-known and respected novelists, was appointed chairman of this presidential commission.

The rhetoric of the junta government manipulated language to further its cause and deny the disappearances and brutality that it inflicted on thousands of Argentines. Its leaders argued that their fight was helping to create a free and peaceful Argentina, where all voices would be respectfully heard. On July 9, 1977, Admiral Emilio Massera, who as a youth was a student of philology, delivered a speech in honor of Independence Day, which reveals the language of lies and deceit used to mask the reality of what the government was doing to its citizens. Feitlowitz documents a part of his speech:

We believe in a country where the love of liberty and personal initiative will be so great that no one will feel that he is a child of the government, but rather its legal brother.

We believe in a culture that is spontaneous and free, that will be no one's political tool, and in which the natural nonconformity of artists and intellectuals will be the most vibrant element of its construction, and not [a cause for] its dissolution ...

We believe that the best proof that a country is civilized resides in its scrupulous protection of the right of its minorities to peacefully dissent. (Feitlowitz 27-8)

Massera's theme of his speech was freedom and democracy, while behind the veil of rhetoric dissenters were disappearing and being thrown from planes.

President Videla also publicly denied the government's involvement with the disappearances and the existence of concentration camps in Argentina. He proclaimed Argentina's call for freedom and the commitment to fight for this ideal. Feitlowitz documents an appearance Videla made on U.S. television on September 14, 1977, in which he admits to the reality of missing persons in Argentina, but offers reasons for this in an attempt to deflect blame away from the government. He transforms the disappeared from victims to perpetrators who are undermining Argentina's mission to create a free country. He says:

We must accept as a reality that there are missing persons in Argentina. The problem is not in ratifying or denying this reality, but in knowing the reasons why

these persons have disappeared. There are several reasons: they have disappeared in order to live clandestinely and to dedicate themselves to subversion; they have disappeared because the subversive organizations have eliminated them as traitors to the cause; they have disappeared because in a shootout with fire and explosions, the corpse was mutilated beyond identification; and I accept that some persons might have disappeared owing to excesses committed by the repression. That is our responsibility and we have taken steps to ensure that it not be repeated; the other factors are beyond our control. On more than one occasion, persons who were thought to be missing later appeared before the microphones on television in some European country, speaking ill of Argentina. (29)

Denial and the distortion of language became crucial props in creating an illusion of a peaceful reality. The rhetoric functioned as a veil to darken the truth about Argentina's *desaparecidos*.

In addition, language was used as a form of torture, depriving the prisoners of "comforting past associations" (Feitlowitz 49) that became related to pain. Feitlowitz offers numerous examples of words distorted and given new meanings by the junta's government. For example, *Avenida de la Felicidad* (Avenue of Happiness) was the name given to the corridor leading from the prisoner's cell to the operating theatre, or torture chamber; *enfermería* (infirmary) was another name for a torture room, where prisoners were tortured while others witnessed it; *marcadores* (markers) were prisoners who agreed to go with their torturers to identify other individuals for kidnapping; and *huevera* (egg carton) was a torture chamber with walls lined with egg cartons to muffle the sounds (53-6). The list Feitlowitz offers is long and harrowing to read, leaving one to imagine the terror felt at the sound of these words and what they meant for the prisoners sent to the *enfermería* or the *huevera*. Feitlowitz offers a profound reflection on the impact violence has on language, which aptly applies to the case of Argentina:

The repression lives on in such aberrations of the language, in the scars it left on the language. When a people's very words have been wounded, the society cannot fully recover until the language has been healed. Words mark the paths of our experience,

separate what we can name from ineffable terror and chaos. At once public and intimate, language is the boundary between our vulnerable inner selves and the outside world. When, like skin, the language is bruised, punctured, or mutilated, that boundary breaks down. We have then no defense, no way to protect ourselves. (62)

In *Cambio de armas*, Valenzuela analyzes the junta's repression and its effect by showing how the use of physical violence destabilizes the victim's body and use of language in ways that re-enforce the structure of domination. She articulates stories of violence but refuses to leave her characters in such spaces of violation. Instead, she reinscribes the bodies of the disappeared into the stories and offers her characters ways to deal with the violence they endure through a re-appropriation of their imaginations, language, and bodies. Yet, she offers no easy answers for how to live with the effects of trauma.

The Question of Genre

In addition to understanding the historical context of *Cambio de armas*, the literary tradition from which Valenzuela emerges is imperative to my discussion of her stories and how they offer an alternative narrative to the officially sanctioned annals of history. The collection of Valenzuela's tales resists placement within and a strict adherence to a particular genre of writing. Written by a Latin American woman about violent and marginalizing experiences, these stories seem fated to be placed under the genre of the Latin American *testimonio*. In his book, *Against Literature* (1993), critic John Beverley provides a comprehensive discussion of the distinguishing characteristics of the Latin American *testimonio*. He defines it as "a novel or novella-length narrative in book or pamphlet form, told in the first person by a narrator who is the real protagonist or witness of the events she or he recounts ... usually a 'life' or significant life experience (for example, the experience of being a prisoner)" (Beverley, *Against* 70). It is also defined as collaboration between the

witness, who is often illiterate and not a professional writer and an individual who records, tapes, or transcribes the story (for example, a translator, journalist, or writer) (70-1).

Beverley emphasizes that while the *testimonio* centers on the personal self, it is a consciousness-raising, mediated representation of the real events where the emphasis is on the expression of a collective self, and “it cannot separate from a group or class situation marked by marginalization, oppression, and struggle” (83). The experience is understood as a collective and inherently political situation and “involves an urgency to communicate, a problem of repression, poverty ... or struggle for survival” (“Margin” 94-95).⁴ In other words, the *testimonio* form attempts to tell an extreme lived experience and to give voice to the victims who previously had no access to public discourse.⁵

While *Cambio de armas* speaks of personal and collective suffering, giving voice especially to those *desaparecidos* who never returned from Argentina’s prisons, it nonetheless exceeds the boundaries of the *testimonio* in three distinct ways. First, the text’s most significant departure from the format of the *testimonio* is the polyphony of narrative voices, which convey the cataclysmic events so many Argentines experienced regardless of

⁴Many Latin Americanists trace the genre of *testimonio* to Miguel Barnet’s 1966 *Biografía de un cimarrón* (*Biography of a Runaway Slave*). Anthropologist Miguel Barnet conducted a series of interviews with Esteban Montejo, a former slave and veteran of Cuba’s War of Independence. The publication of *Quarto de despejo* (*Child of the Dark*, 1960) by Carolina Maria de Jesus, which tells the story of an Afro-Brazilian woman trying to raise her children in São Paulo’s poorest *favela* (shantytown), can also be considered one of the earliest testimonios. Other widely known Latin American testimonios include Elena Poniatowska’s *Hasta no verte, Jesús mío* (*Here’s to You, Jesusa*, 1969), Hernán Valdés’s *Tejas verdes, diario de un campo de concentración* (*Diary of a Chilean Concentration Camp*, 1974), Domitila Barrios de Chungara’s *Si me permiten hablar* (*Let Me Speak!* 1977) Jacobo Timerman’s *Preso sin nombre, celda sin número* (*Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number*, 1980), Rigoberta Menchú’s *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (*I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*, 1983), Omar Cabezas’s *La montaña es algo más que una inmensa estepa verde* (*Fire from the Mountain, the Making of a Sandinista*, 1982), Nidia Díaz’s *Nunca estuve sola* (*I Was Never Alone: A Prison Diary from El Salvador*, 1986), Alicia Partnoy’s *The Little School, Tales of Disappearance and Survival* (1986), Alicia Kozameh’s *Pasos bajo el agua* (*Steps Under Water*, 1987), and Ruth Behar’s *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza’s Story* (1993).

⁵Critic Kimberly A. Nance, in her work *Can Literature Promote Justice* (2006), also defines *testimonio* as “not only a text. It is a project of social justice in which text is an instrument” (Nance 19). She offers a comprehensive discussion of the *testimonio* genre as well as traces the history of its development as a widely valued and legitimate literary genre.

gender and political affiliation. Second, the switching of voices, perspectives, and time in and among each story creates a mosaic of textual chaos and fragmentation revealing to the reader not only what happened but the difficulty posed by living with and after a traumatic experience. These multitudes of stories and fragments of experiences and points of view offer another version of Argentina's history rather than a singular historical record of one voice. Third, Valenzuela, as an established author, already had access to ways of communicating with the public.⁶

Cambio de armas consists of a distinct form of the author's expression and represents the emergence of a corpus of texts that attempt to relate the stories of extreme crises. Such narratives are unique due to their fragmented style and chaotic transmission of traumatic memory. Trauma theorist Shoshana Felman asserts that such texts "impart knowledge" of trauma and offer "a firsthand knowledge of a historical passage ... and of the way life will be forever inhabited by that passage ... knowledge of the way in which history concerns us all" (Felman 111). Thus, Valenzuela's narratives inscribe historical events that influence the reader and become a way to acknowledge the pain, suffering, and loss due to Argentina's military regime. While addressing the marginalization and dehumanization of individuals belonging to a particular group, namely those labeled as subversives, Valenzuela's narratives are, nonetheless, fictional creations. Literary critic Amy Kaminsky, while addressing the difficulty of affixing a genre label to the text of Argentine writer Alicia Partnoy's *The Little School, Tales of Disappearance and Survival* (1986), states that Partnoy's work represents "the elusive form of crafted personal recollection that cannot quite be called either fiction or nonfiction" (Kaminsky 53). Kaminsky's assertion applies to Valenzuela's collection of

⁶Prior to the 1982 publication of *Cambio de armas*, Valenzuela was already a published writer with literary works such as *Hay que sonreír* (1966), *El gato eficaz* (1972), *Aquí pasan cosas raras* (1975), and *Como en la guerra* (1977), as well as published articles. Between 1979-1989, Valenzuela lived in a self-imposed exile in the United States.

stories as well. Valenzuela crafts stories at once personal and collective, thus revealing the intimate depths of trauma and its effect on one's physical and psychological life. In addition, Valenzuela complicates the possibility of placing her text within the boundaries of a specific genre. She shows the government's constructed view of history as well as how characters who are politically and rhetorically stripped of agency and legitimacy find their voice again. In the introduction to her text, Partnoy succinctly expresses the blurring of history and fiction also found in *Cambio de armas*. She writes: "Beware: in little schools the boundaries between story and history are so subtle that even I can hardly find them" (Partnoy 18). Valenzuela disrupts the junta's government siege of silence with *Cambio de armas*.

The historical context of *Cambio de armas* resists affixing a genre label to the text because Valenzuela's work stands between history and fiction. She fictionalizes historical events and brings a repressed history to the forefront of literary consciousness. The text's self-reflexive characteristics in the creation of the stories, as well as in the recognition of and reflection on the characters' physical realities, further complicate the inescapable and complicated question of genre when confronting *Cambio de armas*. Valenzuela uses her text to acknowledge the coexistence of oppositional memories—those documented by government officials wanting to suppress knowledge of the events and those remembered by people trying to uncover the atrocities. Valenzuela signals the need to come to terms with the past through her characters and their bodies. Although she writes the missing bodies back into Argentina's story, these characters live with psychological fragmentation, thus signifying trauma's scarring effect on the body.

An examination of the historiographic metafictional qualities of *Cambio de armas* further explains the ways in which Valenzuela's stories perform an act of witnessing and

testimony. Literary theorist Linda Hutcheon describes historiographic metafiction as not merely a merging of fiction and history into one creation, but rather a highly critical approach to questioning relations of power and control as related to such spaces as the historical, social, and political. Such writing offers an alternative history distinct from the official history acknowledged or denied by governmental representatives or archives. Hutcheon writes:

Historiographic metafiction ... is ideological fiction, taking ideology as meaning those modes of feeling, valuing, perceiving and believing which have some kind of relation to the maintenance and reproduction of social power. To write either history or historical fiction is equally to raise the question of power and control. (Hutcheon, *Canadian*, 235)

Valenzuela's text questions the official record of Argentina's history presented by the government during the years of *la Guerra sucia*. She uses her version of an alternate reality in Argentina during this period as a way to expose the scarring structures of tyranny and domination on the body and mind of her characters.

“Cuarta versión”

Valenzuela's first story in *Cambio de armas*, titled “Cuarta versión” (“Fourth Version”), illustrates the necessity to find new ways of representing traumatic and violent experiences.⁷ The unnamed narrator of “Cuarta versión” sets the task of reconstructing a fourth version of the story about the protagonist named Bella and her lover, Pedro. Readers are neither told these other versions of the story nor the origin of the alternate accounts of the characters. The instability in narrative voice as well as the questionable veracity of Bella's

⁷I am using the English translation of *Cambio de Armas* entitled *Other Weapons* (1985) by Deborah Bonner.

story further emphasizes the precariousness of (re)constructing a linear and coherent narrative when violence and deceit are involved.

The story follows Bella, a beautiful young actress who is having an affair with Pedro, an ambassador to her country. Pedro, already married but intrigued with Bella, offers asylum to political refugees in his embassy. There is political unrest in the country, and as the story progresses, readers learn that Bella has many friends involved in subversive activities against the government, which consequently place their lives in danger. Towards the end of the story, it is revealed that Bella retains close connections to many individuals considered subversives. After performing in a stage play that addresses the issues of disappearance and torture, Bella is shot and killed at her own party during a police raid there. It is left unclear as to which version of the story readers should believe and whether or not Bella's murder is intentional or accidental.

The narrator uses and interprets these unnamed and mysterious versions of Bella's story to construct a different story of what happens to her. Rather than critique and discard the numerous accounts of the story, the narrator uses these pieces as a foundation to begin her own (re)creation of the story. When reconstructing the sequence of events surrounding Bella's life, the narrator addresses the difficulty of this endeavor: "*Páginas y páginas recopiladas anteriormente, rearmadas, descartadas, primera, segunda, tercera, cuarta versión de hechos en un desesperado intento de aclarar la situación ... No hay autor y ahora la autora soy yo, apropiándome de este material que genera la desesperación de la escritura.* (Valenzuela 21) (*Pages and more pages collected, put back together, set aside, first, second, fourth version of the events in a desperate attempt to clarify the situation ... There is no author and now I am the author, claiming the text and writing, despairing.* Bonner 20).

Establishing one coherent chronicle of the reality and official story between Bella and Pedro becomes unstable and impossible, especially when the activities of the characters are under constant surveillance by those in positions of powers.

The opening lines of “Cuarta versión” address the inherent problem of constructing one dependable account of the story about these fictional characters:

Hay cantidad de páginas escritas, una historia que nunca puede ser narrada por demasiado real, asfixiante. Agobiadora. Leo y releo estas páginas sueltas y a veces el azar reconstruye el orden. Me topo con múltiples principios. Los estudio, descarto y recupero y trato de ubicarlos en el sitio adecuado en un furioso intento de rearmar el rompecabezas. De estampar en alguna parte la memoria congelada de los hechos para que esta cadena de acontecimientos no se olvide ni repita. (Valenzuela 3)

There are countless pages written to a story that can't be told because it's too real, too stifling. It's overwhelming. I read the scattered pages over and over again, their order sometimes reconstructed at random. I hit upon many different beginnings. I study them, rule them out, then reconsider them in a mad attempt to put the puzzle back together. I try to figure out where they go, to imprint somewhere a frozen memory of the facts so the chain of events won't be forgotten or repeated. (Bonner 3)

The narrator questions the possibility of writing a reliable account of this story and speaks to the problems present when reconstructing the traumatic memory of a story. Furthermore, the narrator alludes to the historical context and its traumatic events when she states: “*Momentos de realidad que de alguna forma yo también he vivido y por eso mismo también a mí me asfixian, ahogada como me encuentro ahora en este mar de papeles y de falsas indentificaciones*” (Valenzuela 3) (“*Moments of reality which in some way I too have lived, and which for that very reason stifle me, and also overwhelm me, the way I feel now amidst this sea of papers and false identities*” Bonner 4). The reality lurking underneath the story of Bella and Pedro is one of fear and violence, indeed a story that overwhelms the narrator because of the numerous versions of what actually happened with them. Just as the narrator of “Cuarta versión” interprets an already existing narrative, she also deconstructs the official

version of Argentina's history by intermingling Bella's apparent love story with references to sequestered and dead bodies.

Bella's love affair with the married ambassador, Pedro, deceptively appears as the main storyline of "Cuarta versión," but the quiet subtext of political refugees, disappearances, and death shifts the story's central focus away from Bella and Pedro. As the story progresses, the narrative about the political repression gains momentum and prominence as central to the story. The narrator states: "Quiero a toda costa reconstruir la historia de quién, de quiénes? De seres que ya no son más ellos mismos, que han pasado a otras instancias de sus vidas" (Valenzuela 3) ("I must by all means reconstruct the story—whose story? The story of those who are no longer themselves, who have gone on to other pressing matters in their lives." Bonner 3). The narrator wants to write what is unspoken, " ... ésta parece ser la historia de lo que no se dice" (Valenzuela 22) ("This seems to be a story about what is left unsaid." Bonner 21). Valenzuela's inclusion of political refugees and dead bodies attempts to access that which is forbidden from sight and which the government's leadership denies. The narrator, reflecting on the writing of this story, reveals the subtext of violence and terror:

Lo que más me preocupa de esta historia es aquello que se está escamoteando, lo que no logra ser narrado. Una forma del pudor, de la promesa? Lo escamoteado no es el sexo, no es el deseo como suele ocurrir en otros casos. Aquí se trata de algo que hierva con vida propia, hormigueando por los pisos altos y los subsuelos de la residencia. Los asilados políticos. De ellos se trata aunque estas páginas que ahora recorro y a veces reproduzco sólo los mencionan de pasada, como al descuido. (Valenzuela 21)

What bothers me most about this story is what's being disregarded, what isn't being told. A form of modesty, of promise? But sex isn't what's being concealed; it isn't desire, as is usually the case. It's something that has a life all of its own, rustling through the upstairs floors and the basements of the residence. The political refugees. That's what it is, although in the pages I am now looking through and

sometimes bring to light, they are only mentioned in passing, offhandedly. (Bonner 20)

The references to the political unrest increase as the narrator attempts to piece together what happened to Bella.

The narrator's repetitive return to the ambiguity and unreliability of these other versions of Bella's story layer the narrative with more confusion surrounding the political refugees in Pedro's embassy. Although mentioned numerous times in "Cuarta versión," these bodies are never individualized. Rather, the refugees remain nameless, faceless, and generic bodies occupying space in the embassy. Bella describes the embassy as "llena de misterios bajo el más prosaico nombre de asilados políticos" (Valenzuela 5) ("... full of mysteries, otherwise known as political refugees, in more prosaic terms" Bonner 5). During a party one night, Bella and her friends quietly discuss fifteen corpses found floating in a local river and another friend named Navoni who is in hiding. They instruct one another to forget Navoni's name. The evidence of physical violence with the fifteen floating corpses emphatically gives presence to the disappeared, yet the suffocating fear of being connected to subversive individuals and activities keeps the larger narrative of Argentina's repressive governmental control from clearly emerging as a coherent and linear narrative in the story. Valenzuela merges torture and death in this scene, which explains the fear of and instruction about not mentioning Navoni's name again.

To further solidify the inescapability of the repression and terror, a bomb explodes in the street. The narrator's version of this episode questions whether or not the incident will appear in the following day's newspapers: "La bomba había estallado a una cuadra, ya estaban llegando los patrulleros y quizá al día siguiente lo leerían en los diarios. O no" (Valenzuela 17) ("The bomb had gone off one block away. The patrols were arriving, and

maybe the next day they'd read about it in the papers. Or maybe not" Bonner 16). Readers learn that bombs are a common occurrence during this period. Such references to real historical events anchor "Cuarta versión" in a world outside Bella's fictional one. The police sirens, described as "wounding the skin of the night" (Bonner 15) ("... allá donde nacen las sirenas policiales que hieren la piel de la noche." Valenzuela 15) are frequent sounds during this time. The growing number of the missing dead bodies and sounds of assault intrude upon Bella's story as well as the narrator's reconstruction of events.

Valenzuela's amalgamation of fiction and the historical events of Argentina's *la Guerra sucia* raise the issue of the possibility of placing historical events alongside fiction. To think this through further, Hutcheon offers an explanation of the paradox of history as writing and history as "the unimpeded sequence of raw empirical realities" (Hutcheon, *Postmodernism* 92): "The process of critically examining and analyzing the records and survivals of the past is ... historiographic method. The imaginative reconstruction of that process is called historiography ... It is historiography's explanatory and narrative employments of past events that construct what we consider historical facts" (92). Hutcheon explains further: "To write history—or historical fiction—is equally to narrate, to reconstruct by means of selection and interpretation. History (like realist fiction) is *made* by its writer, even if the events are made to seem to speak for themselves. Narrativization is a central form of human comprehension" (Hutcheon, "Canadian" 231-232). This is most evident when the narrator admits to actively attempting to uncover the concealed version of events:

Los papeles escamotean el otro plano de esa realidad donde Bella es apenas una pieza más, un peón en el juego. Y yo en medio de todo esto, tratando de rescatar aquello que se nos escapa de entre los dedos porque responde a un escamoteo más global: la ley de asilo. Un delicadísimo equilibrio, una ley que no debe ser infringida ni aún años más tarde y por vías de ficción. (Valenzuela 23-24)

The papers cover up the other level of reality where Bella is just one of many elements, a pawn in the game. And here I am in the midst of all this, trying to rescue all that's being covered up because it has to do with more general deceit: the laws of political asylum. The delicate balance, a law that must not be infringed upon years later even in fictional form. (Bonner 22)

Even Valenzuela's fictional narrator cannot overlook the historical reality of political prisoners, mass disappearances, and systematic torture and killing that plagued Argentina during the junta's reign of terror. Regardless of whether or not this fourth version of Bella's story is closer to fiction than reality, what cannot be concealed, even in this story, is the violent governmental repression and the ensuing trauma caused by its violent acts.

The narrator, throughout "Cuarta versión," combats multiple and confusing accounts of Bella's story. By doing this, Valenzuela subtly suggests that denial, distortion, and terror bring profound obstacles to the uncovering of and recovery from the violence. By reinscribing the missing or disappeared bodies into "Cuarta versión," Valenzuela offers the possibility of undoing the authoritarian power of the military junta and their fabricated assertions about saving the country from detrimental forces. Unraveling the shrouds of secrecy concerning the existence of the bodies ultimately offers a loosening of the government's tightly controlled machinations of truth making. In this way, the body becomes a tangible witness to the untold truth behind the denials and distortions. The bodies leave empty spaces thus making it impossible to continue to deny their absence. Ironically, their absence becomes evidence of their existence. The narrator alludes to this by stating the difficulty of reconstructing Bella's story from numerous and varying versions. At one point in the story, the narrator suggests:

En este magma de datos se me traspapelan capítulos enteros (como los asilados, solos ahora en el silencio de la embajada, dueños de ese espacio restringido y anónimo, traspapelados también ellos. Sin saber dónde se encuentran en medio de esa compleja realidad externa que los rodea y amenaza.

Páginas enteras pueden desaparecer tragadas por las otras mientras ciertos papeluchos menores afloran a cada instante para reestructurarla B. (Valenzuela 34-35)

Amidst the mass of facts I lose track of entire chapters. Just like refugees, now alone in the silent embassy, forgotten, in possession of that restricted, anonymous space. Unaware of their position in that complex outside reality that surrounds and threatens them.

Entire pages disappear, swallowed up by the rest; other minor scraps of paper pop up time and time again, restructuring B. (Bonner 33)

Whether it is pages to the story or the disappeared bodies, the narrator refers to the colossal structure of death and destruction at the individual and national level. Both offer only narrative fragments yet call for an archival investigation into the untold parts of the account—a transparent validation that the disappeared bodies exist after all as did Bella and her lover Pedro.

The human body becomes the site where Valenzuela, and by extension her narrator, reconfigures the traces of evidence and traumatic memory. The textual focus on the body provides a means to challenge the oppressive practices and relations recounted in “Cuarta versión.” The body becomes the vortex for fiction and reality: “*Hay un punto donde los caminos se cruzan y una pasa a ser personaje de ficción o todo lo contrario, el personaje de ficción anida en nosotros y mucho de lo que expresamos a actuamos forma parte de la estructura narrativa, de un texto que vamos escribiendo con el cuerpo como una invitación*” (Valenzuela 4) (“*There’s a point where paths cross and one turns into a fictional character—or just the opposite, the fictional character lives inside us and much of what we express or act out is part of the narrative structure of a text that we write with our bodies, like an invitation*” Bonner 4). The body, as the site where governmental repression is simultaneously enacted and subverted, is placed at the center of Bella’s performance of a play. The play,

entitled “*El todo por el todo*,” breeches the line of demarcation between censorship and truth telling. The narrator describes the play:

Espectáculo concebido para invitar al público a jugarse tratando de burlar las barreras de censura mientras la posibilidad todavía existiera, apurándose antes de que la represión—esa mancha de aceite—completara su eficaz marcha de mancha y lo contaminara todo. Creación y censura, lo hecho y lo deshecho ... lo desechado” (Valenzuela 32)

The performance had been conceived to invite the audience to participate, trying to evade barriers of censorship as long as that was still possible, working fast before the oil slick of repression moved in, spreading its reach and polluting everything. Creation and censorship, doing and undoing ... doing away with everything. (Bonner 31)

The performance of the play reinscribes the missing and marginalized disappeared persons and therefore sabotages what authoritarian censorship purports to control, the human body itself. Bella’s interior monologue about the play’s depiction of torture on stage expresses the dynamic relationship between fiction and history as played out on the human body in “Cuarta versión.” Bella’s imagined experience of the physical pain from torture suggests an engagement with and visible rendering of the acute experience of torture many of her friends suffer. Bella concludes:

Si vuelo a mi país y me golpean, me va a doler. Si me duele sabré que éste es mi cuerpo (en escena me sacudo, me retuerzo bajo los supuestos golpes que casi casi me hacen doler. Es mi cuerpo?). Mi cuerpo será, si vuelvo ... Cuando le arranquen un pedazo será entero mi cuerpo. En cada mutilado pedacito de mí misma seré yo. Y así lo represento y representando, soy. La tortura en escena, la misma que tantos están sufriendo ... (Valenzuela 41)

If I go back to my country and they torture me, it will hurt. If it hurts I’ll know that this is my body (on stage I shake, I squirm under the supposed blows that almost hurt—is it my body?). It will be my body if I go back ... When they pull a piece off, it will be my whole body. In each little maimed part of myself will be me. And thus I perform it; and performing, I am. Torture on stage, just as so many undergo it ... (Bonner 40)

For Bella, the tortured body becomes the authentic document for the reality of the government's violent repression. By conflating the spaces of the public and private at the site of the body, Valenzuela uses the stage performance of torture to render a transcription of the invisible and disappeared bodies outside the frame of the play back into the discourse of Argentina's history. The authoritative discursive act of denying and concealing the tortured bodies literally becomes present during Bella's performance. And, indeed, Bella recognizes: "Yo subo a escena y mi cuerpo dice por mí lo que yo callo" (Valenzuela 56) ("I go on stage and my body speaks for me, saying what I can't." Bonner 54). Bella offers the audience an alternative to the spectacle of torture by inviting them to participate as witnesses to state terror. The play's audience, and by extension the story's readers, must decide whether or not to engage with this project of witnessing in which the violently damaged and missing bodies become individuals with voices, faces, and stories to tell.

Bella emphasizes the way in which torture leads to a lack of agency for the victim-survivor. Torture will force her to know and confront her body as it is being harmed, hence revealing the body's vulnerability in this structure of power and domination. Returning to Elaine Scarry's text, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, she argues that torture works to remove consciousness from the human body. In other words, the extreme physical pain of torture is a moment of complete embodiment where the victim's body is severed from language and other cultural associations. The torturer assumes power and control over the victim's voice and body. In her text, Feitlowitz also documents a real life example of the body's exposure to harm during torture that illustrates Scarry's view of the torturer-victim paradigm. She shares with readers one survivor's experience in an Argentine concentration camp. The victim-survivor, left unnamed by Feitlowitz, recalls his

internal struggle to remember that he was a human being during the torture sessions. The torturer's objective was to separate the victim from his human sentience through the horror and alienation of his tortured body (Feitlowitz 66). This witness states:

The physical evidence goes against you, you're so weak, so sick and so tormented, you think, if you *can* think: I *am* shit; I *am* these stinking wounds, I *am* this festering sore. That is what you have to fight against. And it's goddamn difficult; because whenever they feel like it, they replenish the physical evidence that goes against you. (66; italics in the original)

The survivor is acutely aware of not only his physical vulnerability but also the psychologically precarious situation of the tortured individual. The body makes known what the mind undergoes, a battle to keep one's humanity amidst ubiquitous violation. Just as Bella suggests that torture will make her know herself, the survivor speaking to Feitlowitz intimately knows the struggle to remember his human dignity in a complex structure designed to destroy it.

The omnipresent and stifling presence of political repression invades the erotic in "Cuarta versión." The context and content of a particular scene Bella narrates seemingly appears to be her reflections during sexual intercourse with Pedro. However, as Bella continues her interior monologue it becomes increasingly difficult to decipher if she is describing torture or sexual intercourse with Pedro.

Yo lo ví, lo ví, yo lo hice y lo deshice, reconstruí, armé y desarmé. Armar al ser humano? Desarmarlo para descubrir cómo está hecho? Presentación que viene de tan atrás, ganas de saber, de romper un poquite, empujar un poco más para comprobar hasta dónde resiste (y casi siempre se caen, casi nunca aguantan y después aprovechan la caída para salir corriendo).

... casi siempre es ella quien se machuca y hace trizas, se golpea y destruye, y el otro nunca está allí para amortiguar el golpe. El otro casi siempre cae encima de ella—ileso—y la aplasta.

(sofocado estoy bajo el cuerpo de él, todos mis orificios obturados sin poder respirar ni gritar y él tan satisfecho y yo casi casi tan satisfecha también, y sofocada. Será éste el precio? Sofocada.) (Valenzuela 31)

I saw him, I saw him, I did him and undid him. I put him back together and took him apart. Put a human being together? Take him apart to see what he's made of? The aspiration that comes from way back, the need to know, to break apart, push a little further, to find out how much he can take (they almost always collapse, they hardly ever can endure it, so they take advantage of the fall and run off).

... She almost always ends up being the one who gets ripped apart, beaten and destroyed, the other one is never there to buffer the shock. The other one usually collapses on top of her, unscathed, squashing her.

(I'm suffocated under his body, all my openings are stopped up. I can't breathe or scream, and he's so satisfied and I almost as much: I'm also suffocating. Is that the price one has to pay? Suffocated.) (Bonner 29-30)

The sexual dynamic between Bella and Pedro is based on a structure of oppression, which further reflects the structures of domination present in Argentina during *la Guerra sucia*.

This passage develops the assertion that sexual and political aggression are closely connected to one another. Torture, as a perverted and extreme form of power, implies a systematic and conscious exertion of control over the victim. For Bella, sexual intercourse with Pedro is simultaneously pleasurable and painful, yet the violence outdoes the pleasure. Describing herself as being beaten and destroyed during intercourse with Pedro blurs the story's two narratives—Bella's story and the account of the political refugees and disappeared persons.

With some forms of torture, instruments are literally placed into the victim's bodily openings. Bella perceives Pedro's sexual penetration of her as an act similar to such torture: "sofocado estoy bajo el cuerpo de él, todos mis orificios obturados sin poder respirar ni gritar ..."

(Valenzuela 31) (I'm suffocated under his body, all my openings are stopped up. I can't breathe or scream ... Bonner 30). Valenzuela's insertion of torture imagery at the moment of sexual union between Bella and Pedro reveals the sickness of Argentina's military oppression and the belief in their duty to destroy individuals in order to save Argentina from subversive forces. In this passage, Bella's body becomes dehumanized as she is left to surrender to the appropriation of her body for someone else's pleasure and control. The literary construction

of a violent and abusive power through the erotic experience between Pedro and Bella further shows the military junta's obsessive and violent grip on Argentina's citizenry.

“De noche soy tu cabello”

The fourth story of *Cambio de armas* entitled, “De noche soy tu cabello,” (“I’m Your Horse in the Night”) is narrated in the first-person voice of a woman nicknamed Chiquita. Her lover, Beto, a revolutionary involved in secret activities against the government, is on the run from the law. Beto visits Chiquita at night to evade the police. Their names are aliases, hence underscoring the necessity to conceal one’s true identity in a police state such as Argentina. The story opens with the couple’s last night together before Chiquita is arrested and subsequently tortured by the police to extract information from her regarding Beto’s whereabouts.

The couple’s relationship expresses the private and public story of Argentina during *la Guerra sucia*. During their last night together, Beto’s attention focuses on Chiquita’s body. He bases his sexual relationship with her on his ability to dominate their interactions with one another. The night he clandestinely arrives at her house, Beto immediately embraces her body rather than speaking with her. Chiquita recalls:

Entró bien rápido y echo los cerrojos antes de abrazarme. Una actitud muy de él, él el prudente ... Después me tomó en sus brazos sin decir una palabra ... diciéndome tantas cosas con el simple hecho de tenerme apretada entre sus brazos y de irme besando lentamente. Creo que nunca les había tenido demasiada confianza a las palabras y allí estaba tan silencioso como siempre, transmitiéndome cosas en formas de caricias. (Valenzuela 105)

He came quickly and locked the door behind him before embracing me. So much in character, so cautious ... Then he took me in his arms without saying a word ... telling me so much by merely holding me in his arms and kissing me slowly. I think he never had much faith in words, and there he was, as silent as ever, sending me messages in the form of caresses. (Bonner 97)

When Chiquita, happy to see Beto, attempts to talk with him about his experiences during his extended absence he dismisses her questions and insists that her ignorance about his activities are for her own safety. As their encounter ensues, Beto's condescending attitude toward Chiquita emerges. While the two lovers drink cachaça and dance to Brazilian singer Gal Costa's song titled "De noite eu sou teu cavalo" ("I'm Your Horse in the Night"), Chiquita tries to share with Beto her interpretation of the song as being about a saint who is the horse of the spirit who rides her. Beto dismisses her suggestion and corrects her by insisting the song is about a sexual encounter where the man is riding his woman. Beto, focused on Chiquita's body, cares little about her ideas and intellectual interpretations. He rejects her version of reality: "... Chiquita, vos siempre metiéndote en esoterismos y brujerías" (Valenzuela 107) ("Chiquita, you're always getting carried away with esoteric meanings and witchcraft." Bonner 99). In this encounter between them, Beto dominates Chiquita's body and thoughts by silencing her language and dismissing her creativity. Just as Argentina censored speech, thought, and bodies during *la Guerra sucia*, this reality plays out between Beto and Chiquita. Beto turns Chiquita's body into an object for his sexual gratification. Similarly, the guardians of Argentina's *la Guerra sucia* turned the human body into a space to exercise their domination to produce terror resulting in answers to the activities and whereabouts of individuals involved in revolutionary activities against the government.

After Beto leaves, Chiquita is arrested. At this point, in her version of the story, it becomes increasingly ambiguous whether or not Chiquita's memory of Beto's last visit is a dream. The fact that she recalls this memory while imprisoned, tortured, and interrogated about Beto's whereabouts calls into question the veracity of her account. By envisioning her

memory of Beto as a dream, Chiquita resists the police's penetration of her recollection of Beto during their torture sessions with her. She asserts:

Mi única, verdadera posesión era un sueño y a uno no se lo despoja así no más de un sueño. Mi sueño de la noche anterior en el que Beto estaba allí conmigo y nos amábamos. Lo había soñado, soñado todo, estaba profundamente convencida de haberlo soñado con lujo de detalles y hasta colores. Y los sueños no conciernen a la cana. (Valenzuela 108)

My only real possession was a dream and they can't deprive me of my dreams just like that. My dream the night before, when Beto was there with me and we loved each other. I'd dreamed it, dreamed every bit of it, I was deeply convinced that I'd dreamed it all in the richest detail, even in full color. And dreams are none of the cop's business. (Bonner 100)

Chiquita's dream version of Beto's visit weaves a complicated entanglement between her imagination and the reality in the interrogation room. She offers a reconstruction of their night together. Nonetheless, the police insist on constructing their own account of what happened with Beto. Like the police and Chiquita, readers do not have the certainty of whether Beto is in hiding or dead. Chiquita's dream and the police's insistence on knowing the tangible facts of the case only place doubt over whose version of the story to believe.

Violence and brutality permeate the text and Chiquita's body with her arrest. The narrator boldly addresses the reality of torture and reveals the severe tactics many of Argentina's military personnel used to extract information from individuals considered subversive to the junta government. She resists succumbing to this violence while simultaneously exposing the military's use of torture: "Y quémenme no más con cigarillos, y patéenme todo lo que quieran, y amenacen, no más, y métanme un ratón para que me coma por dentro, y arránquenme las uñas y hagan lo que quieran. Voy a intentar por eso? Voy a decirles que estuvo acá cuando hace mil años que se me fue para siempre?" (Valenzuela 109) ("Go ahead, burn me with your cigarettes, kick me all you wish, threaten, go ahead, stick a

mouse in me so it'll eat my insides out, pull my nails out, do as you please. Would I make something up for that? Would I tell you he was here when a thousand years ago he left me forever?" Bonner 101). Her memory of Beto surfacing during torture allows Chiquita to confront this deadly and nightmarish experience by sublimating the violence with her retreat into a dream world of physical and sexual love. She learns that even in a context that strips her of agency, the imagination allows Chiquita to control her version of the story. In the story's final line, Chiquita asserts: "Y si por loca casualidad hay en mi casa un disco de Gal Costa y una botella de cachaza casi vacía, que por favor me perdonen: decreté que no existen" (Valenzuela 109) ("And if by some wild chance there's a Gal Costa record and a half-empty bottle of cachaça in my house, I hope they'll forgive me: I will them out of existence." Bonner 101). Within the power of her imagination lies Chiquita's answer for psychological survival. She assumes power over the language she uses to speak about Beto and the police's appropriation of her last encounter with him.

Elaine Scarry argues that the torture victim's use of her imagination as a conscious expression of creativity works to subvert the torturer's deconstructive power over the victim. This helps understand how Chiquita's imagination is a vital tool for her mental survival in an apparatus of state-sponsored terror and violence. Scarry argues that since torture and its ensuing physical pain for the victim actively destroys language and dismantles her voice, the tortured individual's imagination is an essential way in which the victim can survive the torture. Scarry suggests:

Imagining is, in effect, the ground of last resort. That is, should it happen that the world fails to provide an object, the imagination is there, almost on an emergency stand-by basis, as the last resource for the generation of objects ... imagining a companion if the world provides none, may—at least temporarily—prevent longing from being a wholly self-experiencing set of physical and emotional events that,

emptied of any referential content, exist as merely painful inner disturbances. (Scarry 166-167)

For Chiquita, her dreams of Beto prevent her from drowning in the corporeal pain of torture. Although her dream state further envelops the story with uncertainty and ambiguity, Chiquita's creative rendering of her last night with Beto allows her to distance her body's vulnerability from the torturers. Chiquita's assertion of her power in a system designed to strip her of it occurs with her refusal to relinquish the facts behind her last encounter with Beto. Now, their story exists in the realm of her imagination. Chiquita's triumph is that "De noche soy tu cabello" ends with her version of their love story. By the story's end, readers do not know whether or not the police kill Chiquita or free her. This further emphasizes the importance of Chiquita's creative engagement with her imagination in dreaming of a different reality for her and Beto.

"Cambio de armas"

Valenzuela's final story, "Cambio de armas" ("Other Weapons"), which also carries the title of the entire collection, examines the relationship between the tortured body, language, and power. The story is a series of episodes, each titled with the name of an important object or issue. The female protagonist, Laura, is sequestered in an apartment by the colonel she attempted to kill. She is now an amnesiac unaware of who she is and what she is doing there. Later in the story, readers learn that Laura's condition is the result of being tortured and imprisoned as a sex slave by the military colonel. Consequently, Laura's failed attempt to murder him and the resulting torture renders her mind blank. When readers first meet Laura, the colonel, known as Héctor and later as Roque, controls her identity and by extension her present reality, which offers Laura her only knowledge of who she is. In his

apparent endeavor to legitimize and cover up what he has done to Laura, Héctor marries her, yet this is not a marriage based on mutual respect, freedom from abuse, and love.

Thousands of Argentina's citizens met their deaths after systematic and barbaric torture during *la Guerra sucia* years. Valenzuela uses these historical events as the backdrop for Laura's story to depict the emotional and psychological result of such extreme experiences. In the case of Argentina's military junta, the regime's determined denial of its crimes is challenged and uncovered. Even after the military junta's reign of terror passed, its victims did not have an audience to receive their testimonies because of the years of denial and distortion that surrounded the government's activities. "Cambio de armas" offers this testimony.

The safety and warmth associated with the domestic space of the home is inverted in "Cambio de armas." The confines of the apartment limit Laura's world. In addition, what the colonel allows to enter the physical space of the home constitutes Laura's contact with the external world. I return to Scarry's discussion about torture and the importance of the physical surroundings of the torture room to help explain the ways in which the tangible space of the apartment functions in Laura's reality. Scarry writes: "The room, both in its structure and its content, is converted into a weapon, deconverted, undone. Made to participate in the annihilation of the prisoners, made to demonstrate that everything is a weapon, the objects themselves, and with them the fact of civilization, are annihilated ..." (Scarry 41). The concept of home, rather than connoting safety and warmth, is Laura's prison. It is where sexual and psychological violation repeatedly occur at the whim of Héctor. Door keys sit on a nearby table offering the impression that Laura is free to leave anytime, yet she cannot recall what these keys are for. The window Laura sits near does not

have a latch with which to open it; nonetheless, Héctor is the only one who can open it. Rather than offering a view, the window looks out on an exterior white wall with soot stains from the rain. Although keys and windows represent a way out of the apartment's confinement, Héctor converts them into powerful weapons of control. As Scarry explains: " ... the de-objectifying of the objects, the unmaking of the made, is a process externalizing the way in which the person's pain causes his world to disintegrate; and, at the same time, the disintegration of the world is here, in the most literal way possible, made painful, made the direct cause of the pain ... " (41). The domestic space of home and all its contents become the means for Laura's isolation from the outside world. Héctor determines the concrete embodiments of civilization that enter the apartment, including even the dresses he brings her to wear.

In the episode titled, "La fotografía" ("The Photograph"), a photograph of Laura and Héctor on their wedding day rests on the lamp-table. As to be expected in a wedding photograph, they are described: "Ella y él mirándose a los ojos con aire nupcial" (Valenzuela 116) ("He and she, staring into each other's eyes with a just-married look about them." Bonner 108). The wedding picture manifests the tension between appearance and reality in the internal conflict occurring within the apartment. With the photo, Héctor creates reality and exposes photography's staggering capacity to manipulate any reality for the invested interest of those in power. Héctor exerts his control over Laura by presenting a home of domestic bliss. Yet, beyond the ethereal vision of this photograph lurks the shadow of torture, rape, and violence. In this way, the photograph becomes another weapon of repression and a vehicle for perpetuating the illusion of happy newlyweds. False appearances generated by the photo's manipulation of reality are not completely hidden upon

further examination of the facial expressions of Laura and Héctor. The narrator describes them: “Ella tiene puesto un velo y tras el velo una expresión difusa. El en cambio tiene al aspecto triunfal de los que creen que han llegado” (Valenzuela 116) (“She’s wearing a veil and, behind the veil, an absent expression. Whereas he has the triumphant look of those who think they’ve gotten somewhere.” Bonner 108). The description of them is jarring and disturbing since these are not the typically anticipated looks of newlyweds.

To understand how the unexpected functions in the description of this photograph, Roland Barthes’ discussion in *Camera Lucida* (1981) proves helpful. Barthes distinguishes between two elements that attract a viewer to a photograph: the studium and the punctum. He explains the studium as kind of human interest, the “application to a thing ... a kind of general, enthusiastic commitment” (Barthes 26). It is the studium that the viewer seeks out. With Laura and Héctor’s photograph, its viewers look for the newly minted and in love expressions of young lovers. The second element, the punctum, is not sought after, not looked for in the photo, “it ... rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces” the viewer (26). For Barthes, the photograph’s punctum bruises and pricks the observer and crosses the boundary between the text of images and the text of words. Laura’s expressionless face unexpectedly wounds the viewer’s expectation that depictions of joy will abound in this wedding photograph. Rather, the narrator describes it as “ese elemento personal que es lo menos suyo de todo ...” (Valenzuela 119) (“... that personal element that’s the least personal of all ...” Bonner 111). Describing such an intimate piece of history juxtaposed with the impersonal only further solidifies the darkness lurking within the walls of the apartment. In the picture, Laura is “... luciendo su major aire austente tras el velo ...”

(Valenzuela 119) (“... wearing her finest absent gaze behind the veil ...” Bonner 111).

Clearly, Laura is a woman undone by torture, rape, and imprisonment.

The distinctive look on Laura’s face in the photograph expresses her interior disposition evident in the vacuous expression, and this look directly confronts the reality of Héctor’s power over Laura and what he is doing to her. Instead of the wedding veil acting as a literal cover for and erasure of her violation, the testimony of Laura’s situation is evident through her body’s facial expression. On the visual level, this photograph speaks to Laura’s humanity that has been nearly destroyed by Héctor. Amidst these false perceptions, the body tells a truer story. Physical touch between them betrays the truth behind the masks of a wedding photo and warm home. The narrator observes: “Pero intuye que las asperezas existen sobre todo cuando él la aprieta demasiado fuerte, más un estrujón de odio que un abrazo de amor o al menos de deseo, y ella sospecha que hay algo detrás de todo eso pero la sospecha no es siquiera un pensamiento elaborado ...” (Valenzuela 117) (“But she senses his roughness, particularly when he holds her too tight, squeezing her more out of hatred than embracing her out of love or at least out of desire, and she suspects that there’s something behind all of that, but the suspicion isn’t even a developed thought ... ” Bonner 108).

As further evidence of Laura’s situation, the story’s fragmented structure of narration, with the series of episodes, reflects the extreme bodily and psychic violation of Laura. This narrative fragmentation reveals Laura’s inability to live beyond her present situation. She perceives reality only as a felt experience in the present. Laura’s ineffectiveness to access reality beyond her immediate environment is a direct result of the torture she undergoes. The story’s opening scene titled “Las palabras” (“The Words”) reveals Laura’s absent state of mind or the narrator’s perception of it:

No le asombra para nada el hecho de estar sin memoria, de sentirse totalmente desnuda de recuerdos. Quizá ni siquiera se dé cuenta de que vive en cero absoluto. Lo que sí la tiene bastante preocupada es lo otro, esa capacidad suya para aplicarle el nombre exacto a cada cosa y recibir una taza de té cuando dice quiero (y ese quiero también la desconcierta, ese acto de voluntad), cuando dice quiero una taza de té. (Valenzuela 113)

She doesn't find it the least bit surprising that she has no memory, that she feels completely devoid of recollections. She may not even realize that she's living in an absolute void. She is quite concerned about something else, about her capacity to find the right word for each thing and receive a cup of tea when she says I want (and that 'I want' also disconcerts her, that act of willing) when she says I want a cup of tea. (Bonner 105)

Laura's dissociation from self and the outside world is further evident in the uncertainty of her name. She believes her name is Laura because Martina, the housekeeper, calls her by this as does Héctor.

In addition, Laura's anxiety over and inability to find the right word to name its corresponding object betrays her absence from memory, self, and world. The omniscient third person narrator observes:

Y después están los objetos cotidianos: esos llamados plato, baño, libro, cama, taza, mesa, puerta. Resulta desesperante, por ejemplo, enfrentarse con la llamadas puerta y preguntarse qué hacer. Una puerta cerrada con llave, sí, pero las llaves ahí no más sobre la repisa al alcance de la mano, y los cerrojos fácilmente descorribles, y la fascinación de un otro lado que ella no se decide a enfrentar. (Valenzuela 114)

Then there are the everyday objects: the ones called plate, bathroom, book, bed, cup, table, door. It's exasperating, for example, to confront the one called door and try to figure out what to do. A locked door, yes, but there are the keys, on the ledge, within her reach, and the lock's easy to open, her fascination with the beyond, which she can't make up her mind to face. (Bonner 106)

Torture deconstructs language and its meaning for Laura. She undergoes a linguistic and bodily regression leading to this loss of self-identity and perception of the world. Laura lives a concrete fragmentation in her inability to name objects, know her name and to have certainty of anything. Also, Valenzuela's narrative choice to use a third-person narrator

further emphasizes the silence surrounding Laura's personal history, identity, and memory as the consequence of her psychological destruction precipitated by the torture. The reader never knows the internal machinations of Laura's present state of mind, which intensifies the mystery and, at times, difficulty in deciphering Laura's story and identity. This re-enforces Laura's situation—Héctor controls her knowledge and environment and another voice mediates Laura's interior reflections.

To understand the torturer-victim paradigm between Laura and Héctor and its psychological results on Laura, I return to Scarry's work. She explains that the pain torture causes possesses the power to inhibit the victim of pain from making her story accessible to others. Scarry suggests that physical pain from torture has a quality of separation, in so far as the person in the state of pain is separated from the person witnessing someone else in pain (Scarry 37). Language becomes an inadequate mode of communicating this one-sided experience of suffering since it has an invisible quality, in that it is something felt only by the receiver. Scarry goes further to assert that: "Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned" (4). Littered throughout "Cambio de armas" are clues to Laura's intense state of traumatic repression and dissociation. The narrator relates Laura's difficulty in understanding words:

... es como si viera la imagen de la palabra, una imagen nítida a pesar de lo poco nítida que puede ser una simple palabra. Una imagen que sin duda está cargada de recuerdos, (y dónde se habrán metido los recuerdos? Por qué sitio andarán sabiendo mucho más de ella que ella misma?) ... imposible tener acceso a ese rincón de su cerebro donde se le agazapa la memoria. Por eso nada encuentra: bloqueada la memoria, enquistada en sí misma como en una defensa. (Valenzuela 115-116)

... it's as if she could see the image of the word, a clear image despite the lack of clarity a word can have. An image that is undoubtedly charged with memories. (Where have all the memories gone? Where are they, going around knowing much

more about her than she herself?) ... it's impossible to have access to that corner of her brain where memory crouches, so she finds nothing: memory locked into itself as a defense. (Bonner 107)

Laura lacks ownership of her body, world and actions, which has been precipitated by torture and the subsequent destruction of her memory. She has become a blank slate, unmade by torture. In addition, Scarry associates the physical pain of torture to the power of the torturer. This individual divorces the victim's voice from her body through the pain, thus heightening the separation of the victim from the witness or any one who has not been a receiver of this pain. For example, Laura's inability to know her name and those of domestic objects betrays this separation from herself caused by the shattering experience of torture and imprisonment. Valenzuela writes: "En cuanto a ella, le han dicho que se llama Laura pero esto también forma parte de la nebulosa en la que transcurre su vida" (Valenzuela 113) ("As for herself, she's been told she's called Laura, but that's also part of the haze in which her life drifts." Bonner 105-106). Not only does Laura lack any confidence in naming and knowing herself and her environment but the torture also isolates Laura from her body.

In her body, Laura's trauma manifests itself at times such as when she looks at her nose in the mirror and no longer recognizes this body part as belonging to her: "... la misma que ahora contempla en el espejo, que palpa sin reconocerla para nada como si le acabara de crecer sobre la boca. Una boca algo dura hecha para una nariz menos liviana" (Valenzuela 119) ("... the same nose she now sees in the mirror, which she touches but doesn't recognize at all, feeling like it had just appeared above her mouth a second before. The mouth is rather hard, made for a nose that wasn't quite so light." Bonner 111). At other times she looks in the mirror for a long time, "tratando de indagarse" (Valenzuela 113) ("trying to find herself out." Bonner 113). Laura's separation from her body, as well as from words and their

meanings, illustrate Héctor's power over his victim as well as the sick relationship between them. At one point, Laura compares herself to a plant in the apartment, "algo vivo y como artificial" (Valenzuela 122) ("living, but somehow artificial" Bonner 114).

As part of Héctor's complex and created narrative about Laura's life and identity, he treats her as a sick patient in need of medicine. In *Discipline and Punish, The Birth of the Prison*, Michel Foucault argues that the metaphor of illness has been used to justify torture. Torture is a way of "treating a criminal" and the way "to obtain a cure" (Foucault 22). On a few occasions, Héctor instructs Laura to take pills for what ails her; Héctor appears to medicate Laura due to her psychological and physical wounds. This part of the story speaks to the larger reality that occurred in Argentina during *la Guerra sucia*. Marguerite Feitlowitz documents the government's use of the illness metaphor during this time. She quotes part of a speech Admiral Emilio E. Massera gave: "These are difficult days ... days of cleansing, preparation ... this country has been ill for too long for a sudden recovery. That's why we must understand that we have only begun our period of convalescence ... our recuperation of the nation's health" (Feitlowitz 33). The tropes of sickness, treatment, and cure (33) rationalize for Héctor as well as the government their inhuman treatment of fellow citizens. Health means silence and conformity to the will of those in positions of power.

One of the most disturbing interactions between Laura and Héctor occurs in the episode "La marilla" ("The Peephole"). Héctor's bodyguards engage in sadistic voyeurism as they watch Héctor rape Laura in the living room. After opening the peephole in the door to allow his men to watch the performance, Héctor exposes Laura to the humiliation of the male gaze as she lies on the sofa naked. Héctor relies on the gaze of his men, called number One and Two, as another way to assert his domination over Laura. His identity as her master

creator and mediator depends, in part, on being able to flaunt his sexual dominance and get away with it as others watch. After he and Laura are naked, he approaches the door to uncover the peephole “con su soberbia erección” (Valenzuela 135) (“with his proud erection” Bonner 125). The authentication of his beastly dominion by the gaze of One and Two affirms the psychological and physical architecture of degradation and violence throughout the story. Héctor rapes Laura with an animalistic frenzy by penetrating her with violent and aggressive movements:

El apareamiento se empieza a volver cruel, elaborado, y se estira en el tiempo. El parece querer partirla en dos golpes de anca y en medio de un estertor se frena, se retira, para volver a penetrarla con saña, trabándole todo movimiento o hincándole los dientes ... él duplica sus arremetidas para que el gemido de ella se transforme en aullido. (Valenzuela 135-136)

Lovemaking becomes cruel, elaborate, and extends over time: he seems to want to split her in two with thrusts from his hips and in the middle of a shudder he stops short, moves away and then dives into her again furiously, not letting her move, digging his teeth into her ... he doubles his thrusts to turn her groan into a howl. (Bonner 126)⁸

Héctor reduces himself and Laura to the status of animal and its prey through the actions of his body. Animal imagery reflects their present state as he calls her *perra* (bitch) and the narrator describes him as a caged animal roaring with dissatisfaction over this encounter with Laura. Her body is not only internally violated by the rape act, but her exterior body also carries markers of her violation.

Laura’s corporeal self carries the physical scars from the torture she survives. One day, Laura examines her back in the mirror and what she sees confuses her:

... esa larga inexplicable cicatriz que le cruza la espalda y que sólo alcanza a ver en el espejo. Una cicatriz espesa, muy notable al tacto, como fresca aunque ya esté bien cerrada y no le duela. Cómo habrá llegado ese costurón a esa espalda que parece

⁸The English translation of “*el apareamiento*” into “lovemaking” is problematic because the word “lovemaking” strips away the brutality of Héctor’s actions towards Laura in this scene. The verb *aparear*, meaning to mate as between animals, more adequately expresses the absence of humanity and love between Héctor and Laura.

haber sufrido tanto? Una espalda azotada. Y la palabra azotada, que tan lindo suena si no se la analiza, le da piel de gallina. (Valenzuela 119)

Then there's that long inexplicable scar that runs down her back, that she can only see in the mirror. A thick scar, apparent to the touch, sort of tender even though it's already healed and doesn't hurt. How did that long seam get to that back that seems to have suffered so much? A beaten back. The word beaten, which sounds so pretty if you don't analyze it, gives her goose pimples. (Bonner 110)

Héctor writes his power over Laura onto her flesh. The physical infliction of wounds on Laura's body embodies the larger issue of historical trauma saturating Valenzuela's story. The personal, lasting physical memories of injury mirror the wounds incurred by Héctor as well as the national silence. The portrait of Laura's scar configured within the narrative becomes the personal and the historical markers of trauma. This corporeal image that communicates the physical traces of Laura's torture and dehumanization achieves at the same time the affirmation of her humanity. The carved image of violence on the body undermines the horror of Argentina's military junta through the body's mediation in the narrative of "Cambio de armas." By continuing with a textual emphasis on the body, "Cambio de armas" reveals the gaps created by the unspeakable nature of Laura's trauma especially evident in her loss of words and their meanings. By establishing a visual image of the body and by extension Laura's physical humanity, Valenzuela engages in the process of recalling and reconstructing Laura's dignity and humanity. This visual articulation of Laura's physical state that translates her individual trauma succeeds in refuting the violence of the military junta.

An episode of "Cambio de armas" called "Los espejos" ("The Mirrors") is pivotal in both understanding the relationship between Laura and Héctor and signaling Laura's initial steps towards awakening to herself and memories of her past. The torturer-victim relationship Scarry discusses is manifested in this episode. As Scarry explains, "torture ...

consists of a primary physical act, the infliction of pain, and a primary verbal act, the interrogation” (Scarry 35). The verbal act is composed of two parts: the question asked by the torturer and the answer the victim gives (35), or in this case refuses to give. The victim’s pain is thoroughly absent from the torturer’s sentient experience, and this separation and alienation from comprehending the victim’s pain enables the torturer to inflict and sustain the torture for long periods of time. Simultaneously, the prisoner experiences an annihilating pain, which permeates every space and sentient feeling of her physical being. Her focus is not on the question but rather on the excruciating pain she now feels invading her body. The physical distance between the torturer and victim may be insignificant, but their “physical realities are colossal” (Scarry 36). In other words, the torturer and victim may be physically near one another in the torture room, but their experiences during this period are enormously different. The torturer asserts the importance of his world through the questions he asks the victim, “... a world whose asserted magnitude is confirmed by the cruelty it is able to motivate and justify” (36). The prisoner’s world is diminished by her answers “... that articulate and comment on the disintegration of all objects to which (the victim) might have been bonded in loyalty or love or good sense or long familiarity” (36). The prisoner’s diminishing reality wins for the torturer his power. During the torture session following Laura’s capture after she tries to shoot Héctor, he demands to know who gave the order to kill him. Laura refuses to answer, thus leading to her prolonged imprisonment and repeated sexual violation.

In “Los espejos” Héctor and Laura are in bed together. Mirrors cover the walls and ceiling of this room where Héctor rapes Laura. He asserts his power by insisting that she look in the mirror during the rape. He commands her to keep her eyes open so that she can

watch what he does to her in the mirror. By touching and licking the individual parts of her body he attempts both to define her identity according to his wishes and control her consciousness. The scene, isolated from any eroticism, acts rather as a depiction of how the torturer recreates his victim's bodily image and identity. As the scene progresses, Laura's flashbacks to the torture interrupt her present reality in the bedroom. While Héctor demands that Laura open her eyes again, she recalls being kicked, her arm twisted, and being told to remember the names of those who sent her to kill the colonel: "Abrió los ojos, puta! ... Abrió los ojos, cantá, decime quién te manda, quién dio la orden..." (Valenzuela 123) ("Open your eyes, you bitch! ... Open your eyes, spit it out, tell me who sent you, who gave the order ..." Bonner 115). Héctor yells at Laura to open her eyes, in an attempt to force her to be seen as he sees her—as a sexual object for his pleasure and use. However, Valenzuela refuses to leave Laura in this passive state and space of powerlessness. As the story moves forward, Valenzuela restores Laura's presence and sense of self the torture and imprisonment eroded, which ultimately reinserts Laura into Argentina's history of totalitarianism and violence by allowing her to reappear in "Cambio de armas."

In this textually complicated merging of past and present, Laura's initial awakening to the memories of her past begins as she looks in the mirror when Héctor touches every part of her body. He perceives her as his whore and wants Laura to view herself as one too. Yet, the dissociation from her body begins to diminish while Héctor objectifies this same body:

... ella va descubriendo el despertar de sus propios pezones, ve su boca que se abre como si no le perteneciera pero sí, le pertenece, siente esa boca, y por el cuello la lengua que la va dibujando le llega hasta la misma boca pero sólo un instante sin gula, sólo el tiempo de reconocerla y después la lengua vuelve a bajar y un pezón vibra y es de ella, de ella ... (Valenzuela 123)

... she discovers her own nipples as they awaken, she sees her mouth open as if it didn't belong to her, but it does, it belongs to her, she feels that mouth, and from her

neck the tongue that's tracing her reaches for her mouth, but only for a split second, without greed, just enough time to recognize her and then the tongue goes down again and a nipple twitches and it's hers, hers ... (Bonner 114-115)

The sensations of sight and touch affirm Laura's bodily existence. Her awakening involves an intimate relation to sentient feeling, as well as an initial resistance to Héctor's construction of her identity by closing her eyes. This distinguishes Laura from her existence as an object for Héctor. The brilliance of Valenzuela's narrative in this episode is that she identifies with Laura's body the dehumanization she suffers while also acclaiming the uniqueness of her body and the inseparability of its parts. The textual focus on Laura's individual body parts is an aspect of what defines her humanity. Although Héctor sees only an object of pleasure in Laura's nakedness, she begins to see herself as fully human at the same time. Valenzuela writes: "Y con la lengua empieza a trepársele por la pierna izQUIERda, la va dibujando y ella allá arriba se va reconociendo, va sabiendo que esa pierna es suya porque la siente viva bajo la lengua y de golpe esa rodilla que está observando en el espejo también es suya, y más que nada la comba de la rodilla—tan sensible—, y el muslo ..." (Valenzuela 122-123) ("His tongue starts creeping up her left leg, drawing it, and she starts to recognize herself up there, she starts to know that leg is hers because she can feel it's alive under his tongue and suddenly the knee she sees in the mirror is also hers, and most of all the curve of the knee, so sensitive, and her thigh ..." Bonner 114). The retracing of the corporeal offers potentially life-giving nourishment for Laura's mind. This juxtaposition to Hector's consumeristic focus on Laura's body illustrates his corrupt humanity. In his attempt to reduce her to mere bodily fragments, the corporeal portrait Laura sees of herself in the mirror informs her of her humanity and ultimately reveals the futility of Héctor's attempts to remake Laura only in his image.

As the scene rapidly shifts between past and present it culminates in Laura's simultaneous shout of "No" to identifying her accomplices in the attempted murder as well as her refusal to open her eyes during the rape. The past and the present meet in a suspended space of time. The narrator describes the effect of Laura's "No":

...un *no* que parece hacer estallar el espejo del techo, que multiplica y mutila y destroza la imagen de él, casi como un balazo aunque él no lo percibe y tanto su imagen como el espejo sigan allí, intactos, imperturbables, y ella al exhalar el aire retenido sople Roque, por primera vez el verdadero nombre de él, pero tampoco eso oye él, ajeno como está a tanto desgarramiento interno.
(Valenzuela 124)

... a *no* that seems to shatter the mirror on the ceiling, that multiplies and maims and destroys his image, almost like a bullet shot although he doesn't perceive it and both his image and the mirror stay there, intact, impervious, and she, exhaling the air she'd kept in, whispers Roque, his real name, for the first time. But he doesn't hear that either, as distant as he is from so much trauma. (Bonner 115)

Laura's "No" represents not only her refusal to name her accomplices in the murder attempt, but is also a rejection of Héctor's perception of her as an object for pleasure. Although Laura does not completely rebel against the colonel at this point, she begins to piece her past together and make progress in recovering her lost memory and identity. The information she remembers in "Los espejos" as she looks in the mirror is the initiation to regaining her consciousness. Rather than acting as a mimetic object, the mirror offers Laura a way to recuperate her memory and identity. It is significant that Laura remembers Héctor's real name, Roque, during this blurring of the past and present. Out of the instability of memory and time emerges a piece of certainty regarding the identity of her captor and rapist. Although this episode depicts male domination over a female, the inversion of his authoritative power over Laura displayed in her recall of memory and verbal articulation of resistance with "No" underscores the fact that Laura before her imprisonment and torture resisted the terror of tyranny. She tried to assert her will by shooting Roque even though it

failed and resulted in her capture. Valenzuela blends the sexual, verbal, and political in this episode as a defining marker for Laura's awakening consciousness. By imagining a new self, separate from Roque's constructed identity of her, Laura begins psychologically to free herself from him.

As the story progresses, Laura's resistance against the colonel becomes incrementally stronger as her body reacts to the growing self-consciousness to her past. For example, one day after his colleagues visit them in the apartment, Laura has the sensation of wanting to vomit although she is unsure what is causing this. Roque's laughter provokes deep anxiety in her: "Sólo cuando ríe—en las raras, muy contadas ocasiones en que ríe—algo parece despertarse en ella y no es algo bueno, es en desgarramiento muy profundo por demás alejado de la risa" (Valenzuela 139) ("Only when he laughs—on those very rare occasions when he laughs—does something seem to awaken within her, and it isn't good. It's a deep pang, far removed from laughter." Bonner 130). Even the word colonel "solo le evoca una punzante sensación en la boca del estómago" (Valenzuela 141) ("only evokes a piercing sensation in her stomach." Bonner 132). In addition, the keys placed nearby the door no longer fool Laura into thinking she can use them. She understands that they will not fit into the apartment's locked front door but rather are there to give her the impression of having the freedom to leave and enter the apartment when she chooses to.

As Roque continues to attempt to mold her into his desired image, she resists: "Una ella borrada es lo que él requiere, un ser maleable para armarlo a su antojo. Ella se siente de barro, dúctil bajo las caricias de él y no quisiera, no quiere para nada ser dúctil y cambiante, y sus voces internas aúllen de rabia y golpean las paredes de su cuerpo mientras él va moldeándola a su antojo" (Valenzuela 138-39) ("He wants her to be erased, a malleable

woman that he can put together as he pleases. She feels like clay, pliable under his touch, and she doesn't want to be, she refuses to be pliable, changing, and her inner voices howl in rage and hit against the walls of her body while he molds her at leisure." Bonner 129).

Valenzuela reveals that an engagement with reality occurs in Laura's physical reaction to the past. The physical manifestations of her awakening elicit evidence of the undeniable connection between the verbal and physical articulation of trauma. Laura's awareness of and reconnection to her body helps her psychologically begin to find a way back to knowledge about her past and self.

In the episode, "El rebenque" ("The Whip"), Laura's visceral reaction to a whip Roque brings home betrays this link between body and mind for the trauma survivor. When Roque shows her the whip "ella se pone a gritar desesperada, a aullar como si fueran a destriparla o a violarla con ese mismo cabo del talero" (Valenzuela 131) ("[she] starts to scream desperately, howling as if she were going to be ripped apart or raped with the grip of this weapon." Bonner 122). Although Laura cannot identify why the whip evokes this reaction, her body's spontaneous response betrays the growing awareness to her existence in the apartment. As Laura sobs like a wounded animal, Roque puts away the whip and tries to calm her down. Yet, in the deep recesses of Laura's memory, she identifies the whip with the latent memories of the trauma of torture and rape. Laura's body is the first to express what the mind has not yet fully uncovered.

By story's end, Laura's self-awareness is realized when she points a gun at the colonel's back as he leaves her for the last time. The colonel prepares to flee the country when it becomes evident that the regime's power is under attack and most likely to fall. This provokes Roque to confess what he has done to Laura, although he justifies the ways in

which he violated her by saying he saved her from death. He argues: “... parecería todo lo contrario pero yo te salvé la vida porque hubieran acabado con vos como acabaron con tu amiguito, tu cómplice ... yo solo, ni los dejé que te tocaran, yo solo, ahí con vos, lastimándote, deshaciéndote, maltratándote para quebrarte como se quiebra un caballo, para romperte la voluntad, trasformarte ...” (Valenzuela 143-144) (“I know it doesn’t look that way, but I saved your life; they would have done you in just like your friend, your accomplice ... I didn’t let them lay a hand on you, all alone, there with you, hurting you, tearing you up, beating you to break you, just like a horse, break your will, transform you ...” (Bonner 134). Now, Laura knows the mystery of her past; lies and deceit are no longer concealed. The story’s last line reads “Entonces lo levanta y apunta” (Valenzuela 146) (“She lifts it and aims” Bonner 135). Although the ending is ambiguous as to whether or not Laura will shoot and kill Roque she nonetheless learns how to survive by regaining her self-awareness of her present and past. Laura’s recuperation of the connection between her body and mind as well as the memories of her past exemplify what Scarry describes when the torture victim-survivor at last awakens. Scarry concludes: “... to be present when the person in pain rediscovers speech and regains his powers of self-objectification is almost to be present at the birth, or rebirth, of language” (Scarry 172). Although Laura does not verbally confront Roque about his horrid behavior towards her, Laura’s engagement in a language of the body signals this rebirth to which Scarry refers. Laura’s actions of lifting the gun and aiming reveal her recognition of what a gun is used for. Her once thwarted action of trying to shoot and kill Roque may be fully realized at last. The narrator describes Laura’s eyes: “sus ojos se ponen alertas, vivos después de tanto tiempo de permanecer apagados” (Valenzuela 142) (“Her eyes are alert, alive for the first time in ages” (Bonner 132).

Just as corrupt and brutal leaders governed Argentina, so, too, is Laura's life once determined by Roque's cruelty and exercise of power over her. The fundamental violation captured in "Cambio de armas" is the objectification of Laura. Roque reduces her to an object that can be beaten, tormented, and imprisoned. Valenzuela uses Laura's story to reveal on an individual level what happened on a massive scale to thousands of Argentines during the Dirty War.

Cambio de armas is difficult and disturbing to read. The stories challenge readers to confront the physical and emotional violations perpetrated by the military junta's government. Valenzuela offers no facile way to confront abuse and to heal from it especially when deceit and denial shroud the violations committed. Nonetheless, she exposes these crimes while making a scathing indictment of the acts of terror and tyranny government officials inflicted on their fellow citizens. The stories in *Cambio de armas* not only protest against authoritarian regimes of domination and violence, but show readers also that the imagination of writers and their characters is a powerful weapon for combating the silencing of voices and bodies.

CONCLUSION

The Reader's Response in an Era of Trauma

What is past is not dead; it is not even past. We cut ourselves off from it; we pretend to be strangers.

Christina Wolf, *Childhood Patterns*

At the heart of *Corregidora*, *Stigmata*, and *Cambio de armas* is the exploration and excavation of how the encounter with a traumatic past influences living in the present. Jones, Perry, and Valenzuela “rip that veil drawn over ‘proceedings too terrible to relate’” (Morrison “The Sites of Memory” 91).¹ The body absorbs and expresses the trauma but also becomes the site for psychological and physical healing from such experiences. These writers reveal the complicated relations among traumatic historical events, personal memories, and the use of the imagination to render trauma authentic for their characters and readers. For the female protagonists in these works, the journey to psychological healing demands a confrontation with personal and inherited turmoil however painful this proves to be—indeed, it is a labor of recuperative healing. To repair their ruptured souls and bodies they must enter into an interior personal struggle that leads to a re-engagement with the external world in light of how their traumas shape self-identity and their

¹As an African American female writer, Toni Morrison believes it is her job to relate such events. She writes: “it is also critical for any person who is black, or who belongs to any marginalized category, for, historically, we were seldom invited to participate in the discourse even when we were its topic” (Morrison “The Sites of Memory” 91).

interpersonal relationships between family members and/or individuals outside the familial circle.

An important and haunting question facing readers of potentially disturbing stories is why engage in reading literary texts that agitate our imaginations, senses, and perceptions of what it means to survive trauma? Jones, Perry, and Valenzuela show that healing from legacies of violence and injustice requires survivors to engage actively in confronting oppressive and catastrophic violence. Readers of their narratives become participants in stories that beckon them to consider the nature of humanity and what kind of relationship these texts establish between readers, authors, their characters, and the present and past. Trauma narratives potentially have the power to effect national memory because “they chronicle experience that has yet to be incorporated into the popular imagination” (Miller 19). These texts intervene into historical events and provide not only alternative histories to the officially sanctioned accounts but also *unofficial* stories about the past. Literature offers these authors the imaginative space for speculation about and restoration of the gaps and silences for which conventional historical accounts do not typically allow. The skillful storytelling of the writers examined in this project transcend the limits of straightforward understanding which historical documentation usually involves. Readers are asked to put aside the concern for clarity and certainty and, rather, reflect on and respond to these stories and the characters within them.

Literary critic Nancy K. Miller asserts, “the task of reading the report of extreme events ... requires an adjustment of our skills as readers” (7). When the reader faces a text that shatters all conventional norms and comforts, a “disorientation ... attends the reader’s arrival in a universe that violates all expectations, (and) we are forced to re-examine the

troubling conjuncture of the extreme and the everyday” (7). The traumatic narrative “produces something like a document whose origin belongs to the past (and those who died in it) but whose effects belong both to the present and the future—to the living readers whose post-traumatic responsibilities are both retrospective and prospective” (7). These works break the silence that surrounds crimes of sexual violations and unimaginable degradation of the human body and mind. Jones, Perry, and Valenzuela guide their readers through a complex matrix of what it means to face the impact of incomprehensible acts of horror committed during racial slavery and Argentina’s *la Guerra sucia*.

Dori Laub offers valuable insight into the relationship between writer and reader. Laub asserts that for the victim-survivor to bear witness to the traumatic event(s), there must be a listener to receive the stories: “For the testimonial process to take place, there needs to be a bonding, the intimate and total presence of an *other*—in the position of one who hears. Testimonies are not monologues; they cannot take place in solitude. The witnesses are talking to *somebody*: to somebody they have been waiting for a long time” (Felman 71; italics in the original). The survivor needs to not only tell the story but also to have an individual who hears and receives the story as part of her survival and return from the isolating traumatic event(s). Although Laub’s discussion refers to the listener of trauma as someone who is in the room receiving the victim’s signals such as silence, tears, and voice fluctuation, this discussion nonetheless is helpful in examining the role of the reader who reads trauma narratives. The reader of these texts responds to the survivor’s victories, defeats, and silences in a different way. The listener becomes one of the victim’s links to the external world. Laub delineates further the listener’s role:

The listener to trauma comes to be a participant and co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening, he comes to partially experience trauma in himself. The

relation of the victim to the event, therefore, impacts on the relation of the listener to it, and the latter comes to feel the bewilderment, injury, confusion, dread and conflicts that the trauma victim feels. He has to address all these, if he is to carry out his function as a listener, and if trauma is to emerge, so that its henceforth impossible witnessing can indeed take place ... The listener has to feel the victim's victories, defeats and silences, know them from within, so that they can assume the form of testimony. (58)

The reader may empathize with Ursa's triumph when she manages to express and move away from her inherited trauma through the creation and performance of the blues songs or when Lizzie completes her quilt and in the process her mother Sarah finds psychic healing from being abandoned by her mother Grace. Defeats and silences are abundant in all three texts. Laura's silent reflection on her body in the mirror as Roque rapes her is terrifying yet leads to her recuperation of memory and a heightened self-awareness by story's end. The readers respond to the silences and incomprehensibilities of the protagonists' plights in the lack of vocabulary on the page and in the imagery of the violated body. The fragmentation of a linear narrative and the lack of continuity in narrative voices express the defeats of these characters. Such textual mutilation creates disorientation in readers who must work to untangle and understand the significance of these events, just as the authors lead their protagonists to interrogate and integrate the traumatic experience(s). Although the readers are not traumatized like the characters, the story still affects them. Just as listeners receive the survivor's testimony by listening, so, too, the readers receive the author's text by committing to read it. The listeners and readers share the common purpose of participating in narratives of survival through their willingness to receive the story either through sound or sight.

In an era of media saturation that feeds viewers a steady stream of violent images and stories depicting war, genocides, missing children, battered women, and natural disasters (to

name only a few), a voyeuristic tendency may propel some individuals to engage in reading trauma narratives. Perhaps they are looking for a thrill from the emotional appeal such stories offer them. There is a spectrum of readers that will approach trauma narratives and carry with them different responses based on their personal experiences. These include readers looking to learn of a people's suffering and willing to become another witness to the trauma survivor. Some individuals will have experienced and survived their own traumas; others will carry no intimate knowledge of traumatic experiences while still some will approach the texts, in part, for the purpose of scholarly analysis. Nonetheless, all readers will encounter moments of choice to continue on or close the book and this will depend on the past and present experiences and motivations of each reader.

Laub rightly distinguishes the listener from the victim. The listener remains a separate individual from the victim "and will experience hazards and struggles of his own, while carrying out his function of a witness to the trauma witness. While overlapping, to a degree, with the experience of the victim, he nonetheless does not become the victim—he preserves his own separate place, position and perspective" (58). Distance between the author and reader is essential in allowing the victim to witness to the traumatic event(s). Although Laub refers to the individual who has actually lived through and survived a traumatic experience, his discussion helps illuminate the reader's relationship to the characters in *Corregidora*, *Stigmata*, and *Cambio de armas*. Each text tells a unique and individual story while simultaneously conveying to the reader a much larger history of violence and death inflicted on victims of racial slavery and *la Guerra sucia*. Jones, Perry, and Valenzuela's female characters are recipients of historical violence in these authors'

created fictional worlds. As a result, the authors ask readers to examine how violence can be inflicted and sustained.

Dominick LaCapra contends that readers' role is as a "secondary witness" to the survivor's "working through" process (LaCapra, *Writing History* 78). He asserts that readers of trauma narratives can also participate in a type of "working through" process that manifests in them "empathy and empathic unsettlement" (78), which

involves a kind of virtual experience through which one puts oneself in the other's position while recognizing the difference of that position and hence not taking the other's place. Opening oneself up to empathic unsettlement is ... a desirable affective dimension of inquiry which complements and supplements empirical research and analysis ... Empathy is important in attempting to understand traumatic events and victims ... (78)

LaCapra distinguishes readers from the survivor and calls for maintaining a distance between readers and individuals in the text.

It is dubious to identify with the victim to the point of making oneself a surrogate victim who has a right to the victim's voice or subject position. The role of empathy and empathic unsettlement in the attentive secondary witness does not entail this identity ... (78)

Corregidora, *Stigmata*, and *Cambio de armas* are abundant with heartbreaking episodes—Ayo's kidnapping from Africa and the grueling Middle Passage (which becomes the site for much of her trauma), Lizzie's forced and prolonged hospitalization in psychiatric hospitals, Roque's rape of Laura as others watch and do nothing to stop the sexual violation, Bella's murder, and the torture of Chiquita by the police as she dreams of her lover Beto. The many violently graphic scenes in the narratives lead some readers to respond with sorrow, fear, and even relief. The readers' sorrow comes from the recognition that they are outside of the text looking in, separated from the events of the tale yet relieved that it is not them in the situation. Nonetheless, fear operates at the level of the readers' textual participation in and

commitment to continue reading the story even when it is unsettling. Most readers come to know that this dehumanization may not have happened exactly as depicted in the novels, but the larger reality is that similar violations occurred during racial slavery and *La Guerra Sucia*. The readers' bodily identification, as well as an emotional identification with these protagonists, allows them to more actively participate with the text. The stories demand from readers a response, which will depend, in part, on their ability to process the narratives' events and significance. Readers do not experience the bodily pain; however, they cannot escape the violence and ensuing carnage on pages in these texts—they must face the mangled and wounded bodies if they are to continue reading these stories.

The reader confronts Lizzie's gapping wounds on her body, Ursa's lost womb, and the missing and scarred bodies in Valenzuela's stories. A commitment to stay with *Corregidora*, *Stigmata*, and *Cambio de armas* even when they are disturbing becomes not only part of the process of memorializing the captured experiences in these stories, but also a way in which all of the wounded, disappeared, and murdered individuals encountered there are memorialized, whose bodies were left in the vast ocean during the Middle Passage, thrown to their deaths over the Atlantic ocean, or were never recovered. These lost and unaccounted for bodies belonged to families in Africa, the United States, and Argentina that may neither have discovered what happened to their family member(s) nor had the opportunity to mourn their death.

Readers must recognize the survivor as not just the subject of a traumatic event, but also as a human being who bears this mark of trauma, yet is a unique and unrepeatable person in the present. The imbrications of the traumatic past and lived present are evident in the ways the authors' narratives focus attention to the past but also how they conceptualize

the characters as more than a sum of their traumas. As the female protagonists uncover the painful emotional realities from the past, they enter into their own healing by imagining and engaging in ways that external communities of listeners (including the readers of these texts) may help them reach a deeper understanding of how the inherited and/or directly felt experience of trauma shapes who they have become. Readers are asked to consider the life (hi)stories of these characters as a “plea by an other who is asking to be seen and heard, this call by which the other commands us to awaken ...” (Caruth, *Unclaimed* 9) to their humanity in light of what they survived. This call to readers “constitutes the new mode of reading and listening that both the language of trauma, and the silence of its mute repetition of suffering, profoundly and imperatively demand” (9). This process helps move the survivor from an isolated self frozen in the traumatic memory to a more socially and psychologically integrated individual.

Although the female protagonists readers meet in *Corregidora*, *Stigmata*, and *Cambio de armas* achieve different depths of healing and integration with their unspeakable experiences they nonetheless beckon us to enter into their wounding and struggle for survival. The textual disruption in each text and the beaten, bruised, scarred, and dead bodies provoke in readers a visceral recognition and relation to the characters. Shoshana Felman suggests that readers of literary testimonies of trauma become “belated witness[es]” (Felman 108). These stories open up in readers “the imaginative capability of perceiving history—what is happening to others—in *one’s own body*, with the power (of insight) usually afforded only by one’s own immediate physical involvement” (108; italics in the original). Personal memory is a source of singular importance for knowing the crises taking place in the bodies and minds of the wounded characters.

Given the unusual pairing of these writers, the authors and characters consistently show impressive similarities. The protagonists' healing from their traumas involves repairing the relationships to their violated and scarred bodies. These authors examine the body's connection to the violence of the past. It is clear from these texts, therefore, that trauma studies is moving us to consider the body as the site where the body and mind heal themselves. These processes are at once intimately personal yet require engagement with the external world, perhaps at times even with perpetrators of the violence. Survival becomes a creative act—an act that engages the imagination of the protagonists to envision a life beyond the stasis of the intrusive and traumatic repetition of painful memories. It is a deeply personal act because each woman must individually enter her physical and psychological wounds and meditate on the memories of terror that injured her before she can share her understanding of this past with other individuals. The imagination helps them purge the painful and tragic past by facing and pushing through harmful behaviors, beliefs, and relationships. In the end, this difficult memory work and confrontation will become pieces of the larger mosaic of each protagonist's life. Their bodily and psychological discourses now include narratives that envision lives beyond the trauma and futures that offer hope.

It is necessary to examine the function of Jones, Perry, and Valenzuela as writers who narrate traumatic historical events in their countries. They write from the position of mediums that tell stories of pain, violence, and survival because all three writers have not been directly victimized by state-sponsored slavery and torture. For Jones and Perry, the similarity in their literary texts exists in the fact that both writers deal with events of a remote past—American slavery and its lasting generational consequences, whereas Valenzuela writes of Argentina's immediate past. All three women make the belatedness of trauma into

an updatedness of trauma by conceiving stories revealing trauma's pervasive and far-reaching consequences on the cultural imagination of a nation. The imagination joins these writers with their characters and readers, thus bridging the gap between trauma and its effects caused by the passage of time. They channel the stories of dehumanization, trauma, memory, and survival through the stories and characters they create and introduce to readers. The revelatory nature of these texts shows readers that the markers of trauma do not exist in isolation or only within the time period they occur. The effects of trauma revealed through their characters insert into the cultural discourse questions about one's country regarding how it permitted such human rights violations to occur. Just as readers participate in a form of witnessing so, too, do Jones, Perry, and Valenzuela become witnesses to the lives of the characters they create in their literary works.

Valenzuela's position as writer is especially complicated because at the outset of the military dictatorship in Argentina she was active in a group that helped those persecuted by the government flee the country. Although she stayed in Argentina for the first three years of the dictatorship and published her work *Como en la guerra* (1977) (*He Who Searches*) during that time, she eventually sought exile in the United States from 1979 until 1989. Valenzuela may not have experienced the violence like many of her fellow citizens and friends did, but her close proximity to the oppression and fear, nonetheless, immersed her in it. The impact of the governmental repression on her is evident in the textual preoccupation with issues of power, domination, violence, and social and political critiques surfacing in many of her literary works.

The rendering of these stories into literary language transmitting trauma calls for innovative narrative approaches that shift and destabilize language, the body, and the ability

to know. In these ways, the authors in my project make explicit the arduous and potentially transformative process of addressing and integrating trauma into their female characters' identities and lives. Jones, Perry, and Valenzuela demand a rethinking of history by resurrecting and recuperating the forgotten and silenced voices in their works of fiction. Their use of multifarious narrative methods show that the interior journey of trauma is riddled with pain, obstacles, and danger.

Yet, out of such narrative confusion and textual ambiguity emerge both the inscription of the protagonists' personal healing as well as the inclusion of these stories into the larger narrative of the Americas. Jones, Perry, and Valenzuela emphasize that telling these stories is important even if they are rejected, misunderstood, and dismissed by some readers. At times, remembering appears unwise because it thrusts the characters into a descent of apparent madness or, at the very least, psychological instability. Remembering trauma proves that things will never be the same again, but the implications of impending change do not necessarily mean more destruction and violence for survivors.

Corregidora, *Stigmata*, and *Cambio de armas* show that literary art has the power to imaginatively write back into history those who were silenced, hurt, forgotten, and erased by traumatic historical events. These women writers reveal to readers that their narratives do not exist in isolation, but rather they challenge, move, and inspire long after they are read. Trauma narratives offer readers a critical function of reflecting on, evaluating, and helping to build critical skills for approaching the consequences of historical and socio-political traumatic events. These fictional works challenge our assumptions about the personal and public negotiation of trauma and its indelible effects on culture.

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