CRISIS, FORMULATION AND AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL INTIMACY IN 1950s AMERICA

by

OLGA AKSAKALOVA

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2012

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the
Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the
dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Nancy K. Miller

_____ _____

Date Chair of Examining Committee

Mario DiGangi

_____ _____

Date Executive Officer

Morris Dickstein

Joshua Wilner

Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

CRISIS, FORMULATION AND AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL INTIMACY IN 1950S AMERICA

by

Olga Aksakalova

Adviser: Professor Nancy K. Miller

Crisis, Formulation, and Autobiographical Intimacy in 1950s America explores how critical circumstances of historical and personal significance can inspire and direct autobiographical production. I concentrate on Alfred Kazin's *A Walker in the City* (1951), Vladimir Nabokov's *Speak, Memory* (1967), and Robert Lowell's *Life Studies* (1959), three American autobiographies whose first or final versions were produced in the nineteen fifties, decade marked by a surge of autobiographical texts and genres in the United States and the emergence of autobiographical theory in France. Engaging with Robert Jay Lifton's theory of trauma, namely the concept of *formulation*, I investigate how the relationship between the self and the world is fostered in the wake of a crisis as reflected in autobiographical performance unfolding through drafting, meta-writing, revision, publication, and republication.

As I trace the evolution of the texts, I find each author's persistent attempt to forge a connection to the multiple relational others, including the reader, implicated in the autobiographical act. I argue that the prospect and process of gaining this connection – at once troubling and rewarding – tend to stimulate writing and facilitate revision as the writers cross the threshold from the pre-war to the post-war world and grapple with the shifts occurring in their private lives. In the course of writing and re-writing their autobiographies, Kazin, Nabokov, and

Lowell develop a special kind of closeness with their relational others that arises from the interrelated acts of identification, projection, and narration. Looking at autobiographical process (revision, textual versioning) rather than merely product (final text), I illustrate how these acts are enhanced, qualified, or reversed as they are repeated. They produce *autobiographical intimacy*: forged by various forms of interaction(s), it is a virtual space whereby participants of the autobiographical act foster communication, reciprocity, and potentially trust – productively or otherwise.

Acknowledgements

Before reaching the Graduate Center, I was fortunate to meet truly exceptional mentors, colleagues, and friends at Queens College who showed me the way into the English Studies with tremendous faith and encouragement: Howard Kleinmann, Hugh English, Thomas Frosch, David Humphries, Joan Dupre, John Troynaski, Judith Summerfield, and Michael Roberts.

I am very grateful to my adviser Professor Nancy K. Miller who helped me shape the most amorphous ideas, conquer the most disturbing fears, and turn the most difficult corners in the writing process. Her own wide-ranging, distinguished scholarship has inspired many threads in this dissertation. Her feedback always directed me to the immensely gratifying moments of thinking and writing. I want to thank Professor Miller for her enduring generosity and kind support every step of the way.

My heartfelt thanks go to Professor Morris Dickstein whose course on the fiction and film of the fifties inspired this project. His enlightening seminars, books, and conversations were the highlights of my graduate career. I am very grateful to Professor Dickstein for his generous support in my first years of graduate school, throughout all the stages of my oral exam, and of course in the course of dissertation writing.

I thank Professor Joshua Wilner who taught me how to read, write, and think in pieces in a wonderful seminar on Pascal, Dickinson, and Wittgenstein. He also taught me how to bring the pieces together in a seminar paper and then in a dissertation. I am indebted to Professor Wilner for his precise and insightful questions, especially those pertaining to Nabokov and Kazin.

This dissertation could not have been completed without the love and enduring support of my family and friends who never doubted that one day I would be writing my acknowledgements, generously forgave numerous last minute meeting cancellations, and never

failed to say the right thing at the right time. I owe special thanks to my mother Lyudmila Aksakalova for listening to my late night brainstorms and for being my friend.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Autobiography scholars have consistently noted that a crisis can create a powerful impetus for life writing. In "The Style of Autobiography" (1971), Jean Starobinski sees the "internal transformation of the individual" as a major motivating factor for constructing a self-narrative (78). Anthony P. Kerby's *Narrative and the Self* (1991) places autobiography in the context of traditional narrative structures that "promot[e] one moral order over another." A self-narrative, Kerby posits, can be "usefully seen as driven by some such conflict, tension, or crisis in our own lives" (63). Drawing on these earlier works, in her book *Mirror Talk: Genres of Crisis in Contemporary Autobiography* (1999) Susanna Egan argues that an autobiographical response to crisis is marked by patterns of *mirror talk*, reflexive and interactive practices through which the writer and the reader proceed to construct and tell their stories. Suzette Henke begins to explore women's autobiography from a therapeutic perspective in her book *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women's Life-Writing* (2000). Henke uses the term *scriptotherapy* to refer to the healing potential of the autobiographical genre. She writes: "Through the artistic replication of a coherent subject-position, the life-writing project generates a healing that temporarily restores the fragmented self to an empowered position of psychological agency" (xvi). In *Crisis, Formulation, and Autobiographical Intimacy in 1950s America,* I follow and expand these lines of inquiry in my attempt to explore the factors of historical and personal significance that inspire and direct autobiographical production.

I concentrate on the nineteen fifties, the period in American literature when the link between crisis and life-writing was historically conditioned: the aftermath of a major upheaval of the century, World War II, was marked by a surge of autobiographical works and genres. In

addition to the writers' and readers' interest in autobiography, there emerged the first work of autobiographical theory: George Gusdorf's seminal essay "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography" (1956). Gusdorf emphasized the shift "from *bios* to *autos*—from the life to the self" which positioned autobiography at the crossroads of philosophy, psychology, and literature (Olney, "Autobiography" 19). To understand this profound interest in autobiography in the aftermath of the war, I turn to the two historically relevant theories in psychology put forth by Erik Erikson and Robert J. Lifton. In *Life History and the Historical Moment* (1975), Erikson states:

> Some periods in history become identity vacua caused by the three basic forms of human apprehension: *fears* aroused by new facts, such as discoveries and inventions (including weapons), which radically expand and change the whole world image; *anxieties* aroused by symbolic dangers vaguely perceived as a consequence of the decay of existing ideologies; and, in the wake of disintegrating faith, the *dread* of an existential abyss devoid of spiritual meaning. (21, original emphasis)

These three factors were pronouncedly present in the post-war years. The threat of the nuclear holocaust, existential anxieties and crumbling religious beliefs in the face of inexplicable atrocities directed attention to the self and its re-construction through the narrative means of autobiography. Robert E. Sayre explains this phenomenon: "In an age of threatening depersonalization, when, paradoxically, everyone wants to find his/her 'identity,' the autobiographer is a hero…or another one of the antiheroes" (30).

Whereas Erikson illuminates the overarching, historically grounded motivation to think and write autobiographically as a way of filling the "identity vacua," Lifton focuses on the issues

of death, survival, and continuity of life that permeate postwar psychology; in this way, Lifton directs attention to the forces that shape postwar autobiographical experience. He defines Hiroshima and the ensuing, irrevocable threat of nuclear destruction as a collective trauma looming into prominent existence after the war: "we are all survivors of Hiroshima and, in our imaginations, of future nuclear holocaust. The link between Hiroshima and ourselves is not simply metaphorical, but has specific psychological components which can be explored in relationship to the general psychology of the survivor." He defines a survivor as "one who has come into contact with death in some bodily or psychic fashion and has himself remained alive," but immediately enlarges his definition: "the holocausts of the twentieth century have thrust the survivor ethos into special prominence," creating a world in which "the survivor becomes Everyman" (*Death in Life* 479). Having survived, individuals learn to live with a pervasive image of death, Lifton posits. Naturally, we associate death with "biological and psychic annihilation," but we also "require a psychological language—our own system of professional symbolization—to express a sense of endless biohistorical continuity." In other words, the death image encourages us to think in symbolic categories about existential continuity; Lifton calls this mode of thinking "symbolic immortality" and suggests that it can be achieved through creative activity (*The Broken Connection* 21). In the postwar years, this activity was largely identified with autobiography.[1] In fact, central to Gusdorf's understanding of autobiographical project is a mental encounter with death; it occupies one's future-oriented imagination and spawns a creative effort that signifies one's life through writing: "In narrating my life, I give witness of myself even from *beyond my death* and so can preserve this precarious capital that ought not disappear" (29, emphasis added).

[1] Autobiographical works that appeared in the postwar decade are discussed later in this introduction.

In addition to this gesture toward immortality, Lifton offers a helpful insight into autobiographical production by illuminating a linkage between a critical moment and the ensuing processes of renewal and communication:

> What I am suggesting is that to "touch death" and then rejoin the living can be a source of insight and power. This is true not only for those exposed to holocaust, or to the death of a parent or lover or friend, but also for those who have permitted themselves to experience fully the "end of an era," personal or historical. (*The Life of the Self* 115)

In this dissertation, I argue that the moment of transition at the root of autobiographical work sets in motion a narrative which incarnates the process by which the writer attempts to rejoin the living. Lifton calls it *formulation*:[2]

> Formulation includes efforts to re-establish three essential elements of psychic function: the *sense of connection*, of organic relationship to the people as well as non-human elements in one's life space, whether immediate or distant and imagined; the *sense of symbolic integrity*, of the cohesion and significance of one's life, […]; and *the sense of movement*, of development and change, in the continuous struggle between fixed identity and individuation. (*Death in Life* 367, original emphasis)

Of main importance to my thesis is *the sense of connection*, but every one of the three elements in Lifton's model can guide life-writing.[3] In Lifton's model, the sense of connection lies at the

[2] Lifton borrows this concept from Susanne K. Langer who "equates formulation with the symbolizing process itself, and (paraphrasing Cassierer) with 'the natural ordering of our ambient as a "world"' (*Philosophical Sketches* [New York: Mentor, 1964], p. 59)." Lifton explains his conceptual framework as the "effort … to apply this formative-symbolic perspective within a psychological idiom" (*Death in Life* 568 n.).

core of formulation rendering "the survivor as creator: the one who has known disintegration, separation, and stasis now struggling to achieve a new formulation of self and world" (*Living and Dying* 136).[4]

The centrality of this relationship between crisis, creativity, and communication in the postwar experience guides my analysis of specific autobiographical texts here. While remaining sharply focused on the authors' narrative practices, my dissertation reaches beyond the familiar notion of narrative as a form bringing structure and coherence to a chaotic reality. The study draws attention instead to a particular feature of autobiographical experience: relational selves and their modes of interaction. Initially suggested by Susan Stanford Friedman in "Women's Autobiographical Self" in her description of women's autobiographical experience, the concept of relational selfhood has transcended gender boundaries. Paul John Eakin and Nancy K. Miller have argued that an autobiographical self can define itself only through its connections with other selves, including the reader (*How Our Lives* 43-98, "Representing Others" 4). The construction of relational selfhood constitutes a central vector in the current discourse of crisis, trauma and autobiography, but its formative and reparative potential has not yet been explored. When Susanna Egan explains the workings of the "dialogic" texture of contemporary life-writing, her vantage point is the position and composition of the autobiographical subject rather

---

[3] For example, Lifton's *sense of symbolic integrity* reverberates in Paul John Eakin's recent book *Living Autobiographically: How We Create Identity Narrative* (2008). Eakin maintains that a narrative act does not simply describe identity, but is a "part of the fabric of our lived experience" (2). Constantly engaged in narrating our lives even in daily life, we steadily perform "autobiography's identity work," and in doing so we reveal our profound need to carry it on. What we really need, Eakin argues, is autobiography's "temporal tracking": "the memory work involved when we look back on our pasts is driven not only by our present circumstances but also by our plans for the future" (151). The way we do this is by "marking" certain memories of the past for future reading, and thus we imagine ourselves in the future. The same process enables the *sense of movement*, as Lifton defines it above: a comparative mechanism of self-analysis and reflection is intrinsic to the practice of temporal marking.

[4] Lifton co-authored *Living and Dying* (1974) with Eric Olson, but formulation as a psychic model was first mentioned in Lifton's own *Death in Life* (1967).

than this subject's attempted reparative practices (23). Recognizing the significance of communicative aspects of life-writing, in their introduction to *Extremities: Trauma, Testimony, and Community* (2002) Nancy K. Miller and Jason Tougaw call for a revised way of reading the present day "culture of first-person writing," namely to construe it not as "a feature of wide-scale narcissism or the idioms of identity politics," but as an epitome of "a desire for common grounds—if not an identity-bound shared experience, then one that is shareable through identification" (2). In *Narrating Our Healing: Perspectives on Working Through Trauma* (2007), Chris n Van Merwe and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela locate this desire across literary genres, not strictly in autobiography; they lay emphasis on the recuperative experience of the reader of trauma narratives. Both *Extremities* and *Narrating Our Healing* are concerned with trauma narratives as testimonials, whereby a traumatic event is explicitly shared with the reader/listener. I focus instead in how trauma or any experience of rupture motivates and directs autobiographical production without necessarily being overtly present in the ensuing text.

Building on the above studies, my work proceeds to unravel the forms of autobiographical exchanges and their formative potential in relation to specific moments of crisis in the authors' lives. To this end, I closely analyze the circumstances surrounding the autobiographical act and their possible figuring in the text's compositional history, as well as in the final work. I focus on three major American autobiographies written in the postwar decade -- Alfred Kazin's *A Walker in the City* (1951), Vladimir Nabokov's *Speak, Memory*: *Autobiography Revisited* (1967)[5], and Robert Lowell's *Life Studies* (1959) – and examine each

[5] The first version of Nabokov's autobiography, *Conclusive Evidence*, was published in 1951. I analyze both editions, as well as the Russian text *Drugie berega* (1954).

text in light of its various versions, including draft manuscripts, as well as paratextual materials.[6] I find that each is an autobiographical act indeed closely associated with a critical moment in the author's personal history; to varying degrees and in ways specific to the author's life circumstances, this moment is linked to the repercussions of the war. What connects these authors in addition to their historical nearness and experience of rupture is that the end of the war coincided for each of them with a curious departure from previous literary commitments and the beginning of a long-term investment in autobiography. Prior to writing autobiography, Kazin had a notable posture as a literary critic, Nabokov as fiction writer, and Lowell as a symbolic poet dealing mainly with religious and political themes. Having completed their first autobiographical volumes in the fifties, each of these authors later re-engaged in autobiography. Leigh Gilmore calls this practice of "returning to the autobiographical scene" a *serial autobiography* (96). Plausibly, there is a connection between a critical moment and a continuous autobiographical performance.

I am interested in how the relationship between the self and the world gets revised while the autobiographical performance unfolds through drafting, meta-writing, revision, publication, and republication. As I trace the evolution of the texts, I find each author's persistent and escalating attempt to forge a connection to the multiple relational others, including the reader, implicated in the autobiographical act. In fact, with respect to this group of texts, the prospect and process of gaining this connection – at once troublesome and rewarding – tend to stimulate writing and facilitate revision as these writers cross the threshold from the pre-war into the post-

[6] Gerard Genette defines paratexts as "those liminal devices and conventions, both within and outside the book, that form part of the complex mediation between book, author, publisher, and reader: title, forewords, epigraphs, and publisher's jacket copy are part of a book's private and public history" (*Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation N. pag.*).

war world and grapple with the shifts occurring in their private lives. In the course of writing and re-writing their autobiographies, Kazin, Nabokov, and Lowell develop a special kind of closeness with their relational others that arises from the interrelated acts of identification, projection, and narration. Looking at autobiographical process (revision) rather than product (final text), we can see how these acts are enhanced, qualified, or reversed as they are repeated. They produce what I have come to see as *autobiographical intimacy*; forged by various forms of interaction(s), it is a virtual space whereby participants of the autobiographical act face the task of fostering communication, reciprocity, and potentially trust – productively or otherwise. A visceral experience, it is nonetheless grounded in concrete textual practices. Thus, in the course of his revision Kazin overcomes what he initially perceived as a barrier between himself and his reader. Gradually, he mines suppressed memories and carries them out into the public terrain. Nabokov and Lowell find new ways to involve their familial others, as well as the reader, in their texts to achieve conversation and reciprocity.

Curiously, each of these authors builds intimate zones with their relational others around the critical events that spawned their life-writing projects: the Holocaust, exile, mourning and mental illness. A major impetus for *A Walker in the City* came from the intense guilt Kazin felt for disassociating himself from the suffering Jewish nation. Accordingly, *A Walker in the City* conveys a torturous reconnection with the Jewish community by reconstructing the scenes of what Svetlana Boym has called *diasporic intimacy*, the form of relations "that is not opposed to uprootedness and defamiliarization but constituted by it" (227). Kazin evokes colorful memories of growing up in the Jewish Brownsville, an American version of a European shtetl. Steeped in domestic details, Kazin's narrative revives and makes him a participant in cultural memory. Vladimir Nabokov's *Speak, Memory* delineates the routes of diasporic intimacy through the

author's Russian translation and revision of the original English text *Conclusive Evidence* for the Russian émigré audience - *Drugie berega.* This work hinges on mutual recognition of experience and occasions collective remembering. The loss of a native language is an excruciating reality of exile. Acutely aware of this, Nabokov resists this loss by fostering various elements of *linguistic intimacy* to include certain readers and exclude others. Furthermore, Nabokov shows that his most intimate and precious memories of his family reside in the semantics and phonetics of the Russian language; while these memories are alive, so is his Russian. In his autobiography, language and memories kindle each other. The genesis of Lowell's *Life Studies* is rooted in two sites of loss: the loss of parents and the loss of sanity. Lowell's confessional poetry adopts the mode of conversation that counteracts these losses, enabling him to restore communication with his parents and reenter the world outside the mental clinic. He develops what Deborah Nelson describes as *poetic intimacy* – employing the confessional form to both convey and elicit deeply private revelations (45).

This linkage between the development of different forms of autobiographical intimacy and the sources of crisis is worth investigating. Autobiography offers narrative resources to rebuild the relationship between individual and the world in ways that other genres such as fiction or literary criticism cannot. At once, it affords a textual distance and a close proximity between the "I" and the "you" in the text and the "I" and the "you" in the world. When autobiography becomes serial, as the case with the authors here, the attempt at formulation is recurrent, indicating the act of ongoing transition. The act of revision itself is then a form of formulation: it repeatedly creates a new opportunity to initiate social contact.

By drawing attention to how intimacy is produced in and through autobiography, my study seeks to open larger questions about the ways in which autobiographical performance

redefines relationships among the people involved in it."[7] However, it does not assert that autobiography readily and ubiquitously affords reconciliation and healing. Rather, it highlights the fact that authors can *recognize* in this form a propensity to enable meaningful communication with the world that in turn constitutes an important step in their private attempts at formulation and potentially reparation. Although the tropes of crisis and communication have been found intrinsic to autobiographical performance across historical and cultural contexts and genre boundaries, I would hesitate to disassociate their relationship as construed in this dissertation from the specific tenor of the postwar culture. In *A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives: Reading Autobiography* (2010), Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson promulgate a reading of autobiography suggested by Carolyn R. Miller who understands the genre "not as fixed form but as social action" (qtd. in Smith and Watson18). Thus, Smith and Watson assert, "the autobiographical might be read, as Couser suggests, for what it does, not for what it is."[8] Following this lead, I want to review the role of autobiographical genre in the aftermath of World War II.

The fifties writers pursued autobiography in several ways. In addition to more traditional forms of memoir exemplified in such works as Alfred Kazin's *A Walker in the City* (1951), Vladimir Nabokov's *Conclusive Evidence* (1951) and later *Speak, Memory* (1967), Mary McCarthy's *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood* (1957), there emerged innovative works of autobiographical fiction: Norman Mailer's *Advertisements for Myself* (1959), Jack Kerouac's *On*

[7] Scholars may be interested in undertaking studies, such as oral history, focusing on whether/how autobiographical performance can affect those who are implicated in the text. Such studies can offer insights into how the ties of intimacy get exposed, questioned, nurtured, or destroyed as the text is coming into being and then exists in the public space.

[8] Thomas G. Couser's "Genre Matters." *Life Writing* 2.2 (2005): 123-40. The previous citation is from Caroline R. Miller's "Genre as Social Action." In *Genre and the New Rhetoric*, ed. Aviva Freedman and Peter Medway, 23-42. London: Taylor & Francis, 1984.

the Road (1957), Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952). Confessional poetry came into the limelight with the publication of *Life Studies*. Read in their cultural context, these works illustrate what Morris Dickstein describes as a distinctive "turn inward" in postwar America (17-18). When the economic crisis was over and advertisement was on the rise, the drive for upward mobility revived in every part of the country. But material gains came with spiritual losses, a concern vividly documented in the literature of the fifties, raising the levels of self-awareness to the new heights and redefining the boundaries between public and private spheres. Previously unfathomable but now entirely real repercussions of the war – the threat of nuclear war, the horrors of the Holocaust, resurgence of psychoanalysis, existential philosophy, the Cold War – created a newfound concern for the powers and limitations of the individual in the materially prosperous America and in the world governed by oppressive institutions (Dickstein 83-141). The same concern dominated European art and philosophy. William H. Chaffe points out:

> People as diverse as Humphrey Bogart, Jackson Pollock, James Dean, and Camus shared in common the image of trying to understand chaos, interpret the meaning of a world almost destroyed by war, and find a niche for individuals who wanted to create their own freedom in a world increasingly controlled by structures beyond human influence." (136)

In American literature, historical and social backgrounds became "something the protagonist can break from" (Karl 178). The rejection of social mores formed a central theme in J.D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* (1951), Saul Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953), Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), and Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957). Non-conformist behavior in these novels was a way of preserving the inner self, to use Holden Caulfield's word, to escape "phoniness" (Dickstein 10).

In this way the writers of the period answered the concerns outlined in a major book of social criticism, David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* (1950) that brought to light the other-directed character of post-war society; Riesman contended that American behavior was being increasingly determined by and directed toward the social rather than personal values. The shift from inner- to other-directed behavior, according to Riesman, was the result of the new role of capitalist institutions, such as the free market, that "affect[ed] not only the market for money and goods but the self-salesmanship of individuals" (xxxviii). Arthur Miller showed the tragic core of this attitude in Willy Loman's blind predilection for being "well-liked." Norman Mailer dramatized it differently: under the title that epitomized the gesture of self-salesmanship -- *Advertisements for Myself* – he collected a variety of sketches and published works that rejected its very premise. For instance, included in *Advertisements* was his contribution to the 1952 *Partisan Review* symposium, "Our Country and Our Culture," dedicated to the discussion of American intellectuals' changing attitude toward American culture from rejection to acceptance. Mailer's statement affirmed his contempt for integration:

> It is worth something to remind ourselves that the great artists—certainly the moderns—are almost always in opposition to their society, and that integration, acceptance, non-alienation, etc. etc., have been more conducive to propaganda than art. (190)

This position informs our current view of the decade and its literature as propelling individuation, withdrawal, and autonomy of the self.

However, the range of autobiographical engagements in the fifties, including the texts examined here, suggests that in their quest for autonomy from the accepted social order, writers also harbored a desire for connection with their contemporaries, closely and distantly related. In

a curious way, the autobiographical pursuits of the fifties capture the two opposing images that came to describe the decade: the road and the house. Centrally present in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957), Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955), Patricia Highsmith's *The Price of Salt* (1952), the road motif suggests social liberation and self-exploration -- the road away from the stifling social norms and toward the self. The house metaphor is more complex. In the most obvious sense, it represents the cultural promotion of a suburban household. However, in *Pursuing Privacy in Cold War America* (2002), Deborah Nelson explores its implications within the context of the growing anxiety over the "death of privacy" occasioned by the containment policies during the Cold War. Concentrating on Richard Poirier's seminal text *A World Elsewhere* (1966) in relation to the discourse of privacy in confessional poetry and constitutional law, Nelson shows that the house epitomized "the central metaphor *in* and *of* American literature." It embodied the "paradoxes that other cold war conceptions of privacy generated," namely:

> The privatizing of literature paradoxically initiates "a struggle to create through language an environment in which the inner consciousness of the hero-poet can freely express itself, an environment in which he can sound publicly what he privately is" […]. Ultimately, however, "[sounding] publicly what [one] privately is" falls victim to "the impossibility of living through the 'eye'… [,] the impossibility of totally divorcing the self from time, biology, economics, and the words by which the free, visionary environment of the 'eye' is translated into the social entity: the 'I,' living in relation to near things. (107-108)

Autobiographical narrators who choose to address their audience in the first person and not in the voice of a fictional character proffer this paradox by creating a swath of possibility for the *I*'s existing both autonomously and relationally.

The abundance of life-writing in the fifties already configures autobiography as a culturally shared and valued endeavor. The writers were drawing inspiration to pursue life-writing from each other, while their readers were eager to learn about their lives. This in turn gave them a chance to tell of theirs. In *Kafka Was the Rage: A Greenwich Village Memoir* (1997), Anatole Broyard recalls the powerful contagiousness of autobiographical thinking after the war. As a book dealer, he witnessed the common eagerness in the authors and readers to tell their life stories:

> Like the people who had sold me books, the talkers wanted to sell me their lives, their fictions about themselves, their philosophies. Following the example of the authors on the shelves, infected perhaps by them, they told me of their families, their love affairs, their illusions and disillusionments. I was indignant. I wanted to say, Wait a minute! I've already got stories here! Take a look at those shelves! (33)

Similarly, Alfred Kazin explains the proliferation of confessional writing in the second half of the twentieth century as an "invitation" to readers "to become confessional themselves" ("The Self as History" 41). What ensues in the course of autobiographical production is then a confessional dialogue, but the reader's part can be perceived only by the reader herself unless she chooses to communicate her response. This inaudible interaction shares a strong affinity with what Lauren Berlant identifies as a major quality of intimacy: "To intimate is to communicate with the sparest of signs and gestures, and at its root intimacy has the quality of eloquence and brevity" ("Intimacy" 1). Autobiographical intimacy can operate in the same mode of inaudible

interaction, but it can also thrive on pronounced communication, especially when the autobiographer addresses a family member or a friend in the text. This interaction can and of course does also leave the confines of the text and becomes a more explicit subject of conversation in life, attending perhaps to such issues as disclosure of family secrets and falsification of experience.

To observe how authors initiate and perform these forms of communication within and outside their texts and to address the concomitant questions of formulation, methodologically I rely on relevant studies in trauma and autobiography. However, the main approach here falls under what can be described as *textual versioning*, term coined by Donald H. Reiman in reference to the possibility of presenting "to the public enough *primary* textual documents and states of major texts […] so that readers, teachers, and critics can compare for themselves two or more widely circulated basic versions of major texts" (169). In similar terms, Susan Stanford Friedman calls for a two-directional, intertextual reading of "textual clusters" and Brenda R. Silver employs Reiman's concept to elucidate Virginia Woolf's text versions as a "feminist practice" ("The Return" 146, Silver 217). Both Friedman and Silver illustrate the value of textual versioning in a feminist context. In similar terms but in reference to women's autobiography, Nancy K. Miller proposes "an intratextual practice of interpretation" that "would privilege neither the autobiography nor the fiction, but take the two writings together in their status as text" (*Subject to Change* 60). Recently, Jessica Cantiello examined different renditions of a specific autobiographical scene in Julia Alvarez's novels and essays. She argues that versioning can be the autobiographer's "way to communicate with her serial readers." Through this communicative practice, "[s]erial writers create what [she] call[s] serial readers" who are in the position to engage in the continuous intertextual reading (87).

A careful examination of different textual versions, translations, paratextual and archival materials is indispensible to this project. Since I am interested in how life circumstances prompt autobiographical performance, my primary objective has been to analyze any available authorial commentary on the experience of crisis and/or its relationship to the current autobiographical engagement. I complement my analysis of the texts with these findings. Alternate genres, autobiographical or otherwise, pursued by the authors have formed another important vector in my textual research. I have observed whether and how genre and language differences facilitate the versioning of scenes and tendencies and/or reveal something about the relationship between the author and his relational others. The archives have offered an incomparable degree of insight into the parallels between different forms of revision: of texts, the authors' views of autobiography, their experience of crisis, and their relationship with the audience. Finally, I have explored the dual potential of revision as repetition, its capacity to incarnate crisis and its equally strong capacity to sustain a dialogue between the author and his relational others.

Chapter 1: Forging the Native Grounds

Always a human being got damaged somewhere and somehow. Life was full of damage. And always there was the chance of renewal. – Alfred Kazin, "Going Home"

I believe in dialogue as one of the highest rungs of human good, and these days assess my steady, if painful, growth by the fact that I wish for dialogue between myself and another, and am trying to shed every small personal difficulty in my character that stands in the way of this. – Alfred Kazin, Journals 12/21/48

In New York I make my connections. – Alfred Kazin, Journals 1/11/73

Before writing his first memoir *A Walker in the City* (1951), Alfred Kazin was known primarily as a literary critic, author of acclaimed *On Native Grounds* (1942), a literary history built on the premise that "[o]ur modern literature in America is at bottom only the expression of our modern life in America" (Preface xiv). His first attempts at memoir writing were registered in *Commentary* and *The New Yorker* where he published respectively two autobiographical sketches, subsequently integrated into *Walker*. Continuing to work in these two genres, Kazin viewed their relation to each other in ambivalent terms. On the one hand, he claimed, the memoir "was no great departure from the criticism" and "a branch of literature, a way of writing like any other – of characterization, analysis and almost physical empathy." On the other, he found, the "critic's weakness for ideas" formed a major barrier to authentic self-portrayal when he began his autobiographical venture ("Past" 123-124, 128). A less contradictory view can be found in a private space of his journal in 1948 when he was actually beginning to expand his writing horizons to include autobiography: "all my criticism is a moral autobiography, or fiction in which other writers have been characters drawn from some

sense of myself" (Journals 7/14/48). Highlighting autobiographical pervasiveness in the familiar form of literary criticism, Kazin essentially loosens genre boundaries here.

This unstable perspective opens particularly rich possibilities for understanding the onset of Kazin's autobiographical engagement immediately following World War II. It directs attention to the question of what could be indispensably appealing about memoir writing and the ensuing pangs of exposure if literary criticism already afforded a familiar, creative, distancing, in a word, safe venue to address personal questions.[9] Considering that Kazin's personal journal had always provided ample space for reflection and recollection, as did his sessions with psychoanalyst Janet Rioch in the late nineteen forties, his decision to pursue autobiography is even more bewildering. His subsequent returns to the genre, as well as copious critical reflections on its nature, invite further questions regarding historical specificity and personal significance of his first autobiography *A Walker in the City*.

In this chapter, I follow Kazin's trajectory in traversing critical and autobiographical domains with particular attention to his concept of "alienation on native grounds." American authors, Kazin argued in *On Native Grounds*, tend to celebrate their solitary position while, paradoxically, remaining completely immersed in the American scene: "But what interested me was our alienation *on* native grounds—the interwoven story of our need to take up our life on our own grounds, and the irony of our possession" (Preface xv, original emphasis). Critics Richard Cook and Paul John Eakin point to the poignancy of this double awareness for Kazin's own conceptualization of his place in the

[9] As noted by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, "In contemporary parlance *autobiography* and *memoir* are used interchangeably" (274). I follow this lead.

American culture; as critic he found "a point of connection with his subject through a shared sense of isolation and 'graphic loneliness' – more keenly alert than most to the 'irony of our possession'" (Cook 71, Eakin 44). I view the "alienation on native grounds" phenomenon as a guiding metaphor for understanding *Walker,* as well as its publication history, and for gaining a new insight into the tenor of postwar autobiography. That Kazin began his pursuit of autobiography at this point in his career reflects his susceptibility to the common postwar gesture of withdrawal from native grounds and his way of resolving a personal crisis. But it also manifests an additional meaning of native grounds—less familiar in postwar studies, but important to Kazin's critical analysis of American literature and his personal writings—as comprising cultural, familial, and social roots, as well as contemporary and future generations of readers.

Through my analysis of the *Walker*'s publication history, along with Kazin's unpublished voluminous personal journal, I illustrate in this chapter the ways in which autobiographical process illuminates this extended meaning of native grounds. I posit that while criticism, personal journal, and therapy sessions—each in its own way—helped Kazin to develop a self-narrative, they failed to provide a channel for sharing his life story with the world through the act of ongoing exposure: the publication of a life story. His autobiographical act transcends temporal and spatial limitations and enables a full integration of Kazin's personal story into the common, polytonal narrative of his generation. I discuss the form, significance, and the ultimate stakes of this integration for Kazin after first closely analyzing the critical circumstances—both personal and historical—that led to his self-writing and its very process.

After the publication of *On Native Grounds* in 1942, Kazin found himself at the peak of happiness, recognizing beauty and life energy all around him: "I'm excited by the book's coming out. But also the reviews, the whirl of New York, the high lean proud tower of Radio City, the most beautiful American building. […] Excited by the women in the morning light, the proud, the beautiful women of New York […]" (Journals 10/27/42). He was now at the forefront of the New York literary milieu and very enthusiastic about the possibility of becoming an educator to soldiers in England and the United States. Hungry for intellectual and sexual freedom, he began an affair with Mary Lou Petersen that led to his divorce from Asya (Natasha Dohn). The new life entailed a long-awaited "break" from the past pressures and family expectations: "'Everybody of my generation had his orgone box, his [Mary] Lou, his search for fulfillment. There was, God knows, no break with convention, there was just a freeing of oneself from all those parental attachments and thou shalt nots'" (Cook 73-74, 87; qtd. in Cook 88). However, this sense of liberation soon brought him to the edge of depression. Mary Lou's apartment on Barrow Street turned into a disarray of "horribly separate, bulking, intrusive, immovable objects like Mary Ellen herself." This environment was in no way stimulating, but alien and stifling: "Nothing I now looked at in the Barrow Street apartment seemed to have any relation to anything else. When I tried to write, the words broke off each other like dry twigs. There was suddenly no light, no habit, no naturalness to my day." Even the identity of his lover grew opaque: "I did not know who Mary Ellen was; I felt that I was living on a sand hill surrounded by vultures and gulls who were waiting to descend on it" (*New York Jew* 96). The

sense of sudden estrangement mingled now with the imminent threat, pushing him out onto the streets.

There Kazin felt the same sense of confusion and displacement as he "wander[ed] in a trance from hotel to hotel, each more unreal than the last" (*New York Jew* 96). It is evident in Kazin's journal that he was projecting his feelings of loneliness and despair onto the city, noticing its monotony, coldness, and destructive pressure:

> There is nothing so oppressively lonely to me as a walk in New York on Sunday afternoons. […] All that life which had been flung here all week, without thought, without memory, but only to reach a point in a schedule, has now, one somehow feels, been emptied into great boxes and taken away. The storefronts are glass; the walks are glass; the sky, which might have been unnoticed in its beauty before, is now too remote to seem true. (Journals 10/18/43)

It was at this time that Kazin was growing aware of his sensibility of a lone walker in the desolate city, observing "the meanness, the crushedness, the unspeakable dumb crushed suffering inside all those people I see in the subway" and identifying with the scattered homosexuals, "homeless, intellectual, and desperate" (Journals 5/9/53; 4/3/44). He admitted having the first inkling of *Walker* at that time (Journals 5/9/53).

In February of 1944 Kazin was living and feeling "utterly alone"; he saw himself at a point "I've been headed for ever so long." Finding out "for what" was both

the aim and the challenge (Journals 2/14/44). His journal entries from this period allow for a glimpse into his lonely universe in which he nonetheless saw an opportunity to "learn truly […], and perhaps to be at peace, at last" (Journals 3/4/44). He prayed to the "Distrustful and Distrusted God" to "teach me to be honest – not by curbing my desires, but by giving me new faith in men" (Journals 3/6/44). He was desperately trying to gain the inner strength, to grow more sincere and honest; at that time, honesty was more important than happiness (Journals 5/19/44). He began analyzing his relationship with his others, namely his reaction to their criticism or misunderstanding, and realized that he needed to put more effort into learning the truth about himself before expecting understanding and acceptance from them (Journals 1/24/44). Compounding all these issues was the scary, unyielding truth underlying his break with Asya and Mary Lou that he would soon start to unravel with psychoanalyst, Janet Rioch: his attachment to people was merely a way to avoid panic and the fear of loss (Journals 8/30/44).

Early in the course of his therapy, Kazin understood that his current crisis with women was linked to his mother's obsessive worries about his health since childhood (Cook 90). In his journal, he was now contemplating "the ghosts with which we wrestle—the ghosts in us of other beings' effects on us" (Journals 6/23/44). Having had internalized his mother's constant awareness of "life's hazardousness," he developed an excruciating fear of losing someone whose presence in his life was in truth only "habitual and necessary." In his relationship with Asya and Mary Lou he had been replicating the old pattern from his childhood and adolescence of wanting to stay connected to his peers even when he did not truly value their presence: "I was

greedy for solace and friendship; thought I could bridge the gap between me and them anyway[10]: with words, with assertions of companionship. So with Asya and Lou: I have never had real relations with them; I was only using them." The sense of guilt and self-punishment followed: "All my life I have lived like a bullet going through walls: I have thought only of my own progress, and in the end there has been no progress, for in my life-long terror, in my never ending anxieties, I have lived only for myself, so that now I am left only with myself" (Journals 8/30/44, original emphasis). Kazin was now reflecting on his current loneliness in the voice of none other than Dostoyevsky's protagonist from *Notes from Underground*: "I am a naked man, a frightened man; my loneliness is absolute now" (Journals 8/30/44).

What magnified his personal crisis was the growing awareness of the Holocaust and the disturbing connection it bore to his break from Asya and by extension from his Jewish roots. In 1944, when "the world was burning with war," Kazin felt "consumed with guilt" for leaving Asya and for distancing himself from the life of the Jewish community. The difficult reality of the Holocaust confronted him on a very private ground. He felt "as bad as any Nazi," thinking that the "Jews burned every day in Europe were being consumed in a fire that I had helped to light." He could appease himself only in his fantasies where "I saved bearded old Jews from attack in the subway, and was again a *mensch*, a son of the people" (*New York Jew* 96).Throughout his later writings,

[10] All underlined words in journal citations appear so in the original text.

Kazin would repeatedly, almost obsessively, recall one episode that illustrates how deeply the experience of the Holocaust affected his personal Jewish universe:[11]

> The last time I saw our kitchen this clearly was one afternoon in London at the end of the war, when I waited out the rain in the entrance to a music store. A radio was playing into the street, and standing there I heard a broadcast of the first Sabbath service from Belsen Concentration Camp. When the liberated Jewish prisoners recited the *Hear O Israel, the Lord Our God, the Lord is One*, I felt myself carried back to the Friday evenings at home, when with the Sabbath at sundown a healing quietness would come over Brownsville. (*Walker* 51-2)

The passage brings across how the most private family space of the kitchen acquired another reality with the coming of the Holocaust, how world history relentlessly broke its way into the family history, and irrevocably reshaped the course of personal history. From now on Kazin would not be able to think of himself outside the context of Brownsville or the Holocaust; he would not be able to see them apart either.

The fact that we can find this episode in several of Kazin's works attests to the traumatic repercussions of the terrifying juncture of the public and private worlds. In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Cathy Caruth argues that repetition is intrinsic to traumatic experience; whether physical or emotional, trauma is "experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive

[11] This scene is described in *Walker, Writing Was Everything* and "The Past Breaks Out."

actions of the survivor" (4). Similarly, Bella Brodzki reads implications of trauma in narrative repetitions and flashbacks as they occur in a Holocaust text; she notes, "repetition and return can be both formal, stylistic strategies and thematic structuring devices in a Holocaust text" ("Teaching Trauma" 128-130).[12] In Kazin's case, the repetition occurs on several narrative occasions. Each time, he offers no explanation of how the fusion of the public and private realities affected him. All he offers is a pure statement of fact that an intense moment in the present revived and colored in an indelibly tragic light a memory of the past that otherwise may not have been revived at all. The prisoners' return to their spiritual source motivated Kazin's own attempt to return to his "natal country" of Brownsville, a hurtful, sporadic, yet unyielding attempt that would take the form of writing (*Writing* 120). Julian Levinson sees it as a "way of participating in the refusal to surrender life, identity, and peoplehood to the Nazis. Writing the story of his life becomes for Kazin the symbolic equivalent of the prayer uttered by the survivors" (157).

At the end of the war, the uncontrollable threat of the nuclear bomb further undermined the boundary between social and personal experiences. If at the beginning of the war Kazin felt both "numb" and "excited," predicting that "[i]n a week nothing will be as it has been," at the end of war the excitement was replaced entirely by a lingering

[12] Brodzki's analysis of trauma and language concerns the narratives of Holocaust survivors and their descendants. Although Kazin does not fit into either category, he was strongly affected by the Holocaust atrocities, so I find this perspective on trauma helpful to understand his experience. Robert J. Lifton also extends the category of survivor to include people witnessing trauma that was experienced by their contemporaries (*Death in Life* 479). In the same vein, Nancy K. Miller and Jason Tougaw call trauma victims not only "those who have suffered directly," but also "those who suffer with them, or through them, or for them if only by reading about trauma" (*Extremities* 2).

and insurmountable threat of extinction (Journals 12/8/41). In a journal entry from 1946, Kazin meditated on how daily natural occurrences were now inevitably imbued with a new set of apocalyptic associations:

> The weather has been sickeningly warm these days. […] Suddenly the talk took on a note of fantasy –obviously, Isaac said, atom bombs were being shot off somewhere, and there was a vast decomposition taking place in the solar structure. We were drawing nearer the sun, and were going to dry up, etc. etc. What interests me in this is the renewed awareness of how large a part the bomb plays in all our thinking these days. It is a particularly warm day—somewhere, in the fear of our days, it becomes the natural thing to say that the bomb is working on us—that bomb which like a leukemia, a cancer of the blood, a blight slowly eating away in the unconscious, swims so obscurely and menacingly in our thoughts. I take this as another sign of the reign of fear under which we live nowadays: fear whose content is the feeling of absolute loss of control. We live, study, eat, love, write; life goes on; how else can we believe but that it does, that it must? Yet here is the phantom that pursues us now and day, not because it is so terrible a bomb, but because it is so peculiarly […] uncontrolled a force, and has so many links with that nature which we can manipulate so cruelly, till living we erode ourselves into its first victim. (Journals 11/26/46)

Thus, living after the apocalypse meant facing a constant reminder of its second coming. After Hiroshima, Lifton explains, "there has been the sense that there is no avoiding

doom" (*Hiroshima in America* 341). The astounding fact about this vision of human experience as hopeless and of human beings as powerless puppets was that the force bringing it into existence was the human force:

> For the incineration of Hiroshima, and the nuclear arms race that followed upon it, ultimately confronted humankind with itself. It has shown us that an organized group of people – for that is all that nations are—is capable and willing to annihilate humanity and most of the earth's life in pursuit of what that group considers to be its legitimate purpose or 'interests.'(Mack 324)

The magnitude of destruction the bomb entailed superseded that seen in other war atrocities, but in principle all organized crime during and after the war -- Hitler's and Stalin's concentration camps, McCarthyism, and obliteration of Hiroshima and Nagasaki -- revealed people's limitless potential to rationalize and bring about destruction.

French existentialist literature conveyed the sense of doom and absurdness of the human experience; in mid-1940s, it began reaching American readers in English translation through *Partisan Review* (Cotkin 109) where Kazin frequently published. Along with the works by Sartre and Camus, Franz Kafka was growing into the "rage" of the fifties generation (Broyard 3). His image of the universe as a cold, monstrous, bureaucratic machine oblivious to people's destinies added a new element of fantasy and alienation to postwar fiction (Dickstein 93) and had a particularly strong resonance in the circle of New York intellectuals (Cotkin 108-9). Not surprisingly, Kazin encouraged Kafka's readers to concentrate not on the problematic of allegory or allusion, but rather on the sharp angle of realness to Kafka's view of the human condition, however

unsettling it might be: "Kafka is difficult not because 'he really meant' to say this or that about the nature of contemporary experience, but because he saw in his private and contemporary agony that part of us all which is more real than the public 'reality.'" Relating Kafka to Pascal, Kazin pointed to their shared view of existence as "'metaphysical anguish,'" but distinguished between Pascal's insistence that this "condition [is] preliminary to the seeking of grace, an avenue to God" and Kafka's conviction – closer to his contemporaries' view – that it is a permanent experiential reality: "there is a goal but no way; there is a problem, but no resolution; there is only an eternal search" (*The Inmost Leaf* 143, 145).

Dostoyevsky also became a towering presence in the postwar scene, and a central subject of Kazin's personal interest. Adopting the title of W.H. Auden's *The Age of Anxiety*, Kazin wrote eloquently about the relevance of Dostoyevsky's sensibility at the time "when man can no longer tell in his atomic insecurity how much his inner conflicts, human-duplicated, contribute to the social disorder and how much they are made by it." He did not see value in Dostoyevsky's religious steadfastness for the modern life, finding that "the day when his message could be taken even by the Russians, on his terms, has long since passed," but instead placed emphasis on Dostoyevsky's truthful portrayal of human soul as being constantly at odds with itself and with the world: "an awareness of man, as man, in his social loneliness, his emotional cheating, his fertile and agile hostility, his limited power to love—always Dostoevsky's subject is the war in man" ("A Devout Russian Iconoclast" BR1).

Kazin's view of Dostoyevsky's world should not be regarded merely as the insights of an astute literary scholar writing from his place in history, but of someone

who in the privacy of his writing was experiencing the very "war in man" he described. When Kazin returned to New York from a reporting assignment in England in 1945, he was distraught: "only the opening of Dante's *Inferno* spoke to my condition: 'In the middle of our life, I found myself in a dark wood, for the straight way was lost'" ("The Past" 123). Having lost Asya, he was now living alone in a rented Brooklyn Heights apartment belonging to a painter who had left behind disturbing portraits of concentration camp prisoners; again, history inserted itself into his private space where, in solitude, Kazin was fighting his private battles. The brooding, insuppressible anguish over the Holocaust and Stalin's regime deepened his guilt and loneliness and brought him back to Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*, now admittedly so:

> In the winter of my discontent, freezing in Pineapple Street, obsessed by the war against the Jews and Stalin's grabbing what Hitler had left, I found myself identifying with that terrible voice in Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*:
>
> > I am a sick man. I am a spiteful man…being overly conscious is a disease, a genuine, full-fledged disease. Ordinary human consciousness would be more than sufficient for everyday human needs—that is, even half or a quarter of the amount of consciousness that's available to a cultured man in our unfortunate nineteenth century, especially to one who has the particular misfortune of living in St. Petersburg, the most abstract and premeditated city in the whole world. (Cities can be either premeditated or unpremeditated.). (*Writing* 116)

This voice spoke to Kazin's current condition and his tendency as an intellectual to delve into every issue with heightened awareness, and it did so in a way particularly familiar to Kazin – through the meditation on the city as a major shaper of experience.

Yet, Kazin's vision of New York was far more ambivalent than Dostoyevsky's vision of St. Petersburg. On the one hand, living here after the war was, as he admitted, "my particular misfortune" (*Writing* 116). It was the "'greatest city of the greatest country in the world,' where we are always at war and where in a thousand factories words are made only for what they will sell or conceal" (*The Open Street* 20-21). A decade ago the city had a fostering energy, helping Jewish intellectuals grow into a community of believers in radical politics.[13] After the war, however, New York became a nucleus of modern desolation, an urban nightmare where one felt estranged from oneself and others, as Kazin reflected in a note to self: "Write an essay on the noise in the modern city called A Little Day Music. Theme: I can't hear myself"; the word "myself" is crossed out and changed to "you," highlighting the double measure of estrangement that the postwar city engendered (Journals 10/7/45). On the other hand, the anonymity and solitude experienced in the city enlivened his literary imagination; here, he could be a "young writer in the city, 'looking for material.' He decides to follow someone at random, [and] the adventure begins" (Journals 9/24/45).

[13] Richard Cook describes the nurturing atmosphere of New York in the thirties: "with its political meetings, rallies, guest lectures, and endless discussions of radical politics, [New York] was especially rich with fresh contacts and connections. Politics coincided with friendships, and friendships were in part a function of politics. […] In postgraduate New York, politics was new friends, parties, social discoveries" (40).

Most important, the city exuded a promise to nurture creativity and self-reparation; "I dreamed of putting my life in order by writing a book set against the New York background," Kazin writes in retrospect ("The Past" 123). This hope was fueled in large part by his living in close proximity to Brooklyn Bridge, a meaningful historical anchor whose physical existence made the present and the past feel equally real: "I came alive walking it every day and trying in my journals to do justice to the old city still huddled on either side." Ultimately, the bridge "made my coming home meaningful" (*Writing* 116). In 1946, Kazin collaborated with photographer Henri Carrier-Bresson to write an essay about the bridge; he pursued research on the history of the bridge and reread poems by Hart Crane and Walt Whitman dedicated to the bridge (Cook 114). This project never materialized as planned, but Kazin remained fascinated by the subject and set out to create his own book about New York.

Initially, Kazin did not conceive of his book as purely autobiographical. He envisioned it as having three parts, the first and the third describing postwar New York and the middle one "The Old Neighborhood," drawn from his notes, focusing on his childhood years in Brownsville. However, in the course of numerous revisions, the book would acquire an overarching retrospective narrative frame: contemporary New York City would provide a standpoint from which the narrator would view his Brownsville childhood. The shortest second section that at first "didn't seem grand enough as a subject by comparison with midtown and New York on Sunday" would expand into a book-length memoir, inundating the other two. It would take Kazin five torturous years to produce *Walker* as we know it today (*Writing* 120)

Kazin's intensive revision process reflects not only an aesthetic struggle of a writer exploring a new form, but an existential search for continuity and belonging in the postwar world permeated by the themes of alienation and solitude. Kazin readily accepted these themes, partly because alienation was a feeling intimately familiar to him, as we would soon learn in *Walker*.[14] His original theme for the book was the "assault on personality, the struggle for the safeguarding of personality" (Journals 2/17/47). The growing popularity of existentialist thought surely propelled this vision, as did his "interest in Melville and other American interpreters of 'man's separateness on earth'" (Cook 134). But the writer who ascribed the urgency of this vision to the urban environment was Blake; a stanza from his poem "London" would become an epigraph to the first chapter of *Walker*: "In every cry of every Man, / In every Infant's cry of fear, / In every voice, in every ban, / The mind-forg'd manacles I hear." In his introduction to the 1946 edition of *The Portable Blake*, Kazin depicted the predicament of his own walker in the city, "always the wanderer in the oppressive and sterile world of materialism which only his imagination and love can render human." Blake's "integral vision of the suffering of man and his alienation from institutions as one" helped Kazin to articulate his own theme of *Walker*, "the alienation of man from present institutions" (Introduction to Blake 13, Journals 07/26/48).

[14] In an unpublished piece, Kazin explains one of the major themes in *Walker*: "It is a book […] about the struggle against an environment which did not afford that boy much spiritual support" (*A Walker in the City*, TS. Notes).

However, as mentioned before, Kazin's attitude towards the city was far more complex than he was ready to articulate in the beginning stages of *Walker*.[15] Despite his intimate knowledge of alienation as a postwar ailment and a deeply personal sentiment—both bearing a strong linkage to New York—Kazin began to challenge its philosophical and literary value as delivered through existentialist tenets. He accepted that the "intense pessimism and loneliness expressed in Existentialist theory are not false," seeing them as "moments, critical and devouring moments in the life of man," but he scathed the incentive to "compose a theory of existence on the basis of them" (Journals 5/11/). As William Chafe explains, "existentialism could lead either to a sense of powerlessness and helplessness, or to a posture of engaged commitment" (135). Eventually, Kazin opted for the latter. He believed that "life will survive even this totalitarian ice age." In the face of uncontrollable institutions, he sought "always to hold out for cardinal values, and to live by them, whatever 'they' say, whoever 'they' […] are in the moment" (Journals 4/2/47).

One such value for Kazin was a visceral connection between himself and the world that revealed itself mainly as an urban vision:

> I have a dream of an infinite walk—of going on and on, forever unimpeded by weariness or duties somewhere else, until the movement of my body as I walk becomes the shadow of the world as it turns on its axis, until my body and the world in its skin of earth are somehow blended in a single motion. (Journals 3/7/47)

[15] Writers rarely perceive urban experience in unequivocal terms. In *The City as Catalyst* (1979) Diana Festa-McCormick observes that in fiction the city "serves as a repository for miseries, hardships, and frustrations, but also for ever-renascent hopes" (15).

This imagined physical amalgamation yielded a hope for finding a place in the historically continuous universe and in the collective unconscious:

> My mind is like a tableau of the ages. […] In my one man, in my 'single' mind, the whole of the human past lies embedded – superstition, mysticism, delight in the senses, the discovery of nature, the practice of scientific method, the defiance of authority, the wish to authoritate, the discovery of human love, the gleeful reflex of the animal. Everything past is a part of me, traveled and reincarnated into a new […] destiny; I am a passage from all that has gone before me. (Journals 5/5/47, original emphasis)

In the manner of Whitman, here Kazin delights in knowing that he carries within himself a trace of humanity. He articulates the need to know that his life is not a random accident, but a meaningful continuation of the past destinies.

Kazin's sense of universal integration hinged entirely on his incessant attempts at self-knowledge and self-acceptance, and these in turn thrived on his ability to locate himself in the definite physical entities, from the interiority of his body to the exteriority of the city: "It is merely that the great insight of my recent life has been acceptance, an inexpressibly delicious *feeling of being me*, no one else, of not wanting to be anyone else, of being *grounded* in this life, this city, this body, and in no other." While gravely marking it with "boredom and fatalism," the city nevertheless framed "this existence of which I am *threaded through and through*" (Journals 10/11/49 emphasis added).

Threading is a remarkably telling metaphor for Kazin's experience of the city and his need to feel connected. It is inspired by the images of cables observed in the bay at Riverside Park: "As soon as I look up to the coil and swing of the cables, I am threaded through, caught up and threaded through, by millions of lines." The act of threading here suggests a connection to the city that is not static, but electrifying and reaching simultaneously and endlessly forward and backward. Arresting in this metaphor are its connotations of permanence and continuity. They delineate the meaning of "the divine," which for Kazin was epitomized in "the continuum, in the apprehension of an unterminating energy, and infinity of suggestiveness" (Journals 5/8/49). His ties with the city thus had a major significance as they grew to represent larger ties with the universe.

In light of Kazin's personal revelations about the war's ultimate threat, New York City represented the survival of American civilization. A cursory remark in his journal entry from 1952, explicates his biggest fear of America's defeat: the "odd sense" that "perhaps, if America lost, America would die out entirely" (9/10/52). New York, with its major landmarks of American history and literature—subjects of Kazin's elaborate ruminations—embodied the national character like no other city.[16] In the postwar context, New York stood as an epitome of power—industrial, architectural, and cultural. "Its beauty rested on nothing but power, was dramatic, unashamed, flinging against the sky, like a circus act, one crazy '*death-defying*' show after another" (*New York Jew* 152,

[16] Brooklyn Bridge was one such landmark. In his journal, Kazin referred to his autobiography as the "Bridge." In *Writing was Everything*, he talks about its significance for American writers: "[Hart Crane's] *The Bridge* (1929) is a modern epic, as perfectly expressive of a twentieth-century poet's need to make a myth for the future out of the iron and grit of daily living as Whitman's need, in the century before, to transcend the ruins of the old religion in a myth of joining Brooklyn and Manhattan, island and island, earth and water" (116-17).

emphasis added). If being a part of this city signified the primacy of survival, it was to be accomplished through the contemplative acts of walking and writing. Two forms of movement, they remained linked in Kazin's mind to the point of merging, as evident in his curious figurative phrasing in one journal entry: "the city I have walked is one long chain of thoughts which I gather together here" (Journals 12/3/47). Later in *New York Jew* (1978), Kazin would reiterate this link between walking and writing that had grown intact in the postwar New York: "Every day I went prowling and sniffing in a delirium of sensations that came into my mind as whole sentences" (210). Using language to make sense of what he saw in the city and recording it spontaneously in his journal allowed him to tap into the rhythm of the continuous cycle of life energy.

The process of adapting to and adjusting this rhythm is best depicted in the essay *The Open Street* (1948), an excerpt from *Walker* while it was still a work in progress, published as a limited edition in a booklet and intended as a "New Year's Greeting" for friends (Cook 123). The essay unfolds in the present time and focuses on the morning walk in New York. Here, the act of walking propels the narrative flow, as the various sites and people inspire meditative flights into the city's history; they also open entry points into the narrator's imagination. While producing this essay, Kazin already knew that his book-length autobiography would be centered on his personal past more so than on the present day reality of the city, which meant the bulk of the essay would not be a part of the final manuscript (Journals 5/2/47, 7/6/47). Yet, he went along and published *The Open Street*. It remains a valuable piece of writing, for it captures the conflict embedded in Kazin's concept of alienation on native grounds: on the one hand, it celebrates liberation from all social ties and creative freedom, and on the other marks the

beginning of his gradual, rhythmical re-acquaintance with the city as he knows it: a site that comprises the tropes of continuous identity—personal, cultural, and literary—and thus metonymically represents his native grounds.

A defining feature of *The Open Street* is that the narrator is always outside; the relationship between the walking man and his changing surroundings is formed in and through motion:

> I go about these Brooklyn streets that are named after fruits—my own street, Pineapple, then Cranberry and Orange, and turning into Fulton Street, go along it toward Brooklyn Bridge and the harbor—past the last of the cobbled streets, the closed saloons, the pool parlor, the German bakery where I sometimes have my lunch, past the long lines of garbage cans rattling cover to cover in the wind, the sailors' missions and the greasy flophouses whose lights never go off, past the little stores darkened by gray muslin curtains that are the local chapel of the Puerto Ricans and Mexicans in the neighborhood, past the usual drunk of some sixty years with a gray stubble and vomit over his coat, sitting on a doorstep waiting for the bars to open. (7-8)

An exercise in description, this passage illustrates the journalistic aspect of *The Open Street*, which Kazin would dismiss in *Walker*. Here, the speaker is not a character in the story but merely an observer. His rich descriptions of the cityscape are devoid of dialogue or any form of engagement other than contemplation. We do not learn much about his life, as he limits his personal revelations to two general, unsubstantiated

remarks about belonging to the city and being overpowered by urban structures: "The bridge has helped, in a way I would never have expected when I grew up in New York, to make it my city" and "The skyscrapers lean on each other like a great mound of standing cannon. We are always under siege to them, even when they sleep. Row on row that unbreaking even surface of glass and steel hides interminable abstractions of human energy. I know something of their force; the whole outward frame of my life is theirs" (11, 17). That knowledge remains intriguing, but concealed to the reader.

The more personal details he chooses to disclose appear in the concluding passage: "I need to walk in these streets as I need to pray and to dance; somehow it is only when I walk alone that I feel the possibility of doing either. Somewhere in my childhood I learned that I could separate myself from what was merely painful or unintelligible by walking away" (21). This reference to childhood indicates the habitual continuity of Kazin's alienation and the receptive role of the street that had always embraced him at moments of despair. In *Walker,* Kazin would write elaborately about his stammer and the isolation it caused, pushing him onto the street when he was a boy; in *The Open Street*, he lets us grasp a similar kind of escape he sought immediately after the war. He intuits in his meditation what David Riesman would soon call the other-directed character of American people: "Every day begins in this great city hotel of other people's opinions. Somehow we must get out, if only into the loneliness of the street, to find the hard ungiving identity in ourselves" (21).

Sifting through the city's commercial debris, Kazin needed the emptiness of the street to remind him "how deeply a writer must go down into himself to find the first

ring of truth" (20). To understand what Kazin could mean by "the first ring of truth," I find it useful to turn to José Ortega y Gasset's remarkable essay "The Self and the Other" published in *Partisan Review* in 1952, the year in which the journal organized its famous symposium *Our Country and Our Culture* in the attempt to encourage writers to rethink their relationship between American artist and his/her country. Although Gasset's piece was not included in the symposium, it provides a relevant historical platform for conceptualizing Kazin's work in the postwar context.

At turbulent moments, when "all the world is in tumult, is beside itself, and when man is beside himself," Gasset observes, one "loses his most essential attribute: the possibility of meditating, or withdrawing into himself to come to terms with himself and define what it is that he believes and what it is that he does not believe; what he truly esteems and what he truly detests." Gasset asserts that the ability to demarcate the contours of one's inner world, to redefine and reconnect with its essentials is a basic human capacity, as animals' actions are determined purely by outside forces. The animal "does not rule its own life, it does not live from *itself,* but is always alert to what is going on outside it[,] to what is *other* than itself." This means that "the animal always lives in estrangement, is beside itself, that its life is essential *alteración*" or, as the translator explains, it is in the constant "state of tumult" (392-393). Following Gasset's logic, it is clear that in the human experience, a disconcerting moment, or the *alteración*, becomes both a triggering force of and a major barrier in one's attempts to collect oneself. When one does succeed in exercising one's "marvelous faculty" of withdrawing from the world, a triumphant return follows:

> From this inner world he emerges and returns to the outer, but he returns as protagonist, he returns with a *self* which he did not possess before—he returns with his plan of campaign: not to let himself be dominated by things, but to govern them himself, to impose his will and his design upon them, to realize his ideas in that outer world, to shape the planet after the preferences of his innermost being. (394, 395-396)

Gasset universalizes this experience, highlighting its three stages:

> 1. Man feels himself lost, shipwrecked upon things; this is *alteración*. 2. Man, by an energetic effort, retires into himself to form ideas about things and his possible dominance over them; this is taking a stand within the self, *ensimismamiento*, the *vita contemplative* of the Romans, the *theoretikos bios* of the Greeks, *theory*. 3. Man again submerges himself in the world, to act in it according to a preconceived plan; this is action, *vita active*, *praxis*. (398, original emphasis)

Gasset's emphasis on the perpetual occurrence of this pattern in human history and its multiple discursive contexts detracts attention from the immediate historical relevance of his essay, though, considering the centrality of social withdrawal in the postwar thought (Karl 178, Dickstein 6, 18), such relevance is clear, as is its literary incarnation – the rise of autobiography. I grasp in Gasset's three-step behavioral model a useful framework for any study of autobiography, especially one focused on traumatic spurs for self-writing since they create the ultimate condition of *alteración*

and encourage introspection. The writing, when intended for an audience, then epitomizes a mediating mechanism between the self and the world.

Curiously, the same thread of reasoning is articulated in Kazin's journal, though in Thoreau's words: "Not till we are lost, in other words, not till we have lost the world, do we begin to find ourselves, and realize where we are, and the infinite extent of our relations" (Journals 1/25/49). Both Thoreau and Gasset draw attention not only to the introspective mode, which came to dominate postwar literature, but also to the inevitability of the ensuing or concurrent return to the community, whether it occurs in thought or action. Lifton calls it *formulation*. For Kazin, loneliness was not to be cultivated or accepted. It denoted the "absence of spiritual friendship, absence of anything to believe in. Expectancy of defeat in everything that concerns me vitally" (Journals 5/19/48). At the same time, alienation was a painfully persistent feeling with its roots in his childhood sadly epitomized by his stammer, the ailment largely responsible for "the brokenness of my link with the world" (Journals 8/30/44). In his childhood and youth, the link remained irreparable since he could speak freely only while walking alone on the street: "There was something unnatural about it; unbearably isolated. I was not like the others! I was not like the others!" (*Walker* 24). Several years after completing *Walker,* a different vision of the self and the world transpired, one in which a radical thinker was ought "not to favor the ideal self over the world, or the world over the self, but to bring the self back into the world as its natural home" (Journals 5/2/59).

But while writing *Walker*, Kazin was focused on alienation; the book was to comprise the following themes:

> the alienation of man from present institutions; the moral state of man in the city; the solitude that must follow upon man's effort to examine his deeper and more sincere relations to, and rejections of, present-day society and culture; the call to integration, i.e., the involvement of his total self in his living activity; the mode of walking, or meditation. (Journals 7/26/48)

Kazin mirrors Gasset's model here, as he discerns the inner logic of his autobiography: to use the figure of a steady street walk as a mechanism to maintain self-autonomy – its value, perils, and limitations – and experience social integration. A year later, the latter will be given more emphasis in a journal entry that happens to be one of the few that address the reader; given the subject of the entry, the penchant for interaction through identification, the assumed presence of the reader is a particularly relevant:

> But shall I tell you—o friend—[…] what gives me my happiness these days? It is identification with all the living. We human beings are engaged in a terrible struggle. There are inordinate odds against us. There are times, walking in the street, when the sight of another man, walking like me, ranging himself against the infinite, fills me with inexpressible pity. But this is pity, not sorrow: <u>pity</u> that is understanding, a givingness, the music of the common measure. (Journals 10/11/49)

Kazin illustrates his willingness and need to remain connected to the people around him, whether they are his implied readers or strangers asking for or providing pity. It is no wonder then that after the publication of *The Open Street*, Kazin happily celebrated his sense of being "grounded in this city, these streets, among these people, as a matter of course, without even the possibility of hypothetical denial" (Journals 10/11/49).

This attempt at integration can be grasped in the present narrative time of *The Open Street*, the spontaneity of the story's progression, and the detailed sensory descriptions. The relationship between the walking narrator and his changing surroundings is at once intimate, as evident in the carefully observed nuances of each site he passes, and distant since the narrator remains an observer. It lies not so much in their interaction, but rather in their having penetrated each other's existence, that is, in their sense of mutual belonging and identification: "almost without my will I feel the life of my own body joined to the life that has passed through here and is waiting behind all those sleeping windows to start up again" (9-10). Kazin adopted Cartier-Bresson's gift of the visual artist to see "the city man in the city setting, the man and the street as one" (*New York Jew* 156). Thus, simultaneously the symbol of connection and separation, Brooklyn Bridge reminds him that, while the individual and the street are two separate entities, "the street is always merged with the lives of those who walk in it" (*Open Street* 12).[17]

[17] Charles Molesworth's discussion of the relationship between the city and its dwellers highlights this merging:

> [I]n the urban setting we constantly confront the intersection of private and public spaces, as much of our urban experience allows public space to become the stage for private experiences and private spaces to be unfolded onto public experiences. This intersection

Kazin's walk in *The Open Street* is also an attempt to locate the roots of his existence in the city's history and in the American literary tradition. Not yet able and willing to construe the immigrant Brownsville as an integral part of the city's history, Kazin addresses the confluence of different groups of settlers in New York: "I go past Middagh Street. It is supposed to have been a Miss Middagh, descended from one of the first families on Brooklyn Heights […]. [W]hat would Miss Middagh have made of me and my Latin-American, Negro, Chinese and Italian neighbors?" The walker's immigrant identity is presented in deceptively modest terms here. It is defined relationally not in one, but in two ways: toward the long-departed first settlers and the currently present, growing, diverse group of new settlers, the latter being the subject of a condescending look from the former. But Kazin turns the tables: to show the prominence of his and other immigrant groups' presence in New York, he changes the point of view from that of Miss Middagh's future-oriented gaze to his contemporaries' retrospective gaze -- When was this and did it ever happen?" (8) -- that does not register an historical trace of the Middaghs except when their family name appears as a street name.

Illusory or flesh-and-blood, residents always have a place in the city's history, making the whole urban experience devoid of absolute solitude. In the early morning the walker is aware of his solitude and the surrounding silence, yet he feels "dreamily carried

---

> of spaces results in large measure from the market aspect of the city, since it is the market that is especially capable of mediating private desire and public activity. (14)

along on an invisible human tide." A strong image that illustrates this movement is the underground life of the subway system that creates a "slight tremor under my feet." The narrator is aware that he shares this urban reality with his fellow New Yorkers: "almost without my will I feel the life of my own body joined to the life that has passed through here and is waiting behind all those sleeping windows to start up again." The image of an empty street thus does not connote the bareness of a wasteland, as the street is filled with memories: "The street stretches blankly forward, yet looks stamped with reminiscences of its real life, like the face of a sleeper" (*Open Street* 9-10). A city street becomes a microcosm of permanent historical marks that manifest temporal continuity in its physical form. At the moment of emotional distress and social chaos, Kazin chooses to tell his story through the city because, holding the past and present in the same physical space, it promises a sense of continuity. Reflecting on the period of writing *Walker* in *New York Jew*, Kazin remarks, "The city before my eyes in 1950 lifted me back into another city; one level of being swept me into another" (210).

With sanguine clarity, the walker can discern the contours of his identity, as his steps are belting out his name. The same steps bring him closer to American writers: "I am another in that long line of solitary American walkers who began as explorers, pioneers, surveyors, and ended by hugging their innermost thoughts fiercely to themselves" (*The Open Street* 21-22). In the emptiness and calm of the morning harbor, he embraces a temporary escape from the oppressive Manhattan skyscrapers and feels "as if I could shake myself free of all these closed forms and suddenly fly outward, like the birds that perch briefly in the cable work and towers of Brooklyn Bridge" (17). The new freedom promised geographical and historical transcendence, allowing him to "feel closer

to Whitman's time than to my own" (19). Thoreau is another literary figure from the past whose presence grows salient in Kazin's conception of his walker. In his essay "'What Makes Alfred Walk?'" Jerry Schuchalter presents an interesting fact about Kazin's possible awareness of Thoreau's exploration of the theme of walking in the lecture, later published as an essay, "Walking" in the *Atlantic Monthly* (1862). Although Thoreau's theme is a walk in nature, he values it for allowing him to follow the "old prophets and poets, Menu, Moses, Homer, Chaucer" ("Walking" 5). Walking does not bear an American mark for Thoreau as it does for Kazin, but, curiously, for him too it epitomizes belonging to tradition.

The Open Street illustrates that the city provided literary, historical, and familial grounds that Kazin was now struggling to face and ultimately claim. What it fails to show is that remembering the personal past and writing about it defined the course of that struggle and its ultimate result. In his journal entries from the period of drafting *Walker,* Kazin described memory as a force that generously yielded both control and support: "In relation to his memories, a man is like one walking, or bounding, rather, in a net, every last strand of which supports him" (Journals 7/2/46). At the same time, memory work stimulated a gradual recovery and reconstruction of "that whole side of my life which I suppressed before"; this was a painful process, but with the help of his therapist Kazin identified his task as "not to affirm what was, is and remains bad in the Brownsville material, but in my ability to master it and to describe it faithfully" (Journals 7/6/47; 2/17/47). It at once propelled and was propelled by a self-searching and self-affirming impulse to write a book that, in Kazin's words, "calls to me to be me" (Journals 5/2/47).

The conceptual progression of the book from *The Open Street* to *Walker* is best captured in a parenthetical statement from his journal: "a travelogue raised to a quest" (Journals 8/18/49). The quest was for "my natal country," as Kazin realized that the "only thing emotionally authentic in my vast manuscript was those carelessly scribbled pages about growing up in Brownsville. On these, […] I could build my book" ("Past" 129). In an unpublished note, Kazin emphasizes the urgency of his personal narrative:

> But the book is not simply a recollection: it is consciously, wholly deliberately offered by a writer who often darts back into the past but always shows that past coming to life through his present consciousness. The idea is given on the very first page—"past and present become each other's faces." I studiously avoided all false naivete, childlikeness, etc. As I say in the last line of the opening pages, "Brownsville is that road which every other road in my life has had to cross." I always show myself, as I am now, going back to Brownsville (*A Walker in the City*, TS. Notes).

The yearnings of his "present consciousness" were to alleviate the burden of guilt for disassociating himself from the Jewish community and to discern his various, albeit equivocal, attachments and their interconnectedness. They account for his quest's two-fold character. First, it involved his exploration of his Brownsville past, whose value lay not so much in its temporal remoteness, but in its current relevance and vibrancy, as we learn in the opening line of *Walker*: "Every time I go back to Brownsville it is as

if I had never been away" (5).[18] Secondly, it was a quest for a larger and truer vision of New York that included Brownsville, and therefore included him.

These aspects of Kazin's quest are fully illuminated when we place *Walker* in its larger context of postwar Jewish-American literature. In *Exiles on Main Street*, Julian Levinson links Kazin's interest in autobiography to the post-Holocaust revival of Jewish culture:

> Irving Howe describes the postwar moment as the beginning of his personal 'reconquest of Jewishness.' Some began exploring the possibilities for Jewish faith and practice in postwar America; others set out to discover the specifically 'Jewish' quality of cultural icons like Franz Kafka and Marc Chagall; still others reevaluated the Western literary canon with an eye toward anti-Semitic currents. Even when the Holocaust was not explicitly mentioned in these postwar meditations, it was always an implicit backdrop, a kind of centripetal force drawing Jewish intellectuals to reflect on an identity whose meaning had been dramatically reorganized in the span of less than a decade. (156)

Steven J. Rubin observes this tendency in the Jewish-American autobiographies written in the second half of the twentieth century. Rubin draws attention to Alfred Kazin's *Walker* (1951), Meyer Levin's *In Search* (1950), Herbert Gold's *My Last Two Thousand Years* (1972), and Irving Howe's *A Margin of Hope* (1982), finding them

[18] The fact that this line originated in his journal where it denoted the opposite meaning — "Everytime I go 'home,' to Brownsville, […] it is as if I were entering a foreign country" (Journals 12/10/46) — shows how Kazin's relationship to Brownsville evolved while he was writing *Walker*.

"neither laments of alienation nor celebrations of success. They are expressions of cultural retrieval, of a 'reconquest' of Jewishness, and of the desire to link individual identity with that of the group" (180). Victoria Aarons delineates the same theme in post-World War II Jewish-American fiction, where we encounter characters "for whom knowing the past, imagining lives before them, is fundamental to their ability to define for themselves their own futures" (16). Telling the story of the Jewish experience for fiction writers—"the disintegration of the shtetls, the devastation of the Holocaust, the dislocation of the immigrant"—she shows, "enacts a deeply ingrained history of bearing witness in Jewish culture and letters" and becomes a vehicle for "plac[ing] themselves within a communal context defined by the changing historical and cultural circumstances of Judaism" (5, 4, 5).

As I mentioned earlier, Kazin's evocation of his Brownsville childhood was informed by the disturbing, guilt-bearing awareness of the Holocaust. In 1944, before undertaking his New York book, Kazin wrote the essay "In Every Voice, in Every Ban" for *The New Republic* which focused on the suicide of Shmuel Ziegelboym, the Polish Bund leader, who was able to escape to England. Richard Cook summarizes Ziegelboym's note as it was reprinted in Kazin's work:

> Addressing himself to the president of Poland, the Polish people, and 'the conscience of the world,' Ziegelboym took note of the murder of more than three million Polish Jews by the Germans and the continuing slaughter of those still alive, all occurring under 'the passive observation' of the rest of the world. He wrote that he belonged with the

> victims in their mass graves and that by his death he wanted to express his 'strongest protest against the inactivity with which the world is looking on and permitting the extermination of my people.' (91-2)

The title of Kazin's essay came from Blake's poem "London": "like the poem, the essay can be read as a cry against 'the mind-forged manacles' that chain the human spirit in ignorance and prejudice" (Cook 92). The fact that these same lines of Blake's poem would later appear in Kazin's epigraph to *Walker*'s first chapter frames his autobiographical endeavor as a cry against his own ignorance of and prejudice against his Jewish community. Moreover, it is hard not to attribute the autobiographical character of *Walker* to Kazin's view of his marriage to Asya as a "Jewish autobiography, not a marriage of minds" *(New York Jew* 258). By the time he began writing *Walker*, this Jewish autobiography was over, and had to be reckoned with by taking into account Kazin's conflicting feelings about his Jewishness originating in childhood. In the subsequent autobiographical volumes covering his adult years *Starting Out in the Thirties* and *New York Jew*, Kazin would comment more explicitly on the difficult allegiances implicated in his first marriage.

Kazin's relationship with Asya was marked by the same kind of oscillation between wanting to build and sever his ties with the Jewish family. In his review of Richard Cook's biography, Michael Weiss addresses the ramifications of this oscillation in Kazin's jarring criticism of alienation in postwar literature, most notably in the essay "The Alone Generation," from which Weiss quotes a striking passage: "The age of 'psychological man,' of the herd of aloners, has finally proved the truth of

Tocqueville's observation that in modern times the average man is absorbed in a very puny object, himself, to the point of satiety." Weiss contends, "Alienation was a sentiment [Kazin] mistrusted most in literature because he mistrusted it most in himself," but ponders, "How did one of the most temperamentally and spiritually isolated writers of his time become such an astute chronicler of it?" Kazin's Jewishness helps to explain this, as it remains "a lodestone to which his intellectual pursuits and personal torments kept returning" (205-206). In his essay "Beginnings and Ends: The Origins of Jewish American Literary History," Michael Kramer shows the historical origin of Kazin's ambivalent position toward his Jewish roots. He explains that throughout history, the Jewish literary tradition has subsumed the past and the theme of continuity, while American literature has emphasized self-sufficiency, originality, and departure from the past. "In a sense, early Jewish American writers and thinkers found themselves in a conceptual bind, looking backward to Jewish origins and forward to American vistas" (14).

Kazin's *Walker* demonstrates that these battling sensibilities were very much intact even in the later period of Jewish-American literary history. In the essay "The Past Breaks Out," he describes his involvement with *Walker* as "the push toward home and the pull away again, the longing for the secret treasure of family and Jewish togetherness, and the contrary motion of seeking the open treasure that is the great city, infinite New York that belonged not to 'us' but to 'them'" (133). Growing up in Brownsville, a "city within a city," known in the country as the "Jerusalem of America," young Alfred felt at odds with the demands of his community (Landesman 2-3). A neighborhood synagogue—a staple of his religious and ethnic identity—promised an inherited but in no

way comforting sense of belonging: "I felt a loveless intimacy with the place. […] Secretly, I thought the synagogue a mean place, and went only because I was expected to (*Walker* 44-45). However, the walls of this synagogue housed "this God of Israel" who evoked resentment and fear, at the same time that "He fascinated me" and "seemed to hold the solitary place I most often went back to." The "place" was none other than a visceral vestige of identity and self-fulfillment: "There was a particular sensation connected with this—not of peace, not of certainty, not of goodness—but of depth; as if it were there I felt right to myself at last" (*Walker* 47). Once he had begun reading Hebrew prayers in their English translation, he not only became aware of his private relationship with God, but also grew more understanding of what until then seemed meaningless rituals. Now he understood the "*deepness*" behind the "gloomy obscurities of Shabbes" and was suddenly initiated into this otherworld upheld and shared by his "miserable *melamed*" and "the elders smelling of snuff," as well as all the Jewish forefathers; a line from the prayer "*When your fathers provoked me*," triggered an exclamation "How many fathers I had!" The custom of wearing a prayer shawl during evening service acquired meaning as it provided access to shared ancestral memory and kinship: "how each of my fathers must have stood up alone, and each wrapped round and round in his prayer shawl, as at the moment of his death, addressed himself in the deepest prayer to God alone" (*Walker* 101-102, original emphasis).

These revelations occur in the chapter entitled "The Block and Beyond" that explores with equal vehemence the boy's attachment to his block on Chester Street and his dream to venture beyond it. The narrator's nostalgia is two-directional: it is experienced by the adult, discovering his yearning for a familiar place in his past, "[t]he

block: *my* block," as well as by the adolescent, yearning for the unknown "Beyond" and the alluring future it entails. (83, 88, original emphasis). The world beyond Chester Street comprises a wide geographic range, from the "other end of our block" that was "dear to me for the contrast" to the more spatially remote Manhattan and temporally remote "anything old and American." The latter inspires young Alfred's fantasy of taking the train "back and back to that old New York of wood and brownstones and iron, where Theodore Roosevelt as Police Commissioner had walked every night" (*Walker* 87, 90).[19]

On his way to this distant American past, he would be in the company of the fathers very different from the ones who wear praying shawls and through meditation enter their common spiritual space; he would be surrounded by his *American* fathers: "among the darkly huddled crowds waiting to go out to the train, looking out on Brooklyn Bridge all dark sweeping cable lines under drifts of snow, I pretended those were gaslights I saw in the streets below, that all old New Yorkers were my fathers, and that the train we waited for could finally take me back […] to that old New York" (*Walker* 90). Yet, another mention of the fathers in the book impresses upon him a mediated truth that many American fathers were at one point immigrants: "Oh that ride from New York! […] clear across Brooklyn, almost to the brink of the ocean all our fathers crossed" (9). In this way, Kazin instills the immigrant past into the city's history. The autobiographical space ultimately allows him to proffer his own ties to the city.

As the narrator of *Walker,* Kazin revisits his adolescent years when he describes how, feeling alienated from the American scene, he attempted to "legitimize

[19] After the war, the same wish to penetrate into the old New York inspired Kazin's writing of *Walker*.

my strange quest for the American past" by reading books (172). While in *The Open Street* he simply wished to follow in the footsteps of American authors and thus assume a connection to them, in *Walker* he fully explicates what actually constituted this connection, in a nutshell their shared sense of alienation: "I knew somewhere in myself that a Ryder, an Emily Dickinson, an Eakins, a Whitman, even that fierce-browed old German immigrant Roebling, […] were alien, too, alien in the deepest way, like my beloved Blake, my Yeshua, my Beethoven, my Newman." So, the boy was not alone in his aloneness, though living in Brownsville he "nevertheless […] thought of myself then as standing outside America" (172). If the boy is looking for connection through books, the adult narrator attains it through walking, which "could take me back into the America of the nineteenth century" (170). Seventeen years after completing *Walker,* Kazin would address in more explicit terms the paradox of the urban writer's identity that is defined both through and against the city; in the essay "The Writer and the City," he brings up the children of immigrants who "remind us that, until recently, the writers most sensitive to the city were indeed strangers to it, found it as strange as immigrants once did." But it is certainly the city, he argues, that remains a writer's "fundamental principle of society" (110). These lines appear in a critical essay, but their roots are evidently autobiographical.

As readers, we do not experience *Walker* as a travelogue partly because we encounter a narrator who is not only a walker, but also a dweller in the city; this is evident in the book's section titles: "From the Subway to the Synagogue," "The Kitchen," "The Block and Beyond, "Summer: The Way to Highland Park." His walks take him in and out of places that are both private and shared: the house, school, library, synagogue, fire escape where he reads American classics and Jewish prayers, secretly in

English, with equal fascination. He describes his visits to these places in the past tense, yet with such level of detail and narrative intensity that the present seems to dissolve as we follow him into his "trance" of recollection (7):

> *Down we go, down* the school corridors of the past smelling of chalk, lysol out of the open toilets, and girl sweat. The staircases were a gray stone I saw nowhere else in the school, and they were shut in on both sides by some thick unreflecting glass on which were pasted travel posters inviting us to spend the summer in the Black Forest. Those staircases created a spell in me that I had found my way to some distant, cool, neutral passageway deep in the body of the school. There, enclosed within the thick, green boughs of a classic summer in Germany, I *could still* smell the tense probing chalk smells from every classroom, the tickling high surgical odor of Lysol from the open toilets, *could still* hear that continuous *babble, babble* of water dripping into the *bowls*. (28, emphasis added)

The description of the spell shows how Kazin navigates the spaces of the past, gradually drawing his reader into them by providing sensuous details and creating a whirling rhythm by repetition and alliteration. Once the past has been penetrated through the physical locales, he keeps us there by creating fantasy spaces. We continue to follow the narrator, disconnecting further from the present narrative vantage point and experiencing the scenes he relates as if they were temporally immediate. When the

narrative returns to the present, we easily share the narrator's feeling of "bumping awake at harsh intervals" (*Walker* 7).

This exploration of the past as a layered entity, extending beyond Brownville into some intangible spaces, constitutes Kazin's primary narrative technique for the book. It grows especially pronounced when he portrays the scenes of *diasporic intimacy*, a term Svetlana Boym uses to describe how a domestic practice in a diasporic home "reflects collective frameworks of memory that encapsulate even the most personal of dreams" (228). Kazin's sense of being Jewish was not founded on religious observance or Zionism, but rather on "some heightened sense of existence," the palpability of "living the Jewish experience through and through" ("Past" 130). He delves into the domestic spaces of Brownsville because they carry the essence of the Jewish life in *galut* or exile. One scene in *Walker* illustrates this particularly well:

> Twice a year, on the anniversaries of her parents' deaths, my mother placed on top of the ice-box an ordinary kitchen glass packed with wax, the *yortsayt*, and lit the candle in it. Sitting at the kitchen table over my homework, I would look across the threshold to that mourning-glass, and sense that for my mother the distance from our kitchen to *der heym*, from life to death, was only a flame's length away. (69, original emphasis)

Brownsville constitutes an existing physical place that can serve as a shared entry point into a more distant, physically unattainable, but post-mnemonically available *der heym* or home: "Old as the synagogue was, old as it looked and smelled in its every worn

and wooden corner, it seemed to me even older through its ties to that ancestral world I had never seen.[20] Its very name, Dugschitz, was taken from the little Polish village my mother came from" (42).

The stories associated with *der heym* comprise a shared history of pogroms and the Holocaust: "In the light of that mourning-candle, there were ranged around me how many dead and dying—how many eras of pain, of exile, of dispersion, of cringing before the powers of this world!" (70). In this sense, Kazin's idea of *der heym* was ambivalent. On the one hand, "Heym was a terrible word. I saw millions of Jews lying dead under the Polish eagle with knives in their throats." On the other, it was an "entirely dim and abstract" terrain whose "orthodox dignity" he perceived from an old photograph. Having had internalized his parents' worries and fears, "all those running wounds of a world I had never seen," he still wishes that he had shared their past: "I often felt odd twinges of jealousy because my parents could talk about that more intense, somehow less *experimental* life than ours with so many private smiles between themselves" (58-9, original emphasis). His quest for home is therefore manifold, involving several temporal and experiential frames conjured up in and through Brownsville.

One such frame opens the world of Russian intelligentsia, another trace of the distant *der heym* brought into the Kazins' Brownsville apartment by the "unmarried cousin" Sophie and her single female friends. Like Kazin's mother Gita, these women

[20] Marianne Hirsch uses the term post-memory to describe this type of remembrance that occurs across generations and bears personal linkages: "Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation" (*Family Frames* 22).

are dressmakers, but they are well-read in Russian classics and meet with condescending smiles Gita's disapproval of their singlehood: "They felt they belonged not to the 'kitchen world,' like my mother, but to the enlightened tradition of the old Russian intelligentsia" (54). The unmarried cousin's room is a microcosm of that tradition suggestively colored by the asceticism expected from the living space of an immigrant and a muted romantic yearning of a single woman:

> There was no closet: her embroidered Russian blouses and red velvet suits hung behind a curtain, and the lint seemed to float off the velvet and swim in multicolored motes through the air. On the wall over her bed hung a picture of two half-nude lovers fleeing from a storm, and an oval-framed picture of Psyche perched on a rock.[21] On the wicker bookstand, in a star-shaped frame of thick glass, was a photograph of our cousin's brother, missing since the Battle of Tannenberg, in the uniform of a Czarist Army private. (71)

In addition to these possessions so revealing of their owner's life, there is a wide array of books including Shalom Aleichem's works in Yiddish, "scattered volumes of Russian novels," and literature in English (72). The scope of this woman's and her girlfriends' intellectual interests impress the boy all the more because there is no conflict between their Jewishness and their cultural and Socialist aspirations. These women create models for identification for the boy that his Socialist father and dressmaker mother, remaining the upholders of the Jewish faith and traditions, can

[21] These were famous popular images.

only partially provide: "I was suddenly glad to be a Jew, as these women were Jews—simply and naturally glad of those Jewish dressmakers who spoke with enthusiastic familiarity of Sholem Aleichem and Peretz, Gorky and Tolstoy, who glowed at every reminiscence of Nijinsky, of Nazimova in The Cherry Orchard, of Pavlova in 'The Swan'" (58). In fostering these cultural links, Sophie uncovers his "primal link to her and through her to the headstrong Russian literature that partly shaped his sense of a literary vocation" (Solotaroff xvii). By relating her story in his autobiography, Kazin demonstrates interest in deploying memory to trace the roots of his attachments and passions, familial and artistic.

Memories, the existential modalities they conjure and the patterns of identification they suggest constitute the subject matter of *Walker*. Admittedly, Kazin's recollections of Brownsville were difficult to write about because they comprised multiple layers of self-discovery and self-acceptance: "It was not to those streets I turned, […] but to an acceptance of that to which my mind was turning. Those streets were not the end but the ground of my self-discovery" (Journals 1/31/51). Kazin's idea of self-discovery is rooted in the American conception of the self as autonomous, but the process through which it occurs suggests a relational register. His self-discovery is bound to the physical environment which provides access to the other, more distant places—physical and imaginary—and their inhabitants. This narrative trail connotes a relational autobiographical mode, reaching backward and thus signifying a connection between autobiographer and his familial roots.

However, in writing *Walker* Kazin exposes an additional aspect of relationality: deploying narrative registers of remembering, he is able to write his personal history into the literature and history of the nation. He enlists himself in the echelons of writers he respects: Thoreau, Emerson, and Whitman. He seeks a "cherished connection with something fundamental to American literature," namely, "the need to present to God, the Eternal Reader and Judge of the soul's pilgrimage on earth, the veritable record of one's inner life" ("Past" 124). Among his literary models, Kazin names *The Education of Henry Adams*; Thoreau's *Walden* and journals; Whitman's *Leaves of Grass,* diary of the Civil War, and *Specimen Days*. He also feels close to Hemingway and Faulkner, the "country boys" who "wrote out of memory" and thus "anchored themselves in the present only out of a kind of rage; they always knew where 'home' was, the real, the old" (Journals 9/15/52). In no small measure, Kazin's autobiography also reveals his initial commitment to finding a connection to his contemporary writers. In 1944, before receiving the *Harper's Bazaar*'s assignment, Kazin ruminated in his journal:

> I formed the conception of a book about childhood and modern literature, a conception stemming not only from my own increased awareness of how dominant the patterns of hostility and worthlessness Mama showed me became, in my later psychic life, but from the obsession with childhood in contemporary American writing, particularly among writers of my own generation. (Journals 9/25/44)

With such a heightened awareness of the current literary moment Kazin leaped into a new genre. This move warranted a different way of understanding his relationship with

contemporary writers, not only as their critic but also as a fellow literary artist sharing in their pursuits. In the same vein, it demanded that he form a new relationship with his reader; in fact, it implicated the emergence of a whole new community of readers who are interested in memoir, not just criticism. Kazin's narrative "I" now assumed a new, autobiographical voice through which to construct his personal history.

In her recent article "Getting Transpersonal," Nancy K. Miller describes this relational aspect of autobiographical writing using the term "transpersonal"; it refers to the complex ties between the autobiographical "I," the "generation in which it loves and works," and its distant ancestors (3). These ties reach backward and sideways, illuminating two crucial facets of relational selfhood exemplified in Kazin's *Walker*. In the genre-related discourse, the perennial nexus of self-relationality comes to the fore in autobiographical works, showing the writers' ability, if not their need, to deploy self-narrative as a means of simultaneously perceiving, reiterating, crystallizing, and constructing anew the links between the self and the other. That the reader assumes the role of the "autobiographer's most necessary other" has been raised repeatedly in autobiography criticism (Miller, "The Entangled Self" 545). Miller has explored how the mechanisms of identification and disidentification are brought into action by both writers and readers of autobiographical texts (*But Enough about Me* 3, "Getting Transpersonal" 3). Quoting psychologist Katherine Nelson,[22] Paul J. Eakin makes a point about how relational selfhood develops through the essential act of storytelling which presupposes the presence of an audience: "Sharing memories with others is in

[22] Nelson, Katherine. "The Ontogeny of Memory for Real Events." In *Remembering Reconsidered: Ecological and Traditional Approaches to the Study of Memory*, ed. Elric Neisser and Eugene Winograd. New York: Cambridge UP, 1988. 244-76.

fact a prime social activity" (qtd. in Eakin, *How Our Lives*, 109). Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson illuminate the dilemma implicit in this activity: "The self-narrator whose story is published cannot know who in fact her readers […] will be. But she cannot tell her story without imagining a reader" (89).

In the remaining part of this chapter, I hope to add to these inquiries by highlighting the potential, indeed a promise—in Kazin's case perceived as a fulfilled one—of autobiographical text to enable its author to connect to the other with whom he/she shares not only his/her past and present, but also future. Kazin's engagement with *Walker* conveys that the relational self and its entwined narratives reveal the autobiographer's effort to depict the self existing in and moving through time. In this way, it emphasizes the importance of historical continuity in one's conception of self. After completing *Walker*, Kazin wrote in his journal, "The beauty of a story is that it embodies the journey through time which is the only formal signature of our living at all" (12/30/52). Gusdorf delivered the same point in his 1956 essay: "In narrating my life, I give witness of myself even from beyond my death and so can preserve this precious capital that ought not disappear" (29). Implicit in this historically synchronous thinking is what Gusdorf defines as autobiography's "task of reconstructing the unity of a life across time" (37). Kazin understands his autobiographical project as an attempt, and a fairly successful one, to complete this task through self-exposure and a productive dialogue between the autobiographical "I" and its reader in the present and future.

To ascertain the role of the reader in Kazin's conception of the self in history, I want to revisit in greater depth than I have done in the preceding pages the several autobiographical routes he pursued before and while working on *Walker*. As I have shown, Kazin's critical writing on American authors, along with those on Kafka, Dostoyevsky, and Blake formed implicit accounts of his personal conflicts and quite explicit renditions of the postwar period. After the war, Kazin also probed the fictional domain and even tried his hand at poetry. He attempted to use some of his journal writing for a novel, but later admitted that "it bored me" ("Alfred Kazin: The Critic as Creator" 103). While his manuscripts of the poem "Ashes on Fire" and the novel *End of the War* remained unfinished and unpublished, the short story "Going Home" did appear in *Harper's Magazine* in 1945. These literary experiments were inspired largely by his six-month stay in England in 1946 where his assignment was to complete reports on soldiers' and workers' education. He did not get to see the war in action, but got

> close enough to hear and feel the V-2s exploding randomly and unnervingly in the streets and parks of London, to see the thousands of people sleeping in the subway stations of the West End, to gaze at the spotlights playing above the mounds of antiaircraft guns in Hyde Park, and to learn a good deal about the English people during the wartime. (Cook 9)

The subject of "Going Home" is a soldier's return home upon release from psychiatric care. His anticipation of seeing his wife grows into intense anxiety when upon arriving at his hometown late Saturday night, failing to reach her on the phone, he boards another train and leaves. "The darkness was all around him like the past and

the world in which a splinter fell off the tree. They took a man and put him into the Army, told him nothing but yelled at him and fed him and marched him, and *he fell like a splinter off the tree*" (478, emphasis added). While this story does not yield a strictly autobiographical reference, it provides a helpful frame for understanding Kazin's state of being at the end of the war (Cook 88). I recognize in this soldier Kazin's own sense of falling out of the familiar reality—pre-atomic and pre-Holocaust—and a struggle to regain the old forms of attachment and grounding. The veil covering the writer's life is thinner in fiction than in criticism, but even so fiction did not hold Kazin's interest for long.

At the same time that Kazin was seeking elusive ways of autobiographical expression, he began thinking about exposure, autobiography, memory, and self-writing.[23] His psychoanalyst Janet Rioch helped him to develop these tropes, and in this way, as Kazin admitted, she played a crucial role in his completion of *Walker* (Cook 90). During his sessions with Rioch, Kazin was growing increasingly conscious of "two familiar keystones in my life—the alternating phobias of being the weakest, the most miserable, and the loneliest of mankind; and that of being a 'superman,' who in his heart never knew why he looked down on people whose interest and love he would have welcomed." The latter necessitated a profound anxiety about the book that

[23] In a journal entry from August 15, 1946, Kazin flirted with the idea of accidental self-exposure: "Write a fantasy in which all telephone wires get twisted. Absolute breakdown of private communications: Everyone's message open to everyone else" (15). On September 11 of the same year, responding to Rousseau's *Confessions* in his journal, he articulated his vision of what makes one a successful autobiographer: "What we ask of a writer who offers to tell us 'the whole truth about himself' is not that he paint himself blacker than everyone else, but that he show us what makes him <u>like us</u>" (16). Also in his journal but on December 21 of 1946, Kazin described the nature of memory, echoing Proust: "Memory a continuously developing film, erupting into vividness under particular stimul[i]."

had to "wow people," but gradually Kazin came to see its purpose differently: "[I]t can come only out of my acceptance of myself as I was, and am now, and my faith as a human being in the sufficiency of my experience" (Journals 7/6/47).

The underlying value of his conversations with Rioch was that they elicited a new form of autobiographical narrative, one that depended on the powers of the skilled facilitator and was less marked by self-disguise than fiction and literary criticism.[24] Yet, the self-narrative constructed at Rioch's office was not the end of but merely a stage in the autobiographical process Kazin wished to undertake. In 1946, he made a clear distinction between writing in his journal and talking to Rioch: "I have come to assume that talking to Rioch three times a week would take care of my confessional needs. But Rioch's business is to take care of my irrationality; I can only lead up to the point with her of saying what it is I want to affirm and how I wish to live. The definitions and the constructions belong here" (10/4/46). By 1948, he was even more convinced that developing a self-narrative through writing held intrinsic value: "it is no longer true that my weekly sessions with Rioch relieve me of the need of 'examining myself' here—there is everything to say, outside that strictly clinical room." By "here" Kazin of course meant his journal where he certainly continued a trenchant self-analysis that

[24] The question of authentic self-portrayal in psychoanalysis recalls the mediated autobiographical truth, in Philip Lejeune's terms, the "autobiographical pact" (*On Autobiography* 3-30). In the psychoanalytic context, David P. Spence's book *Narrative Truth and Historical Truth* demonstrates that the mutual effort of the analyst and the patient to construct a coherent story out of fragments of memories and associations is bound to fallacy due to the lack of linguistic transparency: "[…] often the need to express an idea or scene in words takes precedence over the need to be truthful. What is sayable may pre-empt what is really remembered; the need to assume a coherent part of the analytic conversation may tempt the patient to demonstrate more fluency than is warranted by the data. Rather than appear as a tongue-tied, incoherent bystander, unable to shape a complete sentence, the patient may be lulled by the demand to be verbal in place of being accurate" (280).

had begun in his sessions; his entries from 1944 when he was just starting psychoanalysis are especially long and thorough conversations with self about the difficult truths of his childhood, relationships, and deeply rooted anxieties. At the end, self-exploration through writing granted him a "spiritual well-being" (Journal 5/13/48).

Kazin's journal is an important life-long autobiographical document that in his lifetime has not been published in its entirety.[25] It attests to the fact that life-writing not only coincided with, but predated his other literary forays; Kazin explains the purpose of his journal in these terms:

> The reason for this journal: I get about 1/5000000 of my daily thoughts, fantasies[,] miseries[,] ambitions—oh, the sheer tidal flow of my consciousness—into what I write and say. I must use this book from now on as a knife to cut off the dead skin of custom. It should be a real daybook, filled to the brim with everything possible, no matter how foolish. It is only by following my follies to their end, to their very end, that I shall know wisdom. (5/13/48)

As evident in the entries cited throughout this chapter, Kazin's journal comprises a range of subjects and forms: records of daily events and encounters, reflections on personal relationships, the initial tackling of literary texts, quotations of interest, as well as deeply personal revelations and self-analysis. Philippe Lejeune's insight into diary writing helpfully summarizes the possibilities offered by a private journal:

[25] Recently, however, Richard Cook collected most of the journal contents in the book *Alfred Kazin's Journals*, Yale UP, 2011. The journal material quoted throughout this chapter is from the original manuscripts and typescripts.

"[T]here are two aspects—to analyze oneself and to deliberate. The diary offers a space and time protected from the pressures of life" (*On Diary,* 195). In 1991, when Kazin was diagnosed with cancer, he was determined to publish selections from his journal, and, after substantial revisions, he did. The book came out in 1996 under the title *A Lifetime Burning in Every Moment* which was taken from T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*. "[T]he title suggested both 'the moment to moment life, the impulse and waywardness' of daily living, as well as the religious significance of that Augustinian 'moment' when 'time past, time present, time future [becomes] instantaneous with the present'" (Cook 399). The actual unrevised journal—a mixture of manuscripts and typescripts—is held at the Berg Collection in New York Public Library.

In his important essay "The Self as History: Reflections on Autobiography" (1979), Kazin shows that his journal writing played an integral role in his conception of and engagement with personal history:

> What I have tried to write in *A Walker in the City*, *Starting Out in the Thirties*, *New York Jew*, is personal history, a form of my own influenced by the personal writings of Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman. Its passion and beat come from my life in history, recorded since I was a boy in notebooks that I value not for their facts but for the surprise I attain by writing to myself and for myself. 'I write for myself and strangers,' said Gertrude Stein. The strangers, dear reader, are an afterthought. (31-32)

The task of a personal historian is to document with precision, vividness and poignancy the individual's experience of living in a given historical moment, according to Kazin. He

was not in pursuit of an objective historical record, or a purely confessional narrative, but of a truthful, though mediated portrait of himself experiencing the present, reflecting on the past, and constructing the future. In this sense, his journal *was*, as Kazin said, "my life in history," a living record of existence that is both continuous and evolving.

One wonders then: if the journal fulfilled the major demands of personal history why write autobiography? If "audience" is the afterthought, as Kazin assures us, why does it have to occur at all, following the spontaneous self-exploration in its delightful unpredictability? Why could not Kazin as autobiographer be content with what Lejeune calls the "posture of *self-address*" but sought a public addressee (*On Diary* 94, original emphasis)?

Having an audience was indeed a problematic afterthought for someone who stammered[26] and at one point was startled by a typewriter for its "immediate audience-feeling" (Journals 7/6/47). Yet, it was an essential afterthought for Kazin. By pursuing autobiography that is intended for publication against all odds, Kazin seems to be saying that only when written for a specific audience can a personal story become a life in history, standing alongside and interacting with other lives, and thus weaving the texture

[26] That his stammer traumatized his relationship to language, expression, and communication is captured in the following journal entry: "Problems of communication, problems of the unloosening, the giving out. Let me not dwell so much on the past, on the daily secret anxieties about my stammering, for 'stammering' is only a general word for a basic specific distortion of one's power to speak directly. I should like to speak simply, firmly, honestly, through every medium that is open to me." (12/21/48)

of History. To illustrate this last point, I want to briefly review the shifts in Kazin's conception of the audience that occurred while he was working on *Walker* and were in turn registered in his journal.

In the early stages of *Walker* when it was still envisioned as a grand travelogue with only a small middle section devoted to Brownsville, Kazin was determined to "'prove' myself at any cost" and to make his book a "'success'" (Journals 8/26/47; 7/6/47). He was convinced that the ambitious writing about experiencing contemporary New York would appeal to his readers. Yet, as we have seen, very soon it ceased being appealing to him. He was longing to "write out the book as my heart dictates," or make it a memory narrative. Thinking about form, he wished to "get into my writing the spontaneity of this Journal" and free it of the rigid frames of the "'well-organized' paragraph" and its "artificial unity" (Journals 5/19/48). Insofar as he was aware of his inclination to relate "every thing [as] it comes out of my deepest memory, experience [and] search for conviction," he was also aware of his own effort to suppress this impulse out of "fear of being thought sentimental," which resulted in physical discomfort and continuous procrastination (Journals 12/23/48; 7/26/48). At that time, Kazin was grappling with the image of his reader. On the one hand, he was not attempting to avoid the eyes of the other: "One should write not so much for 'oneself alone' which is meaningless"; neither was he willing to write solely *for* the other, who is "external." His ideal implied audience was "that […] part of oneself which, challenging simultaneously others and one's material personality, is free of both, for that part of oneself which is not so much in oneself and its constant friend" (Journals 5/15/48). On the other hand, it was difficult to stave off the vision of the reader as a critic, someone "looking over my

shoulder," or merely a "'scoffer'" (Journals 7/26/48). By 1949, however, he felt somewhat reconciled with the prospect of having an audience:

> The word, gone forth, can never be revoked; it belongs to them as much as to me. I wrote, and having written spoke to them; and now they read, and talk back to me. To be misunderstood hurts; to be scorned […] hurts. Yet beyond this, the word I gave forth is there—at last it is the writer himself who is in the public domain (Journals 12/31/49)

Once the writer yields possession of his work, allowing it to be a shared and fluid property, he finds himself, or rather his writing persona, in the public domain where he is no longer a vulnerable figure receiving the unwanted gaze. There he is a performer and a communicator in contact with his audience.

Having accepted this role, Kazin was able to reconsider his initial fear of self-exposure. It no longer fit the model in which the reader invited him/herself into the author's space by looking over his shoulder; instead, it connoted the author's self-invitation into the other's life story. In "The Self as History," Kazin explains the appeal of confessional writing as creating "an invitation" to the readers "to become confessional themselves" (41). The role of the personal historian is hardly any different, except to say it engenders an intimate dialogue rather than a confessional monologue or "the speech of the living soul" (Journals 4/11/46). The idea of intimacy as linked to the public presence came to Kazin through Marc Rothko in the mid nineteen forties when he was only beginning to conceive of *Walker*: "'I have to paint large so as to keep it intimate,' Rothko said." Kazin wondered, "Intimate with what?" Rothko's paintings conveyed to Kazin his

unhappiness through "the mystery within and around those large rectangles, swimming in interior spaces, increasingly dimmed (as Rothko neared his end) by muted colors and black borders." Perhaps Rothko fascinated Kazin because he too was lonely, and he too sought an intimate connection with people rather than isolation. "Rothko's longing for intimacy haunted me, as did his round, spectacled face knotted in pain behind all those plain-spoken admissions about the loneliness he felt in the world," Kazin admitted, adding, "He was looking for something beyond the merely personal (which in our time means psychological)" (*Writing* 114).

After completing his first work of personal history, *Walker*, Kazin was able to articulate more assertively than before the challenge and the value of his own effort to initiate an intimate conversation with the audience, both as an autobiographer relating a part of his life story and as a scholar putting forth his unique literary vision:

> And when I ask myself, what it is that [k]eeps me from writing this preface to [*On Native Grounds*] for Anchor, what makes every and any essay in contemporary literature such an ordeal for me, it lies, I see this now, not in my lack of courage to say "no" to pissers like Fiedler and Rahv and how many others; but in the simple courage to say "yes" to what, so often feels like the craziest, most unbelievable, most unbearably <u>private</u>, self[-]centered, AlfredKazinish kind of thought. It is not lack of "courage" that keeps us from saying our piece, from going through with our vision. It is the sickly feeling of being ridiculous, in being <u>only</u> this, ourselves alone and <u>only</u> ourselves. (Journals 6/27/55)

The same feeling inhibited his initial impulse to delve into the Brownsville material wholeheartedly. Once his self-narrative was complete, though, Kazin believed "there is no use in being heroic about isolation"; he realized, in fact, "what kills us is the isolation, the lack of dialogue, of growth in ourselves that comes from talking to each other." At that point, Kazin even contemplated publishing his journal:

> Take this diary. Fundamentally, I write in it not to console myself, not to take notes, but to write, to write of all the things that I want to write of, and in just the spirit I damned want to write in. And I am not afraid to release it, to publish it all; of seeming "ridiculous." But is it not true that a diary like this, the record of a life-long commitment and meditation and quest, should be not merely a communion with oneself but also an address to the outside world, precisely because this book holds what is truest and deepest in me? (Journals 6/27/55)

Of course when time came to publish his journal, Kazin modified most of his entries (Cook 404), but what is significant about his commitment to staying maximally truthful to his inner experience is its constructive potential to create the basis for an intimate relationship with the reader.

What began as an endeavor leading to separation and concealment of the individual from his world, ironically and unremittingly grew into one that enabled his meaningful interaction with it, one that extended both across and along the axes of time and space. *Walker* lucidly illustrates the complexity and paradox of Kazin's own experience of feeling alienated on native grounds. Responsive to and propelled by the

personal and historical crises, this work highlights the multiple dimensions of the so-called native grounds and the varied, process-bound, relational means autobiography offers to construct them with.

In the course of writing *Walker*, Kazin revised not only the content and tone of his narrative, but also the way he envisioned the boundaries between public and private spheres. Recollecting the beginning stages of *Walker* in 1955, Kazin remarked, "Surely all the agony of those last years, when I was finishing up *On Native Grounds*, and then the break with Asya, was my sudden doubting that what I thought and felt had resonance into the real; I began to see the world in separate chambers, this damned literary nonsense of the private and the public." His first, for a long time suppressed impulse to write a personal book and present it to the public eye was therefore the "instinctive right sense" that the "reality of things" is not compartmental but "manifold." At a turbulent historical moment, when one's sense of identity is shattered, the world around one carries the same sense of fragmentation—in Gasset's words, *alteración*. This is the major fault Kazin finds with the literature of his time:

> There—in that last phrase, [the manifold reality of things] there is the real agony of so many writers and intellectuals today. For there <u>is</u> no manifold reality for them; the great thing outside is a blank stretch of blue sky, sometimes turning cloudy, and all the excitement of the human vision — "I would drink deeper, fish in the sky whose bottom is pebbly with stars"— is forgotten in the cold and tinny stare that the external turns on us. Surely it is only when reality draws us deeper and deeper, promises

> more and more of its secret heart to us, promises us more than can be shown – surely it is only in the faith of this manifoldness, and to the extent of what we can see of it, that we really live. (Journals 7/2/55)

The sanguinity of this passage reveals the essential value of the autobiographical process in helping Kazin come to see the inner and outer worlds not in terms of conflict, but of interaction resulting in the production of relational or formulating possibilities lacking in the discourses of fiction, psychoanalysis, or literary scholarship.

Chapter 2: Inconclusive Evidence: Performing Crisis, Synthesizing Time, Re-speaking Life

Long distance has always a bracing effect, says Véra. – Vladimir Nabokov, Diary, 1958.

The fact that of our Russian heritage the hardiest survivor proved to be a traveling bag is both logical and emblematic. – Vladimir Nabokov, *Speak, Memory*

...Ustin … took the calls on our ground-floor telephone, the number of which was 24-43, dvadtsat' chetïre sorok tri[…]. I wonder, by the way, what would happen if I put in a long-distance call from my desk right now? No answer? No such number? No such country? Or the voice of Ustin saying '*moyo pochtenietse*!' (the ingratiating diminutive of 'my respects')?

– Vladimir Nabokov, *Speak, Memory*

Stranger *always rhymes with* danger. – Vladimir Nabokov, "The Art of Literature and Common Sense"

In his typical self-aggrandizing manner, echoing Rousseau, Nabokov pronounces in *Speak, Memory*: "Neither in environment nor in heredity can I find the exact instrument that fashioned me, the anonymous roller that pressed upon my life a certain intricate watermark whose unique design becomes visible when the lamp of art is made to shine through life's foolscap" (14). While the author and many of his critics place emphasis on the intricacies of design and the position of the artistic lamp, I want to draw attention to what ultimately determined when and how the lamp began its work and explore Nabokov's autobiographical texts from this angle. Focusing on the nexus of genre, language, identity, and audience, I illustrate in this chapter that the crisis of displacement initiated and propelled Nabokov's continual engagement with autobiography. Wrought with textual revisions and translations,

Nabokov's *Speak, Memory* (1967) demonstrates that his response to crisis transformed from *exhaustive* to *recursive* between 1936 and 1967, years that bookend his autobiographical publications. The process of recursive writing and translation epitomizes Nabokov's determination to re-contextualize his life story for his Russian and American audiences, as well as for himself. I argue that ultimately, in a myriad of forms, this textual practice reflects Nabokov's constant effort to transform the experience of loss, fragmentation, and dislocation into one of completeness, integration, and belonging, indeed, to both Russian and American shores.

When Nabokov arrived in America in 1940, he had been away from Russia for twenty one years. The Nabokov family's departure was forced by the advancing Bolshevik Revolution. In 1920 the family settled in Berlin, leaving Vladimir and his brother Sergey in Cambridge to continue their studies. A liberal political leader, once a faculty member at the Imperial School of Jurisprudence and chancellor in the first Provisional Government, Nabokov's father, Vladimir Dmitrievich, remained politically active in Berlin where he was assassinated in 1922 (Boyd, Chronology xxxv-xxxvi). The loss of his father was a major trauma for the 23-year old Vladimir, compounding his nostalgia for Russia. As Julian W. Connolly points out, Nabokov's early fiction owes its deep sense of loss to these two painful experiences (*Early Fiction* 10). Upon graduating from Cambridge, Nabokov joined his family in Berlin and lived there until 1937 when he was forced to move again, now with his wife Vera and son Dmitri. Hitler was ascending to power, and in 1933, Véra, being Jewish, lost her job (Boyd, Chronology xxxviii). "Certain elements in the émigré population of Berlin made clear their sympathy with the Nazis, and cast aspersions on Nabokov for his marriage to a Jew." In 1936, Nabokov also learned that one of his father's

assassins, Sergey Taboritsky, was appointed as Hitler's second-in-command. The Nabokovs left Germany just in time:

> In 1938, the year after the Nabokovs had fled to Paris, an article in the pro-Nazi Russian language newspaper *Novoe Slovo* called for the destruction of the works of Sirin […] along with other Russian-Jewish artists: 'There, in the boiling pot, all those "excercises, by the Sirins, the Chagalls, the Knuts, the Burliuks, and hundreds of others will be cleansed entirely. And all those" works of genius, will flow where flows all filth, opening the passage to fresh, national art.'" (Brodsky 50)[27]

After their travels in Europe between 1937 and 1939, Véra, Vladimir and Dmitri settled in Paris from where they would leave for America in 1940.

The major tragedies in history touched Nabokov's family and repeatedly sent him on the road. Exile was an inherently traumatic state for him not only because it was wrought with the looming threats of destruction, forcing him to adapt to new countries, but perhaps also because he reached these countries as a fortunate survivor, having lost his less fortunate family members on the way. Two decades after the death of his father, his brother Sergey died in a German concentration camp (*Speak, Memory* 201). As a survivor and a writer, in his memoir Nabokov sets out to revive what had been irrevocably lost: his father's and brother's lives, his childhood, his country. He devotes a full section of Chapter 9 to his father's biography, which he assembles from his recollections and the contents of "a large bedraggled scrapbook, bound in black cloth"

[27] For discussion of the Holocaust in Nabokov's fiction, see Anna Brodsky's chapter "Nabokov's *Lolita* and the Postwar Émigré Consciousness" in Domnica Radulescu's edited collection *Realms of Exile.*

(133). We learn about his father's political and ethical convictions ("He was eloquently against capital punishment. Unswervingly he conformed to his principles in private and public matters"); the subjects of his writing ("he reveals a very liberal and 'modern' approach to various abnormal practices, incidentally coining a convenient Russian word for 'homosexual': ravnopoliy")[28]; and his musical talent, a "melodious gene" that resurfaced in Nabokov's son Dmitri (134, 137, 138). His brother's biography is briefer, as his was "one of those lives that hopelessly claim a belated something – compassion, understanding, no matter what – which the mere recognition of such a want can neither replace nor redeem" (201).

But regaining time and commemorating the lives of the lost family members were not Nabokov's only aspirations as an autobiographer. As its genesis and textual history suggest, *Speak, Memory* was conceived at a crucial, doubly critical threshold between the imminent threat of Nazism and a new wave of displacement. Nabokov's first autobiographical sketch "Mademoiselle O" was written in French and published in 1936. Shortly afterward, Nabokov began drafting chapters of his autobiography, which were later lost. This drafting coincided with the escalating power of the Nazis and epitomized Nabokov's preparation for America: he wrote already in English and was simultaneously looking for a teaching assignment in the United States (Boyd, Chronology xxxix). Nabokov learned English in childhood and mastered it in Cambridge; it was therefore the language that strangely and superbly epitomized a bridge between his past and future. As such, it embodied a hope for liberation, a return to a comfortably familiar linguistic universe while also a permanent move to an experientially foreign territory of the New World. Writing in English at this point of his life was closely linked to the idea of recounting a life story: *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, completed in 1939 and published in the U.S. in

[28] This invented word in Russian stresses equality.

1941, was his first English novel written "in anticipation of landing the kind of academic or publishing job he had begun to seek in the English-speaking world" (Boyd, Introduction xxii)[29]; tellingly, it concerns a protagonist V who attempts to write a biography of his dead half brother, writer, Sebastian Knight. J.B. Sisson observes several autobiographical threads in this novel:

> The distant relationship of Sebastian and V. reflects Nabokov's behavior toward his younger brother Sergey, and Sebastian resembles Vladimir in other ways: both are born in 1899, flee Russia as a result of the Revolution, attend Cambridge University, live in Europe, and write brilliant, idiosyncratic fiction. Nabokov also adapted incidents involving his father, his Uncle Rukavishnikov, and Irina Guadanini, with whom in 1937 Nabokov had an extramarital love affair. (633-34)

The turbulent late 1930s were therefore marked for Nabokov by two parallel efforts to write in English and to write autobiographically.

These two tendencies tell us something important about Nabokov's anticipation of the upcoming move to America: he was determined to tell of his Russian and European years to his new American readers in *their* language. Beginning with his first piece of autobiographical prose "Mademoiselle O," Nabokov also set out to separate his life from his fiction, attempting to rescue "some treasured item of my past" from "the artificial world where I had so abruptly placed it" ("Mademoiselle O" 66).[30] For him, untangling the knots of "autoplagiarism" was a deeply personal affair to be carried out strictly by the author himself; likely to turn it into "dull

[29] In his 1966 interview with Alfred Appel, Nabokov explained his decision to write *Sebastian Knight* in English: "Oh, I did know I would eventually land in America" (*Strong Opinions* 88).

[30] This passage is also present in *Speak, Memory*. Nabokov saw "Mademoiselle O" as a "cornerstone" of his autobiography (Foreword to *Speak, Memory* 4).

literary lore," readers and critics were not welcome participants in this endeavor (*Speak, Memory* 23).[31] In the United States, Nabokov was not only writing autobiographical non-fiction, but also using his real name, disavowing his European émigré penname Sirin.[32] It became important for Nabokov to meet his new community of readers as Nabokov, and he did. Separate sections of his autobiography were published in different American magazines and in 1951 Nabokov collected them in the book entitled *Conclusive Evidence*.

The book promised to carry out a complete self-introduction of a European émigré writer to his American readers. A trace of this vision appears in the title *Conclusive Evidence*. Nabokov introduces this volume as a "truthful" "account" of his life prior to coming to the U.S. ("Author's Note," *Conclusive Evidence*), the "conclusive evidence of my having existed" (Foreword to *Speak, Memory* 4). The notions of factuality and evidence implied in this title are tied to the idea of identification, which Nabokov tends to associate with his adoptive country. When the narrator of Nabokov's short story "Time and Ebb" arrives to New York from Europe, he quickly realizes, "we lived in the era of Identification and Tabulation; saw the personalities of men and things in terms of names and nicknames and did not believe in the existence of anything that was nameless" (82). In *Lolita* this odd era is depicted in the teacher's template of adjectives describing the girl's personality: "aggressive, boisterous, critical, distrustful, impatient, irritable,

[31] For an enriching discussion about the reasons behind Nabokov's apprehensive attitude toward his readers' efforts to trace autobiographical threads in his fiction, see Galya Diment's chapter "Nabokov's Biographical Impulse" in *The Cambridge Companion to Nabokov*.

[32] In *Speak, Memory*, Nabokov disassociates himself from Vladimir Sirin by referring to Sirin in the third person as a Russian émigré writer living in France after the Revolution. He omits the fact that Sirin was his penname in Europe. Neil Cornwell describes Nabokov's renouncement of his pseudonym as a self-assertive gesture signifying Nabokov's transition from Europe to the United States: "One meteoric career, that of the exiled Russian writer Sirin, was effectively over. A second, and in world terms, rather more explosive career, that of the American-English writer 'Vladimir Nabokov,' was about to be launched" (151).

inquisitive, listless, negativistic (underlined twice) and obstinate" (81). The English language itself was for Nabokov a "circumstantial" medium, as opposed to the "musically inconclusive" Russian (Foreword to *Drugie berega* 354, my translation).[33] The title *Conclusive Evidence* reflects the same mode of identification and tabulation: a circumstantial logic leading to a conclusion. It conveys a sense of completion and marks a new beginning, echoing the feeling that inspired it:

> The day before, after months of soliciting and cursing, the emetic of a bribe had been administered to the right rat at the right office and had resulted finally in a *visa de sortie* which, in its turn, conditioned the permission to cross the Atlantic. All of a sudden, I felt that with the completion of my chess problem a whole period of my life had come to a satisfactory close. (*Conclusive Evidence* 222)

The phrase "conclusive evidence" suggests that the "satisfactory close" has taken place. For his readers, Nabokov sets up the expectation to be presented with an inclusive and conclusive narrative -- an *exhaustive* account of the author's past; he urges them, and himself, too, to anticipate a story attesting to his successful crossing of temporal, spatial, and linguistic thresholds.

There are no excruciating emotions of love and loss, alienation and nostalgia in the long passage quoted above. Thinking about an enormously affective departure in connection to the pragmatics of a chess game neutralizes the experience. However, Nabokov's poem "The Poets" written in 1939 in anticipation of the same departure from France conveys a deeper emotional distress:

[33] Unless noted otherwise, all cited passages from *Drugie berega* are my translations.

In a moment we'll pass across the world's threshold

into a region – name it as you please:

wilderness, death, disavowal of language,

or maybe simpler: the silence of love;

the silence of a distant cartway, its furrow,

beneath the foam of flowers concealed;

my silent country (the love that is hopeless);

the silent sheet lightning, the silent seed. (29-36)

We can perceive in the title *Conclusive Evidence* and the autobiographical act it inaugurates an attempt to eschew the troubling images of the poem.

That it was not a successful attempt becomes clear with the Russian translation of the book *Drugie berega* (*Other Shores*) that came out with a modified content in 1954: intended most readily for his fellow Russian émigrés and potentially his compatriots living in Russia, *Drugie berega* signaled Nabokov's wish to stay connected with his Russian readers. In the course of his translation, which he started in 1953 in the middle of America while butterfly hunting, Nabokov "revised many passages and tried to do something about the amnesic defects of the original – blank spots, blurry areas, domains of dimness." He also "discovered that sometimes, by means of intense concentration, the neutral smudge might be forced to come into

beautiful focus so that the sudden view could be identified, and the anonymous servant named" (Foreword to *Speak, Memory* 5-6). But in no way was the Russian autobiography a conclusive act either. In 1966, Nabokov returned to English: he translated the text of *Drugie berega*, which bore additional corrections, photographs, and illustrations, and entitled the book *Speak, Memory: Autobiography Revisited.*[34] Moreover, in the years elapsing between the two later works, Nabokov began contemplating a sequel to the autobiography. In fact, the inkling came as early as 1951 when he was still thinking in terms of conclusive evidence: "I see quite clearly now another book 'More Evidence' – something like that – 'American' part" (Diary). The sequel was never completed.

Barely initiated or happily completed, Nabokov's repeated revisions and translations introduce a *recursive* element to his autobiographical process and quickly dispel the possibility of drawing a line under his past. Unable to revisit his past, he compulsively revisits its story. What urges him is not simply nostalgia, but the feeling of having neither fully left nor arrived, the state of "permanent transience" (Aciman, "Permanent Transients" 13). Nabokov calls it the "habit of impetus": "I propelled myself out of Russia so vigorously, with such indignant force, that I have been rolling on and on ever since." He admits, "True, I have rolled and lived to become that appetizing thing, a 'full professor,' but at heart I have always remained a lean 'visiting lecturer'" (*Strong Opinions* 27). In Russia, Nabokov was convinced, he would feel even more alienated and perceived as a ghost.[35] This kind of ambivalence constitutes a "permanent state" of crisis for exile, "a balancing act reenacted in the text," as Susanna Egan says (5).

[34] In the British 1951 edition (Gollancz) the title was changed from *Conclusive Evidence* to *Speak, Memory*. Throughout the chapter, I refer to the American edition as *Speak, Memory*, without the subtitle.

[35] This image is conveyed in the unpublished preface to *Conclusive Evidence*. I discuss it in detail later in the chapter.

Nabokov figuratively articulates the same idea in a passage that remains textually unchanged in all three versions of the autobiography, appearing emphatically as the concluding section of Part 3 of Chapter 2. It concerns the author's mother's habit of gathering mushrooms and her pleasure of watching them lying on the table:

> As often happened at the end of a rainy day, the sun might cast a lurid gleam just before setting, and there, on the damp round table, her mushrooms would lie, very colorful, some bearing traces of extraneous vegetation – a grass blade sticking to a viscid fawn cap, or moss still clothing the bulbous base of a dark-stripped stem. And a tiny looper caterpillar would be there, too, measuring, like a child's finger and thumb, the rim of the table, and every now and then stretching upward to grope, in vain, for the shrub from which it had been dislodged. (*Speak, Memory* 28)

The image of a dislodged caterpillar whose impulse to return to his original dwelling is futile, yet persistent, and countered by the survival instinct to cling to the table, brilliantly captures Nabokov's experience of exile. Holding on to the new land, he continued reaching back to the old one, registering these attempts in his revisions. Like his governess Mademoiselle O, who, upon arrival to the terrifyingly foreign Russia, turning the Russian word for "where," "gde," into "Giddy-eh?" sought "the blessed land where at last she would be understood," Nabokov was searching for the country of his childhood (*Speak, Memory* 72). But, unlike his governess, he realized that this land was unattainable, its location defined by the temporal and psychological rather than spatial coordinates. This becomes clear when he visits Mademoiselle in Switzerland and is astounded to see her and her elderly girlfriends reminiscence about Russia as their version of the non-existing country that he, at the time a Cambridge student, was searching for: "One is

always at home in one's past, which partly explains those pathetic ladies' posthumous love for a remote and, to be perfectly frank, rather appalling country, which they never had really known and in which none of them had been very content" (*Speak, Memory* 116). This epiphany runs as a parallel, sobering trope to Nabokov's yearning for home as his exile continues. It warns him of the destructive outcome of his absorption in the past: the loss of touch with the present American reality. Directed to the reading audiences in both countries, Nabokov's autobiographical iterations illustrate that textually the contradictory impulses of arrival and return can be fulfilled, albeit only temporarily.[36]

Living in exile, Nabokov remained "very much concerned with things Russian" and carved a place for himself in Russian literature: "In modern Russian literature I occupy the particular position of a novator, of a writer whose work seems to stand totally apart from that of his contemporaries" (*Strong Opinions* 13, "To Laughlin" 34). These statements challenge his later description of his literary trajectory as sequential: "I think of myself today as an American writer who has once been a Russian one." In fact, in the same interview, he contradicts himself, saying that a writer's "identity should be immediately recognized by a special pattern or unique coloration" rather than his belonging to a national literature (*Strong Opinions* 63). Here,

[36] The praxes of return and arrival take on a paradigmatic significance in Nabokov's narrative practices beyond autobiography. In his analysis of character development in Nabokov's fiction, Brian Boyd finds:

> In Nabokov's fiction each life follows its own distinct pattern, indiscernible in advance, ever clearer in retrospect, but certain moves recur again and again. First, *the myth of return*: the futile attempt to return to or relive the past. Next, *the myth of arrival*: the futile attempt to foresee or control the future. Third, *the surprise of the ending*, a new possibility that undercuts what we and the heroes have foreseen, but in a way that sends us, and perhaps them, back to the beginning. The ending may mark the failure to reach a coveted past, or a coveted future, or both at once." ("Nabokov as Storyteller" 35-6, original emphasis)

Maria Louise Ascher examines Nabokov's revisions of his autobiography to make a larger statement about the affinities existing between autobiographical performance and exilic sensibility. She views revision and repetitions also in reparative terms, but only with respect to how Nabokov's multiple revisions grant him a return to specific memories.

Nabokov emphasizes the intrinsic qualities of one's aesthetics that transcend national borders and can be purportedly detected regardless of which subjects occupy the writer at different stages of his/her artistic life. This vision has no room for the "before" and "after" construct suggested in the earlier remark.

A close analysis of the autobiography's progression from *Conclusive Evidence* to *Drugie berega* to *Speak, Memory* further questions the *before/after* temporal dichotomy and unearths instead the *to/from* spatial paradigm. Although not extensively addressed in the autobiography, the question of return remained its complex theme. It comprises Nabokov's yearning for the Russia of his past, his lack of faith in the actual return, and his reliance in turn on the mnemonic and textual returns. The feeling of "homesickness" had crystallized in his consciousness before he left Russia for good (*Speak, Memory* 195). In the fall of 1917, Nabokov and his family escaped the Bolshevik regime in Petrograd and migrated to Crimea. He corresponded with his lover, Liussia Shul'gina, named Tamara in the autobiography, who fled to Ukraine and was writing to him from there (Boyd, Chronology xxxiv). Throughout *Conclusive Evidence*, *Drugie berega*, and *Speak, Memory*, Nabokov recalls Tamara's letters as the first evocations of his nostalgia: "Ever since that exchange of letters with Tamara, homesickness has been with me a sensuous and particular matter" (*Speak, Memory* 195).[37] Following the elaborate recollections of images associated with home and reflections on exile, Nabokov contemplates a return:

> What it would be actually to see again my former surroundings, I can hardly imagine. Sometimes I fancy myself revisiting them with a false passport, under an

[37] In *Drugie berega*, Nabokov comments on the musicality of Tamara's words that a Russian reader can perceive more easily than an English reader: "[…] her intonation… intonation was exceptionally clear, and mysteriously it transformed her thoughts into a special music. […] This is the sound I remember verbatim from one of her letters, and never afterward had I been able to better express my yearning for the past" (505, my translation).

> assumed name. It could be done. But I do not think I shall ever do it. I have been dreaming of it too idly and too long. (*Speak, Memory* 195-6)

And, he does undertake a return in his poetry and novel *Look at the Harlequins!*. For instance, in the poem "To Prince S. M. Kachurin" the speaker disguised as an American clergyman travels to St. Petersburg and stays at "a blue / drawing room with a view on the Neva." The poem is addressed to Prince S.M. Kachurin who had advised the speaker to go on this trip. While in St. Petersburg, the speaker sees "all that had been in my keeping / for so long," but he wants to go further, to Vyra, the site of his most dear childhood memories (4, 24-5). As he reckons the details of his train ride, he is afraid of being recognized. The reader's anticipation of his trip to Vyra remains unfulfilled since the narrative abruptly shifts: "Anyway at our next meeting / I shall tell you everything / about the new, the broadshouldered / provincial and slave" (69-72). He confesses, "I want to go home," as Boyd puts it, "*home* to the wild America he dreamed of as a boy, and its brave adventures, far from this stifling vapor of fear" (73, *American Years* 115, original emphasis).

In the autobiography, the same note of disenchantment about the physical return is conveyed through a telling editorial move. One possible title for the autobiography prior to *Conclusive Evidence* was *The House Was Here* (Nabokov, Letter to Elena Sikorskaia, *Perepiska* 59). It corresponded to the passage that was intended as a preface to Nabokov's autobiography but at the end discarded. The passage dated 1951 was found attached to Véra Nabokov's copy of *Conclusive Evidence*:

> The house was there. Right there. I never imagined the place would have changed so completely. How dreadful—I don't recognize a thing. No use walking any farther. Sorry, Hopkinson, to have made you come such a long way. I had been

> looking forward to a perfect orgy of nostalgia and recognition! That man over there seems to be growing suspicious. Speak to him. Turisti'. Amerikantsi'. Oh, wait a minute. Tell him I am a ghost. You surely know the Russian for 'ghost'? Mechta. Prizrak. Metafizicheskiy kapitalist. Run, Hopkinson! ("The House Was There" 333)[38]

The house in question is Nabokov family's country estate in Vyra (Funke 334). In the final version, *Speak, Memory*, in place of the intended passage Nabokov supplies a sketch of the map of Nabokov's land properties; it is inserted between the foreword and the first chapter. Of course, the map is built from memory and does not represent the current physical landscape: "Today where Vyra stood there is nothing but a scraggly clump of trees" (Boyd, *The Russian Years* 46). It is certainly accurate, but only insofar as it represents—and visually validates—the physical reality of the past as remembered by Nabokov.

By substituting the passage with the map, Nabokov draws attention to a peculiar interplay between the physical, imagined, and textual returns. Clearly, he has no illusion that upon return he would find the same Vyra he had left in 1919. In removing the preface from the text he further divests this illusion of any grounding in reality. Instead, he values the validation of Vyra's previous existence in the terms of cartography, albeit purely mnemonic. Along with the map, he adds to *Speak, Memory* the photographs of his family and the house in St. Petersburg. At some level, he is still busy proving his past existence by featuring the people who shared that existence

[38] The transliterated Russian words used in the passage are translated as follows:
Turisti – tourists
Amerikantsi – Americans
Mechta – dream
Prizrak – ghost
Metafisicheskiy capitalist – metaphysical capitalist

and the locales where that existence took place. The image of a butterfly in the map conveys the spirit of his childhood to which he owed his life-long fascination with butterflies. It can also be seen to emphasize the mnemonic and aesthetic attributes of this map and remind his readers that, as a signifier, the map has no signified entity in real time and place. Vyra as he knew it can be neither retrieved in the Russian landscape, nor recreated in the American one. When Nabokov's interviewer Alvin Toffler wondered about his refusal to own a home after fleeing Russia, Nabokov responded: "The main reason, the background reason, is, I suppose, that nothing short of a replica of my childhood surroundings would have satisfied me. I would never manage to match my memories correctly—so why trouble with hopeless approximations?" (*Strong Opinions* 27). Having no hope in finding Vyra in the Soviet Russia or in building its replica abroad, Nabokov claims no faith in returns and bets his cards on successful departure.

And yet a recurrent dream about this return persists. In *Speak, Memory*, Nabokov recalls a year-long leave he took from Russia as a child with his family, and derives a poignant, lasting meaning from his first experience of homecoming:

> An exciting sense of *rodina*, 'motherland,' was for the first time organically mingled with the comfortably creaking snow, the deep footprints across it, the red gloss of the engine stack, the birch logs piled high, under their private layer of transportable snow, on the red tender. I was not quite six, but that year abroad, a year of difficult decisions and liberal hopes, had exposed a small Russian boy to grown-up conversations. He could not help being affected in some way of his own by a mother's nostalgia and a father's patriotism. In result, that particular return to Russia, my first *conscious* return, seems to me now, sixty years later, a rehearsal –

> not of the grand homecoming that will never take place, but of its constant dream in my long years of exile. (71, original emphasis)

Here, the passage is placed in the chapter dedicated to Mademoiselle O, whose story of displacement helps Nabokov understand his own exile. The passage did not appear in the English translation of the story "Mademoiselle O" published in *The Atlantic* in 1945. Neither did it emerge in *Conclusive Evidence*. It first appeared in *Drugie berega* in this form[39]:

> We had vacationed to different types of waters, sea and mineral, every autumn, but never stayed for so long—a full year—abroad, as then, and as a six-year old, for the first time I had the chance to feel the essence of the rapture of return to the motherland faintly smelling of burning logs. It was, once again, the kindness of fortune, one of the many rehearsals of the actual show, which, for all I know, may not happen, though it is demanded, as it were, by the musical completion of life. (362)

In *Speak, Memory,* the return motif is masterfully framed by Mademoiselle's story (she returns to Switzerland only to feel nostalgic for Russia where in the past she had felt nostalgic for Switzerland) and blended with his parents' feelings of nostalgia and patriotism that he would ultimately inherit; he invites us to the moment when the passing of inheritance actually happens. After forty eight years of exile, the faint but extant hope for return mentioned in *Drugie berega*—"show, which, for all I know, *may not* happen"—became a lost hope in *Speak, Memory*—"the grand homecoming that *will never* take place" (362, 71, emphasis added). That

[39] The placement of the return passage is different in these texts: in *Speak, Memory* it is a part of the Mademoiselle O. chapter, while in *Drugie berega* it appears in the section of the first chapter dedicated to Nabokov's Russian tutors.

Nabokov first mentions the return in his Russian (*Drugie berega*) rather than English (*Conclusive Evidence*) self-narrative is significant: it not only exposes the intrinsic relation between memory and language in Nabokov's autobiographical process, but suggests subtle, fluid connections between textual, imaginary, and mnemonic returns.[40]

In turn, these forms of return are suggestive of and central to Nabokov's effort to strengthen his communication with the community of expatriates—and potentially his compatriots—through autobiography. The immediate readership for *Drugie berega* was to be found among the Russians who shared Nabokov's contempt for the Soviet regime and were living largely in exile. In a letter to James Laughlin, Head of New Directions, Nabokov specified that his émigré audience resided "chiefly in Paris." Brian Boyd adds, "Now in preparing his book for an émigré audience to whom V. D. Nabokov and Vladimir Sirin were major figures and every memory of Russia a treasure, there was much to insert, much he could not omit" (*American Years* 257). With the Russian émigré reader, Nabokov, no longer Sirin, defined and extended the borders of the "unreal estate" of his memory, authenticating its intangible existence, finding comfort perhaps in the mutual kindling of what otherwise could pass into oblivion. In the exilic state of "compulsive retrospection" (Aciman, "Permanent Transients" 13), they could aid each other, turning the whole enterprise into *collective retrospection* or collective mnemonic

[40] In foreword to *Drugie berega* Nabokov points out that events can be more easily and fully remembered in the language in which they were experienced: "The book 'Conclusive Evidence' took a long time to write (1946-1950), through a specially torturous effort, since memory was tuned in one key – the musically inconclusive Russian – while another key of circumstantial English was imposing itself upon it" (354, my translation). Brian Boyd reiterates the essential role of language in Nabokov's unyielding quest for the "exact truth": "[T]he fact of writing in Russian about a Russian past seemed to reactivate and sharpen his memory" (*The American Years* 504).

return. [41] This return could result primarily from textual interaction, as Nabokov limited his personal communication with the Russian émigré community in the States (Boyd, *The American Years* 21-22).

Writing for the Russian-speaking audience had a hidden wishful potential: the book could eventually reach the Soviet audience and escape the "air of fragile unreality," inescapable fate of the émigré literature published abroad (*Speak, Memory* 219).[42] Alexei Zverev describes this as a "literary return to Russia" and links the return motif in Nabokov's oeuvre to the publishing history of his works in Russia (291).[43] To understand Nabokov's own attitude to his Soviet reader, I want to juxtapose his critical and literary statements. In his 1962 BBC interview, Nabokov claimed,

> I will never go back [to Russia], for the simple reason that all the Russia I need is always with me: literature, language, and my own Russian childhood. I will never return. I will never surrender. And anyway, the grotesque shadow of a police state will not be dispelled in my lifetime. I don't think they know my works there—oh, perhaps a number of readers exist there in my special secret service, but let us not forget that Russia has grown tremendously provincial during these forty years, apart from the fact that people there are told what to read, what to think. In

[41] Nina Khrushcheva's view of Russian emigrants as "communally conscious emigrants" supports this idea of communal exilic experience (85).

[42] Nabokov's books remained banned in the Soviet Union until 1990s. Before then, as Nabokov predicted, they were smuggled into Russia (*Strong Opinions 53*).

[43] Zverev traces the publication and reception history of Nabokov's works in Russia, including the fact that "[i]n all the years following his emigration, not a single line of his was published in his homeland," and posits: "The persistence of [the return] theme says much: above all, that a hypothetical return tantalized, attracted, and tormented the writer" (291-2).

> America I'm happier than in any other country. It is in America that I found my best readers, minds that are closest to mine. I feel intellectually at home in America. It is a second home in the true sense of the word. (*Strong Opinions* 9-10)

The Russia he needed may have been with him, but he was not with Russia. His alter ego in the poem "Fame" heartlessly dwells on this state of affairs:

> Who, some autumn night, *who*, tell us, please, in the
> backwoods
> of Russia, by lamplight, in his overcoat,
> amidst cigarette gills, miscellaneous sawdust,
> and other illumed indiscernibles -- who
>
> on the table a sample of *your* prose will open,
> absorbed, will read *you* to the noise of the rain,
> to the noise of the birch tree that rushes up window-
> ward
> and to its own level raises the book? (65-72)[44]

These stanzas suggest that Nabokov suffered from the lack of readership in the Soviet Russia. He thought the country "provincial" but nonetheless wanted to be known there. Nabokov saw his early Russian novels as "belong[ing] to Russia and her literature," but this vision was in no way shared or supported in his homeland (*Strong Opinions* 10; "To Altagracia De Jannelli 29). He

[44] Asher Z. Milbauer directs critical attention to Nabokov's poem "Fame" to understand Nabokov's relationship with his reader and his experience of exile.

considered his Russian works to be "a kind of tribute to Russia," but in his lifetime Russia did not seem to be aware or accepting of that tribute (*Strong Opinions* 13). The fact that in his lifetime his work had no presence in the place he had once considered home ultimately defined the calamity of his exile: "exile means to an artist only one thing—the banning of his books" (*Strong Opinions* 118). In "Fame," the images of backwoods, overcoat, and birch trees planted closely to the windows summon a distinctly Russian scene whereby the books by Russian classics—Pushkin, Gogol, Dostoyevsky, and Esenin who remained rooted in the country regardless of the exilic and turbulent moments in their biographies—would be found with a greater probability than those of exiled writers. The enjambment resulting in the line isolation of the two images of backwoods and a ward calls attention to the contrast of an enclosed space of a ward (perhaps reminiscent of Chekhov's "Ward #6") and the open, boundless space of backwoods.[45] In juxtaposing these two images, Nabokov seems to be after a contrasting, revealing metaphor of living in the motherland vs. living in the adoptive country.

Toward the end of the poem, the tone changes; the speaker declares himself "remarkably happy" having discovered his "main secret"—his art—that transcends the tangible grounds of the author-reader relationship (their presence in the same country where the books are published, distributed, and reviewed): "I find laughable the empty dream / about readers, and body, and glory." Nabokov claims, "A book's death can't affect me since even the break / between me and my land is a trifle." Overcoming physical constraints, his "word" is "curved to form an aerial viaduct," through which he can "keep endlessly passing incognito / into the flame-licked night of my native land" (104, 105, 107-8, 111-12, 41, 43-44). The act of return figures in the poem in

[45] In the Russian original of the poem, there are no single-word lines.

two ways: as a relationship between the author and his Russian readers, achieved through means other than legitimate publication, and as the author's fictional portrayals of his incognito visits to Russia.[46] Both of these iterations of return took place in Nabokov's lifetime. Asher Milbauer observes, "It is the genius to create that enables Nabokov to build a viaduct, a bridge made of words, that brings the writer and the audience closer to each other and obliterates the distance between East and West. The tensions existing between the past and the present give rise to creative power" (57). I would add to this astute commentary that the choice of language was an integral part of this "bridge made of words."

Nabokov's zealous efforts to carry out his own translations of the autobiography and most of his fiction reveal a heightened demand for an unmediated contact with readers on both shores. The reminiscences he relates throughout his autobiography concern the bygone, pre-revolutionary Russia whose image was either suppressed or distorted during the Soviet regime. In the deleted from *Conclusive Evidence* Chapter 16, Nabokov's pseudo-review of his autobiography, he discusses at some length the book's exposition of "how freely opinions could be expressed and how much could be done by civilized people in pre-Revolutionary Russia." As his own anonymous critic, Nabokov hails the book for opening a window into Russian history:

> When the Revolution broke out in spring 1917, Nabokov senior participated in the Provisional Government and later, when the Bolshevik dictatorship took over, was member of another short-lived Provisional Government in the frail still free South. The group to which these Russian intellectuals belonged, Liberals and non-Communist Socialists alike, shared the basic views of Western democrats.

[46] Zverev reports that Nabokov's works reached his Russian critics as early as mid-sixties and in 'Ardis' reprints in the seventies (293).

> However, American intellectuals of today, who got their Russian history from Communist or Communist-sponsored sources, simply know nothing about the period. Bolshevik histories naturally played down pre-Revolution democratic struggle, minimized and violently distorted it, and hurled at it coarse propaganda insults ('reactionaries,' 'lackeys,' 'reptiles' etc.), not unlike the way Soviet journalists dub today surprised American officials 'Fascists.' The surprise is thirty years late. (251, 253)

His main concern here is to provide his American readers with the accurate historical knowledge. For his Russian readers, the book would have a considerably larger historical significance. If/when made available to them, Nabokov's autobiography could be a tribute to Russia in its own right—a tribute indeed to Russian history undistorted and unabridged. The textual return to the other shore seems no less valuable for what it could contribute to the Russians' conception of their national history than for how it could fortify Nabokov's place in his motherland and its literature. I do not wish to diminish Nabokov's personal and artistic gratification derived from finding an audience in Russia, only to illuminate another, less egocentric motivation for his textual return.

That Nabokov does indeed write for the reading audiences in both countries becomes evident if we analyze his choices of titles—the immediate appeals for the reader—for his Russian and English versions. These two editions were published in the same year of 1951, so what could have accounted for the difference in titles? His choice of *Conclusive Evidence* was likely guided by the concerns other than aesthetic, for in the same 1951 he already thought the "the phrase suggested a mystery story" (Foreword to *Speak, Memory* 4). Perhaps the "evidence

of my having existed" was an important message to send to the American people, among whom he now lived. With respect to the British audience, Nabokov was not concerned with evidence, but wanted to spark interest and signal accessibility: "I planned to entitle the British edition *Speak, Mnemosyne* but was told that 'little old ladies would not want to ask for a book whose title they could not pronounce'" (Foreword to *Speak, Memory* 4). So, it came out in England as *Speak, Memory* in the same year of 1951 that it came out in the U.S. as *Conclusive Evidence*. The title *Drugie berega* appeals to both Russian emigrants and Russian residents through the double invocation of Alexander Pushkin's nostalgic poem about his first exile to Odessa "Again I have visited…" and Alexander Herzen's book *S Drugogo berega* (*From the Other Shore*) written in the form of an essay "assess[ing] the consequences and point[ing] the moral of the final failure of the European revolutions of 1848."[47] The title *S Drugogo berega* alludes to the fact that this was Herzen's first book after he emigrated from Russia where "there was no room […] for a high-spirited, gifted, violently liberty-loving, romantically inclined aristocratic young man who wished to enter the field of public activity" (Berlin xiv, ix).

Herzen was also the author of autobiography *My Past and Thoughts*, a book much revered by Nabokov. In *Speak, Memory*, there is a photograph of the Nabokov family house in St. Petersburg on Morskaya Street, known in the Soviet Union as Herzen Street. Nabokov's

[47] The parallel to Pushkin grows more pronounced throughout the autobiography. Pushkin returns to Mikhailovo where he grew up and then later spent two years in exile. His current return conjures up not only those two periods – childhood and the exile – but also the nostalgic thoughts he had during the exile in Mikhailovo for an earlier exile in Odessa: "Here is the woody hill, where I often sat still – and watched / The lake, remembering sadly / The other shores, the other waves…" (My translation). This layered nostalgia is very familiar to Nabokov. Upon visiting Cambridge where as a student he had previously felt intense yearning for Russia, Nabokov has the same impulse as Pushkin, though it turns out to be less fruitful: "As I strolled under those sung trees, I tried to put myself into the same ecstatically reminiscent mood in regard to my student years as during those years I had experienced in regard to my boyhood, but all I could evoke were fragmentary little pictures …" (*Speak Memory* 213). Overall, events in Nabokov's life rarely have a single retrospective frame– one reminiscence is often presented in relation to another.

caption introduces Herzen as "a famous liberal (whom this commemoration by a police state would hardly have gratified)" (17).[48] Nabokov commemorates Herzen faithfully, reflecting both his political views and love for Russia. He reinstates Herzen's rightful place in Russian literary and political history, and in doing so reinstates his father's: Herzen was not only Vladimir Dmitrievich's favorite author, but also a role model whose behavior he was likely emanating in his youth.[49] Herzen's presence in the autobiography thus resonated with Nabokov on the personal level, providing a new way of grappling with the loss of father and homeland.[50] Julian W. Connoly observes that the relationship between the self and the other (in this case between his father, Herzen, and himself) is a key to Nabokov's portrayal of "the richness of human experience, from the rapturous potential of the human imagination to the stark realities of alienation, loss, and suffering" (*Early Fiction* 1-2).

Nabokov respected and treasured both his Russian and American readers, as long as he perceived them as "people wearing [his] own mask" (*Strong Opinions* 18). This commonly quoted remark shows that his solipsistic and narcissistic view of audience is deceptive. Asher Milbauer gives an insightful reading: "The paradox inherent in this statement is obvious: on the one hand, he plays down the role of an audience, yet, on the other, he provides a detailed

[48] Sergey Karpukhin calls attention to this caption in his article "Nabokov and Herzen" that explores biographical and artistic parallels between the two writers.

[49] Karpukhin notes that having read *My Past and Thoughts*, in which Herzen describes being arrested with his friends for evicting a school professor and refusing to leave his friends when offered a release, V.D. Nabokov followed Herzen's example: "In March 1890 Nabokov was arrested along with other students who demonstrated for academic freedoms and the independence of universities. They were kept in custody until late evening, without the authorities starting an enquiry. And then the Petersburg general governor arrived and ordered the release of Nabokov, a son of the former minister of justice. VDN asked if his friends would be released with him. As the answer to this was "No," he decided to stay in prison with his friends" (29).

[50] Another critic, Michael Wood, offers extensive commentary on Nabokov's portrayal of the relationship between him father and himself in the autobiography (91).

description of the reader he would like to have, namely, a reader who has close affinities with the writer himself" (57-8). His translations are one way to ensure that these affinities are not lost. For instance, in Chapter 3, section 6 of *Drugie berega,* he explains that the passage he is about to cite from the American and British editions of the book was meant *not* for the "Russian reader of my generation," but merely for the "idle foreigner, who has received in due time and from propagandists and silly companions a purely Soviet understanding about our Russian past" (393) and can thus make the grave mistake of linking his nostalgia to the loss of material possessions. His explanation of the mistake follows in the quoted material from *Conclusive Evidence*, with only two withheld details: the year of the Russian Revolution, of which a Russian reader would need no reminder, and the name Kickovski which in Russian was switched to "aurochs":

> My old (since 1917) quarrel with the Soviet dictatorship is wholly unrelated to any question of property. My contempt for the émigré de Kickovski, who 'hates the Reds' because they 'stole' his money and land, is complete. The nostalgia I have been cherishing all these years is a hypertrophied sense of lost childhood, not sorrow for lost banknotes. (*Conclusive Evidence* 40-41)

In *Conclusive Evidence* and *Speak, Memory*, respectively, before relating this passage, he spares his "general" English-speaking reader from the offensively alienating remarks, explaining that "The following passage is not for the general reader, but for a particular idiot who, because he lost a fortune in some crash, thinks he understands me" (*Speak, Memory* 73).

Another striking instance of Nabokov's awareness of where and by whom his work would be read is the opening sentence of Chapter 4. In *Conclusive Evidence* and *Speak, Memory*, respectively, it appears as follows: "The kind of Russian family to which I belonged – a kind

now extinct – had, among other virtues, a traditional leaning toward the comfortable products of Anglo-Saxon civilization" (45, 57). In *Drugie berega*, the defining phrase that is wrapped in em dashes in the English versions would have certainly antagonized the Soviet or even contemporary Russian readers, so Nabokov alters and adds to it:

> In the lifestyle of such families as ours, there was [a traditional leaning toward] all matters English: this word [English] by the way, was pronounced in our family with a classic stress (on the first syllable), but grandma M.F. Nabokov would say it in a very old-fashioned way: anglitski. (397, bracketed material is from Nabokov's own English translation as it appears in *Speak, Memory* 57).

The clause following the colon is presented as spontaneous and unimportant, but it reveals a moment of intimacy with a Russian reader, one marked by familiarity with and recognition of the Russian way of pronouncing the word "English." Russian speakers have the linguistic capacity to engage in the act of recognition and share the space of diasporic intimacy with the writer, to be initiated into a shared native discourse defined by sheer phonetics. Through his autobiographical project Nabokov explores textual and paratextual narrative devices to simultaneously and continuously expose and mend ruptured relationships, including the one with his Russian reader.

Nabokov's American fiction is not impervious to these preoccupations of winning acceptance. With the disappearance of Sirin, Nabokov began to fashion his American identity, obliging others to recognize "the fact that I am an American citizen and an American writer"

(qtd. in Boyd, *American Years* 3).[51] In a major way, writing *Lolita* was the "task of inventing America" ("On a Book Entitled *Lolita*" 312). Nabokov succeeds at capturing the immediacy of the most vital tropes of the American fifties culture, such as the prominence of the youth culture and prevalent infatuation with the road (Dickstein 125-6). Linguistically, *Lolita* is an exquisite "love affair with the English language"; it was originally written in English, and though Nabokov still felt uneasy about "abandon[ing] my natural idiom, my untrammeled, rich, and infinitely docile Russian tongue for a second-rate brand of English," he certainly impressed his readers and critics alike with the quality of his prose ("On a Book Entitled *Lolita"* 316-17). Both linguistically and thematically, *Lolita* is an epitome of Nabokov's departure from Russia and Europe; Morris Dickstein points out that in this novel "the writer transcends himself, escaping the airless world of some of his other novels to achieve a burning intensity in dealing with both love and the American landscape" (124). Having maintained the status of a national bestseller for over a year, *Lolita* re-entered the American cultural scene as Stanley Kubrick's film adaptation (Pifer 305-6).

However, this American masterpiece, coming into being in the midst of Nabokov's butterfly hunting trips at "such of our headquarters as Telluride, Colorado; Afton, Wyoming; Portal, Arizona; and Ashland, Oregon," was gestated and written concurrently with two major works dealing with exile and alienation, *Conclusive Evidence* (1951) and *Pnin* (1957) ("On a Book Entitled *Lolita* 312).[52] Moreover, while invoking the riches of the American scene in

[51] This quote is from Nabokov's letter to his publisher in which he expressed criticism that a new blurb for *Conclusive Evidence* did not place sufficient emphasis on his status as an American. In a letter to his sister, Yelena Sikorskaia, Nabokov proudly claims the Americans' reception of him as "an American writer, not a Russian professor" (21 January 1946, my translation).

[52] "CONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE and PNIN have been brief sunny escapes from [*Lolita*'s] intolerable spell" ("To Katharine A. White" 140, original emphasis).

Lolita, Nabokov was covertly paying heed to the trends in Russian literary tradition. In his discussion of Nabokov's translation of *Lolita*, one of Nabokov's prominent scholars Alexander Dolinin unveils the novel's "nourishing, though deeply hidden, roots" in "the culture of the Russian Silver Age with its stilted eroticism and its adoration of Edgar Allan Poe, Oscar Wilde, Maeterlinck, and the French *poètes maudits*," in "a Symbolist and post-Symbolist tradition (stretching from Briusov to Georgy Ivanov) of shocking explicit 'confessions' and 'diaries' that aestheticized sexual perversions," in "the images of Aleksandr Blok's poetry," and of course in "the themes and tropes of Vladimir Sirin's *Otchaianie* (*Despair*), *Dar* (*The Gift*), "*Volshebnik*" ("The Enchanter")" (322). Many of these roots have remained concealed to the American readers who focused, naturally, on the motifs familiar to them. In this sense, Nabokov set the bar very high for himself: to create a novel whose value was to be recognized in the literary and cultural contexts on both shores. Nabokov augured his novel's success in Russia where it had become the subject of copious criticism. In this sense, I agree with Dolinin that "the Russian *Lolita* should in fact be considered a *new redaction* of the novel, its second avatar in a parallel linguistic and cultural reality, rather than a bleak copy of the dazzling original" ("*Lolita* in Russian" 323).[53]

Lolita was not the only novel that was translated into Russian and gradually reached the Soviet and post-Soviet space. I would note, though, that autobiography enabled Nabokov's return to Russia more readily than did his fictional works. When asked to translate one of his English novels into Russian by the publisher, Nabokov opted to translate his memoir instead, even though he had several commitments at the time (Boyd, "Introduction" xxiv). The proximity between the narrating "I" and the reader affords the possibility of intimacy that cannot be

---

[53] Alexander Dolinin's essay "Nabokov as a Russian Writer" in Julian Connolly's *The Cambridge Companion to Nabokov* is an in-depth study of Nabokov's position within classical and modern Russian literature.

accomplished through fiction. Susanna Egan explains that in the attempt to create "a third, or hybrid, space from two or more places of origin, the autobiographer of diaspora discriminates among a plurality of possible positions, all incomplete and in continuous process, in order to recognize who speaks, who is spoken, and just who might be listening." The audience is then "closely implicated in the interactions that constitute even temporary meaning, and are accordingly required to be conscious of their own positions in relation to the autobiographer" (121). For Nabokov and his reader – Russian and American – the intimacy that is formed in this dialogue is rooted in linguistic accessibility and enabled by the first person narrative voice.

Unlike fiction, autobiography provided space in which the narrating "I" of a son, husband, and father could convey, revive, and build family intimacies. Language remains an important instrument in this endeavor. When remembering his parents, Nabokov cites their direct speech in transliterated Russian: "To love with all one's soul and leave the rest to fate, was the simple rule she heeded. 'Vot zapomni [now remember,] she would say in conspiratorial tones as she drew my attention to this or that loved thing in Vyra (*Speak, Memory* 25). He not only dedicates his book to Véra, but addresses her directly as "you" in several places. Yet, intimacy is not a part of Nabokov's elucidation of his book's thematic genealogy. Rather, tellingly, exile is "[p]ossibly the most moving theme in the book is the line of 'exile'" (Chapter 16, 249).[54] The profound sense of loss associated with exile naturally produces the impulse to protect and preserve what is most meaningful—memories, feelings, language, relationships. Items of the "unreal estate"

[54] In the voice of an acclaiming and insightful critic, Nabokov instructs his reader to look for thematic constellations rather than focus on individual tropes: "All thematic lines mentioned are gradually brought together, are seen to interweave or converge, in a subtle but natural form of contact which is as much a function of art, as it is a discoverable process in the evolution of a personal destiny" (Chapter 16, 250). In connecting exile to intimacy, I follow Nabokov's lead.

(*Speak, Memory* 26), they usually lie in the intimate domain. As Lauren Berlant points out, intimacy is "formed around threats to the image of the world it seeks to sustain" ("Intimacy" 7).

In Nabokov's adult life, the spaces of his life and his books were intimately shared with his wife Véra. Most of his books are dedicated to her. Véra's biographer Stacy Schiff explains:

> For many years he had been a national treasure in search of a nation; Véra was a little bit the country in which he lived. She, and Dmitri, allowed Nabokov what the world had tried to cheat him of: stability, privacy, an atmosphere of Old World taste and original humor, of strong opinion and exquisite, uncorrupted Russian. (299)

At the same time that Véra preserved and nurtured these Old World values, she joined her husband in embracing the New World through her involvement with his writing (including his correspondence with American publishers) and teaching for the American audience (Schiff 130-31). Schiff notes the special quality of Véra's presence in her husband's autobiography: evasively relentless; Véra's name is used only in the dedication and the index, so an inattentive reader may be perplexed when seeing "you" on several occasions in the text and realizing instantly that he/she is not the one being addressed (161). For example, Nabokov recalls butterfly hunting with Véra:

> It is astounding how little the ordinary person notices butterflies. 'None,' calmly replied that sturdy Swiss hiker with Camus in his rucksack when purposely asked by me for the benefit of my incredulous companion if he had seen any butterflies

> descending the trail where, a moment before, you and I had been delighting in swarms of them. (*Speak, Memory* 98-99)

Unlike his exiles Humbert and Pnin, Nabokov is not alone; he has Véra who shares deeply his interests and thoughts.

Nabokov's successive revisions of his autobiography afford not only a stronger bond with his general Russian and American reader, as I suggested earlier, but evidently also with Véra. On one occasion, the revision process takes Nabokov from a favorite childhood book, Mayne Reid's *Headless Horseman,* to the gratifying recovery-by-substitution of that image by a real-life scene. By the time he gets to *Speak, Memory*, he shares his triumphant discovery with Véra:

> The edition I had (possibly a British one) remains in the stacks of my memory as a puffy book bound in red cloth, with a watery-grey-frontispiece, the gloss of which had been gauzed over when the book was new by a leaf of tissue paper. I see this leaf as it disintegrated—at first folded improperly, then torn off—but the frontispiece itself, which no doubt depicted Louise Pointdexter's unfortunate brother (and perhaps a coyote or two, unless I am thinking of *The Death Shot*, another Mayne Reid tale), has been so long exposed to the blaze of my imagination that it is now completely bleached. (*Conclusive Evidence* 137-38)

> [The edition I had (possibly a British one) remains in the stacks of my memory as a plump book bound in red cloth, with a watery-grey frontispiece, the gloss of which had been gauzed over … by a leaf of tissue paper] to *preserve* it against the unknown threats. I recall the slow death of this *protective* leaf, [at first folded

improperly] in the ugly diagonal, and [then torn off]; [but the frontispiece itself] as if bleached by the blazing sun of boyhood imagination, I cannot recall—it [no doubt depicted Louise Pointdexter's unfortunate brother (and perhaps a coyote or two)] cactuses, spiky yucca —so, instead of that picture, I see from a rancho window a for-real South-western desert with cactuses, hear a morning [plaintive call of a quail – Cambel's Quail, … overwhelming me with a sense of undeserved attainments and rewards]. (*Drugie berega* 479, bracketed material is from Nabokov's own English translation as it appears in *Speak, Memory* 151)

The edition I had (possibly a British one) remains in the stacks of my memory as a puffy book bound in red cloth, with a watery-gray frontispiece, the gloss of which had been gauzed over when the book was new by a leaf of tissue paper. I see this leaf as it disintegrated – at first folded improperly, then torn off – but the frontispiece itself, which no doubt depicted Louise Pointdexter's unfortunate brother (and perhaps a coyote or two, unless I am thinking of *The Death Shot*, another Mayne Reid tale), has been so long exposed to the blaze of imagination that it is now completely bleached (but miraculously replaced by the *real* thing, as I noted when translating this chapter into Russian in the spring of 1953, and namely, by the view from a ranch *you and I* rented that year: a cactus-and-yucca waste whence came that morning the plaintive call of a quail – Gambel's Quail, I believe – overwhelming me with a sense of undeserved attainments and rewards). (*Speak, Memory* 151, emphasis added)

What in *Conclusive Evidence* comes across as yet another instance of irredeemable loss—the passage ends suggestively with the word "bleached"— in *Drugie berega* is already a discovery of the gratifying possibility of gain through reinvention. As the protective leaf fails to preserve (repeated word in the Russian version) the fragile picture against the blows of time, so does Mnemosyne, as Nabokov refers to memory, fail to retain the details of an image. True, Nabokov inherited his mother's affinity for "future retrospection," obsessive drive to concentrate on the particulars of experience so as to safely store them in the halls of memory for future retrieval, but he also realized that "retain[ing] the doomed, the departing, the lovely dying things" amounted to "pathetic attempts" (Chapter 16, 253). Being open to the possibility of reconstructing a scene in the present rather than retrieving it from the past constitutes a new exegetical field for future retrospection. At this crossroads of loss, reinvention, and commemoration through art, intimacy turns explicit, concretized through language. Its volatility and endurance are revealed at once. Véra shared with her husband the physical space of the rancho where, brought about by loss, the act of reinvention took place. Yet, she does not seem to have known back then about the miraculous substitution (Nabokov seems to be letting her know about his thoughts and discoveries only now in the book). Intimacy is regained, Nabokov suggests, when one can invite one's significant other into one's previously concealed thoughts and discoveries.

Earlier I cited the passage that links the completion of a chess game to Nabokov's first conscious acknowledgement of the ensuing move to the New World. In *Conclusive Evidence*, the passage is followed by these lines: "Everything around was very quiet; faintly dimpled, as it were, by the quality of my relief. Sleeping in the next room were my wife and child" (222). Intensely aware of the upcoming departure, Nabokov reassures himself of his wife and son's peaceful presence near him. In *Drugie berega* and *Speak, Memory,* "my wife" becomes "you,"

an indication that throughout the years of exile the family stayed intact and their intimacy not only survived, but grew stronger (530, 229). [55] In fact, in the fifties, the couple explored a new intimate space, a shared diary.[56] Throughout his life, Nabokov kept many datebooks in which he recorded among other things his daily chores, recipes, and literary notes. In one such book dated 1951, Nabokov's entries are complemented by Véra's. Stacy Schiff explains the chronology:

> As with most other demonstrations of self, [Véra] came to this one obliquely, if not accidently; the exercise may well have belonged to the my-husband-started-but-had-to-switch-to-something-else-in-a-hurry school. The datebook began its second life on Tuesday, May 20, 1958. Its first entry is in Vladimir's hand, though not entirely in his words: "Long distance has always a bracing effect, says Véra." […] The pages continue in a collaborative fashion, as only the Nabokovs could devise one; it is almost impossible to believe that the two were not sitting next to each other that May Tuesday. (225)

Indeed, the opening line of the first entry frames their shared life-writing as a ramification of the intense bracing effort. Véra's presence in the autobiography epitomizes the same ramification.

The last chapter, as it appears in *Conclusive Evidence*, *Drugie berega*, and *Speak, Memory*, respectively, is an extensive address to Véra. As Schiff suggests, considering the ample body of reminiscences Véra supplied for her husband's autobiographical adoption, the chapter

[55] In *Drugie berega* another sentence appears right before Vera is addressed: "Peering from under the sofa was a toy track" (530). Alluding perhaps to the upcoming move, it may have been edited out to avoid overemphasis.

[56] In the later period of Nabokov's life, he recorded Vera's and his dreams, pointing out recurrent motifs. This subject can be fruitfully explored in another study.

really "amounts to a tribute" (162).[57] This is the only chapter in the autobiography in which the narrating "I" continually engages "you," its life companion and confidant, while revisiting scenes from their life in Germany and France, and their departure to America. Vladimir, Véra, and Dmitri constitute the circle of characters that sets this chapter apart from the rest of the book, which revolved around Nabokov's extended family. None of the family members are addressed as "you" on those pages, perhaps because Nabokov's addressee has to be someone who cohabits the time and space with him in the moment of writing.[58] Although the "you" never speaks in the last chapter, it seems to be propelling the narrative momentum as a silent addressee whose tacit presence is necessary for the narrative of this chapter to begin ("The years are passing, my dear, and presently nobody will know what you and I know"), continue ("You remember the discoveries we made (supposedly made by all parents)"; "I think bourgeois fathers […] will not understand my attitude toward our child"; "You know, I still feel in my wrists certain echoes of the pram-pusher's knack"; "But whatever the truth may be, we shall never forget, you and I, we shall forever defend, on this or some other battleground, the bridges on which we spent hours waiting with our little son […] for a train to pass below") and end ("There, one last little garden surrounded us, as you and I, and our child, by now six, between us, walked through it on our way to the docks, where, behind the buildings facing us, the liner *Champlain* was waiting to take us to New York") (*Speak, Memory* 231, 233, 234, 236, 242).

[57] Also, see Schiff pp. 75-76; Nabokov himself admits that Vera helped him to translate *Conclusive Evidence* into Russian (Foreword to *Speak, Memory* 5); other family members contributed by clarifying certain details (Wood 90).

[58] Having fled Russia, Nabokov's mother and siblings lived in Europe, and he corresponded with them regularly.

By addressing Véra as "you," Nabokov adds an epistolary dimension to his autobiography. The form of an aestheticized letter suits particularly well the subject of exile, but in this chapter Nabokov inverts its customary function of reaching the loved ones across borders. While his letters to his mother and siblings (not a part of his autobiography) unavoidably reveal the distance separating them, his aestheticized letter to Vera who is beside him on the new land reveals only their wholesome intimacy granted a lasting existence through art.[59] Addressed to the significant other who has participated in the emigration with him, this chapter helps Nabokov to transform the experience of *dislocation* into *relocation*. He brings this distinction into a sharp focus by organizing the chapter around the theme of gardens and parks and zooming in on the image of roots:

> Roots, roots of remembered greenery, roots of memory and pungent plants, roots, in a word, are enabled to traverse long distances by surmounting some obstacles, penetrating others and insinuating themselves into narrow cracks. So those gardens and parks traversed Central Europe with us. (*Speak, Memory* 241)

The ocean of course interrupted this physical traverse, but spawned a new means to attain grounding through the following process: "Whenever I start thinking of my love for a person, I am in the habit of immediately drawing radii from my love – from my heart, from the tender nucleus of a personal matter – to monstrously remote points of the universe." Nabokov understands different registers of intimacy as existential anchors ("I have known people who, upon accidentally touching something – a doorpost, a wall – had to go through a certain very

[59] In *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form*, Janet Gurkin Altman defines the dual role of letters in epistolary fiction that can be usefully adopted with respect to epistolary autobiography: "Given the letter's function as a connector between two distant points, as a bridge between sender and receiver, the epistolary author can choose to emphasize either the distance or the bridge" (13).

rapid and systematic sequence of manual contacts with various surfaces in the room before returning to a balanced existence") and constituents of stability ("It cannot be helped; I must know where I stand, where you and my son stand") (*Speak, Memory* 232). What seems essential for Nabokov's conceptualization of the self as agency is its meditational position between the intimate and public domains.

His autobiography engenders a textual manifestation of this position at the reader-writer points of contact. In the preceding fourteen chapters, Nabokov identifies his readers as "the general reader" and "you," Véra, but in Chapter 15 whereby Véra's presence as "you" is more prevalent, the general reader is "displaced, invited to move over; or shown to have been eavesdropping all along, spying on a message meant for someone else" (Wood 99). Yet, Nabokov does not invite us to leave explicitly, as we know he would not hesitate to do (earlier he asked general reader to skip a passage and then resume reading). In other words, he implicitly asks us to stay. Plausibly, our presence is demanded to represent "the unknowledgeable beyond the unknown" to which he can draw the radii of love from the nucleus of his family (*Speak, Memory* 232). The events and impressions Nabokov recounts in this chapter are drawn from the private communication between him and Véra, as in the following depiction:

> On cold days [Dmitri] wore a lambskin coat, with a similar cap, both a brownish color mottled with rime-like gray, and these, and mittens, and the fervency of his faith kept him glowing, and kept *you* warm too, since all you had to do to prevent your delicate fingers from freezing was to hold one of his hands alternately in your right and left, switching every minute or so, and marveling at the incredible

> amount of heat generated by a big baby's body. (*Speak, Memory* 236-37, original emphasis)

Stemming from what is inherently a shared, intersubjective space of parenthood and of private communication, this intimate collaboration reveals the nature of their relationship in exile. Yet, in thinking about his feelings toward his family, he has "to have all space and all time participate in my emotion." Thus would be created a path to immortality, "helping me to fight the utter degradation, ridicule, and horror of having developed an infinity of sensation and thought within a finite existence" (*Speak, Memory* 232). A similar extroversive gesture of translating private autobiographical memory into language and then transmitting it into the world is lucidly expressed in the title *Speak, Memory*.

Since the outreach from the deeply intimate into the boundlessly public realm occurs with the help of the general reader through the epistolary form of the last chapter, the position of this reader demands closer attention. Michael Wood notes that the chapter facilitates "the intimacy of a text, of reading; we can share the couple's feelings only if we don't invade them" (99). The reader is not estranged, rather more deeply engaged as a result of this narrative shift to epistolarity. It imbues the text with playful vibrancy but ensures that it is not arbitrarily produced, certainly not by such a careful contriver as Nabokov. Janet Altman identifies three traits of epistolary discourse – *Particularity of the I-you*, a *Present Tense*, and *Temporal Polyvalence* -- and I would argue that Nabokov makes use of all three traits to keep his reader involved (117-18, original emphasis). The *particularity of the I-you* is unique to letter writing where the *I* is always narratively linked to *you*, in explicit or implicit terms. With the persistence of *you* in the last chapter, the reader comes to anticipate a further progression, and since this is the last chapter,

wishes for a culmination in dialogue. The addressed *you* does not turn into the narrating *I*; that is, not in the conventional sense. If the readers investigate the book's sources, however, they would find that Véra does have an expressive presence in the chapter since she supplied chunks of its content. To a more general group of readers, another surprise is in store: Véra assumes a visual, documented presence through her passport photo. Nabokov thus does fulfill our anticipation but in these unexpected ways.

Another attribute of epistolarity is that *a present tense* characterizes the moment in which a letter writer relates his/her story, becoming a temporal perch "from which he looks toward both past and future events." So, the "relationship of both temporal aspects to the present is important in the unfolding of letter narrative" (Altman 117-18). Nabokov has used the present time in the previous chapters but mainly to put forth a vision ("The cradle rocks above an abyss, and common sense tells us that our existence is but a brief crack of light between two eternities of darkness") or to give a specific reminiscence a sense of immediacy ("And now comes that bicycle act") (*Speak, Memory* 9, 162). In the opening passage of Chapter 15, however, Nabokov slips into a different narrative present shaped by the receptive role of his addressee. She is invited to join the narrator in recounting the past in order to build a relational context for their shared present and future:

> They are passing, posthaste, posthaste, the gliding years – to use a soul-rending Horatian inflection. The years are passing, my dear, and presently nobody will know what you and I know. Our child is growing; the roses of Paestum, of misty Paestum, are gone; mechanically minded idiots are tinkering and tampering with forces of nature that mild mathematicians, to their own secret surprise, appear to

> have foreshadowed; so perhaps it is time we examined ancient snapshots, cave drawings of trains and planes, strata of toys in the lumbered closet. (231)

Several snapshots, both written and visual, do follow. They depict Vladimir and Véra's delightful parental discoveries and park itineraries in Europe; they even offer a glimpse into their American future from the standpoint of the past:

> There, in front of us, where a broken row of houses stood between us and the harbor, and where the eye encountered all sorts of stratagems, such as pale-blue and pink underwear cakewalking on a clothesline, or a lady's bicycle and a striped cat oddly sharing a rudimentary balcony of cast iron, it was most satisfying to make out among the jumbled angles of roofs and walls, a splendid ship's funnel, showing from behind the clothesline as something in a scrambled picture – Find What the Sailor Has Hidden – that the finder cannot unsee once it has been seen. (243)

Ironically, both the opening and the closing passages of the chapter quoted above are oriented toward the future but from the different standpoints of the present and of the past. The narrating voice tricks us into thinking about the future – this becomes a rhetorical hook – but keeps the main action in the past.[60] In this way, Nabokov complicates what Altman describes as *temporal polyvalence*: "The temporal aspect of any given epistolary statement is relative to innumerable moments: the actual time that an act described is performed; the moment when it is written down; the respective times that the letter is dispatched, received, read, or reread" (118). Since in

[60] Nabokov considered the writer's role above all as a great enchanter: "There are three points of view from which a writer can be considered: he may be considered as a storyteller, as a teacher, and as an enchanter. A major writer combines these three—storyteller, teacher, enchanter—but it is the enchanter in him that predominates and makes him a major writer" ("Good Readers and Good Writers" 5).

Nabokov's work the threads of epistolary narrative are interpolated into a non-epistolary autobiographical text, we perceive the succession of these different times, but do not expect to trace their coordinates. In fact, we do not quite know what to expect. As Wolfgang Iser has long established, "expectations are scarcely ever fulfilled in truly literary texts. If they were, then such texts would be confined to the individualization of a given expectation, and one would inevitably ask what such an intention was supposed to achieve" (958). The only expectation Nabokov does set for his reader and faithfully fulfills is that whatever expectations we have are bound to be unmet.

A good example is still the opening passage of the last chapter ("They are passing, posthaste, posthaste, the gliding years"…). It prepares us for a spousal reminiscence occurring decades after the experience, though in reality only ten years had elapsed between the family's departure from Europe and the first publication of the chapter as "Gardens and Parks" in *The New Yorker* (Foreword to *Speak, Memory* 3-4). What follows – the motif of walks in gardens and parks running through several narrative segments -- does not warrant such an elegiac opening. The passage remains the same in all the editions, including *The New Yorker* essay, revealing Nabokov's invariably augmented sense of the temporal gap between the Russian/European and American years.

It also amplifies the note of finality that pervades the chapter, framing the book as indeed *conclusive* evidence. For instance, the last garden the family sees before boarding the ship is described as being "[l]aid out on the last limit of the past and on the verge of the present" (*Speak, Memory* 242). Véra's passport photo and its caption visually perform this transition. Nabokov's reader is to walk away from this final version of the autobiography with an unmistakable feeling

that the author and his family have successfully arrived; after all, the document attests to that. Yet, it is only the American reader that sees the photo, as *Speak, Memory* has not been translated into Russian. This becomes Nabokov's only way of demonstrating his arrival to himself and to the Americans around him. Also included in the final chapter is a photograph of two specimens of the butterfly *Plebejus (Lysandra) cormion* Nabokov "preserved in the American Museum of Natural History and figured now for the first time from photographs made by that institution (*Speak, Memory* 241, caption). The lengthy caption informs us that Nabokov published "the original description" of this butterfly in 1941; he provides detailed bibliographical information of his publication. American Museum of Natural History and *Journal of the New York Entomological Society* are the American sites where Nabokov's presence has been registered, and they are promptly mentioned in the chapter dedicated to the family's transition to America.[61]

After *Conclusive Evidence* had been revised and renamed *Speak, Memory*, Nabokov continued thinking of his sequel as *Speak On, Memory* or as *Speak, America* (Boyd, *American Years* 48). Regardless of the title, the new volume entailed a further verification of his arrival to the U.S. The book was first conceived as an amalgam of criticism, autobiography, and even fiction. In his diary book from 1951, Nabokov sketches a plan for fifteen chapters, paralleling the same number in *Speak, Memory*; having preliminary content only for chapters 1-9 and 15, he leaves blank the four numbers in between:[62]

[61] For more on Nabokov's use of photographs in *Speak, Memory*, see Laurence Petit's "Speak, Photographs? Visual Transparency and Verbal Opacity in Nabokov's *Speak, Memory*." Laurence focuses on narrative unreliability with regard to photographs depicting Russian life.

[62] Brian Boyd found a different sketch in Nabokov's archive in Montreux that consisted of "a chapter on his years at the M.C.Z., perhaps another on his butterfly hunting, one on his relationship with Edmund Wilson, one on his lecture tours, perhaps one on the car pool to Wellesley, another on Cornell, another on *Lolita*'s misfortunes and fortunes" (*American Years* 564).

1. Criticism and addenda of ‘conclusive Evidence’
2. Three Fences
3. Dreams
4. MC 2 and collecting (merge back into Russia)
5. St. Marks […]
6. Story I am doing now
7. Double Talk (enlayed)
8. Edmund W.
9. The assistant-professor […] who was never found not […]
10.
11.
12.
13.
14.
15. Criticism and additions […] to this

In time, this plan would change and eventually Nabokov would give up the idea of writing a sequel all together, basing his decision on the distinction between the types of material at hand. The “distant past” explored in the first part was akin to “highly organized poetry” whereas the “recent past” of *Speak On, Memory* would be “nothing but rough topical prose” (qtd. in Boyd, *American Years* 580-1).

Though only attempted, not executed, Nabokov’s autobiographical sequel sheds new light on his preoccupation with revision. Throughout his autobiographical endeavor, the posture of return and renewal was not new to Nabokov or his American readers. They were being repeatedly reassured that Vladimir Nabokov was a new American writer with a rich Russian and European background. But for Nabokov, serial writing had its own set of implications when it came to autobiography. As I tried to show on previous pages, compulsively pursuing the performative act of arrival and return, Nabokov conditioned his self-writing to operate in the recursive, serial mode through his multifarious translation. The inception of the second volume reveals the persistence of his iterative impulse: the aim to authenticate not only his arrival but

integrated existence in the new country; his preliminary chapter topics show his participation in the artistic, social, and scientific spheres of the American life.

The sequel could also function as a potent instrument in maintaining control over who would narrate the story of his life and how it is to be narrated -- that is, what patterns should be named as the constituents of its design. In the late 1960s Andrew Field, who would become Nabokov's first biographer, began gathering materials for his book:

> While Field looked ahead to Nabokov's biography, Nabokov himself looked back to a second volume of his autobiography […]. […] He wanted to impose artistic order on his life as he imposed physical order on his papers, and to set down his own inner view of his past before Field recorded the outer. (Boyd, *American Years* 564)

The issue of contested authorship recalls Nabokov's zeal in getting things right not only with respect to the factual truth, but also out of respect to and faith in the higher order of things. Nabokov saw in autobiographical writing an opportunity to elicit and express series of themes running through one's life, endowing it with shape and meaning: "One cannot but respect the amount of retrospective acumen and creative concentration that the author had to summon in order to plan his book according to the way his life had been planned by unknown players of games, and never to swerve from that plan" (Chapter 16, 250). In building his sequel, he becomes one of the unknown players. His initial outline for the new volume included fifteen chapters even though he had ideas only for ten. He envisaged the form prior to content, making sure it corresponded in its number of chapters to that of *Speak, Memory*.

A fiction writer who was also a lepidopteristand, and, I would note, an exile forced to move around the world by uncontrollable forces, Nabokov was zestfully seeking order and control through his narrative technique of patterning.[63] To understand its full scope, I want to briefly turn to Vladimir Alexandrov's book *Nabokov's Otherworld* whose premise that "an aesthetic rooted in [Nabokov's] intuition of a transcendent realm is the basis of his art" (3) illuminates the link between metaphysical and aesthetic dimensions of Nabokov's worldview.[64] Throughout Nabokov's fiction and autobiography, Alexandrov shows, this link "hinges on his seminal epiphanic experiences," while it is also "structurally congruent with a characteristic *formal* feature of his narratives, in which details that are in fact connected are hidden within contexts that conceal the true relations among them" (7, original emphasis). An example is a scene from childhood involving General Kuropatkin who amused young Vladimir by arranging matches in the way that showed the difference between calm and stormy sea.

> This incident had a special sequel fifteen years later," Nabokov reports, "when at a certain point of my father's flight from Bolshevik-held St Petersburg to southern Russia he was accosted while crossing a bridge, by an old man who looked like a gray-bearded peasant in his sheepskin coat. He asked my father for a light. The next moment each recognized the other.

[63] Brian Boyd correlates Nabokov's Lepidoptera with his disposition to remain in ardent control: "witness his refusal to submit to interviews unless he could have the questions in advance, write out his answers, and check the final text; or his insistence that his characters were his 'galley slaves'; or his famous comparison of the relationship between author and reader to that between chess problemist and problem solver; or his command of form at all levels, from phrase to finished fiction" ("Nabokov, Literature, Lepidoptera" 18). The link between exile and obsessive authorial control is further discussed in Galya Diment's "'Nabokov' Doesn't Rhyme with 'Love'?: On Love and Control in *Speak, Memory*."

[64] Alexandrov construes Nabokov's metaphysics as "Nabokov's faith in the apparent existence of a transcendent, non-material, timeless, and beneficent ordering and ordered realm of being that seems to provide for personal immortality, and that affects everything that exists in the mundane world" (5).

Nabokov's meta-conclusion is precise and succinct: "The following of such thematic designs through one's life should be, I think, the true purpose of autobiography" (*Speak, Memory* 15-16). It is implied here that the task of discerning and conveying thematic threads – reading art in life and transporting life into art – is to be performed best, if not exclusively, by the person who experienced them first-hand. Nabokov's reader is thus faced with a task to "either […] accumulate the components of a given series, or to discover the one detail that acts as the 'key' for it; when this is achieved, the significance of the entire preceding concealed chain or network is retroactively illuminated" (Alexandrov, *Otherworld* 7). The interaction between the author and his readers thus parallels what he saw as the interaction between the otherworldly "players of games" and the people of this world who spend their lifetimes deciphering fixed game plans arranged elsewhere in such delightful experiences as epiphanies.

For the author of such conviction, the autobiographical project could offer a complex meditational space where he could be simultaneously the reader and the author of the patterns governing his life. As Alexandrov maintains, in Nabokov's fiction the device of "textual patterning" epitomizes "the tantalizing possibility that there is only one correct way in which details can be connected, and one unique, global meaning that emerges from them" (*Otherworld* 14). Engaging in autobiographical writing is the closest he can get to both ascertaining and articulating what he perceives as the one and only correct path, the closest he can get to authoring his life.

The pursuit of authority and agency over one's life could be rendered a common motif for autobiographical writing, but for Nabokov the stakes are exceptionally high. On the one hand, his artistic philosophy aims to illuminate the aspects of existential purpose; while this purpose

may not be fully known through the means available in the physical world, it awaits a mind capable of recognizing and attempting to decipher it. Nabokov's notorious resistance to biographical inquiries demonstrates his lack of faith in other people's renditions of his life and art, his distrust in their ability to catch the echoes from the otherworld: Andrew Field's work about Nabokov was meticulously corrected; Nabokov's interviewers were required to show their questions in advance and receive written answers from Nabokov; and literary scholars were to face a "fifty-year restriction on the papers he deposited in the Library of Congress" (Boyd, *American Years* 611).

On the other hand, for Nabokov, who lived in exile for decades, authoring his life story entailed reaching an alignment between its different periods and places. Nina Khrusheva observes,

> Making sense of the present and future requires continuity with the past. Emigration painfully ruptured that continuity—life had to start anew. Time was broken—things and concepts familiar from before were no longer part of the current reality. So to create a meaningful past, Nabokov had to project artistic patterns of significance upon it retrospectively. (96-7)

David Carr describes this process in a more general framework of temporality, experience, and individual consciousness seeking narrative coherence. He turns to Frank Kermode to posit that "'we can perceive duration only when it is organized'" (qtd. in Carr 25). By narrating the past, however, we proceed retrospectively as well as prospectively, pursuing mnemonic channels for the sake of coherence in our existential stories that are heading forward: "a multiplicity of activities and projects, spread out over time and even existing simultaneously in the present, calls

for an active reflection that attempts to put the whole together" (75). Carr also notes that autobiographical practices are differently contextualized but ubiquitously recurrent pursuits, and as such they are "often occasioned by the transitions and stages of life. We are composing and constantly revising our autobiographies as we go along" (76). When approaching an autobiographical text, readers who are interested in the author's autobiographical motivations take a retroactive route, trying to re-activate the circumstances that spurred autobiographical production. Nabokov sends us on this route several times, and every time we end up in the same place of exilic crisis. In Susanna Egan's words, "crisis is an unstable condition seeking change" (5). The change can be sought, Nabokov tells us, but never quite achieved, for he seeks, and seeks endlessly, the inherently contradicting, mutually destructive dreams of return and departure. When each autobiographical revision takes us back to the same moment of loss, we realize that it was successively re-lived by the author. To author an autobiography thus entails the inherently counterintuitive inclination to re-experience crisis and an attempt to resolve it.

Nabokov's textual revisions, his intended sequel included, evince his urge to confront the imminent collapse of the previously constructed life-governing pattern, and his readiness, if not compulsion, to face the challenge of reconstructing it. In this process, the need for folding and unfolding the pattern of his life narrative is Nabokov's, so the prerogative is also his. One interviewer, James Mossman, explicated this causal link in his question to Nabokov: "Do you manipulate the past in order to combat life at its less harmonious?" Nabokov admitted with arresting confidence the blurred boundary between experience and its autobiographical rendition: "My existence has always remained as harmonious and green as it was throughout the span dealt with in my memoirs, that is from 1903 to 1940" (*Strong Opinions* 145). Saying nothing about the aspect of manipulation inherent in autobiographical authoring, Nabokov covertly draws attention

to the fact that his existence would *not* have been harmonious and green had it not been composed as such by him in his memoirs.

In positing a narrative and existential alignment, Nabokov exemplifies a major premise of Paul John Eakin's seminal work *Living Autobiographically* that we conceive of our life experiences and our role in them as subjects through narrative practices. These can range from talking about the self internally or with others to stylized autobiographies. Eakin draws on the studies in psychology, neurobiology, and anthropology to deliver a lucid conclusion: "narrative is not only a literary form but part of the fabric of our lived experience. When it comes to our identities, narrative is not merely *about* self, but is rather in some profound way a constituent part *of* self" (2, original emphasis). If narrative and identity are so tightly linked, then one's *manner* of narration can reveal one's conception of the self and its interaction with the world.

Nabokov's self-narrative is conspicuously marked by repetition. At the plot level, events are frequently presented in the narrative categories of prequels and sequels, as in the case with the General Kuropatkin story. Nabokov calls the second story a "sequel" because all the main characters reappear in the scene, and what brings them together is the same figure of the matches. Standing on its own, the new story would not have such a rich meaning. Nabokov is fascinated by the returned presences that create and follow their own narrative logic, denouncing the rules of unidirectional, chronological progression. Among many other instances of thematically correlated events flashing across the temporal spectrum, there is a beautiful moment of what Alexandrov has fittingly called "cross-generational patterning" (44). In the last chapter, Nabokov recalls his son finding a piece of broken pottery on the beach that miraculously "fitted exactly, and continued, the pattern of a fragment I had found in 1903 on the same shore, and that the two

tallied with a third my mother had found on that Mentone beach in 1882, and with a fourth piece of the same pottery that had been found by *her* mother a hundred years ago" (*Speak, Memory* 242). Inclined to observe or imagine an endless continuity of experience, Nabokov is able to find the way out of the "prison" of time (10). Sometimes, however, a steadily pulsating experience is none other than a repeated "rehearsal" that never ends in performance. Describing his first "*conscious* return" home from an unusually long trip, he sadly admits that it was a rehearsal of what would become an incessant dream of return from exile (*Speak, Memory* 71, original emphasis).

Outside of the textual domain, Nabokov continued seeking recurrent thematic tropes in his life; not surprisingly, their contours were defined by his exilic moves. In a 1965 interview, Nabokov was asked: "You're responsible for brilliant summaries of the lives and works of Pushkin and Gogol. How would you summarize your own?" His response reveals a predilection for repetitions, in this case temporal:

> It is not so easy to summarize something which is not quite finished yet. However, as I've pointed out elsewhere, the first part of my life is marked by a rather pleasing *chronological neatness.* I spent my first twenty years in Russia, the next twenty in Western Europe, and the twenty years after that, from 1940 to 1960, in America. I've been living in Europe again for five years now, but I cannot promise to stay around another fifteen so as to retain the rhythm. (*Strong Opinions* 52, emphasis added)

In the same vein, he sought out comparable repetitions in trying to frame his nostalgia: "I think I am trying to develop, in this rosy exile [Montreux], the same fertile nostalgia in regard to

America, my new country, as I evolved for Russia, my old one, in the first post-revolution years of West-European expatriation" (*Strong Opinions* 49). If the repetition is not exact, its mechanism still persists in the form of substitution: "The emotions of my Russian childhood have been replaced by new excitements, by new mountains explored in search of new butterflies, by a cloudless family life, and by the monstrous delights of novelistic invention" (*Strong Opinions* 145). The new experiences are not evaluated for their own virtue here, but for the level of intensity they share with his treasured emotions; their capability to replace those emotions *is* their virtue.

Nabokov's iterative narrative practices are evident even beyond the thematics of self-experience. As Alexandrov has shown, they form the core of his relationship with the readers of his fiction and autobiography alike (*Nabokov's Otherworld* 7). When he scatters details and symbols to be garnered by a careful reader, he promises an epiphany, but, as we soon learn, it can come only as a result of recursive reading. "Curiously enough, one cannot *read* a book: one can only reread it. A good reader, a major reader, an active and creative reader is a rereader," Nabokov believes. Upon re-reading, we would be prompted to disregard the "terms of space and time" implicated in the physical act of turning the pages and following lines and develop a holistic sense of appreciation akin to our perception of a painting: "The element of time does not really enter in a first contact with a painting." The repetition we experience as a part of our reading process is inherently twofold: we are re-reading to make meaning for ourselves, but in doing so we are re-creating the trajectory of the author and thus take part in *his* creative process. This is exactly what Nabokov demands in his characteristically patriarchal manner: "Since the master artist used his imagination in creating his book, it is natural and fair that the consumer of a book should use his imagination too" ("Good Readers" 3, 4). The consumer would be rewarded

for the effort by learning in turn to discern meaningful patterns in his/her world and thus come to appreciate it. So, the author and his readers thus learn to disregard the "element of time" in their understanding of life narratives. In the process of re-reading Nabokov's work, we revisit our own life stories in new patterned and pattern-seeking ways (Boyd, *American Years* 164).We learn to survey our lives to find/construct our own evidence that "this world is not as bad as it seems" (Chapter 16, 261).

Since repetition was such a predominant experiential and artistic trope in Nabokov's world, it is understandable why the sequel *Speak on, Memory* continued growing into an exceedingly compelling project. In 1964 when Nabokov was already living in Montreux, he returned to the project with renewed interest: "the rereading of my stuff [*Speak, Memory*] has made me prodigiously anxious of writing the 'American' second part" (*Notes for Work in Progress*). Now the American past was further away in time and space than it had been when he first contemplated the sequel in the early 1950s. Yet, as Nabokov claimed, it was not distant enough. That this alluring project did not become a book, a new challenge and delight in detecting new patterns while also expanding the existing ones, requests more attention.

Nabokov's steady commitment to autobiographical work readily subscribes him to Leigh Gilmore's theorization of serial autobiography: "Writing beyond the limit of one autobiography is a way to resist the little death that ending an autobiography represents" (97). His textual returns to the first volume aimed precisely at conquering death, but in his view the chronological progression implied in the sequel of his life story that he liked to define by spatial moves -- Russian/European Years to American Years -- did not prove the best weapon. After moving to Switzerland in 1961, Nabokov returned to his autobiography in two ways: by drafting a sequel

and by translating/revising *Drugie berega* into *Speak, Memory*. Why did he ultimately carry out the latter and dismiss the former? Perhaps because the latter involved reaffirming and/or introducing thematic patterns that disregarded the rules of chronological progression and followed instead the logic of correspondences. When producing autobiographical sequels in his journal essays (a process he dubbed "erratic sequence") or admittedly in the General Kuropatkin story, Nabokov did not equate seriality with linearity (Foreword to *Speak, Memory* 4). The sequel to *Speak, Memory* organized around Nabokov's American years would have indicated the passage of time toward the scarier one of the "two eternities of darkness" (*Speak, Memory* 9). In the human quest for coherence, a sequential view of experience is identified with chaos: "It is at such times, moments of 'distraction' and disconnection, that the events, experiences and actions of real life do indeed assume the character of a 'mere sequence,' the senseless progression of 'one thing after another' so often mentioned in [Heidegger's] theories [of *Angst* and of *Zerstreutsein*]" (Carr 88). Nabokov's reflections on the nature of time in the piece "On Time and Its Nature," a part of his 1971 interview, convey a strikingly similar view: "Time, though akin to rhythm, is not simply rhythm, which would imply motion—and Time does not move" (*Strong Opinions* 186). He understands time as Van Veen, the character from *Ada*, does: as a "'fluid medium for the culture of metaphors'" (qtd. in *Strong Opinions* 186). In the autobiography, we can observe the fluidity of spatial metaphors through which Nabokov finds echoes of experience across time and space: a special floral scent common in the Crimea is discovered later in the American South (*Speak, Memory* 211) ;[65] the snow from the night of Mademoiselle's imagined arrival to Russia in the midst of winter is felt as "real" in America (*Speak, Memory* 74). In this paradigm, no demarcations exist between the three time frames, so conceptually time remains

[65] Susan Sweeney addresses Nabokov's practice of "transposing one country with another" to "compensate for his exile"; she concentrates mainly on the revealing verbal substitutions (66).

"free of content and context" and experientially it is a substance in which "[t]he Past is also part of the tissue, part of the present, but it looks somewhat out of focus" (*Strong Opinions* 186).

With respect to his own life story, Nabokov locates a temporal scheme based on a Hegelian dialectic of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis:

> The spiral is a spiritualized circle. In the spiral form, the circle, uncoiled, unwound, has ceased to be vicious; it has been set free. I […] discovered that Hegel's triadic series […] expressed merely the essential spirality of all things in their relation to time. Twirl follows twirl, and every synthesis is the thesis of the next series. If we consider the simplest spiral, three stages may be distinguished in it, corresponding to those of the triad: We can call 'thetic' the small curve or arc that initiates the convolution centrally; 'antithetic' the larger arc that faces the first in the process of continuing it; and 'synthetic' the still ampler arc that continues the second while following the first along the outer side. And so on.
>
> A colored spiral in a small ball of glass, this is how I see my own life. The twenty years I spent in my native Russia (1899-1919) take care of the thetic arc. Twenty-one years of voluntary exile in England, Germany and France (1919-1940) supply the obvious antithesis. The period spent in my adopted country (1940-1960) forms a synthesis – and a new thesis. (*Speak, Memory* 215)

Although life is construed as chronologically divided here, Nabokov understands each segment of the time past in terms of its inclusion in the time present and thus seeks to synthesize rather than separate his experience into neat chronological chambers. The very act of telling of Russian

and European memories in the American autobiography embodies synthesis that is also a new thesis: the author's American life is indelibly colored and contextualized by the periods he had spent in other countries. The richness and poignancy of such multifarious existence is conveyed in the deeply poetic passage concerning Mademoiselle's arrival to the snowy Russia as witnessed by the author's "proxy":

> Very lovely, very lonesome. But what am I doing in this stereoscopic dreamland? How did I get here? Somehow, the two sleighs have slipped away leaving behind a passportless spy standing on the blue-white road in his New England snowboots and stormcoat. The vibration in my ears is no longer their receding bells, but only my old blood singing. All is still, spellbound, enthralled by the moon, fancy's rear-vision mirror. The snow is real, though, and as I bend to it and scoop up a handful, sixty years crumble to glittering frost-dust between my fingers. (*Speak, Memory* 73-4)

The prisms of Nabokov's memory and imagination work according to the laws of "'cosmic synchronization,'" the phenomenon of perceptual multitasking common to poets and alien to scientists: "while the scientist sees everything that happens in one point of space, the poet feels everything that happens in one point of time" (*Speak, Memory* 169).[66] A distant exercise in 'cosmic synchronization' occurs in a bedtime moment from childhood when, mesmerized by his mother's "pigeon-blood ruby and diamond ring" he "might have seen a room, people, lights, trees in the rain—a whole period of émigré life for which that ring was to pay"

[66] For more on Nabokov's understanding of timelessness through 'cosmic synchronization' in *Speak, Memory*, see pages 23-57 in Alexandrov's *Nabokov's Otherworld*.

(*Speak, Memory* 59). Here, as in the previous passage, temporal frames are aligned symmetrically, not sequentially, which allows him to perceive temporally distant events in the same experiential modality of the present.

Why does Nabokov choose to talk about timelessness through synthesis? In the context of temporality, synthesis is generated by retrospection, which in turn operates as repetition: the events of the thetic and anti-thetic arcs are necessarily repeated when by means of narration they are coalescing and transforming each other. The mechanism of repetition so crucial to Nabokov's cognitive and narrative practices has an immeasurable asset for an exilic mind: it preempts loss.[67] When translated or replaced, past events may take on new, broader meanings, but they do not cease to exist. Re-scripted on Nabokov's pages, they reappear so as not to disappear, inspiring such syntactically balanced and reassuring statements as "Everything is as it should be, nothing will ever change, nobody will ever die" (*Speak, Memory* 56). The poignancy of this sentence of course lies in the fact that nothing is as it should be, everything has already changed, and people did die. In resisting loss, Nabokov also enacts it, returns to it, validates it – endlessly. And such are the contradictory potentialities of repetition, autobiographical or otherwise: "If repetition makes us ill, it also heals us; if it enchains and destroys us, it also frees us, testifying in both cases to its 'demonic' power. All cure is a voyage to the bottom of repetition" (Deleuze 19).

[67] André Aciman identifies loss as a "key" in which "exile reads change, […], time, memory, self, love, fear, beauty" ("Shadow Cities" 22). Eva Hoffman, inspired by Nabokov, believes "[l]oss is a magical preservative" made such through memory's "retrospective maneuvers" (qtd. in Hoffman, "The New Nomads" 35).

Chapter 3: Psychic Trauma, Mourning, and Autobiographical Conversation

Is getting well ever an art,
or art a way to get well?
-- Robert Lowell, "Unwanted," *Day by Day*

Alas, I can only tell my own story—
talking to myself, or reading, or writing,
or fearlessly holding back nothing from a friend,
who believes me for a moment
to keep up conversation.
-- Robert Lowell, "Unwanted," *Day by Day*

In the essay "After Enjoying Six or Seven Essays on Me," Robert Lowell gives *Life Studies* (1959) a central place in his oeuvre: "Looking over my *Selected Poems*, about thirty years of writing, my impression is that the thread that strings it together is my autobiography, it is a small-scale *Prelude*, written in many different styles and with digressions, yet a continuing story—still wayfaring" (992). Following the metrical and densely metaphorical poems of his first three books — *Land of Unlikeness* (1944), *Lord Weary's Castle* (1946), and *The Mills of the Kavanaughs* (1951) — the free verse and explicitly personal revelations of *Life Studies* have earned Lowell the reputation as a brilliant pioneer of the new poetic school of confessional poetry. M.L. Rosenthal coined the term *confessional* in his review of *Life Studies*, noting later that he "meant it to have a very special meaning. It was poetry that gave the game away shamelessly but was redeemed aesthetically by the artistic quality which it achieved at the same time" ("Remembering Lowell," Meyers 219). Lowell himself challenged the notion of confession, admitting to the "tinkering with fact" and "a lot of artistry" that occurred within his work ("Interview with Frederick Seidel" 246).

In the history of the Lowell scholarship, the term gained a range of implications: disclosure as a form of violence against the other and the self, followed by apology (M.L. Rosenthal); catharsis (Bowen); "the public avowal of a point of view," namely the "poverty of the ideology of the family that dominated postwar culture" and the emergence of "poetic truth from the actual pain given and taken in the context of family life, especially as experienced by children" (Middlebrook 648). However, what his critics rushed to deem confession, Lowell himself saw first and foremost as conversation: "In *Life Studies* I was very anxious to get a tone that sounded a little like conversation" (Lowell, Alvarez "Robert Lowell in Conversation" 79).[68] Lowell further downplays the performative aspect of his work when he bluntly states, "I fear the performance. I expand on stage and feel bloated." He admits, "I am no convert to the 'beats.' I know well, too, that the best poems are not necessarily poems that read aloud" ("On 'Skunk Hour' 227). What Lowell finds valuable in the Beat poetry is not its auditory appeal, but candor and accessibility – vehicles for the new forms of interaction, reciprocity, and potentially intimacy with the reader. Lowell states: "I hoped to write poems as pliant as conversation, so clear a listener might get every word, and I would" ("Conversation with Hamilton" 284).

In this chapter, I posit that *Life Studies* must be explored not solely in relation to confession, regardless of how one reads this term, but also with heightened attention to its conversational aesthetic. This perspective can stimulate a new set of critical and theoretical inquiries, but of special interest to me here are the reparative potentialities of the autobiographical act for the writer – and for the reader too -- that it brings to the limelight. Thus, I engage with the notion of conversation in order to understand the triangulated relationship

[68] Here, Lowell voices the defining quality of free verse: its conversational tone. Mary Oliver describes the form in similar terms: "Speech entered the poem. The poem was no longer a lecture, it was time spent with a friend. Its music was the music of conversation" (70).

between trauma, autobiography, and form in *Life Studies*. I focus mainly on the two overtly personal sections of the volume "91 Revere Street" and "Life Studies" since their geneses are poised conspicuously at the threshold of trauma: Lowell's parents' deaths and his mental breakdown. I examine these sections in relation to the preceding prose drafts, as well as Lowell's later autobiographical poems with similar thematics. Read alongside each other, these texts illustrate that a continual conversation governs Lowell's relationship with his reader and also with the two main characters inhabiting his autobiographical space: his recently deceased parents. Writing in the aftermath of traumatic events, Lowell construes autobiography as a medium of interaction and produces what critic Deborah Nelson has called the "poetic intimacy":

> Lowell's breaking of his characteristically dense line was a gesture of invitation that transformed the reader's relationship to the poem. His innovation was to make himself—the "real Robert Lowell" as James Merrill noted—available, not as abstract and universal poet but as a particular person in a particular place and time. (45)

While Nelson touches mainly on the reader's experience, I attend also to the value of conversational poetics for Lowell, emphasizing the fact that he wrote autobiography while coping with the traumas of his parents' deaths and his manic episode. This vantage point illuminates how the elements of mourning, rupture, and reparation repeatedly mobilize the gestures of disclosure and dialogue in *Life Studies* and beyond. I find that through the mechanisms of language and memory, these gestures epitomize the attempts to reconstruct forms of intimacy that either had never existed or been shattered. What we see emerging in *Life Studies* are in fact multiple, interdependent, unsettling, yet mutually empowering intimacies.

In the two decades preceding *Life Studies*, Lowell experienced a series of traumatic ruptures. In 1943, he was arrested for refusing to serve in the war. In 1948, he divorced Jean Stafford and disconnected from Catholicism. Overall, Lowell perceived a wide gap between the thirties, "a period of parties and politics," and the decades that followed, being infused with the inescapable threat of the atomic bomb.[69] His three earlier books were written during or in the aftermath of the war when the notions of "violence, heroism" were "everyday matters and […] governed my style." Apocalypse intermingled with heroism in ways unprecedented, incomprehensible, and overwhelming:

> Things seemed desperate. Even though our cities weren't bombed you felt they might be, and we were destroying thousands of people. The world seemed apocalyptic at that time, and heroically so. I thought that civilisation was going to break down, and instead *I* did. (Lowell, Alvarez "Robert Lowell in Conversation" 77, original emphasis)[70]

The breakdown to which Lowell refers here could be one or both of his manic episodes occurring in 1952 and 1954. What he does not say is that the gripping terror of existential collapse was compounded by the deaths of his parents: Robert Lowell Senior's in 1950 and Charlotte Lowell's in 1954. His mother's death in fact triggered his breakdown, leading to hospitalization at Payne

---

[69] The bomb is represented in the natural images of sun and moon in "Man and Wife" ("the rising sun in war paint dyes us red") and "Fall 1961" ("Our end drifts nearer, / the moon lifts, / radiant with terror.").

[70] In fact, some critics read *Life Studies* as a reflection of social chaos. In the dust jacket blurb to *Life Studies*, Elizabeth Bishop wrote: "A poem like 'My Last Afternoon with Uncle Devereux Winslow,' or 'Skunk Hour,' can tell us much about the state of society as a volume of Henry James at his best" (in Axelrod, *Critical Response* 63). Kevin Stein finds in *Life Studies* a deep sense of connection between the private and public maladies. Axelrod points out that *Life Studies* is not just about family, but "culture in decline" (*Robert Lowell*, 104). I discuss this in more depth later in the chapter.

Whitney clinic. Ian Hamilton, Lowell's biographer, explains: "Lowell knew that during the later stages of this last episode his delusions had been neither Christ-like nor Napoleonic, and that more notably than in earlier episodes, there had been a regression to the infantile: the mother's boy no longer had a mother" (220).

After his release from the hospital, Lowell moved to Boston with his wife Elizabeth Hardwick where he began his "ancestor-worship" (qtd. in Hamilton 225). Doctors prescribed psychotherapy and self-analysis, which soon grew into "yards of prose," that is, autobiographical prose ("To Peter and Eleanor Ross Taylor" 244). From the start, the project was fueled mainly by Lowell's therapeutic needs: "I am writing my autobiography literally to 'pass the time.' I almost doubt if the time would pass at all otherwise. However, I also hope the result will supply me with swaddling clothes, with a sort of immense bandage of grace and ambergris for my hurt nerves," Lowell wrote in one of his early drafts ("Near" 362). In this way, Lowell made a transition to a new stage in his career. Autobiography now epitomized a new genre, prose a fitting medium. But while writing his autobiographical prose, in 1957 Lowell went on the reading tour on the West Coast where he heard Ginsberg and realized that his previous poems "hid what they were really about, and many times offered a stiff, humorless, and even impenetrable surface…. I was reciting what I no longer felt" (Lowell, "On 'Skunk Hour'" 227). He "began to have a certain disrespect for the tight forms" and started exploring free verse; its subject matter remained autobiographical (Lowell, "Interview with Frederick Seidel" 243). The first poem written in this new style was "Skunk Hour," now appearing last in *Life Studies* (Lowell, "On 'Skunk Hour' 227). In his choice of form, Lowell was guided mainly by the demands of his material:

> When I was working on *Life Studies*, I found I had no language or meter that would allow me to approximate what I saw or remembered. Yet in prose I had

> already found what I wanted, the conventional style of autobiography and reminiscence. So I wrote my autobiographical poetry in a style I thought I had discovered in Flaubert, one that used images and ironic or amusing particulars. ("After Enjoying" 992-3)

By Lowell's own admission, the association between autobiography and prose and, soon, free verse did not prove enduring:

> In *The Union Dead*, I modified the style of *Life Studies*—free-verse stanzas, each poem on its own and more ornately organized. Then came metrical poems, more plated, far from conversation, metaphysical. My subjects were still mostly realism about my life. ("Conversation with Hamilton" 269)

Lowell's life was "the spine" of his later work *Notebook*, but here too he wrote in a "more difficult and complicated" style, believing that "more can perhaps be said thrusting through complication" (Lowell, "Talk" 151-2).

This shift in form between *Life Studies* and Lowell's subsequent autobiographical poetry suggests that the loose flow of prose and free verse was intrinsically related to the material of *Life Studies* and therefore associated with the critical circumstances of his life at the time.[71] Lowell admits, "regular beat was what I didn't want" because regularity was the quality decidedly alien to his content; as such, it threatened to "ruin the honesty of sentiment" ("Interview with Frederick Seidel" 243). Perhaps, his initial decision to compose autobiography in prose had less to do with Flaubert and stylistic conventions of the genre and more with the

[71] The only other piece of prose "The Raspberry Sherbet Heart" can be found in Lowell's archive at the Houghton Library; it is undated, but it has been deduced that Lowell wrote it after *Life Studies*. However, here, Lowell uses prose to experiment with autobiographical fiction: he draws from his family life in New York of the 1960s to construct a short story (Witek 3).

traumatic events occurring in his life. Perhaps, ultimately it is not autobiography but crisis that resists meter.[72] The nuanced variations in form that occur within *Life Studies* attest to that: when the plot implicates personal trauma – Lowell's troubled relationship with parents, their deaths, and his mental illness – Lowell turns from the persona-dominated poems filled with religious, historical, and literary subjects to either overtly autobiographical prose ("91 Revere Street") or transparent and direct, first-person free verse narratives ("Life Studies" sequence).[73] In fact, some of the less revealing poems of *Life Studies* were written earlier and modified, "heavily shaken up" and "'reinspired'" in Lowell's words, to appear more consistent with the style of the book ("Conversation with Hamilton" 269). In other words, the writing generated for the first time after the traumatic events of the fifties comprises only "91 Revere Street" and "Life Studies." The prose of "91 Revere Street" was produced in 1956 and the poems of "Life Studies" in 1957, soon after he had heard Ginsberg. Yet, some material for the "Life Studies" sequence had been generated in prose prior to the West Coast readings. So, from the start of his project, independently from the Beats, Lowell was interested in initiating conversation by writing about his life in the way that was maximally transparent and accessible.

In addition to Deborah Nelson's *Pursuing Privacy in Cold War America*, two other scholarly inquiries into *Life Studies* have touched on the subject of conversation and intimacy,

---

[72] That many of Lowell's poems in *Life Studies* were begun as ruminations in prose gives credence to this claim, which will be further developed in the chapter.

[73] The autobiographical self permeates all sections equally, but in Parts 1 and 3, this self must be discerned through other individuals, notably writers, as well as in the political and religious events described in "Beyond the Alps" "Inauguration Day: January 1953." Steven Gould Axelrod points out the relationship between the overtly and covertly personal poems of *Life Studies*: "The title characters of 'The Banker's Daughter' and 'A Mad Negro Soldier Confined at Munich' are the first among many exiles, madmen, and prisoners populating the pages of *Life Studies*, all in some measure standing for Lowell himself" (*Life and Art*, 103).

but their approaches are quite different from mine. In his essay "Freud and the Skunks: Genre and Language in *Life Studies*," Lawrence Kramer pursues a Freudian reading of the relationship between language and life history in *Life Studies.* He points out Lowell's prime rhetorical strategy of replacing the "anonymous confessional interlocutor" with figures of apostrophes throughout the book and offers two psychoanalytic explanations. In a general sense, "[t]his rhetorical turn regularly represents both a resistance to the mute unresponsiveness that is built into the confessional mode and a concomitant demand for intimacy, dependency, touch." The latter is undermined, Kramer maintains, because an "apostrophe is always addressed to someone who cannot listen to it," so a substitution occurs wherein apostrophes "set beloved, intimate others in the place of the silent, anonymous Other to whom the poetry of *Life Studies* is really addressed." Kramer understands this elaborate address as Lowell's unsuccessful attempt to fulfill his Oedipal sexuality (82-3). Throughout his essay, Kramer pursues a psychoanalytic reading of Lowell's conversation in verse, recognizing patterns of interlocution that involve not just the general reader, but the Oedipal Other. In this frame of thought, however, the family as audience is either an absent or a passive confidant entrusted with the speaker's repressed desires; the volume provides a window into the speaker's "*unconscious* motives"; multiplicity of voices reflect thwarted identifications and the speaker's "volatile subjectivity" (96, 87 original emphasis). My discussion of Lowell's use of apostrophes as a way to construct intimacy parallels Kramer's, but while he concentrates on the *absence* of the addresses, I build my analysis on how Lowell endows them with a *presence* in his poetic space.

Terri Witek's book *Robert Lowell and Life Studies* also explores the relationship between form, language and the concept of the self in *Life Studies*. Witek engages with the autobiography scholar Paul Jay who identifies the "ongoing problem of all autobiographical writing" as the

question of "… how to use one medium—language—to represent another medium—being" (qtd. in Witek 6), drawing attention to the fact that "in the early 1950s, both style and self were in jeopardy" for Lowell, which ultimately resulted in "one of the most amazing self-help projects of twentieth-century literary history" (7).[74] This line of reasoning shows the significance of multiple others in *Life Studies*, but only insofar as they serve as variations of Lowell's own self. To show Lowell's pursuits of self-identification with the various others, Witek explores his production of and confrontation with "dual choices: between male and female, between Mother and Father, between fixity and freedom, between prose and poetry" (64). Emerging through these is the figure of a fragmented self, Witek concludes. She understands *Life Studies* as a story of the unstable ego searching for definition, grounding, and form through multiple incarnations of the Other. This quest is not the product of a dynamic, reciprocal communication, though, but of projection -- the deployment of passive relational others that repeatedly shed light on the speaker's own sense of self. Conversational poetics explored in such a way serve the ego alone rather than this ego's relationship with the other egos; there is no room for venturing out of its shell, but only to solidify this shell's shape and borders, productively or otherwise. While I do not doubt the plausibility of this psychoanalytic reading and the idea of relational selfhood it promotes, I want to direct attention to Lowell's eager engagement in conversation throughout *Life Studies.* I would argue that he treats this work as a venue not merely for identity quest, but for the meaningful interactions that had enabled that quest in the first place.

The family reminiscences of "91 Revere Street" and "Life Studies" expose the processes of mourning and reparation whereby interlocution is a central preoccupation and a major drive. Evidently, from the start of his project, one of Lowell's private tasks was to redress strained

[74] Paul Jay derives his focus from Paul de Man who argues in "Autobiography as De-facement" that the process of producing autobiographical self is governed strictly by the capacities of language (Witek 6).

communication with his mother. In 1951, Lowell described his mother to Elizabeth Bishop as "a very competent, stubborn, uncurious, unBohemian woman with a genius for squeezing luxury out of rocks." Her dominance over her son and husband had long alienated Lowell. In the same letter to Bishop, he explained their estrangement in the terms of failed communication: "Well, under the best conditions, of course, I can't begin to make sense of her or to her" (126). However, shortly before her death, Lowell visited his mother in Boston where the dynamics of their relationship began to change. Immediately after her passing, Lowell rushed to inform his friends and relatives of the breakthrough in their communication. Ian Hamilton writes: "[I]t was the first time he had been alone with his mother for any length of time since 1951: 'We were alone,' he later said, 'and talked over almost everything. That's how it was'" (200). Lowell described the same experience to Harriet Winslow, specifying that they were able to hit a fortunate note of productive communication and reconciliation before Charlotte Lowell's sudden death in Rapallo: "Not knowing anything of the future for Mother, we *did* get on so well and said so much" ("To Harriet Winslow" 218). In his book *The Ethics of Mourning*, R. Clifton Spargo provides a helpful framework for grasping the latent mechanisms and implications of such statements for a mourner. Spargo's focus is elegiac poetry, but the concept of reciprocity he considers to be central in mourning is relevant to the type of reflection carried out by Lowell:

> At the moment in which reciprocity between the self and the other becomes impossible, the elegist casts an eye back on the history of personal relationship and reflects on the degree to which the reciprocity of relationship has been realized, serviceable, or possible in the first place. (130)

In the reflective passages quoted above, Lowell analyzes reciprocity specifically in the context of communication.

To delineate Lowell's emphasis on conversation in poetry, I want to consider this aspect of mourning, especially since the loss of the mother was a powerful impetus for *Life Studies*.[75] In the memoirs of parents' death, reciprocity is often denoted in the discursive practices of exchange, as Nancy K. Miller shows: "With the loss of the second parent, the child/parent *dialogue* moves into the space of memory and writing." Analyzing the work of Annie Ernaux and the loss of her own parents, Miller posits, "The reparation of belatedness requires *engaging* with the dead" (*Bequest and Betrayal* x, xi emphasis added). Lowell's belated attempt at communication was cut short with Charlotte's death, and four months later he found himself at Payne Whitney. "When Mother died, I began to feel tireless, madly sanguine, menaced, and menacing. I entered the Payne-Whitney Clinic for 'all those afflicted in mind,'" he later reflected ("Near" 350). Considering his last conversations with Charlotte, the inability to disengage after having just gained momentum in communication is understandable. But their aborted conversation was soon displaced onto the acts of memory, invention, and narrative.

First, however, Lowell wrote *about* his relationship with his mother and her death in prose, the form he associated with conversation and believed to be "less cut off from life than poetry" (Lowell, "Interview with Frederick Seidel" 244). He pursued two different iterations of prose: letters and autobiographical sketches. These functioned as a working area where things got said and unsaid, done and undone, found and lost. Poetry remained an aesthetic domain that,

[75] In his essay "Grief and Nothingness: Loss and Mourning in Lowell's Poetry," Jay Martin finds that the motifs of loss and mourning inform Lowell's whole oeuvre, not just *Life Studies*. They are relevant, if not vital, to any inquiry of Lowell's aesthetic decisions, especially the ones taking place in the aftermath of his parents' deaths and informing the elegiac mode of *Life Studies* poems. For a detailed discussion of multiple elegies and their subversion of the traditional elegiac mode in *Life Studies*, see Jahan Ramazani's *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney*.

at least in the early stages of the autobiography, was associated with formal restrictions.[76] At the end, autobiographical prose served as raw material from which Lowell crafted many free-verse poems.[77]

Correspondence was a more familiar prose terrain, marked by spontaneity and "sudden intimacy" (Saskia Hamilton 141). "What better way of keeping your friends in mind than always being on the point of writing," Lowell wrote to William Carlos Williams (qtd. in Saskia Hamilton 141). With Ezra Pound he shared an image of his mother very different from the one he had described to Bishop; after death, the mother was no longer "competent" and "stubborn," but uncertain and selfless, not at all different from her son:

> We were very much alike… only for most of her life she had no idea where or who she was. Most of our lives we weighed on each other like stones, but at the end […] during the last ten months or so we were in a funny way speaking different languages, very close—the same metabolism, the same humor, the same boldness, and slowness. (qtd. in Hamilton 210)

To recognize the mother in oneself means to prolong her life, but, if we were to venture a less obvious explanation, the probing into the personality and identity of the recently deceased parent is a potent example of retrospective rationalization of the conflicts existing between the parent and the child — How can a mother with no solid sense of herself build a functional relationship with her son? — and the newly gained intimacy this understanding affords.

---

[76] In his interviews, Lowell repeatedly stated his difficulty of conveying personal material in "tight metrical forms" ("Interview with Frederick Seidel" in *Collected Prose* 244; "In Conversation" 75).

[77] It is important to note, however, that some poems in the collection were originally drafted in couplets: "Beyond the Alps," "Words for Hart Crane," "Inauguration Day: January 1953," and "To Delmore Schwartz" (Hamilton 234).

It is significant that Lowell's sharing of his identity with his mother is only temporary. Five days after his letter to Pound, he wrote to Allen Tate:

> At the end, she really was trying to free herself from me. And in her last months she *had*, at least for the moment. I am surprised how many people loved her. You won't understand this. But when they met her without me or my Father, marvelous qualities came out. A boldness and humor—all her own. I saw this more and more last fall when I was with her. Together, except sometimes when we were alone, we sat like stones on each other's heads—inhibiting and inhibited. But with a drink or two and me in the distance people were charmed." ("To Allen Tate" 219, original emphasis)

The same qualities – boldness and humor – that only several days ago they had unequivocally in common now appear as distinctively Charlotte's own; they now define her independence from her son and husband. The assumed presence of receptive correspondents provide limitless possibilities for this revision of the mother's character: Pound who did not know Lowell's mother and Tate who did know her were receiving different versions of Charlotte Lowell.

The attempt to understand the personality of the mother, contradictory as it is, manifests a notable trope in the mourning process: ushering the mother out of the family context and attempting to ascertain her independent traits. Nancy K. Miller terms this an act of *realization*:

> Realization typically begins by unmasking a parent's self-serving construction, taking the edge off one's parent's highly elaborated persona (Vladek Spiegelman's self-righteousness, Françoise de Beauvoir's self-delusion). Realization entails understanding our parents' own unfinished business with their mothers and fathers: seeing it *as theirs*, finding the language in which to name it,

> and moving on. These acts of revision mean trying to reimagine your parent as a person with whom you can deal. (*Bequest and Betrayal* 6)

The last sentence powerfully implies the child's inclination to continue, or perhaps only begin dealing with the parent after her passing. In other words, the ending of a parent's life marks the need for and the beginning of a new form of intimate interaction with the parent(s).

The prose manuscripts of Lowell's autobiography provide ample space for this interactive process to unfold. Conveyed here are its demands and persistence, urgency and hazardousness, destructive and recuperative potentialities: his autobiographical process dispatches Lowell to the early traumas of his childhood, brings him to the mental institution and also marks the beginning of his recovery. In the subsequently discarded prose manuscript "Near the Unbalanced Aquarium" (1957), Lowell pinpoints the moment at which these drastic modes come into play:

> One morning in July 1954 I sat in my bedroom on the third floor of the Payne-Whitney Clinic of New York Hospital, trying as usual to get my picture of myself straight. I was recovering from a violent manic seizure, an attack of pathological enthusiasm. … My mind, somewhat literary and somewhat muscle-bound, hunted for the clue to the right picture of itself. In my distraction, the walls of the hospital seemed to change shape like limp white clouds. I thought I saw a hard enameled wedding cake, and beside it, holding the blunt silver knife of the ritual, stood the tall white stone bride—my mother. Her wedding appeared now less as a day in the real past than as a photograph. (346)

One implication of this passage is that the state of mourning and the demands it places on the individual psyche through the experience of realization deprive one of agency. Lowell's manic

episode and the incipient moments of realization imposed through the image of the mother as a bride occur on their own accord without his initiation. They adhere to the laws of mourning, but they intertwine in ways that are at once traumatizing and liberating. Lowell does not have the intention to recollect the image; it simply presents itself to him. However, having imposed itself, this photograph sets Lowell on the path of writing that in turn grants him a newly gained sense of agency and the tangible grounds of intimacy.

Upon his release from Payne Whitney, Lowell begins to unravel his wrought delusion in the autobiographical sketch entitled "Antebellum Boston" (1957), now published in Robert Giroux's *Robert Lowell: Collected Prose.* The whole narrative is an attempt to see things from Charlotte's point of view. Although the image of the bride cutting the cake does not figure here, his parents' wedding stands as a defining event in Charlotte's life. Lowell begins by redefining the standards of factual accuracy for himself and his reader in terms of what constitutes the reality of his life experience: "Perhaps it is fraudulent for me to describe recollections of things I did not see. Nevertheless, the two years before my birth are more real to me than the two years which followed" (292). Surprisingly, we learn that his current act of realization is merely a repetition and extension of the same act he had performed as a three-year old child. At this age, he was forced to revise the image of his mother: "I could no longer see Mother as that rarely present, transfigured, Sunday-best version of my nurse. I saw her as my mother, as a rod, or a scolding, rusty hinge—as a human being." To resist this new negative, paradoxically human image, he resorted to imagination: "More and more I began to try to imagine Mother when she was happier, when she had been merely her father's favorite daughter, when she was engaged and unmarried" (293). Therefore, after Charlotte's death, Lowell employs the strategy to cope with loss that had worked in the past. In his childhood, the fantasies of his mother's premarital

life sprang from photographs and the stories she had told him of her girlhood. When Lowell was beginning his autobiographical project, Charlotte's photographs were still with him, links to the earlier time of his childhood, but her stories had to be mnemonically re-created (292). The task of re-constructing his mother's story imbues the experience of realization not only with an increased sense of agency, but also with the vibes of intimacy, as it brings to mind the scenes of story-telling from the past.

The fact that Lowell's mother was "rarely present" when he was a child, explains why her scrapbook and the photos included in it had remained precious to him throughout the years. As in his childhood, now too they served the dual function of fabricating the image of the mother as a Boston daughter and counteracting the loss of the mother through her visual presence. While the former helped to distance her, it also redeemed and cast her as approachable, as someone with whom he could begin to *deal*. The latter left him with the possibility of approaching the mother, and also communicating with her. In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes memorably contends: "Every photograph is a certificate of presence" (87). Marianne Hirsch comments on how photographically produced presence creates the intimate space of common remembrance: "Photographs in their enduring 'umbilical' connection to life are precisely the medium connecting first- and second-generation remembrance, memory and postmemory" (23). Lowell agilely pursues these tropes with regard to one particular photograph that seems to possess all the clues to Charlotte's life. It is the last snapshot appearing in Charlotte's scrapbook, and it features Charlotte with her father Arthur Winslow:

> I can still see Mother as she was in that picture, posed before the brownstone pillars of 18 Chestnut Street. I see her strong, firmly modeled chin, her pulled-in, tiny waist, her flounces, her beaver muff, and her neck, which was like a swan's

> neck crowned with an armful of pyramidal hair and an ostrich feather. She seemed a lady out of Edith Wharton's *Age of Innocence*. The time covered in the novel would have been at least a decade earlier, but Boston and my grandfather proudly worked at lagging behind the fashions, a precise and mysterious degree of lagging, just as difficult to comprehend as the latest fashion itself. In the photograph of Mother snapped in front of the Chestnut Street house, Grandfather stood behind her in the doorway. He wore a round fur cap which made him look like a Cossack and he was smiling; to my curious eye he seemed not so much a person as a fascinating, ever-new face with a grin, and a lasso of fur about him. (294-5)

Presented here as archetypal characters rather than flesh-and-blood family members, the mother and the grandfather are figures representing and preserving Boston as they know it: traditional, aristocratic, Republican. Static and impersonal as these images are, they immediately transport Lowell into the intersubjective space whereby he interweaves his mother's memories—collected from her stories, scrapbooks, and photos—with his own fantasies and childhood reminiscences:

> I imagined Mother waiting to be handed into her touring car, a frail, ailing, indestructible, thirty-foot, carriage-like affair… . Mother, her strong chin unprotected and chilled in the helpless autumn, seemed to me the young Alexander, all gleam and panache, Alexander, as in her copy of Plutarch, conferring with his aide-de-camp before the battle of Granicus. Mother, also, was a sort of commander in chief of her virgin battlefield. Steaming up out of my croupy delirium, I saw horses, wondrously tall, stepping up Chestnut Street—horse-chestnut street where the stables were even then being altered into garages.

> The horses looked down their bald, bleached Norman noses at me, and shook awkward silver bells that turned out to be my christening cups, which Mother had sold because she wanted to clear her shelves. My horses reached their noses into the upper foliage of trees and pulled down bushels of green-and-gold leaves; they nibbled grotesquely and dribbled out of the sides of their mouths a landslide of green slates that were slipping from the stable roof. A flight of green umbrellas drifted through the air, upside down.

At this point of the narrative, we have no doubt that his imaginings emerge from what he had seen in Charlotte's scrapbook as a boy: "On another page of Mother's scrapbook I saw crowds in London, Brussels, and Paris; the people grimaced under their shiny, rained-on umbrellas. They had the look of spectators at a gladiatorial show. They were listening to the declaration of World War I" (295). In trying to disassociate his mother from the Lowell family, the son is able to be present in her life more firmly as he interacts with her scrapbook and completes the story of her Boston youth with and for her.

The same photograph guides Lowell in his attempt to explain his mother's spiteful and tyrannizing attitude toward him and his father. A close look at it reveals a barely noticeable presence of Robert Lowell Sr., "and this recessiveness, within the family portrait, was not, alas, an accidental aspect of a single photograph but the genuine and enduring placement at all times" (295). As Lowell continues to talk of his father's reticence in the photograph and in life, the figure of the mother becomes uncannily reminiscent of Hedda Gabler. Her father, descendant of the Boston elite family and a self-made mining engineer in Colorado, was her real hero in life against whom her husband's meekness was ever more evident and irritating. Like the Winslows, Robert Lowell Sr., a Naval officer, carried a noble Boston name, but lacked assertiveness and in

his wife's view did not have a "mean or an extraordinary bone in his body." Lowell provides an insight into that Oedipal triangle:

> Mother's conception of her father was very different from her notion of her Lieutenant Lowell. Even her military notions were reserved for her father, who was a great conquering emperor in her mind. […] It was always my grandfather she admired, even if she called him Napoleon. (296-7)[78]

As a child, Lowell lived with the idea that his grandfather was in fact his father: "He was my Father. I was his son" ("Dunbarton" line 10). The grandfather was also the nurturing figure to the boy: "Grandpa! Have me, hold me, cherish me!" ("Grandparents" 31).

In the course of "Antebellum Boston" and other prose manuscripts, Lowell's empathy for his mother unmistakably transpires as he continues to survey her life as a wife and a mother. Charlotte married "because she thought it was time to. She was not in love with the man, nor did she really admire him" (qtd. in Hamilton 386).[79] She had to part with her beloved Boston and stay with the man who "did not presume to advise and direct": "Mother sighed for her father, whose urgent domination she had long been accustomed to and been sustained by" ("Antebellum" 299). The level of subjectivity Lowell conveys is striking; it springs straight from the stories she shared with him in her lifetime. For instance, a scene of "bereavement" she

[78] The figure of Napoleon presided over Lowell throughout the years. If his mother readily identified Napoleon with her father, Lowell, perhaps wishing to climb into the same Oedipal position, took on the Napoleon persona in his manic episodes (Hamilton 220).

[79] These lines are quoted from excerpts of Charlotte's notebook that she kept in 1937 while seeing a psychiatrist. Lowell included these excerpts in his early drafts of autobiographical prose and later, providing no frame of reference, let his mother tell her story in the poem "The Next Dream" in *Notebook* (Hamilton 385-6).

experienced as a pregnant wife left with her in-laws while her husband was on duty reached Lowell by the means of merciless telling:[80]

> She didn't enjoy Grandmother Lowell and Great-grandmother Myers at all; she was miserable with them. The only thing she enjoyed was taking brisk walks and grieving over the fact that she was pregnant. She took pride in looking into the great Atlantic Ocean and saying, without a trace of fear or illusion, "I wish I could die." ("Antebellum" 300)

In the current state of his own bereavement, Lowell salvages this moment of his mother's past confided in him most likely in one of the many furtive conversations he held with Charlotte throughout his boyhood ("During Fever").[81] This particular conversation has remained painfully memorable to him, however, as we learn two decades later in the poem "Unwanted" from his last book *Day by Day*:

> … Mother,
> I must not blame you for carrying me in you
> on your brisk winter lunges across
> the desperate, refusey Staten Island beaches,
> …
> for yearning seaward, far from any home, and saying,
> "I wish I were dead, I wish I were dead."
> Unforgivable for a mother to tell her child—

---

[81] See my discussion of "During Fever" below.

Here, Lowell recalls a conversation during which the act of "unforgivable" sharing took place and at the same time initiates a new conversation with the mother in which he actually justifies to her and to himself her telling. This allows him to attempt to forgive the unforgivable:

> but you wanted to share your good fortune,
>
> perhaps, by recapturing the disgust of those walks;
>
> your credulity assumed we survived,
>
> while weaklings fell with the dead and dying. (64-7, 69-71, 72-5)

In another poem from *Day by Day*, Lowell resolves to admit to his mother: "It has taken me the time since you died / to discover you are as human as I am… / if I am" ("To Mother" 36-8).

In the early stages of mourning (in "Antebellum Boston"), Lowell was not fully able or ready to parse the situation and to begin even remotely thinking about forgiveness as he is doing in *Day by Day*. But what he *was* able to do in the prose of "Antebellum Boston" and later in *Life Studies* is open the lines of conversation, both troubled and intimate. In fact, what in "Antebellum Boston" were vague evocations of temporally distant conversations, in "Life Studies" are already fully realized attempts at *making* conversation with the mother. In "During Fever," the first stanza concerns Lowell's daughter who in her delirium mumbles "Sorry" and reminds him of himself (5). However, the daughter's sickness never arises again in the poem; beginning with the second stanza, the speaker delves into his own reminiscences that involve and are addressed to his mother in every stanza. This is stanza two:

> Mother, Mother!
>
> as a gemlike undergraduate,
>
> part criminal and yet a Phi Bete,
>
> I used to barge home late.

Always by the bannister
my milk-tooth mug of milk
was waiting for me on a plate
of Triskets.
Often with unadulterated joy,
Mother, we bent by the fire
rehashing Father's character—
when he thought we were asleep,
he'd tiptoe down the stairs
and chain the door. (6-18)

The intimate scene between the mother and the son excludes the father. The contrast between "rehashing" and "tiptoeing" reflects the difference in the parents' temperaments, and also conveys the son's closeness to his mother; it is carried over into the present moment by means of the poetic text. In the last stanza of "During Fever," Lowell condenses some tropes of "Antebellum Boston," but here his act of realization actually pivots on the mother's interlocutory presence:

Born ten years and yet an aeon
too early for the twenties,
Mother, you smile
as if you saw your Father
inches away yet hidden, as when he groused behind a screen
over a National Geographic Magazine,
whenever young men came to court you

back in those settled years of World War One.

Terrible that old life of decency

without unseemly intimacy

or quarrels, when the unemancipated woman

still had her Freudian papá and maids! (31-42)

One of the difficulties Lowell experienced when writing autobiographical prose was constructing transitions and "putting in things that didn't seem very important but were necessary to the prose continuity" (Lowell, "Interview with Frederick Seidel" 243). As the above stanzas illustrate, in poetry, and free verse in particular, the absence of transitions creates conversational looseness that is enhanced by figures of apostrophe. So, in the last stanza above, Lowell is able to articulate to his mother, himself, and his reader what it was that had essentially alienated Charlotte from the Lowells. In the prose of "Antebellum Boston," he presents her life in Boston but refrains from explicitly stating that it was "terrible." In the poem, however, he can actually address the mother, so he confronts her openly with the root of their problems, while also extending his empathy. Thus, he offers his mother the kind of intimacy that had never been fully possible during her lifetime -- neither with her father, who was capable only of "unseemly intimacy," nor with her son and husband. That he is able to procure a *seemly* form of intimacy based on honest communication also tells us something about the kind of interlocutor he imagines his mother to be: a Charlotte who continued on the path of self-learning and acceptance of her misfortunes, the path on which she had in her lifetime.[82] Having become the mother who finally made sense to her son, Charlotte was able to *receive* his forgiveness.

[82] I am referring here to Charlotte's psychiatric counseling and her ability to discuss issues with Lowell prior to her passing in Rapallo.

The mode of interaction and re-creation of intimacy are so central to Lowell's mourning experience and to his ensuing autobiography that even the scene of Charlotte's death emphasizes an encounter with her body that constitutes her presence.[83] Charlotte is revivified by the recollections of the sympathetic and grieving nurse, as well as by Lowell himself. When Lowell arrives at the hospital, his mother is already dead. He approaches her body in the presence of the Italian nurse, thus sharing his first minutes of loss with the mother and a person whose words bring her to life:

> We stood with tears running down our faces, and the nurse talked to me for an hour and a half in a patois that even Italians would have had difficulty in understanding. She was telling me everything she could remember about Mother. For ten minutes she might just as well have been imitating water breaking on the beach, but Mother was alive in the Italian words. I heard how Mother thought she was still at her hotel and wanted to go walking, and said she was only suffering from a little indigestion, and wanted to open both French windows and thoroughly air her bedroom each morning while the bed was still unmade, and how she kept trying to heal the hemorrhage in her brain by calling for her twenty little jars and bottles with their pink plastic covers, and kept dabbing her temples with creams and washes, and felt guilty because she wasn't allowed to take her quick cold bath in the morning and her hot aromatic bath before dinner. She kept asking about Bob and Bobby. "I have never been sick in my life. *Nulla malettia mai! Nulla*

[83] In a letter to Elizabeth Hardwick Lowell stressed this fact: "Pretty rough—I spent the morning with her nurse who only speaks Italian, both of us weeping & weeping. I mean I spent it in the room with her body!" (210).

> *malettia mai*!" And the nurse went out. "*Qua insieme per sempre*." She closed the door and left me in the room. ("Near" 349, original emphasis)

As the mother is speaking through the nurse, she is present and helpful in creating the mourning space for her son. The above passage is condensed in the opening stanza of "Sailing Home from Rapallo" in *Life Studies*: "Your nurse could only speak Italian, / but after twenty minutes I could imagine your final week, / and tears ran down my cheeks (1-3). In place of the mother's and the nurse's actual words, Lowell uses the apostrophe, "your"; this allows him to preserve the intimate aura of the scene where the conversation took place and maintain the succinctness expected from the poetic form.[84] When the body is gone, it is the voice that remains. Back in the prose excerpt, it is vividly depicted:

> They misspelled Mother's name on her coffin as *Lovel*. While alive, Mother had made a point of spelling out her name letter by letter for identification. I could almost hear her voice correcting the workmen: "I am Mrs. Robert Lowell of One Seventy Marlborough Street, Boston, L, O, W, E, *double* L." ("Near" 350, original emphasis)

It becomes evident in Lowell's later poem "The Scream" from *For the Union Dead* that Lowell understood loss most poignantly as the absence of voice, and with regard to his mother, the absence of her scream. In the poem, a few impressions from childhood lead to the image of the mother emitting "the scream, / not even loud at first…" but memorable for returning Lowell to the early moment of forgiveness, remarkable for the level of objectivity and maturity of the young son toward his mother: "When she went away I thought / 'But you can't love everyone, /

[84] In his interview with Frederick Seidel, Lowell named as one weakness of the prose form its tendency "to be very diffuse" (244). His revisions of "Sailing Home from Rapallo" reflect an effort to move away from this element of prose.

your heart won't let you!'" The absence of her scream defines her physical absence and recalls other absences:

> A scream! But they are all gone,
> those aunts and aunts, a grandfather,
> a grandmother, my mother—
> even her scream—too frail
> for us to hear their voices long. (31-40)

The sense of temporal perspective (*For the Union Dead* was published in 1964, five years after *Life Studies*) seems to intensify Lowell's loss, taking him on the route of forgiveness whereby he would continue till he reaches his last poems. But in "Coming Home from Rapallo" Lowell's nostalgia for his mother's voice is more ambivalent than in "The Scream." On the one hand, he highlights "double" to convey the emphatic inflection of Charlotte's voice and thus bring it to life. On the other, while the nurse's detailed descriptions of Charlotte's last days and her idiosyncrasies portray her as a woman standing *outside* of the Lowell family, the reproduction of her metallic corrective voice locates her *within* the family and in turn produces a colder image of the mother who categorically unsubscribes herself from even an accidental expression of love (in his mind, he hears her correct the crucial misspelling). This contradictory vision of the mother discloses a tenacious effort to explore the possibilities of intimacy with an understanding of where these possibilities can hold no firm ground. In his later poetry, Lowell achieves a more tenably forgiving and accepting stance; as Ramazani points out, he turns from the contemptuous anti-elegy of *Life Studies* to "the more traditional codes of elegy" (241).

Such a pronounced change in perspective underscores the persistence of the conversational mode in Lowell's autobiographical poetry and its reconciliatory potential. His

effort to achieve understanding and intimacy does not cease, but instead continues more fruitfully as time progresses. Lowell resumes the conversation with and about his mother in his last book *Day by Day* (1977) whereby Charlotte reappears as apostrophe in "To Mother" and "Unwanted." In the first stanza of "To Mother," Lowell finds himself in the "luxurious Boston," so intimately associated with his mother that he instantly longs for a conversation with her: "I almost lifted the telephone to dial you, / forgetting you have no dial." Lowell revisits his mother's humor, only this time attributing their similitude to his nearing her age:

> Your exaggerating humor,
> the opposite of deadpan,
> the opposite of funny to a son,
> is mine now— (5-8)

He returns to her voice, now discerning in it "the unwilled ruffle of drama" (10). He also lets her speak: "'Why do we keep expecting life to be easy, / when we know it never can be?'" This she says in response to his questioning of her habit to "brush mantelpiece and banister / with the forefinger of a fresh white glove for dust" (32-33, 30-31). Conversations continue to be both recalled and initiated in ways that deepen the intimate ties between the son and the mother. Although evidently Lowell grows more forgiving and accepting of his mother only with time, as Ramazani insists, his later poems concerning the mother merely epitomize the quest of realization he had begun earlier. "To Mother" captures this note exceptionally well: "Becoming ourselves, / we lose our nerve for children" (22-23).

As with Charlotte, Lowell's foray into his father's life began during his stay at Payne Whitney and then continued in the autobiography. In his lifetime, Robert Lowell Sr. was overshadowed by his wife and followed her decisions -- including the most disputed one of his

resigning from the Navy -- making it difficult for his son to have earnest respect for him. We saw earlier in the chapter that Lowell's contact with his mother actually depended on his father's absence. Unaccustomed to having intimate conversations with his son, the father is a less audible interlocutor than the mother in *Life Studies*. Perhaps because Lowell was more used to talking *about* the father rather than *with* him, he deals with the father in the prose of "91 Revere Street" and less substantially in "Life Studies" poems, and not through apostrophe. However, the wish to address the father is registered in one poem kept in the Houghton Library at Harvard[85]:

> You sailed to China, Daddy, and knew your math
>
> Had all the answers. When you stood on tap,
>
> Reserved and beaming, just behind the scene,
>
> And did the dirty work as engineer
>
> Aboard the Pennsie. Daddy, your career
>
> Shot like a rocket from that Turkish bath
>
> Of pipes and coils and fell in Mother's lap.
>
> I prize the life you whittled to routine:
>
> As early as teatime you would spread your graphs
>
> To dodge our conversation, and prove
>
> Systems to break the market, to collapse…
>
> Daddy, we cannot talk, and now you move,

[85] In one manuscript from "At Payne Whitney" (the earliest draft of Lowell's autobiography, it combines the material later included in "91 Revere Street," "Near the Unbalanced Aquarium," and "Antebellum Boston"), Lowell recalls a moment when threatened by another patient, he "hid the sheet of onion-skin paper on which I had written the first and last lines of a sonnet entitled:

> TO MY FATHER
>
> You sailed to China, Father, and knew your math…
> Friendly to all, and loving none, perhaps.

Shy Smiler, through my world of photographs,

Friendly to all and loving none perhaps.

Whereas with his mother Lowell could begin speaking openly about the dynamics of their relationship during her lifetime, his father had remained distant until he died.[86] The above poem, as well as several others in the Houghton file, revolves around the father, but since the poems are undated, it is impossible to tell whether Lowell wrote them immediately after his father's death, or it was his mother's passing that had goaded him into a more expressive form of mourning. In either case, "You sailed to China, Daddy, and knew your math" is an earlier, if not the earliest written attempt to face the father emphatically and empathetically. The poem and its timing frame the ensuing reminiscences in *Life Studies* as ramifications of and therefore links to the initial conversational impulse so notable in the poem: Lowell addresses his father three times in the course of the poem as "Daddy," and thus he easily undermines the statement "we cannot talk." The fact that they cannot talk does not mean that they do not do so, and this will be evident in *Day by Day*.[87]

"You sailed to China, Daddy, and knew your math" epitomizes the seized opportunity to say *to* the father at least partially that which shortly before and after his death Lowell could only say *about* him, as in a letter to Elizabeth Bishop:

> My father died quite suddenly on the 30th of August, and we have been rusticating and maundering with my mother. His death was painless—not really tragic, for he had little besides filling the days to look forward to. He was not a

[86] Lowell was hurt to find out that his father had not mentioned him in his will (Hamilton 169).

[87] Lowell would write an actual dialogue between himself and his father in the poem "Robert T.S. Lowell" in *Day by Day*. See this discussion later in the chapter.

> suffering or heroic man, but rather as someone said "happy-seeming": always smiling or about to smile—and deep under, half known to him: apathetic and soured. There was at least one great might-have-been—a first-rate Naval career. The death seems almost meaningless, as is perhaps always the case when life has long resigned itself to a terrible dim, diffused pathos. (18 Sept. 1950, *Words* 108)

The detached, unsympathetic voice of the son dismisses the father's life as irredeemably purposeless. But the father as addressee in "You sailed to China, Daddy, and knew your math" resists such a merciless assessment, demanding the transference of hopelessness into the terrain of mourning: in the poem, it is not the father's life that is hopeless, but the son's yearning for conversation with the father.

In "91 Revere Street" the paths of realization are such that Lowell is able to continue writing about his father with some degree of ambivalence and underlying pathos, as in "You sailed to China, Daddy, and knew your math." Before we learn anything about Lowell's father, we are introduced to his great grandfather Major Mordecai Myers. An admirable figure ever present in his descendants' lives by way of his portrait, he was an unusual Bostonian: "a dark man, a German Jew—no downright Yankee." Lowell reads in his portrait "something undecided, Mediterranean, versatile, almost double-faced about his bearing" (16). He chooses to begin his narrative about his father with the image of this remarkable man as if to let Mordecai Myers' qualities spill onto his father's personality by default of inheritance. However, in the company of other ancestors, Mordecai Myers also confers upon Robert Lowell Sr. the motto "I prefer to bend than to break," which he takes to the extreme: "He was a mumbler. His opinions were almost morbidly hesitant" (16, 20).

Toward the end of his narrative, Lowell comes full circle back to Mordecai Myers, whose message to his family, and Lowell in particular, is to refrain from judgment and accept that people cannot choose their inheritance: "'My children, my blood, accept graciously the loot of your inheritance. We are all dealers in used furniture'" (51). This is a kernel of realization that prompts a forgiving backward glance on the father and accentuates those few moments in the text in which his meekness and agreeability are not of his own making. For instance, we learn that Robert Lowell Sr. was ancestrally inclined to maintain a dispassionate stance, as did his family of "[e]asy-going, Empire State patricians." In this description, Lowell moves his parents' conflicts to the level of inheritance and ancestry, relieving them of his own blame: the Lowells "lacked that granite *back-countriness* which Grandfather Arthur Winslow attributed to his own ancestors, the iconoclastic, mulish Dunbarton New Hampshire Starks" (16). But the father remains the central subject of "91 Revere Street," whereby we learn to attribute his timidity to the fact that he never knew his own father who died before he was born. "At each stage of his life, he was to be forlornly fatherless" (22). The deeply pathetic undertone of this statement will be heard again in the upcoming poems of the "Life Studies" sequence and in Lowell's later poetry. In "91 Revere Street," it can be easily glossed over being dominated by the detached, acerbic sentences:

> He was a deep boy brought up entirely by a mild widowed mother and an intense widowed grandmother. When he was fourteen and a half, he became a midshipman. By the time he graduated from Annapolis, he had a high sense of abstract form, which he beclouded with his humor. He had reached, perhaps, his final mental possibilities. He was deep—not with profundity, but with the dumb depth of one who trusted in statistics and was dubious of personal experience. In

> his forties, Father's soul went underground: as a civilian he kept his high sense of form, his humor, his accuracy, but this accuracy was henceforth unimportant, recreational, *hors de combat*. His debunking grew myopic; his shyness grew evasive; he argued with a fumbling languor. In the twenty-two years Father lived after he resigned from the Navy, he never again deserted Boston and never became Bostonian. He survived to drift from job to job, to be displaced, to be grimly and literally that old cliché, a fish out of water. He gasped and wheezed with impotent optimism, took on new ideals with each new job, never ingeniously enjoyed his leisure, never even hid his head in the sand. (22)

This passage is a good example of how Lowell employs prose to resist intimacy. One thing he could not forgive his father was that he succumbed to Charlotte's pleading and resigned from the Navy. Resignation robbed him of the opportunity to have a fulfilling life and his son of the opportunity to look up to his father. As a third-grader, Lowell "was afraid Father's leaving the Navy would destroy my standing"; as a grown man working to comprehend how his father could give up the only path that could define him as a hero to himself and to the others, he is inexorably resentful (17). He delivers his relentless criticism and disillusionment in the objective tone of an observer, if not therapist, denying his father empathy and intimacy.

However, writing in the footsteps of these bitter remarks, only a year later in "Near the Unbalanced Aquarium," another prose draft for *Life Studies*, Lowell develops an appeasing tone and a mature, absolving perspective of writer and son:

> As I try to write my own autobiography, other autobiographies naturally come to mind. The last autobiography I looked into was a movie about a bullterrier from Brooklyn. The dog's name was, I think, House on Fire. The district he came from

was so tough that smoking had to be permitted in the last three pews at High Mass. House on Fire's mother had been deserted by his father. House knows that his father is a great dog in the great world, either as a champion fighter or as a champion in exhibitions. House on Fire keeps saying with his Brooklyn accent, "I want to be a champ so that I can kill my father." In the end, there is peace.

My own father was a gentle, faithful, and dim man. I don't know why I was agin him. I hope there will be peace. (363)

In this remarkable passage, what begins as a self-reflective description of writer's craft quickly becomes a revelation of autobiography's existential significance for Lowell. *Life Studies* both initiated and took him through the process of getting to know his parents as people rather than merely disappointing parents and himself as their benevolent son.[88] The peace he hopes to reach with his father connotes a continuity of engagement with the father's life story that grows more vivid in the "Life Studies" sequence.[89] "Commander Lowell" is essentially an animated portrait of the father as a misfit, being spoken to – slightingly – but never a speaker, except when alone in the bathtub:

Having a naval officer
for my Father was nothing to shout
about to the summer colony at "Matt."
he wasn't at all "serious,"

[88] In "Charles River," a sequenced poem from *Notebook* (1967), Lowell recalls a defining moment in their relationship: having found out that his father wrote a disparaging letter to the father of Lowell's girlfriend at the time Jean Stafford, Lowell stormed into the house and knocked him down. In his recollection, Lowell cries out: "I do not know how to unsay I knocked you down." It is not the *undoing* that he seeks, but the *unsaying*. *Life Studies* is a wavering attempt at that.

[89] The poems dedicated to the father in "Life Studies" were adopted from "Near the Unbalanced Aquarium."

when he showed up on the golf course,
wearing a blue serge jacket and numbly cut
white ducks he'd bought
at a Pearl Harbor commissariat…
and took four shots with his putter to sink his putt.
"Bob," they said, "golf's a game you really ought to know how
to play,
if you play at all."
They wrote him off as "naval,"
naturally supposed his sport was sailing.
Poor Father, his training was engineering!
Cheerful and cowed
among the seadogs at the Sunday yacht club,
he was never one of the crowd.

"Anchors aweigh," Daddy boomed in his bathtub,
"Anchors aweigh." (18-37)

In contrast to the resentful son, desperate to pass cold judgments on the father in the "91 Revere Street" passage, this speaker is the son who conveys sympathy, calling his father "Poor Father" and "Daddy," not just "Father." Lowell shifts from his descriptive, temporally organized sentences bound to condemn the downward path of the father's personal and professional achievements ("When he was fourteen and a half, he became a midshipman. By the time he graduated from Annapolis, he had a high sense of abstract form, which he beclouded with his

humor. … In his forties, Father's soul went underground….") to detailed visual scenes that show the reasons for the father's failed interactions and offer a glimpse into his inner world of unfulfilled aspirations. While Lowell does not engage his father in direct conversation through an apostrophe, he succeeds at showing us what makes this engagement impossible in the first place, at least at this stage of mourning. The image of the father presented here is of someone detached not only from his surroundings, but from himself. He sings of a hope to get to the anchors, but this hope becomes hopelessly deferred. He seems to be incapable of admitting the grimness of his situation even to himself. And, being estranged from himself, he alienates his son. When the son opts for autobiography, however, he resists his long-endured predicament by penetrating into the father's world with some degree of compassion. When the outsiders or the readers are called upon to hear of this world, they are compelled to adopt the son's empathetic stance. In this way, the father gains a company of interlocutors he lacked in his lifetime; in another poem "Terminal Days at Beverly Farms," we get to hear his last words "I feel awful" said to Charlotte, starkly but typically out of tune with his behavior that last "morning of anxious, repetitive smiling" (46, 44).

The poem "Father's Bedroom" continues the sequence. It takes us into the intimate space of the room dominated by blue, color of the sea. Lowell is careful not to be intrusive; as Frank J. Kearful notes, he "'reads' his father's bedroom, taking in 'pen-writing' and dots before his gaze falls upon a book" (126). At the same time, however, Lowell's reading is such that, contrary to its common connotation of privacy, the bedroom does not enforce the father's withdrawal and isolation. Rather, it is portrayed as a familial space. In "Near the Unbalanced Aquarium," we learn that the "blueness of the room had been achieved by Mother through an accumulation of inconspicuous touches" (355); in the poem itself, Lowell finds a surviving book with two

inscriptions of his father's mother, signifying a connection that had not broken between them throughout time:

> … volume two
> of Lafcadio Hearn's
> *Glimpses of unfamiliar Japan*.
> Its warped olive cover
> was punished like a rhinoceros hide.
> In the flyleaf:
> "Robbie from Mother."
> Years later in the same hand:
> "This book has had hard usage
> on the Yangtze River, China.
> It was left under an open
> porthole in a storm." (12-23)

The bedroom thereby comprises filaments of relations that withstand the blows of time. It is a powerful spatial metaphor for containing, exposing and engendering family intimacies; thus, it counteracts the father's isolation and allows the son to connect with him in a new way. The physical space thus becomes the site of personal connection.

The last poem in the sequence dedicated to the father "For Sale" remains focused on the Beverly Farms house. It is the parents' last abode, an almost 18-month long intermediary dwelling between life and death. In the poem, it is portrayed as a site of loss that has been endured (death of the father) and looming in a distance (death of the mother):

> Poor sheepish plaything,

organized with prodigal animosity,

lived in just a year—

my Father's cottage at Beverly Farms

was on the market the month he died.

Empty, open, intimate,

its town-house furniture

had an on tiptoe air

of waiting for the mover

on the heels of the undertaker.

Ready, afraid

of living alone till eighty,

Mother mooned in a window

as if she had stayed on a train

one stop past her destination. (1-15)

In the prose version, Lowell adds a religious note to the father's sudden absence:

> Three days after Father's death, the Beverly Farms house almost gave the impression of having once been lived in. Its rooms, open, eviscerated, empty, and intimate, were rooms restored to "period." Perhaps this vacancy, this on-tiptoe air, came from my knowing that everything about me had waited three days for Father's return to us from the undertaker. ("Near" 354)

His death transforms the father from an insignificant human figure to God's child deserving resurrection. But the key point here is that this transformation occurs in the son's mind: he

"waited" for the father to return. Lowell articulates his visceral yearning only when he is several years away from the death scene.

To be able to address his father in the open space of published poetry, Lowell had to have an even greater temporal distance. As he was beginning to age, Lowell developed a stronger sense of identification with his father. In "Middle Age," poem from *For the Union Dead*, he writes:

> At forty-five,
> what next, what next?
> At every corner,
> I meet my Father,
> my age, still alive.
>
> Father, forgive me
> my injuries,
> as I forgive
> those I
> have injured!
>
> You never climbed
> Mount Sion, yet left
> dinosaur
> death-steps on the crust,
> where I must walk. (6-20)

A belated forgiveness is both granted and requested while a path of humble existence -- a newly discovered inheritance for the speaker -- is discovered. Having created open access for his parents to enter into his poetry and for his readers to witness and understand their conversations, Lowell finds a community of interlocutors to help him handle not only past conflicts, but also the beginning of a new phase in his life – the middle age. The short lines and varied rhythm create the inflections of spoken language. Nearing sixty, Lowell, picks up this conversation with his father, who died at fifty three, in the poem bearing the father's full name "Robert T.S. Lowell" in *Day by Day*:

> *Son*
> I futilely wished
> to meet you at my age;
> the date never came off.
> It would take two lifetimes
> to pick the crust
> and uncover the face
> under our two menacing,
> iconoclastic masks. (1-8)

While Lowell's tone is more morbid here than in "Middle Age," he creates the tempo and emphatic line breaks suggestive of conversation. The second speaker, the father, acquires a perspective on his life that he was unable to obtain or express in his lifetime. In this new incarnation, he is a wise interlocutor imparting his life knowledge to his aging son. Now that Lowell lets the father relate his own biography, the chronological narrative structure employed earlier in "91 Revere Street" takes on a more positive, redemptive stance:

Father

You had your chance to meet me.

My father died before I was born.

I was half orphaned… such a son

as the stork seldom flings to ambition.

I lay

in the lee of my terrible elders;

the age had a largeness I lacked,

an appetite that forgave everything…

our Spanish War's oversubscribed,

battle-bright decks.

At fourteen

I enlisted at Annapolis.

At twenty-seven

I proposed in uniform

and married your mother—

a service I served with even wistfulness,

enslaved by the fire I courted.

I only wished idly
with dilated eyes
to relive my life.

Your game-leg beagle would tiptoe to my room,
if she heard you were asleep—
loneliness to loneliness!

You think that having
your two children on the same floor this fall,
one questioning, one climbing and breaking,
is like living on a drum
or a warship—it can't be that,
it's your life, and dated like mine. (9-37)

Between *Life Studies* and *Day by Day* the "personal vibrance" of Lowell's poetic autobiography is charged with the intense energies of mourning and forgiveness (Lowell, "Interview with Frederick Seidel" 266). Throughout time, these energies had changed their course, engendered the incremental development of conversational tendencies in Lowell's autobiographical poetry and became reflected in them. The communicative exchanges Lowell creates in the "Life Studies" sequence and in his later works produce the reciprocity "extended beyond the parameters of a lived relationship," as Spargo puts it, and support the comforting "hypothesis of the other's abiding interest in those who mourn her" (130).

The prose drafts of *Life Studies* that reveal the link between mourning and dialogue in Lowell's poetics also proffer another link between mourning and recovery from mental illness. Whereas in the published text the accounts of parents' deaths and manic episodes are compartmentalized into separate works, in the prose drafts they occupy a common, undivided textual space. Belonging to the same mental territory of trauma, these two subjects are addressed in a continual flow of shifting recollections. For example, the detailed, deeply moving description of the father lying in his casket is followed by the narrative of Lowell finding himself in the Occupational Therapy room at Payne Whitney:

> I was the only person Mother permitted to lift the lid of the casket. Father was there. He wore his best sport coat—pink, at ease, obedient! Not a twist or a grimace recalled those unprecedented last words spoken to Mother as he died: "I feel awful." And it was right that he should have the slight overruddiness so characteristic of his last summer. He looked entirely alive, or as he used to say, *W & H*: Well and Happy. Impossible to believe that if I had pressed a hand to his brow to see if it were hectic, I would have touched the *cold thing*! There were flowers; not too many. To one side of the casket, someone had accidentally left Admiral K—'s framed photograph. In the Navy, officers are listed according to rank and age; Father and K—had once been the only officers in their class who were not outranked by younger men. And now in the photograph Admiral K--, who had risen from glory to glory, stood on his Mediterranean flagship holding his binoculars half-raised to his eyes, and seemed to squint through the sun's dazzling, difficult glare into what were either folds of an awning or thirty

> uniforms on hangers. The picture was inscribed: "To my old friend, classmate + shipmate 'Bob' Lowell."
>
> Occupational Therapy, or O.T., was held in a suite of rooms on the top floor. It was a sunny, improving world; and here, unable to "think" with my hands, I spent a daily hour of embarrassed anguish. Here for weeks I saw my abandoned pine-cone basket lying on the pile for waste material. ("Near" 357, original emphasis)

In a single narrative act, Lowell moves from one traumatic locale to another, but they contain equally intense moments of experience. The proximity of these passages invites a comparative reading and creates a suggestive, chilling parallel between the dead body of the father facing eternal solitude and the inept body of the son resisting therapy. Earlier in the narrative, Lowell suggests the same reading when he follows the image of his mother "permanently sealed in her coffin," and "solitary" with his own entrance into the space of "the Payne-Whitney Clinic for 'all those afflicted in mind'" ("Near" 350). We can also read these passages as having a direct cause and effect relationship: the parents' deaths leading to the breakdown.

In presenting the two disconcerting states of mourning and psychic disturbance in the space of the same narrative, Lowell also insinuates that they may impel similar recuperative processes in which a traumatized individual seeks disclosure and meaningful human interaction. In her book *The Mourner's Dance: What We Do When People Die*, Katherine Ashenburg shows that throughout human history mourning practices, ranging from the communal recital of prayer Kaddish in Judaism to contemporary practice of group therapy, have presupposed the presence of a community: "Both the ancient religious duty and the modern phenomenon bring together people who may be strangers to one another, with a range in the 'age' of their bereavement —

they meet at different points along the mourner's path" (214). When Lowell re-writes his parents' lives and deaths, he creates a similar communal space that is filled with a community of interlocutors whom he knows (his family and friends) as well as with a group of anonymous readers. They may or may not have experienced the loss of parents, but their presence seems essential for Lowell as he goes through mourning. With respect to his mental illness, the act of putting the whole experience into language proves to be therapeutic and dependent on the presence of an audience. Lowell saw "some connection" between "confessional poetry that's a work of art" and "someone's outpourings, sensational confessions for the newspapers or confessions to one's analyst." He explains: "When I was doing what might be called confessional poems there was a big chunk of something to be gotten out, but a great deal of it was very tame; the whole thing wasn't any very great story, but still there were things I wanted to say." Thus, what he finds most readily therapeutic is the act of release, which assumes someone on the receiving end, but along with it he cultivates the "pure technical joy" of the composition process: "poems are dull if you don't have that" ("Robert Lowell in Conversation" 81). Here, he is concerned with the poetic merit of his work and imagines a reader who would appreciate his craft. As we saw earlier, this reader, Lowell hoped, had to "get every word" of his poetry. The strong emphasis on accessibility points back to Ginsberg, but also to an earlier time at Payne Whitney when Lowell's communicative ability was deeply impaired:

> And as I stood there, obsequious, scornful, fearful, and fierce, Mr. Kemper [Occupational Therapy instructor] would come to me in his mild, beach-colored smock. He was a shy, precise man who, blushing as if at his own presumption, would tell gentle, instructive anecdotes so as to avoid crude, outright answers to my haphazard questions on technique. He was used to the impatience of patients;

> but he seemed stunned when he discovered that my polite, hesitant, often erratically detailed questions seldom implied even an appearance of attending to his answers. I would interrupt in midsentence with new questions, or drive deafly, blindly, marringly into my work. ("Near" 358)

That Lowell includes this particular moment in his narrative marks it as particularly disturbing and memorable. If impaired communication is a sign of mental illness, the ability to communicate in a clear and coherent manner in writing, the form naturally appealing to Lowell, is a positive affirmation of recovery. In other words, the reparative potentiality of a self-narrative inheres not only in its mechanisms of release, but in its communicative power. The last section of this chapter focuses on the types of interaction with the general reader that Lowell demands and initiates at different stages of writing *Life Studies*.

In one of his manuscripts, Lowell states: "I began writing about myself in 1954 when I was in the Payne Whitney mental clinic" (*The Balanced Aquarium*). As his work progressed, Lowell concerned himself less with its therapeutic value and more with the questions of form, though the therapeutic impulse remained a startling undercurrent in his autobiography. It transpires throughout his revisions of both form and content, and these, in turn, result in the perpetual repositioning of the reader as interlocutor.

At Payne Whitney, Lowell turned to autobiographical poetry as a "substitute for the regulation Occupational Therapy requirement." One of the verses he wrote was: "I was already half-way through my life / When I woke up from Mother on the back / Of the *Hill* in Boston, to a sky-line of Life / Insurance buildings, still in blue-print." However, soon "the labor, cynicism and maturity of writing in meter became horrible. I began to write rapidly in prose and in the style of a child." Namely, he began describing a specific childhood scene: "…name, Bobby

Lowell. I was all of three and a half. My new formal gray shorts had been worn for all of three minutes" (qtd. in Witek 37).[90] As a published poet, Lowell was accustomed to associating the writing of verse with wide readership. That he began writing in verse but then recoiled from it suggests that at the moment of acute crisis he both demanded and resisted the reader.[91] Following the early Payne Whitney installments, came several prose sketches. Between 1954 and 1955, Lowell worked without a publishing contract, but requested and signed one in 1955. This move was "uncharacteristic of him" and led Robert Giroux to conclude that "he wanted the legal document to serve as a goad to writing" (Introduction ix). The document also ensured there would be readers other than his wife and writer friends. If this awareness of the outside reader was not a primary spur for writing, it certainly was not a spur for quitting.

For this general reader whose presence was now certified by the contract, Lowell produced prose that was fluid and fragmentary, gliding between Payne Whitney scenes, childhood reminiscences, scenes of parents' deaths, and reflections on their lives. A good example of this associative writing can be found in "Near the Unbalanced Aquarium":

> And a great iron gate, some twenty feet high, protected us from the city and living. The gate was just a little bit prettier and more ornate than use demanded. It was really locked, and a patient would have had to be an athlete or a thief to scale it. Beyond it we could see the blinding blue sparkle of the East River. Often, an orange tugboat was moored a few feet away from us. It had a swollen

[90] These lines laid the groundwork for what would become a *Life Studies* poem "My Last Afternoon with Uncle Devereux Winslow."

[91] I discuss this vacillation more fully later in the chapter with respect to his expurgation of the material dealing with the manic breakdown of 1954.

> fleece-and-rawhide buffer on its prow. As if begging admission to our asylum, the boat kept moving with chafing sounds toward the concrete embankment.
>
> My mind moved through the pictures of conscience and remained in its recollections, weightless, floating. On a sallow sheet of onionskin paper, whose semitransparency half revealed and half concealed the pink pads of my fingers, I tried to write some lines of verse:
>
> > *In Boston the Hancock Life Insurance Building's beacon*
> > *flared*
> > *Foul weather, Father, as far as the Charlestown Naval Yard.*
> > *And almost warmed…*
>
> On the nights when Mother was dying all alone at that little private hospital in Rapallo, the needle of the Hancock Life Insurance Building was flashing storm warnings. (348)

As Lowell moves in his description from the outside world into the hospital, his reader acts as a boat that has finally succeeded at gaining access to the asylum. Terri Witek explains how Lowell understood the space of the mental hospital: "When Lowell writes about Payne-Whitney, he sometimes describes himself and the other inmates as fish in a 'balanced aquarium,' a fluid world held captive within a more structured one" (45). In the long passage quoted above, Lowell denies his reader the role of a removed observer; he pulls him/her out of the openness and free flow of the river into the enclosed aquarium and further into his mind.

Once deftly drawn into it, the reader has to be able and ready to witness graphic, disturbing scenes of mental and physical suffering. As a narrator, Lowell invokes in his reader a range of reactions from deep empathy to tolerance to unnerving identification. He speaks openly

of the severity of his condition and that of the other patients in the painfully detailed depictions of their troubled interactions, during which once again Lowell fails at communication:

> Roger, an Oberlin undergraduate and fellow patient, sat beside Anna on the piano bench. He was small. His dark hair matched his black-flannel Brooks Brothers suit; his blue-black eyes matched his blue-black necktie. He wore a light cashmere sweater that had been knitted for him by his mother, and his yellow woolen socks had been imported from the Shetlands. Roger talked to Anna with a persuasive shyness. Occasionally, he would stand up and play little beginner's pieces for her. He explained that these pieces were taken from an exercise book composed by Béla Bartók in protest against the usual, unintelligibly tasteless examples used by teachers. Anna giggled with incredulous admiration as Roger insisted that the clinic's music instructor could easily teach her to read more skillfully. Suddenly I felt compelled to make a derisive joke, and I announced cryptically and untruly that Rubinstein had declared the eye was of course the source of all evil for a virtuoso. "If the eye offends thee, pluck it out." No one understood my humor. I grew red and confused. The air in the room began to tighten around me. I felt as if I were squatting on the bottom of a huge laboratory bottle and trying to push out the black rubber stopper before I stifled. Roger sat like a rubber stopper in his black suit. Suddenly I felt I could clear the air by taking hold of Roger's ankles and pulling him off his chair. By some crisscross of logic, I reasoned that my cruel boorishness would be an act of self-sacrifice. I would be bowing out of the picture, and throwing Roger into the arms of Anna. Without warning, but without lowering my eyes from Anna's splendid breastplate

> blouse, I seized Roger's yellow ankles and pulled. Roger sat on the floor with tears in his eyes. A sigh of surprised revulsion went round the room. I assumed a hurt, fatherly expression, but all at once I felt eased and sympathetic with everyone. ("Near" 351-2)

The narrator's violent lunge unsparingly demonstrates the physical aspect of mental affliction. It grows even more pronouncedly disconcerting and pathetic for the reader in the next scene in which recovery from mental ailment is shown to be physically traumatizing and further linguistically debilitating:

> I was then transferred to a new floor, where the patients were deprived of their belts, pajama cords, and shoestrings. We were not allowed to carry matches, and had to request the attendants to light our cigarettes. For holding up my trousers, I invented an inefficient, stringless method which I considered picturesque and called Malayan. Each morning before breakfast, I lay naked to the waist in my knotted Malayan pajamas and received the first of my round-the-clock injections of chloropromazene: left shoulder, right shoulder, right buttock, left buttock. My blood became like melted lead. I could hardly swallow my breakfast, because I so dreaded the weighted bending down that would be necessary for making my bed. And the rational exigencies of bedmaking were more upsetting than the physical. I wallowed through badminton doubles, as though I were a driver in the full billowings of his equipment on the bottom of the sea. I sat gaping through Scrabble games, unable to form the simplest word; I had to be prompted by a nurse, and even then couldn't make any sense of the words the nurse had formed for me. I watched the Giants play the Brooklyn Dodgers on television. (353)

The level of detail Lowell provides in these passages indicates that he has neither forgotten nor wishes to forget about the experience. He must recall and tell about his trauma. Chris N van der Merwe and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela in their book *Narrating our Healing: Perspectives on Working through Trauma*, describe this process as "transformation of traumatic memory into narrative memory" (vii). For Lowell, this transformation requires the presence of a reading audience. "The significance of the empathic listener for the trauma narrative is the possibility created for the victim of trauma to externalize the traumatic event," Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela posit (27). Indeed, when Lowell says that his "outpourings" have something in common with the release work performed by a patient in a psychoanalytic session, he gives his reader the role of a receptive therapist. However, his reader cannot remain a detached observer, as he/she is drawn into concrete places within the clinic and introduced to their inhabitants. The reader thus perceives Payne Whitney as a living space, not an abstract entity. Even if we try to shun from the physical actuality of the place, Lowell does not let us succeed: we are held there by the power of the narrator's revelation and subsumed trust in our empathetic presence.

For the reader to function as a perceptive and empathetic therapist, he/she must engage in acts of identification, an important element of communication. Donald Spence explains:

> Sensitive, empathic listening can probably take place *only* if the words spoken by one speaker are invested with private meanings by the other. Unless some kind of internal elaboration takes place, the listener hears only words—we can imagine our response to a long monologue in a completely foreign tongue—and communication fails. To listen with understanding and involvement requires the listener to be constantly forming hypotheses about the next word, the next sentence, the reference for a recent pronoun, or the color of the bride's eyes,

> because it is only in the midst of this kind of activity that words take on some kind of meaning. (116-17)

The passages from "Near the Unbalanced Aquarium" show that our understanding and ensuing empathy depend largely on our ability to identify with the narrator who is vulnerable and divested of integrity by his malady. They illustrate that Lowell indeed "wrote from the perspective of the vulnerable and marginalized, a perspective his friends certainly saw in his work and understood" (Travisano 47). Reading "Near the Unbalanced Aquarium," we are easily compelled to view our own lives from this perspective, to awaken our own vulnerable, subdued voices. Once that happens, we are in conversation with the narrator, whose language we now understand, and with ourselves. In the case of the latter, we are able to face our own traumas and begin working through them. Identification with a traumatized narrator of a literary text can endow the reader with "some kind of healing," Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela surmise (ix).Whether pursued by the author or the reader of a traumatic narrative, healing should not be understood as an "end to all suffering," they maintain, but as a way of "facing and work[ing] through trauma, so that the tragic loss caused by the trauma is balanced by a gain in meaning" (ix, viii).

But can any kind of meaning be derived from *not* telling? In its published form, *Life Studies* excludes the Payne Whitney narratives. Lowell deals with mental illness in four poems throughout the volume, but none of them focuses on the 1954 episode. "A Mad Negro Soldier Confined at Munich" recalls his stay at a Munich clinic in 1952; "Waking in the Blue" depicts the "house for the 'mentally ill,'" McLean's Mental Hospital, in New England, where in early 1958 Lowell found himself along with another, older highborn New Englander Stanley, a "Harvard all-American fullback"; "Home After Three Months Away" focuses on his first

weekend visit home from McLean; and "Skunk Hour," intended as "the anchor poem in its sequence," strings together several themes of the volume, including mental illness (Lowell, "On 'Skunk Hour'" 226). In the history of Lowell's manic episodes, the one of 1954 seems to have been the most intense, urging him to put into writing the "most extensive and most richly detailed" account of a "psychotic episode," as testified by Ian Hamilton (215). Yet, he excludes it from the final text.

In a letter to Elizabeth Bishop, Lowell offers some explanation of his difficulty to talk about this experience:

> A lot of water has gone under the mill-wheel, since we were last writing almost a year ago now, I have been sick again, and somehow even with you I shrink both from mentioning and not mentioning. These things come on with a gruesome, vulgar, blasting surge of "enthusiasm," one becomes a kind of man-aping balloon in a parade—then you subside and eat bitter coffee-grounds of dullness, guilt etc. (14 Nov. 1954, *Words* 152)

Later, upon his release from McClean's, he wrote to Peter Taylor in similar terms: "It's not much fun writing about these breakdowns after they themselves have broken and one stands stickily splattered with patches of the momentary bubble. Health; but not a kind which encourages the backward look" (317). Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela note that having endured a trauma, one feels "a strong pull towards forgetting, or rather a denial of memory" and a "deep need to recall the details of the trauma" (30). This vacillation surfaces in Lowell's need to secure a publishing contract, which implied the idea of a reading audience, and his subsequent exclusion of the Payne Whitney material from the final text.

But, why was it more difficult for Lowell to face the printed material about his Payne Whitney episode than his stays at Munich or McClean's? One explanation can be found in Lowell's overall vision of his first published autobiography: "In *Life Studies,* I caught real memories in a fairly gentle style. It's not meant to be extremity. […] I have been through mania and depression; *Life Studies* is about neither. Mania is sickness for one's friends, depression for one's self" (Lowell, "Conversation with Hamilton" 286). To write about his most intense manic episode openly would mean to inflict the pain on his friends again and on his general reader now too. It may also mean to risk alienating the reader. Leigh Gilmore points out, "[a]utobiography about trauma forces the reader to assume a position of masochism or voyeurism" (22). In the *Life Studies* poems about mental illness, Lowell seems to be less concerned with granting his readers entrance into the mental hospital and more with depicting the overall quality of mental disturbance. Although there are some strong images of mental maladies in the published poems – a girlfriend setting the town on fire, a locked razor, the skunks – Lowell refrains from detailed prose narration found in "Near the Unbalanced Aquarium." The readers are able to grasp the reality of life in a mental hospital, but in a figurative form that provides horrific images but requires *them* to supply the narrative.[92] Of the four poems on the subject, only two are set within the hospitals: "A Mad Negro Soldier Confined at Munich" and "Waking in the Blue." We are not exactly granted entrance. "A Mad Negro Soldier Confined at Munich" comprises the protagonist's quoted speech, creating a distancing effect. The poem has a stable rhyme pattern that makes it less conversational. It offers no central narrative to follow, just fragments of thoughts and impressions. In the following two stanzas they are unified by animal imagery:

In Munich the zoo's rubble fumes with cats;

[92] Alfred Kazin thought that the "graphic" quality of Lowell's poetry "gave him a real audience" (*Writing* 125).

hoydens with air-guns prowl the Koenigsplatz,
and pink the pigeons on the mustard spire.
Who but my girl-friend set the town on fire?

Cat-houses talk cold turkey to my guards;
I found my *Fraulein* stitching outing shirts
in the black forest of the colored wards—
lieutenants squawked like chickens in her skirts. (5-12)

In "Waking in the Blue," Lowell's rhymes are more scattered, but the interactions between the patients or the speaker's own inner turmoil are withheld. The speaker's position is that of an observer: "I grin at Stanley, now sunk in his sixties, / once a Harvard all-American fullback" (12-13). The realistic portrayals of the actual interactions between Roger and Anna and the bed making scene give way in "Skunk Hour" to the exhaustive statements, "My mind's not right" and "I myself am hell; / nobody's here" (30, 35-6), and in "Home After Three Months Away" to suggestive adjectives "Cured, I am frizzled, stale and small" (40).

Although in these four poems Lowell deals with mental illness in less explicit terms than in his prose, he still invites his readers as close interlocutors stimulated to draw on their experience and imagination to supply meaning to his sketchy descriptions. Moreover, framed by the personal reminiscences of "91 Revere Street" and the other poems in the sequence, these four poems prompt the reader to view mental illness as a part of the author's biography and to find its links to the specific events narrated earlier. The readers thus engage in mental conversation with the poet, in which they ask questions and put forth conjectures. They may be impelled to initiate the same process in relation to their own lives. At the same time, by presenting mental illness

more figuratively, as in "Skunk Hour," Lowell shows its resonance beyond the boundaries of his personal life and casts light on the culture of the fifties, the decade he deemed "tranquillized" ("Memories of West Street and Lepke") (12).

His contemporary reader could identify with the speaker not on the personal basis, but through a shared cultural moment. Lowell's critics have widely addressed the social implications of mental illness as portrayed in *Life Studies*. Most notably, Morris Dickstein links *Life Studies* to such seminal works of the fifties as *The Catcher in the Rye*, *Howl*, and "The White Negro," noting their preoccupation with madness as "an undercurrent of the enforced sanity of the fifties" (146). Lowell himself explained the setting of his poem in the postwar terms: "I hoped my readers would remember John of the Cross's poem. My night is not gracious, but secular, puritan and agnostic. An existential night. Somewhere in my mind was a passage from Sartre or Camus about reaching some point of final darkness where the one free act is suicide ("On 'Skunk Hour'" 226). Lowell is not looking to conceal the darkness or put a psychoanalytic band aide over it. He is looking to expose it in a way that would make it subtly but surely "visible" – through personal narrative:

> During the last twenty years [1936-1956], the earth's surface seems to have sagged and cracked. These have been the years of Hitler, Stalin's purges, Buchenwald, the atomic bomb, the threat of nuclear war. During this period our graver and more high-powered critics have had to attempt a massive reappraisal; they have pretty well agreed that writers can be too healthy for their own good. Today we are all looking for darkness visible, and we know that a realistic awe of evil is a mighty valuable thing for the writer to have. ("Art and Evil" 129)

Other poets followed Lowell's lead in employing personal voices to organize, what Diane Middlebrook sees as "the protest against Impersonality," the act of "reinstating an insistently autobiographical first person engaged in resistance to the pressure to conform" (635). In this way, Lowell initiates another conversation among poets; they are also his readers coming to begin and participate in a common cultural endeavor.[93]

Lowell's attempts to facilitate conversation with his parents and reading communities continue throughout his autobiographical works following *Life Studies*: the apostrophes persist and private confessions continue reaching the public domain and leading the reader to "believe he was getting the *real* Robert Lowell" (Lowell, "Interview with Frederick Seidel" 247). In his Payne Whitney days when he was scribbling personal poems, Lowell intuitively grasped the germ of the confessional mode: such private matters as self-reparation and family reconciliations required the interlocutory presence of the Other. Like Alfred Kazin, Lowell was well acquainted with psychoanalysis, but his recovery from the Payne Whitney episode was a subject he associated strictly with the autobiographical writing. His publishing contract, his immediate readers, (Elizabeth Hardwick, Elizabeth Bishop, colleagues and relatives) and Boston constituted the essential parts of the public life Lowell was trying to reenter. Upon his release from Payne Whitney Lowell anticipated his move to Boston where he knew he would feel grounded and secure; he wrote to Elizabeth Bishop: "The thought of going back to Boston sometimes makes me feel like a flayed man, who stands quivering and shivering in his flesh, while holding out a hand for his old sheet of skin" (16 July 1965, *Words* 168). It was the uncovering of the roots and the weaving of these relational networks that Lowell sought rather than a psychoanalyst's couch. His experience with *Life Studies* brought him to value the "truth and the simple expression of

[93] In *Midcentury Quartet*, Thomas Travisano shows that Lowell had particularly close affinities with Elizabeth Bishop, Randall Jarrell, John Berryman, W.D. Snodgrass, Anne Sexton, and Sylvia Plath.

very difficult feelings" in poetry ("To Anne Sexton" 326). He performs this expression in the way that gradually grows from confession into conversation in which not only his, but his addressees and readers have the chance to face their "many false voices" and "find a true one" (Lowell, "Talk with Robert Lowell" 85). The intimacy that ensues from the interaction between a confessional poet and his confessional reader can go a long way toward exposing, re-experiencing, but also potentially resolving both personal and shared traumas. Lowell's *Life Studies* illuminates the reader's position as autobiographical interlocutor and opens many lines of communication that can occur through the mechanisms of empathy and resistance.

Epilogue

From its initial stages, this study has relied on a composite methodological approach to postwar American autobiography, combining in innovative ways autobiography criticism, postwar trauma theory, and paratextual analysis. I have explored the interaction of two crucial strands in autobiography criticism – crisis as spur for autobiography and relational selfhood – in relation to the diverse literary phenomenon appearing in the aftermath of a historical crisis. Postwar autobiographical practices reflect the culture's growing concern about the threats to privacy proffered by Cold War politics; they also exhibit a conflicting predilection for self-autonomy and social interaction. The acts of compulsive, private, public, veiled or confessional self-narration have been analyzed in light of Robert J. Lifton's concept of *formulation*. Encompassing the issues of trauma, creativity, identity, and external relations, formulation epitomizes the quintessential qualities of autobiographical experience particularly in the postwar decade. Each of my chapters argues that although the accounts of crisis may not be textually explicit, they guide the process of life writing in ways that engender and empower formulation.

Considered in the autobiographical context, formulation is not an abstract concept of post-traumatic theory, but a dynamic process occurring through narrative means, in relation to readers and over time. It can take place through revision and serial publication. A recurrent return to the autobiographical endeavor that was originally spawned by crisis (personal and/or historical) suggests that the crisis has not been fully resolved, arguably, that it can never be fully resolved. What is potentially reparative about the recurrent autobiographical gesture is that it produces a channel for gradual fostering of a relationship with those whose presence is invoked in the texts, and with the reader. My analysis of textual revisions has revealed that in the process

of formulation memories are deployed in ways that expose and construct fields of intimacy between the autobiographer and his/her relational others.

These findings can be productively employed to analyze other postwar texts with varying degrees of autobiographical affinity. Mary McCarthy's memoir *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood* (1957), for example, readily lends itself to the kind of work performed in the preceding pages. Writing in the wake of the war and her recent divorce about the death of her parents and her difficult childhood in a new literary form (before *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood* McCarthy wrote mainly fiction), McCarthy persistently invites her readers to interact with her autobiographical persona. An inquiry may be launched toward understanding how and why she builds this dialogue throughout her drafts, as well as in her subsequent autobiographical works, *How I Grew* (1987) and *Intellectual Memoirs: New York, 1936-1938* (1992), and the ultimate significance the dialogue has for the writer admittedly interested in probing "the common world that lies between the contemporary reader and the contemporary author" (McCarthy 292). Moreover, alternating between the two modes of supplying and questioning a narrative, McCarthy draws attention to the questions of omniscience and meta-commentary in autobiography. A fruitful study may emerge from the consideration of how unreliable narration and meta-narrative technique aid in constructing and/or threatening autobiographical intimacy.

Works of autobiographical fiction emerging in the fifties, most notably Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) and Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957), constitute another territory for a critical inquiry. These landmarks of American postwar fiction can reveal new thematic, biographical, and historical dimensions if viewed as examples of *autofiction*, "[a] term used often in France for autobiographical fiction, or fictional narrative in the first-person mode" (Smith & Watson 259). Commitment to autofiction is marked by the conscious avoidance of

autobiographical pact, term coined by Philip Lejeune to denote a "reading contract" between the autobiographer and his/her audience that "there is *identity of name* between the author (such as he figures, by his name, on the cover), the narrator of the story, and the character who is being talked about" (*On Autobiography* 28, 12; original emphasis). The evasion of autobiographical pact can potentially raise new questions about the relationship between the self and the world in the post-crisis reality of the fifties. For instance, a gesture could be made toward understanding whether the lack of autobiographical pact allows for or threatens formulation and/or perhaps facilitates other recuperative modes.

In addition to prose autobiography and autofiction, confessional poetry came into fruition in the fifties. This form of life writing takes its own unique stance toward autobiographical pact, stretching its limits to the opposite extreme as it claims to open intimate truths about the authors' lives. As such, it encourages the same level of confessional investment from the reader (Kazin, "The Self as History" 41), setting forth a conversation, which is really a mode of formulation. My approach to Lowell's *Life Studies* paves the way for exploring the conversational potentialities of Anne Sexton's, W.D. Snodgrass's, and Sylvia Plath's poetry in relation to the overall mental fixation on crisis, survival, and the loss of control prevalent in the fifties culture. Confessional writing of the later decades may be analyzed as conversational autobiography written during an ongoing crisis. Morris Dickstein's statement will be crucial for this consideration: "Because of the Cold War, the widespread fear of nuclear annihilation, the Korean War, and finally the war in Vietnam, American society had remained, psychologically at least, in a wartime frame of mind (87).

Viewed as pronounced clusters of life writing emerging at the same time, postwar prose memoir, autofiction, and confessional poetry ought to direct attention to the ways in which

each group of authors defined its aesthetic in relation to the contemporary (and, if relevant, preceding) authors working in the same and neighboring autobiographical forms.[94] Such a study may shed new light on autobiographers' individual and collective response(s) to the volatile state of privacy in the United States during the Cold War (Nelson xii).

In the larger context of autobiography studies, my dissertation contributes to the scholarly conversation about the relationship between crisis/trauma and autobiography. It complements Leigh Gilmore's analysis of the motivational mechanisms at play in serial autobiography (defined as "the pattern of returning to the autobiographical scene") (96). Gilmore ascertains in this serial practice a way to divert trauma, "to resist the little death that ending an autobiography represents" (97). My study exposes another crisis-based factor underlying the impulse to write serial autobiography – formulation.

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson have helpfully summed up current views on trauma life narrative as "focus[ing] on the narrator's reliving of a past event and emphasiz[ing] a gap that cannot be closed between the narrative present and the narrated past" (283). Construing trauma as impetus for rather than a narrative focus of autobiography, my work expands this definition and in so doing establishes a tighter ontological link between trauma theory and autobiography theory in the postwar context and possibly beyond. This link is implicit in Lyndsey Stonebridge's essay "Theory of Trauma." Stonebridge calls attention to the fact that "trauma theory itself largely arose out of considerations of mid-century writing" (MacKay 7) and discusses Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* as a crucial example of such writing. The importance of Freud's work, Stonebridge notes, lies in his argument that "his own identity, that of a Jewish person, was founded not on divine truth, but on trauma." In turn, this finding's ultimate value

[94] With respect to confessional poetry, Thomas Travisano insists on viewing Lowell, Jarrell, Bishop, and Berryman through the lens of their sustained "behind-the-scenes interchange" (13).

for psychoanalysis is that it "reaffirms psychoanalysis's starting point: that *identity begins with a trauma,* a wound in the psyche of which we cannot speak, but upon which we nonetheless fixate in our imperfect memories, fictions, repetitions, and compulsions" (195, emphasis added). As a form of writing inevitably and deeply concerned with identity, autobiography is a terrain where these narrative fixtures ("imperfect memories," etc.) are formed. Like a psychoanalytic session, autobiography is mobilized by what is perceived as crisis or trauma, and, if studied from the angle suggested in my study, it can be said to epitomize a trauma narrative delivered in explicit or implicit terms. This theoretical standpoint may illuminate concepts of trauma theory, in addition to those discussed here (repetition and formulation), that are particularly pertinent for an autobiographical text in question.

Methodologically, my study suggests several entry points into autobiographical texts. I have made the case for archival research and paratextual analysis as essential instruments for comprehending autobiography's propensity to facilitate the acts of reaching inward and outward and to convey how these acts unfold and affect each other. Scholars interested in observing the autobiographer's changing views of the self and its relation to the world will find this methodological move productive. The approach can reveal how relational others are engaged, protected, and betrayed *throughout* the autobiographical process. Further, as my analysis of Nabokov's English and Russian autobiographies indicates, paratextual analsysis is crucial when the subject of study is autobiography in translation. Finally, I have viewed paratextual materials in terms of both content and form variations (journal and published autobiography in Kazin's case, first person narrative with epistolary fragments in Nabokov's, and prose and poetry in Lowell's). This dual approach has helped to discern how autobiographers articulate and cope with crisis and the changing role of the audience in this process. Other, not necessarily crisis or

trauma-related studies, may pursue this methodology to explore what guides an autobiographer's choice of form, and how the concept of the self is revised when the audience changes from the self to the other.

Works Cited

Aarons, Victoria. *A Measure of Memory: Storytelling and Identity in American Jewish Fiction*. Athens: U of Georgia P. 1996. Print.

Aciman, André, ed. *Letters of Transit: Reflections on Exile, Identity, Language, and Loss*. New York: New Press, 1999. Print.

---. "Permanent Transients." Foreword. Aciman, *Letters* 7-14.

---. "Shadow Cities." Aciman 15-34.

Alexandrov, Vladimir E., ed. *The Garland Companion to Vladimir Nabokov*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1995. Print.

---. Nabokov's *Otherworld*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991. Print.

Altman, Janet Gurkin. *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1982. Print.

Ascher, Maria Louise. "The Exile as Autobiographer: Nabokov's Homecoming." Radulescu 67-86.

Ashenburg, Katherine. *The Mourner's Dance: What We Do When People Die*. New York: North Point Press, 2003. Print.

Axelrod, Steven Gould, ed. *The Critical Response to Robert Lowell*. Westport: Greenwood Press. 1999. Print.

---. *Robert Lowell: Life and Art*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1978. Print.

---, and Helen Deese, eds. *Robert Lowell: Essays on the Poetry*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986. Print.

Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1981. Print.

Berlant, Lauren, ed. *Intimacy*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2000. Print.

---. "Intimacy: A Special Issue." Berlant, Lauren. Ed. *Intimacy*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2000. 1-8. Print.

Berlin, Isaiah. Introduction. *From the Other Shore.* By Alexander Herzen. Trans. Moura Budberg. Westport: Hyperion Press, Inc. 1981. vii-xxiii. Print.

Bishop, Elizabeth. "On *Life Studies.*" Axelrod *Critical Response* 63.

Bowen, Roger. "Confession and Equilibrium: Robert Lowell's Poetic Development." *Criticism* 11 (1969): 78-93. Print.

Boyd, Brian. Chronology of Nabokov's Life and Works. Alexandrov, *Garland* xxix-l.

---. Introduction. *Speak, Memory: Autobiography Revisited*. By Nabokov. New York: Everyman's Library, Knopf, 1999. ix-xxv. Print.

---. "Nabokov, Literature, Lepidoptera." *Nabokov's Butterflies: Unpublished and Uncollected*

Writings. Eds. Brian Boyd and Robert Michael Pyle. Boston: Beacon Press, 2000. 1-31. Print.

---. "Nabokov as Storyteller." Connolly, *Cambridge* 31-48.

---. *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991.

---. *Vladimir Nabokov: The Russian Years*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990.

Boym, Svetlana. "On Diasporic Intimacy: Ilya Kabakov's Installations and Immigrant Homes." Berlant, Lauren. Ed. *Intimacy*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2000. 226-252. Print.

Brodsky, Anna. "Nabokov's *Lolita* and the Postwar Émigré Consciousness." Radulescu 49-66.

Brodzki, Bella. "Teaching Trauma and Transmission." *Teaching the Representation of the Holocaust*. Ed. Marianne Hirsch and Irene Kacandes. New York: The Modern Language Association, 2004. 123-148. Print.

Broyard, Anatole. 1993. *Kafka Was the Rage: A Greenwich Village Memoir*. New York: Vintage Books, 1997. Print.

Cantiello, Jessica Wells. "'That Story about the Gun': Pseudo-Memory in Julia Alvarez's Autobiographical Novels." MELUS 36.1 (2011): 83-108. Project Muse. Web. 15. Aug. 2009.

Carr, David. *Time, Narrative, and History*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991. Print.

Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore: Johns

Hopkins UP, 1996. Print.

Chafe, William H. *The Unfinished Journey: America since World War II*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991. Print.

Connolly, Julian W., ed. *Cambridge Companion to Nabokov*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005. Print.

---. *Nabokov's Early Fiction: Patterns of Self and Other*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009. Print.

Cook, Richard. *Alfred Kazin: A Biography*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2007. Print.

Cornwell, Neil. "From Sirin to Nabokov: the Transition to English." Connolly, *Cambridge* 151-169.

Cotkin, George. *Existential America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2003. Print.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference and Repetition*. Trans. Paul Patton. New York: Columbia UP, 1994. Print. Trans. of *Différence et Retetition*. Presses Universitaires de France, 1968.

Dickstein, Morris. *Leopards in the Temple: The Transformation of American Fiction 1945-1970*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2002. Print.

Diment, Galya. "Nabokov's Biographical Impulse: Art of Writing Lives." Connolly, *Cambridge* 170-184.

---. "'Nabokov' Doesn't Rhyme with 'Love'?: On Love and Control in *Speak, Memory*." *Journal of Evolutionary Psychology* 10 (1989): 275-83. Print.

Dolinin, Alexander. "*Lolita* in Russian." Alexandrov, *Garland* 321-330.

---. "Nabokov as a Russian Writer." Connolly, *Cambridge* 49-64.

Eakin, Paul John. "Alfred Kazin's Bridge to America." *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 77.1 (1978): 39-53. Print.

---. *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1999. Print.

---. *Living Autobiographically: How We Create Identity in Narrative*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2008. Print.

Egan, Susanna. *Mirror Talk: Genres of Crisis in Contemporary Autobiography*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1999. Print.

Erikson, Erik H. *Life History and the Historical Moment*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. 1975. Print.

Festa-McCormick, Diana. *The City as Catalyst: A Study of Ten Novels*. Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson Press, 1979. Print.

Friedman, Susan Stanford. "The Return of the Repressed in Women's Narrative." *Journal of Narrative Technique* 19.1 (1989): 141-56. JSTOR. Web. 20 Aug. 2012.

---. "Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice." *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*. Ed. Shari Benstock. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1988. 34-62. Print.

Funke, Sarah. "Afterword on the Unpublished Preface to *Conclusive Evidence.*" *Conjunctions* 31. (1998): 333. Web. 2 Aug. 2012.

Genette, Gérard. *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997. Print.

Gilmore, Leigh. *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2001. Print.

Giroux, Robert. Introduction. *Robert Lowell: Collected Prose.* By Robert Lowell. Ed. Robert Giroux. New York: FSG, 1987. ix-xiv. Print.

Gusdorf, Georges. "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography." Trans. James Olney. Olney, *Autobiography* 28-48.

Hamilton, Ian. *Robert Lowell: A Biography*. New York: Random House, 1982. Print.

Hamilton, Saskia, and Robert Lowell. "I Was Naked without My Line-Ends": Robert Lowell's Letters." *Harvard Review* 25 (2003): 140-151. JSTOR. Web. 17 August 2012.

Henke, Suzette A. *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women's Life-Writing*. New

York: St. Martin's Press, 1998. Print.

Hirsch, Mariann. *Family Frames*: *Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997. Print.

Hoffman, Eva. "The New Nomads." Aciman, *Letters* 35-63.

Iser, Wolfgang. "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach." *The Critical Tradition: Classical Texts and Contemporary Trends*. Ed. David Richter. 956-968. Print.

Karl, Frederick R. *American Fictions, 1940-1980: A Comprehensive History and Critical Evaluation*. New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1983. Print.

Karpukhin, Sergey. "Nabokov and Herzen." *The Nabokovian* 53, Fall 2004. Print.

Kazin, Alfred. "Alfred Kazin: The Critic as Creator." Interview by Robert B. Silvers. *Horizon* 4.6 (1962): 98-103. Print.

---. "A Devout Russian Iconoclast." *NYTBR* 6 January 1946, 1+. ProQuest Historical Newspapers. Web. 13 Aug. 2011.

---. "Going Home." *Harper's Magazine*. Apr. 1945: 476-478. Web.

---. *The Inmost Leaf: A Selection of Essays*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company. 1955. Print.

---. Introduction. *The Portable Blake*. By William Blake. Ed. Alfred Kazin. New York: Viking

Press, 1946. 1-55. Print.

---. Journals. 1933-1990. MS and TS. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, New York Public Library, New York.

---. *New York Jew*. New York: Knopf, 1978. Print.

---. *The Open Street*. New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1948. Print.

---. "The Past Breaks Out." *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*. Ed. William Zinsser. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998. 119-139. Print.

---. Preface. *On Native Grounds: An Interpretation of Modern American Prose Literature.* 1942. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers. xiii – xviii. Print.

---. "The Self in History: Reflections on Autobiography." Stone 31-43.

---. *A Walker in the City*. Orlando: Harcourt, Inc., 1951. Print.

---. *A Walker in the City*. TS. Notes. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, New York Public Library, New York.

---. "The Writer and the City." *Harper's Magazine* December 1968. Web. 28 July 2012.

---. *Writing Was Everything*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1995. Print.

Kearful, Frank. "Connecting Rooms: Entering 'Father's Bedroom' in Robert Lowell's *Life*

Studies." Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas 6.1 (2008): 111-133. *Project Muse.* Web. 14 August 2012.

Kerby, Anthony P. *Narrative and the Self.* Bloomington: Indiana UP. 1991. Print.

Khrushcheva, Nina L. *Imagining Nabokov: Russia between Art and Politics*. New Haven: Yale UP. 2007. Print.

Kramer, Lawrence. "Freud and the Skunks: Genre and Language in Life Studies." Axelrod and Desse 80-98.

Kramer, Michael P., and Hana Wirth-Nesher, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Jewish American Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003. Print.

Kramer, Michael P. "Beginnings and Ends: The Origins of Jewish American Literary History." Kramer, *Cambridge* 1-11.

Landesman, Alter F. *Brownsville: The Birth, Development and Passing of a Jewish Community in New York*. 2nd ed. New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1971. Print.

Lejeune, Philippe. *On Autobiography*. Trans. Katherine Leary. Ed. Paul John Eakin. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1989.

---. *On Diary*. Trans. Katherine Durnin. eds. Jeremy D. Popkin and Julie Rak. Honolulu: The Biographical Research Center, U of Hawai'i Press, 2009. Print.

Levinson, Julian. *Exiles on Main Street: Jewish American Writers and American Literary Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2008. Print.

Lifton, Robert Jay. *The Broken Connection: On Death and the Continuity of Life*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979. Print.

---. *Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima*. New York: Random House, 1967. Print.

---. *The Life of the Self: Toward a New Psychology*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1983. Print.

---, and Greg Mitchell. *Hiroshima in America: Fifty Years of Denial*. New York: G.P. Putman's Sons, 1995. Print.

---, and Eric Olson. *Living and Dying*. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974. Print.

Lowell, Robert. "After Enjoying Six or Seven Essays on Me." Lowell, *Collected Poems* 991-993.

---. "Antebellum Boston." Lowell, *Collected Prose* 291-308.

---. "Art and Evil." Lowell, *Collected Prose* 129-144.

---. *At Payne Whitney*. Robert Lowell Papers (MS Am 1905). Houghton Library, Harvard University.

---. *The Balanced Aquarium*. Robert Lowell Papers (MS Am 1905). Houghton Library,

Harvard University.

---. *Collected Poems*. Ed. Frank Bigart and David Gewanter. New York: FSG, 2003. Print.

---. *Collected Prose*. Ed. Robert Giroux. New York: FSG, 1987. Print.

---. "A Conversation with Ian Hamilton." Lowell, *Collected Prose* 267-290.

---. *Day by Day*. 1977. *Collected Poems*. Ed. Frank Bigart and David Gewanter. New York: FSG, 2003. 709 – 848. Print.

---. "An Interview with Frederick Seidel." Lowell, *Collected Prose* 235-266.

---. *The Letters of Robert Lowell*. Ed. Saskia Hamilton. New York: FSG, 2005. Print.

---. *Life Studies* and *For the Union Dead.* 1967. New York: FSG, 2007. Print.

---. "Near the Unbalanced Aquarium." Lowell, *Collected Prose* 346-363.

---. *Notebook.* New York: FSG, 1967. Print.

---. "On 'Skunk Hour.'" Lowell, *Collected Prose* 225-229.

---, and Dudley Young. "Talk with Robert Lowell." Meyers 148-153.

---. "To Elizabeth Bishop," 18 September 1950, letter 99 of *Words in Air,* eds. Thomas Travisano and Saskia Hamilton. 108-109.

---. "To Elizabeth Bishop," 14 November 1954, letter 124 of *Words in Air,* eds. Thomas Travisano and Saskia Hamilton. 152-153.

---. “To Elizabeth Bishop,” 16 July 1955, letter 129 of *Words in Air*, eds. Thomas Travisano and Saskia Hamilton. 166-169.

---. “To Elizabeth Hardwick,” 15 February 1954, letter 229 of *The Letters of Robert Lowell*, ed. Saskia Hamilton 209-10.

---. “To Allen Tate,” 15 March 1954, letter 237 of *The Letters of Robert Lowell*, ed. Saskia Hamilton 218-220.

---. “To Peter Taylor,” 15 March 1958, letter 327 of *The Letters of Robert Lowell*, ed. Saskia Hamilton 316-17.

---. “To Peter and Eleanor Ross Taylor,” 18 February 1955, letter 262 of *The Letters of Robert Lowell*, ed. Saskia Hamilton 243-244.

---. “To Anne Sexton,” 11 September 1958, letter 337 of *The Letters of Robert Lowell*, ed. Saskia Hamilton 326.

---. “To Harriet Winslow.” 13 March 1954, letter 236 of *The Letters of Robert Lowell*, ed. Saskia Hamilton 218.

---. “You sailed to China, Daddy, and knew your math.” *Miscellaneous Fragments and Untitled Poems*. Robert Lowell Papers (MS Am 1905). Houghton Library, Harvard University.

---, and A. Alvarez. “Robert Lowell in Conversation.” Meyers 79-83.

---, and A. Alvarez. “Robert Lowell in Conversation.” Meyers 74-78.

---, and Elizabeth Bishop. *Words in Air: The Complete Correspondence between Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell*. Eds. Thomas Travisano and Saskia Hamilton. New York: FSG, 2008. Print.

---, and Stanley Kunitz. “Talk with Robert Lowell.” Meyers 84-90.

Mack, John E. “Exposing the Killing System: Robert Jay Lifton as Witness.” In *Genocide, War, and Human Survival*. Eds. Charles B. Strozier and Michael Flynn. Boston: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1995. 319-325. Print.

MacKay, Marina, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of World War II*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009. Print.

---. Introduction. *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of World War II.* Ed. Marina MacKay. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009. 1-9. Print.

Mailer, Norman. 1959. *Advertisements for Myself*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992.

Martin, Jay. “Grief and Nothingness: Loss and Mourning in Lowell’s Poetry.” Axelrod and Desse 80-98.

McCarthy, Mary. “Characters in Fiction.” *On the Contrary*. New York: FSG, 1961. 271-292. Print.

Merwe, Chris N van der, and Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela. *Narrating Our Healing: Perspectives on Working through Trauma*. Newscastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007. Print.

Meyers, Jeffrey, ed. *Robert Lowell: Interviews and Memoirs*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1988. Print.

Middlebrook, Diane. "What Was Confessional Poetry?" In Jay Parini, ed., *Columbia History of American Poetry*, 632-49. New York: Columbia UP, 1993. Print.

Milbauer, Asher Z. *Transcending Exile: Conrad, Nabokov, I.B. Singer*. Miami: Florida International UP, 1985. Print.

Miller, Nancy K. *Bequest and Betrayal: Memoirs of a Parent's Death*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2000. Print.

---. *But Enough About Me: Why We Read Other People's Lives*. New York: Columbia UP, 2002. Print.

---. "The Entangled Self: Genre Bondage in the Age of the Memoir." *PMLA* 122.2. (2007): 537-548. Print.

---. "Getting Transpersonal: The Cost of an Academic Life." *Prose Studies* 31.3 (2009): 166-180. EBSCOhost. Web. 29 July. 2012.

---. **“**Representing Others: Gender and the Subjects of Autobiography.” *Differences* 6.1 (1994). 1-27. *Academic Search Complete.* Web. 15. Aug. 2009.

---. *Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing. New York*. Columbia UP, 1988. Print.

---, and Jason Tougaw, eds. *Extremities: Trauma, Testimony, and Community*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2002. Print.

Molesworth, Charles. “The City: Some Classical Moments.” *City Images: Perspectives from Literature, Philosophy, and Film*. Ed. Mary Ann Caws. New York: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, OPAC (Amsterdam) B.V., 1991. 13-23. Print.

Nabokov, Vladimir. “The Art of Literature and Common Sense.” Bowers 371-379.

---. Author’s Note. *Conclusive Evidence*. By Nabokov. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1951. N. pag. Print.

---. Chapter 16 or On *Conclusive Evidence*. Appendix. 1967. *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited*. By Nabokov. New York: Everyman’s Library, Knopf, 1999. 247 - 261. Print.

---. *Conclusive Evidence*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1951. Print.

---. Diary. MS and TS. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, New York Public Library, New York.

---. *Drugie berega* [*Other shores*]. 1954. *Другие берега. Избранные произведения: Король,*

дама, валет, Защита лужина, Другие берега. [*Other Shore. Selected Works: King, Queen, Knave, The Defense, Other Shores*] Moscow: Eksmo-press, 2002. 351-542. Print. (in Russian).

---. "Fame." Nabokov, *Poems and Problems*. 102-113.

---. Foreword. 1967. *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited*. By Nabokov. New York: Everyman's Library, Knopf, 1999. 3-8. Print.

---. Foreword. Nabokov, *Другие берега* 353-54.

---. "Good Readers and Good Writers." Bowers 1-7.

---. "The House Was There." *Conjunctions* 31. (1998): 333. Web. 2 Aug. 2012.

---. *Lectures on Literature.* Ed. Fredson Bowers. San Diego: Harcourt, Inc. 1980. Print.

---. *Lolita*. 1955; reprint, New York: Vintage International, 1997. Print.

---. "Mademoiselle O." *Atlantic*. Jan. 1943: 66-73. ProQuest Direct Complete. Web. 15 Aug. 2012.

---. *Notes for Work in Progress*. Berg Collection of English and American Literature, New York Public Library, New York.

---. "On a Book Entitled *Lolita*." *Lolita*. 1955; reprint, New York: Vintage International, 1997. 311-17. Print.

---. *Poems and Problems*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1970. Print.

---. “Poets.” Nabokov, *Poems and Problems*. 92-95.

---. *Selected Letters: 1940-1977*. Ed. Dmitri Nabokov and Matthew J. Bruccoli. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989. Print.

---. 1967. *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited*. New York: Everyman’s Library, Knopf, 1999. Print.

---. *Strong Opinions*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973. Print.

---. “Time and Ebb.” *Atlantic*. Jan. 1945: 81-84. ProQuest Direct Complete. Web. 15 Aug. 2012.

---. “To Altagracia De Jannelli” 16 November 1938?. Dmitri Nabokov and Matthew J. Bruccoli 28-29.

---. “To Elena Sikorskaia.” 6 December 1949. Vladimir Nabokov and Elena Sikorskaia. *Perepiska s sestroĭ* [*Correspondence with Sister*] 58-9.

---. “To Elena Sikorskaia.” 21 January 1946. Vladimir Nabokov and Elena Sikorskaia. *Perepiska s sestroĭ* [*Correspondence with Sister*] 29.

---. “To James Laughlin” 24 July 1941. Dmitri Nabokov and Matthew J. Bruccoli 34-35.

---. “To Katharine A. White” 29 September 1953. Dmitri Nabokov and Matthew J. Bruccoli 140.

---. “To Prince S. M. Kachurin.” Nabokov, *Poems and Problems*. 134-141.

---, and Elena Sikorskaia. *Perepiska s sestroĭ* [*Correspondence with Sister*]. 1985.

Ann Arbor, Mich.: Ardis, 1985. Print.

Nelson, Deborah. *Pursuing Privacy in Cold War America*. New York: Columbia UP, 2002. Print.

Oliver, Mary. *A Poetry Handbook: A Prose Guide to Understanding and Writing Poetry*. San Diego: Harcourt, Inc. 1994. Print.

Olney, James, ed. *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980. Print.

---. "Autobiography and the Cultural Moment: A Thematic, Historical, and Bibliographical Introduction." Olney 3 – 27.

Ortega Y Gasset, Jose. "The Self and the Other." *Partisan Review*. 19.4 (1952): 391-409. New York: AMS Reprint Company, 1964. Print.

Petit, Laurence. "Speak, Photographs? Visual Transparency and Verbal Opacity in Nabokov's *Speak, Memory.*" *Nabokov Online Journal* 3 (2009): n. pag. Web. 14 August 2011.

Pifer, Ellen. "*Lolita*." Alexandrov, *Garland* 305-321.

Radulescu, Domnica, ed. *Realms of Exile: Nomadism, Diasporas, and Eastern European Voices* Lanham: Lexington Books, 2002. Print.

Ramazani, Jahan. *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney*. Chicago: U of

Chicago P, 1994. Print.

Reiman, Donald H. *Romantic Texts and Contexts*. Columbia, Mo.: U of Missouri P, 1987. Print.

Riesman, David, Nathan Glazer, and Reuel Denney. 1961. *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character.* New Haven: Yale UP, 1969. Print.

Rosenthal, M.L. in "Remembering Lowell." Meyers 218 – 221.

Rubin, Steven J. "The Ghetto and Beyond: First-Generation American-Jewish Autobiography and Cultural History." *Multicultural Autobiography: American Lives*. Ed. James Robert Payne. Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1992. Print.

Sayre, Robert F. "The Proper Study: Autobiographies in American Studies." Stone 11-30.

Schiff, Stacy. *Véra (Mrs.Vladimir Nabokov).* New York: Random House, 1999. Print.

Schuchalter, Jerry. "'What Makes Alfred Walk?': Alfred Kazin's *A Walker in the City* – A Rewriting of Henry David Thoreau's 'Walking' Essay." *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 21 (2002): 24-38.

Silver, Breda R. "Textual Criticism as Feminist Practice: Or, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf Part II." *Representing Modernist Texts: Editing as Interpretation*. Ed. George Bornstein. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1991. 193-222. Print.

Sisson, J.B. "*The Real Life of Sebatian Knight.*" Alexandrov, *Garland* 633-643.

Smith, Sidonie, and Julia Watson. *Reading Autobiography*: *A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*. 2nd ed. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2010. Print.

Solotaroff, Ted. ed. *Alfred Kazin's America: Critical and Personal Writings*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2003. Print.

Spargo, Clifton R. *The Ethics of Mourning: Grief and Responsibility in Elegiac Literature*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2004. Print.

Spence, Donald. *Narrative Truth and Historical Truth: Meaning and Interpretation in Psychoanalysis*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1982. Print.

Starobinski, Jean. "The Style of Autobiography." Trans. Seymour Chatman. Olney, *Autobiography* 73-83.

Stein, Kevin. Private Poets, *Worldly Acts: Public and Private History in Contemporary American Poetry.* Athens: Ohio UP, 1996. Print.

Stone, Albert E., ed. *The American Autobiography: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1981. Print.

Stonebridge, Lyndsey. "Theories of Trauma." MacKay 194-206.

Sweeney, Susan Elizabeth. "'By some sleight of *land*': How Nabokov Rewrote America." Connolly, *Cambridge* 65-84.

Thoreau, Henry David, "Walking." *Atlantic* June 1862. Web. 28 July 2012.

Travisano, Thomas. *Midcentury Quartet: Bishop, Lowell, Jarrel, Berrymand and the Making of a Postmodern Aesthetic*. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1999. Print.

---, and Saskia Hamilton, eds. *Words in Air: The Complete Correspondence between Elizabeth Bishop and Robert Lowell*. New York: FSG, 2008. Print.

Weiss, Michael. "Alfred Kazin, Hidden Stranger." Rev. of *Alfred Kazin: A Biography*, by Richard Cook. Democratiya 13 (2008): 205-217. Web. 13 August 2011.

Wisse, Ruth R. "Jewish American renaissance." Kramer, *Cambridge* 190-211.

Witek, Terri. *Robert Lowell and* Life Studies: *Revising the Self*. Columbia: U of Missouri Press, 1993. Print.

Wood, Michael. *The Magician's Doubts: Nabokov and the Risks of Fiction*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995. Print.

Zverev, Alexey. "Literary Return to Russia." Trans. Anna K. Primrose. Alexandrov, *Garland* 291-304.