PILGRIMAGES TO THE PAST: PLACE, MEMORY, AND RETURN IN CONTEMPORARY LIFE WRITING

by

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Abstract

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Pilgrimages to the Past draws from recent scholarship on autobiography, memory, and trauma, while attending to the historical and ethnic specificities of each text. Extending beyond an inquiry into how autobiographical narratives evoke place and how they present the interplay between location and remembering, my dissertation aims to show that the autobiographical impulse, or the desire to tell one's life story, is intimately bound with specific locations that inspire and facilitate remembering. Return lends the past new urgency and propels its narrative reconstruction. An important concept in this project is the dialogic dimension of the homonym routes/roots, which Susan Stanford Friedman sees as integral to processes of identity formation in an age of increased mobility. This analysis of the recuperative potentialities and reparative limits of return seeks to explore place as identity's foundational and transformational site. Going back affirms the returnees' connection to places from the past; at the same time, return changes how they perceive and inhabit their location in the present. Although returns are retrospectively oriented, they propel a prospective engagement with the past that both acknowledges its relevance and accepts its irretrievability. Insofar as visiting places of ancestral or personal significance ultimately leads to an incorporative separation from the

past, Pilgrimages to the Past posits that journeys of return are, in fact, journeys of departure that result in the returnee's turn towards present and future.

The diasporic quest for origins organizes Eva Hoffman's After Such Knowledge: Memory, History, and the Legacy of the Holocaust (2004) and Daniel Mendelsohn's The Lost: A Search for Six of Six Million (2006). In Running in the Family (1982) and My Brother (1997), Michael Ondaatje and Jamaica Kincaid, two writers of the postcolonial experience now living in North America, play on "the return of the native" theme as they describe visits to their home islands, Sri Lanka and Antigua, respectively. The predicament of exilic homecoming, in turn, is the key theme in Marjane Satrapi's Persepolis 2: The Story of a Return (2003). Revisits to places of personal significance, rather than to a place of origin, give narrative shape to Susan J. Brison's Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self (2002), Joan Didion's The Year of Magical Thinking (2005), and Alix Kates Shulman's To Love What Is: A Marriage Transformed (2008).

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Professor Meena Alexander's seminar on Migration and Memory first inspired me to explore the attachments that bind us to places from our past. During the year she was on leave from the Graduate Center and traveled around the world as Guggenheim Fellow

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Although she did not personally know me at that time, Professor Sondra Perl kindly agreed to read my dissertation prospectus on a very short notice so that I could make the deadline and apply for a CUNY-wide dissertation fellowship. Her excellent suggestion that I attend to the relationship between gender and memory encouraged me to expand my analysis of return memoirs. I would especially like to thank Professor Perl for making an effort to attend my defense despite being injured.

I would also like to acknowledge the assistance and support I received from Professor Randolph L. Braham and the Rosenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies he directs. Professor Braham's comment that the survivors' homecomings section of the post-Holocaust returns chapter resonates with his own experience was the most validating reader's response I could wish for.

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Introduction

Memories are so deeply bound to place, to places, making up a palimpsest for us.
Meena Alexander, "In the Mercy of Time–Flute Music"

I was talking about time. It's so hard for me to believe in it. Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not. Places, places are still there. …Where I was before I came here, that place is real. It's never going away.
Toni Morrison, Beloved

But to continue–the three old men and the one old woman are complete, as I was saying, because they died when I was a child. They none of them lived on to be altered as I altered–as others, like the Stillmans or the Lushingtons, lived on and were added to and filled and left finally incomplete. The same thing applies to places. I cannot see Kensington Gardens as I saw it as a child because I saw it only two days ago.
Virginia Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past"

In her memoirs, "None of Us Will Return," "Useless Knowledge," and "The Measure of Our Days," collectively published in the volume titled Auschwitz and After, Charlotte Delbo bears witness to her experience in the concentration camp and its aftermath. To evoke the extremity of her ordeal and to convey how its trauma carries over into her life after liberation, Delbo forgoes a linear narrative organization and instead plots her recollections onto the topography of the camp. The camp arrivals area, block 25 where the inmates are put to die, a stream in which she bathes, and a house her unit passes on their way to work are but a few places that locate Delbo's memories of the time she spent in Auschwitz and Ravensbruck. Adding up to a reconstructive account of daily existence in the camps, Delbo's figurative returns to these sites are revealing of the complex interplay between place and memory: a memory of an event is always tied to a memory of the place where it happened.

Delbo's Auschwitz and After constitutes a point of departure for my project that focuses on post-1945 autobiographical narratives organized around the authors' literal, as well as figurative, journeys to places from their ancestral or personal past. Memoirs of return, as I name these texts, engage and reconfigure the spatial aspect of remembering Delbo's project foregrounds.

The Holocaust marked a defining political, cultural, and aesthetic shift in the twentieth century. Unprecedented in scale and systematization, it traversed national borders and claimed lives of millions. The Nazi genocide resulted in the destruction of Jewish communities from across Eastern and Central Europe where they had been living for centuries. A vast political and social upheaval, the Holocaust also challenged the ruling intellectual discourses to explicate, or at least account for, the atrocity. At the same time as it required the revision of philosophical notions of good, evil, and humanity, the Holocaust raised questions about the ethics and aesthetics of its representation. As a chronotope, the time-space that has come to evoke the Holocaust, Auschwitz encapsulates the event's inconceivable violence and its effects.[1]

In their introduction to Extremities: Trauma, Testimony, and Community, Nancy K. Miller and Jason Tougaw argue that as "a paradigmatic event of unspeakable human suffering, of lives lost in extremity," the Holocaust "has produced a discourse–a set of terms and debates about the nature of trauma, testimony, witness, and community" (3; 4). The relationship between location and remembering, I would like to suggest, is of key importance to this discourse. Thus, revealing the concentration camp as a place of no return to which one keeps coming back in memory, the formal organization of Delbo's

[1] Mikhail Bakhtin develops the concept of the chronotope in The Dialogic Imagination. Michael Rothberg focuses on the chronotopic aspect of the concentrationary universe in Traumatic Realism: the Demands of Holocaust Representation as he discusses Theodor Adorno's famous "after Auschwitz" dictum (see pages 26-30 I).

memoirs establishes a discursive paradigm and opens ways for approaching other autobiographical texts concerned with the connection between place and memory.

The first part of Delbo's trilogy, "None of Us Will Return," opens with a description of the camp arrivals area, "the station [that] is not a railroad station," through which all new transports pass (4). Delbo recaptures the chaos of the arrival scene by describing how the place must have looked like to the weary people who have just endured a grueling journey in cattle cars. Scared and disoriented, the new arrivals do not know where they are: "They look for the station's name. This is a station that has no name" (5). Shouting guards separate men from women and children. Their "bundles, comforters and keepsakes" litter the platform (4). If it is the morning, "the mist veils the marshes" that surround the station (4). To those who come by night, "floodlights reveal the white barbed wire with the sharpness of astrophotography" (4). As they are led down "the street of arrivals," those entering the camp do not realize that "It is actually the street of departures" (7). The last road for those who will perish is also "a one-way street" for those who will survive: they will never be able to resume the lives they are leaving behind now (7).

Whereas in Delbo's memory the arrivals area stands for the terror of the unknown and unthinkable, block 25, another place she cannot forget, evokes the horror of knowing too much. Block 25 is where women who are too sick to get up, too weak to last through a roll call, or too emaciated to withstand another day of work are taken, never to be seen again. "Every two or three days," Delbo recalls the block 25 routine, "trucks arrived to take the living to the gas chamber, the dead to the crematorium" (19). Although others cannot know what is happening there unless the door is wide open when they are passing

by, through a barred window, Delbo and other inmates in her barracks have an unobstructed view into the "the yard of block 25, a courtyard enclosed by walls" (17). The women, however, are determined not to witness what takes place in there. "We never turn our heads in that direction," Delbo remembers (17). The one time Delbo and her companions break their resolve and look through the window, they see piles of frozen female corpses stacked on top of one another in front of block 25. Preserved in Delbo's memory, the courtyard strewn with bodies of dead women registers the extremity and ubiquity of death that characterized the daily camp existence.

In turn, Delbo's memory of the stream where she hastily washes herself is a memory of an event that broke the sameness and monotony of days measured "only by heavy penalties and roll calls" (147). Attempting a step-by-step narrative reconstruction of the bath she took on the seventy-seventh day after her arrival to Auschwitz, Delbo discovers that she "remember[s] only the stream. The memory of it obliterated all the other impressions of the day" (146). She cannot recall who was with her, how her own body smelled, or what her work assignment was that day. Although to describe the bath Delbo relies on "reported remembrances" and reverts to the use of conditionals–"It must have happened like this, but I have no memory of it," she concludes her account of the episode–she can vividly picture the stream (152; 153). She remembers its slippery grass-covered banks, "here and there a shrub with opened buds," and how the stream's water "ran over pebbles" (149). The memory in which "there is only the stream and me…is wrong, absolutely wrong," Delbo realizes, but it is all she recalls nonetheless (148). Eclipsing Delbo's memory of everything else that happened that day, the indelible memory of the stream suggests that the bath represented an explosion of the frame of the

concentrationary universe. When Delbo remembers the stream, then, she remembers a place that, for a brief moment, seemed to exist outside of Auschwitz.

Delbo's memory of the house where her unit is allowed to take shelter on a rainy afternoon is another memory of a rupture in the numbing repetitiveness of the camp. She remembers the heavy rain that has been ceaselessly falling since early morning on that particular day. It made working in the fields especially difficult. In order to pull out the scotch-grass roots turned up by the plow," the women have to bend over and move slowly "furrow after furrow" (76). Cold, soaking wet, and fighting off the weight of "clods of wet earth, glued to our clogs," they notice an empty house in the distance (76). When the rain picks up, to the women's utter disbelief, the guards march them off in its direction. Although it is a dilapidated farmhouse awaiting demolition because it belongs to Jews, Delbo and her companions "enter the house as though it were a church" (77). She remembers "a smell of wet plaster. The floorboards and the wallpaper have been torn off. As well as most of the doors and windows" (77). As they huddle together "on the rubble covering the floor," the women begin to imagine how they would furnish the place (77). Having nearly forgotten "what a house is like," they are surprised to "find a whole unused vocabulary" (77). Words such as "a dining room," "a table," "a fireplace," or "draperies" evoke a life from before the war. In no time, the abandoned "house bedecks itself with all its comfortable, familiar pieces of furniture" (77). Its existence belies the stark reality of the camp: "The house has grown warm, lived in. We feel good," Delbo describes the short respite from exhaustion and despair the place offers (78). Her memory of the house at once reveals and obscures the incommensurability of the concentration camp with the world beyond it.

In addition to showing Delbo's memories as metaphorical revisits of specific locations in the camp, Auschwitz and After further highlights the relationship between place and memory in its presentation of the crisis in which survivors' actual return from Auschwitz results. Although during their imprisonment Delbo and her companions dream about coming back home, after liberation they are not able to resume their former lives. Instead, they continue to face the lingering effects of the camp experience. Delbo and her comrades whose first-person monologues she includes the last volume of the trilogy, "The Measure of Our Days," figure survival as "a malady of time and space," to use Michael Rothberg's evocative expression (163). In the war's aftermath, the bounds of Auschwitz cross spatiotemporal boundaries and extend to encompass the survivor's present.

In one her poetic ruminations on the impossibility of separating her Auschwitz past from her present, Delbo wonders if her return really happened:

> tell me did I really come back
> from the other world?
> As far as I'm concerned
> I'm still there
> dying there
> a little more each day (224)

The realities of the concentration camp and the life after liberation overlap and coexist in her mind. She remains caught up between the past she cannot forget and the presents she cannot inhabit. As a consequence, she does not belong to either.

Gilberte, a fellow survivor, also confesses that despite having come back twenty-five years ago, she still doubts that Auschwitz is a part of her past. The experience remains vivid in her memory, and the pain she still feels is so intense that the temporal and spatial distance from the camp seems unreal to her: "I keep on telling myself, just to make sure of it, that we came back twenty-five years ago, otherwise I wouldn't believe it. I know it as we know the earth is spinning, because we learned it, but you must think to know it" (253). For Gilberte, the affective weight of memory does not recede with time. Even though the concentration camp has become a distant history, an experience from a past long gone, it does not lose its force. Her memory keeps her pain alive and pulsating.

Similarly, for Mado, another woman from Delbo's convoy, the trauma of Auschwitz persists as arrested time that "does not pass over me, over us. It doesn't erase anything, doesn't undo it" (267). Mado feels that she has not survived but merely outlived herself. "I'm not alive. I died in Auschwitz but no one knows it," she describes her present as a living death (267). Liberation, Mado suggests, does not equal a release from the concentrationary universe that continues to haunt those who have come back. Delbo's and her companions' post-war lives, then, reveal that Auschwitz, the place from which "None of us was meant to return," is also the place from which "None of us will return" (114; 113).

"Uprooting," Eva Hoffman points out, was "an almost intrinsic part of the Holocaust's aftermath" (After Such Knowledge 77). Following the end of Second World War, a great majority of Eastern and Central European Jews who survived left their countries of origin. The Jewish exodus was not the only mass migration that defined the

post-1945 period. The diminishment of Western European political power and influence the war demonstrated led to independence movements across colonies in Asia and Africa. As Michael Rothberg observes, "The period between 1945 and 1962 contains both the rise of consciousness of the holocaust as an unprecedented form of modern genocide and the coming to national consciousness and political independence of many of the subjects of European colonialism" (Multidirectional Memory 7).[2] Repatriation, emigration, and internal migration were among the major effects of decolonization. "As the Europeans left, so did many of their former colonial subjects," Raymond F. Betts observes (78). "In scarcely more than three decades" after the Second World War, he brings up the staggering statistics, "over 16 million individuals within the former colonial world changed their place of residence" (Betts 78). Conversely, exile, another form of displacement that characterized the second half of the twentieth century, directly resulted from the growth of oppressive political regimes in certain regions of the world. Eastern and Central European dissidents fled communism and sought asylum in the West. Similarly, in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution, those opposing Islamic fundamentalism found refuge abroad.

Whereas the upheavals of the post-WWII decades required many to abandon their places of origin, the late 20th and early 21st centuries, a period Eva Hoffman calls "the era of memory, the era of returns," opened up opportunities for revisiting ancestral homelands that were abandoned or lost (203). The contemporary interest in origins has no doubt been fostered by recent global political shifts, relative ease of travel, and rapid spread of communications and research technologies, all of which have also transformed

[2] In Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization, a work of scholarship that participates in what he himself calls the "colonial turn in Holocaust studies" (70), Rothberg explores the "unexpected resonance between the Holocaust and colonialism" (21).

the patterns of migration. At the same time as these changes have made it possible for new migrants to maintain close connections to the countries they left behind, they have encouraged and enabled the second, third, and more distant generations to explore their ties to heretofore inaccessible and unknown familial homelands. Present-day acts of recovery and repair—the quest for roots, the reconstruction of family genealogies, the rediscovery of past histories and geographies, the retrieval of dispersed communities and the efforts to archive a disappeared world—seek to make meaning of the losses and atrocities suffered in the last century.

The memoirs of return Pilgrimages to the Past considers at once reflect and participate in the current preoccupation with the past. The diasporic quest for origins organizes Eva Hoffman's After Such Knowledge: Memory, History, and the Legacy of the Holocaust (2004) and Daniel Mendelsohn's The Lost: A Search for Six of Six Million (2006). Hoffman's and Mendelsohn's journeys to Eastern Europe transform their relationship to the familial past and redefine their understanding of what it means to be a Jew in contemporary United States. In Running in the Family (1982) and My Brother (1997), Michael Ondaatje and Jamaica Kincaid, two writers of the postcolonial experience now living in North America, play on "the return of the native" theme as they describe visits to their home islands, Sri Lanka and Antigua, respectively. The predicament of exilic homecoming is the key theme in Marjane Satrapi's Persepolis 2: The Story of a Return (2003). In the second volume of her graphic memoir, Satrapi describes her efforts to make herself feel at home again in Iran after an absence of four years during which the home country has been destroyed by war and succumbed to religious fundamentalism. Revisits to places of personal significance, rather than to a

place of origin, give narrative shape to Susan J. Brison's Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self (2002), Joan Didion's The Year of Magical Thinking (2005), and Alix Kates Shulman's To Love What Is: A Marriage Transformed (2008). Returning to where a life-transforming event took place enables all three authors to come to terms with the crisis and its consequences.

Pilgrimages to the Past draws from recent scholarship on autobiography, memory, and trauma, while attending to the historical and ethnic specificities of each text. Extending beyond an inquiry into how autobiographical narratives evoke place and how they present the interplay between location and remembering, my dissertation aims to show that the autobiographical impulse, or the desire to tell one's life story, is intimately bound with specific locations that inspire and facilitate remembering. Return lends the past new urgency and propels its narrative reconstruction. An important concept in this project is the dialogic dimension of the homonym routes/roots, which Susan Stanford Friedman sees as integral to processes of identity formation in an age of increased mobility.[3] Engaging Friedman's argument that "Roots and routes are…two sides of the same coin: roots, signifying identity based on stable cores and continuities; routes, suggesting identity based on travel, change, and disruption," my analysis of the recuperative potentialities and reparative limits of return seeks to explore place as identity's foundational and transformational site (153). Going back affirms the returnees' connection to places from the past; at the same time, return changes how they perceive and inhabit their location in the present. Although returns are retrospectively oriented, they propel a prospective engagement with the past that both acknowledges its relevance

[3] Friedman's formulation builds on James Clifford's discussion of the interconnection between roots and routes. In particular, Friedman credits Clifford's essay, "Traveling Cultures," with alerting her to the complexity of the roots/routes homonym.

and accepts its irretrievability. Insofar as visiting places of ancestral or personal significance ultimately leads to an incorporative separation from the past, Pilgrimages to the Past posits that journeys of return are, in fact, journeys of departure that result in the returnee's turn towards present and future. Precisely because they have acknowledged the continued relevance of the past, the returnees can assert their distance from it.

In The Art of Memory, Frances Yates relates a Greek legend attributing the creation of mnemonics to a tragic event. The only one to survive the collapse of a house where a sumptuous banquet was held, the poet Simonides of Ceos returns to the place of the catastrophe (Yates 1). Families of those who perished rely on his memory to identify their dead loved ones. As Simonides walks among the rubble, he recalls where individual guests were seated (Yates 2). This experience inspires him to develop the innovative techniques of memory retention that orators will subsequently embrace. Return to a place from the past, the legend suggests, facilitates the work of memory. An already familiar location evokes events that took place in it. As a result, the returnee can vividly remember what happened at the site to which she has come back. By revisiting a place, then, one revisits the past.

Experience and the memory it leaves behind, the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan argues in Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience, transforms "abstract space, lacking significance" into a "concrete, filled with meaning place" (Place and Space 199).[4] To illustrate the transformation, Tuan offers a scenario: "We are in a strange part of town: unknown space stretches ahead of us. In time we know a few landmarks and the routes connecting them. Eventually what was a strange town and unknown space becomes

[4] Incidentally, Yi-Fu Tuan is also the author of a return memoir. In 2007, he published Coming Home to China in which he describes the journey he undertook more than sixty years after leaving his homeland.

familiar place" (Tuan 199). The observation that the accrual of experience (and thus memory) over time is what distinguishes place from space guides Tuan's definition of the relationship between time and place. Its three main aspects include the perception of "time as motion or flow and place as a pause in the temporal current," the recognition that "while it takes time to form an attachment to place, the quality and intensity of experience matters more than simple duration," and the understanding that, insofar as place makes time visible, it serves "as memorial to times past" (Tuan Place and Space 179; 199; 179). In essence static and preservative, place has the potential to accumulate and keep together temporally distant experiences. Put differently, place situates the past.

In Remembering: A Phenomenological Study, the philosopher Edward C. Casey elaborates the connection between place and memory Tuan's analysis of the interplay between place and time implies. Although "the relationship between memory and place is at once intimate and profound," Casey observes that the spatial aspect of remembering —"memory of place, of *having been in a place*"—happens to be "one of the most conspicuously neglected areas of philosophical or psychological inquiry into remembering" (183; italics in the original). Intellectual investigations of memory have focused on remembered time, not remembered place, he points out.

According to Casey, the close affinity between place and memory can be attributed to the very similar function each of them serves. He describes their common task as "that of *congealing the disparate into a provisional unity*" (Casey 202; italics in the original). Whereas place holds objects and things together, memory "draw[s] together diverse moments of time" (Casey 202). Since, as Casey observes, "both roles, the one of containing and the other synthesizing, are fundamentally 'reservative,'" place and

memory "reinforce each other" (203). In consequence, place possesses "intrinsic memorability" and memory is "naturally place-oriented or at least place-supported" (Casey 186-7). Place's ability to hold memories, or its "memorial potency," as Casey calls it, results in its "memorial evocativeness" (202; 198). When we revisit an already familiar place, we are inspired to remember the experiences we associate with the location. Place, then, calls up memories of the events that happened in it. Consequently, Casey suggests that "Rather than thinking of remembering as a form of re-experiencing the past *per se*, we might conceive of it as an activity of *re-implacing*: re-experiencing past places" (201; italics in the original). When we remember a particular time, then, we actually remember having been in a particular place.

Just as Casey critiques the valorization of temporality over spatiality in philosophical and psychological inquires into memory, the feminist critic Susan Stanford Friedman argues against privileging time over space in studies of the narrative. In Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter, Friedman calls for shifting the critical attention from how a narrative is temporally resolved to how it is spatially organized. Reading through "the spatial lens," she argues, would reveal that location, not time, often operates as the moving force behind a narrative (Friedman 139). A spatialized reading would consider the following questions: "How does each space reflect the cultural production of spatialized meaning? Or, determine the nature or changes in character? Or, provide the conditions within which the agency of the characters must maneuver?" (Friedman 139). To illustrate the approach she advocates and to demonstrate how changes in location move the plot and provide insights into characters, Friedman performs a space-centered reading of Toni Morrison's Beloved. By

focusing on Sethe's place at any given time in the novel—her life at Sweet Home, her escape across the river, her subsequent stay at the Quakers, and her eventual arrival at 124—Friedman is able to show that spatial plotting organizes and makes intelligible the novel's narrative (139).

Casey's emphasis on the spatial aspects of remembering and Friedman's argument about the importance of space in the narrative echo in Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's call for critical and theoretical approaches to autobiography that would investigate "the ways in which remembering confuses our expectations of linearity and spatiality**,** of poetics and thematics in narrative" (39). Such readings, Smith and Watson propose in Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader, would offer valuable insights into the understanding of both the genre itself and the discursive and political contexts from which it originates. In response to Watson and Smith's call, Pilgrimages to the Past aims to explore how the place-driven structure of return memoirs enacts and illuminates the relationship between location and remembering. Moreover, by focusing on the theme of return, this project argues for the importance of place in autobiography, a genre that has been traditionally understood to revolve around time-oriented narrative construction.[5]

The Simonides legend's relevance to the study of return memoirs extends beyond the insight into the connection between place and memory it provides. Just as an extreme event, the collapse of a roof onto a crowded banquet hall, brought about the art of memory, a crisis occasions an autobiography. In "Sketch from the Past," Virginia Woolf

[5] In his contested essay, "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography" Georges Gusdorf argues that one of autobiography's defining conditions is the continuous narrative structure through which the writer can "reconstitute himself in the focus of his special unity and identity across time" (35). This coherence can only be achieved by the work of memory, "a second reading of experience," that renders past experiences legible and interpretable in hindsight (Gusdorf 38). Crucial in the autobiographical project, memory, then, denies any gaps in experience by merging the autobiographer's many identities into one; memory, and what it leaves out, enables and structures the life narrative (Gusdorf 40).

ponders the nature of memory and concludes that "one only remembers what is exceptional." (83). Lives are composed of unremarkably ordinary "moments of non-being" and unusually intense "moments of being"; it is these transformative moments that one vividly remembers (Woolf 83). Jean Starobinski echoes Woolf's observation when he argues that "one would hardly have sufficient motive to write an autobiography had not some radical change occurred in his life" (78). Similarly, in Mirror Talk: Genres of Crisis in Contemporary Autobiography, Susanna Egan notes that "crisis is seminal for autobiography" (4). The autobiographical project, then, is initiated by a turning point that simultaneously marks a shift, or a discontinuity in one's life, and yet becomes an occasion for its reflective integration into a life narrative. Accordingly, autobiography is always already positioned within the tension between continuity and rupture in one's life experience.

In the memoirs of return this project considers the crisis that needs to be integrated into the author's life story always involves a place. The trip to Zalosce, her parents' hometown, Hoffman believes, will enable her to complete what she calls "one of my life's major tasks," the separation from the familial past that has for long overshadowed her own life (After Such Knowledge 233). Mendelsohn goes to Bolechow, his ancestral *shtetl*, in order to overcome the "tantalizing proximity and unbridgeable distance" that define his connection to his lost relatives' traumatic past ("What Happened Uncle Shmiel" 26). The wish to rediscover the past he does not know much about also drives Ondaatje's return to Sri Lanka. After an absence of twenty five years, he goes back to come to terms with "the childhood I had ignored and not understood" (22). Showing that she continues to be "vulnerable to my family's needs and influences," Kincaid's

return to Antigua, nonetheless, allows her to assert her separateness (20). Satrapi comes back to Iran in hopes of finding relief from the pain of alienation and homesickness she felt in exile. Brison's life is abruptly shattered in the "muddy creek bed at the bottom of a dark ravine;" having repeatedly come back to the place in memory and in reality, Brison can reconstitute her violated self (Aftermath 2). The frequency and intensity of the vortex effect, as Didion calls a place's ability to set forward a series of memorial associations, are measures of grief. It is only after the returns to places she and her husband knew together no longer lead her to despair that Didion knows her mourning of John has begun. Shulman's husband barely survives a falling accident on the small Maine island where she has been spending her summers for decades. The couple's return to "the scene of the crime" on the second anniversary of the incident is markedly different from their pre-accident vacation stays (150). At the same time as Shulman fully grasps the extent of her and Scott's loss, she is ready to reconcile herself to the transformation both their lives have undergone in the fall's aftermath.

The complex negotiations of and working through memorable life crises, Susan Egan argues, give rise to new practices in autobiographical writing (5). Memoirs of return, this dissertation proposes, comprise a distinct sub-genre within autobiography. Making the very processes of remembering involved in writing an autobiography an inseparable part of the life story they tell, they simultaneously perform and cast light onto, what James Olney calls, "the mutually reflexive acts of memory and narrative" (xiv). Structured by parallel stories, of the past and of coming to remember it, they can be seen as meta-memoirs in which the autobiographers self-reflexively ruminate on the relationship between place and memory, the past and the present, life's crises and the

memories they leave behind. The return to a place from the past constitutes and reflects the autobiographical narrative; literal and metaphorical returns make up and mirror autobiographical memory. By emphasizing the role of both real and figurative returns in creating and evoking memories of the past, memoirs of return not only offer insights into the processes involved in the formal construction of autobiographical memory and autobiographical narrative, but also invite a critical reading that is attentive to how the text negotiates and reconciles the temporal and spatial aspects of memory.

The first chapter, "'I knew the story by now; now I wanted a place': Postgenerational Returns in Eva Hoffman's After Such Knowledge and Daniel Mendelsohn's The Lost," focuses on two recent memoirs that belong to the distinct autobiographical genre spawned by the post-1989 wave of Western Jews' journeys to former *shtetls* throughout Eastern and Central Europe. Employing the term Eva Hoffman uses to describe the second and third generations born in families of Holocaust survivors, "postgenerations," I call these texts postgenerational return memoirs. Both Hoffman's and Mendelsohn's autobiographical narratives revolve around roots journeys, but the authors' generational difference—they belong to the second and third generation, respectively—and their relationship to the people whose story they set out to reconstruct sets these two memoirs apart. Born after the war's end in 1945 to parents who survived by hiding, Hoffman travels to Zalosce, her parents' hometown, in 2001, the same year Mendelsohn first visits Bolechow, his ancestral *shtetl*. The visit to the site of family memory, Hoffman hopes, will enable her to locate, and thus make more concrete, her parents' Holocaust experience. On the other hand, Mendelsohn journeys back to Bolechow, a site of lost family history, not to authenticate his ancestral past but to

establish the unknown facts about uncle Shmiel, his wife and four daughters, all of whom perished in the Holocaust. Although in both these texts a visit to the familial *shtetl* is crucial to the author's double task of discovering and telling the story of his or her origin, the return journey does not completely reveal or recapture the familial past; the returnees must take full measure of the unbridgeable distance that separates the past from the present. Accordingly, Hoffman's and Mendelsohn's postgenerational returns culminate in departures that acknowledge the importance but do not recover the loss of the ancestral past.

The second chapter, "'The place one had been years ago': Emigrant Returns in Michael Ondaatje's Running in the Family and Jamaica Kincaid's My Brother, explores the authors' relationship to a place of origin they left at a young age and revisit as adults. Although the home island, Sri Lanka and Antigua, respectively, figures prominently in each writer's memory, the long-postponed homecoming carries a different meaning for Ondaatje and Kincaid. A haunting dream of his dead father inspires Ondaatje's return journey to Sri Lanka, the place where he spent the first eleven years of his life. After an absence of twenty five years, Ondaatje goes back in hopes of repossessing the home he has half-forgotten. As he embarks on his quest to rediscover the island and remember his childhood, Ondaatje understands the distance from his past as his temporal and spatial separation from Sri Lanka. Taking him back to the places from the past he can neither vividly recall nor completely forget, the return journey, he trusts, may recuperate the severed bond. Kincaid, on the other hand, does not return to Antigua reclaim the place of her birth. If Ondaatje visits Sri Lanka in hopes of remedying the distance that separates him form his childhood home, Kincaid returns knowing all too well that her detachment

from Antigua has never been fully achieved. Summoned to come home and help care for her brother dying of AIDS, she perceives her involuntary homecoming as an opportunity to assert her separation from the place she willfully left at the age of sixteen. Coming back, then, serves opposite purposes for Ondaatje and Kincaid. Back in Sri Lanka, Ondaatje relies on his own fragmentary memories and the reminiscences of others in order to get a hold of his past. Back in Antigua, Kincaid purposefully remembers the life she rejected as she struggles not to lose her footing in the present.

Repatriation, rather than a homecoming visit, is the central theme of the third chapter, "'Can I come back?' 'What a question!': The Predicament of Exilic Homecoming in Marjane Satrapi's Persepolis 2: The Story of a Return." Having spent four years in Austria, a place where she never ceased to feel like an unwelcome foreigner, Marjane, the teenage protagonist of Satrapi's graphic memoir, comes back to Iran with the intention of staying for good. She hopes that being back home will bring an end to the acute nostalgia and painful alienation that made her European exile unbearable. Yet, the sense of not belonging Marjane experienced abroad does not abate even after she rejoins her family. Rather than relieving the feelings of estrangement and displacement Marjane hopes to escape by leaving Vienna, her return to Tehran exacerbates them. Her former home, she discovers, has been transformed as a result of the Islamic Revolution and the political upheavals that followed it. Nothing is the same as she remembers it. Tehran, the place she has nostalgically longed for, has become an alienating space replete with signs of deprivations those who stayed behind have had to endure. Yearning to fit in, Marjane is determined to readapt. Despite all her efforts at readjustment, however, she does not

manage to feel at home again. Four years after coming back, Marjane decides to leave for Europe again. Her second departure, she understands, is a definite one.

Unlike the first three chapters, the last one, "'The way you got sideswiped was by going back': Returns to Places of Personal Significance in Susan J. Brison's Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of the Self, Joan Didion's The Year of Magical Thinking, and Alix Kates Shulman's To Love What Is: A Marriage Transformed," does not explore the meaning of revisits to a place of origin. Instead, it considers returns to and memorial evocativeness of locations where some important event in the author's life took place. In Aftermath, Brison, a rape survivor, repeatedly comes back to the crime scene through flashbacks. As her traumatic memories re-immerse her in the event, she continues to feel vulnerable to its obliterating violence. It is only after Brison literally goes back to the place where she was assaulted that her recovery takes on a new turn. Having returned and seen the place again, she acquires the distance necessary to tell the story of her attack and survival. Whereas revisits to a site of trauma punctuate the process of Brison's psychic and physical recovery from rape, returns to locations that call up memories of the past she shared with her husband John mark the trajectory of Didon's grief. Again and again, the newly widowed Didion finds herself in places where she remembers incidents from her and John's life together. In the first months after John's death, she finds these place-induced memories unbearable: they remind her that she has come back alone. Gradually, however, the encounters with locations both she and John knew well allow Didion to come to terms with his loss. Returns to both a place of a catastrophe—the island of her husband's near fatal fall—and to other places she and her husband Scott frequented during their twenty-year long marriage require Alix Kates Shulman to take full measure

of the change her and Scott's lives have undergone as a result of his accident. As Shulman revisits the familiar places that map her and Scott's past happiness, she grasps the extent of the loss she and her husband suffered as a result if his injuries. At the same time as these returns reveal to Shulman that her relationship with Scott will never be the same, they encourage her to accept and find meaning in the life she and her husband have built after the fall.

Chapter 1: "I knew the story by now; now I wanted a place": Postgenerational Returns in Eva Hoffman's After Such Knowledge and Daniel Mendelsohn's The Lost: A Search for Six of Six Million

Some people want to forget where they've been; other people want to remember where they've never been.
Eli Cohen and Gila Almagor, from their film Under the Domim Tree (quoted in James Young's At Memory's Edge, 1)

With the era of memory, the era of returns.
Eva Hoffman, **After Such Knowledge: Memory, History and the Legacy of the Holocaust**

Autobiographical narratives in which Holocaust survivors and their descendants reflect on the meaning of returns, or visits, to places from their personal or familial past complicate and illuminate the interplay between place, memory, and history by considering the recuperative potentialities and reparative limits of return journeys. All returnees, survivors themselves, as well as their children and grandchildren, set out with the implicit assumption that the past can, at least partially, be found and recovered in place. Each generation's encounter with specific locations, however, challenges that supposition. Back in formerly familiar places, the returning survivors confront the "memorial potency of places," as the philosopher Edward C. Casey refers to the fact that places both contain and preserve one's memories (202). The return, thus, lends the survivors' past a new urgency. Yet, while the revisited places situate the survivors' memorial lives, the returnees note with dismay that their physical appearance rarely attests to the very events whose remembering they inspire. The interaction between place, memory and historical past also shapes the way in which the roots-seeking descendants of Eastern and Central European Jews perceive their familial homelands. Lacking their own memories of *shtetl* life, children and grandchildren depend on their partial and fragmentary knowledge of a place's past to guide their quest. As a result of their visits,

the ancestral past, previously glimpsed from family stories, brief notes in history books, and few, if any, surviving photographs, becomes more real and tangible; it is, however, never completely revealed or recaptured. Like the returning survivors, members of the second and third generations who visit places where their families once lived must take full measure of the unbridgeable distance that separates the past from the present. Consequently, the returnees' journeys culminate in a departure that acknowledges, but does not ultimately recover, past losses.

First returns, as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, head of the core exhibition planning team at the future Museum of the History Polish Jews in Warsaw, refers to Eastern European Jewish survivors' homecomings in the immediate post-liberation and post-war period, invariably required that the returnees confront and account for the damage and destruction of the places and communities to which they had belonged before 1939 ("Rising from the Rubble").[6] Upon their return, camps survivors, those who survived in hiding, former partisans and soldiers, all attempted to find out about the fate of their relatives and friends; some came back in order to reclaim the children who had been hidden or placed under the care of the non-Jews (Adamczyk-Garbowska 5; Skibinska 525).[7] Many returnees also hoped to be able to recover the property their families had lost during the war (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Sites of Return"; Skibinska

[6] As Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska points out, the former Jewish inhabitants of what is today the eastern part of Poland were coming back as early as the summer of 1944, right after the region had been liberated (2). The wave of first returns was followed by another one in the late 1950s, after the period of severe Stalinism, during which it was very difficult to both enter and leave the country (Adamczyk-Garbowska 15). The number of returning survivors significantly increased post-1989. Today, all across Eastern Europe, local companies specialize in "heritage tours" as well as customizable itineraries that allow the descendants of Eastern European Jews to visit places where their ancestors once lived. Many of the tours include trips to Holocaust-related sites as well.

[7] Coming back to one's former hometown in order to inquire about the whereabouts of one's family and friends was only one of the many ways in which survivors attempted to find out about what had happened to the people they had known. For an overview of other activities and initiatives aimed at reuniting the survivors see Skibinska, 523-25.

518).[8] However, first returns shattered rather than fulfilled most survivors' hopes for reuniting with their close ones. All too often, the returnees also had to reconcile themselves with the fact that they would not be able to repossess their family property. Taking the full measure of the loss whose extent they hadn't yet fully grasped, the returnees led, or participated in, exhumations; they actively helped to identify mass burial sites and frequently undertook the construction of symbolic graves and memorials (Adamczyk-Garbowska 14; Skibinska 561-67). Having come back to find out what was left of their former lives and communities, the returning Jewish survivors had, instead, to bear witness to the devastation of the world they had known before.

The returnees' narrative reports of these bitter homecomings are included in the majority of y*izker-bikher*, the memorial books recording in Yiddish or Hebrew the local histories of Eastern European Jewish communities that perished in the Holocaust (Kugelmass and Boyarin 17; Adamczyk-Garbowska 3). Published in editions rarely exceeding a few hundred copies, yizkor books were aimed at Jewish émigrés as well as survivors (Kugelmass 386). A yizkor book's section dedicated to the post-war period included at least one account of the first return (Adamczyk-Garbowska 3). The titles of these vignettes – "Searching for the Life That Was," "Belhatov Without Jews," "My Tragic Night in Zhelekhov," and "A Visit to My Town of Bilgoray," to mention only a few[9]–evoke the authors' nostalgic longing for their former homes, as well as the sorrow and pain that invariably followed the discovery of their irrecuperable loss. All too often,

[8] Alina Sibinska's research provides detailed information about the legal, procedural and practical aspects of Jewish survivors' post-war efforts to reclaim property in central Poland (518-23). Jan T. Gross's book on the 1946 Kielce pogrom, Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz, also discusses the circumstances surrounding Jewish survivors' returns to Poland in the immediate aftermath of WWII. In particular, see the chapter "The Unwelcoming of Jewish Survivors" (31-80).

[9] I'm referring to excerpts included in Kugelmass and Boyarin's collection, From a Ruined Garden: The Memorial Books of Polish Jewry.

the first returns were solitary journeys; just as the former inhabitant of Chmielnik, many survivors came alone. Even though they were being warned against the dangers and risks of travel during that period, the returnees were determined to visit the places from their past. "[M]y heart was pained, and would not let me rest," a survivor explains his reasons for undertaking the trip to Tarnogrod, his hometown, in May of 1945 (Krumerkop 215). Homecomings, however, rarely quelled the survivors' anguish. To the contrary, going back intensified the pain of estrangement and displacement from which the returnees sought relief.

The returnees' postwar reports are structured around their visits to specific places that map their past. The town's train station, the market square, the local synagogue, the Jewish cemetery, and the house where the survivor's family used to live usually make up the topography of the first return.[10] Whether ravaged or unchanged, abandoned or teeming with life, the formerly familiar places, the returnees concede, have become locations of loss–remnants of, rather than links to, the not-so-distant past.

The very moment of the survivor's arrival often signals the changes that have taken place during the survivors' absence. At the Bilgoray train station, a returnee, who thought it prudent to disguise himself as a gentile so as not to become a victim of anti-Semitic violence, notes with dismay and sadness that the Jewish coachmen and porters have been replaced by the Poles (Krumerkop 215). The Polish driver he has hired to take him all the way to Tarnogrod, his hometown, matter-of-factly informs him that there are local Jews buried on both sides of the road they are driving on (Krumerkop 215). When the driver praises the Nazis who murdered them, despair and fear overwhelm the

[10] In listing the specific places, I am drawing on Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska's study of the patterns of return that emerge from yizkor books.

returning survivor who is about to enter the town he has been longing to see again. "Where am I going, and to whom? Is there really no one left? " he is despairingly asking himself as they are approaching the outskirts of Tarnogrod (Krumerkop 216). Anxiously awaiting answers to the same questions, a survivor coming back to Zhelekhov also arrives unannounced and directs her first steps to the house of a Polish acquaintance who used to know her family well (Ashlak 218). Having encountered few or no other Jews, the returnees take a walk around their town's once busy and bustling market square. A survivor who goes back to Belkhatov is struck with the market's peacefulness on a Monday, a market day (Raykh 217). New store signs are everywhere, but he notices the "still legible, insistent, and accusing" old inscriptions that have not been completely covered by the fresh paint (Raykh 217). Even though the signs are now boasting new ownership, the returnee can still vividly remember the names of their former Jewish owners (Raykh 216). Just as in Belkhatov, in Bilgoray the Jews' absence is palpable. To a returning survivor, the town appears eerily quiet and depopulated. "[W]alking around in broad daylight, I barely recognized the city….everything was a void, and in midday there was no living soul to be seen," he describes his first impressions (Rapoport 221). Like the market square, the local synagogue strikes the returnees as empty and abandoned. The former Belkhatover reports that on the day of his visit "[t]he walls of the synagogue stand intact, but the windows are gone" (Raykh 217). Finding the emptiness of the place unbearable and oppressive, he walks away (Raykh 217). Sadly, as this and other survivor learn, the Jewish cemetery is often as deserted and devastated as the house of prayer. Even though he must have visited the place many times in the past, the Belkhatov returnee has difficulty finding his way to the cemetery now (Raykh 217). He nearly

misses it because it has been razed to the ground; only "bits of broken graves" remain on the site, now a harvest field (Raykh 217). Dismantled, the old Jewish gravestones have been used to pave a road to the Catholic cemetery (Raykh 217). A similar discovery horrifies a survivor who has come back to Bilgoray (Rapoport 221). Finding the desecration "terrifying," he is unable to perceive his hometown as anything else than "a vast graveyard," albeit an unmarked one (Rapoport 221).

What makes a returnee feel "oddly alien" in a place that was once his or her home, then, is not just the unsettling confrontation with the irreparable destruction war has caused in familiar locations (Raykh 216). The returning survivors' realization that almost all signs of former Jewish life have been erased from these ruined places compounds their sense of irrecuperable loss. Rather than attesting to Jews' former existence, these places obscure their absence. Since its material traces are mostly gone, Jewish presence remains only as a specter haunting those who came back to find it again. Despite the fact that Jews' absence is unbearably palpable to the returnees, all too often, however, the present non-Jewish inhabitants are indifferent, if not oblivious, to it. In the villages, towns, and cities to which the survivors return, the present seems to have been unmoored from the past. There is no one and nothing to come back to, they realize. Their pre-war world has vanished. The first returns, then, are bitter homecomings that ultimately result in survivors' departures from the formerly familiar places in which they have become unwelcome strangers.

Jewish survivors who did not go back to their former homes at the war's end could undertake a return journey only years, or even decades, later. As a result of the political changes that took place in the region after 1945 there were extended periods of

time during which travel to and from Eastern and Central Europe was severely restricted. However, two watershed events–the upheaval of 1956 that marked the end of severe Stalinism, and the collapse of communism in Poland in 1989 that spurred transformation in neighboring countries as well–encouraged and made possible Jewish survivors' returns to their former homes (Adamczyk-Garbowska 15).

Two writers of international acclaim, Elie Wiesel and Aharon Appelfeld, were among those who embarked on these deferred returns, as I call Jewish survivors' homecomings that took place decades after the war.[11] Deported to Auschwitz in 1944 at the age of 15, Wiesel returned to Sighet, his hometown, for the first time in 1964;[12] driven out by the Germans and Romanians in 1941 when he was 8 years old, Appelfeld traveled back to Bukovina, where his family used to live, in 1996.[13] In Wiesel's and Appelfeld's narratives of deferred returns, like in the accounts of first returns found in yizkor books, a combination of desire and fear, anticipation and dread, accompanies the survivor's decision to go back. "For twenty years I had done nothing but prepare for this journey. Not with joy–on the contrary, with anguish," Wiesel admits his ambivalence ("Last Return" 111).[14] "For years, I dreamed about going back to my childhood home," Appelfeld reveals, only to add that his nostalgic longing has always been tempered by a pervasive "sense of estrangement [that] clung to me whenever I thought of returning"

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[11] In contrast to accounts of first return that appeared in yizkor books, Wiesel's and Appelfeld's narratives of deferred returns were published in periodicals with a relatively large readership. Wiesel's "Last Return" first appeared in the March 1965 issue of *Commentary* (it was later reprinted in the collection Legends of Our Time), and Appelfeld's "Buried Homeland" came out in the November 23, 1998 issue of *The New Yorker*).

[12] Wiesel mentions in his essay that he is coming back after a twenty-year long absence. Since he was deported from Sighet in 1944, his return journey must have taken place some time in 1964.

[13] Both Wiesel and Appelfeld, then, belong to the 1.5 generation as Susan Rubin Suleiman refers to "child survivors of the Holocaust, too young to have had an adult understanding of what was happening to them, but old enough to have *been there* during the Nazi persecution of Jews" (Suleiman 277).

[14] Wiesel decided not to go back to Sighet after the liberation of Buchenwald. Turning down the Americans' offer of repatriation, he explained that he "no longer had a home" ("The Last Return" 112).

(48). He suspects that the imaginary homeland he has repeatedly recreated in his writing greatly differs from the Bukovina of today (Appelfeld 49).[15] By going back to Bukovina, then, he might lose rather than reclaim the places of his childhood. Both Wiesel and Appelfeld expect that the deferred homecoming will turn out to be an encounter with "[t]he dead past or the past revived" (Wiesel "The Last Return" 111). It will expose or erase the distance between the past and the present, either disappoint or fulfill their intense yearning for the lost home. Neither alternative, however, will allow for indifference. "In either case, there would be despair," Wiesel somberly notes, realizing that his return will likely lend a new urgency to the loss with which has already lived for two decades ("The Last Return" 111). Like first returns, then, deferred returns call for a reckoning with the past, its losses and remains. Recalling his 1964 visit to Sighet in an essay about a subsequent return five years later, Wiesel vividly remembers the panic that overwhelmed him when he intuited that "there, more than anywhere else, I would grasp the true extent of my loss" (Wiesel, "House of Strangers" 57).

It is precisely the reentry into the places from their past that makes Wiesel's and Appelfeld's homecoming a deeply affecting and transformative experience. Like the survivors who went back in the immediate aftermath of the war, both authors set out to revisit locations they most readily associate with their past. The topography of Wiesel's and Appelfeld's deferred returns echoes that of first homecomings. The town's market square, the synagogue, and the Jewish cemetery are where the survivors direct their steps upon arrival.

[15] The passage in which Appelfeld reflects on his continued artistic engagement with his fragmentary but vivid memories of his home village echoes Salman Rushdie's discussion on how memories of lost home inspire and inform the work of writers in exile.

Without difficulty, Wiesel recognizes his hometown's center. He notes in/with disbelief that it has not changed at all: "The low, gray houses are still there. The church and the butcher shop are still facing each other. The synagogue, deserted now, still stands at the corner of the little market square" ("The Last Return" 111). More bewildered than comforted by Sighet's apparent timelessness, he identifies the town's enduring landmarks: "the movie theater, the hotel, the girls' high school" (Wiesel "The Last Return" 115). Looking around, Wiesel finds no evidence of the tragic events that took place over twenty years ago. In contrast, the Czernovitz of today barely resembles "the ideal city" Appelfeld so fondly remembers (51). The buildings in the town's center have not been destroyed, but there are barely any hints of Czernovitz's former splendor: "Herrengasse, the street of fashionable clothing stores, restaurants, and cafes, was not what it had been, but beneath the peeling walls one could see delicate traces of the old elegance" (51). The recent addition of rows of "ugly new houses…, an inheritance from the communist regime" accompanies the city's present-day shabbiness (51). Rather than quelling his nostalgia, the present-day Czernovitz fails to live up to its image in Appelfeld's memory.

Just as the walk around the market square does, the visits to the local synagogues allow Wiesel and Appelfeld to gauge the extent of the transformation their hometowns have undergone. Determined to see again "all the places that had once filled [his] landscape," Wiesel makes sure to return to all the town's synagogues (125). There is only a commemorative stone where the oldest one once stood; a few others are forgotten, neglected, and empty. Only one synagogue, "too spacious for the fifty Jews who assemble there on Rosh Hashana," is still open (Wiesel 126). In turn, nothing at all

indicates there used to be a synagogue in Appelfeld's hometown (61). When he goes to Czernovitz, he discovers that the town's temple has not been destroyed; it still exists but in a "strange incarnation, as a movie house, casino and billiards hall" (Appelfeld 55).

Even though they have not been desecrated, the untended and overgrown local Jewish cemeteries Wiesel and Appelfeld visit powerfully convey the absence of the communities whose past they commemorate. Since he was not allowed to come to the cemetery as a young child, Wiesel enters it for the first time as an adult ("The Last Return" 127). Despite having never been there before, he experiences it as "the only place in Sighet that reminded me of Sighet, the only thing that remained of Sighet" (Wiesel, "The Last Return" 127). Yet, the comfort of feeling "at home, on familiar ground" is unsettled when Wiesel notices a cenotaph, "[a] tomb with no corpses" erected in memory of Sighet Jews who perished in the Holocaust ("The Last Return" 127; 128). As he lights a candle and spots an old Jew who has silently joined him, Wiesel realizes that, contrary to his initial impression, the Sighet of his childhood cannot, after all, be found even among its dead. The cemetery in Vishnitz, the small town in which Appelfeld's grandfather lived, similarly attests to the vanishing of the local Jewish community. Upon his visit, Appelfeld confronts neglect and abandonment: "the tombstones had sunk into the earth or else were about to fall over" (55). One of the last remaining signs of Jews' prior existence in Vishnitz, the small graveyard, like the town's Jewish past, has already been forgotten.

In addition to revisiting familiar locations, each writer seeks out the one place that holds the greatest personal significance for him: Wiesel looks for his family's house, and Appelfeld locates the mass grave where his mother and grandmother are buried. Not knowing whether or not his house has been destroyed, Wiesel anxiously sets out into his

old neighborhood. He relies on his memory to find his way, and as he is approaching his old house, a panic attack seizes him. The thought of standing in front of it is just as terrifying as the thought of discovering that the house no longer exists (Wiesel, "The Last Return" 119). When he finally sees and recognizes his family house, Wiesel is overwhelmed: "The street, the house: here they were, mine again. More than before, better than ever. Total, irrevocable possession: more than when I had lived there" (120). Yet, he hesitates before entering through the gate and is stopped short of knocking on the door by the barking of a dog (Wiesel "The Last Return" 120). Remembering that "[t]here had never been any dog in the house," Wiesel realizes that someone else now lives there ("The Last Return" 121). Shamed, he runs back into town and notes bitterly that he has just been driven out from his home again ("The Last Return" 121). It is only on his subsequent visit to Sighet, five years later, that Wiesel dares to enter the house. Inside, everything is as his family had left it: "[t]he same furniture, the same chairs, the same beds standing in the same place" ("The House of Strangers" 60). Even the nail he drove into the wall back in 1936 "in order to hang the portrait of the Wizsnitzer Rebee" is still there; a cross, however, has replaced the religious man's picture (Wiesel, "The House of Strangers" 60). That one change, small but powerful nonetheless, conveys to Wiesel the irrevocability of his loss. The home he came back to reclaim is no longer his. It has become a house of strangers.

Appelfeld's site of reckoning is the mass grave where his mother and grandmother were buried, along with other Jews murdered in the pogrom incited by the Germans and Romanians who invaded Drajinetz, his hometown, in June of 1941 (48). The mass grave, Appelfeld confides, was at the center of the survivor's guilt he has been,

without much success, repressing for many years (50). An escape into the fields saved his life. A return to the place where his mother and grandmother lost theirs would allow him to bear a belated witness to their deaths. Since Appelfeld does not know the grave's exact location, he asks the villagers to guide him. No one appears to know either. Finally, after Appelfeld's repeated inquiries, the village children point the way (54). A man who participated in the burial indicates the unmarked spot. "A book of psalms that I had brought along rescued me from muteness," Appelfeld remembers (54). It occurs to him that the recitation of the Kaddish is the only appropriate response to the somber tenor of the place. The visit to his mother's grave does not put Appelfeld's sorrow to rest, but having seen "where she was buried and what you can see from there" enables him to locate his life's shaping loss (61).

Wiesel's and Appelfeld's deferred returns, are, just like survivors' first returns, bitter homecomings. Without relieving the returnees' longing for their lost home, they reveal that the past can neither be found nor reclaimed in the places to which they have come back. "Sighet is not Sighet any more," Wiesel concludes after the visit to his hometown ("The Last Return" 111); "This was not my Czernovitz," Appelfeld declares upon arriving to his "ideal city" (51). For both writers, the return, a journey of repossession, turns into a journey of disavowal as they discover that the places they called home do not exist as they once were. Back in Sighet, Wiesel faces the implacable fact: his hometown, as well as most of its Jewish inhabitants, now belongs to a disappeared world. "I searched for the people out of my past, I searched for my past, and I did not find them," he despairs ("The Last Return" 125). In turn, Appelfeld's visit to Bukovina forces him to renounce the nostalgia that has sustained him for decades. "Until

recently," he writes, "I had thought that there existed a childhood home far from me and another childhood home within me. Now I know: what there was dwells only within me. Outside is an alien land, like my village, which has uprooted the memory of the common life of the past hundred and fifty years without leaving a trace" (61). Upon their return, then, Wiesel and Appelfeld come to realize that their former homes have become locations of loss. Even though these places stir up the survivors' childhood memories, they have preserved few material remnants of the past they so powerfully evoke. As a result, the places Wiesel and Appelfeld recall greatly differ from the places they revisit, and both returning survivors must concede that the Sighet and Bukovina they remember so well live on only as places in memory.

Remembering *in situ*, as Karl A. Plank refers to the kind of remembering in which "the setting of our memory and the setting of our remembering are one and the same," suggests that a place remains memorially evocative despite having undergone changes that effectively obscure what little of its past has remained (264). The returnees' place-inspired memories, then, highlight the disjuncture between place's memorial potency and its preservative limits. In turn, this disjunction at once affirms and challenges the survivors' tenuous connection to the places they revisit. The simultaneity of familiarity and estrangement in which remembering *in situ* results points to the radical discontinuity between the survivors' past and present. In that respect, remembering *in situ* constitutes a form of countermemory: in contrast to ordinary memory, understood as "the reconstitution of a past without lacunae or faults," it exposes rather than conceals these gaps (Nora 9).[16] One cannot go home again, the returnees concede. Insofar as it requires

[16] My understanding of what constitutes countermemory draws on James E. Young's definition of countermonuments, which he defines as "memorial spaces conceived to challenge the very premise of the monument" (At Memory's Edge 96). Consequently, I suggest that remembering *in situ* can be seen as a form of countermemory, because it unsettles the retrospective continuity remembering otherwise

that the survivors renounce the very places they came back to reclaim, the long-postponed homecoming reenacts the forced expulsion that happened years ago. A journey of loss rather than recovery, the deferred return is, as Wiesel puts it, the last return. Even if survivors undertake the journey again, their subsequent visits to formerly familiar places will no longer hold the promise of a homecoming.

"Uprooting," Eva Hoffman points out, was "an almost intrinsic part of the Holocaust's aftermath" (After Such Knowledge 77). Unprecedented mass migrations characterized the period immediately following the end of Second World War. Emigration was an experience shared by most Eastern and Central European Jews who survived. In fact, at that time, Holocaust survivors, many of whom found themselves in displaced persons camps set up across the continent, were referred to as "Jewish refugees," not "survivors."[17] The eventual leave-taking in which both first and deferred returns resulted meant that the children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors, belonging to the "diaspora of ashes," would grow up in places far from the buried homelands of their ancestors (Fresco qtd. in Raczymow 103). "Orphans of that [vanished] world" they never knew, as the French writer Henri Raczymow describes them, the descendants of Central and Eastern European Jews have roots that are "disasporic" (103). Since the places of their familial origins perished, the postgenerations' roots "are not attached to any particular land or soil. . . . Rather they creep up along the many roads of dispersion" that followed the expulsion and destruction

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accomplishes.

[17] Hannah Arendt discusses the tensions and ambivalence surrounding the widespread use of the word "refugees" in her polemical 1943 essay titled "We Refugees." In The Era of the Witness, the French historian Annette Wieviorka points out that the term "survivor" was not really in use until the Eichmann trial (88).

of Jewish communities from their homelands (103).[18] Thus, it is the "dialogic dimension of the homonym routes/roots," to borrow the feminist critic Susan Stanford Friedman's phrase, that defines the post-Holocaust generations' relation to the always already lost places from which their ancestors came.[19]

In the postwar period, the figure of the *shtetl*–a diminutive derived from the Yiddish word *shtot,* or town–came to stand at the center of Jewish memory (Hoffman, Shtetl 111).[20] As it was perceived, the *shtetl* embodied the very "locus of Jewishness" (Kirschenblatt-Gimbelt, "Introduction" 3). Drawing attention to the fact that until the war Jews considered Eastern Europe to be a place of exile, Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi suggests that the emergence of the *shtetl* as "an authentic original" is directly linked to the Holocaust. "[T]he destruction seems to have territorialized exile as a lost home," she observes (DeKoven Ezrahi 17).[21] In addition, the newly found allure of the *shtetl* reflected the homesickness of the many displaced Jewish survivors and émigrés who were struggling to start new lives someplace else. For Jews in the United States, the historian David Kassow writes, the *shtetl* "became a symbol of the integral Jewishness

[18] Translated into English, the French word "déracinement" stands for both uprooting and rootlessness. As Raczymow describes it, the post-Holocaust generations' relationship to their ancestral homelands involves this double aspect of "déracinement."

[19] Discussing narratives of intercultural encounter in Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter, Friedman employs the homonym to illuminate the ways in which identity can be understood through its relationship to space. My own use of the routes/roots homonym in the context of the postwar generations' relationship to the places from their families' past additionally draws on the double meaning of the word "roots" as both the place of origin and ancestral past in general.

[20] The historian David Roskies provides a brief overview of the *shtetl*'s shifting signification during the past two centuries. The following are the varied incarnations of "the evolving image of the shtetl: as the ghetto-existence best left behind; as the Jewish body politic under siege; as the idealized Heimat, the local Old Country homeland, arrested in time; as paradise lost; and finally, as the staging ground for Jewish martyrdom" (Roskies 43).

[21] Similarly, in her informative introduction to the 1995 re-edition of the groundbreaking study Life is with People: The Culture of the Shtetl, Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimbelt's attributes the emergence of "the *shtet*l as the locus of Jewishness" among American Jews to the destruction of Jewish Eastern European communities in the Holocaust (3).

and the supportive community that many American Jews–economically secure in their new suburban homes–now began to miss" (23).

Yet, Jewish nostalgia for the destroyed *shtetl* did not merely originate in the Holocaust; it had, somehow, to account for it as well.[22] In survivors' narratives of first and deferred returns, after all, the *shtetl* is the site of happiness and sorrow, beauty and devastation, safety as well as danger. That ambivalence, however, has rarely been preserved in the process of cross-generational transmission. Instead, a bifurcation of the *shtetl's* memory appears to have taken place. Thus, the post-Holocaust generations tend to perceive the lost Eastern European Jewish world as either an "idealized [place], sequestered in the imagination as quaint realm of 'before'" or "as nothing but a prelude and a prefiguration of the catastrophe" (Hoffman, Shtetl 7). For decades, these two dominant perceptions of the *shtetl* have rarely been questioned or challenged. Since Westerners, including the descendants of Jewish survivors who emigrated in the war's aftermath, could not easily enter Eastern Europe until 1989, the region assumed the aura of what Eva Hoffman describes as "a terra incognita, an imaginary entity made up of received ideas and fierce opinions, scraps of family anecdotes and almost entire absence of information" (After Such Knowledge 138). An opportunity to critically engage and revise the mythology of the *shtetl* arose when the borders were at last opened, and those who traced their Jewish ancestry to Eastern and Central Europe could return to search for the remnants of their families' past lives.

Even though foreigners could travel to some parts of Eastern and Central Europe in the 1960s and 1970s, the survivors of the Holocaust, as well as their descendants,

[22] Jack Kugelmass briefly discusses American Jews' returns to their familial *shtetls* that were taking place during the 1920s and 1930s (385).

started to undertake roots journeys en masse only after 1989. Drawn to them by "simultaneous attraction and repulsion," the returnees were finally able to confront the sites that haunted their own or their relatives' past (Redlich 268). Soon, an industry catering specifically to those embarking on the so-called "Jewish heritage," or "roots" tours developed. Today, individuals or groups may choose from many Jewish or Holocaust-themed trips across the region.[23] In addition to touring the cities, towns, and villages from which their families came, the Jewish visitors can hire local guides and researchers who will conduct genealogical research and act as translators.

The post-1989 wave of Western Jews' returns to former *shtetls* throughout Eastern and Central Europe spawned a distinct autobiographical genre, which I call the postgenerational return memoir.[24] Eva Hoffman's term, the word "postgenerations" describes the second and third generations born in families of Holocaust survivors.[25] As those "who came after," the descendants of Holocaust survivors grew up with the sense of the secondariness, or "post-ness," of their own lives in relation to the lives of their survivor parents or grandparents (After Such Knowledge 60; 25). Published as short essays, individual chapters, or entire books, postgenerational return memoirs focus on the authors' efforts to establish the missing facts about their ancestral past. A visit to the

[23] The United States Memorial Holocaust Museum includes "Holocaust-related travel" on the list of its annotated bibliographies. The extensive bibliography includes guides to specific regions, countries, or even cities.

[24] Journeys of postgenerational return also drive the plots of a number of critically acclaimed novels published in the United States in recent years: Jonathan Safran Foer's Everything Is Illuminated (2002), Lily Brett's Too Many Men (2002), and Lisa Pearl Rosenbaum's A Day of Small Beginnings (2006).

[25] It is generally understood that those defined as "children of survivors" were born after the war and have at least one parent who survived the war "in concentration camps, in hiding, or fighting with the partisans" (Steinitz vi). Psychological and psychoanalytical studies of the children of survivors were first published in the late 1960s. The essay by Erica Wanderman provides an overview of the early research. Hoffman credits Helen Epstein's book, Children of the Holocaust: Conversations with Sons and Daughters of Survivors, published in the United States in 1979, with coining and popularizing the term "second generation" that conferred a collective identity on the children born in families of Holocaust survivors. In his 1995 book, Fear and Hope: Three Generations of the Holocaust, the Israeli psychologist, Dan Bar-On argues that the impact of the Holocaust is not limited to the survivors and their children but extends to members of the third generation as well.

familial *shtetl*, as well as other places the family called their home, is central to the author's double task of discovering and telling the story of his or her origin. As it invariably confronts the roots seeker with the double distance of space and time, the quest becomes an occasion to ruminate on issues of memorial transmission and bearing witness across generations.

Eva Hoffman's After Such Knowledge: Memory, History, and the Legacy of the Holocaust and Daniel Mendelsohn's The Lost: A Search for Six of Six Million are postgenerational return memoirs whose authors belong to the second and third generation, respectively.[26] Born after the war's end in 1945 to parents who survived by hiding, Hoffman travels to Zalosce, her parents' hometown, in 2001, the same year Mendelsohn first visits Bolechow, his ancestral *shtetl*. Both Hoffman's and Mendelsohn's autobiographical narratives revolve around roots journeys, but the authors' generational difference and their relationship to the people whose story they set out to reconstruct sets these two memoirs apart. The visit to the site of family memory, Hoffman hopes, will enable her to locate, and thus make more concrete, the past her parents remembered. On the other hand, Mendelsohn journeys back to Bolechow, a site of lost family history, not to authenticate his ancestral past but to establish the unknown facts about his uncle Shmiel, his wife Ester, and their four daughters.

For Eva Hoffman, as for other children of survivors, the Holocaust has always been a foundational fact, her first and "inescapable knowledge" (After Such Knowledge x). "In my home," she remembers, "the past broke through in the sounds of nightmares, the idiom of sighs and illness, of tears and the acute aches that were the legacy of the

[26] Whereas the quest for the lost relatives drives and organizes Mendelsohn's narrative, Hoffman's book is an extensive meditation on the question of Holocaust memory and commemoration. "From Memory to the Past" is the chapter in which Hoffman specifically reflects on her journey to Zalosce, her parents' hometown.

damp attic and of the conditions my parents endured during their hiding" (10). Even though Hoffman's parents' fragmented stories tended to omit many factual details that would allow her to reconstruct their wartime ordeal accurately, their chronic bodily ailments powerfully attested to the shattering and lasting impact the events had had on their lives. Thus, it was through her parents' affective and embodied memories rather than through a coherent narrative, Hoffman points out, that their Holocaust past has been passed on to her (9).[27] Marianne Hirsch refers to the second generation's primordial awareness of their parents' traumatic experiences as postmemory, "a secondary, belated memory mediated by stories, images, and behaviors among which [the children of survivors] grew up, but which never added up to a complete picture or linear tale" ("We Would Not Have Come Without You" 262). A unique kind of memorial transmission across generations, postmemory reflects the second generation's temporal and spatial exile from the world that was their parents' past. Imaginative investment, projection, and re-creation negotiate the postgeneration's access to a past which is experienced as deeply personal even though it is unavailable through recollection (Hirsch, Family Frames 22).

Hoffman's intuited understanding of what had happened to her parents, then, had to draw from her own childish imagination as much as, if not more than, from their tales. Because the Holocaust belonged to "a deeply internalized but strangely unknown past," as a young child, Hoffman could apprehend it only as "an enigmatic but real fable," one that was "half awful reality, half wondrous fairy tale" (6; 11). Inspired by reality and fantasy, the young Hoffman has formed an imaginary geography of her parents' past:

[27] When Hoffman watches her parents' videotaped testimonies at the Vancouver Holocaust Center, she is taken aback with their "impressive coherence." She attributes the changed mode of their witness "the difference between family and public speech" (After Such Knowledge 195).

> A peasant's hut, holding the riddle of life or death; a snowy forest, which confounds the senses and sense of direction. A hayloft in which one sits, awaiting fate, while a stranger downstairs, who is really a good fairy in disguise, is fending off that fate by muttering invocations under her breath and bringing to the hiding place a bowl of soup. The sister, young, innocent, and loved, standing naked above a pit that is soon to become her own mass grave. . . . The pursuit of powerless people, bent silhouettes running desperately through an exposed landscape, trying to make it into the bordering woods. (11–12)

The envisioning of her parents' surroundings constituted Hoffman's attempt to overcome the simultaneous temporal and spatial distance that separated her from their past. Undoubtedly glimpsed from her parents' broken stories, the specific places–a peasant's hut, a hayloft, a mass grave–located, and thus made more concrete, their experiences. Yet, since, after all, Hoffman had never seen these places, she had to rely on her own imagination to picture them. "The attic in my imagination, to give only the most concrete example," Hoffman elaborates, "probably bore no resemblance to the actual attic in which my parents were hidden. In fact, I had almost no information to go on, nothing that would allow me to put together a real attic in my mind" (34). Thus, although Hoffman always found the topography of her parents' survival–the attic and the few other dark and crowded hiding places that repeatedly came up in their incomplete wartime stories–highly evocative, the real locations were unknown to her.

At the same time as her parents' place memories failed to provide descriptive details that would allow Hoffman to accurately reconstruct their whereabouts, they powerfully

conveyed the affective aspect of their experience in these locations. “The huddled hiding; the despair, the fear, my father’s alertness to danger, my mother’s deep resignation” were the emotions Hoffman was able to pick up from her mother’s attic stories (34).

Accordingly, the convergence of a specific place, the attic in which her parents hid, and their unique story of survival mediated Hoffman’s earliest apprehension of the Holocaust. Its primary image, for her, had always been that hiding place. The first time she came across black and white photographs of concentration camps, Hoffman recalls, she was shocked not only by what they depicted but also by the fact that “[t]hese images were not the attic. They were not ‘my’ Holocaust” (193). The confrontation with the visual documentation of the camps, then, called for a modification and expansion of her knowledge about the event whose horror had so far been transmitted to her through her parents’ memories. The attic, Hoffman writes, has remained “one of the deepest images I have” even after repeated exposure to other images of the Holocaust, many of which have eventually become “part of my inner storehouse” (After Such Knowledge193).

At once a mediated representation and projection of the Holocaust, a simultaneously real and imagined place–a postmemory–the attic exposes the tensions structuring the second generation’s relationship to their survivor parents’ past. For her and other children of survivors, Hoffman observes, the Holocaust is “a felt past,” a past to which they have “a living connection” (After Such Knowledge 125; 126). Nevertheless, as intimate as the second generation’s link to the Holocaust is, Hoffman emphasizes throughout After Such Knowledge, it was their parents, not they, who lived through it. In the process of cross-generational transmission, she points out, the parents’ past gets imprinted on, but not re-experienced by, their children. There is a great difference

between having spent months in hiding and merely imagining what it must have felt like. Hoffman's parents' attic might have become "her" attic, but the two are not the same place.

Thus, at the same time as Hoffman herself acknowledges that the concept of postmemory accurately captures certain aspects of being a child of Holocaust survivors, she also departs from Hirsch's formulation (After Such Knowledge 180). Whereas Hirsch posits that postmemory is "a powerful and very particular form of memory" (Family Frames 22), Hoffman admits that "[i]n a sense, the very question of memory is moot for me" (After Such Knowledge 180).[28] Describing her relationship to her parents' past as "proximity charged with feeling," Hoffman argues that "Transferred loss, more than transferred memory, is what children of survivors inherit (After Such Knowledge 180; 73). The inheritance of loss "that has no concrete shape or face," Hoffman elaborates drawing on Freud's theory of mourning and melancholia, has produced "a dimensionless melancholia," a condition central to the second generation's experience (After Such Knowledge 73). Yet, the generational distance, compounded by temporal and spatial exile from their parents' homelands, is not the only reason why the Holocaust has remained spectral and shadowy for the children of survivors. Hoffman is convinced that, for a long time, she could not comprehend and come to terms with her parents' past because she "knew it *as* mythology and had no way of grasping it as actuality" (After Such Knowledge 16; italics in the original). Hence, Hoffman asserts, it is only after children of survivors have "face[d] the realities of their inheritance *as* realities" that the haunting will come to an end, and they will be able "to recognize that the awful events in

[28] Marianne Hirsch responds to Hoffman's objection in her most recent essay "The Generation of Postmemory."

whose spectral grip they have lived belong to another time; that the past need no longer live on within their psyches and bodies; that it is indeed the past" (74; italics in the original). Accordingly, "the hinge generation," as Hoffman refers to children of survivors, marks "the point at which the past is transmuted into history or into myth" (After Such Knowledge 198). The hinge generation's task, as Hoffman sees it, is to ensure that the Holocaust is not turned into the latter. Facing the alternative both as individuals and as a group, children of survivors must strive to understand their parents' traumatic past as a historical event of great "affective and moral complexity" (After Such Knowledge 198).

Seen in light of Hoffman's argument, the post-1989 wave of journeys to Eastern and Central Europe undertaken by members of the second generation reflects the peculiar relationship children of survivors have to their parents' past. As they "make their 'returns' to lands they have never seen," the roots-seekers assume that the places they set out to visit will be recognizable and familiar; after all, they know all about them from their families' stories (After Such Knowledge 203). The quotation marks surrounding the word "return," however, signal Hoffman's awareness that both the premise and promise of such journeys are precarious. The heritage tourists not only conflate their families' place memories with the past and present reality of the actual village or town, but they also suppose that their lived connection to their parents' past translates into their connection to places from that past.

Yet, while these excursions are, undoubtedly, a symptom of the "placeless melancholia" that characterizes the experience of those born in survivor families, they simultaneously present an opportunity to dispel it (Hoffman, "Long Afterlife of Loss").

Engaging the tension between the Holocaust as a mythic fable and the Holocaust as a historical event, roots journeys facilitate the second generation's confrontation with their parents' traumatic past. The postgeneration's returns to familial homelands are, to use Hoffman's metaphor, "hinge" journeys. On these visits, the ancestral past, with the Holocaust at its center, is consigned to the realm of myth or allowed to enter the realm of history.

Skeptical, but not exempt from the second generation's desire to visit their familial *shtetls*, in 2001, Hoffman takes a trip to "that mythical town of Zalosce" where her parents were born and hid during the war (After Such Knowledge 205). Unlike most survivors who emigrated from Eastern and Central Europe soon after the war, Hoffman's parents left their hometown but stayed in Poland until 1968–a year that marked the departure of a great majority of the country's remaining Jews. As a result, Hoffman grew up relatively close to Zalosce but neither her parents nor she had ever gone there. Even when traveling to Ukraine became possible after 1989, Hoffman's parents never expressed the wish to return, committed as they were to "to the idea of never looking back" (After Such Knowledge 206). Moreover, they actively discouraged Hoffman and her sister from undertaking the trip. As a result, it was only after both her parents had died that Hoffman began to plan a visit to Zalosce, the town in which her parents spent the first thirty years of their lives. Conceiving of it as "a form of homage and of mourning," Hoffman saw the journey as an opportunity to gain a better insight into her familial past that had remained elusive until then (After Such Knowledge 206). Seeing her parents' hometown, Hoffman believed, would make it possible "to touch on the geography of our family's prewar lives," and thus it would allow her "to pin down

concretely the places that have lived such a rich life in my imagination" (After Such Knowledge 205; 206).

Locating the real Zalosce, however, turns out to be a more difficult task than Hoffman has anticipated. Unlike the returning survivors who could depend on their own memory to find their way back home, Hoffman must rely on maps and research. As many of the second generation who travel to Eastern or Central Europe in search of their families' past invariably do, Hoffman discovers that the one place she longed to visit does not appear on any maps (ASK 208). Disoriented, she almost gives in to the local historian's suggestion that perhaps the place she is looking for is not Zalosce but Zalozec, another town in the region. After all, Hoffman reasons, the name is close enough; "Zalosce might have become Zalozec," she concedes (ASK 208). This straightforward reason for Zalosce's apparent nonexistence does not trouble Hoffman as much the other probable explanation. "Or else, I might have made 'Zalosce' up in the first place, as part of my fairy-tale world," she worries (208). Even though she already is in Ukraine, in proximity to the places from her parents' past, Hoffman still finds herself "in a liminal territory, where concrete realities easily dissolve into imaginary entities" (208). At its outset, then, the very journey whose goal it was to see and experience her parents' hometown as a lived reality threatens to reinforce rather than dispel its imaginary existence.

Zalosce, in the end, does turn out to be a real place. Thanks to the hired driver who happens to have visited it once before, Hoffman and her sister are able to see their parents' hometown. Upon arrival, Zalosce strikes Hoffman as "a pastoral town/village with a primitive economy, a pitiable 'main street,' and a supply of vodka that began

flowing (to our considerable chagrin) at breakfast and did not stop until bedtime" (After Such Knowledge 209). Decidedly unremarkable and provincial, the town does not in any way convey the drama of Hoffman's parents' wartime experience. Similarly, the warm welcome Hoffman and her sister receive from the locals and town authorities, a number of whom generously offer to assist and guide the sisters as they explore the place, in no way suggests the events that took place in Zalosce over five decades ago.

The town itself appears inscrutable at first, but the encounters with its residents, some close to her parents' age, offset Hoffman's initial disappointment. A woman turns out to have been a neighbor of Hoffman's father's family. She informs Hoffman that the Wydras owned an inn and can even recall the names of all of Hoffman's uncles, her father's lost brothers (After Such Knowledge 209). After glancing at Hoffman's sister, Olga, an older woman, marvels that she looks just like her grandmother Hava. "Hava was our paternal grandmother, whose face we had never seen, not in life, not in photographs," Hoffman explains her unexpectedly emotional reaction to Olga's exclamation (After Such Knowledge 210). Because of Olga's vivid memory, Hoffman's parents' prewar years become "a suddenly fuller, more inhabited past**"** (After Such Knowledge 210). The world Hoffman glanced from her parents' broken stories is thus "confirmed and thereby given a new reality" (After Such Knowledge 210). Hoffman also meets Hryczko, the man whose parents sheltered hers and a few other Jews. The conversation not only allows Hoffman to fill in additional details, but it also enables her to get to know "the other side of the story, that of my parents' rescuers" (After Such Knowledge 211). To honor the Hryczko family, Hoffman reads out loud the unsent letter her father wrote shortly before his death. All the unexpectedly moving meetings with the Zaloscers who remember the

war result in "this unlikely reconnection after more than fifty years, this improbably refinding of an almost lost thread" (Hoffman, After Such Knowledge 214).

Not incidentally, the same people who so generously share their memories with Hoffman also offer to take her to the places her parents referred to in their stories. The topography of Hoffman's visit very much resembles the topography of survivors' return: the mass grave where her mother's sister is buried; the Jewish cemetery; her father's house, and down the road from it, her mother's house; the bridge Hoffman knows from the only Zalosce photograph her family was able to hold on to. Like the returning survivors, Hoffman is struck by how much these inconspicuous places occlude. The mass grave is "an innocuous square of ground" (After Such Knowledge 217). A "grassy knoll on which cows now graze" is where the Jewish cemetery once was (After Such Knowledge 217). If it weren't for the guides' pointing, "Here. Right here," Hoffman would find these places unremarkable because the way they look in the present does not in any way convey their past. These locations become meaningful only because she, with the villagers' assistance, is able to transpose their history onto them. After Hoffman is informed about what happened in the places to which her guides have led her, time and again, she finds the incongruity between these places' tragic history and their present appearance unsettling. As she is standing over "a large indentation in the ground, overgrown and covered by branches," exactly where her parents' underground bunker was, Hoffman can only "stare downwards in a state of incredulity" (After Such Knowledge 218). The place about which, up until now, she could only fantasize is suddenly real. The hollowed ground, Hoffman realizes, "is where It started, this cavity in the ground from which my life and the world had emerged" (After Such Knowledge

218). Having located her origin, Hoffman is struck with the fact that the shallow pit, "the heart of darkness," looks "so fresh and sunlit now, and filled with nature's gentle sounds" (After Such Knowledge 218).

Confronting the actuality of places that have always been part of her primary knowledge, Hoffman is overcome by "waves of loss, beating against the mind's shore. Loss of what I did not know" (After Such Knowledge 217). The visit to the specific sites from her parents' past enables Hoffman to locate the losses that have so far been "placeless." In Zalosce, what was lost acquires a more definite shape and becomes more palpable. Hoffman admits that walking around the town in the company of the few people who still remember her parents has allowed her to picture their prewar lives as quite ordinary, "normal enough" (After Such Knowledge 219). "That thought," she observes, "alters my vision of the horror years: It makes them both more palpably frightening and less infinite in magnitude" (After Such Knowledge 219). At the same time as this refraction offers Hoffman some consolation, however, it brings up an unanswerable question about her parents' shattered lives: "How could they bear it (After Such Knowledge 219).

Hoffman realizes, then, that even after it has been located and given shape, the loss she inherited from her parents will always lack content. "[T]here are limits to what imagination can do," she concedes her inability to put herself in her parents' place (After Such Knowledge 217). Hoffman's reaction to finding her parents' underground bunker echoes the "empathic unsettlement" she felt when she was watching a documentary in

which a survivor was explaining how he and others managed to spend months hidden in a hole dug under a pigsty:[29]

> The man lay down on the grassy spot where the hiding place had once been, stiffly, his arms aligned to his body. This is how they lay each day, for eighteen months, he said. … I confess that as I looked at the man demonstrating his position, lying stiffly on the ground, I wondered what made this game worth the candle; why he and seven others would have wished to go on. The paralysis of the situation, the abjection of turning into an underground animal, seemed to me too unbearable, too dehumanizing, to be tolerated. (After Such Knowledge 45)

Seeing, or even being present in, places where survivors hid is not conducive to understanding how it must have felt like to live through that experience. Rather, the confrontation with the very physicality of the hiding places–Hoffman's parents' bunker, the man's hole–is a measure of the distance that separates the survivors from those who came after. As Hoffman realizes, she can, at best, "almost touch" her parents' reality which, as her journey to Zalosce makes clear, will always be ungraspable (After Such Knowledge 219).

"Still, the visit helps," Hoffman insists, even as she is contemplating the recuperative limits of assigning inherited loss a place. In Zalosce, her "deeply internalized but strangely unknown past," her parents' Holocaust experience, has been rooted "in solid actualities" (After Such Knowledge 6; 220). This anchoring releases the

[29]"Empathic unsettlement," Dominick LaCapra explains, involves "being responsive to the traumatic experience of others" in a way that "resists full identification with, and appropriation of, the experience of the other" (41; 79).

pull of Hoffman's dimensionless melancholia. She can finally begin to mourn the loss her parents transferred to her. Placeless melancholia can transition to mourning not because what was lost has become known as a result of Hoffman's journey. Rather, the return has confronted her with the ultimate unknowability of her parents' Holocaust past. Once Hoffman acknowledges and accepts it, a "thoughtful separation" from the trauma that preceded her own birth becomes possible (After Such Knowledge 198). A "hinge" journey, coming back to Zalosce has enabled her to complete what she calls "one of my life's major tasks" (After Such Knowledge 233). Having visited her parent's hometown she can "distinguish shadows from realities and fable from history" at last (233). Ultimately, then, Hoffman's journey to Zalosce, is a non-return. It makes her consider her parents' past as both more immediate and more remote than she previously thought; this realization, in turn, propels Hoffman's cautious departure from the familial past that has for long overshadowed her own life.

What Hoffman perceives as the crucial responsibility, or burden, conferred on the hinge generation–the difficult task of "separat[ing] the past from the present" and learning to "see the past *as* the past"–is distinct from the issue that confronts the grandchildren of survivors (After Such Knowledge 279). "[T]he unique problem that faces my generation," Mendelsohn writes, is
"a problem that will face no other generation in history" (The Lost 433). The grandchildren, he points out, are "the last generation that will be touched personally by the Holocaust, the last for whom it will be more than a matter of intellectual or historical or interest or of moral inquiry. … We are the last generation to whom the dead are close enough to touch, yet frustratingly out of reach" ("What Happened to Uncle Shmiel" 26).

In contrast to the second generation who feels an intimate connection to their families' Holocaust experience, the third generation perceives the link between their grandparents' past and their own lives as tenuous. Mendelsohn describes it as "a strange interweaving of tantalizing proximity and unbridgeable distance" ("What Happened Uncle Shmiel" 26). Thus, as far as the grandchildren are concerned, the survivors' past, fairly removed from the present, is already a part of history. Facing consequences of that transition is the task of the third, and last, generation.

If the second generation's journeys to Eastern and Central Europe are driven by the travelers' urgent wish to sort out the "[i]mpossible attachments, impossible enmeshments" that bind them to their parents' traumatic past, the third generation's visits to ancestral homelands are motivated by the root-seekers' desire to recover the familial bond that, often, has already been lost (Hoffman, After Such Knowledge 67). The grandchildren's journeys, then, are an encounter with the familial past about which they do not know enough, rather than a confrontation with the past that has overshadowed their own lives. Like children of survivors, then, members of the third generation suppose that going to places whose memory has been passed down in their families will make the past more concrete. For the grandchildren, however, roots journeys are not just about apprehending their familial history as an actuality. They set out on their trips because they want to retrieve the past as both real and specific. Mendelsohn's quest is, as the subtitle of his memoir announces, "a search for six of six million." Pointing out that the vastness of the Holocaust occludes the fates of individuals who perished during that time, Mendelsohn conceives of his visit to Bolechow as a mission "to rescue my relatives from generalities, symbols, abbreviations, to restore to them their particularity and

distinctiveness" (The Lost 112). What happened to Uncle Shmiel's family constitutes only a "very narrow scrap of the story," Mendelsohn readily admits (The Lost 112). Yet, six decades after the event, the pursuit of these lost details may be the only way in which members of the third generation can apprehend their relation to the past that, with each passing year, is becoming more remote.

Like Zalosce for Hoffman, Bolechow, a small town in present-day Ukraine, has always been "a mythical place" for Mendelsohn who grew up under the spell of his maternal grandfather's stories about *shtetl* life (66). While the Zalosce Hoffman pictured reflected the gloom of her parents' tragic tales, the Bolechow Mendelsohn imagined was colored by his grandfather's nostalgic memories. Having left Bolechow in the early 1900s to immigrate to America, Mendelsohn's grandfather continued to vividly remember the home he never saw again. For his young grandson, an avid listener of his stories, he painted an alluring picture of the place: "*a nice town*, *a bustling little town*, *a shtetl*, a place that was famous for the timber and meat and leather goods that its merchants shipped all over Europe, *a place where a person could live*, *a beautiful spot near the mountains*" (Mendelsohn, 7, italics in the original). According to the grandfather's wistful memories, the local Jews and the other ethnic populations coexisted in harmony reflected in the town's topography. Bolechow was "a peaceful place, a little town with a square and a church or two and a shul and busy shops" (Mendelsohn 19).

Mendelsohn's grandfather's stories, however, ended well before the advent of the war, which shattered the idyll of pre-1939 Bolechow. He knew very little about the years during which, as Mendelsohn is able to establish later on, 99.2 percent of the town's Jews perished (The Lost 403). The family of uncle Shmiel, the only Jaeger brother who was

still living in Bolechow at that time, was among them. About Shmiel, his wife and four daughters, "[i]t was impossible to know anything very important," Mendelsohn recalls, "except the one salient fact, the awful thing that had happened [to them] and that was summed up by the one identifying tag, *killed by the Nazis*" (The Lost 26; italics in the original).

Captivated by his grandfather's richly descriptive anecdotes about the past and intrigued by the "irritating lacuna" at their center–uncle Schmiel and his family's missing story– Mendelsohn spent his youth trying to untangle and order his family's confounding history. Still, even after years of meticulous research, Mendelsohn, already a classicist in his late thirties, still confronts the tantalizing gap that had first motivated his relentless pursuit of his family's complicated past: no one knows what had happened to the family of uncle Shmiel, the lost Jaeger brother. Just when Mendelsohn contemplates abandoning his search, "a small number of strange coincidences, odd reminders of Bolechow, or Shmiel, or [his] family's specific past" suggest "the possibility that the dead were not so much lost as waiting" (The Lost 43). Bolechow, "the crucial place," is where Mendelsohn goes to pick up the nearly forsaken search (The Lost 80).

Wryly observing that the "return to the ancestral shtetl was by now . . . cliché," Mendelsohn is at once ambivalent and hopeful about his and his siblings' painstakingly planned visit to Galicia, now part of Ukraine (The Lost 109). The journey to Bolechow, he confesses, "had always been my obsession from the beginning" (The Lost 81). Admitting that "the idea of the family return to its roots" may be easily mocked, Mendelsohn also insists on the vital importance of understanding "[w]hat kind of place my family had come from" (The Lost 109; 110). As much as he is interested in getting to

know the human and cultural geography of Bolechow and the area that surrounds it, Mendelsohn also believes that Bolechow is "the only place I could go to find what happened to them all" (The Lost 80). Accordingly, he expects that the journey will yield new information about uncle Shmiel, his wife Ester and their four daughters. "It is of course possible to learn about the suffering of the Jews of Bolechow without having to go to a town that is now called Bolekhiv," Mendelsohn concedes, but the facts and details listed in history books are necessarily "impersonal" and unconcerned about specific individuals (125). As a result of his "strange and arduous trip" to Bolechow, Mendelsohn hopes, his family's rather "generic story" will be transformed into "a dramatic tale," the kind of narrative that cannot be found in the Holocaust encyclopedia he occasionally consults (The Lost 112; 125; 110). Conceiving of the return to Bolechow as a journey of both discovery and recovery, Mendelsohn and his siblings set out with high hopes.

Contrary to all expectations, however, Bolechow, "the town about which [Mendelsohn] had been hearing, thinking, dreaming, and writing for nearly thirty years," looks unimpressive at first sight (The Lost 80). Similarly to Hoffman, who is disappointed by Zalosce's ordinariness and provincialism, Mendelsohn is struck by how unremarkable and desolate Bolechow appears. On the rainy Sunday of his arrival, the town "doesn't look like much: a cluster of fat, steep-gabled houses grouped among a tangle of streets so dense that the little open square in the middle feels like a sigh of relief, the whole thing nestled in a depression among the hills" (Mendelsohn 115).With most of its present-day inhabitants in church, it seems as if Bolechow were deserted. Looking around, Mendelsohn is able to identify some places he has heard about. The old Ukrainian church and the town hall are still there. So is the synagogue, except that it now

serves as a leatherworkers' meeting place. Other places, like the Jaeger's family house and store, have disappeared.

With the help of Alex, the local historian who makes his living by assisting *shtetl schleppers*, as the Jewish roots travelers are sometimes called, the Mendelsohns manage to talk to a few passers-by. Olga and Pyotr, the elderly couple to whom they are directed, spent the Second World War in Bolechow and witnessed some of the events that took place during that time (The Lost 122-29). They recognize Shmiel's last name and remember that his family owned a butcher shop, but their memories are not more detailed than that. The Jaegers, Olga tells the visitors, "were very nice, very cultural people, very nice people" (The Lost 124). Pyotr recalls the last Aktion in which the remaining Jews of Bolechow were forcefully led out of town, shot and buried in a mass grave (The Lost 128). Yet he cannot confirm whether Shmiel or any other member of his family was among those killed that day. In the end, neither Olga nor Pyotr is able to establish "some fact, some detail that could either prove or disprove the stories" that are already familiar to Mendelsohn and his siblings (The Lost 128).

At once exhilarating and frustrating, the exchange with the elderly Ukrainian couple makes Mendelson acutely aware of the potentialities and limits of his return to Bolechow. Talking to Olga and Pyotr he experiences a "sudden and vertiginous sense of proximity" to his dead relatives (The Lost 123). Before Mendelsohn met the couple, the only person who had known Shmiel's family and could tell him anything about them was his own grandfather. As exciting as this realization is, Mendelsohn cannot but help to wonder "how absurd this whole expedition was, how mightily time and space and history were against us, how unlikely it was that anything of them could still remain" (The Lost

119). Having come as "close as you can come to the dead," Mendelsohn is not, after all, able to find out about the exact circumstances of his relatives' deaths (The Lost 123). In Bolechow, "the inevitable distance" that separates the past from the present does not disappear (The Lost 123). To the contrary, the visit reveals it to be unbridgeable. Mendelsohn comes to realize that even in Bolechow his family's specific story, as well as the past in general, remains out of reach.

Similarly to Hoffman whose visit to Zalosce provoked more questions about her parents' Holocaust experience than it has answered, Mendelsohn leaves his ancestral hometown wondering about the very knowability of the past. Having finally made the trip to Bolechow, Mendelsohn realizes that he returned neither to the place his grandfather so fondly recalled nor to the town Uncle Shmiel's family called their home. Bolechow, he observes, "is now so physically transformed–many buildings vanished or altered beyond recognition, the bustle of the 1930s eroded to nothing after sixty years of soviet stagnation and poverty–that the Bolechow I visited in 2001 bears only an imperfect resemblance" to the town it was decades ago (The Lost 204). The journey, then, challenges the belief that propelled Mendelsohn to undertake his search. The lost past, he learns, cannot be found in Bolechow.

Anticlimactic as it ultimately is, Mendelsohn's return to Bolechow does, in the end, lead him to find out about what happened to Shmiel, his wife, and their four daughters. The traces of Mendelsohn's lost relatives begin to emerge "[n]ot on the trip itself; but, in a way, from having gone on the trip" (The Lost 145). Through Mendelsohn's Israeli uncle, a copy of the video taken in Bolechow reaches Jack Greene, an ex-Bolechower now living in Sydney. As one of the few surviving Bolechow Jews, he

puts Mendelsohn in touch with the others. During the next four years, Mendelsohn travels all over the world to meet them. Sydney, Vienna, Tel Aviv, Kfar Saba, Beer Sheva, Vilnius, Riga, Haifa, Jerusalem, Stockholm, and Copenhagen are among the cities where those who remember Shmiel and his family now live. In the course of these journeys, the story Mendelsohn hoped to discover in Bolechow begins to gradually take shape. Taken together, the survivors' stories enable Mendelsohn to imaginatively reconstruct what it was like to live in Bolechow in the 1930s and later, when the war broke out. In addition, having pieced together the fragmentary and often contradictory tales, he can more or less accurately guess the fate of each of his lost family members. Still, the list summarizing the facts he has managed to establish during all his travels is brief (The Lost 434). Mendelsohn, nonetheless, does not consider the scarcity of concrete information a defeat. "[T]he trips that we took brought us into proximity with a past that, like the people who inhabited that past, we thought we had lost forever," he points out (The Lost 434). Had he not embarked on the search, the few details would have not have emerged at all. Like his visit to Bolechow, then, the worldwide pursuit of the truth about Uncle Shmiel's family convinces Mendelsohn that the past is only partially and incompletely recoverable. In turn, the past's elusiveness means that it will always have to remain a matter of conjecture. Whatever he has been able to find out, Mendelsohn realizes, "is, inevitably, approximate" (The Lost 204). In a way, then, his quest past must end where it started.

Believing that coming back to Bolechow again after all the years of intensive research and travel would provide him with a sense of closure, Mendelsohn revisits Bolechow in 2005 (The Lost 450). His second return, he assures his mother before departing, will be his last (The Lost 452). Whereas he planned the earlier visit in "total

ignorance," he will now be arriving with "partial knowledge" (The Lost 450). Equipped with "my tapes, the stories I'd heard, the descriptions, the maps that Jack and Shlomo had meticulously drawn and faxed me, all the data that I'd culled over four years," Mendelsohn feels well prepared to reenter the place from which his family came (The Lost 456).

Indeed, just as Mendelsohn expected, on his second and last return, Bolechow appears to be "the same, but different" (The Lost 462). Arriving on a sunny day, Mendelsohn is pleasantly surprised to notice that the town, which seemed abandoned when he saw it in 2001, is "alive with activity: cars buzzed noisily around the square, construction sites clanged and buzzed and sputtered, mothers were pushing strollers, and the place was alive with the colors of many newly painted buildings" (The Lost 462). Pleasing as it is, Bolechow's liveliness seems somewhat misplaced; it obscures the dark history of the town. Walking around the market square and seeking out some specific landmarks, Mendelsohn ponders the historical opaqueness of places. Like other buildings, Dom Katolicki, where the first Aktion in which Shmiel's wife and youngest daughter died took place, "does not—and couldn't possibly—suggest the saturated histories of the events that have occurred within" (The Lost 463). Even though Mendelsohn knows the terrifying details of what happened inside it, the "stolid little structure in front of [him]" looks inconspicuous (The Lost 463). Just as the former Dom Katolicki, now used as a movie theater, the Taniawa mass grave fails to evoke the past. Marked only by a small concrete obelisk, the burial site is hidden "in a forest so opulent with chest-high wildflowers that being there was like being in a fairy tale" (466). In Bolechow, like in Hoffman's Zalosce, it is impossible to perceive or find traces of the

past in a given location unless one already knows what happened there. “Essentially indifferent to their past, altogether amnesiac,” as James E. Young puts it, places are historically evocative only to those who can project their past back onto them: “They ‘know’ only what we know, ‘remember’ only what we remember” (62). Hoffman and Mendelsohn, rather than the places they visit, are the bearers of the past.

Yet, playing a crucial role in memorial transmission across generations, transposition often confounds rather than illuminates the past whose fragmentary story one has received. Mendelsohn’s chance discovery of uncle Shmiel and one of his daughter’s hiding place exposes just how precarious our access to and understanding of the past is. On his last day in Bolechow, Mendelsohn manages to find out that two Polish sisters hid Shmiel and Frydka in their own house, which still exists today (The Lost 478). The old man who confirms the story Mendelsohn has heard a few times before agrees to take the visitor to the place. The addicts who now live in the one-story building let Mendelsohn in. Nothing inside suggests it once was a hiding place. Mendelsohn is ready to leave when he remembers to ask about a cellar. As soon as the woman pulls away a rug, a trapdoor is revealed. Excited, Mendelsohn lowers himself down into the dark opening:

> The hole was just that: a hole. I had descended maybe eight or nine feet and was at the bottom. Down here, there was no light, and even though the trapdoor above my head was open, the space itself was steeped in a profound, inky, black: I had to stretch out my hands to locate the walls, which turned out to be very close. I figured the space measured maybe

> three feet on a side. Because I was deep underground, it was very cold, surprisingly cold. (The Lost 482)

Crouching in the dark and fighting off his claustrophobia, Mendelsohn wonders if, perhaps, his is an inherited affliction. As he is looking for words that would accurately describe the way the place feels like, he suddenly becomes aware of his grandfather's one-time comment that has remained cryptic until now: "This is horrible, it's like being in a–Oh my God I am so stupid, I said to myself. A *kestl*, a *kestl*, not a *castle*" (Mendelsohn, The Lost 482). Already years ago, Mendelsohn realizes just then, his grandfather knew something about Shmiel's hiding place. He referred to it in Yiddish, using the word "kestl," which means box or cellar. For Mendelsohn, "kestl," however, stood for the English word "castle." Standing in the dark cellar, he realizes that he spent years searching for information that was available to him all along–had he been able to interpret his grandfather's story correctly. Having almost missed the truth about uncle Shmiel twice, for the first time as a young child unfamiliar with Yiddish and for the second time as an impatient adult unwilling to ask an old man a few more questions, Mendelsohn wonders about the limits of quests such as his: "In the end, we get so much wrong not because we aren't paying attention but because time passes, things change, a grandson cannot be his grandfather, for all that he may try; because we can never be other than ourselves, imprisoned by our time and place and circumstances" (The Lost 482). The truth can easily get lost, or warped, in transmission. Our efforts to re-create the past are often ill served by the meaning we accord to specific words, things and events. What of the past is revealed to us "depends, ultimately, on who we are and what we already think we know, or want to know" (Mendelsohn The Lost 482). The very moment

Mendelsohn finally manages to find out what happened to uncle Shmiel exposes just how ungraspable the past is.

The rediscovery of the cellar causes Mendelsohn to consider how the present frames and mediates our access to and understanding of the past. In turn, the experience of standing under the tree where Shmiel and Frydka were shot makes Mendelsohn ponder the very limits of apprehending the past of others. He learns about the execution from an elderly Polish woman who has been living in Bolechow since 1928. A neighbor of the two women who hid Shmiel and Frydka, Mrs. Latyk takes Mendelsohn to the spot where his uncle and his daughter were murdered (The Lost 499). Located in the back garden of the house in which Shmiel and Frydka hid, the "ancient apple tree with a double trunk" is "*the place where it happened*" (The Lost 501; italics in the original). Such a place has always seemed to be merely "hypothetical," but now, standing under the tree, Mendelsohn "confronted the place itself, the thing and not the idea of it" (The Lost 501). The tree's concreteness and specificity overwhelm Mendelsohn. At the same time, as he is standing in the place where Shmiel and Frydka were killed, he realizes that he never truly can be in their place:

> As I stood in this most specific place of all, more specific even than the hiding place, that place in which Shmiel and Frydka experienced things, physical and emotional things I will never begin to understand, precisely because their experience was *specific* to them and not me . . . I was reminded the more forcefully that they had been specific people with specific deaths, and those lives and deaths belonged to them, not me, no matter how gripping the story that may be told about them. (The Lost 502)

The tree, then, at once fulfills and disappoints Mendelsohn's search. Just as peering at the shallow pit where her parents' bunker once was makes Hoffman realize that she will never know how her parents felt, standing under the tree makes Mendelsohn aware that there is nothing more he can find out about uncle Shmiel and Frydka. He already knows everything he can know, and part of that new knowledge includes understanding just how much will always remain irretrievably lost. Rather than explicating the enormity of Shmiel and Frydka's deaths, the tree attests to the unknowingness of the final moments of their lives. Accordingly, Mendelsohn decides to conclude his search right then and right there in the very place where he "had found [Shmiel and Frydka] most specifically" (The Lost 502). Mendelsohn's last visit to Bolechow, then, like survivors' and the second generation's homecomings, concludes with an act of departure that acknowledges the spatial and temporal distance no return can ever overcome. "[H]aving gone back that one last time, I know at last that there is, now, truly nothing left to see, nothing left of *Bolechow*," Mendelsohn explains (The Lost 45; italics in the original). His quest did not close the gap "between the place [he]'d always heard about and the place that existed on the map, between Bolechow and Bolekhiv" (The Lost 66).[30] Instead, it revealed this distance to be unbridgeable.

As he is preparing to leave Bolekhiv, Mendelsohn remembers a promise he made to himself: "I'd look through the back window and stare at the little town as it receded, because I wanted to be able to remember not only what the place looked like when you were arriving there, but what it looked like when you were leaving it forever" (The Lost

[30] In the author's note, Mendelsohn makes an even more detailed distinction. Having explained the logic behind his use of place-names throughout the text, he admits that "The one more or less consistent exception to this norm–a forgivable one, I hope–is my use of the old German spelling for the name of the town that atlases today give in its Ukrainian form, Bolekhiv, and which most of the people I interviewed referred to by its Polish name, Bolechów; but to which my family, who had dwelled there for well over three centuries, has always referred as Bolechow–a habit I have found impossible to break" (The Lost 512).

503). Looking back, Mendelsohn believes, expresses "a wish that nothing will be left behind, that we will carry the imprint of what is over and done with into the present and future" (The Lost 503). For many years, this same "impossible wish" drove Mendelsohn's search (The Lost 503). It is only after he comes to Bolekhiv for the second time that he can, regretfully, renounce the desire to retrieve and reanimate the lost past. Mendelsohn's forgetting to look back as he is driving away from the town, is not, then, as he refers to it, "the last of my many mistakes" (The Lost 503). Mendelsohn does not look back because, having returned for the last time, he comes to understand that "Bolechow had slipped out of sight" long before he thought of finding it again in Bolekhiv (The Lost 503). At once a leave taking and a letting go, Mendelsohn's departure from his ancestral *shtetl* signals his readiness and "willing[ness], finally, to allow it to take its place in the present" (The Lost 456).

All three waves of returns to places transformed by the Holocaust–first, deferred, and postgenerational–invariably end in a departure. The returnees leave having discovered that the past has not been preserved in the locations to which they came back. "I searched for the people out of my past, I searched for my past, and I did not find them," Wiesel sums up the bitter disappointment his homecoming occasions ("The Last Return" 125). Like other returning survivors, he realizes that it is his memory of the past, not the past itself, that inheres in the formerly familiar places. The second and third generations, for whom the familial past has always existed as a world apart, visit their ancestral homelands expecting to clarify their, at once tenacious and precarious, connection to the traumatic events that preceded their birth. In Central and Eastern Europe, that history becomes more concrete and real. At the same time, in the towns and

villages where their families once lived, the children and grandchildren of survivors must reconcile themselves to the past's inaccessibility and remoteness. Hoffman describes the simultaneous palpability and elusiveness of the past she experiences in Zalosce, her parents' hometown, as "a near-touching of the time before, this near-meeting of parallel lines that, after all these years, seem to be bending towards each other again" (After Such Knowledge 218). Similarly, in Bolechow, the home to generations of his family, Mendelsohn ponders "the strange proximity of the dead, who yet manage always to remain out of reach" (The Lost 98). Having come as close to the past as they could, descendants of those who survived or perished in the Holocaust must leave knowing that they can neither recover nor repair their families' losses. The postgenerational returns, then, like survivors' homecomings, mark a point of departure: the returnees realize that it is impossible to reenter and repossess places from the past, which itself exists only as a memory or a conjecture.

Chapter 2: "The place one had been years ago": Emigrant Returns in Michael Ondaatje's Running in the Family and Jamaica Kincaid's My Brother

In the opening pages of Running in the Family, Michael Ondaatje recalls a dream that inspires his return journey to Sri Lanka, the island where he spent the first eleven years of his life. In the middle of a Canadian winter night, the dream takes Ondaatje back to the once familiar tropical landscape at the heart of which there is the figure of his estranged father surrounded by dogs (21). Woken up by the barking, deeply shaken and disoriented by the vision, Ondaatje finds himself in two places at once: "I sat up on the uncomfortable sofa and I was in a jungle, hot, sweating. Street lights bounced off the snow and into the room through the hanging vines and ferns at my friend's window" (21). The reality of the dream coexists side by side with the winter night. For a brief moment, these two landscapes appear equally familiar and mysterious. Unable to shake off the spell of the dream, in the middle of a party a few weeks later, Ondaatje–whose drunken reverie strangely resembles his father's fabled exploits–becomes aware of his pressing desire to go back and acknowledges that "I knew I was already running" (22). For Ondaatje, the dream, then, functions as a summons to reckon with "the childhood I had ignored and not understood" (22) for the past twenty five years. The unsettling vision has revealed his previously unnamed and unrecognized longing to find his way back to the lost father and to reenter "the original circle of love" (25) broken by his family's dissolution and dispersal throughout Asia, Europe and America. Ondaatje understands his distance from the past as his temporal and spatial separation from his Ceylon childhood. Taking him back to the places from the past he can neither vividly recall nor completely forget, the return journey, Ondaatje trusts, may recuperate the severed bond.

"A composite of two journeys to Sri Lanka[31], in 1978 and 1980," as Ondaatje describes it (205), Running in the Family assembles Ondaatje's diary entries and travel notes, fragmentary childhood memories, archival information, family photographs, interviews with people of his parents' generation, short narratives by his siblings, poems as well as imaginative reconstructions of the circumstances surrounding the lives of his remarkably unconventional family members. The formal organization of Ondaatje's text at once reflects and reveals the complexities of "the process of writing a life–the ruptures, gaps, and workings of memory; the fictionalizing that reconstruction requires; the communal nature of the task" (Saul 260). Resulting in generic indeterminacy, the eclectic structure of Running in the Family has lent itself to diverse interpretations. Ondaatje's autobiographical text has been variously described as "an experimental autobiography in prose" (Solecki 141), a "fictionalized memoir" (Davis 267), a "travel memoir" (Huggan 118), a "non fiction novel" (Russell 23), and a "biographical, and autobiographical, novel" (Snelling 22). Adding to the critical conversation that continues to explore and illuminate the formal intricacy of Ondaatje's narrative, I consider Running in the Family as a memoir of return, an autobiographical text whose author seeks to reconstruct the events in his or her life by returning to places from his of her past. The journey back to Sri Lanka, his birthplace and a home to generations of the Ondaatje family, I propose, becomes for Ondaatje an occasion to engage the questions of individual and communal memory, familial and collective history, and the ways in which both memory and history

[31] It is only in the "Acknowledgments" section that Ondaatje calls his birthplace, Ceylon, by its present-day name, Sri Lanka. As the critic S. Leigh Matthews points out, referring throughout Running in the Family to the island by its former name, Ceylon, despite the fact that it became the republic of Sri Lanka in 1972, years before he undertakes the journey, Ondaatje "makes clear his intention to 'journey back' to the land as it was known in the time of his father, thereby invoking a peculiarly dramatic familial and cultural milieu" (368, footnote #4). Ajay Heble, on the other hand, suggests that Ondaatje's choice to continue to call the island Ceylon reveals his tenuous connection to present day Sri Lanka that no longer is the place to which he fully belongs (189).

are inscribed in a place.

As he prepares for the trip, Ondaatje pores over maps "search[ing] out possible routes to Ceylon" (22). Like the vague memories rekindled by the dream of his father, the maps confirm both his attachment to and estrangement from Sri Lanka: in order to find his way back to once familiar places whose names he recognizes but whose exact location he no longer remembers, he has to rely on maps drawn by others, the strangers who came ashore to plunder and possess the riches of the island. In a chapter entitled "Tabula Asiae," Ondaatje writes about "the false maps. Old portraits of Ceylon" his brother collects (63). Drawn by travelers, traders, and conquerors arriving to Ceylon from different parts of Asia and Europe, these maps, are "[t]he result of sightings, glances from trading vessels, the theories of sextant" (63). Referring to the same place, they picture and name it differently. Rather than conveying factual truth about the island, the old maps "reveal rumours of topography, the routes for invasion and trade, and the dark mad mind of travellers' tales" (64). At the same time as they testify to the island's colonial past, these diverse depictions of Ceylon register the island's elusiveness even as they seek to capture it. Shaping the map-making activity, imaginative geography, as Edward Said names "the invention and construction of a geographical space…with scant attention paid to the actuality of its inhabitants" (181), was tied in with the larger colonial project to possess and control the land. According to the historical geographer William J. Smyth, colonial maps functioned as instruments "of both survey and surveillance" that reflected "the objectives, agendas and cultural assumptions of their patrons and makers" (25). Running in the Family, Ondaatje's chronicle of his return to the places from his past, at

once contests and participates in the mapping of the island.[32] In the first Canadian 1982 edition of the text, the old Ceylon maps from Christopher Ondaatje's collection are featured as inside covers that frame Ondaatje's narrative of his family's life on the island.[33] Running in the Family is Ondaatje's memory map of a lost place and a lost time.

Like mapping, remembering is simultaneously a reconstructive and an imaginative act. There is no neat correspondence between a location and its map, an event and its memory. Instead of accurately rendering a place, colonial maps reveal what it represented to those who came across it. Similarly, rather than conveying the facts about the past, memories tell the truth about its meaning for the one who remembers it. Thus, both maps and memories indirectly articulate the inchoate longings, the secret desires and the unacknowledged fears that shape the individual's experience of a place at a specific time in his or her life. Just as "maps reveal rumours of topography" (Ondaatje 64), memories reveal rumors of time.

Since he does not recognize the Ceylon he has known as a child on any map, Ondaatje, an ambivalent memory tourist, journeys back hoping to be able to draw his own private map of the places he had once called his home. Referring metaphorically to one of his elderly aunts he visits soon after his arrival as "the minotaur of this long journey back…the minotaur who inhabits the place one had been years ago" (25), Ondaatje conceives of the past in spatial terms as a labyrinth navigable by memory.

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[32] Commenting on the passage in which Ondaatje marvels at the mythic and ever changing shapes of Ceylon, John Russell observes that the process through which these old maps have acquired eventual accuracy "forecasts a route his [Ondaatje's] narrative will follow" (26). While I agree with Russell that Ondaatje's quest for his family's past parallels to the explorers' mapping out of the island, I suggest that, ultimately, Running in the Family does not provide a cohesive and accurate picture of the past Ondaatje set out to discover. Instead, it complicates the very process of narrative reconstruction of past events.

[33] In an interview with Sam Solecki, Ondaatje talks about his involvement in the design of his own books. He explains that it is "important to me how a book looks–the quality of the paper, the way the words look on the page, the cover. I really feel that the writer is responsible for this as well as for the writing" (330).

Accordingly, Ondaatje's "runs" through the island trying to locate the past in specific places. As he moves from place to place, he oscillates between the occasional comforts of recognition and frequent surprises of unfamiliarity. Time and again, he experiences the discord between intimacy and distance, first evoked by the dream vision that inspired his journey. As a geopolitical narrative of identity, to use the term Susan Stanford Friedman applies to narratives in which the experience of displacement reveals that relational spatialization, or one's relationship to a place, constitutes a vital aspect of the self, Running in the Family "incorporates the opposing dimensions of the homonym routes/roots" (Stanford Friedman 151). Already in Sri Lanka, Ondaatje muses, "I am the foreigner. I am the prodigal who hates the foreigner" (79), only to refract that assertion by arguing a few pages later that "We own the country we grow up in, or we are aliens and invaders" (81). A prodigal foreigner, then, Ondaatje negotiates the tensions of postcolonial belonging in which dwelling and migration, connection and estrangement, proximity and distance, are never quite reconciled.

In the section "Don't Talk to Me About Matisse," Ondaatje interchangeably presents himself as a native and a foreigner. In one of his diary-like entries, Ondaatje, who is staying at a house in Colombo during the hottest month of the year, implicitly contrasts his reaction to the tropical climate with that of the outsiders. For him, "It is delicious heat" (79), whereas "Heat disgraces foreigners" (80). Yet, ironically, his confident pronouncement that throughout the island's history the foreigners who were arriving in excessive numbers "overpowered the land obsessive for something as delicate as the smell of cinnamon" (80), places him within the group of transient travelers eager to possess the place through which they pass. His return journey is, after all, motivated by a

compulsion to retrieve the lost childhood and the forgotten father, both no less elusive than "the smell of cinnamon" (80) that lured the foreigners ashore. In addition, not unlike the earlier explorers, Ondaatje keeps a diary whose very title "Monsoon Notebook" records his fascination with the exoticism of the place that used to be his home:

> Watched leopard sip slowly, watched the crow sitting restless on his branch peering about with his beak open. Have seen the outline of a large fish caught and thrown in the curl of a wave, been where nobody wears socks, where you wash your socks before you go to bed. …Driven through rainstorms that flood the streets for an hour and suddenly evaporate, where sweat falls in the path of this ballpoint, where the jak fruit rolls across your feet in the back of the jeep, where there are eighteen ways of describing the smell of a durian, where bullocks hold up traffic and steam after rains. (69)

As Graham Huggan points out, Ondaatje's "impressionistic descriptions such as this one come straight out of the traveller's manual" (122). At the same time as he catalogs his experiences that invariably strike him as extraordinary, however, Ondaatje is overly keen on acting as if he were one of the natives. During his first week back, he engages in "the obsessional sarong buying in Colombo, Kandy, Jaffna, Trincomalee," gets drunk on the local toddy drink, and insists on wearing the popular fifteen-cent sandals despite the fact that they blister his feet (70). Proudly declaring, "I witnessed everything" (70), Ondaatje apparently "relishes the role of being a tourist in his own country" (Huggan 122).

As Ondaatje comes to realize in the course of his journeys across Sri Lanka, the tension between belonging and alienation also characterized his ancestors' relationship to

the island. Like Ondaatje today, the previous generations of his family were implicated in colonial power structures. Members of the local elite, they occupied positions of privilege in a system established by colonial rulers. In recognition of the service delivered to Ceylon's Dutch governor, the first Ondaatje who settled on the island as early as in 1600s "was rewarded with land, a foreign wife, and a new name which was a Dutch spelling of his own" (64). In St. Thomas' Church in Colombo, Ondaatje finds the names of his ancestors carved in the stone floor: "We had not expected to find more than one Ondaatje here but the stones and pages are full of them" (66). According to the information in the parish's ledgers Ondaatje closely examines, the generations of Ondaatjes included such influential figures as the Reverend Jurgen Ondaatje, a translator and a chaplain in Colombo; Simon Ondaatje, the last Tamil Colonial chaplain of Ceylon; Dr. Williams Charles Ondaatje, the Ceylonese Director of the Botanical Gardens; Matthew Ondaatje, an expert in finance and military; and Philip de Mehlo Jurgen, a lawyer and a scholar (66-7). In the 1920s ad 1930s, Ondaatje's paternal grandfather, Philip, was a lawyer who made "huge sums of money in land deals" (55) working for the British at the time they were selling and distributing land for tea plantations (Christopher Ondaatje 35). His son Mervyn went to study in Cambridge and joined the Ceylon Light Infantry after he came back home without a diploma. Even the eventual fall of the Ondaatje family was brought about by the socio-political changes that swept through the island in the late 1940s. As Daniel Coleman explains, the privileged class to which the Ondaatjes belonged lost its status after the Second World War, as soon as the British colonial rule ended (111). Ondaatje's parents' divorce and his family's ensuing emigration coincided with a period in which the members of the burgher class were leaving the country in large numbers

(Coleman 111). As Christopher Ondaatje, Michael Ondaatje's older brother, explains in his own memoir of return, The Man-Eater of Punanai, the year 1948 marked not only Ceylon's independence but also the shift in the island's economy dependent on the British market (52). The Ondaatje's family investments suffered; the financial difficulties put an additional strain on the parents' marriage that ended soon and resulted in the family's dispersion (Christopher Ondaatje 52). The colonial upheavals, then, marked both the arrival and departure of the Ondaatjes whose family history has always been intertwined with the island's history.

In Running in the Family the connection between these two kinds of histories becomes textualized. Not incidentally, the chapter about Ondaatje's grandparents' extravagant summer retreats in Nuwara Eliya, a northern region where the heat was less oppressive than elsewhere, bears the title "Historical relations" and is based on entries from "various family journals" that recorded the events of the 1920s and 1930s, "a busy and expensive time" for the Ondaatje and Gratiaen families (39). As it turns out pages later, An Historical Relation is also the title of Robert Knox's memoir about the twenty years he spent on the island held captive by a Kandyan king. What distinguishes Knox's account from the writings by other foreigners who reflected on their experiences in Ceylon is the fact that he "wrote of the island well, learning its traditions" (82). If Knox's historical account attends to the island's native culture and customs, the family sources Ondaatje's consults reveal that centuries of colonization have complicated distinctions of race, ethnicity, and culture: "Everyone was vaguely related and had Sinhalese, Tamil, Dutch, British and Burgher blood in them going back many generations" (41). While they couldn't claim to have been native to the place, the members of the Ceylonese

community to which Ondaatje's grandparents belonged "lived here permanently" (41). The disorienting feeling of alienation and the comforting sense belonging he interchangeably experiences on his journeys through Sri Lanka, Ondaatje comes to realize, are historical relations that run in his family and thus constitute his legacy.

Unavoidably, like the lives of his family members, Ondaatje's return trip turns out to be implicated in the history of colonial conquest and domination. A journey of discovery and wonder, Ondaatje's private quest unsettlingly resembles earlier colonial expeditions. Not only does Ondaatje stylize parts of his narrative as "that most dubious of colonial genres, the travel memoir" (Pratt and Rosner, 13), but he also engages in another activity that aligns him with the outsiders eager to own the land, the mapping of the island. Still in Canada, in the months that precede his arrival in Sri Lanka, Ondaatje turns to the island's various maps in order to find his way back in; his reliance on maps reveals just how tentative his connection to his homeland is. Since they do not depict Sri Lanka the way he remembers it, Ondaatje decides to orient himself by his own memory map in order to find the places he wants to repossess. Back in Sir Lanka, he travels to locations that make up his childhood memories. He remembers some of the places he visits more vividly than others; some of them ideally correspond to his memory of the past while others unsettle him with their difference. Once again, Ondaatje's intention to capture the island that so far has eluded his grasp mirrors the aims that motivated the colonizers' sustained efforts to control the land.

One of the places that confirm Ondaatje's idyllic childhood memories is Kuttapitiya which, as he explains was "the last estate we lived on as children. …My mother and father lived there for the longest period of their marriage" (144). The place is

just as he remembers it: “It was and still is the most beautiful place in the world” (145). To the weary and exhausted after a long drive on bad roads Ondaatje, the harmonious beauty of Kuttapitiya, seemingly unaffected by the passage of time, comes as a welcome relief. He feels completely at ease there and joins his daughter in fantasizing about moving back one day: “my daughter turned to me on the edge of the lawn where I had my fist haircuts and said, ‘If we lived here it would be perfect.’ ‘Yes,’ I said.” (145-6).

If the visit to the Kuttapitiya, the faintly remembered home Ondaatje still sees as “the perfect place for children” (145) confirms his dim childhood memories and anchors him securely in the past, the timelessness he perceives in the region where his family’s former tea estate used to be offers a glimpse into the lives of his parents. Staying with his half-sister Susan, the daughter from his father’s second marriage, Ondaatje marvels at “The green pattern of landscape and life-style almost unchanged” (165). Moved and captivated by the unexpected beauty he finds everwhere around him, he does not doubt that “This is the colour of landscape, this is the silence, that surrounded my parents’ marriage” (167). Just like in Kuttapitiya, the past, the present, and the future are reconcilable in the tea country. In these places, Ondaatje finds the home he thought he had already lost. As a result, the return relieves the original displacement and the sudden severing he experienced at the age of eleven.

The longing to inhabit again the time and place one has grown from is at the heart of nostalgia, which originates in and seeks to bridge the gap between the past and the present, home and exile. The term “nostalgia” combines two Greek words: *nostos* (“returning home”) and *algia* (“longing”) (Boym, Future xiii). A desire for a return, nostalgia afflicts anyone who has left his or her home only to discover that they can leave

a place, but the place does not leave them. “A way of realigning the past with the present” (Deciu Ritivoi 6), nostalgia promises to take the rememberer back to a place from an idealized past. Ondaatje’s return to Kuttapitiya and the tea country, then, fulfills his nostalgic yearning to find the past unchanged and still present in once familiar locations. Reveling in the feeling of being at home in places that make up his childhood memories, Ondaatje succumbs to what Svetlana Boym calls restorative nostalgia, or “a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home” (Future 49).

Inevitably, however, in the course of his journeys across Sri Lanka, Ondaatje encounters places that expose the difference between his memories and the reality that inspired them. Feeling at home where things appear unchanged, Ondaatje re-experiences the pain of dislocation during visits to places he does not quite recognize. Back at Rock Hill, a one-time family residence located “on a prime spot of land right in the centre of the town of Kegalle” (55), he observes with disappointment that “What to us had been a lovely spacious house was now small and dark, fading into the landscape.” (59). Lacking its previous splendor, Rock Hill and its “depressed garden of guava trees, plantains, old forgotten flowerbeds” (60) bespeak impermanence and the changing fates of generations. Taking in the signs of neglect and decay in the place that once symbolized his family’s wealth and good fortune, Ondaatje bitterly remarks, “Whatever ‘empire’ my grandfather had fought for had to all purposes disappeared” (60). Whereas the returns to Kuttapitiya and the tea country make it possible for Ondaatje to indulge in nostalgic recollections of a perfect childhood, the visit to Rock Hill challenges him to ponder the interrelationship between his family’s and the island’s histories. Present-day Rock Hill is a reminder of the Ondaatje family’s gradual demise, a fall concurrent with the collapse of the British

colonial rule. Demanding that Ondaatje take full measure of how much has been lost and how little has remained, the visit to Rock Hill makes him understand that the past for which he is searching will always remain uncertain.

Even more disquietingly, then, seen with Gillian's eyes and complemented by her memories of a troubled childhood, Rock Hill turns out to never have been the unperturbed place Ondaatje remembers. His older sister does not join him in reminiscing about the idyllic times they spent there as children, and instead walks around and points places where their alcoholic father was hiding bottles: "*Here* she said, *and here*" (60). Already aware of the contrast between the actual place and his memory of it and now unsettled by Gillian's stories, Ondaatje gradually discovers that his own recollections may not be accurate. After all, his memory of Rock Hill's grandeur turns out to be merely a memory of a young boy, impressed and awed by a residence that fails to affect the adult he has become; he does not remember his father's drunken spells and, unlike his sister, he did not even know where to search for the hidden bottles. Ondaatje's own memories, then, are, at best, incomplete; their fragmentariness will always prevent him from being able to intimately know the past he longs to reenter on his journey. The differences between his and his sister's memories of the life at Rock Hill, however, bare and frustrate Ondaatje's desire to find the places from his early years unchanged. Insofar as they preserve the illusion of an idyllic childhood, Ondaatje's vague recollections are not so much memories as dreams of the childhood he wishes, and might have wished, had been his.

Disappointed and disoriented by the difference between his memories and the past they evoke, Ondaatje ponders the disjunction between them. As he gradually realizes, he

may come back to the places he left years ago, but, just like he himself, they no longer are what they used to be. Consequently, his visit cannot satiate "the hunger for return" (32) as Isabelle de Courtivron refers to the condition that afflicts contemporary bilingual writers embarking on a quest to re-inhabit the lost home they "never completely left," but to which they, nevertheless, "can never really go back" (33). Such homecomings are "both real and 'in-completable'" because one can come back only as a foreigner (Courtrivron 39). Rather than recovering it, the return reveals the loss of home to be irrevocable. As a result of the unanticipated defamiliarization and unbridgeable distance that strike Ondaatje upon his return to Sri Lanka, the reconstructive nostalgia that initially drives his journey transitions into nostalgia's reflective mode. In contrast to the former, the latter, as Svetlana Boym explains, forgoes the insistent wish for recovery and, instead, becomes a sustained "meditation on history and the passage of time" (Future 49). Whereas reconstructive nostalgia is "an attempt to conquer and *spatialize time*, reflective nostalgia cherishes shattered fragments of memory and *temporalizes space*" (Boym, Future 49, emphasis added). Embarking on his journey, Ondaatje hopes that time may stand still in the places that make up his childhood memories. In the course of his travels, however, he has to concede that familiar locations neither arrest the passage of time, nor are placeholders for and repositories of the irretrievable past. Time passes through and changes places, as well as those who come back to them. Ondaatje's memory, then, does not map his past; rather, it charts its unraveling.

Returning to Sri Lanka in the hope that the past may stand still in the places he nostalgically remembers, Ondaatje also travels back with the intention to animate the silence that surrounds the lives of his ancestors. Ondaatje assumes that the past, locked

in place, can be reentered; knowable through stories, it can be narrated. “The family I had grown from–those relations from my parents’ generation,” Ondaatje observes on the night he makes up his mind to go to Sri Lanka, “stood in my memory like frozen opera. I wanted to touch them into words” (22). Coming to know these forgotten life stories would relieve the distance that separates him from his past. In the act of narrating the lives of his family members, Ondaatje would be able to renew the bond that has been broken by his departure twenty five years ago. Back in his first home, among the places and people to which he had once been close, Ondaatje searches for facts and stories he cannot himself remember. Yet, at the same time as he realizes that the past is neither firmly arrested in places nor wholly conveyed through memories, Ondaatje also comes to understand that it does not get fully revealed through stories either.

Storytelling, like remembering, mediates between the past and the present. Never merely reproducing the events that already took place, stories narrate, or order, the past and thus save it from incoherence. Focused on Ondaatje’s maternal grandmother Lalla, the section “Eclipse Plummage” is a sequence of three chapters which, taken together, offer a glimpse at the process involved in Ondaatje’s task as the chronicler of his family stories. In the chapter “Aunts,” Ondaatje reflects on his reliance on his elderly aunts who generously share their recollections with him: “How I have used them. …They knit the story together, each memory a wild thread in the sarong” (110, ellipsis in the original). The enticing tales of the past emerge from the aunts’ dispersed memories only after they are organized into an intelligible narrative. Ondaatje, then, is not only the story collector, but also the storyteller. Whereas the passage above ostensibly limits Ondaatje’s role to that of the gatherer of stories, another chapter, “Lunch Conversation,” offers a glimpse at

the encounters that inspire Ondaatje's retelling of the past. The informal gathering brings together those who have known Ondaatje's maternal grandmother, Lalla. As each of the guests begins to tell his or her story involving a particular incident, Ondaatje finds himself overwhelmed and gets lost in the cacophony of memories. Not able to follow any story, Ondaatje interrupts and asks for clarification: "Wait a minute, wait a minute! When did it all this happen, I'm trying to get it straight …" (105). Suggesting that he has ultimately managed to arrange the fragments into a story, the chapter ends with Ondaatje's narrative that reconstructs the events that would otherwise remain lost in the confusing exchange of memories. "The Passions of Lalla" which concludes the section pays tribute to Lalla as it organizes all the stories about her into a narrative portrait of a extravagant woman vividly remembered for her unconventionality and unpredictability.

Inviting others to share their recollections with him, then, Ondaatje facilitates their work of memory. Importantly, he also transforms these imprecise and partial recollections as he shapes them into narratives. Well aware of his active role in transmitting the past, Ondaatje ruminates on the interplay between remembering and storytelling that unavoidably mediate our access to the past. Referring to an afternoon spent in the company of his Aunt Phyllis who "presides over the history of good and bad Ondaatjes and the people they came in contact with" (26), Ondaatje describes their conversation as an ongoing engagement with the past that is at once elusive and malleable:

> we will trade anecdotes and faint memories, trying to swell them with the order of dates and asides, interlocking them all as if assembling the hull of a ship. No story is ever told just once. Whether a memory or funny hideous scandal, we will return

> to it an hour later and retell the story with additions and this time a few judgments thrown in. In this way history is organized. (26)

Accordingly, as a narrative to a large extent recreated from "long lists of confused genealogies and rumour" (206), Running in the Family "is not a history but a portrait or 'gesture'" (206). Having set out to order and make sense of the past only to confront the insurmountable limits of the task, Ondaatje realizes that his quest to recapture the lives of his family, just like his return home, will always remain 'in-completable.' In relation to the past, Ondaatje is also the prodigal foreigner whose distance is only provisionally relieved by his proximity.

The gestures Ondaatje makes towards historical accuracy–researching local archives, including photographs, transcribing journal entries, summarizing newspaper accounts–do not fully capture the past because factual reconstruction leaves out "the intimate and truthful" (54). In her essay, "The Site of Memory," Toni Morrison talks about the omissions contained within historical records which are often the only link to the past we long to know more about. The glaring absence of descriptions of slaves' interior lives in their autobiographies propels Morrison's desire to explore the reality hidden by that silence. As a creative writer, she embarks on "a kind of literary archeology: On the basis of some information and a little guesswork you journey to a site to see what remains were left behind and to reconstruct the world that these remains imply" (192).[34] Morrison's journey to "the site of memory" resembles Ondaatje's return to Sri Lanka; her wish to gain access to the unknown truth about slaves' inner lives parallels Ondaatje's search for the "truth [that] disappears with history" (53). The

[34] For a related discussion about the writer's creative engagement with an unrecorded past, see Eavan Boland's essay "Lava Cameo." As Boland sees it, inspired by "rumor, fossil fact, half memories" (10), the imaginative reconstruction of the past is the only alternative to not knowing it at all.

incompleteness of historical artifacts and historical memory, Morrison concludes, can only be remedied by "the act of imagination" (192).[35] Since "the act of imagination is bound up with memory" (Morrison 198), imaginative reconstruction complements factual reconstruction. In Running in the Family, Ondaatje also reconsiders his reliance on historical records and the memories of others. As a result, the inextricable connection between memory and imagination Ondaatje employs gives shape to his narrative. Running in the Family projects "an air of authenticity" without renouncing "the fictional air" (206).

In particular, Ondaatje draws attention to the interrelationship between factual reconstruction and imaginative reconstruction in the sections devoted to his father. As the lost father whom Ondaatje barely remembers, Mervyn Ondaatje occupies a prominent space in the memoir. He is not only at the center of the dream vision that inspires Ondaatje's return, but he also remains a central preoccupation of his son's quest to re-inhabit the past. Like Lalla, known for his "dramatic nature" (170), Mervyn Ondaatje emerges from the endless anecdotes about him as a charismatic figure whose actions at once befuddled and mesmerized those around him: a reckless young man who supports his extravagant lifestyle with family money that was intended to fund his education; an troublesome son who goes out to run an errand and comes back three days later; a charming suitor who convinces his hesitating fiancée to marry him after all; a playful

[35] Similarly, in "Imaginary Homelands," his famous essay on the dilemmas facing the exiled writer wishing to write about the birthplace, Salman Rushdie argues that fragmentary memory does not stall but instead inspires the creative process: "it was precisely the partial nature of my memories, their fragmentation, that made them so evocative for me." (12). Noting "an obvious parallel…with archeology," Rushdie goes on to propose that vague memories resemble "the broken pots of antiquity, from which the past can sometimes, but always provisionally, be reconstructed" (12). In that sense, like Morrison's Beloved and Rushdie's Midnight Children, Ondaatje's Running in the Family can be at once imaginary and true without being factually accurate.

husband who joins his young wife in mocking the seriousness of marriage. However, all these stories, Ondaatje cannot help but think, do not bring him closer to his father who remains to him a stranger with an unconventional biography. Ondaatje's comment about the ways his parents' community commemorates its members applies to his father as well: "An individual would be eternally remembered for one small act that in five years had become so magnified he was just a footnote below it" (169). The real Mervyn Ondaatje has been overshadowed by the mythic memories and legendary tales that circulate among those who have once known him. As a result, his inquisitive son is left wondering: "Where is the intimate and truthful in all this? Teenager and Uncle. Husband and lover. A lost father in his solace. And why do I want to know of this privacy? After the cups of tea, coffee, public conversations…I want to sit down with someone and talk with utter directness, want to talk to all the lost history like that deserving lover" (54, ellipsis in the original). His longing to know his father unappeased, Ondaatje stumbles against the limits of memorial recovery.

When he realizes that Mervyn Ondaatje's contemporaries' memories will not draw the intimate and private portrait of his father he yearns after, Ondaatje turns to his siblings and his father's closest friends. The chapter "Dialogues" brings together their reminiscences and arranges them into a composite account of Mervyn Ondaatje's troubled last years. Told in a distinctive voice, each of these brief vignettes describes a different episode. One of Ondaatje's sister recalls the drinking and despair that follows the father's loss of employment (174). Christopher recounts his father's drunken driving that, luckily, did not end in a tragedy (174-5). Another sister talks about the family having to miss Christopher's ship's departure for England because the father had been

drinking so heavily at that time that he couldn't be left alone for long (174). The unhappiness and distress conveyed by Ondaatje's siblings' memories is only partially relieved by the recollections of one of Mervyn Ondaatje's friends who remarks that "for us he was an utterly charming man, always gracious. …But none of us knew what he was like when he was drunk" (175).

While these disturbing memories offer glimpses into Mervyn Ondaatje's family life on the eve of his marriage's collapse and reveal the contrast between his private and public personas, they are also told in others', not Mervyn's, voices. Instead of closing off the distance that separates him from his father, Ondaatje gradually comes to understand, all the memories and stories he uncovers on his journey make the truth about his father more complex and more elusive, impossible to ascertain once and for all.

"What began it all was the bright bone of a dream I could hardly hold onto" (21), Ondaatje recalls in the opening sentence of Running in the Family. Having sent him on a journey, the image of his father, "chaotic, surrounded by dogs, and all of them were screaming and barking" (21), returns in a story which, like the dream vision, deeply unsettles Ondaatje with its intangibleness. "There is a story about my father I cannot come to terms with" (181), writes Ondaatje in the chapter entitled "Bone." Recounting one of Mervyn Ondaatje's famous "train escapades," his friend Arthur remembers that "he had escaped from the train and run off naked into the jungle" (181). Called to the rescue, Arthur set out to search for him:

> When Arthur eventually tracked him down this is what he saw.
>
> My father is walking towards him, huge and naked. In one hand he holds five ropes, and dangling on the end of each of them is a black dog.

> None of the five are touching the ground. He is holding his arm outstretched, holding them with one arm as if he has supernatural strength. Terrible noises are coming from him and from the dogs as if there is a conversation between them that is subterranean, volcanic. All their tongues hanging out. (181)

The "bright bone of a dream" turns out to be a bone of memory no less haunting or disturbing than the vision that shook Ondaatje into wakefulness on the winter night when he first begun "dreaming of Asia" (22). By providing, what Sonia Snelling refers to as "alternative access to the past through the senses and imagination which traditional historical method officially rejects but inevitably employs" (32), the uncanny similarity between the son's dream and Arthur's memory reveals that the fragile father-son connection exists in a realm beyond the factual. Ondaatje may never grasp the meaning of the dream-story and he may never know the person his father was, but, as a writer, he might find his way back to him as he imaginatively recreates his lost father's life.

Thus, in the chapter that follows "Bone," Ondaatje does not adhere to historical accuracy. The title of the deeply moving chapter, "Thanikama," or aloneness, announces its focus, Mervyn Ondaatje's inner turmoil that followed his divorce in 1947. Ondaatje imagines one day from the distressed and newly alone Mervyn Ondaatje's life. Having spent the day at a Colombo hotel waiting in vain to speak with his wife who now works there and willfully continues to ignore his presence, on his way home to Rock Hill, Mervyn stops to buy cases of alcohol (185-6). All alone in the family residence that not so long ago brimmed with the presence of his children and wife, he drinks himself to sleep. Yet, Mervyn's solitude is suspended for a brief moment when he bends down to

pick a loose page of a novel. The page is numbered 189; the scene appears on page 189 in Running in the Family. Just as through the dream vision the father enters into his adult son's life, the writer-son imaginatively positions himself inside his father's life. Ondaatje's self-conscious gesture of inserting his presence into the narrative he authors is no doubt ironic, but, importantly, it also reciprocates the father's reaching out to his son through the dream. Having touched his father into words, Ondaatje knows that he and his father can come closer to each other, but they can only meet in silence.

Thus, Ondaatje's return does not, ultimately, result in the recovery of the lost homeland and the lost father. Rather, the visit uncovers the lasting and affecting irrevocability of that original loss. Ondaatje's search, however, opens up new ways for coming to terms with the past he cannot recapture. The penultimate chapter of Running in the Family, "Final Days Father Tongue," brings together the voices of Ondaatje's older siblings and younger half-sisters, all of whom comment on the earlier versions of his memoir and add their own reminiscences inspired by their reading of Ondaatje's manuscript. When his half-sister Jennifer assures Ondaatje that his father "missed you all terribly, he longed for you, but with us–his second-family–he was just as loving" (194), she makes Ondaatje aware of the reciprocity of the loss he and his siblings suffered. They lost their father; he lost his children.

Urged by his brother Christopher to "get this book right" (201), in the end, Ondaatje accepts that his narrative, the portrait of his father, will be, like his return, incomplete:

> There is so much to know and we can only guess. Guess around him. To know him from these stray actions I am told by those who loved him. And yet, he is still

> one of those books we long to read whose pages remain uncut. We are still unwise. It is not that he became too complicated but that he had reduced himself to a few things around him and he gave them immense meaning and significance. (200)

Gathered together around remembering their father, Mervyn's children from his two families can only "guess around" him. Yet, that communal act of remembering unites them once again in a circle of love–not the prefect one Ondaatje had set out to enter, but a different one that encompasses both the happy and sad memories of the past. Ondaatje's remembrance project undoes and suspends, albeit provisionally, the family's dispersion he described earlier in his memoir: "Magnetic fields would go crazy in the presence of more than three Ondaatjes. And my father. Always separate until he died, away from us. The north pole" (172). Through and his children's memories, Mervyn Ondaatje is the pole that draws them all in even as they can never come close enough to reach him.

Similarly to Ondaatje, after years of absence, Jamaica Kincaid returns to her home island in response to a summons. Unlike Ondaatje's, however, Kincaid's return is not about reclaiming what she has lost or forgotten. She does not anticipate the journey back with anxious hopes of retrieving the faint memories that now haunt her dreams; neither does she need to look at maps to find her way back. Rather, the return unsettles Kincaid with its inevitability: the past, the places and the people she willfully left behind, continue to make claims on her present. Despite the many years that have passed, the crippling familial obligations from which she struggled to set herself free pull her right back into the life she did not want to live. If Ondaatje visits Sri Lanka in hopes of recovering the distance that separates him form his childhood home, Kincaid returns knowing all too

well that her detachment from Antigua has never been fully achieved. She remains "vulnerable to my family's needs and influences" (20) even though she left the island at the age of sixteen, nearly thirty years ago. Not sharing Ondaatje's dreamy memories of the home island as an idyllic place, Kincaid also does not recall her early life in the company of her parents and siblings to be "the original circle of love" (25), as Ondaatje describes his childhood. Instead, she remembers it as a time when she had to subordinate her own individuality and independence to meet her family's demands.

Whereas Ondaatje makes the decision to return from "within the comfort and order of my life" (22), Kincaid journeys back in response to the news of her brother Devon's illness. On a quiet Thursday night, as she is reading a gardening book in her comfortable Vermont house, "a place whose existence seemed especially miraculous" (135), Kincaid receives a phone call from her mother's friend. Not having communicated with her family for quite some time and temporarily freed from familial obligations that always weigh her down, Kincaid has been experiencing the luxury of being "absorbed with the well-being of my children, absorbed with the well-being of my husband, absorbed with the well-being of myself" (7). When she picks up Russel Page's The Education of a Gardener again, Kincaid is already back in Antigua. Sitting on a lawn in front of the Holberton hospital in the company of the gravely sick Devon, she takes in the "ordinary Antiguan landscape" with its traces of colonial past and signs of present neglect (10).

This particular scene–Kincaid immersed in a book with her youngest brother by her side–reenacts, with a difference, one of her most powerful childhood memories. As a bookish girl of fifteen she was often left in charge of caring for a two-year-old Devon

while their mother was at work. On one such occasion, the mother returned home only to find that Devon's diaper had not been changed the whole day because Kincaid's attention had been captivated by a story she was reading. To punish her, the mother burned all of Kincaid's beloved books (134).

The familiar landscape of the home island, the irresistible joy of reading, and the presence of a vulnerable Devon who demands her care and attention are at the heart of both experiences Kincaid remembers. What distinguishes Kincaid's earlier memory from the memory of reading with Devon by her side on the hospital lawn is her ability to resume and continue the reading interrupted by the unexpected call from Antigua interrupted. Whereas the young girl could only passively watch her mother destroy all of her books, belatedly defiant, the adult Kincaid keeps on reading. Back in the places she easily recognizes and once again among the people who continue to deeply affect her, Kincaid vows, "since I have survived it, my intimate past, I simply shall never repeat it" (157).

"Because human memory is often self-representational," Sue Campbell, the author of Relational Remembering, points out, "it is also a basis for self-reflection, self-knowledge, and identity formation" (48). Since it engages rather than repeats, reconstructs rather than reproduces the past, remembering allows for its re-interpretation and re-presentation. Active rather than passive, remembering and the "memory narratives" it produces "are fundamental not only to developing and maintaining a sense of self but to repairing a sense of self rendered vulnerable through harm or abuse" (Campbell 43).

In My Brother, Jamaica Kincaid draws on the recuperative aspect of memory when she willfully distances herself from the past that continues to encroach on her present. Kincaid's return to Antigua and the resurfacing of memories the journey back occasions inspire her to act against her memory. Whenever present circumstances echo her previous experiences, Kincaid responds to them differently than she did in the past by deliberately exercising the agency she did not possess before. Since they call for negative identification, Kincaid's acts against memory at once undo and re-establish her consuming attachment to the people and places from her past. Insofar as they purposefully assert and enact the difference between Kincaid's past and present, her younger and older selves, herself and her mother, acts against memory constitute Kincaid's autobiographical acts.[36] "All autobiographical acts," as Nancy K. Miller writes, "take place in the tensile space between what's the same and what's different, self and other" (129). Accordingly, in My Brother, it is Kincaid's memory that forms the terrain on which the tensions between sameness and difference, self and other, are worked through. Functioning at once as acts of self-preservation and self-assertion, Kincaid's acts against memory, like all autobiographical acts in general, always already position her in relation to another time, another place, another person against which she defines her present self.

In The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony, Leigh Gilmore refers to the repeated narrative reworking and reconstruction of key events in the autobiographer's life as his or her autobiographical scene. The recurrence of the autobiographical scene is

[36] Anne Rice suggests that Kincaid's frequently uses the temporal markers "then" and "now" to accentuate the difference "between the experiencing 'I' and the narrating 'I'" (29). This distinction illustrates "the process of Kincaid's making meaning, zoning in between different registers of perception marked 'then' and 'now' in her search for a perspective that will afford her some distance and control over the event" (29). In this sense, my discussion on Kincaid's acts against memory implicitly relies on the "then"/"now" distinction Rice discusses.

a marker of serial autobiography whose authors conceive of their life narratives as "open-ended, susceptible to repetition, extendible, even, perhaps, incapable of completion" (96). Jamaica Kincaid is one of the serial autobiographers whose work Gilmore analyzes. [37] The autobiographical scene to which Kincaid repeatedly returns in the narratives comprising her ongoing autobiographical project concerns her complex and unresolved relationship with her mother and Antigua, the island she left at the age of sixteen.

Whereas Gilmore traces the reworking of the autobiographical scene across the multiple narratives within Kincaid's oeuvre, I'd like to apply her theoretical concept to a single work, My Brother, the only non-fictional text within Kincaid's serial autobiography in which Kincaid literally returns to her autobiographical scene. The inter-textual revisiting of the autobiographical scene, Gilmore notes, amounts to the construction of "a subject-in-process" (97), a construction that simultaneously involves "two locations of becoming: in one is the subject-who-writes; in the other, the subject-in-the-text." (97). In My Brother, I suggest, these two locations of becoming correspond to the-subject-who-remembers and the subject-in-memory. Accordingly, the tension between these two positions registers the intratextual emergence of "the-subject-in-process" who establishes herself through her acts against memory that maintain her connection to the autobiographical scene through negative identification.

Like in earlier Kincaid's texts, the figure of the mother looms prominently in My Brother. She is the primary other against whose life Kincaid understands her own. Intensified by her return to Antigua, Kincaid's indelible memories of her mother continually propel her to look back and remember the contentious past marred by the

[37] Leigh Gilmore includes the following texts in Kincaid's serial autobiography: At the Bottom of the River (1983), Annie John (1996), Lucy (1990), The Autobiography of My Mother (1996), and My Brother (1997).

violence of painfully vituperative mother-daughter confrontations. Just as she Kincaid feared, her homecoming reignites the conflict that has never been completely resolved.

When she receives the call informing her about Devon's illness, Kincaid and her mother are "in a period of not speaking to each other" (6). Not engaging in "the usual deliberation I allow myself whenever my family's needs come up–should I let this affect me or not?" (20), surprised by her emotional reaction to the unsettling news about the brother whom she barely knows, Kincaid feels compelled to go back. Yet, even as she heeds the call to return at this critical time, she decides against staying with her mother. She prefers to live at the inn, "the place that was not my mother's place" (29), where she can have "my own room alone, my own isolation" (27). Addressing her disapproving mother in her thoughts, Kincaid rationalizes, if not defends, her choice: "You and I do not get along, I am too well, I am not a sick child, you cannot be a mother to a well child, you are a great person but you are a bad mother to a child who is not dying or in jail" (27). Kincaid's memory of her mother's visit to Vermont some years ago further convinces her that she cannot live with her mother again. Instead of facilitating mutual understanding, their time together culminated in "an enormous quarrel" (27) that highlighted their irreconcilable differences and resulted in Kincaid's emotional breakdown lasting long after her mother's departure. The physical proximity to her mother, Kincaid realizes, threatens the already precarious psychic distance between them. This time around, then, Kincaid is determined to protect her own vulnerability. While the present defiance may not revoke her past surrenders, it refuses to repeat them.

Kincaid's and her mother's shifting attitudes towards the past they both remember reflect the dynamic of the mother-child relationship theorized by Jessica Benjamin in her

essay "The Omnipotent Mother: A Psychoanalytic Study of Fantasy." In Kincaid's memoir, the mother-daughter struggle over memory is based on complementarity which, as Benjamin explains, prevents each member of the mother-child dyad from being able to acknowledge and accept the other's difference and separateness ("The Omnipotent Mother…" 138). First seen in the separation-individuation phase of early childhood development, complementarity rests on the polarity between the dominating and the dominated. The mother's difference is interpreted by the child as a potential threat to his or her reality and results in the fantasy of maternal omnipotence. Through a reversal, the dread of the mother's tantalizing power can only be withstood by the child's own omnipotence. Because the ongoing tension between the fantasy of the mother's all-encompassing power and the recognition of her subjectivity "remains an organizing issue throughout life" (Benjamin 138), reconciliation between the mother and the child cannot be accomplished and attained once and for all; its progress, at turns regressive, is at best gradual and never straightforward.

Before their individual memories became mutually exclusive and the contestation of the other's version of the past came to dominate the mother-daughter struggle for mutual recognition, Kincaid and her mother used to engage in companionate remembering that brought their experiences together into a harmonious tale of the past they shared. "When I was a child," Kincaid remembers, "I would hear her [the mother] recount events that we both had witnessed and she would leave out small details; when I filled them in, she would look at me with wonder and pleasure" (75). Rather than challenging her mother's retelling of the past, Kincaid's "extraordinary memory" (75) added to and complemented her mother's story. As Kincaid admits, her mother's early

praise, “made an everlasting mark and nothing anyone could do made me lose this ability to remember” (75). At the same time that it distinguished her from everyone else around her, Kincaid’s precocious memory stood for the special bond between her and her mother.

Whereas early on Kincaid’s unusual ability to remember what her mother has overlooked strengthened their alliance, with time, Kincaid’s propensity to vividly recall the things her mother has left out begins to mark the escalating discord between them. The shift corresponds to Benjamin’s model of the mother-daughter relationship in which the initial mother-child idyllic harmony is replaced by complementarity. A daughter in thrall of the omnipotent mother fantasy whose power also extends over the past she insists on remembering in a specific way, Kincaid no longer perceives her gift to remember as a sign of her deep connection with her mother. Rather, she insists on her remarkable memory as a trait that sets her apart from her mother. “For my mother an old story is a bad story, a story with an ending she does not like” (25), Kincaid maintains, and, she asserts, her own detailed memory is “perhaps the thing she most dislikes about me” (6). When, standing by the sick Devon’s bedside, Kincaid reminds her mother about the red ants incident that might have claimed his life just days after he was born, her mother exclaims disapprovingly: “‘What a memory you have!’” (6). The reason for the resentment, Kincaid supposes, is her mother’s refusal to consider as legitimate her daughter’s perspective. The past is what her mother remembers it to have been; she disallows others’ memories because they challenge her version of the past.

Recalling her visit following Devon’s unexpected recovery, Kincaid remembers the afternoon she, Devon and their mother spent on the beach (70-73). Insensitive to the

embarrassment she is causing her youngest son, the mother tells a story about the drug-addicted Devon stealing and selling the unusual fern she brought back from her trip to Dominica (73). Empathizing with her brother, Kincaid longs to assure him that their mother "doesn't know what she is doing" (73). When Devon says nothing, Kincaid blames his acquiescing silence on the mother whose powerful memory leaves no room for Devon's own recollections: "She does not like memory, I wanted to tell him; you have no memory, I wanted to tell him, she taught you that" (74). Kincaid's relentless remembering, then, defies her mother's injunction to forget all that puts into question her mother's story of the past.

Holding on tightly to their own recollections of the past, Kincaid and her mother remain locked in the conflict not only over *what* but *how* they remember. Neither Kincaid nor her mother is able to acknowledge that the disparities in their memories may simply reveal that they experienced the past differently. Each perceives the other's memory as an outright attack on her self. Kincaid's mother fails to recognize the validity of her daughter's subjective view of the past; in turn, Kincaid dismisses her mother's interpretation of the events that took place a long time ago as a willful denial of all the pain she has caused her.

Thus, even though both Kincaid and her mother agree that the past has greatly influenced Kincaid's present, they understand the foundational role of Kincaid's early life in Antigua differently. Kincaid's mother insists that her daughter has grown up to become the successful writer who returns home to provide the needed assistance for her sick brother thanks to her maternal vigilance and intervention. She acknowledges that "she had been very strict with me [Kincaid] and if she had not been I [Kincaid] would have

ended up with ten children by ten different men" (28). Yet, Kincaid insists that she has attained her present status *despite* the pain and abuse she suffered in her mother's home. She also refutes her mother's genuine concern as the only motivation for her actions– driving away of the boy who used to come over to borrow Kincaid's books, taking her daughter out of school when she barely turned sixteen, burning all of her books as a punishment for neglecting Devon–Kincaid asserts that "It is a mystery to me still why my mother would think I would not be grateful to someone who saved me from such a fate" (28). When, on one of Kincaid's return visits, her mother praises and acknowledges her dedication that makes it possible for Devon to receive adequate medical care, Kincaid accuses her mother of dishonesty: "she did not remember this, she did not remember that if it had been up to her, I would not have been in a position to be blessed by any God, I might in fact be in the same position as my brother right now" (75). Aware that, as Sue Campbell argues, "It is…possible to attack or undermine the selfhood and personhood of others by undermining them as rememberers" (27), as always vulnerable to her mother's overpowering influence, Kincaid defensively wards off her mother's account of the past in order to protect herself.

Caught up in the binary dynamic of complementarity, the mother's and daughter's memories are irreconcilable. Their differing recollections of the same events inevitably cancel each other out and thus question the validity of the other's memory. That irresolvable tension points to the relational aspect of memory, the fact that in functioning as "a source and story of the self that we share with others and of the past that we share with them" (Campbell 48) remembering depends on the presence and recognition of an other. The self-assertion Kincaid performs through her determined acts against memory

always places her in opposition–and thus in relation–to the mother and the past overshadowed by her overpowering presence.

Even though Kincaid remembers her mother and her past in order to set herself free from them, her acts against memory do not so much resolve the consuming mother-daughter conflict as they reenact it in the present. When Kincaid claims that her memory, at once admired and resented, "is what my family, the people I grew up with, hate about me. I always say, Do you remember?" (19), she admits that while her memory sets her apart from the other members of her family, it is their life together she recalls most vividly. As Leigh Gilmore notes, in all of Kincaid's works, "the family threatens annihilation but also offers identity" (114). The intensity with which Kincaid remembers bespeaks both her fierce attachment to her past that continues to loom over her present and her determined struggle to securely anchor herself in the life she has created for herself after leaving Antigua. Kincaid's acts against memory, then, highlight the limits and potentials of memory's simultaneous foundational and transformational role in shaping one's identity. Thus, Kincaid's return to Antigua exposes the persistence of the autobiographical scene against which she defines her present self. Back on the home island, in close proximity to her mother, Kincaid re-experiences the force that binds her to her mother even as she struggles to maintain her own difference. The resurfaced memories the journey home has provoked unsettle the precarious mother-daughter distance whose seemingly imminent collapse Kincaid is determined to prevent at all cost.

As Kincaid's return reveals, leaving a place behind may sever one's connection to it, but it does not necessarily lessen its intensity. While persistent, however, the attachment to the autobiographical scene does not remain unchanged. Kincaid's

homecoming also occasions a sustained reflection on the inherent memorability and relationality of the places that comprise her autobiographical scene. Holding her memories in place, Antigua simultaneously locates and shapes Kincaid's relationship with the members of her family. As she revisits and remembers specific places–her mother's house, the Holberton hospital, Devon's abandoned garden–Kincaid explores how they affect and what they reveal about her relations with the people who inhabit them.

In My Brother, the elegiac portrait of Devon emerges from Kincaid's memories of the places where she saw her youngest brother live and die. These locations–the places she revisits on the trips she makes to Antigua when her brother is still alive, the places she returns to in her memory after Devon is already dead–map Kincaid's narrative of Devon's constricted life. Locating Devon in specific settings–his hospital room, his "little house" (113), his carefully tended garden–Kincaid's place memories invariably account for her own position in relation to the places she recalls. At once revealed through and determined by Kincaid's location, her relationship with Devon reflects her complex connection to the places that comprise her autobiographical scene.

Kincaid's most powerful memory, the memory of the day her mother burned all of her books, foregrounds a paradigm for the narrative representation of Devon. Only "a glance away from the charred soursop trunk," the remains of a tree her mother doused with kerosene and set afire after all previous attempts to rid it of the parasitic insects that infested other plants had failed, Kincaid remembers, "is where my mother's old stone heap used to be, and it was in this place that once my brother's and my life intersected" (128). Bringing Kincaid and Devon's lives together in the same place, however, the

memory of the burned books reveals that a shared presence may not translate into a shared experience. While the memory of the burning pile of books shows both Kincaid and Devon as extremely vulnerable to their mother's commanding personality, it also makes clear that Devon's childish dependence on his mother is compounded by his dependence on Kincaid, the older sister who neglects him that day. Even though she is powerless to counteract their mother's rage, Kincaid, nevertheless, wields some authority over the two-year-old Devon. The stone heap and other place memories, then, suggest that being in the same place with another person often means occupying it differently. The simultaneous intimacy and distance that Kincaid's place memories uphold not only characterize her and Devon's mutual relationship, but they also correspond to the familiarity and estrangement, proximity and distance, that also define Kincaid's connection to Antigua.

My Brother opens with Kincaid's memory of her first visit to the Holberton hospital where the sick Devon has been assigned to a room customarily reserved for AIDS patients. Upon entering his hospital room for the first time, Kincaid sees her "brother lying in the hospital bed, dying of this [AIDS] disease, his eyes were closed, he was asleep…; his hands were resting on his chest, one on top of the other, just under his chin in that pious pose of the dead, but he was not dead" (8-9). The emaciated man no longer resembles the full of bravado man of twenty-three she saw when she visited Antigua the last time (3). Kincaid's arrival does not wake Devon up and as she looks around, she notices the depressing and hopeless squalidness of the small high-ceilinged room with windows facing inward but not outward: "It was a dirty room. …The walls of the room were dirty; the slats of the louvered windows were dirty, the blades of the

ceiling fan were dirty, and when it was turned on, sometimes pieces of dust would become dislodged" (22). During subsequent hospital visits, Kincaid takes full measure of Devon's illness exacerbated by the poor medical care he receives. Dismayed, she asserts that the hospital where her brother is treated "was never a great hospital, but it is a terrible hospital now, and only people who cannot afford anything else make use of it" (11). As Kincaid remembers it, the drab hospital represents the neglect and disrepair that characterize Antigua as a whole. Its impoverishment reflects and adds on to the misery of poor and sick Antiguans who, like her brother, are precluded from getting adequate help elsewhere. Enumerating the kinds of medical care it does not provide, Kincaid suggests that the hospital's attitude towards AIDS patients reflects the social stigma attached to them. She explains that "in Antigua if you are diagnosed with the HIV virus you are considered to be dying" (31). As a result, AIDS patients are considered incurable and receive no treatment. In Kincaid's memory, then, the ill equipped Holberton hospital whose dedication to the well-being of its patients is merely nominal represents not only Devon's vulnerability to and dependency on others but also Antigua's inability and refusal to meet the needs of its most defenseless citizens. Like so many other things in Devon's life, the Holberton hospital carries a false promise which it fails to deliver.

Like the vivid recollection of the dirty hospital room where "other people before him had died of that same disease" (23), Kincaid's memories Devon's "little house" (113) and abandoned garden invoke the endless deprivations that defined her brother's prematurely ended life. Kincaid's memory preserves more than what these places looked like; her recollections of Devon's house and garden are meaningful because they symbolically represent her brother's life that, as Kincaid metaphorically describes it,

"was like a bud that sets but, instead of opening into a flower, turns brown and falls off at your feet" (163). Kincaid's memories of the house and the garden stand for the potential and hope which, in the course of Devon's life, had been invariably turning into defeat and disappointment.

What strikes Kincaid as she remembers Devon's house is that, even though Devon lived alone, his house "was two arms' lengths away from our mother's house" (8). Inside, however, Devon has managed to create a private space that reflected his tastes and interests. Remembering her visit years ago, Kincaid recalls the house's walls decorated by posters of African Americans "who have been extremely successful in the world of sports or entertainment" (44). There are also bookcases of school textbooks chronicling the "history of the British West Indies" (45). Devon, an aspiring musician also owns a radio cassette-player (45). In this room, replete with markers of colonial history and present global US domination, Kincaid often sees Devon languishing on his bed "in a drug induced daze" (44). While acknowledging Devon's private life, the memory of Devon's house registers the incapacitating ennui of Devon's aimless lifestyle marked by unfulfilled dreams of a musical career.

The meaning of her memory of Devon's house, however, Kincaid observes, has not remained the same. The details she remembers–the small house's proximity to their mother's place, its spare furniture and wall decorations hinting at Devon's dreams–allow her to get a better sense of the young man Devon had become during the decades following her departure. After his death, Kincaid returns to the earlier memory and the details she previously overlooked gain a significance they did not possess in 1986, the year she saw Devon as a young man of twenty three. In a self-reflexive passage, Kincaid

observes that the subsequent events, Devon's illness and his ultimate death, now demand that she revisit and reinterpret the earlier memory of his house:

> When I was lying on his bed that time in 1986, I was looking up at the ceiling; the little house was then old, or at least it looked old; the beams in the roof were rotting, but in a dry way, as if the substance of the wood was slowly drawn out of it, and so the texture of the wood began to look like material for a sweater or a nightgown. … Looking up at the roof then, rotting in that drying-out way, did not suggest anything to me, certainly not that the present occupant of the house, my brother, might one day come to resemble the process of the decaying house. (113)

The rotting of the house did not seem remarkable at the time she was looking at it; it did not strike Kincaid as foreboding or symbolic of something else. Yet, years later, the memory of the house, already falling apart, becomes an occasion for Kincaid to reflect on the analogy between the physical condition of the place and her sick brother's body. It is not *what* but *how* she remembers that has changed. Devon's death gave a previously unremarkable memory a new meaning. Explaining how hindsight affects what and how we remember, Daniel Schacter writes that "we reconstruct the past to make it consistent with what we know in the present" (The Seven Sins 146). Our memory, always subject to alteration, Schacter points out, often "says more about how we feel *now* than about what happened *then*" (The Seven Sins 5). Not surprisingly, in her memoir about Devon's illness and death, a narrative aimed "at understanding his dying" (196), Kincaid presents, elaborates, and often reinterprets her memories of her brother in a dedicated attempt to uncover the meaning of Devon's life and death. Distinguishing between the original

memory of the rotting roof and the newer memory that has since replaced it, Kincaid self-consciously resists and accounts for the hindsight bias that invariably influences how she remembers Devon. The retrospective parallel she draws between the decaying house and her brother's decaying body reveals that Kincaid's knowledge of the future makes her earlier memories of Devon intelligible and relevant to her project of telling his life story. Unavoidably, Kincaid's memories of Devon's life always already contain her knowledge about his death. Even when she is recalling Devon who is still alive, Kincaid is also remembering that he is already dead.

Like the memory of Devon's house, taken over by one of the brothers while he was lying sick in the hospital, Kincaid's memory of Devon's garden stands for the futility of all her brother's life efforts. Kincaid remembers that on her visit years ago "behind the small house in which he lived in our mother's yard, he had planted a banana plant, a lemon tree, various vegetables, various non-flowering shrubs" (11). Surprised and impressed when she first sees it, Kincaid wonders if her brother shares her love of gardening. When Devon confirms that he planted the garden all by himself, amazed, Kincaid cherishes the newly discovered connection between her and her brother (11). However, when she returns to Antigua when Devon is already ill, her brother's carefully tended plot is no longer there (19). Just like her mother's garden which had to make space for Devon's house (11), the plot where Devon's garden used to be is now occupied by his older brother's new addition (13). At the same time that it allows her to remember Devon as the brother who shared her gardening passion, then, Kincaid's memory of her brother's garden and its subsequent disappearance causes her to reflect on the differences between her and her brother's lives. A self-professed gardening enthusiast, she is free to

cultivate her Vermont garden. Devon's garden, on the other hand, did not have a chance to flourish. The place that encouraged his creativity and revealed his sensitivity to beauty was crowded out and taken over by the bare necessities of life: a living space for another brother unable to afford a house elsewhere. Just like Kincaid's memories of Devon's untimely death always already underwrite the memories of his troubled life, the painful memory of the garden's leveling overlays the cherished memory of Devon as a passionate and talented gardener. These two contrasting images of a place–a beautiful garden, a garden leveled to the ground–persist in Kincaid's memory as she struggles to make meaning of Devon's existence.

Remembering and writing about Devon's death in order "to understand it, or to make an attempt at understanding his dying, and not to die with him" (196), Kincaid is insistently confronted with the question, "Can you ever be in another's place?" Pondering the answer without ever wavering from her intent to tell Devon's story, she gradually comes to realize that whatever meaning she is able to make of Devon's existence, she can do so "only because my own life can make it have one" (128). When Kincaid observes, "I am remembering the life of my brother, I am remembering my own life" (167), she notes that the two modes of remembering, other- and self-oriented, are simultaneously separate and conjoined. Thus, taking her back to her brother's places, Kincaid realizes, her memory always preserves hers, not Devon's, perspective. As a result, instead of revealing something significant about Devon, her place memories often bring to the foreground Kincaid's own experience and effectively obscure her brother's.

Kincaid senses the potential dissonance in her and Devon's perception of the same place when she recalls that his hospital room lacked a table lamp that would make

reading in the evenings possible. She wonders if Devon was at all inconvenienced by its lack since "[she] only noticed because [she has] become used to such a thing, a table lamp; he did not complain about that" (22). Thus, Kincaid's memory of Devon's hospital not only preserves the image of the place, but it also brings out her awareness that her view of it may differ from Devon's. Like the unfavorable impression the room made on her, its memory is hers, not her brother's. According to James McGaugh, a memory researcher, "Our response to each event depends upon what we expect or predict; and that, of course, is based on our memories of past events" (21). Consequently, Kincaid and her brother cannot perceive the hospital in an identical way. Kincaid brings her previous hospital experiences into Devon's room, whereas the Holberton hospital is the only hospital Devon knows. As Diana Davidson points out, "Kincaid directly compares Holberton hospital's standards of care and drug availability to her expectations of a Western Hospital" (126).[38] Unable to make a similar comparison, her brother cannot measure his hospitalization against the one he might have received elsewhere.

Like her vocal criticism of the conditions in the Holberton hospital, Kincaid's memories of looking at Devon from a distance register her detachment which, however vulnerable she remains to her family's needs, marks her as a privileged insider/outsider whose return to Antigua is merely temporary. Recalling her last visit, two months before Devon's death, Kincaid remembers peering at her bedridden brother "through the louvered windows while I was standing on the gallery" (89). Her proximity to her shockingly emaciated brother deeply unsettles her so that "when I was looking at him through the louvered windows, I began to distance myself from him, I began to feel angry

[38] Sarah Brophy notes in her essay that in this text "the asymmetrical relation between Antigua and the United States, allegorized here in the brother-sister relationship, is exemplified by the epidemiology of HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean" (266).

at him, I began to feel I didn't like being so tied up with his life, the waning of it, the suffering in it" (90). Even as she remains outside, Kincaid feels the distance between her and Devon collapse. Resisting the pull of his tragedy while she is standing within a few feet of Devon's room, Kincaid reminds herself that her own life lies elsewhere, in a far away place she considers her new home. Failing to reassure her, however, the contrast between her and Devon's circumstances makes her painfully aware that had she not left Antigua years ago the life of ceaseless deprivations, blighted hopes, and consuming suffering would have defeated her as it did Devon. As Kincaid recalls, "it frightened me to think that I might have continued to live in a certain way, though, I am convinced, not for very long. I would have died at about his age, thirty-three years, or I would have gone insane" (90). Imagining herself in Devon's place, Kincaid struggles to remember that she has already left it.

And yet, it is, precisely, her distance, the fact that she has lived elsewhere, that motivates her remembering. "I shall never forget him, my brother," Kincaid writes, "but this was not because of his smile, or the way he crossed a swelling river and saved a dog, or his sense of humor, or his love of John Milton…; I shall never forget him because his life is the one I did not have, the life that, for reasons I hope shall never be too clear to me, I avoided or escaped" (176). Like the Simonides legend that links return with survival, Kincaid's memoir also recognizes that the survivor's memory narrative depends on her simultaneous familiarity with and absence from the scene of the catastrophe. Precisely because she has not experienced it, Kincaid can remember and write about "the emergency that was Devon's life and death" (Brophy 274). Kincaid's recollections of the places in which she saw Devon's life unfold already signal the irreconcilable proximity

and distance that both enable and prevent her from speaking about her brother authoritatively. Mapping a narrative of Devon's prematurely ended life, Kincaid's place memories, then, preserve the irremediable estrangement which her desire to tell Devon's life story exposes but does not relieve.

When, after Devon is already dead, Kincaid learns about the lesbian's home, the only place where Devon could "be himself, his real self" (165), she concedes that "his life unfolded before me not like a map just found, or a piece of old paper just found, his life unfolded and there was everything to see and there was nothing to see" (162). Like the falling apart of Ondaatje's memory map, the unraveling of the map of Devon's life Kincaid has constructed through her memory reveals the tenuousness of the task.

Kincaid learns about Devon's homosexuality from a lesbian who approaches her at a reading in one of Chicago's bookstores. The woman tells Kincaid that Devon was a frequent visitor at her house, the only place in Antigua where gay men could "simply meet and be with each other and not be afraid" (161). Taken aback by the unexpected disclosure, Kincaid struggles to reconcile the disquieting revelation with what she has known about her brother. Suddenly, her carefully rendered memory map of Devon's life turns out to be unreadable and false. Instead of accurately depicting his life, Kincaid's place memories turn out to be misguided projections that obscure and lead astray from the life they sought to reveal. Rather than filling in and completing Devon's memory portrait, the belatedly uncovered secret place undoes it. The confident assertion Kincaid makes when she sees her brother alive for the last time, "He would never see me in the place I now live, but I could see him in the place in which he was then living" (88), proves to be presumptuous. In the end, her brother's life turns out to be no less

unknowable to her than her life was to him. The questions Kincaid's return to Devon's places set out to answer, "Who is he? How does he feel about himself, what has he ever wanted?" (69-70), remain unanswerable.

To counteract the challenge to her credibility as a narrator posed by the unexpected disclosure of Devon's homosexuality,[39] Kincaid incorporates the relayed memory of the house of gay men's meetings into her text and reasserts her narrative grasp over Devon's life through when she refracts her earlier memories of Devon in light of the new information (163-65). Just like the lesbian's house, Kincaid's narrative belatedly provides an alternative space where Devon is permitted to be himself. Neither the house nor the narrative, however, is Devon's. Inevitably, at the same time as Kincaid sanctions Devon's homosexuality, she contains and reappropriates it. Reluctant to give up her narrative authority, Kincaid frames Devon's secret into the contours of the story she has been telling all along: "His homosexuality is one thing and my becoming a writer is another altogether, but this truth is not lost to me: I could not have become a writer while living among the people I knew best, I could not become myself while living among the people I knew best" (162). Devon's weekly sojourns in the lesbian's house parallel her own escape to a place where she could live freely. The unknown place, then, no longer confounds her understanding of her brother's life; to the contrary, it discloses Devon's thwarted desire to live an unconstrained life, the kind of life Kincaid has always strived for herself. Making Devon's own perspective on his homosexuality irrelevant, this narrative gesture revokes the initial misrecognition and turns it into a comforting

[39] Identifying Devon as Kincaid's brother and naming her as both the author and narrator of his life story, the memoir's title, My Brother, registers the tension between narration and authorship dramatized by Kincaid's discovery of her brother's closeted homosexuality. Rather than claiming "'we' and 'my brother and I'" as Sarah Brophy suggests (270), the title emphasizes and captures Kincaid's role in transmitting Devon's life story. Since she can write about Devon's life only in and through its relation to her life, the auto/biographical tale Kincaid authors is shaped by her own, not Devon's, narrative perspective.

resemblance. Arguing for an altruistic ethics of relationality that would allow for "the relational status of distinction" (91), Adriana Cavarero points out that "to recognize oneself in the other is indeed quite different from recognizing the irremediable uniqueness of the other" (91). Kincaid's insistence on assimilating Devon's difference is a refusal to grant him a distinctiveness that exceeds her narration.

Commenting on Kincaid's desperate effort to maintain her narrative authority, Sarah Brophy suggests that "it is only through self-annihilation that she can write responsibly about" Devon whose life's unmediated truth can only emerge through "the interruption of her [Kincaid's] autobiographical I" (274). However, contrary to what Brophy implies, these revelatory moments of narrative instability that threaten Kincaid's self-coherence do not render Kincaid's perspective irrelevant. Kincaid's response to the news of Devon's homosexuality does not undo but rather discloses the unacknowledged investments of the autobiographical I she has been constructing throughout the narrative. Devon's life story might have eluded her, but so has her own. Whereas Kincaid's memories of familiar places in Antigua convince her that leaving the island saved her life, the memory of the lesbian's home, the one place she did not know about, makes her realize that her escape has also been anexile.[40]

When Kincaide writes, "my life, with its improbable beginning…of poverty and neglect, cruelty and humiliation, loss and deceit, had led to a sure footing in the prosperous and triumphant part of the world" (100-101), she self-consciously places her life story within the paradigm of immigrant success in which past losses are redeemed by present gains. Yet, just as the shocking news about Devon's homosexuality destabilizes

[40] According to Moira Ferguson, after the publication of Small Place in 1988 , Kincaid became persona non grata in Antigua (95).

Kincaid's narrative account of her brother's life, the disorienting pain the discovery causes her challenges her own autobiographical tale. As Kincaid realizes, her fierce and consuming attachment to her autobiographical scene, the places and people from her past, does not preclude her alienation from it. Whereas his return to Sri Lanka makes Ondaatje aware of his double status as both "the foreigner" and "the prodigal who hates the foreigner" (79), Kincaid unexpectedly confronts the paradox of belonging: she is out of place in the place she was from.

Reflecting Kincaid's unwavering conviction that she intimately knows and understands the place she is from, My Brother is strewn with her confident assessments about her home island: "Antigua is a place in which faith undermines the concrete" (35), she declares; "Antigua is a place like that: parts of everything are no longer being made anywhere in the world; in Antigua itself nothing is made" (24), she sharply observes; remembering the summer when she witnessed daily funerals at the St. John's city graveyard, she admits that "It was then I decided that only people in Antigua died, that people living in other places did not die and as soon as I could I would move somewhere else, to those places where the people living there did not die" (26-27).[41] When she drives around the island on the first night after her return, the signs of neglect and decay she notices as do not so much mark the passage of time as they confirm her memory of Antigua as she used to know it, as it still is. In the Antigua she remembers and the one she sees after a decade-long absence things have always been falling apart. Passing personal landmarks–the Magdalene maternity ward where she was born, a crossing with

[41] As Kezia Page notes, My Brother sets up a stark contrast between Antigua and the United States. Whereas the latter represents a negative space haunted by death, the former stands for an enabling and hospitable place where life can flourish: "Antigua is the location where Kincaid's brother lies sick and dying; Vermont is where the life-prolonging medicines are found. Vermont is where Kincaid's healthy, loving family lives; in Antigua there is poverty, sickness, and a dysfunctional family" (45).

defunct traffic lights, the local prison, Devon's school, her own Princess Margaret School, a funeral home, and her grandmother's house–Kincaid remembers her childhood. As she goes by the places that are no more–a mortuary called the Dead House, the Happy Acres Hotel–she takes notice of their disappearance, but their absence does not surprise or sadden her. Taking inventory of the changes, Kincaid is unmoved and unsurprised: the gloomy shabbiness has always been there, and as a young girl she had already sensed the pervading hopelessness. For Kincaid, Antigua continues to be the negative and inhabitable place she escaped as a sixteen-year-old.

And yet, as Kincaid insistently asserts her continuing familiarity with Antigua, her unawareness of the existence of Devon's secret place undermines her complacent conviction that she knows everything about her home island. Like Devon's life story, Antigua has eluded her. Not able to master her brother's life, Kincaid is also no longer able to master the island. If Ondaatje goes back to Sri Lanka to *re*cover the original loss, Kincaid's return *un*covers the loss of the autobiographical scene, now marked by her absence. Relying on her mother's eye-witness account, Kincaid describes the night Devon died:

> That night as he lay dying and calling the names of his brothers and his mother, he did not call my name, and I was neither glad nor sad about it. For why should he call my name? I knew him for the first three years of his life, I came to know him again in the last three years of his life. … I had never been a part of the tapestry, so to speak, of Patches, Styles, and Muds. (174-5)

The death scene, like the lesbian's house, is a relayed memory that exposes, but does not redeem, Kincaid's absence from Devon's life. At the same time as it adds

crucial details and completes Devon's memory portrait, Kincaid's description of Devon's last night shows her as the missing sister and daughter who was not there. Consequently, in My Brother, Kincaid's struggle to come to terms with the loss of Devon, the estranged younger brother whose life story she both must and cannot tell[42], parallels her mourning of Antigua, the lost place to which she continually returns even as she cannot bear being back.

Taking Ondaatje and Kincaid back to places from their childhood, the return journeys to Sri Lanka and Antigua, respectively, reveal both the ties through which the writers continue to be bound to the islands of their birth and the distance that prevents them from inhabiting their former homes. The visit colors and fills in Ondaatje's faint memories of his early years; having come back, he gets to know the places he has nearly forgotten. Kincaid's return also enacts her attachment, painful and burdensome as it is, to Antigua and her family. At the same time, Ondaatje's and Kincaid's returns suggest that a connection to a place from the past—no matter how cherished or resented it is—does not mean one belongs to it. Although Ondaatje discovers that his family lineage can be traced all the way to the beginning of the island's long colonial history, he must also confront the tenuousness of his own memories that make him a stranger in a once familiar land. Upon her return to Antigua, Kincaid, who claims she forgot nothing, comes to understand that despite remembering her home island all too well she knows only its past, not its present. Back in their places of origin, then, both Ondaatje and Kincaid confront simultaneous familiarity and estrangement reminding them that they have returned after a long absence.

[42] Ramne Soto-Crespo comments that as an elegiac text My Brother engages in "a paradoxical mourning that requires getting acquainted with the person at the same time that one is grieving his loss" (363).

Chapter 3: "Can I come back?" "What a question!": The Predicament of Exilic Homecoming in Marjane Satrapi's Persepolis 2: The Story of a Return

In the middle of Persepolis 2: The Story of a Return, the second volume of Marjane Satrapi's memoir that describes her four-year long exile in Europe and subsequent homecoming, the young Marjane is having a long-distance phone conversation with her parents.[43] The family is communicating for the first time since Marjane's disappearance three months earlier. Showing no figures and transcribing instead the dialogue that ensues, the two panels depicting the conversation allude to the peculiar intimacy of a phone call. As voice transmission supplants physical presence, the distance between speakers becomes both less and more palpable; their reunion is at best provisional. Unable to see her parents' faces, Marjane is attentive to the tone of their voices. In the left image, just above the transcript of Marjane's conversation with her father, the narrator observes that his voice is "soft and soothing" (89). Similarly, in the right drawing that writes out Marjane's exchange with her mother, the sound of the latter's voice is described as "tender, too" (89). Afraid to reveal that she has been homeless on the streets of Vienna and has only narrowly survived a bronchitis-related collapse, Marjane entreats her parents not to ask her any questions about the period during which she was missing, a condition to which they both agree. Although Marjane wants to spare her parents the full knowledge of her ordeal, the question she poses to her father hints at the unhappiness and despair that have led to her downfall. "Can I come

[43] Satrapi's Persepolis series was first published in France by L'Association in four parts: Persepolis 1 (2000), Persepolis 2 (2001), Persepolis 3 (2002), and Persepolis 4 (2003). Ttanslated into English, it was published in the United States by Pantheon in two volumes: Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood (2003) and Persepolis 2: The Story of a Return (2004). Satrapi's memoir was also adapted into an animated film that came out in 2007.

back?" she asks (89). "Of course, what a question," her father answers, sensing her desperate need to go home (89). "Come home, darling, we are waiting for you," the mother rushes to assure Marjane as well (89).

The impossibility of exilic homecoming is the central theme of Persepolis 2: The Story of a Return. The pain of not fitting in Marjane first feels in Austria, however, does not abate even after she rejoins her family in Iran. Her homecoming exacerbates rather than relieves the sense of estrangement she hoped to escape by leaving Vienna. Upon discovering that the familiar place to which she longed to come back has become an alienating space replete with reminders of her absence, Marjane experiences a shock of return.[44] Despite all her efforts at readjustment, she does not manage to feel at home again. Four years after coming back, she departs for Europe again. Leading to a chosen and deliberate exile, Marjane's return exemplifies what the critic Svetlana Boym sees as the painful paradox of exilic homecoming: the returnee's homesickness unavoidably turns into a sickness of being at home.[45] Precisely because she has returned, Marjane must leave again. Contrary to its subtitle, then, Persepolis 2: The Story of a Return is the story of a departure.

In his well-known essay "Reflections on Exile," Edward Said describes the condition of exile as "the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place," a severing that is both uniquely individual and "unbearably historical" (173; 174). Like all other kinds of displacement, Susan Rubin Suleiman observes, exile refers to "a state of being 'not at home'" (283). The impossibility of return, however, is what distinguishes it from uprooting in general. "Expatriates can go home any time they like,

[44] My phrase echoes Meena Alexander's concept of "the shock of arrival."
[45] Boym eloquently writes about the tension between homesickness and sickness of being at home in her discussion of the exilic autobiographies by Victor Shlovsky and Joseph Brodsky ("Estrangement as a Lifestyle").

while exiles cannot," Suleiman points out (283). In its narrow sense, exile denotes penal banishment, or forced removal, from one's place of origin. More broadly, it implies "human mobility across political geographical space" that is driven by "political or religious reasons rather than economic ones" (Pavel 306). Whether exiles leave their home countries by coercion or of their own volition, their departure always is "a precautionary measure against the threat of religious or political persecution" (Pavel 307).

Explicitly situating the author's personal experience of exile within the context of global political events, the second volume of Marjane Satrapi's graphic memoir Persepolis 2: The Story of a Return shows her young protagonist's departure for Europe to be the point of no return.[46] Born in Iran in 1969, Marjane Satrapi was sent by her parents to study in a French-language school in Vienna when she was only fifteen. She came back home after four years but ultimately decided to leave for France where she has been living ever since. Satrapi wrote the prizewinning Persepolis series in French, and it has not been officially translated into Persian. Upon its publication, however, Satrapi became persona non grata in Iran.[47] While the first part of the memoir, Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood, chronicles Satrapi's upper-class upbringing that coincides with the Islamic Revolution, its sequel describes her four-year long stay in Austria and return home that results in her decision to leave Iran for good.

[46] Satrapi's Persepolis is one of many memoirs by Iranian exiles published in the United States in the past decade. Malek's essay discusses these autobiographical narratives as a cultural phenomenon. Two other popular writers who ruminate on the question of the exilic return in their memoirs are Nazar Afisi and Azadeh Moaveni.

[47] "The cost I'm paying for having written these books is huge. Namely, I cannot go back home," Satrapi says in an interview (29-30). As a vocal critique of the ruling regime, Persepolis has been embraced by Iranian public who opposes the government. In the aftermath of the July 2009 post-election protests, a reworked version of the comics circulated on the Internet. Satrapi has agreed that the images from her work be used to compose a visual account of the most recent upheaval. Major world news outlets, including The New York Times and The Guardian, provided links to the website Persepolis 2.0. (http://www.spreadpersepolis.com/).

At the same time as it tackles the predicament of exilic homecoming, Persepolis 2 visualizes and literalizes the effects of exile as displacement, the unmooring produced by leaving one's home behind, and out-of-placeness, the sense of not belonging to a place.[48] In the Austrian chapters of her memoir, Satrapi depicts the physical and psychic uprooting in which exile results through her young protagonist's relationships to specific places.[49] Marjane's departure from Iran is followed by a series of less radical dislocations. While living in Vienna, she moves more than five times, never staying long enough to call a place her own. In each of these temporary locations, Marjane's alienation becomes newly apparent. As she moves from one place to another, Marjane fails to form a lasting attachment to any particular location. She inhabits each of her successive accommodations—Zozo's apartment, the nuns' boarding house, her friend Julie's home, and Frau Doctor Heller's villa—as an outsider. Panels showing Marjane's transient abodes not only convey her isolation, but they also depict her attempts to make sense of her new surroundings. A place's physical layout and décor, the rules that are observed there, relationships with roommates, all expose the obstacles to Marjane's integration. As a site of intercultural encounter, each place Marjane lives in makes her aware of the differences between her and the people around her.[50]

Immediately after her arrival in Vienna, Marjane stays with her mother's friend Zozo and her family. Witnessing Zozo and Uncle Houshang's daily fights over money

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[48] Hilary Chute argues that "the complex visualization" the medium of comics employs sets it aside from other forms of narratives (93). I suggest that the visual representation of exile as separation and estrangement from specific places Persepolis 2 enacts distinguishes it from other narratives of exile.
[49] While Marji is the child protagonist of Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood, her older self in Persepolis 2 is referred to as Marjane. The critic Hillary Chute points out that the graphic narrative form allows for the verbal and visual inscription of "multiple autobiographical 'I's" (WSQ 97). In order to attend to the multiple narrative levels the graphic medium enacts, in my discussion I differentiate between Marji and Marjane, the characters, and Satrapi, the narrator and author.
[50] Include Stanfford Friedman's definition of intercultural encounter

makes Marjane feel less like a welcome guest than an intruder on the their privacy. The domestic tension unsettles Marjane who unwittingly becomes a privy to the couple's financial problems. Two drawings of the bedroom Marjane shares with Shirin, Zozo's daughter, show how ill at ease she feels in a home belonging to a family of strangers. In the left image, the girls are lying on two adjacent beds. Undoubtedly used to her parents' endless quarrels, Shirin has fallen asleep. Her face is turned away from the wide-awake and visibly upset Marjane. A jaggedly outlined dialogue box that hovers over Marjane's head transcribes the conversation flowing in from the other room. To keep from hearing Zozo and her husband's raised voices Marjane is pulling up her blanket. The next panel is a close-up of Marjane's face. Although her eyes are closed, it is obvious she is not sleeping. Frowning and tightly pursing her lips, she is trying to block out the noise Zozo and Uncle Houshang are making by sticking her fingers into her ears. "I was ashamed. I'd never heard my parents bicker over money," the narrator explains the reason behind Marjane's discomfort (3). When a few days later Zozo approaches Marjane and tells her that their apartment is too small to accommodate a permanent guest, Marjane is "happy to leave" and move in to a boarding house run by nuns (4).

Although Marjane's "new home," as her former host calls the dormitory, is free of the tense atmosphere that made living at Zozo's unbearable, staying there also reveals Marjane's outsiderness (5). Satrapi emphasizes its double aspect—Marjane is a foreigner and an atheist—in panels that show Marjane's bedroom. The first time the viewer sees Marjane in her new room, she is resting on a bed. Fully dressed and with her sports shoes on, she has curled up in a near-fetal position. There is a look of weary sadness on her face: the corners of her mouth are pulled down and her gaze is vacant. Marjane is

contemplating the unexpected turn her life has taken. “I had come here with the idea of leaving a religious Iran for an open and secular Europe and that Zozo, my mother’s best friend, would love me like her own daughter” (1). Instead, Zozo asked her to leave only ten days after she had arrived, and now she finds herself in a place run by nuns. In the next image, Marjane is shrinking under the disapproving glares of four nuns; like them, she is wearing black, but there is no cross hanging around her neck. A crucifix, however, is prominently visible in the adjacent drawing that takes the viewer back to Marjane’s sparsely furnished bedroom, this time shown from a bird’s eye view. Her position unchanged, Marjane is still lying on her bed. There is an identical bed next to hers, but it is empty. A dresser topped with several bottles and boxes is the only additional piece of furniture in the room. The room’s decor is minimal: a narrow striped rug, bedspreads and curtains in the same swirling pattern, and a crucifix on an otherwise blank wall. Hanging above Marjane’s bed, the crucifix adds to the austerity of the small room whose blandness is enlivened by the arrival of Marjane’s roommate Lucia. In the series of drawings of Marjane and Lucia’s first meeting, a panel shows them facing each other across the room. With identical grins on their faces and their knees hugged in with their arms, the girls are mirror images of each other. The impression of sameness is amplified by other details. Marjane’s and Lucia’s beds are made in the same way; identical crucifixes hang above the girls’ heads. Yet, the visual similarities between the roommates, as well as the easy mutuality they evoke, are undercut but the wide space separating their beds. No matter how much alike Marjane and Lucia appear in that scene, they cannot reach each other across the distance. The gap between the girls’ beds symbolizes the cultural differences that will shape their future relationship.

After her expulsion from the nuns' boardinghouse a few months later, Marjane stays with Julie, her only girlfriend from school. Marjane's new place is as liberal as the dormitory was repressive. Having found the nuns' rules overly strict and suffocating, Marjane does not quite know what to make of a house where there appear to be no rules to follow at all. A rebellious and outspoken outsider in the boardinghouse, at Julie's, Marjane feels like a compliant and timid innocent. She is a stranger to the world her uninhibited host so comfortably inhabits. The panels illustrating the girls' interactions show how their physical closeness—they share a room and sleep in the same bed—brings out rather than covers up their differences. "Julie and I discussed a lot before bed," the narrator recalls in the image that starts a sequence depicting Marjane and Julie's nighttime conversations (28). The drawing shows Marjane and Julie, their arms leisurely clasped behind their heads, lying under a blanket and discussing Armelle, Julie's mother. In the following panels, the discussion turns to sex, a topic that makes Marjane uncomfortable. Puffing on a cigarette, Julie is talking about her experiences with men. The details of Julie's many relationships unsettle Marjane whose facial expressions range from mild surprise to utter disbelief when Julie says the word "vagina" out loud (28). A rapt listener, Marjane is too overwhelmed to ask any questions. In the last image of the series, she has just learned that Julie is taking the birth control pill. This information makes Marjane speechless; pulling on the blanket, she looks like she wants to hide. The narrator's sums up the effect the nightly sessions have on Marjane: "I was shocked. In my country, even when you had sex before marriage, you hid it" (28). Sharing a bedroom with Julie is Marjane's introduction to the sexual liberties of secular Europe. Although Julie's stories expand Marjane's ideas of permissible sexual practices, she is not ready to

abandon the notions with which she grew up. Marjane realizes that she and Julie share little else than a bed and a blanket.

If the bedroom scenes depict Marjane's encounter with cultural differences in the context of a relationship with one person, the full-page panel depicting the party Julie organizes in her mother's absence shows how Marjane's foreignness sets her apart from a group of people. Julie's party is the first social gathering of this kind that Marjane attends. The guests are sprawling all over the living room clouded with cigarette smoke. Those who are not smoking are either passed out or high on drugs. Undeterred by the lack of privacy, two couples are making out. Marjane who is crouching in the corner, squeezed in between an unconscious man and an amorous couple, appears more a watchful observer of than a jolly participant in the party. No one seems to be paying any attention to her, however. Even though Julie has helped Marjane to put on new makeup and styled her hair, she now looks lost and miserable. "The party was not what I imagined. In Iran, at parties, everyone would dance and eat. In Vienna, people preferred to lie around and smoke," the narrator explains the reason behind Marjane's raised eyebrows and wide-open eyes (31). As an outsider coming "from a traditionalist country," she feels out of place in the crowded room (31).

In the communal apartment where she moves after Julie and her mother leave the town Marjane also stands apart. In the drawing that shows all the people who live in the Wohngemeinschaft, Marjane is the only woman; all her eight roommates are gay men. Nevertheless, for the first time since her arrival in Vienna a year and a half earlier, Marjane appears to have found a place where she feels at ease. In the series of images introducing her new lodgings, she assumes the role of a guide who shows the viewer

around. The first drawing pictures the cobbled street on which Marjane's apartment building is located. With both hands rested on the windowsill, Marjane is leaning out of "the window of my room" (44). In the next panel, she has led the viewer inside to the entrance hall. Alongside its walls, there are doors leading to separate bedrooms. Pointing in the direction of one whose door is open, Marjane identifies it as hers. The adjacent image shows Marjane sitting on a bed in her small room. The narrator recalls the pleasure of finally having a place all to herself. The room, she remembers, "was full of light. I had a double-bed, a bureau and a desk. For the first time in a long time I had my own space. It was really nice" (44). Yet, the modest comfort the room provides is only temporary. Marjane must move again after four months.

It is Marjane's mother, on a short visit from Iran, who finds her next accommodation. Marjane moves in to an old villa, but the charm of the place is marred by the contentious disposition of her landlady, Frau Doctor Heller. While living there, Marjane enjoys "some very pleasant moments" on the terrace facing a sculpture garden (53). At the same time, however, she repeatedly quarrels with her landlady who does not respect her privacy and harbors prejudice against foreigners. Majority of the panels depicting Frau Doctor Heller and Marjane's heated exchanges take place in Marjane's bedroom where the landlady often barges in unannounced. Marjane's boyfriend's visit provokes one such intrusion. A drawing shows the landlady unceremoniously opening the bedroom's door and ordering Markus out (67). As he is leaving, Frau Doctor Heller turns to Marjane and insinuates that she practices "secret prostitution" in her home, mistaking it for "a bordello" (67). Marjane takes this comment as an indication of Frau Doctor Heller's xenophobia. In her view, Marjane guesses, "true Austrians don't go out with

girls like me" (67). The confrontation that puts an end to Marjane and Frau Doctor Heller's tumultuous relationship also involves an encroachment on Marjane's privacy and honor. Shortly after Marjane breaks up with her boyfriend, her landlady accuses her of stealing a brooch that has been missing. Insensitive to Marjane's heartbreak, Frau Doctor Heller enters the bedroom where Marjane has been hiding since the day she caught Markus having sex with another woman. In the image, a crying Marjane is sitting on her bed. With her head bent low, she is covering her eyes with both her hands. There's a puddle of tears by her feet. Yet, the square-jawed Frau Doctor Heller appears unmoved by Marjane's misery. Arms akimbo, she declares Marjane a thief. The unfounded accusation infuriates Marjane so much that she orders her landlady out of the room. The panel that shows Doctor Frau Heller leaving mirrors the drawing of Markus and Marjane's parting on the opposite page. This time it is Marjane who raises her arm and points the exit as her landlady retreats (79). Even though she makes her landlady leave, Marjane understands the fight as a de facto expulsion. Since staying in Frau Doctor Heller's villa is no longer plausible, she decides to move out immediately.

Whereas Marjane's many moves—Doctor Frau Heller's has been her fifth address in the span of four years—signal the exilic predicament of being without a home, her impulsive decision to leave the villa results in literal homelessness. On that late November day, Marjane has nowhere to go; she belongs to no place, and there is no one she could turn to for help. A succession of panels enumerates all the people who might be able to shelter Marjane had they not turned their backs on her. Markus, her "one emotional support," betrayed her (79). Zozo did not keep the promise she had made to her mother. Ingrid, her former friend, has moved on after Marjane started seeing Markus,

and Frau Doktor Heller whom the narrator associates with "absolute evil" is an unlikely savior (85). Without a place to stay, Marjane spends the next few months homeless on the streets of Vienna. All the images of that period convey her desolation. The beginning of Marjane's ordeal is represented by a sequence of three panels arranged horizontally on a single page. They are identical in size and composition. Having walked out on Frau Doctor Heller, Marjane finds a bench and does not move from it for hours. In all three images, Marjane's body position and facial expression do not change. In an attempt to protect herself from the bitter cold, she has tucked her chin and wrapped her arms around herself. There is a look of despair on her face. Only the movement of people who walk by Marjane's bench signals the passage of time. In the top drawing, the passersby are heading right; they are on their way to work. The same group of people, now facing left, appears in the image below. Their workday over, the passersby are returning to their homes. In the last picture of the series, night has fallen, and Marjane, still huddled on the bench, is all alone in the dark. After her first night on the street, "There were plenty of others," the narrator remembers (83).

Without a place of her own, Marjane is forced to look for public spaces where she can keep warm and stay safe. For a while, she finds a semblance of comfort in a routine that consists of spending "the night prostrate and the day letting myself be carried across Vienna by sleep and the tramway" (84). Once Marjane becomes familiar to the tram drivers, they do not let her on, and she must return to the streets. She somehow manages to find "a well-hidden place to sleep at night" (85). Nevertheless, she always has to watch out for danger. In an image showing one of Marjane's restless nights, she is lying in a curled-up position and leaning her head on her bag. With one of her eyes open, she is

alert to the presence of two men whose silhouettes are visible in the background. The narrator's comment alludes to Marjane's apparent fearfulness: "Nights on the street could end very badly for a young girl like me" (85). Marjane's ultimate undoing, however, takes place during the day. A series of nine images traces the progression of Marjane's bronchitis-related infection that culminates in a collapse. The last panel depicts an unconscious, albeit still coughing, Marjane, arms and legs splayed out, lying on the ground. "If I had fainted during the night, no one would have noticed and the glacial cold would surely have prevented me from fulfilling my destiny," the narrator marvels at the circumstantial coincidence that saved her life (87). As a result of the collapse, Marjane is off the cold streets. She is taken to a hospital where she undergoes a thorough medical examination. At her discharge, the doctor asks her where she lives. Despite having spent the past four years in Austria, Marjane provides an instinctive answer, "In Iran" (88). The response allows her to avoid mentioning that she has recently been homeless. It also indirectly contrasts the transience of her Austrian exile with the permanence of her connection to Iran. For Marjane, there is no place to go but home.

The longing to go back home refracts the most pervasive connotation of exile, the prohibition to return. "Exile," Salman Rushdie writes, "is a dream of glorious return" (212).[51] Being away does not sever the exile's affective ties to his or her place of origin. In fact, geographical distance, coupled with the impossibility of coming back, transforms the lost home into a site of nostalgic yearning.[52] Homesickness at once reenacts and seals off the exilic rupturing. On the one hand, the hope for return exacerbates the exile's alienation from his or her present surroundings, and thus intensifies the feeling of being

[51] Rushdie first uses the phrase in his novel, Satanic Verses. It later becomes the title of the essay in which he describes his own return to India in 1999.
[52] For a discussion of nostalgia that makes explicit connection to exile, see Starobinski's essay "The Idea of Nostalgia" and Svetlana Boym's overview of the concept in Future of Nostalgia (3-18).

not at home. On the other hand, nostalgia relieves the pain of uprooting by keeping the exile close to home, if only figuratively, and holding out the promise that his or her separation from the place of origin is but temporary.

The Austrian sections of Persepolis 2 illustrate this double aspect of exilic homesickness. In Satrapi's depiction of exile as displacement and out-of-placeness, nostalgia makes the separation from home both more and less bearable. Coming from Tehran, Marjane brings with her a bag of pistachios, "a specialty of Iran that is often given when someone is going abroad" (8). A national delicacy, the snack is what Marjane generously shares with Lucia, her boardinghouse roommate, only to discover that "the world's best" pistachios are not necessarily appreciated by non-Iranians (8). As a result, the gift that was meant to remind Marjane of home ultimately reminds her of the distance she has traveled. Similarly, Marjane's nostalgia for Iranian tea and the Caspian Sea at once lessens and deepens the pain of being away from home. While she is living at Julie's, Marjane gets to spend a lot of time with Armelle, her friend's mother. A pair of panels reveals what attracts Marjane to the "very cultured woman" (27). The left image shows Armelle talking as Marjane is listening on. As the woman is expounding on yet another of her theories, Marjane looks puzzled. The narrator admits that Marjane did not share in Armelle's passion for Lacan and "listened out of politeness" (27). Yet, the adjacent drawing suggests that Marjane's good upbringing is not the only reason why she does not interrupt Armelle's monologue. In the picture, Marjane and her parents are seated around a table. As there is a samovar at its center, the family must be having tea together. The table is surrounded by sea waves. The narrator's commentary reveals that the drawing reflects what is going on in Marjane's mind as she and Armelle are having

their own tea discussion. Her friend's mother, Satrapi's recollective voice confides, "was the only one who knew Iran. She understood my nostalgia for the Caspian Sea. She was also the only one to have seen a samovar" (27). While she is drinking tea with Armelle, Marjane is remembering her parents. Her memories of home transport her from Armelle's living room to the shore of the Caspian Sea. In the moment Marjane forgets that Armelle is not her mother and that the tea she is drinking comes from a teapot, not a samovar, home is close enough.

Ultimately, however, Marjane's nostalgia is more about sorrow than solace. Overwhelmed by the pain of separation, Marjane tries hard to repress her homesickness. Being nostalgic for Iran, she realizes, prevents her from feeling at home in Vienna, the place where she lives now. To fit in, she radically changes her look and takes to spending time in the company of the school eccentrics (36-8). She appears "quite believable" to her new friends who fail to notice the effort Marjane puts into being just like them (38). The pretense, however, weighs heavily on Marjane. She knows all too well that she is "playing a game by somebody else's rules" (39). An image representing how conflicted Marjane is about her attempts to integrate shows her taking giant steps away from her parents. "The harder I tried to assimilate," the narrator describes Marjane's confusion, "the more I had the feeling that I was distancing myself from my culture, betraying my parents and my origins" (39). Marjane feels guilty about wanting to belong, but remaining loyal to the place she is from is too heavy a load. Every time she comes across news about Iran on TV, she changes the channel. The war reports are "too unbearable" to watch (40). She lies about her nationality at a party because "at the time, Iran was the epitome of evil and to be Iranian was a heavy burden to bear" (41). Marjane's willed

detachment from Iran, then, is not merely about self-fashioning; it is also about self-preservation. “I wanted to forget everything, to make my past disappear,” the narrator admits (40). Denial and repression appear to Marjane the only alternative to the homesickness that reminds her of the home to which she cannot go back. It is only after her collapse on the wintry streets of Vienna that Marjane gives in to her desperate need to go home.

In keeping with Rushdie’s evocative definition of exile as “a dream of glorious return,” Marjane’s homecoming is a rude awakening that simultaneously fulfills and shatters her longing for home. Rather than a journey of recovery and repossession, Marjane’s return is a journey of loss and misrecognition. It neither recaptures the sense of belonging nor relieves the pain of separation. Marjane is as lost at home as she has been abroad. Writing about recent Iranian women’s memoirs, Liora Hendelman-Baavur coins the term “homexilation” to describe the peculiar affective state in which exiles find themselves upon their return to the country of origin (50). Having come back, the returnees experience “growing feelings of home loss and misplacement” (Hendelman-Baavur 50). The Tehran chapters of Persepolis 2 illustrate the self-alienating effects of finding oneself an exile in a place that used to be home. As Marjane is struggling to adapt to the transformation Iran has undergone during her four-year absence, she relives the estrangement she hoped to escape by leaving Europe. Rather than assuaging her nostalgic yearning, the return requires that she come to terms with losing the only home she has ever had.

“From the moment I arrived at Mehrabad Airport and caught sight of the first customs agent,” the narrator recalls her initial impressions of Iran, “I immediately felt the

repressive air of my country" (92). The first panel in the sequence of images depicting Marjane's arrival home shows her standing in line to pass the customs control. Like all the other travelers around her, she appears serious and apprehensive. Already wearing her veil, she is looking on as a bearded officer searches the luggage of a traveler in front of her. In the next two drawings, Marjane is having her suitcase inspected. The customs official addresses her as "sister" and reprimands her for wearing her veil incorrectly. Suddenly sheepish, Marjane obediently fixes the veil so that it covers all her hair. Although Marjane was departing from Austria ready to give up "my individual and social liberties," she only now understands how swift her readjustment will need to be (91).

If the protocol of the interaction with the official is familiar to Marjane—she knows she is expected to show respect and call the officer "brother"—the meeting with her parents catches her unprepared. After she manages to make her mother and father out in the crowded arrival hall, she realizes that the recognition "wasn't reciprocal" (92). An image shows Marjane and her parents standing on the opposite side of the glass wall that separates the arriving passengers from those who are welcoming them. Even as Marjane is excitedly waving and calling out to her parents, their searching gaze passes over her. She is right in front of them, but they do not notice her. "Of course it made sense," the narrator rationalizes the parents' oversight (92). Having left as an adolescent girl four years ago, Marjane is coming back as a young woman. Her parents, however, are still the adults she remembers them to be. "One changes more between the ages of fourteen and eighteen than between thirty and forty," the narrator justifies the parents' failure to recognize Marjane (92). In the next panel, Marjane has come over to her parents who are still looking for her among the arriving passengers. To get their attention, she is patting

her father on the back. Marjane's mother turns first and recognizes her instantly. In contrast, the father appears confused and unsure as he intones his daughter's name as a question: "Marji…?" (92). In the adjacent drawing that depicts the whole family in a tight embrace, the father is no longer perplexed but visibly moved. "My darling, my daughter, oh my! I didn't recognize you!" he exclaims as tears are streaming down his face (92). If the father is shocked by how grown up Marjane has become, she is surprised by how approachable he now appears. "I knew that I had grown," the narrators remembers, "but it was only once I was in the arms of my father that I really felt it. He, who had always before appeared so imposing, was about the same size as me" (92). Joyful as it is, the reunion fills Marjane with sadness. Seeing herself reflected in her father's eyes, she realizes how long and transformative her absence has been. The family Marjane is rejoining is not the family she left. No longer the young daughter who needs to tilt her head up to look her father in the eyes, Marjane has lost her old place in the family and will need to find a new one.

The arrival scenes foreshadow the tension between recognition and change, familiarity and estrangement, Marjane will have to negotiate in the days and months to follow. Already at the airport, she begins to confront what the writer Ha Jin sees as "the truth of the relationship between oneself and one's native land after a long absence from it—one cannot return to the same place as the same person" (66). Exilic homecoming does not erase the returnee's absence. Insofar as it requires that the exile take full measure of how the passage of time has affected both home and herself, return is a reckoning with the consequences of having left. Being back, then, does not guarantee an easy reentry into the past that has been the returnee's consolation and recourse while

abroad. Neither does it allow for a full restoration of the sense of belonging the exile has come back to reclaim. Satrapi illuminates this particular aspect of exilic homecoming—the impossibility to re-inhabit one's former home as if one had never been away from it—by showing how returning to previously familiar places reminds Marjane that she has been living elsewhere.

The succession of panels illustrating Marjane's return to the family apartment hints at confusion she is experiencing. In all of the images, Marjane appears more overwhelmed than relieved to be back. In the first drawing, Marjane's father has just opened the front door and is now gesturing her inside. His "Welcome home!," the narrator confesses, "were the most comforting words that I had heard in the long time" (93). Without undressing or taking her veil off, Marjane starts to walk around the apartment she has not seen in years. The next picture shows her in the living room. Somewhat apprehensively, Marjane is looking at the sofa which, the narrator reveals, is "that sofa on which my parents had announced that they were sending me to Austria" (93). Showing Marjane with her back turned and hands hanging listlessly by her sides, the third image conveys how deeply affected she is by the memory of the conversation that signaled the end of her Iranian childhood. Seeing the sofa has jolted her into remembering the misery of her exile. Reluctant to talk about it to her parents so soon after her return home, "like a boor without saying good night or goodbye," Marjane seeks refuge in her old room (93). In the last two drawings of Marjane's first night at home, the juxtaposition between text and image conveys the complexity of her emotions. The critic Charles Hatfield observes that in comics, a medium "characterized by a plurality of messages," words and images are often "played against each other—to gloss, to illustrate,

to contradict or complicate or ironize the other" (132; 133). In the panels depicting Marjane's reaction to being back in her old bedroom, her body posture and gestures evoke sadness and confusion; the narrator's recollective voice, however, describes Marjane feelings as joy and happiness. In the left image, Marjane has already opened the bedroom door, but she is neither crossing the threshold nor turning the lights on. "My room…My room!!" she marvels as she is taking the place in (93). Whereas Marjane's dark silhouette evokes hesitation and apprehension, the narrator remembers that she "was overjoyed to finally have a place of my own and this reassured me" (93). The adjoining panel, a close-up of Marjane lying on her bed, also registers a disjunction between how Marjane appears and what the narrator recalls. Leaning against the pillow, Marjane is wearily resting her head on her left hand. There is a look of puzzlement on her face, as if she had trouble making sense of her surroundings. "I didn't want to turn the light. I couldn't bear to see everything again so quickly," the narrator remembers (93). Her subsequent assurance that she "spent a good part of the night in the emptiness, just happy to be there" contradicts the pensive look on Marjane's face (93). Will Eisner argues that in graphic narratives "body posture and gesture occupy a position of primacy over text. The manner in which these images are employed modifies and defines the intended meaning of the words" (103). The tension between words and images, then, works to "evoke a nuance of emotion" (Eisner 103). The bedroom scenes suggest that Marjane's happiness and joy at having returned are tinged with sadness and regret. Despite the relief the narrator professes, Marjane does not appear free of the pain that brought her back home.

The following morning, Marjane's realization that her return does not erase her four-year absence becomes even clearer. As she surveys her bedroom, unchanged since she left, Marjane comes to understand that the place reflects the taste of the child she used to be, not the young woman she has become. The room's familiarity both comforts and unsettles her: it is exactly as she remembers it, but she does not fit in anymore. In disbelief, Marjane looks at the punk drawings she put on the wall herself. "Pfff! What shit!" she dismisses her previous fascination (94). When she sits down by her desk, she discovers it is too small for her. Not only does the bedroom look like a child's room, but it has been emptied of her things. There is nothing in her closet, she notices with dismay, and her Kim Wilde tapes are nowhere to be found. As Marjane's mother explains over tea and cigarette, no one expected her to come back and reclaim them (95). In the last panel in the series of images showing Marjane "[taking] stock of [her] surroundings," she resolves to concentrate her efforts on making herself feel at home again (94). Vigorously scrubbing the wall clean of the punk idols she no longer worships, Marjane is intent on distancing herself from the childhood that ended with her departure for Austria. "It was time to finish with the past and to look toward the future," the narrator sums up Marjane's willful resolution (95). In a room that has everything to do with who she was and nothing to do with who she is now, Marjane comes to think of her homecoming as a fresh start, not a return to the past she has outgrown.

A new beginning seems possible and easy in the safe enclosure of the family apartment that has not changed much. Yet, as soon as Marjane steps outside for a walk around her old neighborhood and takes in the physical transformation it has undergone during her stay in Europe, she grasps just how difficult her readaptation will be. Carefully

arranged on two facing pages, the panels in which Marjane explores the formerly familiar places convey how disorienting the reconnaissance is. The first image in the sequence occupies two thirds of the page and reflects Marjane's bottom-up perspective. Her shoulders drawn up and her back slouching, she appears dwarfed by the tall buildings that surround her. Their shattered windows, as well as the imposing mural that decorates the entire wall of a building in front of Marjane, are reminders of the recent Iran-Iraq war. The mural Marjane is reverently gazing up at pictures a pieta-like figure of a veiled mother cradling her fallen son; the couple is circled by tulips, flowers that symbolize martyrdom.[53] The narrator recalls that on her first Tehran outing she saw many more such "sixty-five-foot-high murals representing martyrs, adorned with slogans honoring them, slogans like 'The martyr is the heart of history,' or 'I hope to be a martyr myself,' or 'A martyr lives forever'" (96). These images make Marjane remember "Austria, where you were more likely to see on the walls 'Best sausages for 20 shillings'" (96). She realizes that reconciling her experience in secular Europe with the reality of fundamentalist Iran will not be an easy task: "The road to readjustment seemed very long to me" (96). It becomes clear to Marjane that getting used to the murals—and the politics they represent—will require not only abandoning her nostalgic attachment to how these familiar locations had looked before she left but also letting go of the assumptions and habits she has developed in Europe. Her readaptation, then, will call for a distancing from both her childhood and recent memories.

Whereas the panel depicting Marjane's reaction to the martyr murals presents separation from her personal past as one of the challenges of readjustment, a series of

[53] "It's said that red tulips grow from the blood of martyrs," the narrator explains in an aside that accompanies the drawing Marjane makes in order to gain admittance to the school of arts (127).

three images directly on the opposite page suggests that the process of reacclimation will also involve Marjane's reckoning with the collective past of her home country. The largest of the three pictures is as tall as the mural panel, but its horizontal proportions and perspective are reversed. It emphasizes the depth of the ground under the buildings, not their height; the viewer's gaze is directed downwards, not upwards. Once again, however, Marjane appears diminished by what is around her. Her dark silhouette is wedged in between two rows of multi-storey buildings. Broken window frames, human skulls and bones of war victims are buried in the ground Marjane is standing on. "I felt as though I were walking through a cemetery," the narrator describes her awareness of being surrounded by death (97). The next drawing illustrates Marjane's guilt at having avoided the war that claimed the lives of thousands of Iranians who stayed behind. She looks scared and miserable as skeletons of "the victims of the war I had fled" grab and pull her in all directions (97). In the last image of the series picturing Marjane's first "unbearable" Tehran walk, she is shown fleeing back to her parents', a place that seems unaffected by the destruction and suffering of war (97).

Although the family apartment has not been physically damaged, the war has nevertheless left its mark on it. As Marjane realizes that same evening, she can no longer think of her childhood home as a site of refuge and reassurance. Instead, it is a place where the effects of war can be intimately felt. Marjane's parents who used to hold strong political convictions have given in to disillusionment. The mother has become bitter and cynical; the father appears similarly withdrawn and "blasé" (103). Her parents' apathy becomes understandable to Marjane only after she hears her father's story about what happened during the years of the Iran-Iraq conflict. The panel sequence illustrating the

father's account of the war conveys how shocked and saddened Marjane is to learn of the terror and deprivations her family, as well as other Iranians, have had to endure (103). A rapt listener, she is bowing her head in a silent gesture of respect for the victims. Felling humbled by their heroism, she lowers her eyes. When she grasps how many lives have been lost, she wearily rests her head in her hands. Although her father ends his testimony on a positive note—"All that is behind us. We must go forward now. We must rebuild everything!", he persuades Marjane—his optimism rings false to her. "Despite my father's sounding motivated, I didn't feel any real conviction in his voice," the narrator remembers. The image that shows Marjane ruminating on what she has just learned suggests that her father's story affects her in the same way as her earlier walk around the city did: in light of the collective suffering and sacrifice to which she has just become a secondary and belated witness, the pain of her exile looks trivial. Unable to fall asleep, the wide-eyed Marjane is lying on her bed. With her arms placed stiffly alongside her body and her legs stretched straight, she appears extremely tense. "Next to my father's distressing report, my Viennese misadventures seemed like little anecdotes of no importance," Satrapi's recollective voice describes the reason behind Marjane's decision to keep her own story to herself (103). The disparity in scale between what she and her parents have been through, Marjane concludes, means that her parents "had suffered enough as it was" (103). Since knowing about her ordeal in Austria would only add to their misery, she must remain silent about her own unhappiness.

Marjane's resolve to get over the pain of her European exile echoes the determination with which she attempted to repress her homesickness while living in Vienna. She thought that forgetting where she came from was necessary if she were to fit

in. Consequently, severing her ties to Iran, the place and culture that had shaped her, appeared as the only way to ensure that she would assimilate and belong in Austria. Upon her return to Iran, Marjane once again believes that her experience of having lived someplace else precludes her from being able to integrate. Marjane's desire to feel at home, then, motivates her decision to cut herself off from her recent Austrian past. According no importance to her personal ordeal, she trusts, is the only appropriate way to honor the suffering of those who have had to bear the hardships of war she managed to avoid. No less importantly, it promises to make her readaptation easier. She will be able to rejoin those who have never left only if she puts her European failure behind her.

Although Marjane sees her return home as a turning away from the pain of exile, breaking away from the misery of isolation proves to be more difficult than she anticipated. "I wasn't able to take a step back even though I knew that it was the only way to get out of my funk," the narrator remembers realizing that her efforts to repress her Austrian past hinder rather than enable her re-integration (113). Convinced that her suffering does not measure up to the trauma of surviving a war, Marjane nevertheless longs for recognition of her own struggles in exile. In a three-panel sequence, Satrapi imagines the form such an acknowledgment could take. "I just wanted them [family] to know that I too had suffered," the narrator declares in the drawing that shows Marjane bearing witness to her experience in front of her relatives (113). While she is listing all the deprivations she had to endure—"I lived in the streets," "I spit up blood," "I was alone," "No one loved me" —her captivated audience lets out sighs of compassion (113). In the next image, concerned family members have gathered around the bed on which Marjane, snuggled under a blanket, is sitting. To dispel her gloom, they are offering

treats. “Oh my dear, you have suffered too much…Drink this herb tea,” the grandmother entreats Marjane (113). “It’s fresh-squeezed orange juice, I made it myself,” her father pleads affectionately, and her little cousin is ready to “do a little dance” to cheer her up (113). In the last drawing, Marjane fantasizes about yet another display of empathy. On a walk in the park, an uncle is patting her on the back as he assures her, “I understand you” (113). Even as she yearns for them, however, all the manifestations of concern and compassion seem unwarranted to Marjane. The imagined scenario is followed by a panel illustrating how torn she feels between wanting to have her story heard and believing she mustn’t share it at all. “Certainly, they’d had to endure the war, but they had each other close by. They had never known the confusion of being a third-worlder, they had always had a home!” Marjane ponders the reasons why her experience merits recognition (113). Having never left, her family did not have to contend with the loss of home. Unlike Marjane, they never had to come to terms with the alienation and isolation exile entails. Although great, their suffering was something they shared and went through together. Yet, despite managing to justify why her ordeal deserves acknowledgment, Marjane gives in to self-deprecation. “At the same time, how could they have pitied me?” she doubts herself all over again (113). Unable to neither dismiss nor admit her wish to tell about her life in Europe, she becomes “shut off” and keeps reminding herself she “mustn’t crack up” (113).

Just like her Iranian past did in exile, Marjane’s European past burdens her at home. “My unconscious caught up with me,” reads the narrator’s commentary to an image representing the content of Marjane’s restless dreams while she is living in Austria (40). Trying hard not to dwell on what she misses during the day, Marjane dreams of

home at night. In an almost identical sentence, “My past caught up with me,” the narrator describes Marjane’s inability to move on even after she has returned home (114). “I thought that by coming back to Iran, everything would be fine. That I would forget the old days,” she recalls her crashed hopes (114). The return does not put an end to the confusion Marjane first experiences in exile. Having come back, she finds that readjustment is as painful as assimilation. She falls into a depression that is a continuation of the breakdown that nearly cost her her life in Vienna. The succession of male therapists from whom Marjane seeks help is unable to address her predicament. It confounds them. The images depicting the consultations make clear that the therapists are not the sympathetic audience Marjane has been longing for. Shown sitting stiffly behind their desks, their faces expressionless, the men remain indifferent to Marjane’s story. She can describe what ails her—“I’m ashamed of having done nothing with my life. …I feel like I’m constantly wearing a mask,” she tells one counselor and confides to another that “When I was in Vienna, my life didn’t matter to anyone and that obviously had an effect on my own self-esteem. I was reduced to nothing”—but she cannot overcome her malaise (117). In addition to feeling ashamed of not having lived up to her parents’ expectations and returning as a prodigal daughter, Marjane is experiencing an acute identity crisis.

“My calamity could be summarized in one sentence: I was nothing,” the narrator recalls her despair (118). A blank human figure positioned against a black background represents Marjane’s loss of self-definition. As Satrapi’s recollective voice suggests, coming back home has intensified the self-alienation from which she suffered in exile: “I was a Westerner in Iran, an Iranian in the West. I had no identity. I didn’t even know anymore why I was living” (118). As an exile, Marjane suffered the consequences of

being defined and defining herself as an Iranian. Her ethnic and cultural difference set her apart from the Europeans whose values and convictions she never fully embraced. In effect, she was an outsider who did not belong to the place where she was living but to the place she had left. Throughout the four years of exile, Marjane was able to maintain, what Edward Said calls, a contrapuntal awareness in which "habits of life, expression, or activity in the new environment inevitably occur against the memory of these things in another environment" (186). For Marjane, Iran remained a point of reference whose stability she did not question. While her home country has never ceased to be Marjane's foundational site, her return reveals that Austria has become her transformational site. As a returnee, then, Marjane must confront the changes Iran and she herself have undergone in her absence. Destroyed by a violent war and ruled by a fundamentalist regime, her place of origin no longer defines who she is. At the same time, Marjane realizes that living in Austria, her place of exile, has complicated her identity that now accounts for both her Iranian childhood and Austrian adolescence. Marjane's allegiance to either place, then, is incomplete; she belongs fully neither in Iran nor in Austria. No longer able to stand the pain of lacking an identity and being without a home, Marjane tries to take her own life.

Paradoxically, the failure of her suicide attempt propels Marjane to renew her efforts to readjust. After she learns that her survival is nothing short of miraculous—the amount of pills she took "should have been enough to finish off an elephant," her therapist tells her—Marjane is determined to rise above her despair (119). Since "I was not made to die," she concludes, "I'm taking myself in hand" (119). She comes to understand just then that she feels so out of place back in Iran because the home she had

known before exile does not exist any more. Contrary to her expectations, her return is not a chance to re-inhabit her first home but an opportunity to invent a new one. Marjane's realization echoes the critic Andrea Deciu Ritivoi's insight about the story of Odysseus. Insofar as it shows homecoming as a simultaneous fulfillment and shattering of the dream of return, Odysseus's story, she argues, sets up a paradigm for all exilic returns. "Odysseus's final tribulations, when he has already arrived in Ithaca," Deciu Ritivoi observes, "prove that 'home' is not a passive destination. To be at home, he must make himself at home, rather than expect the feeling to arise naturally" (103). The exile's return, then, reveals that feeling at home and being back in the place one comes from do not necessarily coincide. Rather than a specific location, it is the way one inhabits a place that determines whether or not it can be one's home. At the same time as homecoming marks the loss of the exile's first home, it opens up the possibility for creating a new one.

After she recovers from her breakdown, Marjane eagerly embraces her "new destiny" (121). Determined to make herself feel at home, she embarks on a project of elaborate self re-invention. In order to fit in with her peers, she dramatically changes her appearance and becomes "a sophisticated woman" (120). The car her parents give her "by way of encouragement" gives her independence (122). Soon, Marjane makes new friends and enjoys a vibrant social life. "In short," the narrator reflects on the success of her re-integration, "my life had taken a completely new turn" (122). By the time Reza, her new boyfriend, confides to her his dreams of emigrating, Marjane has comfortably settled in. "I don't want to leave the country right away," she tells him as he is pondering the places they may go to live together (126).

Yet, Marjane's life as a young woman and art student involves daily negotiations of the limits imposed by the repressive regime. Her relationship with Reza must be kept secret in public. As an unmarried couple, they are not allowed to spend time alone. Marjane must also monitor her appearance. On a day she puts on too much makeup, revolutionary guards stop her. She avoids arrest by falsely accusing an innocent man of propositioning her (131). Every time she steps outside, Marjane must carefully fold her veil so that no hair is visible in profile (139). The officially mandated women's dress—a head-scarf, loose tunic, and long pants—even affects her ability to do art. Marjane manages to modify this regulation by proposing a new uniform for female students at her school (144). When she learns of the prohibition to look at and draw an unveiled human model, Marjane organizes a group of like-minded students who start posing for one another in the privacy of their homes (150). Despite daily reminders that she lives in a fundamentalist country where strict laws circumscribe all her personal freedoms, Marjane feels content in the life she has carved out for herself. "Everything was going well: my studies interested me, I loved my boyfriend, I was surrounded by friends," the narrator remembers 1991, the second year of her art studies (158). Yet, she goes on to reveal that there is more to Marjane's ordinary happiness than just good fortune: "My friends and I had evolved**.** I had tempered my Western vision of life and they, for their part, had moved away from tradition" (158). Marjane manages to re-adapt only because she recognizes that her life in Iran will never resemble the kind of life she might have had in Europe. Accepting this difference frees her from feeling caught up in-between the two places whose realities seem otherwise irreconcilable. Marjane's contrapuntal awareness that initially made her re-immersion impossible, then, has given way to an understanding that

in order to feel at home she needs to focus on where she is now. In the end, however, Marjane's effortful conformity produces the same self-alienating effects it aimed to overcome.

Getting married at the age of twenty-two is the greatest personal concession Marjane makes to respect the rules to which she does not truly subscribe. Satrapi introduces Marjane's decision to marry Reza, her boyfriend of two years, by a series of panels that illustrate the obstacles an unmarried couple confronts should they want to go on a trip or rent an apartment. "It was difficult to be together outside of marriage," the narrator justifies her eagerness to make her relationship with Reza official despite knowing "deep down [that] neither Reza nor I was ready to get engaged" (158). As soon as the wedding reception is over and Marjane finds herself alone with her new husband, her suppressed ambivalence changes into despair. "When the apartment door closed, I had a bizarre feeling," the narrator remembers (163). The image representing how she felt as a new wife shows Marjane trapped behind bars. Even though she is gripping the bars with both her hands, she looks resigned rather than determined to set herself free. As the narrator's commentary explains, Marjane belatedly regrets her decision to "become 'a married woman'" (163). "In my mind," she elaborates, "'a married woman' wasn't like me. It required too many compromises. I couldn't accept it, but it was too late" (163). By agreeing to assume the subservient position of a wife, she has betrayed her own principles. "I had conformed to society, while I had always wanted to remain in the margins," the narrator laments Marjane's swift transformation from rebel to conformist (163). A sham from the outset, the marriage lasts only three years. When Marjane asks

Reza for divorce, she concedes that giving in to "the social pressure" is partly responsible for the failure of their marriage (184).

Marjane's entrapment in an unfulfilling relationship coincides with her development as an artist. Yet, the same stifling conventions and restrictive laws that circumscribe her private life also limit her artistic expressivity. With the completion of her first major project, Marjane becomes aware of the external constraints that affect her creative potential (174). As the best students in their graduating class, she and Reza are selected to design "a theme park based on [Persian] mythological heroes" (174). Having agreed to collaborate, for the next seven months they immerse themselves in research and work. "We wanted to create the equivalent of Disneyland in Tehran," the narrator describes their project that required attention to "details [such as] dining, lodging, attractions" (175). In her formal defense speech, Marjane highlights the design's uniqueness. "Our mythology is one of the most complex mythologies on earth, but we have never known how to mine it, for fear of making it vulgar," she tells her committee (176). "In our country we have theme parks," she points out, "but the motifs are American. Which is the reason behind our initiative" (176). Impressed, the commission recommends that Marjane and Reza propose their project to the mayor of Tehran. After having been turned away twice—the first time for wearing an improper head-scarf and the second time for wearing makeup—Marjane meets the mayor's deputy who has agreed to consider the project. His critique focuses on the female characters who, he points out, "are women without veils, seated on the backs of all sorts of real or mythic animals. We can see their shapes and their hair" (177). When Marjane assures the man that she and Reza will gladly design different outfits for all the heroines, he dismisses her idea. "A

Gord Afarid in a chador is no longer a Gord Afarid," he tells Marjane. By transforming the valiant heroines into proper women, such an adjustment, the mayor's deputy implies, would falsify their stories. Were it to comply with the government-mandated ideology, the theme park would misrepresent the mythical past. "Your project is certainly interesting, but it's unachievable!" he sums up his rejection (177). Given no alternative, Marjane abandons her design.

If the encounter with the deputy's mayor alerts Marjane to the obstacles to carrying out her artistic vision, in her new job as an illustrator for an economics magazine she learns about the dire consequences of realizing it. Shortly after Marjane starts working, a fellow illustrator disappears after a drawing of his is deemed offensive by the authorities. The narrator's explanation that "the government couldn't tolerate a mullah being called an assassin" is accompanied by Satrapi's reproduction of the offensive cartoon (180). When a few days later one of Marjane's coworker gets arrested for publishing a drawing of a bearded man, a humorous allusion to the Rapunzel story, the risks of being an artist believing in freedom of expression become even more real to her. Marjane realizes that whereas she is expected to conform to social conventions in her private life, in her artistic life she is supposed to submit to the repressive regime. Any independent choice she makes will be enough to merit either social stigma or imprisonment.

At the same time as Marjane becomes increasingly aware of the pressures and limitations she will have to obey, she grows more determined to respect her own individual values and convictions. The failure of her marriage, coupled with the impossibility to be an artist, propels her to consider leaving Iran again. "Not having been

able to build anything in [her] own country," and not willing to compromise her personal life and art, she decides to go to France all by herself (185). When Marjane informs her parents about her intention to study at the School of Decorative Arts in Strasbourg, they wholeheartedly support her choice (185). "You weren't made to live here," the father tells her and adds that "We Iranians, we're crushed not only by the government but by the weight of our traditions!" (185). The mother also sees Marjane's leaving as her only chance to find fulfillment in life. "You only have one life. It's your duty to live it well," she urges her daughter to take control of her destiny (185). As a spirited young woman who thrives on independence and finds the pressure to conform intolerable, the parents imply, Marjane has no other alternative but to choose self-imposed exile. Only by going away can she ever feel at home with herself.

In anticipation of the nostalgia that will inevitably take hold of her after she leaves Iran, Marjane takes care to visit all the familiar places she knows she will miss. Realizing that she will be able to return to them in memory only, she wants to experience them once again before going away. "Between June and September '94, the date of my definite departure, I spent every morning wandering in the mountains of Tehran, where I memorized every corner," the narrator remembers her solitary walks in the outskirts of town (186). The image shows Marjane contemplating the landscape on one such morning. Turned away from the viewer, she is looking at the mountains spread out in front of her. Together with her grandmother, Marjane take a trip to the coast of the Caspian Sea for which she longed inconsolably during her stay in Austria. In the panel depicting the vacation, Marjane and her grandmother's faces are turned towards the sea wind that stirs the waves behind them. With her eyes closed, Marjane breathes in "that

very special air. That air that doesn't exist anywhere else" (186). While she is bidding farewell to places that most meaningfully evoke home for her, Marjane hopes to preserve her memories so that they can sustain her in exile.

Besides revisiting locations whose natural beauty she does not want to forget, Marjane goes to places that hold a memorial value for her family. She pays homage to her grandfather and uncle who have given their lives to oppose the regime she now flees. She takes flowers to her grandfather's tomb and vows that "he would be proud of me" (186). Marjane gets another bouquet to honor her father's brother. Shown kneeling "behind the Evine prison where the body of my uncle Anoosh lay in an unmarked grave, next to thousands of other cadavers," she makes a promise "to try to remain as honest as possible" (186). Marjane's returns to her grandfather's and uncle's resting places assert her commitment to preserve her connection to the family she will be leaving behind soon. Insofar as her departure represents an individual stance against government-imposed oppression, Marjane assumes her place in the family lineage punctuated by acts of defiance against the ruling regime. Her determination to go into exile rather than bow to a life of compromise is partly a family inheritance. By leaving Iran, Marjane does not turn away from her heritage but claims it.

"I had chosen this departure but despite everything, I felt very sad," the narrator confides in the first panel depicting Marjane's leave-taking. (187). "My father cried as usual, and my mother kept her head," she remembers (187). Repeating what Marjane already heard from her father, "The Iran of today is not for you," the mother implores her to build her life elsewhere (187). "I forbid you to come back!" she says even as she is holding Marjane tight (187). Just as the first volume of Satrapi's memoir, Persepolis 2

closes with a scene of departure at Mehrabad Airport (187). Showing Marjane and her family on opposite sides of the glass wall that divides those who are leaving from those who are staying behind, the last panel is identical in size and composition to the final drawing in Persepolis. In the foreground, slightly to the left, there are the large figures of Marjane's family members. In the upper right corner, surrounded by other travelers whose silhouettes and positioning are the same in both images, Marjane, who has already gone through passport control, is turning back to have one last look at her loved ones. While the overall visual correspondence of the two airport scenes highlights the similarities between Satrapi's 1984 and 1994 departures, the distinguishing details and the narrator's retrospective commentaries reveal the two partings as two very different experiences. In the Persepolis departure panel, the stricken-faced Marji is resting her hands against the glass wall as she watches her mother collapse into her father's arms. The Pieta-like drawing of the parents evokes the pain their daughter's leaving is causing them. The narrator's commentary, "It would have been better to just go," expresses her distress at being the reason for the suffering she can only witness from a distance (153). "Nothing's worse than saying goodbye," Satrapi's recollective voice declares (153). Leave-taking is "a little like dying," she adds (153). In contrast, in the final panel of Persepolis 2, Marjane's face registers optimism, not despair. She is waving goodbye to her parents and grandmother who has come to the airport this time. Although the grandmother's tears and slouched shoulders evoke the heavy sadness of a farewell, the parents' gestures and facial expressions suggest that they find Marjane's second departure more bearable than the first one. With pensive smiles on their faces, they are looking in her direction. Their hands are raised in a gesture of farewell. The narrator

concedes that "The goodbyes were much less painful than ten years before when I embarked for Austria" (187). She goes on to list the circumstances that account for the difference: "There was no longer a war, I was no longer a child, my mother didn't faint and my grandma was there, happily…" (187). The departure a decade ago marked the end of Marji's childhood. As a young girl, she had to obey the parental injunction that she live and study in Europe. She was going away burdened with the pain of separation, but not yet aware of the pain of exile that would follow it. This time, Marjane is leaving as an adult who is ready to accept that her homeland can no longer be her recourse and that "freedom had a price" (187).

In an essay that explores the exiled writer's preoccupation with the home he has lost but to which he keeps returning in his work, Andre Aciman posits that "the act of recording the loss [of home] is the ultimate homecoming, inasmuch as the act of recording one's inability to find one's home on going back becomes a homecoming as well" (145). As a narrative illuminating the predicament of exilic return, then, Persepolis 2 can be seen as Satrapi's figurative homecoming to the place of origin she had to abandon. Tellingly, the memoir's title evokes the splendid ancient Persian capital, a lost place to which it is impossible to return, except in imagination. Like Marjane's rejected arts school graduation design, the theme park featuring the mythic world of Persian heroes and heroines, Satrapi's autobiographical project seeks to recreate a time in a place that no longer exists: the Tehran of her childhood and youth. Thus, even as it ultimately tells the story of a definite departure, Persepolis 2 enacts Satrapi's return to the people and places she left behind and can only revisit through art and memory.

Chapter 4: "The way you got sideswiped was by going back": Returns to Places of Personal Significance in Susan J. Brison's Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of the Self, Joan Didion's The Year of Magical Thinking, and Alix Kates Shulman's To Love What Is: A Marriage Transformed

Susan J. Brison's memoir, Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of the Self, opens with the memory of the walk she took on a bright July morning in the summer of 1990. Thrilled with the opportunity to enjoy a "gorgeous day" in the French countryside, Brison went out on her own as her husband stayed behind to work at home: "I sang to myself as I set out, stopping to pet a goat and pick a few wild strawberries along the way" (2). Her jubilant mood and the idyllic charm of her surroundings, however, were abruptly shattered shortly after. What Brison remembers next is "lying face down in a muddy creek bed at the bottom of a dark ravine, struggling to stay alive. I had been grabbed from behind, pulled into the bushes, beaten and sexually assaulted" (2). While the events she recalls are sequential, their irreconcilability is striking. The stark contrast between the subsequently remembered places)—"a peaceful-looking country road" and "a muddy creek bed at the bottom of a dark ravine"—reveals a rupture in the chronology of the morning's events (Brison 2). Rather than establishing continuity and coherence, Brison's memory registers a gap. When she attempts to write about the assault for the first time a few months later, she still cannot make sense out of this sequence. "All I could come up with was a list of paradoxes," she sums up her early frustrations at not being able to come up with an orderly narrative of the traumatic event and its aftermath (Brison ix).

A composite of Brison's autobiographical and philosophical reflections on the lasting effects of the sexual assault she only narrowly survived, Aftermath explores the

challenges that inevitably confront the trauma survivor as she undertakes the task of "reconstructing a self in the sense of a remembered and ongoing narrative about oneself" (49).[54] With its emphasis on location and place, the memoir's opening scene manages not only to depict the dramatic turn in Brison's life, but it also signals the narrative's reliance on spatial imagery and metaphors to convey the trauma of her sexual assault and describe the arduous process of recovery. In particular, figurative and literal returns to and departures from the site of the assault organize Brison's understanding of the role memory and narrative reconstruction play in the aftermath of trauma.

Kathryn Robson describes the prevalent view of rape "as an invasion of a protected inner space that equates to a violation of the embodied self" (57). Figured in spatial terms, rape is as an act of violent trespass that collapses the distinction between inside and outside. According to the model of rape as an external danger to women's bodily integrity, their physical exposure correlates with the threat of sexual violence.[55] Rape, then, is a calculated risk a woman assumes when she imprudently chooses to venture unprotected into a dangerous place. Teaching the "Violence against Women" seminar for the first time, Brison is struck by how the pervasiveness of rape's spatial model informs women's behavior. She and her female students, Brison realizes, share a sense of having to protect themselves at all times by "locking doors and windows, checking the back seat of the car, not walking alone at night, looking in closets on returning home" (18). Not incidentally, all these precautions aim to close off access to women's vulnerable bodies

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[54] See John Paul Eakin's recent Living Autobiographically: How We Create Identity in Narrative for an elaboration of the concept of narrative identity.

[55] In her essay, "Fighting Bodies, Fighting Words: A Theory and Politics of Rape Prevention," Sharon Marcus contests "the false demarcation between an inside and outside of rape in terms of geographical space" (399). Even though majority of women are raped inside their own homes, Marcus points out, they are continually urged to protect themselves by staying indoors (399).

as well as minimize the risk women run by merely being present in unguarded, and thus unsafe, spaces. Equated with the enclosure of their bodies, women's safety is presumed to be their own responsibility.

Yet, Brison's assault exposes the central premise of the spatial model of rape—the clear-cut distinction between safe and dangerous places—as untenable. She is attacked "in broad daylight" while she is walking by herself along "a peaceful-looking country road" (9; 2). The French authorities who come to Brison's rescue do not question her status as a blameless victim and spare her "the insult, suffered by so many rape victims, of not being believed or of being said to have asked for the attack" precisely because her attack happens in a "safe place" (7). In light of the spatial model of rape that rests on a clear difference between safe and dangerous places, the circumstances of her assault exonerate Brison. At the same time, they prove what the rape script overlooks: there are no safe places for women.

In keeping with the conceptual framework of rape as a violent intrusion and violation of borders, the curtailed ways in which women move in and occupy space not only form an anticipatory response to rape, but they also become its consequence. After the attack, Brison feels exposed and vulnerable in locations she did not consider dangerous before. She is unable to take walks around campus unless a friend accompanies her (61). When she does eventually go out alone, she can't stop herself from "looking over my shoulder a lot and punctuating my purposeful, straight-ahead stride with an occasional pirouette" (14). Even in seemingly ordinary and unremarkable places like a locker room or a parking lot pose a threat. Determined to prevent the possibility of another assault, Brison demands that the university install a lock and add a light so that

the locker room and the parking lot no longer endanger her and other unsuspecting women (61). These precautions, however, do not eliminate Brison's anxiety or contain her fear of another attack. As a rape survivor, Brison recognizes that "a woman can be sexually assaulted anywhere, at any time—in 'safe' places, in broad daylight, even in her own home" (19).

Just as rape, trauma is figured in spatial terms. Psychologist Judith Herman notes that "traumatic events generally involve threats to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death" (33). Traumatic violence breaks the ego's protective barriers and shatters the victim's psychic integrity; it cannot be restored unless the crisis has been re-externalized (Laub "Knowing and Not Knowing…" 287, 299; "Bearing Witness" 69). Trauma, then, is "a state of internal crisis in response to an overwhelming external event that threatens existing mental structures" (Haaken 68). Both rape and trauma, then, can be understood as the violation of the boundary between the outside and the inside. Yet, while the spatial conceptualization of rape additionally collapses the distinction between safe and dangerous places, the spatial model of trauma instead undoes the complementarity of departure and return from the site of violence.

Cathy Caruth defines trauma as the paradox of simultaneous taking leave of and coming back to the scene of the extreme event. "Trauma," Caruth argues, "is a repeated suffering of the event, but it also is a continual leaving of its site" ("Introduction…" 10). Constituted by the disjuncture between "the encounter with death" and "the ongoing experience of having survived it," trauma undoes the polarity between destruction and survival and challenges our "understanding of what it means to leave and to return" (Caruth, Unclaimed 7; 16). Departure and return, then, are inextricably bound with each

other and inscribed in "the endless inherent necessity of repetition" that is at the heart of trauma (Caruth, Unclaimed 63). It is only through repeated acts of going back that the survivor can take leave from the extremity of the original event.[56]

The aftermath of Brison's attack is punctuated by her many returns to and departures from the "muddy creek bed at the bottom of a dark ravine" where her attacker left her to die (2). Brison's very survival hinges on her ability to get away from the place in which she was assaulted and then abandoned. After Brison regains consciousness, she manages to climb up from the ravine. She hides in the bushes by the road and gets up only when she sees an approaching tractor. Its driver alerts the police, and shortly after help arrives (89). Yet, even as Brison physically leaves the scene of the crime behind, it remains a place to which she continues to return in memory.

As most trauma victims do, in the period immediately following the assault, Brison experiences flashbacks that make her relive the attack. Traumatic memories, which can be experienced as sensory or bodily, are usually triggered by an unexpected reminder of the extreme event; they immerse the survivor back into the scene of trauma where she remains arrested (McNally 113). Brison insists that traumatic hauntings constitute "the worst—the unimaginably painful aftermath of violence" (x). She describes her traumatic memories of the rape as "uncontrollable, intrusive, …inflicted, not chosen" returns to the ravine (69). Unbearably intense, flashbacks "immobilize the body by rendering the will as useless as it is in a nightmare in which one desperately tries to flee, but remains frozen" (Brison 45). The vividness of traumatic memories overwhelms the

[56] Clinical studies of P.T.S.D. also suggest that returns to and departures from the site of trauma are central to recovery. In a 2008 New Yorker magazine article, Sue Halpern describes Virtual Iraq, a virtual-reality program tested by the Department of Defense as a possible P.T.S.D. treatment. The program seeks to relieve the traumatic symptoms from which returning Iraq veterans suffer by virtually recreating the trauma scene. These simulated returns to the scene lessen the acuity of veterans' symptoms.

survivor: having been taken back to the scene of extremity, she cannot leave. Insofar as they perpetuate the event even after it has already come to an end, traumatic memories collapse the division between the past and the present. As a result, Roberta Culbertson writes, "the violation seems to continue in a reverberating present that belies the supposed linearity of time and the possibility of endings" (170). As the event from the past intrudes into and is relived in the present, it becomes an inseparable part of both.

Although Brison's traumatic memories repeatedly take her back to the ravine, paradoxically, as a site of trauma, the place marks a point of no return. "I am not the same person who set off, singing, on that sunny Fourth of July in the French countryside," Brison asserts the self-shattering effect of the attack (21). "I left her in a rocky creek bed at the bottom of a ravine. I had to in order to survive," she explains (21). Brison's survival, then, has been predicated not only on her ability to climb up from the ravine but also on her ability to leave behind the self the assault annihilated. In an inverted logic, Brison's death is a precondition for her life. Her sense of having outlived herself illustrates the structural contradiction of trauma, the simultaneity of "destruction *and* survival" (Caruth, Unclaimed, 72).[57] As a place from which Brison has not come back and to which she continues to return, the ravine reflects this incongruity.

Brison's description of the "spectral existence" she feels herself living in the aftermath of the attack further reveals trauma to be an irresolvable crisis of destruction and survival, departure and return (9). The assault has produced a lasting displacement. Disoriented and alienated, Brison can neither take leave of the site of trauma nor reenter the world she previously inhabited: "I was attacked for no reason. I had ventured outside

[57] Similarly, Judith Herman talks about "the dialectic of trauma" (47). In the event's aftermath, the survivor continues to oscillate between two opposing psychological states, intrusion and constriction. Paradoxically, even as the ongoing "alternation between these two extreme states might be understood as an attempt to find a satisfactory balance between them," it perpetuates rather than relieves instability (Herman 47).

the human community, landed beyond the moral universe, beyond the realm of predictable events and comprehensible actions, and I didn't know how to get back" (x). Having survived the brutal attack, she feels can never go back because the world as she knew it no longer exists. In effect, Brison finds herself "alive but in a totally alien world" (9). An exile among places and people she had previously taken for granted, she does not "feel at home in the world" any longer (x). As she puts it, "The fact that I could be walking down a quiet, sunlit country road at one moment and be battling a murderous attacker the next undermined my most fundamental assumptions about the world" (26). Whereas she used to believe in her ability to control and influence her own life, she now recognizes the limits of her own self-determination. Similarly, her earlier trust in the goodwill of others has been replaced by an unsettling realization that "you can be attacked at any time, any place, simply because you are a woman" (13). Consequently, in the first few years after the attack, whenever people ask her if she has successfully recovered by now, Brison's response "depends on what that means" (21). "If they mean 'am I back to where I was before the attack?'," her answer is a resounding no: "I have to say, no, and I never will be" (21). Since the assault robbed Brison of her earlier self and stripped away her beliefs and certainties, she believes she can never resume her previous life.

Having returned to the French countryside many times in memory, shortly before the attacker's trial begins Brison goes back to Grenoble, the place of the assault, in person. During a meeting with her lawyer and the public prosecutor, Brison goes through the dossier of her case. Among legal documents, deposition transcripts, police and medical reports, there are photographs of the crime scene. Brison finds herself poring

over images of "the disturbed underbush by the roadside, my belt found in the woods, and footprints in the mud at the bottom of the ravine where I had been left for dead" (87). Some of the photographs surprise Brison, while others merely confirm what has been imprinted in her memory. After all, she has never forgotten the muddy bottom of the ravine. Worried that confronting the physical evidence has caused Brison to recall the circumstances of her attack all over again, the prosecutor urges her to let go of all her memories as soon as the trial is over (86). Brison sees this exhortation as offensive and dismissive. As a trauma victim, she assures the prosecutor, she has come to understand that "there would be no forgetting" the violence she only narrowly survived (86).

Getting over the case dossier does not prepare Brison for how intensely she reacts to having to testify in her assailant's presence. On the day of the trial she watches the "slight, handcuffed, hardly menacing" man escorted into the courtroom (Brison 105). Despite being certain that the attacker will be sentenced, Brison is relieved to have the protection of the armed guards. As she steps up onto the witness stand ready to testify, suddenly apprehensive, Brison finds reassurance and comfort in being surrounded by "the uniforms, the guns, the judge's robes, the jurors in the precisely placed seats" (105). She notes with relief that they all are "the signs of law and order, of decorum, of 'civilization,' that had vanished during my assault" (Brison 105). The court setting does not replicate the circumstances of the traumatic encounter; in fact, it effectively counteracts them and thus makes Brison's testimony possible. "The propos were all in place for me to tell my story," Brison comments (105). Defenseless and helpless during the assault, she is now under the care and protection of the court authorities. She no longer has to confront the violence alone, without recourse to help from others. Whereas

the traumatic event cast her "outside the human community," bearing witness brings her back to its center (x). The court setting guarantees that Brison will not have to relive the violence of the rape even as she revisits it in memory.

Since Brison's testimony has a specific aim, the attacker's incrimination, she must present and tell her story of the rape in a way that allows "justice to be done" (Brison 107). Customary trial procedures, then, determine how Brison may bear witness to her assault. As Linda Alcoff and Laura Grey argue, a rape survivor's testimony is a discursive event reflective of "the structural arrangements" shaping the context in which her testimony takes place (265). As a rape survivor, Brison has "little opportunity to acknowledge her own interpretive contribution the definition of her assault qua 'trauma' *or* injustice" (Hengehold 200). Rather, her original narrative, Brison realizes, has been transformed by French authorities who came to her assistance: "things (including the 'official story') were being rigged from the start, *in order to* get my assailant convicted. Some things were left out and others (such as the description of me as 'sportive') were *added* to my narrative by the officer to make it more convincing" (107). These modifications seek to establish Brison's credibility as a victim. Committed to ensuring the attacker's rightful conviction, the police and lawyers appropriate her account of the event by adapting it so that it follows the rape script, according to which the male assailant is guilty only to the extent that his female victim can be proven to be blameless.[58] The impact of Brison's testimony, then, hinges on her ability to present herself as "the 'worthy victim' who cannot be construed as contributing to her assault or

[58] Brison is surprised to notice that her official deposition starts with "Since I am athletic," a phrase that has been inserted by the officer who transcribed her testimony. This detail, she realizes, is added as a reasonable, and thus unobjectionable, justification of her solitary outing on the morning she was raped (7). Similarly, she is praised for mentioning her husband "since my assailant, who had confessed to the sexual assault, was claiming I had provoked it" (7).

provoking the rapist in any way" (Hengehold 198). Although the physical evidence supports her version of the assault and the defendant has been identified as the perpetrator, Brison still must establish her credibility as witness. She is expected to recall in detail the events "as they occurred," and her testimony must be "as close to a snapshot as possible—a story unmediated and unchanging—[as if it were told] from the perspective of a detached, objective observer" (Brison 72; 109). When the assailant invokes insanity plea, the burden to refute it rests solely with Brison who is "the only one who knew how he'd behaved" at the time (106). Like the demand for her story's adherence to the standard rape narrative, the pressure to prove the attacker's sanity constrains Brison's testimony, which must establish the man's guilt above all else.

In order to present her narrative in a way that would make her witness credible and her accusations unassailable, "get it straight," Brison took care to prepare for the trial (72). She intently held on to details, repeatedly remembered her early narrative, and even practiced delivering her story in court (108). All the efforts to keep the event alive in her mind, however, were effectively preserving the state of "heightened lucidity" and unrelenting vigilance she experienced as the attack was taking place (Brison 109). The obligation to "keep the story straight," Brison reflects, disregarded and thus added to the anguish and confusion from which she continued to suffer in her rape's aftermath (108). Because of "the requirement for truth," she remained bound to the scene of the attack lest she should forget anything (Brison 109). Having to constantly go back to the site of trauma in memory, Brison was prevented from taking leave of it.

Whereas prior to the trial Brison's rehearsed testimonies kept her tied to the scene of the attack, her court narrative enables her to depart from it. When the judge announces

the verdict charging her attacker guilty with rape and attempted murder, she experiences an immediate physical release: "my body was shaking, wracked with sobs, although I didn't really feel anything but a sudden unclenching" (Brison 108). Her factually accurate and consistent testimony has now become a part of the body of collected evidence on which her case and trial were based. Since she is no longer required to keep her memory of the attack intact and unchanging so that all the details come together in a convincing and believable narrative, Brison is finally free to "leave at least some of the horror behind" (108). Now that her story has been heard and acknowledged, she can begin to reflect on, not just recall, the event. Being able to "let down my guard, get fuzzy about the particulars," Brison writes, makes it possible for her "in a sense, [to] forget what had happened to me. Now I could afford to think about it" (108, 109). Her memory of what happened is no longer to be merely preserved; it can now be actively engaged.

Taking her back to the site of trauma and yet allowing her to assert her distance from it, Brison's return to France marks a shift in how and why she tells her story. She no longer has to concentrate on "getting (and keeping) the story right in order to bear witness" (xii). Instead, Brison may begin "to rewrite the story in ways that enable [her] to go on with her life" (xii).[59] Both these modes of bearing witness are motivated by "the imperative to tell and be heard," as Dori Laub calls trauma survivors' compulsion to articulate their experience, but they highlight disparate aspects of testimony ("An Event" 78). The former establishes facts and thus enables justice to be done. The latter possesses a healing and transformative potential. As it openly acknowledges the irreparable harm and creatively strives to transcend the limits trauma has so violently imposed, the latter

[59] Similarly, reflecting on his work with Holocaust survivors, Laub also links survival with the telling of a trauma narrative: "The survivors did not only need to survive so that they could tell their story; they also needed to tell their story in order to survive" ("An Event" 78).

can do justice to the survivor's experience.[60] Central to the survivor's survival and recovery, the two kinds of bearing witness, which Brison calls "living to tell" and "telling to live," respectively, do not contradict each other. Rather, they reveal a tension between the distinct narrative function each of them serves.[61] By emphasizing "one rigid version of the past" and thus placing lesser importance on the survivor's present, Brison argues, living to tell may stall recovery (103). As the survivor bears witness to what happened to her, she is looking back, not forward. In telling to live, on the other hand, retrospectively oriented memories enable and promote prospective remembering. Telling to live, Brison explains, is

> a kind of letting go, playing with the past in order not to be held back as one springs away from it. After gaining enough control over the story to be able to tell it, perhaps one has to give it up, in order to retell it, without having to "get it right," without fear of betraying it, to be able to rewrite the past in different ways, leading up to an infinite variety of unforeseeable futures. (103)

Through telling to live the future trauma foreclosed can be opened up. Not limited to factual reconstruction, the retelling invites the survivor's interpretation and reflection; it also accounts for the aftermath, in which the survivor continues to confront trauma's effects at the same time as she seeks to accord new meanings to the event. Telling to live, then, at once reckons with and relives the obliterating violence of the traumatic event. If

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[60] While Brison recognizes that her court testimony has to be shaped in a specific way so as to "enable justice to be done" (107), Laura Hengehold argues that the legal setting precludes the survivor from being able to testify in a way that would "'do justice' to the incompleteness of her own evolving sexual and self-understanding and her desire to perceive herself throughout its evolution as an agent with legitimate desires and the power to satisfy them" (193).

[61] Brison identifies the following as the key tasks trauma survivor must complete in order to recover as follows: repossessing self-control, forming a narrative of the traumatic event and assimilating it into one's life (103).

Brison's trip to France is an actual return that proves her survival, telling to live is a return in memory that confirms the survivor has stepped outside of the trauma scene.

"I really am over my assault," asserts Brison in her essay, "Everyday Atrocities and Ordinary Miracles, or Why I (Still) Bear Witness to Sexual Violence (But Not Too Often)," written five years after the publication of Aftermath and seventeen years after the attack took place (195). Another narrative retelling of the attack and its aftermath, this recent essay reads like a palinode, a simultaneous return to and a departure from her earlier characterization and understanding of the attack's impact on her life. The story of her rape, she reflects, "has got shorter and less central to my life's narrative, until I now no longer need to tell it at all" ("Everyday…" 195). She has moved on and "moved beyond" both living to tell and telling to live (Brison, "Everyday…" 195). The assault has ceased to figure as the central experience of her life, and its importance has receded so much so that she does not even consider sharing her story with people who are becoming her new friends: they do not need to be told about it in order to know and understand who she is (Brison, "Everyday…" 195). Referring to a passage from Aftermath, in which she talks about having to take leave of her earlier self so that she might survive, Brison retracts that original statement. She admits that "In spite of my having written, years ago, that I died in that ravine, I now have more in common with my preassault self than with the person I became for more than a decade afterward" (188-9). Even though she continues to confront the trauma's lingering effects, such as susceptibility to depression, the fear of enclosed spaces, and the loss of the ability to enjoy solitary walks in the woods, Brison insists: "I *have* regained my lost self" (195). Recovery, after all, she suggests, is not just about being able to go on; it is, ultimately, about being able to go

back to who one was before the unthinkable happened. Having repeatedly returned the scene of extremity, Brison departed from the scene of violence and reclaimed the life the traumatic event violently interrupted. After Brison assures her readers that she is "no longer in the story" and has "walked out of the picture," she discloses her present location: "I'm sitting at my piano, with a few good friends, making a joyful noise" (197). The imagery invokes—and rewrites—the opening scene of Aftermath. This time, she is not alone. Her song is not cut short; it is, in fact, amplified by the voices of those who will do her no harm.

Emphasizing its shattering and, ultimately, transformative effects, Brison refers to her July 4, 1990 morning outing as "a little walk that changes everything" (102). A similar jolt of radical discontinuity reverberates through the opening of The Year of Magical Thinking, Joan Didion's retrospective chronicle of the first twelve months following her daughter Quintana's septic shock and her husband John Gregory Dunne's fatal cardiac arrest on December 30, 2003. The memoir's first sentences—"*Life changes fast. Life changes in the instant. You sit down to dinner and life as you know it ends*" — capture the clash between routine and disruption, ordinariness and extremity that Brison's descriptive phrase also evokes (3). Faced with "sudden disaster" that happens in a seemingly safe place Didion, like Brison, experiences the collapse of her assumptive world (Didion 4). Just as in Aftermath, in The Year of Magical Thinking the narrative retelling that gradually allows Didion to integrate the critical event into her ongoing life narrative is tied to place. As she literally and figuratively comes back to familiar locations—her and her husband's East and West Coast homes, the streets of Los Angeles and New York, hotel rooms, favorite restaurants, and vacation spots—Didion vividly

remembers the life she, John, and Quintana shared. At the same time, visits to places from the past alert her to the precariousness of her daughter's medical condition and make her relive the pain of losing her husband of forty years. Because these returns require that Didion confront John's present absence and acKnowledge the finality of his departure, they enable her to work through her grief, "a place none of us know until we reach it" (188).

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In Aftermath and The Year of Magical Thinking, the narrative focus on the place where the unthinkable happens highlights the disruption of the before-and-after chronology in which the critical event inevitably results. The irreconcilable sequence of place memories, an open country road and a dark ravine, reflects the rupturing Brison's attack introduces. Rather than the stark contrast between subsequent locations, it is the swift transformation of a familiar setting, Didion and her husband's New York apartment, that conveys the effect John's collapse has on Didion's own life. On the evening of

December 30, 2003, having come home from a visit to the Intensive Care Unit at Beth Israel North where their daughter Quintana is hospitalized, Didion and her husband decide to eat in. As usual, Didion builds a fire in the living room. "Fires," she explains, "were important to us. …Fires said we were home, we had drawn the circle, we were safe through the night" (9-10). The event that follows, however, violently breaks Didion's trust in the safe enclosure a tended fire provides. When her conversation with John abruptly stops, Didion looks up from mixing the salad and finds her husband "slumped motionless" (10). After her frantic efforts at resuscitation fail, she calls for an ambulance. The arrival of the paramedics quickly changes "the part of the living where John lay"—within the sight of the fire—"into an emergency department" (11). Syringes, ECG electrodes, and defibrillating paddles litter the floor; the paramedics gather around the monitor of the electrocardiogram machine. Soon after, they take John out on a gurney. When, a few hours later, Didion returns alone from New York Hospital where John was declared dead, she is struck by the apartment's eerie silence (17). "Because we were both writers and both worked at home, our days were filled with the sound of each other's voices," Didion describes her and John's work habits (16). John's death has quickly changed their home, a space of togetherness, into a place marked by his palpable absence. In the next few days, as relatives and friends come over to offer condolences and support, Didion can't yet bear to think that her and John's home now belongs solely to her. Even as she is painfully aware that her habitual references are not accurate anymore, she holds on to them. "Our (I could not yet think my) …house," she continues to describe the apartment (5). When she abandons the possessive adjective altogether, she still feels the need to add a qualifier: "the bedroom (our bedroom, the one in which there

still lay on a sofa a faded terrycloth robe bought in the 1970s at Richard Carroll in Beverly hills)" (5). The apartment is no longer a place where Didion and her husband live their lives together. It has become a place in which their shared past reminds Didion of her present aloneness.

While the emphasis on location and place in Aftermath's opening scene first signals Brison's reliance on spatial imagery and metaphors to convey the trauma of sexual assault and the process of recovery, Didion's initial focus on how loss transforms a familiar place foreshadows the narrative organization of The Year of Magical Thinking. Throughout the memoir, solitary visits to places Didion remembers from the past mark the trajectory of her grief and illuminate its spatial dimension. Didion's evolving experience of the vortex effect, as she refers to a place's ability to set forward a series of memorial associations, in particular reveals the role location and memory play in the process of working through grief.

"I had first noticed what I came to know as 'the vortex effect' in January, when I was watching the ice floes form on the East River from a window at Beth Israel North," Didion remembers the day she became aware that certain places call up memories of the past (107). Realizing that the hospital room's unusual "rose-patterned wallpaper border, a Dorothy Draper touch" must be a remainder from the time the place still used to be Doctors' Hospital, Didion unexpectedly finds herself remembering a summer decades ago (107). Doctors' Hospital was where one of her coworkers at Vogue underwent an abortion paid for by the district attorney's office (107). The seemingly random memory allows Didion to experience a temporary release from the present she can't bring herself to face. Going back to the past, Didion admits as she follows her memory's unfolding,

"had seemed better than thinking about why I was at Beth Israel North" (107). In her memory, after all, Doctor's Hospital has not yet become Beth Israel North, the place where her daughter lies unconscious; Quintana herself has not yet been born. By remembering herself away Didion can, albeit temporarily, evade the unbearable present. Yet, the respite her memories afford her turns out to be both short-lived and illusory. When her memory of Doctors' Hospital leads her to remember the time she was writing a novel that incorporated the incident, Didion is suddenly aware that "I had hit more dangerous water but there had seemed no turning back" (110). Having purposefully eased herself into the past, she stumbles across a memory that involves a three-year-old Quintana. As it exposes the striking contrast between Quintana as a young child in full health and Ouintana as an adult in a critical condition, the particular recollection plunges Didion back into the present she has tried to leave behind. She is reminded of the reason why she is at the hospital right now. "There it was, the vortex," Didion sums up the shock of her involuntary return to Beth Israel North (110).

Didion's first experience of the vortex effect sets up a paradigm for the ones that follow it. Every time she visits or passes by a place John and Quintana knew as well, memories of their life together overwhelm her. While such spontaneous remembering momentarily drowns out the painful present, it inevitably leads Didion back to it as soon as a memory of her husband or daughter comes up. Revealing of the ways in which place can both hold and provoke memories, the vortex invariably culminates in Didion's return to the present. The jolt of the vortex cancels out the provisional relief remembering has offered as it ultimately asserts the irrevocability of the loss not yet fully registered in Didion's memory.

Philosophical and psychological studies of remembering, the philosopher Edward C. Casey points out, have emphasized its temporal rather than spatial aspect (183). While the classical art of mnemonics relied on the tradition of remembering things in places, subsequent inquiries into memory focused on remembered time, not place (183-4). Yet, as Casey proposes, place is crucial in considerations of memory because it "aids remembering. It does so precisely as being well suited to contain memories–to hold and preserve them" (184). Since place is characterized by "abiding memorability" and possesses "inherent emotionality," it situates one's memorial life (Casey 207; 199). Thus, when a person remembers a place she or he actually remembers having been in it (183). Whereas Casey highlights the reservative role of place, Didion's vortex effect, a unique kind of place memory, emphasizes that place not only contains but also induces memories.

The Beth Israel North hospital where Didion experiences her first vortex is hardly the only place that reminds Didion of her loss by evoking memories of John and Quintana. During her five-week-long stay in Los Angeles where her daughter is being hospitalized at UCLA, Didion repeatedly passes by the neighborhoods she knows from the time when she and her family used to live there. Driving one day, she notices a movie theater where she and John first saw The Graduate in 1967 (118). Its surroundings have changed, but the theater itself has remained "if only to trap the unwary," as Didion bitterly comments on its disturbing presence (118). Caught by surprise, she finds herself remembering the evening she and John had dinner and saw the movie together (118). A few days later, another vortex overcomes Didion. When she realizes that the store where she wants to buy bottled water is exactly where the Bistro–the restaurant she and John

knew very well–once was, she turns back and walks away (120-21). The vortex, however, has already caught her in. Unable to avert it, Didion suddenly remembers the early years of her marriage during which she and John frequently dined at the Bistro. This memory paves way for another one. She recalls the family lunch on the day of Quintana's adoption. Reflecting on this particular celebration, in turn, reminds Didion of her daughter's sixth or seventh birthday dinner, an occasion on which Quintana wore a dress Didion and John bought for her on their trip to Bogota (120-21). These place-evoked memories plunge Didion deeper into her grief. Remembering the life she shared with her husband and daughter, Didion remembers that she might have already lost both of them: John is no longer alive; there is a very real possibility that Quintana may not recover. Back in familiar places, Didion may temporarily reenter the past, but these revisits inevitably lead to the painful realization that she has already outlived it and must now confront "the unending absence that follows" the loss of her loved ones (189).

While she cannot avert nor stop the vortex once it is triggered, Didion believes she may take precautions to shun places that carry such "potentially tricky associations" (176). She is determined to steer away from any venues that hold memories of either John or Quintana.On purpose, she avoids "previously untested territory" by not stepping beyond "terra cognita," the neighborhoods in which she can be sure she will not encounter familiar sights (118). Paradoxically, it is the areas she already knows to which Didion refers to as "terra incognita." While she remembers these places well enough to anticipate the risk of being sucked into a vortex, she cannot control her reaction to the memories these locations may call up. Threatened by the unpredictability of familiar

places, Didion engages in elaborate plotting of her comings and goings around Los Angeles:

> Never once in five weeks did I drive into the part of Brentwood in which we had lived from 1978 until 1988. When I saw a dermatologist in Santa Monica and street work forced me to pass within three blocks of our house in Brentwood, I did not look left or right. Never once in five weeks did I drive up the Pacific Coast Highway to Malibu. …I could avoid driving to UCLA on Sunset. I could avoid passing the intersection at sunset and Beverly Glen where for six years I had turned off to the Westlake School for Girls. (115)

Such determined evasions "require ingenuity" on Didion's part, but they enable her to hold on the "cool customer" persona she desperately struggles to maintain it in the days when Quintana's condition remains unstable (113). Steering clear of the route that passes by her old neighborhood, Didion attempts to prevent the intrusion of the present into the places that map her past. At the same time as the vortex enacts what Casey refers to as "*re-implacing*: re-experiencing past places," its ultimate effect is the exposure of places as inherently temporal (201). Taking Didion back to the past via a specific place, the vortex temporarily displaces the present only to jolt her back into it again as she realizes that her memory of a particular place is, unavoidably, a memory of another time. Every time Didion experiences the vortex, she must accept that memories are held, but time is not arrested, in place.

As it inexplicably fails to set off a vortex, the Beverly Wilshire Hotel where Didion has stayed on many of her previous visits to Los Angeles, is the notable exception to the rule that her re-entry into familiar places provokes a "sudden rush of memories" of

the past (118). Although "its every corridor was permeated with the associations I was trying to avoid," Didion observes, the hotel constituted an "exempt zone" (118; 114). She declares it "the only safe place for me to be, the place where everything would be the same, the place where no one would know or refer to the events of my recent life; the place where I would still be the person I had been before any of this happened" (Didion 118). The seeming permanence Didion finds in Beverly Wilshire comforts her into denial (114). She is able to keep the memory of her recent past and its painful losses at bay and gives in, instead, to magical thinking, her impossible wish that John's death be reversible and Quintana's condition non-life threatening.

Outside of Beverly Wilshire, however, there are no safe places that would shelter Didion from the finality of John's heart attack and the severity of Quintana's illness. When she agrees to cover the 2004 Democratic convention, Didion admits having "not anticipated that my new fragility would travel with me to Boston, a city, devoid, I thought, of potentially tricky associations" (175-6). Although she makes sure to keep her distance from the places that might remind her of her husband or daughter, Didion, nevertheless, stumbles into an unbearably painful memory of John. "Something déjà vu" about the hotel room where Didion is staying makes her recall her first visit to Boston in the summer before her senior year in college (179). She remembers that all these years ago she also stayed at the Parker House Hotel, in a room not very different from the one she is has now (178-80). The subsequent unfolding of memories puts Didion at ease. "For so long as I was thinking about the summer of 1955 I would not be thinking about John and Quintana," she tells herself (179). The calm and comfort turn out to be unsustainable, however, as an even earlier memory of Christmastime and high school dances in

Sacramento resurfaces. It makes Didion remember "the places on the river we went to after the dances. I thought about the fog on the levee driving home" (180). When she wakes up a few hours later, the thick fog on the levee is still on her mind, calling up other memories. Sacramento, Didion realizes too late, was not the only "place in my life where the fog got so thick that I had to walk ahead of the car" (180). The other place Didion remembers just then is

> The house on the Palos Verdes Peninsula.
>
> The one to which we brought Quintana when she was three days old.
>
> When you came off the Harbor Freeway and though San Pedro and onto the drive above the sea you hit the fog.
>
> You (I) got out of the car to walk the white line.
>
> The driver of the car was John. (180)

The memory of a house her family used to live in is intolerable. "I did not risk waiting for the panic to follow," Didion explains her sudden decision to pack and leave Boston at once (180). The cut-short visit makes her realize that the pain of loss does not just inhere in places that call up memories of John or Quintana. Rather, she herself brings it with her whenever she goes.

Having narrowly escaped the vortex effect, on a flight to New York, Didion muses about the expansive beauty of the views from the plane's windows (180). When she recalls some of the most memorable airplane vistas--the opening up of the American west, the islands on the Arctic sea, the seas between Greece and Cyprus, the Alps--she is struck with the realization that she "saw all those things with John" (181). His company was always a part of the experience of appreciating the beauty of a place. Without her

husband by her side, Didion will not be able to see the places in the same way again. "How could I go to Paris without him, how could I go back to Milan, Honolulu, Bogota?," she laments (181). The inability to share her wonder with John, however, is only one reason why Didion finds the thought of solitary returns crushing. As she has already discovered in Los Angeles and Boston, the familiar places she revisits alone at once evoke John's past presence and expose his present absence. Making her remember that John is no longer with her, solitary returns are painful reminders that her life goes on without him. Back in the places she and her husband visited together, Didion must face the growing distance between John and herself.

As Didion observes, the dynamic of the vortex each solitary return to familiar places provokes–the overflow of memories that temporarily offer comfort and relief but are then followed by an abrupt and painful realization that the loss of her loved one is irrevocable–resembles Freud's conception of the work of grief (Didion 133). The task of mourning, as Freud sees it, is the "long-drawn-out and gradual" withdrawal of the ego's libidinal attachment to the lost object (Freud 256). Only after the mourner has recognized and accepted the loss can the reconstitution of her shattered ego begin (Freud 244-5). Finding Freud's theory evocative, Didion quotes from "Mourning and Melancholia" directly: "Each single one of the memories and expectations in which the libido is bound to the object is brought up and hypecathected, and detachment of the libido is accomplished in respect of it" (Freud qtd. in Didion 133). Not incidentally, the passage highlights memory's role in the grief process. Remembering Quintana and John, as Didion understands all too well, upholds the bond she is not yet ready to let go of. On the other hand, memories of her daughter and husband repeatedly confront Didion with the

fact that she can no longer count on their presence in her life. The vortex, then, performs "the testing of reality," as Freud refers to the mourner's ongoing oscillation between denial and acknowledgment of loss (244).

Magical thinking, also a symptom of the beareved Didion's altered mental and affective states, is another case of reality-testing which, as Freud writes, can include "a turning away from reality…and a clinging to the object through the medium of hallucinatory wishful psychosis" (244). Like the vortex, magical thinking revolves around the act of coming back, but it is John's return that is at the center of Didion's impossible wish. Her "year of magical thinking," Didion writes, begins on the first night after her husband's death (33). She declines all offers of company and insists on spending the night by herself. "I needed to be alone," she explains her reasoning, "so that he [John] could come back" (33). In the months that followed, Didion admits, "'bringing him [John] back' had been … my hidden focus, a magic trick" (44). The irrational belief "that what had happened remained reversible" provided refuge from the unbearable alternative, the finality of John's death (Didion 32). The delusional hope that her husband's absence is but temporary and he will soon rejoin her determines how Didion goes about dealing with the tasks that befall her as a new widow. She is unable to remove John's shoes; she cannot bring herself to agree to donate his organs. "How could he come back if they took his organs, how could he come back if he had no shoes?," Didion justifies her reluctance (41). When she hears an interview with Teresa Heinz Kerry who talks about her pressing need to leave Washington and go back to her home in Pittsburgh as soon as she learned about her first husband's death in a plane crash, Didion immediately makes sense of the woman's decision: "Of course she 'needed' to go back to

Pittburgh. Pittsburgh, not Washington, was the place to which he might come back" (38). Insofar as it prolongs the existence of the lost loved one, magical thinking, for a brief while, suspends the painful awareness of loss's irreversibility. Just like the vortex before it culminates, Didion's "magic trick" temporarily averts the death she is not yet able to accept as final (44).

Not surprisingly, then, Didion reads a newspaper science story that discusses the potential of turning back time and changing the course of events as a confirmation of her own hope for John's imminent return. The article explains that the theoretical physicist Stephen W. Hawking's recent retraction of his earlier views in effect upholds "'a basic tenet of modern physics: that it is always possible to reverse time, run the proverbial film backward and reconstruct what happened in, say, the collision of two cars or the collapse of a dead star into back hole'" (Overbye qtd. in Didion 181). The same belief structures Didion's magical thinking, her desperate conviction that her actions may undo John's death and bring him back.

A shift in Didion's grieving process comes when, for the first time, she experiences the vortex without its usual effects, the obliterating distress to which her memories of John and Quintana invariably lead. On the opening day of the August 2004 Republican convention in New York, Didion finds herself in the Tower C escalator at the Madison Square Garden (182). She immediately remembers the last time she was there: in November, on the night before their trip to Paris, she and John came to see a Knicks game. As it happens, they took the same escalator she is on now. Not surprisingly, another memory follows this one. In the summer of 1992 Didion was covering the Democratic convention, also held at the Garden. Each night John would pick her up, and

they would have dinner together at Coco Pazzo (183). The unfolding of memories is almost predictable; Didion is no longer astonished when one recollection seamlessly leads into another. This vortex, however, differs from all the ones that came before it. As she goes over the sequence of the memories that surfaced on the Tower C escalator, Didion becomes aware that she does not wish to change the past:

> I had stood on this escalator thinking about those days and nights without once thinking I could change their outcome. I realized that since the last morning of 2003, the morning after he died, I had been trying to reverse time, run the film backward.
>
> It was now eight months later, August 30, 2004, and I still was.
>
> The difference was that all through those eight months I had been trying to substitute an alternate reel. Now I was trying only to reconstruct the collision, the collapse of the dead star. (183-84)

In contrast to others that preceded it, this particular vortex is no more than a reconstructive memory. It takes Didion back to the time John was still alive, but these recollections are already infused with her knowledge that her husband is already dead. For the first time, Didion's memory does not suspend John's death; it already contains it. Although the vortex takes over, Didion enters the past without leaving the present. She no longer believes there is an alternative to John's death. When Didion reflects on the dead star and film reel from the Stephen W. Hawking's news story, she now sees them as proof that past losses may be remembered but not undone. Early on the vortex effect was crushing precisely because it exposed Didion's magical thinking, the hope that John will return, as untenable. The unfolding of memories on the Tower C escalator, however, does

not cancel Didion's awareness that there is nothing she could have or could now do to have her husband back.

The vortex's function changes, then, as Didion emerges from the stage in which "Grief was passive. Grief happened" (143). Her ability to remember her husband without giving in to despair signals the beginning of the subtle transition through which her grief will have slowly and gradually evolved into mourning. Nearly a year after John's death, place-inspired recollections no longer make Didion forget John's death; the events of December 30, 2003 have already become an indelible part of her memory. The vortex now lacks an effect because loss is already inscribed in the attachment it enacts. On the Tower C escalator at the Madison Square Garden, for the first time, Didion comes to understand that John's death has changed rather than canceled out the bond between her and her husband.

Didion's intimation of her transformed, albeit continuing, relationship to John echoes contemporary understanding of mourning. Informed by Freud's theory, the traditional 20th-century view of bereavement has emphasized "a process of 'letting go' of one's attachment to the deceased person," the psychologist Robert Neimeyer notes (2). New theoretical models depart from the conception of the tasks of mourning as "the relinquishment of emotional ties and a stagic progression toward recovery;" instead, they recognize "the potentially healthy role of continued symbolic bonds with the deceased person" (Neimeyer 3).[62] Rather than "getting over a loss and on with life," then, mourning is defined as "living with loss" (Leader 99). Even after the bereaved has recognized and accepted the death of his or her loved one, the loss remains a felt absence in his or her life.

[62] For a comprehensive review of western theories of mourning see also Hagman and Rothaupt and Becker.

"The craziness is receding but no clarity is taking its place. I look for resolution and find none," Didion remarks shortly after the first anniversary of John's death (225). At the same time as she fears that her memories of him will lose its sharpness and fade away, she reflects that in her new life without her husband she has already made new ones that do not involve him at all. Crossing Lexington Avenue one day, she ponders the necessity of holding on to John's memory even as "keeping time by last year's calendar" is no longer possible (225). The logic that underwrites the fated attempt to go on as if the dead were still with us, Didion offers, can be brought down to this: "we try to keep them alive in order to keep them with us" (225). At the heart of grief, as Didion's year of magical thinking has revealed, there is the impossible wish and vain hope for the dead's imminent return. To Didion, the very supposition of giving up the wait feels like a betrayal not mitigated by her recognition "that if we are to live ourselves there comes a point at which we must relinguish the dead, let them go, keep them dead" (225-26). Those who are still alive, not the dead, commit the ultimate departure. What makes Didion lose "all sense of oncoming traffic" on Lexington Avenue that day is the unbearable thought that it is John, not she, who has been left behind (226).

In the passages concluding The Year of Magical Thinking, Didion invokes the broken promise of return. After she leaves the lei, a Hawaii Christmas souvenir, for her husband at St. John the Divine, she remembers that travelers who were leaving Honolulu on the Matson Lines would throw leis on the water in a gesture that anticipated their coming back. Inevitably, "The leis would get caught in the wake and go bruised and brown, the way the gardenias in the pool filter at the house in Brentwood Park had gone bruised and brown" (226). She brings up the sunken and browned leis again as she

reflects on her faiure to remember one of the rooms in her and John's house in Brentwood Park. Deeply saddened by her own forgetfulness, she comments: "The lei I left as St. John the Divine would have gone brown by now. Leis go brown, tectonic plates shift, deep currents move, islands vanish, rooms get forgotten" (226-27). She cannot prevent all these changes from happening; they all occur without her. Among the wilting flowers, disappearing islands, and forgotten rooms, even memory itself is revealed to be no more than, to borrow the novelist Andrew O'Hagan's phrase, "a place of fading togetherness" (191) to which Didion can only look back, but not return.

Like Brison's Aftermath and Didion's The Year of Magical Thinking, Alix Kates Shulman's memoir, To Love What Is: A Marriage Transformed, opens with a memory of the event that marked a turning point in the author's life and marriage. "On a moonless summer night my husband fell nine feet from a sleeping loft to the floor and did not die," Shulman remembers the July 22, 2004 accident that took place on a small Maine island where she and her husband Scott York had a summer cabin (3). As a result of her 75-year old husband's "near-fatal fall which he somehow survived," Shulman's "universe flipped over" (3; 18). She became the sole and primary caretaker of Scott who sustained traumatic brain injury. His utter dependency and Shulman's determined devotion replaced the freedom and independence that had, until then, defined their twenty-year-long marriage. Writing in the aftermath of a traumatic event, just as Brison and Didion do, Shulman describes how the accident affected her and Scott's lives and thus changed their relationship. Just as in Aftermath and The Year of Magical Thinking, in To Love What Is the author's returns to places that call up memories of the past require that she confront the consequences of what happened on the day her "fate took a turn" (166).

Specifically, in Shulman's narrative, the radical change in how she and her husband now inhabit familiar locations—the island and the studio, their loft apartment, the streets of New York—reveals the extent of the transformation in which Scott's fall resulted (56). In places that used to allow the "motley contents of [their] two disparate lives" to remain separate even as they came together, Shulman confronts the loss of her and Scott's autonomy (56). Insofar as they expose "the bizarre disjunction of then and now," these returns mark Shulman's and Scott's departure from their pre-accident lives to which they can never come back (129).

In contrast to these revisits, Scott's reappearance in Shulman's life in 1984, thirty four years after they first fell in love with each other, was a return that allowed her "to trace the past in the present" and experience the "exhilarating conjunction of then and now" (40). Shulman and Scott grew up in Cleveland where they attended the same high school. Their romance began on Shulman's first day of college when she and Scott, three years her senior, took the same class. Shulman's memories of their courtship, just as her memories of their marriage decades later, revolve around specific places in which their relationship unfolded. Although the school building where they got to know each other no longer exists, Shulman recalls its "high ceilings, tall windows, dark wooden floors, and old-fashioned oak chairs that turned into desks when you swiveled up the heavy arm" (13). She remembers entering the biology amphitheater, noticing "the twenty-year-old Scott York, blond, blue-eyed, and fabulous, sitting halfway up" and deciding to walk up the steps and sit next to him (12). Shulman's other memories of that summer—her and Scott's first kiss, their first date, and their first experience of sex—are also place memories. It was on the class trip to the Cleveland Aroboretum that Scott kissed her for

the first time (15). For their first official date, he took Shulman to "a smoky cocktail bar with live piano music and leather banquettes, at the edge of Cleveland Heights, halfway down the long hill to the city," a place, Shulman did not fail to observe, that was "more sophisticated than the high-school hangouts I was used to" (18). A motel in Cleveland's West Side was where she and Scott made love for the first time. Nearly fifty years later, Shulman, still vividly remembers "the layout of the [motel] room, the smell of woolen blankets even in summer, the Big Ben clock ticking on the night table" (18-9). Shulman's memories so firmly put her and Scott's courtship in places around Cleveland that when she talks to him on the phone from her home in New York more than three decades later Scott's voice strikes her as a "voice from another world" (37). Falling in love with Scott all over again bridges the distance between Shulman's youth in Cleveland and her adulthood in New York, however. The rekindling of their romance allows for a reconnection with the past that simultaneously upholds Shulman's ties to the places she remembers and admits the distance she has traveled from them.

As Shulman revisits the places of her and Scott's courtship figuratively rather than literally, her Cleveland recollections have the unmistakable veneer of "romantic memories of idealized youth" (36). Her and Scott's common history is founded on them. These early Cleveland memories locate the beginning, and thus the promise, of all that Shulman and Scott's relationship would become. When, in the period following her husband's fall, Shulman comes back to these places in memory, she finds comfort in them. She is reassured that there had always been a future ahead of her and Scott. In turn, Shulman's actual returns to where she and her husband felt at home during the twenty years of their marriage are painful reminders that, as a result of the accident, their

future is now foreclosed. The fall and the injuries Scott suffered ended their partnership built on mutual respect and self-sufficiency. Back in familiar places—the island where she and Scott spent their summer, their loft apartment, New York City—Shulman remembers their relationship and mourns its loss.

Long Island in Casco Bay, Maine, where Scott's accident happens, used to be Shulman's solitary summer retreat long before he and she reconnected after years of being apart. "For two decades of summers," Shulman remembers, "I came to this island by myself, in love with solitude, my only connection with the outside world weekly phone calls from the island's single pay home down near the dock or old-fashioned handwritten letters" (10). Far from the distractions of daily life in the city, she was free to concentrate and devote all her time to writing and reading. Both a refuge and a sanctuary, the island nurtured Shulman's need for contemplation and meditation. While Scott's first visit in 1984 marked the beginning of his and Shulman's "island romance," his presence during the summers that followed did not require that she give up her solitude in exchange for his company (150). Designing and building a separate studio to ensure Shulman's "privacy even when he was there" was Scott's first project after he retired (63). Her inviolable workspace during the day, the east-facing studio of pine and glass "with its steeply pitched roof forming the high ceiling of the single room, its asymmetrical fenestration, its lush mahogany floorboards of irregular width" often became a place of intimacy at night (6). Shulman and her husband liked to sleep in the small loft above the studio "in order to wake up to the exhilarating sight of sunrise and surf crashing on the rocks below" (6). As they lay in bed, they would go over the day's events and play their "special game, identifying animals and faces, as varied as the

patterns in passing clouds, in the knots of the pine boards that form the walls and ceiling" (6). Sharing these moments before sleep, Shulman writes, "was always our pleasure" (6). As a space of solitude and togetherness, separateness and intimacy, the island studio reflected the principle of independence and autonomy on which Scott and Shulman's relationship was built.

Just as on the evening of John's heart attack Didion witnesses the transformation of her and her husband's New York dining room into a site of catastrophe, on the night of July 22, 2004, Shulman sees the island studio change into "the scene of the crime" (150). In the very place that embodied Scott and Shulman's pledge to respect each other's separate needs, the equilibrium between freedom and commitment the couple always strove to maintain collapses. When Shulman wakes up in the middle of the first night after their arrival on the island, Scott is not by her side. Unable to see anything in the darkness, she calls his name but he does not answer back. With the help of the flashlight she shines "down over the low wall of the loft onto the floor below," she finally finds Scott "lying on the floor, curled up like a fetus. Naked and deathly still" (6). The scene makes Shulman remember an earlier accident that happened as Scott was building the studio. When working on the loft, he fell backward from a tall ladder; he was able to get up a moment later. Even though both the place and the height of the fall are the same, "This time," Shulman notes, her husband "is silent and immobile" (8). The accident she is witnessing is not, after all, a repetition of the previous one. The reaction of the paramedics who arrive in response to her 911 call further raises Shulman's alarm. They classify Scott's fall as Number 10 emergency and arrange a speedy transfer to the hospital. Despite the high tide that makes the nubble a difficult terrain to navigate, the

rescuers manage to carry Scott to the ambulance truck. Shulman follows in their footsteps. As she is passing Heather and Norm's house where she and Scott had dinner just a few hours ago, she marvels at how far removed that evening already seems: "Can it really have been only a few hours since we sat on that porch and laughed through dinner, carefree and confident?" (17). Shulman's new sense of alienation echoes Brison's and Didion's impressions of the distance that, in the aftermath of trauma, separates them from those who have not experienced a life-shattering event. The joy of last night's dinner now appears to her as a place she has left and cannot ever reenter: "I see through a scrim to that distant world where life proceeds by days and nights, not minute by terrifying minute; it occurs to me that we've left that calm, carefree world behind forever" (17). In light of Scott's fall, Shulman feels displaced and removed from ordinary life. Just as Brison did not set out for her morning walk expecting a sexual assault nor did Didion make the dinner fearing John's collapse, Shulman did not come to the island anticipating a disaster. The visit was to be another return to the island where they always spent their summers. Scott's accident, Shulman senses just then, does more than cut their stay short. It ends the tradition of their annual retreats and marks their departure from the world in which "passions, principles, and hard-won habits…built over a lifetime" could be taken for granted (94). On Shulman's Long Island, like on Brison's French country road and in Didion's dining room, "a life has ended" (104).

Although Shulman has her first intimation of the irrevocability of the departure while she is still on the island, she fully grasps it only after she and her husband come back home to New York. The injuries Scott sustained—broken ribs and feet, punctured lungs, internal bleeding, and blood clots in the brain—render him wholly dependent.

Upon his release from the Rusk Institute at the end of September, 11 weeks after the accident, Shulman becomes her husband's primary caregiver. Their marriage ceases to be "an experimental union of two autonomous souls" committed to look for "ways to be both together and apart" and avoid "impinging on each other's space" (90; 63; 63). As Scott and Shulman's marriage changes so does their relationship to the apartment and city in which they have lived for decades.

"Back in 1986 when we first moved in," Shulman remembers the early days of sharing a home with Scott, the loft was "as open and free as we ourselves aspired to be" (60). A vast single room with high arched ceilings, tall windows, and old oak floors, the place ideally reflected Shulman's "dream of establishing my life with Scott on a basis of openness and trust" (61). In the wall-less space furnished equally by his and her things, Scott's and Shulman's lives coexisted but did not merge. Their autonomous pursuits gave the place its unique character. The loft became an outward manifestation of the partnership Shulman and her husband have managed to build and sustain over the years. Reflective of each other, their home and marriage provided room for both separate passions and shared engagements:

> In every empty spot along the walls of our loft and on all the windowsills sit Scott's sculptures of marble, alabaster, wood, or bronze, admiringly arranged by me; and in a glass-enclosed bookcase between two windows is a shelf of leather-bound, gold-edged presentation copies of my published books, one copy of each, commissioned by him. (61)

The loft's furnishings illustrated Shulman and Scott's dedicated efforts to live their "marriage as an experimental union of two autonomous souls" (90). The way in which

they inhabited the place also sought to accommodate their individual needs. During the day, Shulman had the loft to herself. While Scott was away at work—first in his World Trade Center office and, later, after retiring, in his sculpture studio—she could claim the apartment as a room of her own, her writing space. As much as she relished her daily solitude, in the evenings Shulman took pleasure in Scott's company. After a day's work, she remembers, they would "s[i]t on the sofa in the early evening to bask in the openness of our giant room, watching the setting sun cast moving shadows of our plants and Japanese paper lanterns onto the lone curved wall" (61). In the loft, Shulman's and Scott's privacy and intimacy complemented each other, thus allowing them to thrive as individuals and as a couple.

After the accident, however, Shulman and Scott are no longer "perfect counterparts in self-sufficiency" (63). Just as their relationship does, the loft changes to accommodate Scott's new needs. In preparation for his return from the hospital, Shulman furnishes the apartment with a hospital bed and a new commode. In an attempt to make the space free of any potential "trip hazards," she gets rid of small rugs and tables, adding instead the armchair Scott has always kept in his sculpture studio (59). Whereas Shulman perceives the remodeling as a small, albeit necessary, adjustment that does not really change the loft's character, she finds the requirement that their home be open to aides and visiting nurses at all times intolerable. These "strangers in our midst" make her uncomfortable; she is "distraught by their invasive and relentless presence, oppressed by their ever-observing eyes" (62). As a result of all the comings and goings, Shulman complains, "our loft feels like Grand Central Station" (62). A safe haven and anchorage until now, the apartment turns into a place of constant transfer and movement. The quiet

and peace the couple always cherished "have been reduced to mere abstractions, as all privacy is wiped out" (63). The apartment does not feel like home any more.

When the period of intense home therapies ends and the aides leave, Shulman takes on the sole responsibility for Scott's well-being. Their newly regained privacy comes at a price, however. Because Scott cannot be left alone, Shulman must be on twenty-four-hour watch. Having to devote all her time to her husband's care, she cannot write or read unless he is asleep. The oppressive intimacy makes Shulman acutely aware that Scott's "disability renders him utterly dependent, making prisoners of us both" (63). The loft, formerly a living and working space which "over the years has accommodated meetings, dances, salons, book parties, and fund-raises" has become a closed-off place with no room for Shulman's solitary pursuits (64). Whereas in the past sharing the loft mirrored her and Scott's partnership, their compulsory togetherness in the present signals the loss of their autonomy.

At the same time as staying inside "the enclosed world of Scott's accident" isolates Shulman and her husband from the world outside, it offers them the comfort of a "precarious stability" that vanishes as soon as either of them leaves the apartment (85). As the loft has come to delineate their new place in the world, both Scott and Shulman feel disoriented and lost outside of its confine. The same dread of vulnerability and exposure that causes the widowed Didion to spend most of her time at home prevents Shulman from leaving the apartment and seeking out the company of others. Still, urged by her friends to "to return to the world and reclaim my life," Shulman makes an effort to revive her social life after Scott's condition stabilizes (85). Her infrequent outings, however, only intensify her alienation. If after her rape Brison experiences the aloness

that comes from being "surrounded by people who find it hard to understand what's so distressing," in the months following Scott's fall Shulman feels lost among her well-meaning friends who, she bitterly remarks, are "oblivious of what lies in store for them" (Brison 15; Shulman 86). Thus, every time Shulman goes out and meets people, she confronts "the distance between me and the world expanding, like continents adrift" (86). Being with her friends appears "a mere semblance of ordinary life, which had begun to appear unreal to me" (66). As a result, "usually an evening out," Shulman reflects, ends up "making me feel less like a participant than like an onlooker or, worse, a pretender" (85). The activities and places she used to enjoy before the accident now seem to lack authenticity. Although she used to be able to move between two worlds —the one she shared with her husband and the one she inhabited by herself—Shulman cannot reconcile them any more.

If Shulman finds her solitary outings deeply unsettling, she gets even more distraught on the rare occasions she and Scott venture outside together. In the loft, her husband's dependence and disorientation are manageable: he is never out of her sight. Out on the streets of New York City, in the same neighborhoods and places they walked around for years, the severity of Scott's condition becomes newly apparent to Shulman. Their first lunch after the accident marks a turning point in Scott's recovery; it also exposes its limits. On their way to a restaurant that is only a block and a half away from their apartment, Shulman must assist her husband with "cross[ing] an avenue and two side streets, negotiate[ing] the crowded sidewalk, and descend[ing] the four steps into the restaurant without mishap" (66). The shuffling Scott does not resemble the athletic man "who in his sixties twice took off in hot pursuit of teenage pickpockets, chasing them

down many blocks to the finish rather than be victimized" (66). Scott's total dependence and lost agility make Shulman remember the many trips around the city she and her husband took in the past. This brief yet arduous walk, she notes with sadness,

> is a far cry from the weekly outings to distant corners of the city we launched soon after he became an artist, when, instead of knocking off work on weekends, we had a regular Tuesday 'date' to take the subway to some unfamiliar neighborhood and explore the streets like tourists, sampling the locale wares and ethnic food, returning home to a nightcap of dancing and lovemaking. (65)

The city is no longer the locale of Shulman and Scot's romance because they inhabit it differently now. While Didion's returns to familiar places in Los Angeles and New York require her to her to face up to her husband's absence, every time Shulman wanders around the city with Scott she must come to terms the presence of "a well-meaning, loving, but helpless and clueless man" who is no longer the husband she remembers (104). Shulman and Scott's infrequent city outings are not spontaneous adventures but carefully planned excursions meant to keep him active and engaged. Rather than being her husband's companion, Shulman is his caretaker. As she navigates the city with Scott by her side, Shulman confronts the difference between who they were before the fall and who they have become in its aftermath.

Yet, it is only after she and Scott return to the island where the accident happened that Shulman takes full measure of the losses in which the fall resulted. Buoyed by the success of their recent trip to Italy, she decides to return to Long Island with Scott in order "to defiantly celebrate the second anniversary of his miraculous survival" (141).

Going back to Maine, she optimistically believes, "may somehow make things right again" (148). The visit, however, sorely disappoints Shulman's hope. Soon after their arrival, she discovers that taking care of Scott on the island is far more difficult than watching after him back home in the city. He is unable to use the primitive facilities; the ruggedness of the place exacerbates his vulnerability and dependence. Shulman catalogs all the dangers that must be averted:

> Our stairs to and from the beach are too steep and rickety for his safety; the gaslights are too complicated for him to light; the outhouse takes too long to get to; he can't negotiate the steps at night, and in the daytime, since the nubble shore is hazardously rocky, the only place safe enough for him to walk is back and forth across the beach. (149)

Scott is no longer the summer visitor who felt at home on the island. Instead, two years after his fall, he comes back as a bewildered and fragile man who needs his wife's constant care. His condition has transformed the island from a place of comforting beauty into a place of potential threat. All the activities he used to pursue there—sculpting, reading, building new structures, clearing the ground, chopping wood—are no longer viable pastimes for him (153). Contrary to Shulman's conviction that going back will attest to the miracle of Scott's survival and recovery, the return exposes the extent of Scott's decline.

Being back, in fact, makes Scott's condition worse. For the first time, Shulman becomes the object of her husband's anger and violence. Exhausted by their daily fights, she regretfully admits to feeling defeated by Scott's uncontrollable outbursts: "I'm dismayed by how badly he's deteriorated in our few days here, making him sound like

the kind of man he most abhors and would be ashamed to resemble if he knew: a wife abuser" (155). Scott's transformation into an abusive and dependent husband is accompanied by amnesia (150). Although he has been suffering from short memory loss ever since the accident, his long term memory has not been much affected. Now, however, it turns out that Scott cannot remember any of the summers he and Shulman spent on the island together. The place fails to invoke any recollections he might have of their previous visits, including the last one cut short by his fall. Scott vaguely remembers "the water lapping the beach, the waves, the sky turning orange, that house over there on the far side of the cove with the big windows," but he has no memory of his wife's company (152). Fragmentary and incomplete, Scott's island memories do not so much recapture the past as they reveal that it has been lost for him.

When Scott's confusion gets so profound that he cannot tell whether Shulman is his wife or his mother, she describes to him her own island memories "in an attempt to reorient him" (151). Remembering their common history in the very place that locates it, Shulman believes, may make the past more palpable and accessible to Scott. She starts by recalling in detail the first time he came to join her in 1984. The visit, which almost culminated in a breakup, was the beginning of their "island romance" (150). Her story finished, Shulman guides Scott around the beach house, drawing his attention to signs of the love and lives they shared there:

> I take his hand and lead him around the house to point out each improvement he's made over the years using nothing but hand tools and muscle. I show him the photo of him as a handsome youth that I keep on my desk, the picture postcards tacked on the wall that he mailed to me

> from Italy and New York, and the gifts he's brought me here over the years on his many visits. Through the window I show him the solar panels on the studio roof he once gave me on my birthday as part of his grand scheme to help me in my work, and the studio itself, which, to ensure my privacy, he had earlier designed for me and built from scratch—where, exactly two years ago, he fell to the floor, changing our lives forever. (151)

The place Shulman is showing to Scott is revealed to have been more than just a backdrop for their relationship. It has been shaped by his generosity and concern for his wife's privacy and work. Adapted to fit Shulman's particular needs, the place also houses the archive of her and Scott's past: photographs, postcards, and gifts collected over the years. All the signs of continuity notwithstanding, the island is also the site of traumatic rupture. The accident that transformed Shulman and Scott's marriage happened right here.

Because of the island's memorial duality, its capacity to invoke both the stability and shattering of Shulman and Scott's lives, the 2006 trip is not the defiant return Shulman envisioned. As she remembers her and Scott's previous stays on the island, Shulman is newly struck by the difference between their pre- and post-accident lives. Her island memories put the past and present into bold relief. Scott's physical decline, advancing amnesia, and mental impairment become more apparent in the very place where he used to exercise his self-sufficiency and independence. Since Shulman's primary responsibility is to ensure her husband's safety at all times, she must give up the freedom she has always enjoyed on the nubble. The island she remembers as her refuge

and “haven of solitude,” she bitterly remarks, “is useless to me now” (152). Despite having come back, Shulman may not resume the pleasures she has always savored during her visits. Instead, she must renounce “everything I’ve loved here: I can’t wander over the rocks to collect wild greens, can’t go down to the cove for shellfish, can’t wade in the water or check the apples on my tree, and worst of all, I can’t think or mediate or write or even read” (152-3). Bound to her husband, Shulman cannot explore the island as she once did. The place has become inaccessible to her. Being back on the nubble does not bring Shulman closer to her former life; instead, it makes her feel even farther removed from it. The second-anniversary return to the island, then, is a journey of loss, not recovery. It makes Shulman realize that she and Scott will never be able to resume the kind of lives they led before the accident.

Even the two occasions on which Shulman does manage to recapture her untroubled past lead her to recognize that “my world is elsewhere now” (41). When her friends’ offer to look after Scott while she is showing their children “how to find and identify the edible wild greens, seaweeds, and shellfish,” for the first time in three years, Shulman may wander around the island without Scott by her side (157). Unencumbered by her husband’s presence, she can “feel old age pour off of me into the all-absorbing ocean, until I am suddenly carefree and light” (158). Shulman experiences a similar release the night before she and Scott leave for New York. Having left her husband in the care of Heather and Norm, the friends in whose comfortable guest bedroom she and Scott slept the whole summer, Shulman runs back to the nubble to fetch a jar of truffle paste for the dinner dish she is preparing. As she is crossing the beach, exposed by the low tide, Shulman breathes in the sea air, marvels at the color of the sky and admires the birds

flying above. The sense of freedom intoxicates her: “I feel as buoyant and free as I’ve ever felt before. Free as a child in summer, free as a girl who has finally left home, free as a mother whose children have gone away, free as a wife whose husband if off to a conference, free as a kite that has broken loose, free as a bird riding the wind” (159). However, the elated feeling of not being tied to anyplace, anyone, or anything disappears as soon as Shulman gets back to Heather and Norm’s house where her husband is waiting for her: “‘There you are!’ cries Scott, coming toward me with his arms spread. ‘Finally! I was afraid you’d been kidnapped’” (159). Scott’s embrace cuts Shulman’s reverie short. The solitary run across the nubble, she understands just then, was but a temporary respite. Her place is with Scott now.

At the same time as the return to the island and the few brief moments of freedom it affords her require that Shulman reckon with all that has been lost in the aftermath of her husband’s fall, the visit also propels her to reconsider her and Scott’s present circumstances. She wonders what her life would be like had her husband’s accident turned out differently. Imagining the alternatives, Scott’s full recovery or death, Shulman admits, both “inspires and torments me” (160). On the one hand, she would experience “no more daily bondage, no more unrelenting responsibility”; on the other hand, her life would have “no ballast, no purpose, no love” (160). Scott’s accident put an end to Shulman’s former life, but it gave her present a new meaning. The island is both “the scene of the crime,” as Shulman calls it, and a place where her “fate took turn” (150; 166). The return to the nubble two years after Scott fell down and she lost her independence makes her realize that she must take leave of the past. The accident, Shulman is ready to allow at last, irreversibly transformed her and Scott’s lives; they can

never be resumed. Once Shulman recognizes the change's irrevocability, she is able to concede that "absurd it would be to hide from it or wish it away, much less to resist or rail against it, as if it could be undone by an act of my puny will. Not enough even to merely accept it" (166). By marking Shulman's departure from the past and enabling her to renounce the hope of reclaiming it, the return inspires her to seek fulfillment in the present. She must focus not on what is missing from her new life but on what she can still find in it. Nietzche's principle of *amor fati*, love of fate, resonates with Shulman's new resolve to "live life fully within my limitations" (166). Such an attitude, she explains, is "not a passive resignation, but an active embrace" (165-6). To love what is requires that she "struggle with it, adapt to it, make the best of it, milk it for all I can" (165; 166). Like Brison and Didion, Shulman has returned to a place from the past only to understand that there is no going back. She must leave her pre-accident life behind if she is to step into her present.

In all three texts—Brison's Aftermath, Didion's The Year of Magical Thinking, and Shulman's To Love What Is—the author's returns to places from the past encourage "healing from memory," as the critic Cassie Premo Steele calls the arduous and painful process of coming to terms with life-transforming events. In the aftermath of critical experiences, "memory," she argues, is "both a problem and a promise" (2). On the one hand, it prevents the survivor from being able to forget what happened; she is thus continuously tied to the scene of injury. On the other hand, precisely because memory repeatedly calls up the past, it enables the survivor to confront and work through the crisis. Remembering, then, may ultimately open up "visions for the future" (Premo Steele11). As Brison's, Didion's, and Shulman's memoirs suggest, returns to locations

from the past play up memory's twofold potential to either entrap or release the survivor from the events she cannot forget. Brison's return to the French town where she was attacked is a turning point in her recovery; physically present in the place to which she has been coming back in memory for the past two years, she can finally remember the assault without having to relive its violence. The vortex, Didion's term for describing the memorial evocativeness of familiar places, also points to memory's dual capacity to hinder and promote recovery from a life-altering event. Didion's first experience of the vortex without its customary effect, on the Tower C escalator at the Madison Square Garden, makes it possible for her to remember John without desperately wishing his death were undone. She realizes she must learn to live her life without him. Having returned back to Long Island on the eve of the second-anniversary of Scott's fall, Shulman also realizes that dwelling on the past and hoping to restore it prevent her from living fully in the present. In a place teeming with memories of the life she and her husband had been able to enjoy before the accident, Shulman finds meaning in their present togetherness, constrained as it s by Scott's condition. She comes to love what is. In Brison's, Didion's, and Shulman's return memoirs, then, coming back to formerly familiar places in the aftermath of a critical life event requires a reckoning with the life it shattered. As the revisit propels the acknowledgment of loss, it enables the returnee to depart from her past and turn towards present and future.

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