REVEALING THE OPEN WOUND: BODY METAPHORS IN LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS OF GRIEF

by

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ABSTRACT

In the aftermath of traumatic political events, literary representations of grief can be complex and problematic. This thesis engages with psychological and phenomenological methodologies to investigate literary representations of grief in modernist and postmodernist contexts, across selected post-World War One and post-9/11 novels. It aims to elucidate the relationship between private and political mourning within the novels, through examining the way in which metaphors of the body signify loss, highlight melancholic mourning and imagine potentialities for consolation.

The analysis of the novels draws on Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic framework for loss, and his distinction between mourning and melancholia, to highlight a divergence between representations of private and collective melancholia, and those that signify the completion of mourning. Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of embodiment is also of primary interest, and particularly his notions of intercorporeality and the flesh, which reveal the body as being central to subjectivity and inter-subjectivity. In the representations of grief examined, it is the body that reflects a tension between private and political mourning and signals a capacity to mourn through engaging with, or resisting, the world. Tropes of the resistant body, such as abject bodies, corpses, absent bodies and falling bodies, indicate a liminal space of melancholic mourning that writers portray. These body metaphors, through signifying a melancholic fracturing of identity, depict the challenges of mourning in late modernity, and the extent to which mourning within these periods indicates a shift away from traditional sources of meaning that no longer provide consolation.

This study concludes that a close examination of metaphors of the body across literary representations of grief, deepens our understanding of the politics of mourning. Writers interrogate the capacity to integrate grief when personal and collective narratives retain old identities, rather than opening to alterity.
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents: Brian Cumberland (1946-2010)

and Elizabeth Cumberland (1947-2004).

“Listen to the silence inside the illusion of the world, and you will remember the lesson you forgot, which was taught in immense milky way soft cloud innumerable worlds long ago and not even at all. It is all one vast awakened thing. I call it the golden eternity. It is perfect.”

—Jack Kerouac, Letter to Edie Parker
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INTRODUCTION

The life of the body is waiting.

Waiting always, to be heard —David St. John, Study for the World’s Body

Background and Significance of Research

The subject of representing grief in literature has been a topic of extensive scholarly interest and critique. The complexities associated with mourning in late modernity have been the subject of much critique and discussion. In recent years, many literary critics including Patricia Rae, Tammy Clewell and Nouri Gana, have focused on the psychoanalytic concept of melancholia to interpret literary representations of inconsolable mourning within this period. Other critics, such as Christina Cavedon and Greg Forter, have also highlighted the socio-political usefulness of melancholia to conceptualise a political resistance to alterity.

This thesis investigates literary representations of grief that respond to traumatic events in late modernity, specifically within the genres of post-World War One and post-9/11. I define grief as the suffering experienced in response to loss. Mourning, on the other hand, is the act of processing and integrating loss, which can be pathological or unresolved. I also draw upon Sigmund Freud’s distinction between mourning and melancholia, wherein he characterises mourning as “the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which had taken the place of one, such as one’s country, liberty, an ideal” (Mourning and Melancholia” 243). In contrast to mourning, Freud demarcates the condition of melancholia as more than an object loss, arguing that “in mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself” (246). This equates melancholia with a loss of self through an over-identification with what is lost. This thesis also focuses on instances of traumatic loss, or recollected trauma, informed by the political events in question. I define trauma, using Cathy Caruth’s definition, as “an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of … intrusive phenomena” (Unclaimed Experience 11)—the response to which can also become pathological and melancholic.

My interest in the relationship between grief and literature was first inspired by Freud’s essay “Mourning and Melancholia,” which provided a distinction between mourning and resistance to the work of mourning. This helped to elucidate literary works that grappled with protagonists who could neither express nor resolve their loss. As I initially took an interest in
the history of trauma and grief studies, I also found Caruth’s argument compelling on the incommunicability of trauma and how trauma and literature can meet the gap between the known and the unknown. As I examined the relationship between private and social spheres of grief across the past century, Kenneth Doka’s research on disenfranchised, socially excluded mourning, and the work of Jeffrey Kauffman took my interest. Kauffman links grief with shame that arises due to being expelled from the social world. Both theorists influenced my interest in the socio-political transformation of the work of mourning over the past century and its relationship to literary depictions of grief.

My thesis joins in recent scholarly debates regarding the portrayal of grief in the literature of late modernity, including literary consolations for grief and the cultural politics of mourning. The interest, in recent years, in the representations of mourning in the literature of modernism and postmodernism has sparked debate. A lack of critical consensus around interpreting the repudiation of mourning within these contexts, particularly modernist texts, reflects a collective shift away from traditional sources of consolation. In 2007, Rae examined the topic of melancholic literature, in *Modernism and Mourning*, a volume that included a range of critical responses. Some scholars in Rae’s group of essays argued how a failure to mourn, exhibited in modernist literature, indicates political progressivism. Others still contended that it reflected social conservatism. In 2011, Clewell, Gana, and Martin Middeke and Christina Wald, to cite some of the most influential critics in the field, continued to examine how literary representations of loss have reflected a melancholic refusal of consolation, instigating an interminable working through of loss through to postmodernism. This was followed by subsequent studies, such as those by Sanja Bahun, and Anne Enderwitz in recent years, which similarly draw upon melancholia to discuss a political counter-mourning and resistance to socio-political narratives of continuity. Knowing that there was already a substantial body of work discussing melancholic representations across these periods of literature, I started to take an interest in the broader implications of the way in which grief is engendered culturally. In particular, I queried how literature can explore collective challenges in relation to articulating grief, in the context of larger groups—for example, families, political structures and the media’s narrativisation of events, particularly in post-9/11 novels.

As my research started to engage with the inter-relationship between mourning and collective contexts, I took an interest in melancholia as a socio-political construct. As Clewell suggests, melancholia, through relating to how one identifies in the world, is more than a “discourse of
the private but an approach to the social” (156). Gana’s discussion of the ethico-political significance of signifying loss, made a compelling argument for the need for literature to work through catastrophic events such as 9/11. Further studies, including those by David Eng and Shinhee Han, Mari Ruti, Ronit Lentin, and Forter, all drew attention to collective spheres of melancholia. Cavedon’s recent discussion of cultural melancholia after 9/11, influenced my decision to distinguish between literary representations of individuals experiencing melancholia and a collective melancholia, evident within 9/11 literature, that responds to a resistance to grief inherent in political and inter-generational frameworks of loss. Both private and collective experiences of melancholia illustrate the inter-relationship between political and private processes of mourning in divergent yet inter-related ways—particularly in novels such as As I Lay Dying, Mrs Dalloway and Falling Man, which challenge the hegemony of collective contexts through highlighting tropes of the abject body, dissociation from embodiment and falling bodies in the aftermath of political trauma. I also selected for analysis the novels Daybreak, Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close, and Orpheus Lost for the creative ways in which loss is explored within private and political contexts. Each of my selected novels address the challenge of mourning within modern or postmodern contexts, and an inter-relationship between sanctioned mourning and the socio-political milieu.

My research was also influenced by Caruth’s characterisation of the double wound of mind and body created by the event and Laura Di Prete’s discussion of how corporeal narratives, in literature—“narratives that bear witness to the body” (19). Both consider how narratives that engage with the body can signify loss, returning focus to the body as a medium of self-expression which interacts with political traumas. As I started to examine the relationship between the mind and body across my chosen novels, centring on body metaphors, I also discovered Freud’s portrayal of the mind and body in relation to unexpressed psychic wounds, and Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of embodiment and intercorporeality. This helped me to elucidate the ways in which writers encapsulate private and political encounters and melancholic grief through a resistance to the body in the aftermath of collective trauma.

As already mentioned, my intention at the outset of this research was, firstly, to identify the norms and practices of political and private mourning in late modernity and the relationship between them, as represented across selected literary works; secondly, to examine how the extent to which the psychoanalytic concept of melancholia draws out representations of resistant mourning within these novels; thirdly, to understand the socio-political usefulness of melancholia and how this related to fiction; and fourthly, to investigate how metaphors of
embodiment signified tropes of resistant loss, and illuminated representations of both political and private melancholia across the selected fiction.

On this basis, four research questions were formulated:

1. What is the relationship between political and private mourning, as represented in selected works of fiction?

2. To what extent can Freud’s distinction between mourning and melancholia draw out representations of resistant mourning across the chosen texts?

3. How does melancholia, as a socio-political concept pertaining to collective grief, reflect the themes of socio-political grief within the novels?

4. How do body metaphors signify the relationship between political and private mourning, and mourning and melancholia, within the chosen novels?

This thesis will address a gap within discussions of literary mourning through focusing on the ways in which writers represent the body to portray various forms of grief. Through this, it will determine how subversive representations of the body can interrogate collective frameworks around alterity and identity that influence the process of grief. For example, the post-war novels under discussion challenge identities of heroic self-containment, while the post-9/11 fiction examines political notions of alterity. This study also aims to address a gap in the current research on resistant mourning in literature through focusing on the cultural ramifications of generations and cycles of melancholia. My thesis will draw a comparison between representations of melancholic mourning on a personal level that preserve the loss of private identity and resists the Other and representations of what I term collective melancholia. Collective melancholia is defined as collective identities that resist alterity and thus perpetuate conflict without self-reflexive critique.

In contrast to Clewell, who perceives postmodernist writers of grief fiction as continuing to refuse consolations for mourning, I highlight a distinction between modernist and postmodernist mourning to which the selected writers of post-9/11 fiction draw attention. I argue that, while continuing to challenge the potentialities of mourning through politically resistant frameworks, postmodern representations of grief can also draw attention to the way in which collective patterns emerge out of modernist melancholic tropes. They instead perpetuate cycles of loss through unresolved inter-generational grieving and political dichotomies that exclude the Other. In postmodern narratives, writers start to navigate what
Middeke and Wald describe as “a commitment to political and ethical questions” (8). In doing so, they indicate and imagine where consolation might arise from opening to alterity. This thesis investigates how the literature under discussion represents the relationship between political and private mourning through the body, as a medium through which both subjectivity and alterity, are negotiated.

**Purpose and Methodology**

This primary purpose of this thesis is to discuss mourning and melancholia across selected fiction, to investigate the relationship between private and political mourning. As the objective of this study was to look critically at the change in collective responses to political events in late modernity, novels written in the aftermath of World War One and 9/11 were chosen, as these reflect modernist and postmodernist temporal periods. World War One signalled the advent of high modernism and impacted the world globally. It was an era during which writers interrogated a socio-cultural absence of narrative space for vulnerability, death and the injured mind and body— the material consequences of war that were obscured by narratives of masculine heroism and invulnerability. The 9/11 novels, conversely, reflect the challenges within postmodern contexts of grieving within inter-generational and political contexts of unresolved mourning, and of political resilience and resistance to the Other—a resistance that I define as collective melancholia.

This discussion will focus specifically on body metaphors and how they represent mourning and melancholia and it will draw out a politics of resistant loss portrayed across my selected fiction. It will be argued that body metaphors indicate a resistance to mourning that is reflected through representations of the body in pain and corporeal dissociation—a dissociation that signals a mind-body fracture and a rupture of personal and political identities. Tropes of the body, such as abject bodies, corpses, absent bodies and falling bodies, highlight a liminal space of melancholic mourning that writers portray to draw attention to the challenge of mourning in late modernity. The novelists that have been selected for this study depict a connection between a failure to mourn and a resistance to the body, as the body reflects social agency and continuity in the aftermath of loss. This study also refers to a wider scope of scholarship surrounding the psychology of melancholia and the phenomenology of embodiment, as well as post-war and post-9/11 tropes that I will focus on in the next chapter.
As many of the novels highlight a relationship between identity, loss and the body, in relation to public and private mourning, my individual analyses consider the ideological nuances of representing gender and race through metaphors of embodiment and grief. However, given my intention to distinguish more generally between public and private mourning and to investigate body metaphors, this study focuses more predominantly on examining the trope of the melancholic body. The scope of this study is also limited to six novels and to two events in the interest of providing a close analysis of the novels that I have included. I also chose to compare two politically influential events that reflect modernist and postmodernist contexts, rather than focusing on the myriad of events that would also be representative. My conclusion will briefly consider some alternate approaches to the literature beyond the scope of this study.

In order to highlight the way in which writers represent grief through the body, this thesis draws upon psychological and phenomenological methodological frameworks. I employ Freud’s distinction between mourning and melancholia to highlight representations of resistant mourning in private and political spheres, and how they relate to subjectivity and alterity—as melancholia entails a resistant, egoic attachment to an identity or ideal, inherently based on an exclusion of otherness. Merleau-Ponty, whose work I also draw upon, is useful to exploring how the body is situated in both the public and private spheres, and therefore reflects lived experiences and inter-relationships in the world. Other theorists, including Judith Butler and Julia Kristeva, also contribute to this discussion of the tropes of mourning and embodiment, in relation to melancholia and political alterity.

For the purpose of providing a close analysis, three novels were selected from a cross-section of post-World War One novels, and three from the post-9/11 genre. These were chosen on the basis that they portray a relationship between political and private mourning, and that they use body metaphors that highlight a subversive response to political consolations for mourning. These novels challenge the shift in private and collective identities in the aftermath of these events, articulating the nuances of personal and political resistance to mourning. This thesis will examine metaphors of embodiment within these novels—such as abject bodies, corpses, bodies in pain, tropes of corporeal dissociation and falling bodies—to discuss how melancholic mourning is highlighted through representations of corporeality.
Structure

The remaining chapters in this thesis are organised in the following way. Chapter One will provide an overall discussion of the key themes examined across the thesis in relation to novels from post-World War One and post-9/11 contexts, that focus on grief. It will draw out the methodological framework and highlight some of the key tropes surrounding the representation of body metaphors in relation to the politics of World War One and 9/11, also outlining where the selected novels fit into modernist and postmodernist literary fiction.

Chapter Two will introduce Vance Palmer’s Daybreak, a post-war novel that highlights an interesting tension between the modes of pastoral and melancholic literature, to represent grief. In Chapter Three, I discuss William Faulkner’s anti-pastoral post-war novel, As I Lay Dying, to examine how his melancholic representation of gothic despair characterises an age of loss that lacks the creative capacity for renewal. Chapter Four focuses on the politics of Virginia Woolf’s Mrs Dalloway, which portrays melancholic mourning to draw out polarities between gender identities in the aftermath of war.

In Chapter Five, I begin my discussion of postmodern novels by analysing Don DeLillo’s Falling Man, a novel that portrays mourning in postmodernism as liminal and complex, representing the exigencies of mourning within the context of media narrativisation and hyper-spaces. In Chapter Six, I evaluate Jonathan Safran Foer’s Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close, a novel that uses literary representations of intercorporeality and the mode of comedy to contrast mourning and melancholia in relation the body and the world, exploring shared spaces of mourning through community engagement. Lastly, in Chapter Seven, discussion of Janette Turner-Hospital’s Orpheus Lost will draw together the themes of mourning and melancholia to examine the literary possibilities of consolation through alterity, in her postmodern version of the myth of Orpheus. My concluding chapter will summarise the themes encountered in each chapter and consider the implications of this study.

Overall, this thesis offers a new framework for examining modernist and postmodernist representations of loss through investigating how writers use body metaphors to convey melancholic mourning, and how they imagine possibilities for consolations of mourning through awareness of the body in the world. My comparison between the post-war and post-9/11 novels examines how private and political melancholic mourning is inter-related and
reflected through portrayals of a mind-body fracture, revealed through tropes of the melancholic body in pain.
Chapter One: Revealing the Open Wound: Exploring the Methodology

_Literary creation is that adventure of the body and signs that bear witness to the affect—to sadness as imprint of separation and beginning of the symbol’s sway—_Julia Kristeva, _Black Sun_

This preliminary chapter will address some of the key themes that this thesis will navigate. This chapter will discuss representations of the body and grief, within the novels under consideration. I argue that the novels this thesis examines interrogate collective paradigms of meaning-making and narrative construction that overshadow private encounters with loss and obscure the capacity to mourn. This thesis focuses on the tensions represented between public and private mourning, which I will read through a framework of personal and collective melancholia and the interaction between psychic pain and embodiment. Consideration will also be given to the relationship between grief and its expressivity and to demonstrating how body metaphors in my selected novels, and particularly a portrayal of bodily dissociation, highlight a socially sanctioned and incommunicable, melancholic mourning. Representations of the body will be examined in relation to narrative subjectivity and self-identity, where the disavowal of the body attests to a narrative exclusion or misplaced cultural identity.

This chapter will explore and highlight key tropes within the thesis and contextualise the novels that will be examined. I will firstly discuss the relationship between body metaphors and their representation within literature that addresses trauma, highlighting the relevant ideas Maurice Merleau-Ponty, upon whom I draw to interpret the body in grief. The literary trope of the melancholic body will be explored in the next section through a Freudian lens, particularly nuancing how it relates to grief and narrative subjectivity. Lastly, this chapter will introduce the reader to the socio-political context of post-World War One and post-9/11 representations of melancholic grief and the body, with an overview to how this will be applied in the forthcoming chapters. My selected novels reflect genres of literary representations of grief, post-war and post-9/11, that I discuss in this chapter and have been selected due to how they represent interminable grief through the body. The metaphors signifying embodied grief that I highlight in the novels, draw out a discussion of mourning that centres on the challenges, as well as the potentialities, that writers explore for grieving in modern and postmodern contexts.
The selected novels represent narratives of loss within the contexts of post-war and post-9/11. I have specifically chosen these genres as they depict a contrast between grief within modernist and postmodernist contexts and correspond to cultural shifts that relate to private and collective identity. World War One represents a time when social responses to mourning and bereavement were changing and collective structures and ideologies were being challenged, presenting themes in literature of private identity and expression. The event of 9/11 is a more contemporary encounter with loss and highlights issues of cultural alterity and how collective and political identities and histories, and their response to the Other, can impact encounters with loss. My focus is on those works that I found to be more illustrative of these themes and that particularly emphasise a relationship between private and collective mourning within these contexts. The order of discussion evokes a spectrum within this relationship, ranging from portraying political and personal self-sufficiency in *Daybreak*, through to highlighting instances of shared mourning and incorporating alterity in *Orpheus Lost*.

The post-war novels represent the challenge of private mourning in late modernity and focus on a private and collective dissociation from the body, reflecting a melancholic mourning. The first novel discussed, *Daybreak*, portrays a tension inherent in the pastoral mode, when a retreat to nostalgic ideals of the past is disrupted by post-war trauma and melancholia. Discussion of this novel is followed by an analysis of *As I Lay Dying*, a novel that is distinctly anti-pastoral, which I read as a literary journey into what is resisted in the collective unconscious, that Faulkner accentuates as melancholic. Finally, *Mrs Dalloway* goes, arguably, deeper into this collective wounding of unvoiced mourning, representing a dissonance between gender roles and mourning and a pervasive voicelessness of grief and vulnerable expression in the post-war context. I read each of these novels, inimitably, through body metaphors that delineate a mind-body fracturing inherent to collective power structures.

In the post-9/11 novels that I attend to, I continue to focus on the relationship between the body and melancholia, through an examination of collective melancholia and displacement. I will explore how this impacts upon mourning and intercorporeality and the embodied relationships between self and Other across the novels. I read *Falling Man* through focusing on the theme of collective melancholia in familial and political contexts, examining how they impact a private negotiation of loss. In the chapter on *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, inter-familial and intra-cultural melancholia will be discussed through outlining how the
relationship between the body, intercorporeality and place depicted, differentiates melancholia and the potentiality to integrate loss as a community. The final novel, Orpheus Lost, is discussed as a re-telling of archetypal tropes of mourning inherent in the myth of Orpheus and centres on many of the themes of gender, power, media representation and alterity encountered in the previous novels, but with a focus on bridging separation through ethical accountability for the Other.

Through representing a separation between belief systems and their material expression, writers depict through body metaphors how collective narratives and images, media and political ideologies, have concealed a personal engagement with mourning. Narratives written in the aftermath of World War One reveal a suffering of the body and psyche caused by human sacrifice for ideology, interrogating a socio-cultural absence of narrative space for vulnerability, death and the body after the war. In this context, an authentic expression of mourning, particularly for returning soldiers, is socially excluded and relegated to the interior worlds of characters. The novels resist consolation in existing frameworks of meaning, such as religion, science and aesthetic capitalism and a patriarchal lineage, signifying an interminable, melancholic mourning.

Following on from this, the novels responding to 9/11 that I examine continue to portray an absence of space for mourning within cultural frameworks, responding to a historical and political context of unresolved mourning and political resilience and resistance to the Other—what I define as a collective melancholia. These contexts of melancholia, highlighted by writers, are reinforced culturally through family patterns and political, cultural and national identities, including representations of identity through the media, in response to mourning the event of 9/11 and subsequent terrorist attacks. The novels under discussion depict an additional challenge to mourning posed by an ‘image culture’ that narrativises collective events in repetitive loops, rendering personal grief and a relationship to the Other to the unconscious mind and concealed in the body.

Throughout the thesis, writers’ representations of the body will be examined through the lens of phenomenological theory, as well as a socio-political framework around melancholia. Writers situate grief and awareness of the Other, in the body and the phenomenological realm of lived experience. In my analysis, I draw upon Merleau-Ponty, who argues that the body is situated in the world and within a relational ontology with others. The body, essentially, is a medium through which the world is accessed and experienced. The novels feature psychic
anguish in relation to grief through the trope of the dissociated body, which entails a loss of subjectivity, as the body is connected to what is being experienced—to one’s authorial recognition as a subject in the world.

The psychoanalytic and socio-political concept of melancholia I draw upon, indicates an inter-connection between bodies and mourning that the novels highlight Sigmund Freud’s conceptualisation of mourning and melancholia, discussed in Section 2 of this chapter, is important in situating my definitions of private and collective melancholia and the related implications of melancholia upon the psyche, body and culture. His notion of the work of mourning entails an ability to integrate mourning in the psyche—which pertains to knowing and becoming subjectively expressive in respect to one’s grief. Melancholia, conversely, constitutes a resistance to loss, where grief has become an ego loss that is relegated to the unconscious mind. The novels I examine portray private grief as melancholic. They depict an incommunicable mourning and lost subjectivity that is inter-related with lost ideals and identifications, and manifest in corporeal dissociation. The collective melancholia examined within post-9/11 novels addresses unresolved losses at the level of culture and personal history, that conflict with acknowledging and working through mourning. This disavowal from grief and resistance to the Other derives from cultural, familial and media narratives that resist alterity, perpetuating both melancholia and conflict.

The aim of this thesis is to cross these two eras of literature, that reflect cultural shifts in mourning practices, so as to examine how writers situate the relationship between personal grief and a political context and how this impacts upon the work of mourning. An analysis of these eras, reflected within literary responses, explores how the representation of mourning has shifted from modernism to postmodernism. The potentiality of either successful mourning, or melancholia, is revealed through body metaphors that pose a relationship to corporeality that either suppresses or engages agency and authorial subjectivity. As melancholia retains and protects what is being lost, I read the novels as being melancholic and exploring what has been collectively relegated to the interior and unconscious and dissociated from, both personally and collectively: grief and the body. The post-war narratives illustrate the impact of hegemonic systems that marginalise grief work and subjectivity of individuals, including returning soldiers and women. Through a modernist politics that interrogates collective discourses, these novels reclaim narrative space from collective belief systems that hold captive both the body and subjective identity—they elicit an interiorised, melancholic mourning. Where the post-war novels portray the challenges of
integrating grief at the personal level, the 9/11 literature highlights gaps around mourning within the history into which one is born—including family, culture and belief systems—that create a milieu of unresolved grief. These two eras of fiction provide a divergent yet interconnecting study of how writers represent melancholia, embodiment and agency in relation to private and collective identity and narrativisation.

Across both genres of fiction, the body, as a medium between personal and social realms, communicates the inexpressible grief that writers indicate. It signifies the material devastation of belief systems that perpetuate conflict. Novelists depict the necessity of reclaiming a personal and felt connection to grief within a social context, to grieve and recognise and respond ethically to the pain of the Other. The integration of personal and collective grief involves individuating from belief systems that disenfranchise the expression of grief, through awareness of the body as an anchor in the world.

Section 1 Body Metaphors in Literary Representations of Grief

The link between the body metaphor and literature has been discussed by many theorists and literary critics. The prominent trauma theorist Cathy Caruth, articulates the relationship between literature, grief and meaning-making. In Unclaimed Experience, she writes that “it is at this specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience and the language of literature meet” (3). She describes traumatic experiences as enacting a “double wound” of both mind and body, which is relevant to the way in which writers draw out the dissociated and wounded body as a reflection of suffering in the psyche.1 In “Foreign Bodies”, Laura Di Prete also addresses a relationship between trauma, corporeality and textuality, arguing that corporeality is a central aspect of a textual portrayals of working through trauma. Di Prete describes how representing traumatic grief entails, in many novels, a speaking and writing through the body and returning to the body as a medium of self-expression and self-empowerment within narrative (11). Di Prete defines literature that merges trauma and the body as “corporeal narratives”—narratives of grief and trauma that “show an explicit commitment to the body and its story” (2). What my selected novels emphasise, through drawing awareness to the body, is the lived reality of grief beyond abstractions.

1 In Unclaimed Experience, Caruth discusses a narrative representation of Hiroshima that uses body metaphors to convey grief experienced after the political event. She suggests that, in this depiction of collective loss, “the erasure of the event takes place in the historical and social situation of the integrated body” (33).
Merleau-Ponty, whose understandings of the body and relationships between bodies, underpins my discussion of grief and corporeality in literature, situates interactions in the sphere of experiential ontology. His notion of intercorporeality, which I draw upon throughout this thesis, foregrounds the social nature of the body and how it relates to the world. The term ‘intercorporeality,’ was first introduced in his essay “The Philosophy and His Shadow,” to describe the way in which, when people interact, they are “like organs of one single intercorporeality” (Signs 168). What Merleau-Ponty identifies and argues is that the body is a means for having a world and a medium between self and Other. He draws attention to the materiality of alterity that my chosen writers allude to—the way in which intersubjectivity and intercorporeality are more than concepts, as they are grounded in the experiential structures of bodies. Merleau-Ponty highlights a fundamental relationship between body and world that draws out the ways in which public and private grief interrelate, and how bodies interact, in lived relationships within the world. Another concept that becomes of interest to my discussion is Merleau-Ponty’s later articulation of the “flesh” of the world in The Visible and the Invisible, which constitutes flesh as interplay between subject and object, internal and external. In his theory of flesh, the most essential feature is its reversibility—the exchange between the inside and outside, the subjective and objective, the touching and the touched, the seeing and the seen. Flesh, for Merleau-Ponty, is reconstituted beyond the physical body, re-conceptualising the body as extending into the world.

For Merleau-Ponty, body awareness and consciousness within the world corresponds to intentional action and the subjective association with “I can,” rather than “I think” (137). It is the converse of this that writers interrogate in relation to melancholic mourning, framed around characters and discourses that are centred on thought or habitual action. Most of William Faulkner’s characters, for example, cannot connect to the private, visceral feelings of grief, or to their bodies, as they are engaged in perpetual action toward rigid, ascetic ideals—a trope that mimics soldiers at war. Intentional and conscious, rather than habitual, action necessitates a connection between mind and the body and a recognition of the body as situated within the world and within intercorporeal relationships. As Merleau-Ponty explains: “I am conscious of my body via the world,” just as “I am conscious of the world through the medium of my body” (The Phenomenology of Perception 82). The body is a communicator of subjectivity, a “point of view on the world” (70), just as it is “both an expression of intentionality and a reflection of all expressive operations and acquired views which constitute the cultural world” (388). This perspective links one’s being-in-the-world, to living
and acting through the body as a medium of subjectivity and socio-political expression. Merleau-Ponty’s writings about the body directly correlate to the materiality that my selected writers situate grief within, distinguishing from the mental constructions and ideals of consolation that they interrogate. To achieve narrative agency in mourning, across the novels, is connected to becoming aware of the body in time and place and enacting corporeal agency. The capacity to become aware of habitual movement, and to move towards intentional action and body awareness, is highlighted in relation to incorporating private and political grief.

In the novels I discuss, a distinction between mourning and melancholia is engaged in through the bodies through representations of the body. The lived body, in time and space, adapts to the invitation of the world that is implicit in experiential embodiment, constituting a nexus between the roles of active agent of perception and the passive object of perception by others. The melancholic bodies that many novelists portray is, consequently, resistant to the world and self-enclosed, desiring separation from other bodies. This trope portrayed metaphorically across the novels through bodies that are rigid, impenetrable, self-sequestered and displaced from the external world. The post-9/11 literature that I draw upon for discussion, challenges this self-enclosed, melancholic disposition through themes of intercorporeality, signifying a relationship between opening to alterity and opening to mourning. Suzanne Cataldi, who draws upon Merleau-Ponty’s theory of flesh to discuss grief, writes that “grief reveals how intimately woven and incorporated others are, into the fabric of our own lives” (197). She argues that we cannot make sense of grief and separation until we register “our intercorporeal bonds” (197).

Judith Butler’s discussion of the relationship between the body, ethics and grief, relates to a connection between the body and the world portrayed within my chosen novels. She writes, in her appraisal of 9/11, *Precarious Life*, that the body is “constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere” as it is [g]iven over from the start to the world of others, it bears their imprint” (26). She argues that, because of this, “we understand the world through our bodies” (26). To Butler, grief and the body are inextricably linked with sociality, a vulnerability to the Other that interrupts the self-conscious account of ourselves as autonomous and in control, as “the very ‘I’ is called into question” (23). Here, Butler emphasises the ways in which the body is unavoidably socially inscribed and how bodies already interact in a relationship, comparable to Merleau-Ponty’s intercorporeality. This trope of intercorporeality is
emphasised by many of the 9/11 novels in relation to a corporeal subjectivity that is accepted or rejected, impacting relationships with others in the world, privately and politically.

It is what Butler calls the “unconscious imprint of primary sociality” (*Precarious Life* 28–29), that becomes a part of the politics of grief within the literary representations of grief. The body is a source of splitting from the Other through belief systems and collective conflicts. In being entrenched in discourse through gender and racial roles, as some novels explore, it also presents a potential for ethical reconnection. Butler emphasises this fundamental interconnection between self and Other that arises from collective events and in moments of grief, when we are “forced to appreciate how far our ties with others constitute who we are” (22). She argues that the wound is both material and that it also “testifies to the fact that I am impressionable, given over to the Other in ways that I cannot fully predict or control” (46), recognising an intrinsic vulnerability to the Other in the world.

With the body as a bridge between the self and the world, grief work oscillates between integrating, feeling and letting go through body awareness and ethical agency; and a melancholic attachment to loss, manifest in corporeal dissociation, segregation from others and the perpetuation of unconscious suffering. Novelists propose a connection between connecting to private narratives of grief, and resolving and building inclusive relationships within community. Confronting, through literature, what is concealed culturally and revealed through the body in pain, opens what Tammy Clewell describes as a “social space and shared language for grief, a literary mourning discourse” (14).

**Section 2 Melancholia and Corporeality: Narrativising Concealed Wounds**

Melancholia has an extensive and compelling history in relation to its definition and conceptualisation. Tracing back to antiquity, melancholia was linked to the body as well as the psyche, as well as to internal and external causes. Understandings of the relationship between the body and melancholia have altered significantly over time. Initial notions included the theory of the four humours of Hippocratic medicine prior to the Renaissance, in which melancholy was linked to a physical excess of black bile; and during the Enlightenment period when it was espoused as a disease of the body and seen as a system of pipes through which blood circulated (Radden; Lawler). Earlier conceptualisations focused on the behavioural and bodily aspects of melancholia, up until the Romantic era, when it was linked to subjectivity and thought to, idealistically, “initiate a re-evaluation of the beauty of life in the face of ever-present mortality” (Cavedon 51). In the nineteenth century,
distinctions were made between masculine and feminine states of melancholy and between melancholy and melancholia as normal, or abnormal, respectively (Radden 33, 48).

In her discussion in *The Nature of Melancholy*, Jennifer Radden notes that the extensive history of melancholia and its definitions, leading up to modern-day depression and the resurgence of melancholia through postmodern writing. This attests to its irreducibility as a stable concept. As Raddan argues, “melancholia cannot connote (all of) these distinct and disparate states and conditions” (48) that have been attributed to it over the course of history. As such, in elucidating a framework of melancholia, linked to incongruent and evolving meanings throughout history, it is important to clarify how melancholia is conceived within this thesis in relation to literary representations of unresolvable grief. This thesis focuses on the terminology of melancholia deriving from Freudian history of the body and psyche, as well as in relation to more recent conceptualisations of a socio-political application of melancholia. Both theoretical perspectives espouse a link between melancholia, narrativising mourning and corporeal subjectivity that my chosen novelists delineate. This section will examine the connection between conceptualisations of the psyche and the body and how melancholia, as a construct of resistant and unconscious mourning, is represented as a disavowed subjectivity.

Sigmund Freud’s seminal essay on mourning, “Mourning and Melancholia,” was the first to recognise a distinction between mourning and melancholia within the human psyche. It is widely accepted that Freud’s essay marked an entry point for academic debate around the topic of grief and mourning, within the psychological lexicon (Walter and McCoyd; Granek; Hall). It provided a primary theoretical paradigm from which contemporary grief research is based. In “Mourning and Melancholia,” Freud describes what he calls the work of mourning, which involves integrating loss within the psyche and freeing up libidinal attachments. When mourning is successful, Freud argues, the ego maintains a covert relationship to the deceased. Successful completion of mourning implies being able to work with and complete one’s grieving process within a social conceptual and consolatory framework, allowing the “work of mourning” to culminate, so that “the ego becomes free and uninhibited again” (“Mourning and Melancholia” 245). Stephen Frosh elucidates this aspect of the work of mourning clearly. He writes that mourning “integrates the object into the subject’s psychic life, dissolving it so that it becomes a part of the subject” (52). When unsuccessful, however, the subject succumbs to melancholia, wherein the ego withdraws libido and continues to identify with
the lost object that is preserved and unmourned—the object loss transfers into an ego loss. In *Mourning and Modernism*, Patricia Rae describes melancholia as “unresolvable state of grief, self-criticism, and self-blame” (14), an ongoing and pathological relationship with that which has been identified as lost.

Melancholia has an element of the unknown to it, in the sense that the loss that is mourned is opaque and remains unconscious. As Freud describes it, the lost object is “internalised and withdrawn from consciousness, in contradistinction to mourning, in which there is nothing unconscious about the loss” (“Mourning and Melancholia” 245). In *The Psychic Life of Power*, Butler examines and elucidates the condition of melancholia further. She writes that “the object is not only lost, but that loss itself is lost, withdrawn and preserved” (183). Butler contends that there can be a productive or a debilitating form of melancholia depending on the cultural context. I argue that many of the writers I examine, such as Virginia Woolf and Janette Turner-Hospital, challenge the categorisation of melancholia as necessarily being pathological, attributing it to the potentiality to create or stay resistant to the consolations for mourning reflected in the status quo. While melancholia is related to an unconscious loss and loss of the ego’s subjectivity, the collective melancholia that I will describe, pertains to a collective disavowal of the work of mourning. In this case, subjects have inherited a history of melancholia, silenced losses and conflicts that further obscure a knowability of personal loss that is required to effectively mourn. I will discuss collective melancholia further in Section 4.

In *Mourning and Melancholia*, Freud writes that melancholia “behaves like an open wound” (253), as subjects repeat what they have forgotten the origin of. This conceptualisation draws out the paradox within my chosen novels of unconscious mourning, reflected through corporeal wounding. Freud has also noted some other key words in connection with melancholy, in earlier drafts, framing it as a “wound,” “internal haemorrhage” and “a hole in the psyche.” To Freud, the melancholic is unable to mourn, process and integrate grief due to

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2 The loss itself, according to Freud, can be multifarious and involve the loss of a loved person, or “the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one’s country, liberty, an ideal, and so on” (“Mourning and Melancholia” 252).

3 Trauma has also been described in reference to both physical and psychic wounding. Charles Webel accounts for the etymology of trauma in *Terror, Terrorism and the Human Condition*, as arising from the Greek word “wound.” He describes trauma as “a sharp penetration of the elaborately constructed mechanisms of unconscious defenses of a person subjected to sudden, unnerving and horrifying jolt to their system” (83). Webel notes how dictionary definitions encapsulate both the physical and emotional manifestations of trauma. This thesis will examine the inter-connection of both.

4 These words are a part of Freud’s earlier “Draft G: Melancholia,” written in 1895, and signal some of his initial notions, that perceived melancholia as a fracturing of the psyche.
the unconscious nature of this affliction. In a similar vein, Butler argues that, in melancholic mourning, “there is no final breaking of the attachment; there is, rather, the incorporation of the attachment as identification” which is a psychic form of preserving the object” that is “made coextensive with the ego itself” (*The Psychic Life of Power* 167). Where giving up the object is incorporation, internalising it is “a way to disavow that loss” (167). In the novels that are examined, mourning is depicted as an oscillation between a melancholic resistance to loss that causes a dissociation from the world, body and pain, and a consolatory mourning that involves inter-connection with others and a recognition of the body. A relationship to the body permits a relationship to the world and to the work of mourning, allowing an incorporation of loss.

Freud makes strong links within his work that connect the mind and body within psychoanalytic illnesses, including melancholia. The manifestation of melancholia, he noted, can be somatic, subjective and affective. Of interest to this thesis is his study on hysteria decades earlier, which illuminates a relationship between the body, grief and subjectivity within language. In *Studies on Hysteria*, Freud and Josef Breuer suggest that hysteria is caused by traumatic experiences that have not been completely integrated into the psyche. In the case of hysterics, memories resurface through a symptomatic acting out in which the body expresses the memories in a language that consciousness cannot decipher. In her study of hysteria, Monique David-Menard writes about the relationship between the body and the unconscious, formulating this in terms of a language of the unconscious mind. Noting Freud’s opinion about the hysterical body, its somatic symptoms and language, she writes that “what is played out in the [hysterical] body takes the place of a discourse that cannot be uttered” (3). She argues that the body is a site of language, wherein trauma is expressed through the reactions of the hysterical body—where outbursts, screaming and crying tell a tale of psychic wounding. This is comparable to Butler’s description of melancholia as an acting-out of what is unexpressed: “the miming of the death it cannot mourn” (*The Psychic Life of Power* 142).

Relating to hysteria and the body, Elisabeth Bronfen defines hysteria as a “language of discontent” (*The Knotted Subject: Hysteria and Its Discontents* 421). She describes the traumatic causes of hysteria, particularly the fear of violation, as a reaction to personal and cultural discontent. Bronfen argues that the message communicated by the hysteric is one of vulnerability: vulnerability of the symbolic, of identity and, above all, “the vulnerability of the body, given its mutability and mortality” (xiii). Further to the link between trauma and
subjectivity, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud cites work on hysteria when discussing the trauma experienced by World War One veterans, challenging the cultural assumption that this trauma arose from purely physical symptoms. He writes that “the symptomatic picture presented by traumatic neurosis approaches that of hysteria,” yet “surpasses it … in its strongly marked signs of subjective ailment” and “far more comprehensive general enfeeblement and disturbances of mental capacities” (12). In the novels I discuss, body metaphors of pain and melancholia challenge collective belief systems, narratives and consolatory frameworks that silence a personal connection, language and the knowability of loss, such as dissociating beliefs around masculine heroic strength, religious and ascetic idealism, as well as violent and desensitising narratives created by the media.

In his essay “The Ego and the Id,” written in 1923, Freud expanded his discussion of mourning to depathologise melancholia, through constituting it as a necessary part of the work of mourning and, in fact, the “sole condition under which the id can give up its objects” (29). As Butler has argued, these later revisions encapsulate the impossibility of completed mourning, as Freud equates the final severance of the lost Other in the self to a dissolution of the ego (*The Psychic Life of Power* 196). In building on his early definition, Freud also makes a notable connection between the ego and the body that elucidates a relationship between the body and melancholia. He writes that “the ego is first and foremost a bodily ego” (“The Ego and the Id” 26). As it is derived from sensations that spring from the body, it is also a mental projection of the surface of the body—thus, the melancholic impoverishment of the ego also entails the diminution of the self-perception of the body, that is both personal and political.

The trope of a lost body connection across the fiction I examine, is a signifier of melancholic mourning that also reveals the site of political loss that the writers emphasise. As the ego cannot find consolation, expression of loss and solidarity of identity, the body, through which the world is experienced, is similarly excluded. A prevalent theme in the representation of melancholia in the novels, is corporeal dissociation and a transitional relationship to embodied identity. For example, *Daybreak* features a melancholic returning soldier, Sievright, who cannot place himself in the aftermath of war and feels a disconnect between his heroic identity as a commander, and his more vulnerable tendencies, which creates a disconnect from his body and a rupture between these seemingly incongruent identities—the experience of “two selves” (Palmer 176). In *Falling Man*, which features collective melancholia, there is a similar doubling, but of exterior contexts and spaces. In the liminal
space of his recent trauma, the protagonist, Keith, experiences a dissociation from his body and place—trapped between the hyper-spaces he occupies and his previous domestic space, that no longer feels like home, he is only “half there” (DeLillo 213). Both protagonists are in a space of unresolved grief and trauma that is directly inter-related to their cultural contexts.

In her examination of melancholia in Black Sun, Julia Kristeva explores how melancholia relates to challenges in communicating within social life. According to Kristeva, those suffering from melancholia are “foreigners in their maternal tongue,” as they are alienated and disinvested in language, suffering from an asymbolia that entails being “no longer capable of translating or metaphorising” (Black Sun 53, 9, 42). Melancholia, for Kristeva, necessitates facing the gap in which signification arises. This forces the subject into a position of splitting and dissociation. Returning to hysteria and how it relates to melancholia and communication, the literary historian Sander Gilman frames hysteria as a response to power and sites of control, as much as being about communication and entry into the symbolic order and, importantly, narrativising through the body. He notes that the cure for many hysterical women occurred when they took back control of language. In the case of the physician Josef Breurer’s patient, Anna O., for example, who exhibited hysterical symptoms and resisted her father’s language, it was concluded that “speaking German meant integration into a cultural identity [she] wished to reject, the patriarchy in which she was an immobilised daughter” (Gilman 319). As she began to verbalise, Anna O’s symptoms were relieved, but only cured when she took complete control of language and subjectivity.

Melancholia and hysteria are, in a sense, antithetical neuroses. Hysteria encompasses a pronounced expression of energy and emotional excess through the body; melancholia, on the other hand, tends toward inaction, atrophic energy, as well as social and emotional withdrawal. Yet both are conditions of wounded subjectivity that reflect, through the body, psychic loss. In both neuroses, the body is a means of communication and political expression, of unconscious and socially omitted grief. Writers harness a language of

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5 In The Cassandra Complex, Laurie Schapira also notes a typical pattern in those suffering from hysteria, describing how they were often disbelieved or dismissed when attempting to relate their experiences to others. 6 Gilman describes Anna O.’s hysterical symptoms as a linguistic protest against her German father’s tongue. Anna O.’s hysteria is seen as a “discourse of femininity addressed to patriarchal thought” (316), signifying through the body and through nonverbal language, a protest that she could not put into words. The relationship between mourning, melancholia and communication through subjectivity and narrative, is a key theme within the novels this thesis analyses. These examples of hysteria and narrative subjectivity provide an interesting parallel to the excluded languages signalled across the fiction, that are expressed through the body.
corporeality to express a repressed subjectivity within dominant narratives. In the post-World War One novels I analyse, dominant narratives reflect an exclusion of vulnerability and feminine expression that is embedded in heroic ideals of masculinity. The selected post-9/11 writers, on the other hand, respond to a resistance to alterity that is entrenched in political constructs and cycles of inter-generational melancholia.

Within my selected novels, melancholia is experienced by both genders for antithetical reasons. For the masculine characters, it derives from a vulnerability that is marginalised by gender expectations. For many of the female characters, on the other hand, they have an affinity toward being able to mourn, yet are culturally and intrasubjectively silenced—particularly in the modernist novels that portray the voicelessness of femininity as culturally inherent. The myth of Orpheus also lends itself to a discussion through this lens, as Orpheus fails to mourn when he perceives himself as separate from his feminine counterpart. The novels portray a separation between masculine and feminine that leads up to a final acceptance and incorporation in Orpheus Lost, which I address in different moments through the thesis. Though an interesting point of discussion, gender and the patriarchal interrogation in many of the novels is not a central focus of this thesis and is situated, rather, as another discourse that is resisted by writers, as it creates interpersonal separation and silences around loss. I choose to focus primarily on the theme of melancholic dissociation from the body and materiality as a broader trope across the chosen fiction. This thesis is also concerned with how the body is linked to subjectivity and mourning, as well as the social permission to grieve that is inhibited across the novels.

Merleau-Ponty argues that pathologies point to a broader loss of meaning in the world itself (Phenomenology of Perception 133-134), and it is this loss of a personal connection to meaning and corporeality that writers navigate. The writers discussed in this thesis oscillate between representations of mourning and melancholia to reveal, through the body, fractured socio-political identities and dichotomies that obscure loss and a personal lament. Whether grief is incorporated or interminable is determined by both the capacity to understand and to make meaning out of loss and identity within social contexts, as well as a recognition of the body as a medium of subjectivity and intentionality in the world.
Section 3 Corporeal Sacrifice and Melancholic Disavowal: Grief in Post-War Literature

World War One is described by the historian Nigel Hunt as an imaginative as well as military and political event, as it involved a complex interaction between personal narrative and social discourse (114). It is with respect to this rupture within the political sphere and the context of the shifting cultural milieu of modernism, that this thesis takes an interest in literature from this period and how a melancholic, dissociative grief is represented across selected novels. The post-war novels capture the repercussions of a global event, navigating the silent grief of soldiers, and men who personify heroic ideologies, as well as the suppression of feminine voices. The exclusion, highlighted across the novels, attests to a cultural distancing from vulnerability and the body that impacts private mourning. The selected novels represent post-war grief as an internal process of inner conflict and a resistant mourning. This is represented through a disavowal of narrative subjectivity, corporeality and identity following the war, for those whose vulnerability was socio-culturally unspeakable.

The literary historian Paul Fussell famously argues, in The Great War and Modern Memory, that World War One represented an absolute, unbridgeable break with the past. It is the inter-relationship between this monumental event; the loss of collective forms of consolation; the challenges to hegemony within the modernist movement; and a drastic shift in mourning practices; that situate the melancholic mourning that the chosen writers signify. Like Fussell, Tim Armstrong also writes of the temporal dislocation created by the war, arguing that time was “frozen,” constituting: “a lost past; a traumatic present; a blighted future” (19). Literary critics, including Clewell, Rae, Sanja Bahun, Nouri Gana, Anne Enderwitz, and Martin Middeke and Christina Wald, have discussed grief literature deriving out of modernist, and even postmodernist contexts, as characteristically melancholic. Clewell argues that mourning is rendered “impossible” in an age so reflective of social instability, that has necessitated an interrogation of the symbolic forms of consolation previously offered by religion, philosophy and culture (1-2). Gana proposes that melancholia is in fact a necessary part of the “function of the work of mourning” (33). Indeed, many writers in the post-war period, such as Woolf and Faulkner, were motivated by the horrors of war, as much as this cataclysmic cultural milieu that broke from the past, to portray an age of grief as a “mourning for fallen worlds” (Gandal 5).
Cultural representations of death and responses to mourning, Philippe Ariés has argued, are carefully inter-woven with social life and concepts of selfhood. Anthropological accounts of grief have also highlighted more primitive responses to mourning as entailing socially-integrated bereavement structures. Many of these theorists have focused on the importance of ritual and social bonds (Hockey; Durkheim). Émile Durkheim’s 1912 study of death ritual showed the importance of social integration and solidarity in the grief experience. Religious traditions had provided this social integration and consolation for the meaning of life and death, as grief was consciously confronted and integrated into daily existence and respected as a part of life (Giblin and Hug 13). Yet as modern society became increasingly secular, so too collective meanings became detached from religion and cultural rituals and increasingly aligned with medical science. The sociologist Tony Walter has argued that the meaning of death has been increasingly fragmented, disconnected and privatised in modern times (188). Death has become, as Jeffrey Kauffman argues, “expelled from the self and the social world” (13), so that bereavement is a “hidden and private experience” (Hockey 144).

In her study of World War One and embodiment, Ana Carden-Coyne elucidates this shift in public and private approaches to mourning and death, noting that, in the absence of caretakers, death increasingly took place within hospitals, rather than homes. Attitudes toward death started to shift from religious perspectives that offered the consolation of immortality, to a scientific medicalisation of death based on reason and rationality that tended toward an objectification of the body and death. The rise of psychoanalysis also shifted attention from the communal to the individual experience. Towards the end of World War One, and just five years after Durkheim had defined mourning as being an essential social process,7 Freud’s “Mourning and Melancholia” re-defined mourning as fundamentally a private process. In just a few generations, grief work had radically changed. Mourning, for the most part, had been removed from the public realm and was no longer a social construct.

It is within this context of collective shifts in mourning practices and social life, that literary responses mirror a cultural fragmentation around loss and meaning. Janis Stout suggests that the war period is inextricably linked to the advent of modernist literature. Literary portrayals of the War were almost indistinguishable from a disillusionment arising from the era of modernism (1). In Lamentation and Modernity in Literature, Rebecca Saunders describes a discourse of modernity that she constitutes as “the lament.” She argues that the literary

7 Durkheim perceives mourning as being socially patterned—“a duty posed by the group”—rather than “the spontaneous expression of individual emotions” (443, 567).
“lament” disrupted modernity’s secure environments, through posing disturbing questions and acknowledging the lack of control which constitutes the human condition (7). This style of literature also responded to the “symptoms produced by modern technology, warfare, and social relations” (11). Saunders notes that the grief resulting from world wars, along with the aesthetic conventions of modernism, contributed to “a sense of subjective fragmentation … a loss of a stable sense of self” (5). From the perspective of the sociologist Max Weber, the early modernist world, as conceptualised within culture, was one bereft of meaning, driven by instrumental rationality and the discrediting of collective belief systems yet failing to provide meaning of its own. In many ways, this disruption is a parallel to the disconnection and alienation derived in personal experiences of grief and trauma, as it entailed a rupturing of political and social understandings. In an age that reflected cultural fragmentation, literary trends mirrored what Greg Forter notes as a “deep ambivalence and unconscious aggression,” interrogating and resisting the work of mourning” (1).

The body in pain, the key trope I engage with in my analysis, was a spectacle of post-war life witnessed in the flesh, through wounded returning soldiers whose bodies challenged the ideals of heroic warfare and masculinity. In her account of the physiological ramifications of World War One in *Reconstructing the Body*, Carden-Coyne writes of the shocking aftermath of war carved into the bodies of survivors. She explains that “the presence of the wounded was a constant and difficult reminder of the war’s violence and its repercussions,” explicit in “the numbers of men living with disfigurement, chronic ailments, and disability” (73). She writes of this horrific material destruction of bodies after the war, that led a new form of communication—that of “the image and language of bodily wreckage” (68).

In the aftermath of war, stoic ideals were met with the vulnerability of shattered bodies and an unimaginable number of deaths. Dead bodies were concealed by the collective symbolism of monuments, tombs and mass funerals dedicated to countless unknown men who had lost their lives. The tombs of unknown soldiers across the world became cultural signifiers, reflecting a loss of individuation for so many, even in death. Carden-Coyne describes how militarised bodies became a part of the public sphere, taking on additional cultural meanings, as “[d]ead bodies amounted to nations won or lost,” while “disabled and mutilated bodies

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8 The material reality and sense of horror associated with shattered bodies after the war is described within Carden-Coyne’s non-fictional account of war, *Reconstructing the Body*. She notes that “War cultivated an uneasy disregard for the body … [d]ecomposing bodies became the ‘detritus of warfare which soldiers stepped on, tripped over, tossed away, or reassembled into the protective walls of another trench’” (75).
symbolised entwined stores of victory and defeat” (75). The post-war novels under discussion respond to this theme of militarised bodies, through representing the dissociated corporeality and fractured subjectivity of soldiers who were sacrificed for “anonymous purposes” (*Daybreak* 173), dying namelessly for collective ideals.

Robert Neimeyer and Diana Sands emphasise one of the most critical issues in relation to the tension between public and private mourning, that my chosen writers navigate. They discuss how grief work entails a reconstruction of meaning within the context of one’s own “self-narrative.” Neimeyer describes the challenge that is faced, in this respect, of the predominance of “dominant narratives” that marginalise more fragile, “preferred” accounts of self and, in effect, “colonise” one’s sense of public identity (74). It is a tension created by dominant, collective narratives, in relation to personal identity, that my chosen post-war novels encapsulate. Through representations of the dissociated and abject body, the writers this discussion will now preface interrogate and resist collective frames of mourning and meaning, communicating instead the fragmentation and political wreckage of an age of loss.

Discussion of the post-war novels will commence with *Daybreak* by Vance Palmer, a 1932 Australian novel that blends the modalities of pastoral and melancholic fiction to represent grief. Written in the decade after the war, *Daybreak* portrays both a pastoral, consolatory response and a melancholic and dystopic vision of post-war life. I examine Palmer’s novel through highlighting the relationship between mourning and embodiment that he emphasises. Palmer resists the glorification of war and conflict and insinuates, through his writing, a need to protect an agricultural way of life that has been obscured by the horrors and cultural fragmentation of an overseas war that involved Australia. Through drawing on the pastoral mode to imagine and retain a sense of place, *Daybreak* portrays a melancholic displacement after the war. The novel also foreshadows the potentiality that some of the later texts broach, of re-engaging the senses to perceive the world anew—beyond the attachment to past identities that creates a melancholic dissociation from the present.

Chapter Two will discuss how *Daybreak* articulates a tension between the challenge of mourning, and conserving both a personal and national identity, in the post-war years. Palmer juxtaposes idyllic descriptions of the Australian landscape with the mental anguish of his protagonists, Rossiter and Sievright, who have returned from war. Through this juxtaposition, the novel examines the extent to which war has created dysfunction and otherness that
encroaches upon a return to rural life, experienced within the body and both a mental and corporeal displacement. While the character Sievright is trapped in melancholic disavowal, feeling out of touch with his fallen identity, Rossiter seeks to reclaim sovereignty and belonging through a connection to the land. Palmer’s ultimate consolation to grief is, in a sense, doubly resistant, in that it is based on a pastoral retreat that seeks to move on from the horrors of war by returning to the past. The novel disavows, in part, the complexities that the losses of war have presented, both privately and politically. For the purpose of this discussion, *Daybreak* provides a compelling example of a pastoral and nostalgic approach to loss and how an entrenchment in nationalistic discourse can exclude alterity and the intricacies of loss.

Following a discussion of pastoral and melancholia in *Daybreak*, Chapter Three will examine William Faulkner’s 1930 novel *As I Lay Dying*, that serves as an antithetical contrast to Palmer’s nostalgic and pastoral representation of mourning. My discussion thus moves from a nostalgic retreat to Faulkner’s portrayal of grief as a descent into the collective unconscious, a modernist dystopia. In divergence to *Daybreak*, Faulkner’s work is antipastoral, anti-compensatory, and resistant to the notion of retreating to safety from the exigencies and pressures of historical change. I will argue that Faulkner’s dystopic representation of mourning draws upon body metaphors, particularly of corporeal abjection and depressive sexuality, to outline a rigid cultural suppression of grief and stifling of creativity that is inherent to yet unconscious to the society he depicts. The novel reveals the ways in which unexamined conservative ideologies can disengage from materiality and disconnect from a source of feeling, expression and embodied subjectivity. *As I Lay Dying* represents mourning as a descent into what culture has concealed, revealing through the body the hidden narratives of culturally silenced grief.

Though *As I Lay Dying* is not typically read by critics as a post-war novel, in Chapter Three I discuss how Faulkner’s novel epitomises the tropes associated with World War One and modernist writing, and encapsulates them within totalising corporeal metaphors—such as his portrayal of the masculine body that is dissociated, hollow, utilitarian and mechanised—and the returning soldier, Darl, who is ostracised within his family. Where mourning is disavowed in words, *As I Lay Dying* situates awareness back upon the body through drawing on corporeal abjection. The novel emphasises the fluidity of the body as a communicator through which the world is perceived, enacted and responded to, in contrast to the theme of hollow gender roles that oppress agency. The body oozes out sweat, loses vitality and blood,
becomes injured, dirty and fragmented in Faulkner’s representation, all of which attest to the dimensionality and lived experience of the body in the world. Discussion in Chapter Three will also explore how Faulkner challenges a culture that lacks the capacity to create, through the central theme of the character Addie, whose concealed corpse becomes a signifier of the suppressed feminine and a collective inability to mourn.

Where Faulkner and Palmer focus on rural life, Virginia Woolf’s 1925 post-war novel *Mrs Dalloway*, discussed in Chapter Four, is set in bourgeois England, far-removed from the rural environments of the first two novels. I read Woolf’s novel with a slightly different emphasis to other critics who have examined her portrayal of mourning, through focusing on the body and how it relates to a representation of melancholic mourning. In *Mrs Dalloway*, rigid patriarchal and political structures in the aftermath of World War One cause a suppression of the body that marginalises mourning and creativity. Exposing the divergence between internal feelings and external conceptualisations, Woolf’s post-war novel critiques a disconnection between social identity and personal expressions of pain and loss that are concealed in solitude, but reflected in the body—an invisible presence.

I argue that Woolf draws on the tropes of the body in grief, to illustrate how power and gendered identity impacts the work of mourning. In *Mrs Dalloway*, both the masculine and feminine characters experience the lack of private agency and corporeal dissociation, thematised in Palmer and Faulkner’s novels. Woolf indicates how delineations of power, embedded in socially sanctioned ideologies, impact upon and reinforce, gender roles and expectations—particularly around responding to grief. For Septimus, who is a veteran of war, the personal grief and existential anguish he feels is socially sanctioned and, consequently, he is unable to integrate his grief, nor resume his duties in social life. Septimus falls into a state of melancholic inaction and abjection, a liminal space of bodily dissociation in which he remains detached from the world. He becomes “the giant mourner” (Woolf 61), a signifier of an incommunicable and perpetual grief that Woolf does not imagine consolation for. Through Clarissa, who doubles Septimus from a feminine perspective, Woolf explores the hidden potentiality to resolve mourning through the socially concealed feminine expression. Clarissa’s melancholia is linked to her performance of bourgeois social life, yet she enacts a capacity to sense, accept and engage with her mourning process and accept the polarities of life—signalling Woolf’s ambiguous potentiality for mourning through moving between polarities, instead of remaining lost between them.
Mari Ruti argues that the employment of tropes of melancholia in literature involves “a different type of rewriting” that does not seek to surmount or idealise, but to revisit and reassess the past (646). The post-war narratives discussed in this thesis re-write the gaps within the cultural milieu they represent, to include the unvoiced suffering that is silenced within cultural narratives that exclude vulnerability. The chapters that examine post-war representations of grief will address how writers interrogate collective values that restrict autonomy and hinder creative potential, rendering a separation in the psyche between body and mind. Writers introduce, through tropes of melancholic mourning, the subversive language of the body in pain.

Section 4 Intercorporeal Flesh and Collective Melancholia in Post-9/11 Fiction

In The Literature of Melancholia, Middeke and Wald conclude their introductory discussion with interrogating how literature, and particularly the novel, can potentially “break ‘the melancholic spell,’ of previous generations” through “a reaction to loss which enables ethical agency” (16). The post-9/11 novels that will be introduced in this section continue to reflect, and extend upon, the themes of corporeal dissociation and melancholic mourning through representing what I define as a collective melancholia. Collective melancholia pertains to a resistance to the Other and to the incorporation of grief, that is embedded within collective cultures, including families, media culture and political ideologies. The selected novels emphasise a need, in the aftermath of 9/11, to integrate loss within a framework of alterity that includes the Other and inter-connected personal histories, in order to rebuild community. This section will elucidate melancholia beyond the definition of personal grief, and discuss the socio-political uses of melancholia in relation to both personal and collective frameworks of narrative subjectivity. In contrast to critics such as Clewell, who argue that “postmodern writers exhibit hostility toward consolation” (3), my discussion centres on how the selected postmodernist writers portray melancholic mourning through the theme of collective melancholia, while also highlighting the importance of opening to alterity, in order to incorporate personal and political mourning.

The challenge to mourning proposed in the post-9/11 novels that I examine, is that of reclaiming a personal connection to the broader narratives of one’s inter-generational, historical and collective contexts, through the body. The novels also focus on the importance of transforming and integrating loss through an ethical relationship with the Other. Ann Keniston and Jeanne Quinn identify a broader theme across 9/11 literature to challenge
political discourses that simplify the meaning of the event and its aftermath, to “contest 9/11s co-option for narrowly political ends” (3). While the narratives of early modernism focused on dystopic chaos and dissolving borders, Keniston and Quinn argue that postmodern 9/11 represent a transition from narratives of rupture to those that signal continuity (3). They perceive, in the 9/11 genre, a focus on restoring temporal disruptions and the links between private memory and public history (9), through anchoring loss in materiality and corporeality. It is with a focus on the corporeality of grief represented within the genre, that I frame my discussion.

In The Ends of Mourning, Alessia Ricciardi explores the contemporary crisis of mourning from an interdisciplinary perspective, suggesting that collective awareness around mourning needs to be the most important consideration in terms of postmodern mourning. She views what she perceives as a lack of awareness around mourning as a “cultural failure” which, she argues, will evolve to a culture of trauma. Ricciardi notes that what is absent within this collective context is a “nuanced ethical response to the claims of the past” (2). Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, who coined the psychoanalytic concept of transgenerational haunting, similarly argue that, culturally, there is an inheritance of absent mourning. Maria Torok writes of how “the subject’s self-creation” is impacted by “the interplay between repressions and introjections” that are accumulated by silences transmitted across generations (181). Many critics forewarn that a culture based on a universality has diminished the meaning of human loss—in Ricciardi’s words, where a “lack constitutes the core of the psyche,” then “there is no room for the pathos of working through specific historical losses” (20).

The post-9/11 novels I draw upon for discussion, more so than the post-war novels, focus on how collective grief might return from private interior spaces to an incorporation of grief that is necessarily social. The grief researcher Eric Lindemann, whose research in 1944 built on Freud’s definition of pathological loss, noted that grief is not entirely an interior psychological process, but also one of re-adjustment to the social world. In 1989, Kenneth Doka defined the challenge to mourning in contemporary culture through his term “disenfranchised grief,” that he coined to conceptualise grief that is not recognised and

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9 Lindemann’s paper in 1944, “Symptomology and Management of Acute Grief,” followed Freud’s ideas through distinguishing normal from pathological grieving styles. Lindemann provided a symptomatology of grief reactions, after which many other researchers established similar compendiums (see Parkes, Bowlby, Worden).
supported in the social world of the mourner. If grief is disenfranchised, a mourner is deprived of the catharsis that shared grief might allow, through engaging with loss that is not openly acknowledged, socially validated, or publicly mourned—all aspects of the melancholic mourning portrayed across the post-war fiction. It is with a focus on re-adjusting socio-culturally, that the post-9/11 writers thematise sociality and recognise intercorporeality as an important aspect of mourning and incorporating loss. As Aaron DeRosa argues, post-9/11 novels are defined by their “engagement with alterity” (157); just as they focus on critiquing universalising and dichotomising narratives.

Merleau-Ponty’s theory on the relationship between bodies in the world, draws out an interconnection between bodies that the post-9/11 fiction highlights. Regarding a connection between self and Other, he emphasises an intercorporeal reversibility of the flesh, that implies a relationship that is consistently co-created between self and Other. This reversibility is based upon the inheritance of perceptual exchanges between one’s body and the body of others. Merleau-Ponty argues that we are “always constituting both self and Other in a reversibility ... weav[ing] relations between bodies” (The Visible and Invisible 144). This description aptly evokes the intersubjectivity between the Other and the body in the post-9/11 novels I examine. Body metaphors that depict a reversible flesh of the body, disrupt narratives of identity that exclude the Other. Writers employ metaphors of intercorporeality to propose an ethical response to collective melancholia embedded in cultural histories, and a saturated media culture that reinforces dichotomies and externalises a perspective of collective events.

In A Dialogue on Racial Melancholia, David Eng and Shinhee Han highlighted the socio-political usefulness of melancholia to conceptualise a relationship between hegemonic narrativisation and minoritarian identities in literature. They examine what they term a “racial melancholia,” that is linked both to melancholia to subjectivity from a social perspective. Melancholia, in Eng and Han, is described from the perspective of social identity, as “a series of failed and unresolved integrations” that has created a “suspended assimilation” (670-1), impacting the psyche. In the post-9/11 novels I discuss, cultural fragmentation is an explicit

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10 Eng and Han are interested in addressing group identities and how “melancholia might be thought of as underpinning our everyday conflicts and struggles with experiences of immigration, assimilation and racialization” (669). In my analysis, I argue that the post-9/11 novels also draw attention to broader, collective instances of melancholia and how these impact group identities and create cultural dynamics that resist loss.
trope, as is a theme of failed integrations between and within cultural groups, connected to unmourned losses and resistant identities. Responding to Eng and Han’s work, Ruti argues that marginalised subjectivities have a sense of diminished self-worth found in traditional conceptualisations of melancholia, contending that “melancholia seems to represent an inevitable consequence of hegemonic power” (641). She describes it as “a political act aimed at carving a space,” particularly for “those whose identities are under attack and erasure” (641). Where mourning relinquishes objects, melancholia, in the political sense, conserves what has been obscured by the dominant culture, a form of melancholia that is thematised within representations of terrorism and counter-terrorism, as well as through characters who privately resist grief and trauma, in the post-9/11 novels.

In her 2015 study, Cultural Melancholia: US Trauma Discourses Before and After 9/11, Christina Cavedon coins the term “cultural melancholia” to describe the socio-cultural politics in the United States after 9/11. This is of interest to the political frameworks my selected novels respond to. Cultural melancholia, in Cavedon’s definition, “result(s) from an incapacity or unwillingness of cultural discourses to enter into an introspective reviewing of the ways in which a culture’s own history, mechanisms, and convictions contribute to a perceived malaise pervading the culture” (18). Cultural melancholia is a response to cultural dynamics that she perceives as having arisen after 9/11. Cavedon re-evaluates a contemporary understanding of melancholia as pertaining to a socio-political concept. She challenges and critiques the “American resilience template” that she perceives as embedded in pre– and post-9/11 discourses that failed to allow adequate time to assess what has been lost (63, 66).

Cavedon argues that, due to hastened assertions of the resilience of American culture after the event of 9/11, the public were not given time to assess what had been lost and what ought to be mourned. She contends that the “resilience template” constitutes an appropriation of trauma by the Bush administration, that reinterpreted events based on a collective narrative of American resilience—that, she argues, was largely unchecked by scholars (66). Melancholia and mourning, Cavedon writes, has been contrary to values informing U.S. founding myths, such as resilience, progress, constant change and future-orientation (41). She describes a non-existence of mourning rituals that has led to a cultural tendency toward melancholia in

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11 I also wish to note, out of interest, a similar use of melancholia in postcolonial studies. In regards to postcolonial melancholia, Ronit Lentin draws parallels between melancholia, culture and narrative, citing an example in Germany wherein radical loss led to a resistance of collective processes of mourning, that “left blank holes in individual autobiographies” (56; see also Gilroy).
America, arguing that a loss of mourning inhibits social progress. Cavedon’s critique relates to the themes of melancholia and alterity that writers interrogate within the post-9/11 novels, that highlights how cultural, rather than personal, identifications carry across in histories and are perpetuated by collective narratives—including the media, ingrained political belief systems and unresolved losses within families, impacting personal identity.

In *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning*, Butler similarly critiques the American political reaction to 9/11, particularly in relation to ethical responsibility and relational ties. She argues that the collective narrativisation of the event represented a limited and preclusive first-person narrative point of view, thus under-politicising personal vulnerabilities and responses to loss. From her perspective, this tendency reflected a compensation for the “narcissistic wound opened up by the public display” of the physical vulnerability of the United States as a nation, that she views as being further compounded by military action (5, 7). These combined factors, she argues, avoided a crisis of a “relationality” of identity, toward the Other, that is necessary after collective loss (22), including an awareness of global frameworks. Through critiquing the political sphere, Butler calls for a questioning and deciphering of what has produced traumatic events, and how a nation might become ethically responsible, rather than narrating events through a limited, narcissistic perspective of political resilience. This echoes Noam Chomsky’s commentary of 9/11 in relation to media propaganda in *Media Control* and his infamous statement: “it’s only terrorism if they do it to us. When we do much worse to them, it’s not terrorism” (94). Chomsky’s criticism of a paradigm of duplicitous propaganda and social control relates to dichotomous collective constructs that my chosen post-9/11 writers challenge, and to a broader question that is encapsulated in Butler’s essays: “what, politically, might be made of grief besides a cry for war?” (*Precarious Life* xii). For Butler, and for the novels under discussion, an understanding of 9/11 involves a re-framing of alterity through the body, politics and grief, through recognising that “my own foreignness to myself is, paradoxically, the source of my ethical connection to others” (46).

In the post-9/11 novels, a key corporeal trope through which the selected writers situate grief is the falling body, a motif that signifies a liminal space of unknowable mourning and a transitional space between life and death. Where the tombs of anonymous, unknown soldiers signified the countless soldiers killed at war for political ideals, the falling body, encapsulated most famously in Richard Drew’s ‘Falling Man’ photograph, is a comparable corporeal motif. The falling body signifies the key tropes of the event of 9/11, epitomising both a
traumatic and shocking moment, and a rupturing of cohesive narratives of safety and invulnerability within the United States. The falling, vulnerable body is signified in media representations of the falling body in *Falling Man*; the liminal, disembodied spaces between materiality and nothingness in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*; and references to falling through encountering the Other and inter-generational loss in *Orpheus Lost*. The novels examine a tension between national and personal identities and the ways in which a person is implicated in a history of ideas and cultural biases that affects the incorporation of grief. The novels I will now foreshadow depict the challenge of over-identifying with collective narratives and identities, and instead situate awareness back into the body and the experiences shared in the world with other people, intercorporeally. The order of the novels is intentional, as they move sequentially from narratives of traumatic rupture, toward the possibilities of continuity through alterity and opening to the Other and to the body.

Don DeLillo’s 2007 novel *Falling Man* introduces many of the themes I draw out from the post-9/11 fiction, surrounding collective identities, the body and grief. *Falling Man* centres on the media and corporeal imagery in the public sphere, interrogating a distancing between cultural representations of 9/11 and a personal connection to loss. DeLillo highlights a desensitisation to violence and images that repeat, glorify and anticipate a dissociated response to loss. *Falling Man* centres on the falling body as a trope, developing a tension between the vulnerability of the “awful openness” of media imagery and the challenge his characters experience to find integration within collective frameworks: “a crack in the world where it might fit” (DeLillo 33, 168).

Chapter Five will address how DeLillo navigates, in *Falling Man*, the exigencies of a private bodily connection in the context of a shared collective grief. The novel distinguishes between exteriorising and objectifying the work of mourning, and an affective relationship to loss that is inter-connected with an embodied and visceral awareness of grief. Within a postmodern context of hyper-spaces and media simulations, DeLillo contrasts a melancholic disavowal and displacement of recent experiences of trauma through Keith’s character, with an integration of grief over time through recognising patterns and corporeal agency seen through the character Lianne. DeLillo engages with the trope of intercorporeality, connecting the event to the body and to shared spaces—though most of his characters, ultimately, remain in liminal spaces. Working through grief, in *Falling Man*, involves reconnecting to the broader world in which one is situated, and the body, as the medium for experiencing it.
After *Falling Man*, the subsequent novel I examine, Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, imagines how inter-generational mourning can impact private experiences of grief and the formation of melancholic identities. An early post-9/11 response, written in 2005, Foer illustrates the ways in which a socio-cultural history and familial ties influence a melancholic suppression and silencing of loss that engenders separation from the Other. Foer depicts a collective and familial context of melancholia through metaphors of corporeal displacement, to illustrate how melancholia obscures an engagement with life through the body. Where *Falling Man* hints at the potentiality of inter-connectedness made possible through body awareness and subjectivity, Foer starts to envisage where loss might be integrated through bodily presence in community, shared emotional transparency, comedy, creativity and an empathic recognition of the suffering of others.

Chapter Six will frame a tension that Foer constructs between mourning and melancholia, through illustrating how both relate to grieving through the body and finding a relationship to place and intercorporeality. The novel depicts how the protagonist, Thomas’s approach to conceptualising and retaining the past, rather than feeling his grief, creates a distance that is both mental and reflected in the material world. This distancing further separates him from his loss and excludes him from his life in the present—the world he shares with others. Unable to accept the alterity of grief, his loss remains unknown, “locked inside” him (Foer 17). Where Thomas remains trapped in his melancholic mourning, his grandson, Oskar, works through his grief through breaking out of his metaphorical self-containment and opening to the wider space of New York, to negotiate shared spaces of mourning. Oskar possesses the ability to laugh, play and create—all aspects that attest to Foer’s emphasis on creative, as well as embodied, forms of consolation. Foer suggests a connection between alterity and creativity, in relation to the work of mourning. Through inventive play and negotiating a support network, Oskar has the capacity to imagine himself and the world otherwise. This allows Oskar to perceive himself as an agent who experiences loss and can open to change, rather than a person stuck in an enclosed narrative.

Chapter Seven will examine how Janette Turner-Hospital’s 2007 novel *Orpheus Lost*, re-imagines the myth of Orpheus to envisage an ethical response to mourning. This culminating chapter will close my discussion through examining how the novel portrays the repetitive cyclicity of collective melancholic losses as a separation of mind and body and self and Other, created by unresolved melancholic wounding across generations. Turner-Hospital engages with many of the tropes of grief from the other novels, including nostalgic idealism,
dark descents, falling, tortured bodies and inner and outer conflicts, focusing upon the ways in which cycles of unresolved grief are derived and perpetuated in relation to the Other. In *Orpheus Lost*, counter-terrorism is as brutal as the culture of fear created by terrorism, signalling Turner-Hospital’s challenge to universalising narratives created in the aftermath of inter-racial conflict.

Like DeLillo and Foer, Turner-Hospital depicts the way in which narratives across the media, social discourses and within families, engender a response to loss that obscures a personal connection to grief. Media loops of images, as much as familial and political patterns, play out unconsciously and cyclically, like a “cracked record” (Turner-Hospital 302). Through *Orpheus Lost*, I culminate discussion of mourning, examining how Turner-Hospital revisits the *Orpheus* myth through an approach to collective mourning. She illustrates how mourning, from a collective and personal perspective, is inextricable from a broader context of relationships with alterity that only an ethical recognition of otherness within oneself can bridge. *Orpheus Lost* merges apparent polarities through delineating the nuances of separation—the wounds that are instigated and closed by the Other—allowing a release of the orphic voice back into the social world.

Keniston and Quinn argue that literature expresses what remains unrepresentable: “the space between the real and the imagined, between image and trope, and between the private realm of memory and the public realm of history” (2). The defining place of the literature of loss in postmodernism is perhaps best communicated by David Eng and David Kazanjian, who contend that literary representations can provide alternative meanings of the past and innovative identifications in the present, through allowing “a continuing dialogue with loss” (1), an open relationship with the past that is politically useful, rather than pathological—“a crucial touchstone for social and subjective formations” (23). The post-9/11 novels imagine an embodied reconnection with suffering and a space for alterity and shared mourning, to envisage how melancholic patterns can be transcended through the body, comedy, imagination and intercorporeal awareness. The novels depict the revival of a visceral connection to loss through personal and ethical consideration of the Other, that resolves cycles of conflict. In doing so, they retrieve loss from the unconscious spaces created by collective marginalisation. A recognition of the body and corporeal autonomy is depicted as allowing for a capacity for intentional action. This potentiality alters, through subjectivity, the repetitive wounding of belief systems that have suppressed a connection to the body and the Other.
**Conclusion**

Tammy Clewell writes that literature negotiates “the intersection between the exigencies of public life and the seemingly private zones of bereaved consciousness” (14). Representations of post-World War One and post-9/11 novels examined in this thesis attest to a narrative exclusion of corporeal subjectivity and private mourning, signified through metaphors of the dissociated body in pain. The wounds of grief, arising from a fracturing between self and Other in the world, are inscribed by writers upon the body that mediates personal and social experiences of grief. Reclaiming and integrating personal grief is linked to negotiating intentionality in the world, with an awareness of a fundamental vulnerability and ethical responsibility in relation to the Other.

Metaphors of the dissociated body in pain interrogate the perpetuation of cycles of conflict and mourning sourced from language and discourses that conceal the body and vulnerability and exclude a shared language of grief. The wounds of the body in pain, communicated through these novels, flow into the dark spaces and voids of culture, revealing the unresolved conflicts and separation. A personal and collective mentality that resists and represses grief is exposed. This corporeal mourning provides an elixir of awareness, an “alleviation over the cracks and sores” (Woolf 32), that is released through the language of the body.
Chapter Two: Daybreak

Yet, behind the night,
Waits for the great unborn, somewhere afar,
Some white tremendous daybreak. –Rupert Brooke, “Second Best”

My study of body metaphors in literary representations of grief begins with Australian writer Vance Palmer’s Daybreak, a post-war novel written in 1930 that offers a compelling juxtaposition of pastoral and melancholic responses to loss. The fusion of these two diametrical modes informs this analysis. Particularly of interest is the way in which pastoral and melancholic modalities both tend to idealise the past in the aftermath of loss and, in doing so, can evade the complexities of incorporating mourning in the present. Daybreak focuses on post-war grief through exploring the ways in which a fictional Australian agricultural community adapts to life more than a decade after World War One. Integrating horrific wartime experiences, in Daybreak, involves returning to a place that is home, establishing a connection with the land and aligning with the present moment, to revive a sense of hope—a potentiality that is signalled in the title.

Daybreak focuses on two male protagonists, Bob Rossiter and Harry Sievright, wartime veterans who have returned from the war to settle in a small agricultural township. Rossiter, a former soldier, is at a transitional juncture between his ongoing traumatic memories and his allegiance to his former commander, Sievright—he is looking toward new life with his wife’s pregnancy and plans for agricultural independence. Sievright, on the other hand, is facing an existential dilemma, seeking to escape what he views as entrapment in ordinary existence whilst being, ironically, remaining trapped in debilitating melancholia. Rossiter still finds himself haunted by the loyalties of his wartime experiences and his identity of subservience to Sievright. Ultimately his past loyalties conflict with creating the new life that he desires. Sievright similarly experiences conflict in feeling pressured to uphold heroic ideals and identities after the war, that cause him to become displaced and distanced him from others. Succumbing to states of melancholia, he is unable to either mourn or create a new life for himself.

Daybreak interrogates the mentality of war that destroys life through its use of the pastoral mode, through which Palmer imagines a return to nature and a retreat to the idealised agricultural roots that preceded global conflict. This novel is unique to my discussion in that
it deviates from solely engaging with the trope of pathological melancholic mourning to represent post-war grief. In *Daybreak* Consolation is found, nostalgically, in the past—in connecting back to the land and in retreating to nationalist ideals that have been lost in war. To highlight this pastoral nostalgia, Palmer draws on a theme of place in relation to mourning. The novel imagines how a relationship to nature might offer a potentiality to find a sense of place and connection that allows an incorporation of grief—where melancholia, on the other hand, is portrayed as a displacement that impacts the body, isolating a person from the world. This chapter explores the way in which *Daybreak*, through juxtaposing consolatory and non-consolatory mourning, pastoral and war, illustrates a relationship between a connection to place, the body and grief.

Discussion of *Daybreak* is situated within my methodological framework, that employs a Freudian interpretation of melancholia and Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological understanding of the body and world, to draw out Palmer’s representation of mourning and place. The pastoral consolation for mourning in *Daybreak* is imagined as an opening to the body through surrendering wartime identities, presumed to be a source of conflict and destruction, and instead returning to an idealised, sovereign connection to the land. Palmer’s consolatory mourning is non-traditional in comparison to ritualistic and historical memorialisation. It is based, rather, on situating meaning back in the nostalgic comfort of the past, idealising a connection to home and to individualism that he perceives as having been lost after global conflict.

My discussion of *Daybreak* takes note of the ambiguity inherent in the novel. While the unsustainability of self-enclosed melancholia is thematised, through idealising Australian landscape and independence, the novel espouses a nationalist self-containment rather than addressing or imagining how war can be understood and included within Australia’s cultural narratives. Yet, in exploring war through the pastoral mode, Palmer illustrates how resistance to change operates at the cultural level, as the novel draws attention to the need to critique important elements of the past that are in danger of becoming lost.

An examination of body metaphors and the theme of place in *Daybreak*, will draw out Palmer’s representation of mourning and melancholia in post-war Australia and its relationship to deriving meaning in the aftermath of loss. This chapter explores how polarities of place and displacement, vitality and destruction, movement and stagnation, in Palmer’s *Daybreak*, interrogate a tension between holding on old identities and opening to new ones,
after great loss. The context of Palmer’s pastoral politics, and a comparison between the relationship to mourning portrayed through his protagonists, will interrogate his use of tropes of pastoral and melancholia to represent the aftermath of World War One and the potentialities for mourning that he explores.

**Section 1 War and Place: Daybreak’s Pastoral Politics—A Critical Reflection**

In *Daybreak*, Palmer thematises place and a relationship to environment, as a part of his representation of mind-body grief in post-war Australia. Palmer’s use of the pastoral mode in portraying post-war life, highlights an idealised connection to the body, and cycles of nature, to console grief. This is juxtaposed with his representation of melancholic grief that entails corporeal dissociation. Palmer interrogates the representation of melancholia in fiction through using the pastoral mode for political purposes—to reclaim a lost sense of identity and place in the aftermath of war. Compared to his more acclaimed works such as *The Big Fellow, The Legend of the Nineties* and *The Passage*, *Daybreak* was also well received, though it garnered limited critical attention within the canon of Australian post-war literature.\(^{12}\) *Daybreak* has been noted favourably for its unique representation of place and a romantic return to the Australian landscape (Heseltine; Inglis and Brazier), as well as the novel’s response to wartime themes (Davison; Da Silva). Of the more critical responses, Carolyn Holbrook has queried the idealistic way in which the novel portrays the character Sievright’s demise and death toward the end of the novel, and the renewal of life thereafter. Holbrook interrogates Rossiter’s release from his wartime allegiances through Sievright’s death, which she views as being superficial in lacking a sense of “catharsis through remembering” (87). It is my contention that Palmer intentionally resists, rather than works through, the complexities of war, to draw attention to what he perceives as having been forgotten after, and even prior to, the war. Palmer challenges cultural tropes of post-war heroism, loyalty and comradeship, to emphasise the simplicity of an embodied relationship to the Australian homeland that is self-sustainable, negating a reliance on the outer world. This inherent theme of returning to self-reliance, follows some of the earlier responses to the war by Australian writers, that reflected “a profound disillusionment with war” and also with authority (Taylor 58).

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\(^{12}\) Despite this, Heseltine notes in his comprehensive biographical discussion, that *Daybreak* was the novel that Palmer preferred out of his works (94).
Daybreak is unique in comparison to other novels written in the post-war modernist period, in that it tends not to seek meaning or catharsis from the war itself, nor does it ultimately resist mourning altogether. Rather, the novel illustrates the unsustainability of war mentality, pointing toward consolation found in an absolute retreat from it. In The Great War and Modern Memory, Paul Fussell characterises a recourse to the pastoral mode in post-war literature as “both gauging the calamities of the great war and imaginatively protecting oneself against them,” through offering a sense of comfort that, at the same time marks distance between the desirable and the actual (235-39). It is to engage with this polarity of war and peace and its impact upon mind and body, that Palmer relays a pastoral vision. Daybreak protects an ideal of the Australian landscape and values, insinuating where a sustainable individualism might be created after global tragedy. This is signalled through the repetition, in the novel, of the words “sann fairy ann … [k]eep inside your own fences” (Palmer 95).

Palmer’s use of the pastoral mode stems from political conservatism, as he was opposed to conscription and remained a proponent for protecting what he considered to be Australian values, such as egalitarianism and democratic rights, and love of the land and natural environment. Through being influenced by his conservative agenda, Palmer reflects what Erol Köroğlu describes as the phenomenon of “belatedness” (xvi-xvii)—where writers were influenced in their interpretation of war by the political, socio-cultural and psychological climate of their time, that can change the way an event is remembered. This is an important note for critical consideration, especially as more contemporary literary portrayals of Australians at war reflect a view toward including the Other and denationalising the war, often idealising a “transnational belonging” (Hjort 10), through shared understandings and overlapping constructs of identity.

Palmer reflects, in Daybreak, a desire to protect the constructs of Australian ideology and identity threatened by global conflict. Palmer had, notably, joined the Australian Imperial Force but did make it to France in time for the war; he later campaigned against conscription. In Sacred Places, K.S. Inglis and Jan Brazier make note of Palmer’s socialist and patriotic dreams of a “utopian Australian vision,” that influenced his response to the war (218). Palmer desired for Australia to create “from within itself” a “brave, new world” (218). This desire to create through hard work is evident within the novel where, amongst the romantic, pastoral descriptions of the “downflowing paddocks filled with sheep,” he characterises the land as
having a rustic yet treacherous beauty that requires effort to tame: “It was a hard, self-centred struggle, this carving out a home on the land; there wasn’t that much idyllic about it” (Palmer 102, 39). Yet this toil is narrated amidst natural beauty and pride for the hard-won independence of creating a life on Australian soil, for those “who could pour themselves into the ground” (236). What Palmer considered to be a unique place in the global landscape is undeniably reflected in *Daybreak*, as he imagines a way of returning to a utopian homeland after the war.

Palmer’s diametrical employment of tropes of war and the pastoral mode, draw out his idealisation of Australia. Fussell emphasises the peculiar pairing of war and pastoral, suggesting that if the opposite of war is peace, then the opposite of experiencing moments of war is proposing moments of pastoral (231). In being so divergent, he argues, they hint at an indescribable antithesis (231). Michael Von Cannon, on the other hand, rehabilitating the pastoral mode as being politically reactionary. Von Cannon notes that “much of Great War literature uses pastoral themes to rebuke the war, to represent the tendency of repression and to express traumatic moments re-experienced by those in the trenches and at home” (57). He describes it as an effective modality to challenge the tropes of war, as long as it avoids “simplification, escapism, or repression of reality” (58). Through focusing on place and the body, I argue that, while Palmer handles some themes such as Sievright’s death with redundant simplicity, this is offset by what *Daybreak* offers in terms of a comparison between the constructs of pastoral and melancholia in relation to embodiment—themes of paramount interest to this thesis.

Palmer’s emphasis on place hones in on the theme of dissociation from place that is a primary indication of a shattering of subjectivity across the fiction I discuss, signalling melancholic mourning. In relation to World War One, as Eric Leed points out in *No Man’s Land*, the landscape of war and the nature of trench warfare, rendered the earth itself ambivalent—rather than a place of safety—it was a place where death, dead bodies and the enemy were encountered (20-21). Leed draws on the concept of liminality, a key theme across the melancholic fiction included in this study, to describe how soldiers become estranged from their former lives and identities, separated from a sense of “home.” This is a juxtaposition of place and displacement that Palmer employs from his opening pages, commencing with Rossiter’s recollection of post-war terror within the quiet paddocks of his home, as he awakens to the screams of a rabbit caught in a trap. This entry point to the novel’s themes
introduces the pivotal contrast of Rossiter’s liminality, as he is caught between memories of corporeal displacement experienced in the trenches—the “half-buried days in France”—and his desire to work towards “building up a home for himself” (Palmer 10). Andrew Frayn highlights how, in many instances, post-war fiction centred on the theme of a “need to maintain a stable environment to which combatants might return” (48). Interestingly, the pastoral nostalgia and desire for home portrayed through body metaphors in Daybreak, relates to a definition of nostalgia cited by Johannes Hofer. Hofer defines nostalgia as “the sad mood originating from the desire for the return to one’s native land,” and as a “disease of the body” that emanates from an “afflicted imagination.” She notes that it is often felt by soldiers serving on foreign soil and those removed from home (qtd. in Rae, Modernism and Nostalgia 381). Through engaging with nostalgia, and in contrasting moments of connection with moments of melancholia, Palmer explores and imagines connection to place and particularly how this relates to the body.

Section 2.1 Sheer Animal Terror: Melancholic Loss and the Uncanny Mirror of Vulnerability

The contrast between place and displacement in the opening pages of Daybreak signals Palmer’s intention to emphasise early on the harrowing resonances of the war that haunt his protagonists. Images of a picturesque and sleepy countryside are shattered, prior to daybreak, by a terrifying scream that shocks and unsettles Rossiter, who is in a deep slumber. The scene is set as Rossiter awakens from his sleep, “the soft darkness in which his mind was sheathed,” to a strangely familiar terror that sends “uncanny vibrations” through the “clogged channels” of his consciousness (5). Rossiter cannot place the “sheer animal terror” that interrupts his sleep, that sounds disturbingly Other and perhaps “more than human” (5-6)—sounds that he later sources when he finds a rabbit caught in a trap.

This early passage pre-empts Rossiter’s inner and outer confrontation with the vulnerability of his wartime experiences that have penetrated his psyche, reminding him of his unresolved trauma. As he responds to the rabbit’s cries, hastily rushing out of bed, descriptions of his body are objective, suggesting a displacement with his surroundings. As he experiences this uncanny terror, “his body [is] propped up against a chair, his fingers all thumbs as he felt for the buttons” (6). Between worlds, Rossiter is “awake yet not awake” (5), embodied and disembodied, signalling the liminal space that his character is in, between wartime trauma and consolation. The novel focuses closely on his corporeal response to mental processing, as
images flock before his eyes and his brain becomes “heavy with a flow of blood,” and his nerves are “raw and quivering” (7). These vivid depictions of an over-stimulated nervous system reflect Rossiter’s mind-body response to an unidentified noise that he cannot yet place, signalling Palmer’s portrayal of trauma, displacement and the body.

Rossiter’s corporeal reactions are contrasted with those of the rabbit that he discovers in the bushes. When they meet each other, Rossiter “remain[s] rooted, returning its stare” (16). His approach to the rabbit reflects, metaphorically, his own relationship to vulnerability and unsettled tensions from the war. The trapped rabbit’s body is described closely in the novel through a vivid account of its corporeal terror and an outline of its instinctual and organic reactions to Rossiter’s approach. Though he expects the rabbit to stay still and conceal its terror, mirroring his own approach to unresolved traumas, it starts quivering in vulnerability, fluffing up in terror with its eyes rolling as shrieks come out of its throat. The focus on the rabbit’s instinctual response draws attention to a contrast Palmer builds up between an organic relationship with the body and a disconnection from it. The rabbit releases its fear and distress through quivering, a survival method many animals engage in, to release shock through the body immediately.\(^{13}\) In contrast to the rabbit’s awareness and expression of its terror, Rossiter’s fears are repressed. He remains, uncannily, “haunted by old echoes and associations” (198), continuing to experience the resonances of the war through his body’s memory over a decade later. Rossiter’s traumatised memories and repressed fears cause him to confuse the horrors of war with his life in the present, as he imagines his pregnant wife “caught in a tangle of wires outside [a] trench” (7).

Rossiter’s confrontation with the rabbit sets the scene for his decision to open to resolving the concealed memories of the war that haunt his life—memories that “curled up like nerves in his flesh” (198), conflicting with his desire to create a new life in the present. His ability to recognise and connect to the “uneasy vibrations through the clogged channels of consciousness” (5) within his psyche, that have previously been sheathed within his mind, signals a change in his conscious awareness. The rabbit, who stirs up a physical response of guilt, shame and terror in Rossiter in these early pages, helps him to connect to the hidden sensations of his wartime experiences that he retains. He senses an “awareness of pain through the blood, fusing the memory of present and past agonies” (8). For Rossiter’s

\(^{13}\) Trauma researcher Peter Levine writes of the capacity of animals to naturally heal the shock of traumatic sensation through the body, and through surrendering to the body’s instincts. Human beings, he notes, often dissociate from this inclination.
character, unlike his commander, Sievright, the “darkness around his mind” is, metaphorically, “half-dissolved” (7), signalling the beginning of an awareness that allows him to choose, rather than react, to prior experiences and associations. This early encounter for Rossiter foreshadows his awareness of his corporeal instincts that, through reflection, allow him to release and integrate the wartime impulses that have bound him, ultimately renewing his relationship with the world.

**Section 2.2 “The Impulse Leaked Out Through His Skin”: The Melancholic Body in the Aftermath of War**

In contrast to Rossiter’s growing conscious awareness, Palmer’s other protagonist, Sievright, remains entrapped in a melancholic resistance to the present, reflected in his distancing from the outer world and his body. Through Sievright, Palmer depicts a connection between a melancholic disavowal of loss and a lost sense of identity, that manifests in corporeal dissociation. In *Daybreak*, re-establishing a sense of place is inexplicable from having a connection to the landscape that is fondly described throughout the novel. So too, rectifying the past relates to recognising one’s continuity in the present—signalled as a connection to the body and its permeability within the world.

The divergence between the characters of Sievright and Rossiter, and particularly how they relate to alterity, characterises the difference between letting go of the past and remaining in melancholic mourning. Palmer’s portrayal of Sievright intentionally engages with an ingrained representation of masculinity, as he is described as “more direct, more concentrated, more definitely male” (100). He is depicted as being more attached to his masculine and wartime identities, compared to Rossiter and the other veterans, at the expense of his life in the present. His “majestically self-contained” demeanour (92) signifies his resistance to others and his desire to retain his wartime heroic persona with a “hard, driving egoism” (192)—insinuating his melancholic attachment to what has already been lost.

Palmer employs a language of the body to contrast Sievright’s melancholic, closed demeanour and Rossiter’s conversely open relationship to the world. For Rossiter, who is more open to the world and to resolving his mourning, his sensitivities to the external world are felt deeply. For him, the world “penetrated the skin and left barbs to rankle” (46), signalling his recognition of vulnerability to the Other, a diametrical contrast to egoic resistance. His ability to relate to, and engage with, the vulnerable rabbit, for whom he feels empathy, also suggests a more open relationship to his own defenselessness and to
recognising, rather than repressing, the trauma of war. This differs significantly to Sievright’s impervious disposition, that is signalled in the way he relates to others. Sievright remains corporeally “impenetrable” and resistant to the outer world—“you could never get beneath his toughened skin” (267). His “impenetrable” disposition toward others, causes him to fear the intrusions of others, who he characterises as “a pack of dingoes, ready to sink their teeth in deep” (183). This metaphor reflects his view of alterity as a rupturing of his self-contained corporeality, a prevalent theme relating to intercorporeality that is discussed across this thesis.

The description of Sievright’s relationship to his body, and to the outside world, signals his fractured identity and reflects his inability to embody a new identity in the world. The rupture between his inner and outer worlds is evoked in his feeling “hollow as a drum, a mere shell that echoed sounds and vibrations,” while the “soft, sensitive substance of his inner self” (256, 267) is hidden and denied. In remaining enclosed in an externally idealised image of impenetrable strength, Sievright is also inwardly detached from his feelings and distances himself from the world. Consequently, he remains displaced from his surroundings. This is illustrated in Daybreak as his narrative perspective is only introduced halfway into the novel. His character initially relayed through the speculations and viewpoints of the other characters, evoking an absent presence. In becoming displaced from his world, he possesses “the look of a man who had ceased even then to live in the normal world about him,” echoed in the words of a neighbour who feels “still as if I had seen a ghost” when she sees him riding past (271). This displacement is mirrored in his dissociation from his body, as he remains stuck in a loop of memory associations that are linked with the war, that ring through his brain. Perceived to be judged by others as a fallen veteran, he replays the “images of taunting faces” (262). Through Sievright’s fears of social judgement, Palmer addresses a theme across the post-war novels of the challenges experienced by veterans integrating back into social life.

Attached to expectations and identifications related to his past in the army, Sievright believes that purpose comes from action, and that action gives him purpose. This notion is, of course, subversively challenged by many bouts of melancholic inaction as he succumbs to the “black cloud” (215) of melancholia. Here I return to Freud’s distinction in his essay “Mourning and

14 Notably, two of Palmer’s earlier novels, The Man Hamilton, and Men are Human, also addressed themes of male subjectivity. In Daybreak, Palmer represents, and critiques, certain aspects of masculine and feminine gender construction as a part of his challenge to wartime discourses, a theme that I will examine later.
Melancholia,” between melancholia and the incorporation of grief within the psyche that is evident within Palmer’s novel. In a melancholic relationship to loss, the loss is internalised by the ego, one’s identity state and relationship to the world—the ego becomes impoverished, creating a loss of interest in the outside world (244-46). This description of melancholia applies to Sievright, who is portrayed as being restless in his body as he holds steadfast to the belief that men strengthen their wills by action. He tells Rossiter: “you were born for action” and “to wear out” rather than “rust out” (154), signalling a trope I examine across the post-war novels, of masculine bodies being perceived, culturally, as utilitarian. This trope is reflected in Sievright’s desire for purpose in action, and subverted by Palmer’s descriptions of bodies at war as lacking corporeal agency—of “diggers whose bodies didn’t quite belong to them,” who had fought with a sense of pride, yet were “given to the anonymous purposes of life” and worn out physically: “gaunt-faced, tattered” (173, 259). Sievright recollects the war nostalgically, craving the purpose that the war gave him, even though it exhausted his body: “he might have passed out in action, at the height of his power” (279).

Palmer depicts how Sievright’s melancholia is connected to his lost sense of identity after the war and to his attachment to the past. His melancholia is embedded in the loss of his wartime role as a “steel-nerved company commander,” an identity based on “accumulating legends” that portrayed him immortal—that, seemingly, “set him apart from the death-bound mob” (13). Sievright’s lost will and leaked “impulse,” accompanied with inaction and melancholia, indicates Palmer’s portrayal of the challenge inherent to reconstructing identity after war, particularly when the previous identity is inflated—in Sievright’s case, it exceeds the mortality of the body. Through losing his identity, Sievright also loses his “vital energy,” which is portrayed as a loss of corporeal energy, as “the impulse leaked out through his skin” (106, 257). The word vitality is associated with the Latin word for life, a connotation that signals Palmer’s contrast between sources of meaning and purpose derived from the war, that perpetuated death and destruction; and sources of life that are more sustainable and found, as the novel progresses, through a fluid relationship with nature and an intrinsic source of energy. Sievright’s melancholic numbing from the outer world is characterised through the description of his “nerves that contact with other people” dying, as he remains alienated from those around him, from whom he feels separated, “like bees behind glass” (255). Entrapped in an identity that excludes vulnerability, Sievright cannot access his own feelings—they remain “wrapped in a warm wooly mist” (147), a metaphor that signifies his melancholic cocoon that removes him from the world.
Sievright’s disconnection from relationships is reflected in his declining sexual relationship with his wife, a theme that signals his lost masculine identity, through impotence. Through Sievright’s lost connection to his sexuality and vitality, his loss of heroic, masculine energy is accentuated. This evokes a trope of literal and figurative castration and repressed masculine sexuality, a recurring image that is evident across some prominent examples of post-war fiction that feature returning soldiers. This includes Ernest Hemingway’s literal castration, in *The Sun Also Rises*, of his protagonist, Jake, a wounded veteran who suffers from erectile dysfunction, as well as a “foreignness” within his trauma; and *One of Ours*, by Willa Cather, that features a figurative castration through the metaphor of the bleeding stump, which relates to her protagonist, Claude’s conflicted masculinity. I connect this theme of castration to the ambiguity pertaining to masculine identity that writers relay in the post-war period, particularly a lost association with previous affiliations of power and will, that Sievright’s character finds particularly challenging. Gail Braybon cites this as a reality of a “crisis of masculinity” linked to World War One and a sense of “emasculating” that was widespread, that included sexual impotence among other symptoms (157). Braybon notes that, in the post-war years, the experiences of the trenches and these symptoms, “were at odds with the heroic roles prescribed by conventional understandings of masculinity” (157). This is echoed by Joanna Bourke’s discussion, in *Dismembering the Male*, of the hardships experienced by veterans who had lost their “heroic potency” within social life, a challenge that is emphasised in *Daybreak* through Sievright’s struggles with his masculine identity.

Sievright’s relationship with deterioration and death signals the repression of his mourning and his rejection of mortality, that he externalises through projecting it onto the outer world. His fixation with diseased apple trees in his yard mirrors his fears of external threat, as much as it signals his disconnection from his mortal body and nature. Sievright cannot concede to change, and especially to deterioration, and he is deeply upset when he observes it in nature: “that sense of things turning to wood! Or being eaten slowly by the worm!” (185). He is portrayed as being dissociated from the cycles of nature, from both life and death, as his melancholia keeps him locked in a liminal space outside of the potentiality for renewal. He yearns to control his surroundings and others, fearing that only dissolution will arise rather than regeneration. The anti-pastoral and pessimistic sentiments perceived by Sievright, 15

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15 In contrast to action, which he values the most, Sievright associates staying still and settling with death, as he fears the end of cycles. He tells Rossiter “every groove is a grave” (169), yet it is Sievright who, in denying death and degeneration, becomes relegated to a state of melancholic inaction.
compare to those of Claude in Cather’s novel, who also cannot settle into rural life after the war. In One of Ours, Cather laments the loss of a pastoral landscape, describing orchards that are “left to die out of neglect” due to modern machinery (102). This imagery of nature and death is further evoked by the character, Claude, who laments the “bleeding stump” (27) of a cherry tree that his father had previously chopped down that will no longer bear fruit. This phallic metaphor links in with the themes of patriarchal dominance that are linked to a loss of innocence and possibility, as well as the possibilities of creativity and renewal. Brian Dwyer argues that the use of place is central to the construction of gender in war fiction, as the environment offers a contrast to the constriction of post-war masculine identities. He writes that a “return to the land as innocent…provid[ed] an opportunity for men to be innocent” (229). In Palmer’s fiction, this divergence between war and pastoral, in a similar way to Cather, highlights tropes of post-war masculine identity and grief, through the theme of place.

Palmer contrasts a representation of post-war melancholia through Sievright’s anti-pastoral displacement, with Rossiter’s growing optimism and individuation from his past identities. Sievright’s displacement causes him to want to go foraging in the Australian bushlands for opportunities, a fantasy that is based on reclaiming the excitement of war. Wishing for Rossiter to accompany him, he is let down as he declines, relaying his plans to seed apple trees. Rossiter’s sense of freedom in wanting financial sovereignty is described with almost satirical ambiguity, as he tells Sievright: “I’ve dug in here … settled,” adamant that he is without a “free leg” (181)—the words “dug in” cleverly evoking trench warfare. I read this seeming ambiguity as Palmer’s subversive twist on the war narrative that ruptured a sense of place, in that Rossiter is liberated and content in being grounded and pursuing independence for private means.16 His aims at self-sufficiency, signalled by his refusal of his ex-commander’s desires, are also in contradistinction to Palmer’s depictions of the subservience required by soldiers at war and the lack of a private sense of purpose. Upset by Rossiter’s rejection and disobedience to his desires, Sievright retaliates: “stay here till you’re riddled with codling moth” (192). He is critical of Rossiter being “anchored” and rebuffs his sense of rootedness and connection to nature, place and identity—thwarting the notion of being “centred in his own home” (192, 68).

16 Rossiter’s free-thinking independence is somewhat ambiguous, as he is following the path of his father in returning to the land and his agricultural roots. However, as his sister, Dora, mentions, he has more self-awareness and openness to others, as his “mind wasn’t closed in a hard shell like their father’s” (236-7).
The recurrent motif of the codling moth, which Sievright battles with as they decay his crops, evokes what is hidden and repressed, as the moth is a creature of darkness and concealment. This alludes to the novel’s pastoral antithesis to Sievright’s displacement and rigidity, as well as the themes of embracing nature and cyclicality in relation to mourning loss. The codling moth’s capacity to burrow into fruit to find nourishment and take flight in darkness, is an antithesis to Sievright’s dissociation from his shadow and the darkness of his unconscious. In contrast to his resistance to change—his “warm wooly” cocoon (147) of melancholic stagnancy—moths experience a heightened sensitivity to the vibrations of their environment; they have experienced a cyclical metamorphosis and broken out of their cocoons. Throughout *Daybreak*, motifs such as this insinuate that Sievright has the capacity to emerge from his melancholic grief, but this is a potentiality he does not engage with.

*Daybreak* portrays Rossiter’s character as being able to seed a new cycle of growth and awareness—if only he were to surrender his attachment to sources of meaning from the past that are no longer vital and sustainable and instead open to the world around him. As Rossiter recognises in the early pages of the novel, there is a sense of hope for the future as a part of him is open and “buoyant, responsive to the lift of the awakening world about him … a world that kept the promise of morning” (32-33). Both Sievright and Rossiter, in a sense, regress to the past. Sievright is resistant to change, desiring to retain his previous identity through melancholic disavowal. Rossiter, comparatively, also returns to the past, as he works towards a lifestyle based on the agricultural roots that his father had valued (68), finding comfort in the familiar. The difference between the two is that Rossiter restores a connection to place that is material, while Sievright remains displaced, in a liminal space between incongruent identities. The tension between the two approaches to grief explored in the novel—a consolatory form of nostalgia and melancholic disavowal—both signal a resistance to mourning a new age of cultural uncertainty.

**Section 3 “The Fuddled Image of Himself”: Corporeality, Shame and the Other**

Implicit in Palmer’s depiction of grief after World War One is his representation of bodies and their relationship to identity. *Daybreak* interrogates the ways in which a person can

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17 Rossiter’s recollection of a dream involving Sievright at the beginning of the novel, provides an early insight into the theme of concealed vulnerability. In his dream, Rossiter is haunted by Sievright, who is “wounded and sagging … looking like some frightful scarecrow, eyes rolling, mouth forced open in pain” (6), as his tormented body hangs in the wires. This dream reveals what Sievright represses and needs to accept: his vulnerable, mortal body. The scarecrow also symbolises the illusion of Sievright’s heroic identity, that conceals his underlying vulnerability.
remain stuck and reactive in relation to the past, impacting upon movement and the capacity
to create in the present. Sievright is portrayed as being imprisoned in his attachment to a
mental conception of himself, that prevents him from re-negotiating his relationship to life in
the present. Palmer illustrates how corporeal detachment can occur due to upholding an
incongruent self-image, leading to displacement and shame around one’s being-in-the-world.
This displacement can be understood through Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of corporeality.
Movement is the basis of intentionality and Merleau-Ponty describes this connection to the
body as pertaining to a capacity to act, a sense that “I can” move and act within the world
(Phenomenology of Perception 159). This is based on an intentional arc that “projects around
us our past, our future, our human milieu, our physical situation, our ideological situation,
and our moral situation … that ensures that we are situated within all of these relationships”
(157). For Sievight, who is displaced liminally between these aspects of his life, he
experiences an incongruence that influences his capacity to act—a “paralysis of the will”
(Palmer 176).

Sievright’s socially-constructed mental image of himself conceals the physiological
vulnerability of his unresolved trauma—the “secret turmoil of his nerves showing faintly
beneath the skin of his face” (183). The tension between wanting to escape from “the fuddled
image of himself” (176), to which he feels subjected by the outer world, is inter-related with
his struggle with grief and displacement. He feels his will paralysed from shame, as
humiliating memories are “pricking sharply at the soft, sensitive substance of his inner self”
(174). Feeling judged and laughed at by others for his fallen identity as a commander, this
catalyses in Sievright a “rush of shame” that carries him “blinded through the night … into
the dark and silence” (176-7)—evoking the shame that he has concealed. Sievright’s
metaphorical blindness, signifies his disconnection from his senses and his inability to
perceive himself outside of his old identity. This is connected to his “blind instinct” to be
born again as his heroic self (212).

In relation to shame and melancholia, Freud writes of a sharp conflict between the two
agencies of the ego—a self-identification which renders the narratives of self-debasement
plausible, resulting from the failure to live up to the demands of an egoic identity (Group
Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego 132, 130). The social theorist Jeffrey Kauffman also
inter-links grief and shame in modern contexts of loss wherein grief has been
disenfranchised. For Kauffman, shame entails being in a social environment in which grief
must be hidden, the shame arising from an oppressed subjectivity and dissociation (4, 8).
Shame, Kauffman argues, has been “expelled from the self and the social world” in contemporary discourses, so that it “reappear(s) as a foreign, otherworldly invader” (13). These understandings of shame aptly parallel Sievright’s attempts to assert his strength and will, that are contrasted with his repressed vulnerability—“the imp that was his other self”—which returns in his “dreams in which antic figures capered!” (Palmer 262, 174).

Kelly Oliver presents a compelling argument in relation to shame, subjectivity and sociality, arguing that shame is not originally the result of doing something that is prohibited, but rather of being unable to maintain social relations (114). For Oliver, like Kauffman, shame is interlinked with one’s primary being-in-the-world and subjectivity, at a “deeper, less articulate, unsublimated level than blame or guilt”; she argues that shame colonises psychic space, in direct opposition to autonomy (112-113). For Sievright, the distinction between his idealised social identity and the reality of his pain, splits him into “two selves” (Palmer 176). This splitting of the psyche is inherent to the social shame that Oliver describes as “a sense of double or debilitating alienation from one’s own experience that is directly related to one’s social context and position as marginalized or excluded within mainstream culture” (112).

Sievright experiences two discordant identities, of heroism and vulnerability. His inability to resolve the two identities impacts upon his ability to occupy social space, which is signalled by his dissociation.

Palmer connects Sievright’s attachment to his prior identity with his inability to live his life in the present and connect to the world. Merleau-Ponty writes of the relationship between body and world, using the term “inhabit” to refer to the way in which the body responds to the environment with fluidity and inhabits space (Phenomenology of Perception 174), highlighting how place and embodiment inter-relate. As Sievright’s relationship with his inner self is dissociated, his shame enacts a rupture of his identity, “as if one part of him had escaped from the body” (Palmer 176). His metaphorical division into “two selves” (176) reflects his inability to internally rectify these two identities that he has polarised: his idealised strength and rejected vulnerability, in relation to the outer world. Consequently, he cannot inhabit the world, mind and body. In the passage where he recognises this split, his mind-body dissociation is most pronounced. He is aware that “part of him had escaped from the body and was looking down contemptuously from the ceiling” (176). Later, a shock of contact startles him as the “two selves” reunite in the dark outside, signalling his inner conflict between cohesion and alterity.
Sievright’s displacement from the world and from other people is further highlighted, by way of contrast, with his wife, Jean. Returning to my reference to the construction of gender in *Daybreak*, a theme that is prominent across the post-war novels I discuss, I argue that Palmer challenges the notions of immortality and impenetrability associated with war, heroism and destructive masculine identities, while also highlighting a greater potentiality in his female characters, for letting go of the past. Elaine Showalter argues that the post-war years presented “a crisis of the Victorian masculine ideal” (171), a dilemma of identity that is portrayed across the post-war novels I examine. In *Men of War*, Jessica Meyer similarly describes the challenge for men assimilating identities that were often split during the war—particularly, she notes the rupture between domestic and heroic identities, an aspect that Palmer focuses on in *Daybreak*. Meyer argues that these identities were a source of tension, but central to social definitions of masculinity during and after the war, as men “used their experience to define themselves as men, both in relation to other men and to women” (*Men of War 2*).

Palmer draws attention to a melancholic process in his masculine characters, relating to an attachment to the identities of war that has created a repression of mourning. The female characters, though minor in the Palmer’s novel, conversely signify a trope across all of the novels I examine, that depict feminine characters as having an awareness and openness to grief and external identifications, as well as a capacity to feel and empathise with the pain of others. While it is notable that the male characters in the novels have, in many cases, experienced the events directly—while the female characters are often responding to personal grief and loss—this construction of identity challenges the way in which rigid gender identities can inhibit an incorporation of loss. In *Daybreak*, gender identities are challenged when Sievright has an outburst that is both “distraught and hysterical,” his behaviour perceived as being “like an emotional woman’s” (192), which causes Rossiter to feel ashamed on his behalf. His wife’s desire for him to return to his prior strength and “full powers,” and even to re-awaken the “male instinct for possession” that he has lost—even though this constituted “power over” her (101, 147, 166)—signals Palmer’s portrayal of changing gender roles, and social pressures around gender, after the war. That Sievright is “criticized by others” (104) upon returning from the war, and experiences pressure from those around him, including Rossiter and Jean to uphold a heroic identity, influences his melancholic dissociation from the world and the concealment of his grief.
Palmer also signals a shift in gender roles through Jean’s recognition of the impact of Sievright’s prior dominance upon her subjectivity as a woman, which had caused her to feel “less sharply and aggressively herself” (170). Jean’s agency is also influenced by living with Sievright when he is melancholic, as she feels “buried alive” with him as he loses his vitality (135), signalling her entrapment, as a woman, in their marriage. She reflects on their lost intimacy, “the deadness of her feeling for him,” and a “dull sense” of numbness and apathy that she experiences in their life together (98). This description of the desolation of their relationship, contrasts with the possibility she imagines in an affair with another man, that gave her days “a livelier movement” and “some new movement in life” (124, 139). The failure of her attempts to relate to her husband, epitomised in the image of his self-containment, instigates her contrasting desire to “burst through the folds of outworn feelings and sentiments” and re-connect with life (139).

In comparison to novels, such as An ANZAC Muster by Australian post-war writer William Baylebridge, that reify the masculine Australian warrior, at the expense of female roles that are denigrated and domesticated, Palmer subverts these myths of masculinity and femininity. He challenges the limitation of rigid masculine archetypes and signals, within his female characters, an awareness beyond rigid conceptions and identities, that holds a key to unlocking grief through engaging with both polarities. Jean’s capacity to connect with her inner self, antithetical to Sievright’s dissociation, denotes her fluid relationship to inner and outer worlds. Her natural inclination to accept “the strange underworld” (Palmer 100) of the duplicity of life, allows her to navigate between different aspects of experience, including her relationships with others. In contrast to Sievright’s mental delineations of others, Jean senses the subtler essence of experience, the “faint but positive shocks” continually registered from her being when she engages with others (109). She distinguishes between her mind’s perceptions of others and the outer world, and possesses a desire to continually renew herself. Jean challenges the “sentimental loyalty” to the past, of the other men, wanting instead to “crawl out of our old skins like snakes do” (135). This again signals the recurrent motif of the snake, that conveys Palmer’s theme of cyclical regeneration. The shedding of skin, associated with snakes, signifies a detachment from meaning and associations from the past that Jean desires, allowing a new life. Where Sievright cannot connect to his inner self, Jean is interested in the concealed depths—“the hidden currents that flowed beneath the surface of life” (108)—highlighting Palmer’s theme of returning to nature and to embracing the fluidity of life.
There is some notable ambiguity in Palmer’s portrayal of Jean. Her opening to new life, which is depicted as life-affirming and allows her to incorporate the past, includes her desire, that she does not act upon, to have an extra-marital affair. Dwyer notes a theme across Australian post-war fiction of “the binary of the loyal and the treacherous woman” (228). Indeed, as Sievright views his wife talking intimately with another man, he feels the air “tainted with treachery” (Palmer 262), and is reminded of others who had betrayed him after the war. In Daybreak the binary between loyalty and disloyalty, however, is ambiguous. The ideologies of masculine loyalty, particularly in regards to Sievright and Rossiter who remain loyal to their previous identities, comes at the expense of not being able to move forward and let go, inhibiting an incorporation of grief. In relation to the past, Palmer invites the reader to consider where opening to what has been polarised, through any identity, might invite a sense of possibility.

In Daybreak, the ability to open to and address grief, derives from a connection to fluidity in the present; an acceptance and relationship with the environment and other people; and an understanding of the mutability of a sense of self, as it oscillates between polarities: between power and vulnerability, control and surrender, action and passivity and inner and outer worlds. To be anchored in the world through our bodies, Merleau-Ponty writes, is to experience “harmony between what we aim at and what is given, between the intention and the performance” (Phenomenology of Perception 144). Palmer’s novel explores the challenge to opening to new life, when a person remains attached to the past, illustrating the displacement that ensues from the body and environment in the present, limiting a capacity to move forward.

Just as Sievright finds himself fixated in the past and attached to mind-body associations from the war, Rossiter also needs to detach from his loyalties to Sievright, so that he can release the past and establish a new relationship to his world. Palmer illustrates, through Rossiter’s loyalty to Sievright, how identities are informed by mind-body attachment. His subservience to Sievright, as a commander and a friend, has become emotionally entrenched: a “part of his bone and blood” (180) that permeates “the inner cells of his being … by threads of feeling” (196). Rossiter idealises Sievright’s immortal identity, his seemingly inhuman “power and natural heat” that “overflowed and filled everyone around, making death itself seem a light thing” (48-49). In Sievright, Rossiter found a source of meaning and inspiration.

18 Through interrogating the notion of loyalty, Palmer also subtly challenges the political loyalties of Australia to England, that led to Australia’s involvement in World War One.
and “what he sought in a living man”: an access to a “god” that is, seemingly, invulnerable to destruction (14-15). This is portrayed as an irony in the novel, as this identity is hollow and disconnected from the body, a fantasy.

Palmer critiques the post-war warrior archetype ascribed to veterans, through self-reflexively illustrating the way in which an identity becomes narrativised and culturally accepted through words. Sievright, for example, had become associated with the word “courage,” that has become linked to his character: “a byword (as) stories grew around him” (15). Over time Sievright’s “name came to have a power of enchantment” (15), signalling the socio-cultural construction of his identity, that is a fantasy. For Rossiter, who is attached to his loyalties to Sievright, he feels a corporeal urge to protect and defend Sievright’s identity in the eyes of others, and to fight for him “to the brink of conflict,” even until he has no breath left (45-6, 225).19 His pathological desire to protect an ideal over his own mortality, even after the war, signals an unhealthy and melancholic attachment to a wartime mentality.

In order to release the past, Rossiter needs to also release the ideological “tin god” (14) of Sievright, signifying the hollow and disembodied external source from which he has derived meaning. As the story progresses, Rossiter notices that “something was changing or had already changed in his own interior world,” which allows him to re-negotiate his “own ideas of life,” and release the past, including the “corpse of their friendship” (211, 215, 198).

Establishing a new identity, as Palmer emphasises, requires a balance between reclaiming sovereignty, while also maintaining reverence for the Other. Palmer hints at his nationalist, anti-war politics when Rossiter poses the question: “what about the loyalty that begins at home?” Palmer’s interrogation is further accentuated by suggestions of egalitarianism and individualism, as Rossiter recognises the value of something that “Sievright couldn’t understand”—that of “men being free and equal” (14, 215). Rossiter’s character represents the potentiality for letting go of the past, and creating the post-war life on Australian soil that Palmer idealises. He is drawn to create a sustainable and sovereign existence on the land, following his “instinct for independence” (79). In releasing his desire to be subservient to another, and to an ideal, he grieves an attachment to a disembodied source of life outside

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19 Rossiter’s sister, Dora, recounts that “ever since he was a young, he was haunted by the need of a hero, someone who would give him an image of nobility” (14). This signals his desire for a hierarchical power to comply to, rather than becoming individuated in his own right. The theme of private individuation that the novel engages with encompasses Rossiter’s experiences, in which he finds personal sovereignty in his life. It also hints at Palmer’s political subversion of Australia’s transnational allegiances.
himself, revealing a propensity toward independence and self-sufficiency. This allows him to find his own connection to a sense of place in the world, which I discuss in Section 4.

Section 4.1 The Promise of Morning: a New Rhythm of Birth and Growth

*Daybreak* interrogates a subjection to social conditioning and identities, whilst also signalling the possibilities of embracing a fluidity of mind and body and recreating new cycles beyond the resistance of a melancholic grief. While the little township evokes a “dull cloud of depression” for some of the characters, a “flicker of renewed life” comes from worlds outside of this, such as a passing gypsy show (Palmer 64, 54) that offers the potentiality of renewed perception. It is this sense of life and vitality, and the possibilities of renewal embodied in some of the characters, that signals a consolation for mourning developed in the latter part of the novel. Palmer depicts the ways in which a renewal after grief is catalysed through establishing a relationship to the environment and the body’s sensory experience of the world, which creates a vital energy: “a rhythm of birth and growth” (33). *Daybreak* prosecutes a pastoral consolation for post-war grief, idealising the connection to a personal and self-sustaining source of vitality in relation to place and nature, rather than relying on ideas, concepts and identities, as a source of life.

The juxtaposing representations of Sievright and Rossiter signal the importance that Palmer highlights—of a balance of both polarities of power and vulnerability, that is necessary to avoid re-creating inner and outer conflict. In *Daybreak*, both Sievright and Rossiter need to access the identities within themselves that they have relegated to the Other at the expense of their capacity to move forward. While it is necessary for Sievright to accept his inner world and vulnerabilities to find a balance, Rossiter needs to access his power to act and lead with his own body through intentional action. For both, an awareness of the body’s mortality and instincts provides access to a new awareness of self. In *Daybreak*, the capacity to regenerate and shed skin, to re-imagine and narrativise the self, is found within a pastoral connection to place and in reclaiming an inner experience of the world. Through drawing parallels to nature, Palmer espouses some crucial aspects that signal the completion of mourning, such as acceptance and awareness of the culmination of cycles—facets that are portrayed as organic to the natural world and also to the body.

In the latter part of the novel Sievright discovers, but does not ultimately harness, a capacity to surrender to his body as a source of creativity, that allows him to connect to a source of power. Creativity and melancholia are juxtaposed, as Sievright’s vital potentialities are
dormant and inaccessible in his melancholic introversion. He is compared to a snake that hibernates and lives on its fat in winter when he fails to tend to his land or grow new crops (60), suggesting that the potentiality to accept a new cycle of life already exists around him in his environment, should he choose to relate to it. Sievright’s depiction as a snake in winter, signals the dormancy of his melancholia—the “fat” that he metaphorically lives off evokes the stored, unused energy of his prior attachments that hamper his movement and rejuvenation. In representing the capacity to harness life’s fluidity and cyclicality, the novel alludes to imagination as being a source of empowerment toward mind-body intentionality. As Sievright lies in melancholic repose, he imagines himself as a commander again, which helps him to reconstitute his sense of power, energetically, in his body. Through doing so, he recognises that it still exists—that his power is not only a part of his identity, but a self-sustaining life energy, a “creative uprush of life” (177) that is always a source of revival.

In contrast to the corporeal dissociation caused by constructed identities, Sievright’s body is enlivened through his recognition of inner being. As he reconnects with this internal source of power, he experiences “a surge of renewed vitality pouring through him giving a sharp edge to his senses” (258). This allows Sievright to experience his corporeal vitality that has become unconscious during his melancholia, an energy that is “in his body, flowing through him in life-giving waves” (258). Through relating to himself outside of his constructed identity, he retrieves his subjectivity: “[h]e was himself again, vital and concentrated” (258). Sievright’s connection to his body is, however, experienced as a “return of power that didn’t last” (174). Just moments after he has felt empowered, dizziness overcomes him and his head fills with blood as he hears a bird laughing in a tree, reminding him of leering faces that antagonised him after the war (260). Palmer illustrates how, ultimately, Sievright’s inability to accept the past and particularly his vulnerabilities disconnects him from his life energy and his body, through which he has a potentiality for metaphorical rebirth. This oscillation between awareness of life-affirming possibilities of meaning-making in the present, and a resistance to the fluctuations of life, constitutes Palmer’s representation of post-war grief.

Rossiter, conversely, starts to move towards life-affirming possibilities after he is confronted physically with feeling the need to defend and protect Sievright’s image amongst a group of men. Through hearing the men speak disrespectfully of Sievright at the pub, Rossiter feels “his whole being steeped in a sense of shame” for him, as “the image he had created and securely held” is felt to be dissolving (186). Surrendering to his instinct to defend his former
commander, he starts a fight with the man who voiced his disrespect, Nielsen. The violence of the fight is graphically described and brings forth, for Rossiter, an emergence of wartime memories hidden in his body and mind. He becomes displaced from his surroundings and senses memories in the form of “pictures, vivid but unrelated” from the war (227). As Rossiter watches, Nielsen interchangeably morphs, in his imagination, changing identity to those with whom he feels an emotional attachment, including his wife and Sievright, and lastly the “moist, dewy eyes of the rabbit in the trap” (227). This blurring of identities signifies Rossiter’s relationship to alterity, as he becomes aware of the futility of attacking another in the flesh for the sake of ideals. He notices “conflicting loyalties,” as he recognises through his senses the visceral experience of harming another: “the smell of sweating flesh in his nostrils” (227). The scene of the fight initiates a visceral cathartic release for Rossiter, as experiences, in his body, “a sense of release … as if blood congealed in his veins were flowing again” (227). He recognises, experiences and releases past attachments.

During the fight, Rossiter acknowledges a metaphorical “shaft of light” that breaks into his mind and changes his inner world and perspective (211). This awareness “shifted old landmarks and broke up new soil” (211), a metaphor that links to the consolation of place and pastoral renewal favoured in *Daybreak*. As his bodily awareness is heightened during the fight, Rossiter notices that his attachment to his allegiance, and a desire to defend, was pulling him away from his desire for his own ideal: “his small strip of land, his growing trees, his dream of a life dependent on nothing but the favour of the earth and the plenty dropping rain” (231). Rossiter also recognises the lack of support of those surrounding him, who encouraged the fight, an act that only drew him “further and further from the core of his shell, from his central self” (231). Having understood his habitual inclinations toward conflict as deriving from past allegiances, Rossiter is “conscious of an even fuller sense of release, a sense of newly-gained freedom” (232). He notices, in his body, a capacity to act and respond intentionally rather than habitually—an awareness of what Merleau-Ponty describes as one’s “personal core … [their] power of existing” (*Phenomenology of Perception* 134). This allows Rossiter to perceive his body as a source of agency and intentionality.

When in the final pages of the text, a sudden accident in the yard leads to Sievrigh’s death, Rossiter’s relationship to his former commander is resolved with a reconciliation. This

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20 The character Nielsen, with whom Rossiter fights, is also significant to the theme of sovereignty in the novel, as he is his boss from the saw-mill that Rossiter hopes to quit when he is financially self-sufficient. The fight is pivotal to his process of releasing the past, that is inter-linked with his journey toward becoming independent.
provides a consolatory, and perhaps simplistic, ending to Daybreak, through alleviating the problem of the horrors of war and pathological grief, through their passing in time. Palmer offers solace through Sievright’s gentle surrender to the vulnerability of his dying body, signifying a sense of hope in the cycles of life and death that naturally occur. As Sievright embraces his mortality, both his body and mind relax and tension also releases from his face. He lies flat, “comatose and apparently at ease” (274), signifying his final surrender to his body in death. As he lies on his deathbed, Rossiter and Sievright connect beyond words and outside of the stories and identities they have played out. In this transparency, Sievright “had become near and real to [Rossiter] again” (282). He experiences the “harmony of renewed contact” (282) that allows the men to joke about the moodiness of Sievright’s post-war years, releasing a melancholic attachment. In the stillness of their final convergence, Palmer delineates a shift from the war years—the past “had no reality: it was a part of the confusion of a world they had both left behind” (277). Rossiter finds, in death, a silent communion with Sievright: “[s]ome thin, impenetrable wall seemed to have broken down: currents of life flowed between them in the silence” (276). This balances their previously polarising identities, pre-empting the promise of new life depicted at the culmination of Daybreak.

Section 4.2 Bearing New Life: A Surrender to Body and Land

Palmer’s engagement with aspects of the pastoral mode is distinguished most notably in the ending that the novel provides, that offers consolation through a retreat to agricultural roots. Daybreak highlights, through the pastoral mode, an organic connection between body and environment that allows a renewed capacity for meaning-making and growth. Particularly through Rossiter, and a few of the minor characters, the novel suggests that the body and the vital energy of life is accessible and already attuned to cyclical regeneration.

The relationship between humanity and nature, reflected throughout Daybreak, is personified in the character of Old Mother Nielsen. Though she only features in the novel once, when visited by the local doctor, Lennard, her characterisation contrasts with Sievright’s, to highlight a positive association with nature and vitality that he lacks. Paradoxically, whilst the vital energy of others around her is depicted as dormant, or “pathetically lacking in energy,” she possesses a private source of energy that regenerates beyond herself, that she has “fertilised … by her imagination” (143). Her connection to an internal source of life provides a sustainable relationship to her environment and community. As Lennard reflects when he visits Mother Nielsen: “it was she who had conceived the idea of cultivating trees for street
planting, sending circulars to shire-councils all over the country offering to supply their needs. Steadily … the nursery had grown” (142).

Of interest to this discussion is the way in which Palmer presents Mother Nielsen’s physical illness metaphorically, emphasising a correlation between vitality and the body. Her ability to regenerate life is connected to her capacity to detach from her story, particularly the story of her illness. She is portrayed as having an “internal cancer,” a “hidden growth” (141) within her body. Her inner growth provides an antithesis to Sievright’s battle with the decay in the outer world, symbolised in the codling moth that he finds attacking his crops. Where Sievright’s battle with the external decay of the rotten tree has caused him frustration and alarm, as he attempts to eradicate and cut out that which is rotten, Mother Nielsen builds a relationship with her cancer that is surrendered and accepting, continuing to draw on the energy of life. This approach is described in relation to nature, as she “hung on to life like some tough-rooted tree” (141).

The image of Mother Nielsen presented in the novel resembles Mother Earth personified. She is aptly omniscient, as she “sits on the balcony with her spy-glass”—yet, in contrast to Sievright, she is connected to her community and place, remaining “as much part of their lives as the hill on which the big house was built” (143). Where Sievright has lost his vitality and becomes more self-contained, Mother Nielsen draws on a “secret spring of vitality” that permeates the world around her. She represents a sense of communal inter-connectedness as she “held the place together by the magic of some natural force” (143, 141).21 Mother Nielsen’s inaction, yet connection to vitality, contrasts with Sievright’s overemphasis on action and loss of vitality, accentuating Palmer’s theme of a vital life force being located within an intrinsic connection to energy that is sustained by a relationship to place. Where Sievright’s vitality leaks out of his body, attached to an externally derived identity, this is unsustainable; in comparison to Mother Nielsen, who, in deriving her source of meaning internally, sustains others as a source of inspiration.22

21 Mother Nielsen contemplates the difference between habitual embodiment and being connected to a source of life-sustaining energy, reflecting that “most people have enough of the kind that make their arms and legs move” yet are “driven back on the other sort” (155). This evokes the vital energy that Palmer emphasises as being necessary to growth: a self-sustaining and self-perpetuating connection to life.

22 Mother Nielsen also has the capacity to laugh and is “full of humour” (141), which is alluded to frequently in the novel, signalling her detachment from a fixed identity. Lennard reflects after visiting Mother Nielsen, that he feels “the contagion of the strong flow of life in her … a clearer view into his own mind, a finer edge to his will” (156). This inspires him to laugh off the seriousness of his mental anguish. The use of comedy, in response to tragedy, will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Six of this thesis, when I examine Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close.
It is through the awareness of an intrinsic connection to life, rather than conceptual modes of experiencing, that Palmer highlights a capacity to revitalise perceptions. This is later experienced by Sievright’s wife, Jean, and also Rossiter. As Jean witnesses a “stream of energy flowing” (161) through Sievright, this allows her to also see beyond her story and entrapment in her perception, the life that continues to flow beyond this. When she engages more with her senses, in this scene, she becomes aware of a life outside of Sievright’s destructive engagement with the trees he is angrily chopping down. Jean notices her husband’s “grotesque” habitual embodiment (160), as he resists the flow of life around him. She also becomes aware of her own body, a sensory invigoration and awareness that connects her to her surroundings. Jean recognises how her senses engage with the surrounding world, blood tingling with “the scent of the dew on the long orchard grass, the delicious tartness of a ripe Jonathan prickling her senses … [b]irds calling from the water-dripping gullies below, brightness radiating through the air!” (159).

Merleau-Ponty describes this awareness of the body, that is depicted in different moments in the novel, as a mode to access the world. He explains that the senses give an access to a recognition of the body as an agent of perception that remains enmeshed in and “connatural” with the world that it perceives (Phenomenology of Perception 248). He writes: “[w]hether it is a question of my body, the natural world, the past, birth or death, the question is always to know how I can be open to phenomena that transcend me and … only exist to the extent that I take them up and live them” (381). Merleau-Ponty’s description of access to the corporeal dimension, encapsulates Palmer’s portrayal of the potentiality of lived space that only some of his characters come to access. Jean’s openness to her body permits an openness to the world, allowing her to inhabit and find a sense of place through her senses and the body, allowing space for new life.

Daybreak oscillates between a depiction of melancholic grief, where the body and mind become rigid and resistant to life; and a renewed sensory invigoration, that opens to life, through depicting the ways in which both impact upon the body. Rossiter’s sister, Dora, like Sievright, is melancholic in her approach to life, in that she internalises and grieves the limitation of her cultural surroundings, believing that it is the place itself that contributes to

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23 Like Mother Nielsen, Jean also feels “an inclination to laugh” and notices the music in the background, both of which permit an awareness beyond Sievright’s focus on the axe. Her tendencies toward humour reflect an ability to escape the fixedness of her melancholic story of life and her feelings of entrapment in her marriage. This openness of comedy and irony is a clear juxtaposition to the melancholic attachment to the past, and resistance to the present, found in Sievright’s character.
her despair. She longs to open beyond that limitation through transparency.\textsuperscript{24} She desires “to compose something of her own” (239), as she questions her identity and belonging in her community that is, in her perception, gossipy and insular. Through Dora, the theme of entrapment in gender roles is again insinuated, as she is critical of cultural expectations for her to have children, feeling that “a woman … needed something more than the power to reproduce life” (237). It is through her capacity for creating through music that Dora experiences a mind-body release beyond her melancholic “dark places” and “the mist of her mind” (234, 236). Music allows a revival of her sense of self, “set[ting]) her blood moving to a familiar rhythm” beyond her feelings of oppression that “ke[pt] her from complete fulfilment (36, 236).

In a similar way to Jean, who feels connected to Sievright’s pain, Dora is portrayed as having internalised her brother’s wounds. This attests to her capacity for empathy and connection that Palmer portrays in the female characters, that is noticeably absent in the male characters. Notably, this theme of women sensing, empathetically, the masculine wounding is also present in Rebecca West’s post-war novel, \textit{The Return of the Soldier}, that addresses mental trauma. In West’s novel, the character Jenny, like Dora, begins to bear the pain of her cousin Chris, “like a wound in [her] own body” (West 31). This is comparable to Dora’s reflection that there were “two wounds” in Rossiter’s body, that she is “conscious of … as if they had been in her own” (Palmer 40). This trope of feminine empathy and receptivity suggests a feminine grief depicted across the post-war novels, related to connecting deeply to the masculine wounding and feeling impacted and drawn into the pain. Dora’s capacity to connect with her inner world, in a similar way to Jean’s, is linked to her sensory awareness and attentiveness to her feelings and to how they provide an openness to others. Yet this empathy can also be a cause of pain and disempowerment, which is illuminated by the theme of masculine and feminine imbalance that many of my chosen novels highlight, across the two genres.

Through Dora, Palmer continues to explore the importance of creating anew whilst also remaining connected and grounded in a sense of place. Through her affinity with the character Muller, a romantic and passionate music teacher, she is inspired to find a new appreciation for her rural roots. Signalling the novel’s pastoral idealism, Muller romanticises

\textsuperscript{24} Dora also yearns for deeper connection with others. She desires an “authentic flow of the soul” in conversation, wanting to share transparently “the whole story of her inner life” (239). This is an antithesis to Sievright’s dissociation from others and his hidden, incommunicable shame.
the beauty of peasants “who could pour themselves into the ground, sweeten it, humanise it” (236). Muller changes the way Dora perceives the land and her reality, through creatively inspiring her to find a personal connection to place. He evokes in her a sense of nostalgia for a place she had previously demonised: “this oppressive bush-life from which she had escaped” (236). The possibility of a full engagement and appreciation of the sensory experience of place, through the body, permits, in Daybreak, a newfound openness previously obscured by rigid conceptions and stories that are separate from life in the present. This is a liberation of awareness that Merleau-Ponty describes in Phenomenology of Perception: “by taking up a present I draw together and transform my past, altering its significance, freeing and detaching myself from it” (455). The excitement of life that Dora has lost through being tied to a mental concept of her life, is contrasted with the fullness of life that she feels through her senses when she finds a new richness to the same landscape. As she opens to the land she perceives it anew: “[f]ar, purple mountains, ferny gullies, scents of ripened fruit—the second movement of the Pastoral Symphony again!” (237-8). Like Jean, Dora’s capacity for a new awareness of life, allows her to change her mental patterns. When she hears of her brother’s new baby, born at the end of the novel, she experiences “a new sense of liberation … flowing through her: her fear of being tethered to that little house in the timber had faded away” (242). This signifies her new connection to place beyond her melancholic narrative, and hope for the future.

In the final chapters of the novel, death and life are experienced as a part of a cyclical degeneration that has led to regeneration, enhanced through Palmer’s romantic pastoral prose. Leaving Sievright’s deathbed, Rossiter, like Jean and Dora, attunes to his present surroundings with newfound associations. For Rossiter, a resolution of mourning comes from his extrication, body and mind, from the ideologies of others, a re-negotiation of his “own ideas of life” (215). He experiences a recognition of his autonomy that allows him to let go of the “same old story,” catalysing “a sense of release … as if blood congealed in his veins were flowing again” (230, 227). Through Rossiter, Palmer imagines the possibility of resolving mourning through body awareness, authorial subjectivity and creativity, that sources and connects to new potentialities. He is privy to the awareness that he has resolved his inner struggle, “the conflicts of his mind and blood” (287), through accepting the past and letting go of past identities. With “his path clear ahead” (283), this reflects the sense that his mourning has been completed—his ego is “free and uninhibited” (Freud 245), from the work of mourning. This sense of psychological rebirth is linked with Rossiter’s biological
regeneration in the birth of his son: “the tiny fragment of life he had brought into being” (246).

Rossiter’s feeling of uninhibited awareness, having accepted the past that previously haunted him, accentuates his heightened sensory connection to his environment as he walks across the countryside in the final passage of the novel, captured in some of the most romantic prose of the novel. Sensations that previously registered fear in his body, such as the sound of the drum coming from parades in town, now spreads waves of excitement over him. Released from the prior associations of his unresolved grief, sensations “flood[ed] him with a sense of fulfilment” (282), insinuating his new, life-affirming connection to place. For Rossiter, the seeds planted in the “lift of the awakening world” have come into fruition with a “new access of life” (33, 166). This pastoral imagery of post-war Australia in the later stage of the novel is comparable to Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*. Fitzgerald similarly employs the pastoral mode to revive an ideal, in this case the American dream, connected to perseverance, hope and personal resilience, in the aftermath of war and great loss. Fitzgerald’s novel offers a consolatory, expectant future that is comparable to Palmer’s—he evokes “a profound human change and excitement (that) was generating” (100). The poet Rupert Brooke also comes to mind, both in relation to his use of pastoral and his English patriotism after World War One. His poem, “The Dead,” encapsulates post-war hopes similar to those proposed in *Daybreak*, of hearts that are renewed and “[w]ashed marvellously with sorrow’ as “[t]he years had given them kindness / Dawn was theirs.” Brooke also refers to a “gathered radiance,” and “shining peace” (38), which is aroused in the other two novels.

Like Palmer and Brooke, Fitzgerald connects this national idealism with the land, idealising Long Island as “the fresh, green breast of the New World” and “the pap of new life … the incomparable milk of wonder” (*The Great Gatsby* 100, 189).25 So too, in *Daybreak*, the final pages particularly capture, through the landscape, the beauty, hope and possibility that Palmer hopes to convey of the putatively, mostly-virgin Australian land—the clandestine bushlands remain “silent, solemnly intent upon its own mystery” (Palmer 287). The novel concludes with Rossiter taking in the majestic panorama of the land as it “renew[s] the life of his inner being,” helping him to realise that “perhaps there was a place in life” (288). In these culminating pages, the mind-body stagnancy of melancholic grief has been replaced by fluid

25 The literary critic Northrop Frye notes a similar desire to protect a “green England” in the early twentieth century, that formed the underpinning of British nationalism (130). It is evident that Palmer, like the other writers, also sought to create a nationalist narrative and to invoke the Australian dream.
interaction with the present and an idyllic culmination of a cycle: “life had gathered itself together and was flowing back into its channel again” (270).

**Conclusion**

*Daybreak* has been mostly overlooked by critics, but offers a unique post-war meditation. It highlights the loss of consolatory sources of meaning and connectedness to place, in the aftermath of war, that has consequently culminated in melancholic mourning. Palmer provides a compelling contrast between the war and pastoral genres, depicting how these relate to the body and to finding a lost connection to home and belonging in the world. The novel highlights a relationship between lost identities and sources of meaning that keep the protagonists locked in unresolved mourning, through which a distinction between mourning and melancholia is delineated.

Through engaging with the pastoral mode and illustrating an idyllic relationship to place, *Daybreak* depicts a consolatory mourning that is found in an awareness outside discourses and past identities that enslave and displace the body, creating a melancholic disavowal. Though simplistic in some aspects of narrative consolation, the novel illustrates an interesting connection between the body and place, in relation to resolving grief. Connecting to the sensations of the body and relating to the natural environment is depicted as having merit to sustaining personal growth and creation, through allowing an acceptance and openness to the present. Another compelling ambiguity, that is relevant to this thesis, is Palmer’s consolation, which is situated in returning to sovereignty—in a sense a resistance to globalism. Yet, Palmer’s portrayal of consolatory mourning is also portrayed as requiring a degree of openness to alterity and to the outer world—in this case the natural world—that the novel prosecutes as being essential to completing the work of mourning. *Daybreak* imagines a creative source of life that is situated in nature and the body, that offers connectivity, belonging and aliveness to those who embrace the natural ambiguity of life and death.
Chapter Three: As I Lay Dying

There were no signs of spring. The decay that covered the surface of the mottled ground was not the kind in which life generates—Nathanael West, Miss Lonelyhearts

Written in 1930, William Faulkner’s novel As I Lay Dying, is set in the pre-industrial south of Mississippi. It concerns the Bundren family and the death of their mother, Addie. The novel details her final days and subsequent burial, through the diverse, stream of consciousness, narrative viewpoints of the children, their father, a few local townspeople, as well as Addie’s internalised perspective in the centre of the novel. As I Lay Dying centres around Addie’s death, as well as the challenges of the long journey of the family across the countryside to bury her.

In contrast to the previous chapter on Daybreak, which draws upon the pastoral mode and an idealisation of rural life as a potential consolation in mourning, Faulkner portrays a disconnection from the land, the body and the mother. These fundamental fractures around which the novel is situated, stagnate the work of mourning and the possibilities of creative, cyclic renewal. Divergent to Faulkner’s previous works, some of which were patently pastoral, As I Lay Dying is characteristically anti-pastoral, a contention echoed by Lewis Simpson.26 Rather, it is notably gothic in its execution, a distinction echoed by critics such as Eric Sundquist and David Jarraway. It is antithetical, in this way, to the pastoral mode, intentionally drawing out the darkness and despair of Southern rural life, where writers such as Vance Palmer reify and idealise it.27 Faulkner does not represent a nostalgic view of the past, but reveals the ways in which unexamined conservative ideology disengages from embodiment and disconnects from a source of feeling, expression and subjectivity. The novel, ultimately, challenges all discourses that honour a source of meaning detached from, and in conflict to, lived experience. Faulkner wrote As I Lay Dying in a time when the South’s conservative response to maintaining rural life and customs, was at odds to the development of contemporary American society. In “The Southern Myth and William

26 Simpson argues that Faulkner rejected the pastoral mode entirely in his later fiction, even though his earlier works tend to be more nostalgic and pastoral (“Faulkner and the Southern Symbolism of Pastoral” 403).
27 Susan Donaldson notes that Faulkner began his career as a pastoral poet, immersed in romantic, symbolist and decadent poetry, before turning to their “dark twin,” and engaging in “gothic quests for truth and identity amid ambiguous shadows, ruins and social and familial upheaval” (360). Donaldson notes the irony that “Faulkner has often been hailed and condemned as the founding father … of both Southern pastoralism and Southern Gothicism in modern literature” (359).
Faulkner,” Irving Howe writes that “the South worked desperately to keep itself intact. Through an exercise of the will, it insisted that regional memory be the main shaper of its life” (357). Within this context and the aftermath of global war in World War One, Faulkner responds to the stagnancy inherent in resisting change, through a novel that highlights the material despair inherent in perpetuating decaying ideals.

As I Lay Dying is unique in my discussion of modernist mourning, in that the novel portrays grief and the body through a psychic descent into the collective unconscious of a Southern, post-war culture. The novel also represents a fictional reflection of modernity, critiquing stagnant social discourses such as religion, patriarchal, patriotic and commodity cultures; it is imbued in a suspicion of collective consolations for mourning. Where Palmer idealised a retreat from melancholia to the consolatory frameworks of pastoral, Faulkner’s novel descends into the unconsciousness of a post-war modernist culture. Faulkner reveals the ambiguity of ideals of progress and ascetic self-sacrifice through metaphors of the body. Accentuating this literary descent, the title of As I Lay Dying derives from a passage in Homer’s Odyssey when Odysseus goes into the Underworld to search for directions and re-lives ghosts of his past. At this point in the text, Agamemnon tells the story of Odysseus’ death. In the myth are the words: “[a]s I lay dying, the woman with the dog’s eyes would not close my eyes as I descended into Hades” (Book XI). This intertextuality, in the title, already pre-empts Faulkner’s facilitation, through the novel, of a conscious descent into “Hades,” the realm of death, with open eyes, denoting a transparent awareness that unveils the shadow of the dominant culture. Descending into Hades is the antithesis of religious ideologies, wherein the body is sacrificed and denied in favour of ascent to heaven after death. Faulkner subverts and explores descent and death as signifying, in this case, the end of a collective cycle, so as to interrogate disembodied ideals that are worn out and creating dysfunction.

As one of the most highly acclaimed works of modern literature, As I Lay Dying has been subject to a vast array of interpretations. Responses to this canonical novel range from

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28 Howe writes in depth about “the Southern myth” and Faulkner’s relationship with it, including the context of southern conservatism that was in opposition to American collective expansion. While other regions, he notes, “submitted to dissolution” and to merging with a national identity, the South was “living on the margin of history” (357). The South, he argued, maintained an “often obsessive sense of the past” (357).

29 Revealing his political stance on the suppression of art and creativity in the rural south, in an unpublished draft for The Sound and the Fury, Faulkner flatly declared: “Art is no part of southern life” (qtd. in Moreland 361).

30 Having an eye open refers to the Ancient Greek custom to place two coins on a dead person’s eyes, so that they could pay the ferryman at the river Styx. In Faulkner’s subversion, as in Homer’s Odyssey, a lack of observance to this ritual allows for a conscious descent into the underworld of the collective shadow with both eyes open.
psychoanalytic discussions, through to a focus on Faulkner’s use of multiple narrative techniques and employment of tropes of literary modernism. In “As I Lay Dying in the Machine Age,” John Matthews writes that the text “exorcises realism,” and that “no other novel of Faulkner’s so successfully establishes the autonomy of the modernist text” due to the abstractness of its form, that “rejects the dream-turned-nightmare of technology and the vulgarities of social realism” (72, 85). The novel has been described as a “dark vision” (Justus 10) and has been noted for its dystopic and apocalyptic approach to the modern age. Carol Kolmerten et al. describe As I Lay Dying as a narrative of mourning that, aptly, “give[s] body to the dead” (93). Sundquist similarly recognises the grief process reflected within the novel, describing the disjunctive relationships between corporeality and conscious identity (29)—he suggests that As I Lay Dying engages the reader in a process that mirrors grief. Tamara Slankard focuses on Faulkner’s use of the corpse metaphor, arguing that As I Lay Dying redefines a historical and literary legacy through allowing a fixation on the “decayed past” (10). Slankard suggests that the corpse, as a body metaphor that the novel employs, becomes a site of “negotiation of loss and a mode of discourse” (10).

Though not typically situated as a post-war novel, my reading of As I Lay Dying will establish how the novel reflects many of the post-war tropes that I examine across this thesis. The inclusion of war through associated imagery, such as muddied trenches and mechanical utilitarian bodies, as well as the returning soldier, Darl, who is presented as mad, will be discussed in my analysis. These aspects contribute to Faulkner’s construction of a broader context of socio-cultural dystopia, that includes World War One, challenging discourses that perpetuate conflict, domination and exclusion.31 In his discussion of Faulkner’s representation of war, John Liman argues that, though it does not directly thematise war, As I Lay Dying is “very nearly a perfect specimen of the Great War novel, written during the outpouring of the Great War writing that commenced a decade after the armistice” (45), noting how Faulkner subverts some of the key abstract notions of war, such as glory and pride. This chapter engages with a broader discussion of Faulkner’s use of corporeal metaphors and his portrayal of tropes of grief that encompass the civil war, religion, Southern agricultural and conservative mythologies, dominant patriarchal values,32 as well as World War One. Faulkner questions, broadly, how meaning is sourced and cycles of human growth

31 The reference to another post-war text, The Odyssey, in the title and the epitaph, further insinuates Faulkner’s focus on post-war themes, including grief, death and collective disruption.

32 It is notable that Faulkner repeatedly introduces the theme of the fall of paternity after the War in several of his works, including The Sound and the Fury.
sustained or resisted. He represents the dangers of applying abstract discourses without critical thought, exploring how this impacts subjectivity and the incorporation of loss.

Through drawing on Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of the body and Julia Kristeva’s elucidation of bodily abjection, as well as Freudian melancholia, I examine, in this chapter, Faulkner’s use of body metaphors to portray melancholic mourning. I will firstly discuss his representation of the masculine characters as docile and stoic, disconnected from their bodies and engaged in habitual action. My discussion will focus on how Faulkner destabilises rigid discourses and embodiment through metaphors of corporeal abjection, including blood, sweat, injury, and the ultimate abject metaphor of Addie’s corpse. While the expression of grief is inaccessible through language, in the socio-political context that Faulkner portrays, what is resisted in mourning is grieved through the body’s abject release from the boundaries of culture.

Section 1.1 Containing Social Boundaries: Faulkner’s Docile Bodies, Utility and Engendered Discourse

In Franz Kafka’s modernist portrayal of disempowered corporeal agency in his short story, “In the Penal Colony,” the body is a site of inscription for collective belief systems—Kafka depicts a society wherein laws that are collectively prescribed, are tattooed repetitively, and to the point of death, onto the bodies of condemned men. In As I Lay Dying, Faulkner similarly engages in this theme of the body’s entrenchment in collective ideology, illustrating this trope through depictions of his characters who lack agency, entrapped within habitual movements associated with archaic structures. Faulkner depicts the limitations of unliberated bodies enslaved in an ascetic Protestant discourse, that move in habitual compliance, motivated by religious ideology and morality as a source of meaning. The rigidity of the status quo that Faulkner pessimistically critiques is signified through captive, rigid bodies and the paradox of stagnant action—action geared towards death and perpetuating exhausted discourses.

In As I Lay Dying, Faulkner portrays bodies that are lacking in agency, constantly “a’slaving” (31) and geared toward repetitive action, particularly in relation to building and moving Addie’s coffin—signalling the key trope of death and repressed maternity. The theme of habitual action is succinctly portrayed in descriptions of the character Cash who, even while heavily sweating, continues to work steadily and habitually—“the motion of the saw ha[d]
not faltered, as though it and the arm functioned in a tranquil conviction” (69). In a portrayal that merges man with implement, Cash is described with “the saw against his leg, his sweating arms powdered lightly with sawdust, his face composed” (45). In *As I Lay Dying*, life is epitomised in “slaving and a-slaving”; the “a-laying down” (31-32) only comes with death. Faulkner pessimistically critiques the rigidity of the status quo through captive, rigid bodies and the paradox of stagnant action that is geared towards death and perpetuating exhausted discourses. Faulkner’s portrayal of bodies engaged in repetitive, monotonous action, evokes Merleau-Ponty’s description of habitual embodiment. Merleau-Ponty writes that it is through habit that a person establishes non-cognitive relations with the world in a spontaneous and immediate way, based on the prior understandings of the mind and body, and without necessitating critical thought (*Phenomenology of Perception* 110, 144). This docility is notably expressed by the Bundrens’ neighbour, Vernon Tull, who remarks that the “Lord aimed for him to do and not to spend too much time thinking” (Faulkner 64). The habitual, mechanical body represented in *As I Lay Dying* privileges the external, outer body rather than an inner experience of the body and critical examination—that is notably lacking in the characters. The representation of the compliant body as a machine of discourse, can be understood in relation to the collective context that Faulkner challenges—that encompasses ascetic Protestant values, as well as evoking the post-war trope of the utilitarian masculine body.

Max Weber’s study on ascetic Protestantism reveals the ideological basis of religious servitude implicit within the novel, that is linked to a denial of the body. In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber argues that, inherent within this values system is a “powerful tendency toward uniformity of life” that “aid[ed] the capitalistic interest” and “had its ideal foundations in the repudiation of all idolatry of the flesh” (169). This Puritan vision, derived from Protestantism, meant a life spent serving “God's glory” at the expense of embodied pleasure, along with a duty to hold onto, and increase, possessions. It established a denial of the flesh. The body was perceived, essentially, as a machine that drives labour to enable production and perpetuate commodity culture, as well as to serve God through mortal sacrifice. This asceticism entails a denial of the senses, desire and the body, wherein the brain

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33 Jolene Hubbs describes the rural work system in the novel as a “sweat economy”: a system that creates “the dissociation of the labourer from the fruits of his or her labour” (471). This echoes Weber’s description of the ideal Protestant, for whom labour and hard work were signs of God’s blessing, a trope evident in the ascetic attitudes of the men in *As I Lay Dying*. Ironically, Anse perceives himself as an “honest, hardworking man” who survives through hard work and sweat (Faulkner 98), yet he does not personally work hard. This signals Faulkner’s critique of hierarchical power.
itself is diminished to a piece of machinery (Weber 63). In *As I Lay Dying*, adherence to Protestant conviction and servitude is ingrained due to a fear of spending an eternity in hell (Faulkner 166)\(^\text{34}\)—which, ironically, denies a relationship with the body in the present. With death and grief viewed within this context, living becomes a task of preparation for death, evoked in Addie’s father’s insistence that the reason for living was to get ready to “stay dead a long time” (169), a relationship to mortality that negates the body. Characters refute a personal connection to their flesh and inner body experience, favouring the reward gained from obeisance and a sense of “duty” to God, for which they will be compensated after death. Anse affirms: “I trust in my God and my reward” (19, 66).

Denial of the flesh in *As I Lay Dying* is characterised both in action as well as metaphorically through the symbolism of dissipating, “lost flesh” (212). A fleshless, wooden and stoic, depiction of the characters evokes their lack of essence and hollow embodiment, through which Faulkner portrays a collective mind-body disconnection. In the novel, the “abject nakedness” of the body is shamefully dissociated from, an antithesis to the pride that the characters harness, that keeps them “striv[ing] for sanctity and well-doing” (64) even to the point of collapse and destruction. One’s “abject nakedness” is kept hidden, with a “furious desire” to conceal the sinful mortal body that “we bring here with us, carry with us into operating rooms, carry stubbornly and furiously with us into the earth again” (41). The novel centres on this disparity between the material and the symbolic, word and deeds—that have been separated through patriarchal and religious cultural domination and a favouring of abstraction. Addie notices that words “go straight up in a thin line, quick and harmless,” whilst “terribly doing goes along the earth … so that after a while the two lines are too far apart” (162). Faulkner illustrates how the separation between material and symbolic has occurred through deeming the “selfish mortal body” (156) as Other.

Faulkner’s representation of habitual bodies inter-relates with the trope of mechanical bodies that perpetuate the ideals of war which, I argue, he intentionally signals to subvert, in a similar way to *Daybreak*, a representation of soldiers enslaved in repetitive action toward violent ends. In *Conflict, Nationhood and Corporeality*, Petra Rau writes of the relationship between soldiers’ bodies and the ideals of war, noting that the military body became increasingly mechanised, so that soldiers became “an integral part of the machinery of war”; she links the theme of “body as machine” to men “attached to the machines as the

\(^{34}\) In Faulkner’s portrayal, the characters are already in Hell, but remain unconscious to the dystopia that they have created.
subordinate part thereof” (11; author’s emphasis). Faulkner’s representation of enslaved bodies geared toward discourse—particularly through Cash, who merges with his tools of labour—evokes this utilitarian trope. Particularly when Cash is later injured, Faulkner subverts the limited value placed on masculine bodies when they are no longer useful to collective purposes. This trope of utility is also accentuated through Addie, whose body is only beneficial to bear children, while her life is unmourned by the family who share her blood.

*As I Lay Dying* highlights a corporeal disconnection that the novel grieves, that emphasises the destruction that is inevitable within Cartesian-modelled discourses that undervalue and exhaust the body. Through interrogating these ideals, Faulkner emphasises how, far from being utilitarian, the body is fundamental to the perpetuation of life and the expression and integration of grief.

**Section 1.2 The Soporific Stagnancy of Patriarchal Disembodiment**

In *As I Lay Dying*, the conflict between an abstract, idealised, symbolic body, and the lived body, exposes a mind-body tension that represses what is outside of the collective discourses that Faulkner interrogates, including grief. Faulkner’s corporeal metaphors are paradoxical, signalling his pessimism toward progress and sustainability of the status quo—a context that conceals fluidity and spontaneous creativity. In Faulkner’s melancholic dystopia, there is no space to mourn or for fluid, visceral experiences of the body.

The close description of the character’s bodies in *As I Lay Dying*, illustrates Faulkner’s representation of melancholic rigidity. The characters are described as wooden or lifeless, even as caricatures, often with only their legs being useful, signalling their lack of essence and autonomy and the emphasis of the novel upon their utility. Jewel is described with “his back arched, the muscles ridged through his garments” (205). Paradoxically, he is engaged in rigid action, his “pale eyes like wood set into his wooden face,” as he moves with “the rigid gravity of a cigar-store Indian … endued with life from the hips down” (1). In similarity to *Daybreak*, wherein Sievright remains attached to the ideals of action and perpetual movement internalised during the war, in *As I Lay Dying* habitual work and movement are also of prime importance to maintaining social and familial order, and to engaging in religious servitude. In the novel, inaction, or “a man that hates moving” (Faulkner 101), is considered socially subversive—in similarity to Sievright’s character, who had internalised the need to be of service as an act of heroic masculinity.
The usefulness of the perpetual movement of the characters is subverted, both in their rigidity and in the language of the novel. Like Odysseus at the point of his descent into the Underworld, in the Homeric intertext, the characters are directionless.\textsuperscript{35} They move, but remain stuck, in a state of regression. Described as “soporific,” their actions reflect what Faulkner critiques as a dream-like, unconscious awareness, evoking the collective context of which Faulkner is critical, that is “uninferent of progress” (55, 96). Darl perceives a paradox in the “restless” action (30) and repetitive movement of his brothers that juxtaposes, metaphorically, a buzzard that circles above them. The circular motion of the buzzard engaged in a natural flow with the environment, signals a freedom and cyclicality that contrasts diametrically with the linear movement of the family toward death.

In \textit{As I Lay Dying}, Faulkner draws attention to an inherent dysfunction within family and community life, in what Matthews labels a “critical, self-reflective” examination of the “broken forms of family and community” (91, 83). The character of Anse Bundren, hierarchically positioned as the head of a patriarchal family, has the most power and therefore the entitlement to do the least work. As patriarchal head, he is a detached and disembodied figure of power, an “aimless silhouette” (68), emphasising the futility of the paradigm in which the characters engage. Unlike his hard-working sons, Anse is characterised by a “lack of sweat” (26), signalling his laziness—though, due to his hierarchical importance, this remains unchallenged. His body is as hollow and rigid as the ideology he lives by, and he reflects a hyperbolic woodenness—“like a figure carved clumsily from tough wood by a drunken caricaturist” (151). The youngest son, Vardaman, notices this distinction between mental and corporeal versions of his father, reflecting that: “Pa walks around. His shadow does” (60). Anse is ghost-like in his separation from his materiality, a disembodied shadow that Faulkner connects to the patriarchal lineage he critiques. Both the mother of the family, Addie and Anse, represent lifelessness and death,signifying Faulkner’s dismantling of the sources of life that have informed the dystopia he represents. Though Anse is, in the patriarchal lineage, powerful in comparison to Addie, he lacks agency through being characteristically inactive—he “stands there, dangle-armed” and “motionless” (179, 47), accentuating the collective, melancholic stagnancy.

This portrayal of a distancing from the body through collectively privileging empty symbolic ideals is particularly evoked in the challenges associated with finding a space to mourn, a

\textsuperscript{35} The particular passage in \textit{The Odyssey} that the title signals is Odysseus’ journey into the Underworld searching for direction and revisiting the ghosts of his past.
central theme that I now address. Within the context of a world based on repetitive movement, the suppression and resistance to mourning is expressed both through the repressed inner pain of the protagonists, as well as in Faulkner’s representations of abject and melancholic bodies.

Section 2.1 Faulkner’s Representation of the Melancholic Mourning

In *As I Lay Dying*, it is through representing a collective inability to mourn that Faulkner challenges the limitation of a culture that cannot let go or create anew. As the Bundren family blindly adhere to ideological beliefs that offer certainty, there is no space for the uncertainty of death, outside of the parameters provided within religious mourning practices. For the characters who cannot connect to a personal response to loss, grief becomes “a function of the mind” (38). Darl reflects that, where he had once “believed death to be a phenomenon of the body,” he has come to view it rationally, perceiving it as “no more than a single tenant or family moving out of a tenement or a town” (38, 43). This logical designation of death highlights the mindset Faulkner’s critiques—of a distancing from personal, inner and embodied responses to loss.

The notion that there is no time and space for grief within the cultural context presented, is epitomised in Anse’s response to his wife’s death. He remarks that he will not let it grieve him, accepting her death as “God’s will,” that will allow him to acquire new teeth and a new wife—reflecting his focus on utility and commodity as a source of consolation. At his wife’s deathbed, Anse remains detached from his body. As he views Addie’s dead body, the “awkward claw” of his hand strokes his wife’s bedclothes, absurdly creating and trying to undo wrinkles that continue to arise again. This process reflects his attempts to de-presence himself, rather than physically engaging with his loss. Darl notices his father’s hand “stroking itself” (47), signalling Anse’s disconnection both from his wife and his own body. Even as he later releases some of his grief, “his face streaming slowly,” this is described as a “monstrous burlesque” of bereavement. His face is “wooden and not his own, as if carved by savage caricaturist” (70-71).

Addie’s children similarly experience grief with corporeal stoicism and disconnection, remaining “gravely composed” (129)—they reflect, rather than respond, to death. Their inability to mourn their mother’s death is further emphasised when they carry her coffin, with their heads “lowered, looking aside, down at our hats in our hands and at the earth or now and then at the sky” (83). In not knowing where to look or place their grief, this signals their
inability to find space for their loss, either materially or symbolically. A corporeal
detachment from mourning is also evoked in the militant fashion in which they move,
separating from their senses and “making like they hadn’t touched” (84). Darl reflects as they
carry the coffin: “we move … our faces averted, breathing through our teeth to keep our
nostrils closed” (89), epitomising their detachment from the sensory experience of their loss.
Dewey Dell remarks that she had to go “beyond and outside of me and Lafe and Darl had to
grieve” (52), suggesting that there is no space within their world for grief.

The character of Darl provides a contrast to the rest of his family in terms of his awareness
and response to his mother’s corpse. A returning war veteran, he is socio-culturally
excluded, ultimately perceived as mad and Other within his family. As such, he is given, like
Addie, very little space in his family to be and express himself. Darl is characterised by his
ability to think outside of social and familial parameters—as Cash notes, “this world is not
his world; this life his life” (248). He possesses an existential uncertainty that plagues his
mind and causes him to be deemed “queer” and mad, yet in his subversion to his family he
becomes a voice for what Faulkner conveys about Southern post-war society and commodity
culture. Darl is dissociated from his identity, occupying a space outside the social order. He
ponders: “I don’t know what I am. I don’t know if I am or not” (73-74). His inability to
identify “what” he is comes from his external position to the culture of economic exchange.
This causes him to question his ontology and whether he, in fact, exists.

In comparison to his family, Darl, is open to critiquing his reality, even though he is
perceived by the others as mad. He is described as having “queer eyes … that makes folks
talk” (112). The reference to Darl’s eyes reflects a central motif that Faulkner employs to
indicate a level of consciousness, a signifier encapsulated in the early intertextual reference to
Odysseus having eyes open in the darkness during his descent. Where the other characters
have wooden eyes, particularly Anse, whose eyes are like “burnt-out cinder” that look over
the land, Darl is described as having eyes “full of the land”—Dewey Dell comments that

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36 There are references in the novel to Darl having fought in World War One in France, though, as previously
mentioned, the emphasis on Darl’s veteran status is not overt due to Faulkner’s elliptical style.
37 Cash does, however come to recognises that this perception of madness is subjective. He contemplates:
“sometimes I think it ain’t none of us pure crazy and ain’t none of us pure sane until the balance of us talks him
that-a-way … the way the majority of folks is looking at him when he does it” (216). This reflects an
understanding that perceptions, in his social context, relate to popular contentions rather than critical thought.
38 Addie’s eyes are the only part of her that moves when she is dying, signalling her conscious awareness as she
approaches death, in comparison to the other characters. She is “brooding and alert” and “watchful and
repudiant” (92, 97) at different moments in the novel as she is dying. Her eyes are also felt by Anse who turns
away, resisting this awareness.
“the land runs out of Darl’s eyes” (27, 31, 107). This connection with the land, also indicated in Addie’s character, signals a grounded awareness of materiality that Darl possesses, that the other characters do not—where Anse looks over the land, signalling his dissociation from it, and from his corporeal agency, Darl exists with a relationship to it. As Dewey Dell notices, Darl “knew without the words” (23), signifying his knowing outside of the social construction of language. As this chapter will discuss, tropes of death, corporeality, grief and the feminine are signalled in connection to the earth, from which many of the characters dissociate through valuing abstract ideals. Anse contends that Darl was sane when his sense of the land was restricted to the area of the home, but Darl, having returned from war, locates himself more broadly, beyond the limitation of his family’s insular identity. While some critics have seen Darl’s madness as deriving from the absence of his mother (Vickery; Singal), I interpret the absence as a contributing factor. I also contend that Faulkner signals a broader loss of identity and embodiment, that is inclusive of the ascetic, patriarchal lineage that Darl subverts. Darl is impacted by a sense of confusion in relation to his subjectivity. Though some critics, including John Simon, have perceived him as being schizophrenic, I argue that he is melancholic. He more fittingly reflects what Kristeva terms, the obsessional neurotic, as “he identifies with his depressed mother's disavowal of words,” and “like her, he acts instead of feeling” (Black Sun 54).

Darl’s place as Other within his family is connected to his desire to hide his mother’s corpse and set fire to it in his neighbour’s barn, reflecting what he senses she wants. Through annihilation, Addie’s body would be, symbolically, liberated from being buried and suppressed, thwarting the intentions of patriarchal culture that Faulkner interrogates. In his discussion of Faulkner’s novels in The Ink of Melancholy, André Bleikasten suggests that Darl sets the cabin on fire in order “to take possession of her at last through a second death of which he would be the sole cause” (188). This notion of possessing the mother, and of a double murder of the maternal, encapsulates Darl’s efforts toward intentional action to regain subjectivity. Drawing on the theme of negation in relation to melancholia, in Black Sun Kristeva writes that “language starts with a negation [Verneinung] of loss,” as “[d]epressed persons … disavow the negation: they cancel it out, suspend it” (43-44). She argues that “the loss of the mother is a biological and psychic necessity, the sine qua non condition of our individuation” (27; author’s emphasis). She states that one must, symbolically, kill the mother to become an independent subject. I argue that the destruction of the barn reflects Darl’s annihilation of the symbolic patriarchal structures, while his thwarted attempts to
obliterate his mother’s body signal a desire to destroy the embodied maternal that would permit individuation—a nullification of his parentage, begetting subjectivity.

Darl’s attempts to burn his mother’s body in the barn indicates his seditious and anarchic grief, as much as his symbolic destruction of Gillespie’s barn signals a subversion to cultural dynamics, including the ascetic work ethic. He is most vilified by his brother, Cash, for this cultural transgression and for attempting to annihilate the structures within their community. Cash remarks, disgusted: “there just ain’t nothing justifies the deliberate destruction of what a man has built with his own sweat and stored the fruit of his sweat into” (238). For Darl’s character, a potentiality for mourning is reflected in his awareness of the defunct culture that Faulkner portrays, necessitating a destructive response to the social order that acknowledges his separation. His action resolutely marginalises him from collective culture, as he is ostracised to an insane asylum at the culmination of the novel.

Where grief is repressed and cannot be felt within this collective context, it is through Faulkner’s metaphorical depiction of the abject body that his representation of grief is expressed and communicated. The lived, abject body that senses, bleeds and defies conceptual boundary, becomes the fundamental signifier of repressed grief in the novel. In the absence of verbal expression, the body is the communicator, in As I Lay Dying, of the separation from a lived source of meaning.

Section 2.2 “A Monstrous Burlesque of All Bereavement Flowed”: Faulkner’s Subversive Abjection

The previous sections have centred on oppressive structures that inform and produce captive and subjected bodies. Faulkner represents bodies lacking in agency as a reflection of a stagnant culture that habitually reinforces the oppression of intentional movement. Having explored the boundaries that Faulkner represents, this section will reveal the diametrical trope that he engages with to subvert and balance this oppressive domain—that of bodily abjection. Graphic, and occasionally grotesque, Faulkner’s metaphors of abjection are the most compelling corporeal representation in As I Lay Dying, signifying a form of mourning through the body’s organic and ontological responses. Merleau-Ponty states that a person is conscious of the world through the medium of the body and that the body is more than “a mere container or instrument of agency” (Phenomenology of Perception 82, 87). The body is, rather, a structure of perception, “an ensemble of lived meanings that finds its equilibrium,” and that comprises “stable organs and pre-established circuits” (153, 87). Faulkner’s As I Lay
Dying draws out metaphors of the abject body to situate awareness back upon the body as a communicator and subject of meaning, through which the world is perceived, enacted and responded to, rather than an object of culture. The body oozes out sweat, loses vitality and blood, becomes injured, dirty and fragmented in Faulkner’s novel, all of which attest to the dimensionality and lived experience of the body in the world.

The concept of the abject, according to Kristeva’s definition in Powers of Horror, denotes a primal materiality that escapes signification in the symbolic order. It is the “limit of primal repression” that presents an “intrinsically corporeal and already signifying brand, symptom, and sign: repugnance, disgust, abjection” (11). Kristeva writes that what is abject “is radically excluded,” and draws attention to the “place where meaning collapses” (2). Abjection is caused by the loss of the distinction between subject and object, or between self and Other, a “level of downfall in subject and object” (26). Perhaps most relevant to this discussion, the abject is, for Kristeva, “the equivalent of death” (26). Corporeal abjection interrogates the distinctions of inner and outer worlds. This is portrayed in As I Lay Dying as a corporeal reaction to a breakdown in meaning, expressed through the open wounds of the body in grief. It occupies a liminal space, a void of meaning that “disturbs identity, system, order” and constitutes “[t]he in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (Powers of Horror 4).

Abjection also signals the history of the subject, prior to dichotomy, and the means through which the subject is impelled toward constituting itself, through an act of revulsion and expulsion of that which can no longer be contained.

Erin Edwards suggests that, in As I Lay Dying, Faulkner’s representation of the body “emphasises that which escapes inscription … its dimensionality, its densities and volumes” (741). Faulkner uses a language of abjection to subvert hegemonic versions of the objectified and habitual bodies that slave unquestioningly toward a life after death, paradoxically living in a state of becoming-death. The novel narrates the concealed lived dimension that defies the hollow cultural conception, that “runs under the skin, under my hand, running through the splotches, smelling up into [the] nose” (Faulkner 49). Through portraying a dimension of embodiment, Faulkner represents a type of grief expressed through the visceral experience of life, that does not compartmentalise, contain or conceal, but releases and flows and responds to its environment, often in a subversive undoing of the dominant order. This subversion through bodily abjection, blurs rigid categories of interiority and exteriority, while evoking the corporeal devastation associated with the war, that the novel also mourns. In Reconstructing the Body, Ana Carden-Coyne argues that “bodies—and relationships between
interiority and exteriority—had been broken by war … despite the compensating narrative of heroic wounds and fetishized war imagery that de-politicized the body in pain” (108). The tension between rigid cultural conceptions of grief and the body and the abjection of embodied grief, signifies Faulkner’s challenge to the integrity of the discourses of religion, ascetic commodity culture, and war, that exclude the body.

For the youngest Bundren, Vardaman, learning of his mother’s death encourages his existential need to comprehend his loss within the material world. His expression of grief through his body and senses, is a notable difference to the stoicism of his siblings. Concealing himself in the separate, dark and contained space of the family’s barn, the scents and enclosure of the building permits Vardaman to sense, viscerally, his unspoken grief, providing him a space to express his socially abject mourning. Outside of the view of his family, he notices that he “can breathe again, in the warm smelling,” and that he can cry and “vomit the crying” (48). In the barn, which is “dark … warm, smelling silent,” Vardaman finds a way to grieve through his body, returning to a space that mimics the pre-birth. In the womb-like enclosure of the barn, he finds a solace that allows him to experience a sensory awareness that is devoid in his family.39 In this space, he is “not anything,” indicating his dissolution of a sense of self that allows him to grieve and to become aware of his mourning: to “cry quiet … feeling and hearing my tears” (51).40

Vardaman’s incoherence, his perception of an “unrelated scattering of components,” signifies Faulkner’s subversion through the abject of the collective paradigm—that is only “an illusion of coordinated whole” (51). Kristeva writes of this destabilising impact as an aspect of abjection, which disrupts a “coherent system” in a manner that “endangers a structure,” through an element that escapes the system and renders it “dirty” (Powers of Horror 24).

Vardaman’s experience with washing and cutting up a fish elucidates Faulkner’s use of the abject to defile and dirty the symbolic order that conceals the body. Vardaman personifies and relates to the fish as he tries to clean it, noticing that “it slides out of his hands, smearing wet dirt on to him, and flops down, dirting itself again, gap-mouthed, goggle-eyed, hiding into the dust like it was ashamed of being dead, like it was in a hurry to get back hid again”

39 Where the outer structures of the barn that Darl destroys are a symbol of the patriarchal commodity culture, the womb-like containment of the barn is concealed, signalling Faulkner’s representation of grief and the maternal. What is associated with the maternal are the interior, concealed and enclosed spaces. It is only within the hidden enclosure of the barn, that mimics a womb, that Vardaman can grieve.
40 Vardaman notices that people are resolved of their “integrity” in the darkness (51), insinuating how darkness—a motif employed throughout the novel to signal alterity—destabilises the collective culture through rupturing fixed identities and constructs.
(Faulkner 26). This is a dismantling of what Butler terms “[t]he clean and proper,” that “becomes filthy” through abjection (*Powers of Horror* 8).

Vardaman’s projection of shame onto the fish and the sense of hiding, as he also does later in the dark barn, reflects what he perceives as the abject, which is associated with shame. He later concludes that his mother “is a fish” (78). In this sense, his mother, who is hidden from him after death, embodies this boundary between living and dead, revealed and concealed, tangible and intangible in the world. His own grief, hidden in the darkness, is associated with shame. Faulkner focuses on the connection between grief and shame in a similar way to Palmer, as Vardaman conceals his socially unacceptable pain. Palmer illustrates a dissociation from the body and a doubling of identities, due to the repression of grief and vulnerability in the character Sievright. Faulkner, in a similar way, illustrates how shame, embedded in the trope of concealment, fragments the mind and body and inhibits a sense of agency. Ultimately this loss of agency resists the capacity for an incorporation of loss.

Kristeva writes of abjection that “the body’s inside … shows up to compensate for the collapse of the border between inside and outside,” as “the skin, a fragile container, no longer guarantee[s] the integrity of one’s ‘own and clean self,’” revealing a “dejection of its contents” (*Powers of Horror* 53). The cultural ideology of the individual as cohesive and self-contained, pure and clean, is thwarted in the personified and fragmented fish corpse that Vardaman perceives as his mother. The fish, fragmented, has been “cut up into pieces of not-fish now, not-blood on my hands and overalls. Then it wasn’t so” (Faulkner 48). Vardaman’s perception of time and space is another element that disrupts past and present tense, signifying the impact of sensory perception in the construction of narrative agency. A comprehension of his loss in the physical, mimicked through the fish, helps Vardaman to understand his mother’s absence within time and space, and to place it within his personal narrative trajectory—an embodied and visceral recognition that his siblings do not experience.

Perhaps the most abject depiction of embodiment through which Faulkner subverts the collective culture, is the injury that Cash experiences after falling off a church while attempting to mend the roof. His failure to mend the deteriorating structures of the church, as much as his accident, signifies Faulkner challenge to the boundaries of religious paradigms of meaning. Cash’s heroic and ascetic self-sacrifice through his doubly symbolic fall, commences an ongoing saga of disruption to the family’s funeral procession due to his abject,
injured leg. It also signifies a symbolic descent from the source of meaning of the church, from which the family derive their values—a material fall from grace. 41

Following his injury, Cash becomes corpse-like and can no longer move, indicating the melancholic trope of inaction, that, in a similar way to Daybreak, evokes and destabilises the action deriving from social paradigms that have worn out masculine bodies. In juxtaposition to his prior repetitive habitual movement, Cash “lies on his back on the earth” (144). His face mirrors a cadaver: “his eyes are closed, his face is grey, his hair plastered in a smooth smear across his forehead as though done with a paint-brush” (144). Corpse-like, he appears “sunken a little, sagging from the bony ridges of eye-sockets, nose, gums.” This draws a striking resemblance to Addie as she is dying, her face “wasted away so that the bones draw just under the skin in white lines” (5). The description of his skin evokes the violation of corporeal containment: “the wetting had slacked the firmness which had held the skin full” (144). The abject descriptions of his wounded leg draw an interesting parallel to Erich Maria Remarque’s All Quiet on the Western Front when the character Kat’s leg is injured and Paul carries him. During this scene, the corporeality between the men is emphasised, as when words are absent: “we do not speak much” (136). The blood, sweat and abject wounding, depictions of swollen faces and trembling bodies convey this emotional and visceral scene wherein Paul struggles with the incomprehensibility of losing his last companion. Following his accident, Cash is also rendered wordless and perceived to be dying, in the sense that he has lost his purpose through no longer being able-bodied. He is subsequently discarded by the rest of his family—all but his sister, who gives him water and cares for him.

This double burial of Addie as a maternal signifier, and Cash who has lost his utility to the culture, is reinforced when the Bundrens lay Cash on top of Addie’s corpse. The link between Addie and Cash strengthens Faulkner’s subversion to the dominant culture through abjection. Both the ideals of patriarchal commodity and the source of life from which they have been created, their mother, suffer physical deterioration. Cash lies on Addie with an ashen face and closed eyes, his injured leg seeping in wet, sweaty, clothes. Though he is too proud to voice his pain, and indeed negates it, a pool of vomit surrounds his head and mouth and oozes

41 It is interesting to note that the man who Faulkner most likely based Cash on is the Southern journalist Wilbur Joseph Cash, who represented the mindset of Southern conservatism of which Faulkner is critical. Cash identified the central theme of southern culture as “the savage ideal,” hailing the “triumph of the Southern will” of conservatism (90, 211). He expressed a fervent allegiance to southern traditions and customs and adopted a renunciation of change, refusing new ideas as an invasion from outside (see Clayton).
down his chin, another signifier of corporeal abjection.\textsuperscript{42} Even as Dewey Dell tries to turn his head away from the vomit, it becomes a communication of what he fails to accept or attend to—the “disruption of normal living” (\textit{Powers of Horror} 151). Resistant to his pain, Cash remains proud, “his profile in silhouette, ascetic and profound against the sky” (195), a representation that evokes the hollowness of his connection with his private subjectivity and embodiment. He is only an outline against the sky, even as his body is grotesquely maimed and bleeding. His family repeatedly pour water over his leg, an act that signifies a desire for purity and sanctity in response to the body’s sinful disobedience.

In relation to this pervading nausea evoked in the novel, and particularly in scenes of Cash’s injured leg, an abstract reference to war is evident. Liman argues that the motif of dirt, mud and vomit in the novel signify that the world that Faulkner portrays is nauseating. He notes that many of Faulkner’s narratives from post-World War One feature vomit because it cannot be contained, categorised, or idealised (40). Liman describes \textit{As I Lay Dying} as one of the muddiest novels in all of literature (39), in the literal sense, in that it evokes of the crude and literal reality of war. Paul Fussell’s account of the waterlogged and muddy trenches in \textit{The Great War and Modern Memory}, indicates just how central mud and water were to the material experience of war. I argue that Faulkner intentionally engages with a sub-narrative of the embodied and sensory experience of tropes of war to emphasise the lived reality of war and death, from which grief arises.

The rain and mud experienced most notably in the scenes depicting Cash’s struggle with movement, also signal a cultural stagnation of ideas and a resistance to nature and the environment, that impacts the body. Darl, the war veteran of the novel, comments that “rain and mud are war” (74). This reflection emphasises the lived and felt experience of the trenches, encapsulated by writers such as Remarque: “[o]ur hands are earth, our bodies clay and our eyes pools of rain. We do not know whether we still live” (\textit{All Quiet on the Western Front} 135). So too Siegfried Sassoon’s post-World War One poem “Via Crucis,” captures this materiality of war when he describes how men became “abject beasts.” His poem bears a striking resemblance to some of the wording and corporeal abjection in Faulkner’s novel, as he recounts: “mud and rain and wretchedness and blood … like abject beasts we shed our

\textsuperscript{42}Kristeva writes that “[d]uring that course in which “I” become, I give birth to myself amid the violence of sobs, of vomit” (\textit{Powers of Horror} 3). Though Faulkner is ambiguous about the potentiality for subjectivity of his characters, his portrayal of abjection constitutes an expression of the body-subject. It highlights the illusion of self-containment and resistant identities in the material dimension.
blood / often asking us if we die in vain / gloom conceals us in a soaking sack / mud and rain” (210). 43

Cash’s resistance to his injury reflects a key trope of melancholic silencing through dissociated embodiment that Faulkner highlights and critiques. Initially, Darl thinks that Cash is bleeding to death, noticing that, corpse-like and struggling to keep up, “his flesh is greenish looking … his face suffocated” (88). Cash begins to fall behind, hobbling to keep up, breathing harshly” (89), a clear contrast from earlier depictions wherein he merged with the implements of his labour. Through portraying Cash’s injury, Faulkner disrupts the source of labour upon which the culture relies—the body. As he lies in agony, Anse notices that Cash “has not moved” (151), reflecting a melancholic trope of inaction depicted across the post-war novels. Inaction challenges the brutal impact of actions in favour of ideals that exhaust and destroy the body, such as war. Cash is described by his father repeatedly as a “misfortunate man” (151), as he is culturally invalidated in a commodity culture due to his disability. Transported on top of Addie’s coffin, his cessation of movement signifies his lack of utility to the culture. This moment in the novel also affirms the trope of the utilitarian body—and indeed its vulnerability—that Faulkner engages with as a part of his subversion of war. The passages describing Cash’s disability draw an interesting parallel to the post-war poem “Disabled,” by Wilfred Owen, that portrays the isolating despair experienced by a returning soldier who is injured and feels different from the “strong men that were whole” (51), encapsulating the theme of displaced subjectivity in a physical, as well as a psychic sense.

As the Bundrens place cement on Cash’s leg to mend it, this signifies a lack of understanding of the difference between a person and machine, just as covering his leg with concrete reflects the rigid, structural imposition of commodity culture upon the body. He loses “sixty-odd square inches of skin” (177) when the detrimental concrete is later removed, evoking again the motif of “lost flesh” that Faulkner connects to corporeal dissociation and oppression. As his leg turns the blackest black, “like a nigger’s foot,” (208), this textual description designates the culturally subversive and abject nature of what his leg has become. His leg is depicted as bleeding and dark, drawing upon the Southern cultural heritage of corporeal enslavement and oppression of African-Americans. Faulkner’s fleeting reference to

43 Owen’s “Anthem for Doomed Youth,” also evokes the grim materiality of war, through the “shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells” on the battlefields that are bereft of the “voice of mourning” (48).
this corporeal oppression is also accentuated through the repetitive use of the word “slaving” in connection to the Bundrens’ movement, drawing attention to this other trope of oppression of the flesh in Southern tradition. The darkness insinuated in the slavery reference also connects to the feminine oppression, which I draw attention to in the next section. Those who are as disempowered are concealed and dark, ultimately voiceless, within this context, insinuating tropes of slavery.\textsuperscript{44} This signifier and the associated connotations of disempowerment also relates to Faulkner’s anti-pastoral antagonism of all aspects of the rural south.\textsuperscript{45} Simpson, who writes of Faulkner’s anti-pastoral rhetoric, notes an early Southern belief system of liberating the mind through the use of black labour—yet the irony is that slavery interrupts the pastoral vision, and the domination and lies are concealed by the ideal. Simpson writes that slavery “implies the drastic dispossession of the pastoral vision of the plantation as a dominion of mind” (\textit{The Dispossessed Garden} 30). In this instance, Faulkner draws upon slavery and otherness of the body to destabilise the hidden corruption that the Southern pastoral lineage that has created, that paradoxically entails a disconnection from the land and body, through an over-reliance on the mind.\textsuperscript{46}

Cash’s denial of his corporeal injury reflects the silencing of loss and the body that Faulkner emphasises in \textit{As I Lay Dying}. Even as his leg disrupts the course of action and movement, he repeatedly denies his injury, asserting instead his ascetic obligations. He tells his family: “I feel fine … I’m obliged to you” (201), concerned more about his responsibilities toward the commodity culture than his body, a tendency that signifies both his entrapment, denial, and suppression of feelings and his body. The theme of Cash’s self-sacrifice, a reflection of ascetic values, also signifies his lack of agency, as he is ultimately only geared towards the collective. His corporeal denial hints at the trope of the ideological sacrifice of soldiers at war, as well as religious ideologies that uphold the sanctity of Christ, who sacrificed his body

\textsuperscript{44} This reference to dark bodies is also repeated in the novel in relation to the characters Dewey Dell and Vardaman, who perceive their legs as black in the moonlight (124), as well as in reference to Addie. I read this association as being inter-connected to the trope of darkness and concealment of the body and the melancholic silences around what has been lost. This trope insinuates also what has been traditionally oppressed in Southern culture—including the “dark land,” which communicates a “voiceless speech” (19, 167).

\textsuperscript{45} Examining Faulkner in relation to race, Frederick Karl states that “[n]early everyone is agreed that Faulkner’s public views on race are both difficult to determine and contradictory in what they propose: sometimes enlightened, at other times painful to read” (209). Karl notes that scholars and critics often disagree on Faulkner’s racial views. I read Faulkner’s approach to race as being one of the many elements of Southern conservatism that he interrogates in relation to corporeal dissociation—the links to darkness and black skin signal an oppression of subjectivity in relation to embodiment.

\textsuperscript{46} The aforementioned hierarchical structure of the family, where Anse is at the top and does very little work, while his sons are “a’slaving,” also evokes the tradition and corruption of slavery. Anse is depicted as being the most disconnected from the earth—he is a hollow symbol, rather than embodied, a part of Faulkner’s implicit subversion of the ungrounded agricultural ideals of the South.
for ideals. When Peabody asks him if his leg hurts, Cash has no words and replies “not to speak of,” silencing his pain from collective language, even as sweat “big as marbles running down his face and his face about the colour of blotting-paper” (228)—his corporeal abjection expressing the pain that he resists and conceals. Elaine Scarry’s ruminations in The Body in Pain are of interest here. She notes that “physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language” (4)—being that “pain is not ‘of’ or ‘for’ anything; it is itself alone” (5). Even though Peabody also affirms the silencing of his injury from language, telling Cash “it won’t bother you, not to speak of” (Faulkner 228), the truth of his pain is exposed and communicated through corporeal abjection, drawing attention to the primary, undeniable ontology of the body. I argue that Cash’s loss, so clearly elucidated through body metaphor, is another example of melancholic mourning that Faulkner highlights. He is “hunched, mournful” but ultimately silenced, as he “tries to speak, rolling his head, shutting his eyes” (150-51). His loss, signalled by his body’s pain, is incommunicable and melancholic.

Nowhere is the body more resistant to intentionality than in the melancholic representations presented by Faulkner, of bodies that subvert cultural paradigms through their organic expression. The melancholia that Faulkner portrays, communicates a stagnant and disembodied culture that fails to let go of what is defunct and create anew. Intentional movement, which denotes a subjectivity in the world, is subverted, as sources of consolation in the world are refused and portrayed as ineffective. The final section of this chapter will engage with the ultimate body metaphor in Faulkner’s narrative—the maternal corpse, a metaphor that ultimately disables possibilities of creative renewal.

Section 3 The Abject Subjectivity of the Maternal Corpse

The heart of the novel, in the central passages, contains Faulkner’s most disruptive subversion: Addie’s narrative voice in the wake of her death. In Faulkner’s patriarchal social context of perpetual action, Addie, as the maternal figure, the source of material life for the Bundren children, is a corpse—a direct contrast to the life-sustaining portrayal of maternity through Mother Nielsen in Palmer’s pastoral novel. Kristeva refers to the corpse as primarily abject in the early pages of Powers of Horror in a way that highlights Faulkner’s focus upon Addie in his politically subversive novel. She writes that “[t]he corpse … upsets even more

See Judith Wittenberg, and Am Potter, for comprehensive discussions of the Biblical symbolism in As I Lay Dying. Wittenberg notes similarities between Cash and Christ, such as Cash also being a carpenter and eventually becoming immobilised, as if on a cross.
violently the one who confronts it as fragile and fallacious” (3).48 The metaphor of the corpse, literalises the socio-cultural breakdown that Faulkner emphasises—as Kristeva explains, “the corpse … is death infecting life” (4), drawing attention to the materiality of death in a socio-cultural context that has privileged the symbolic.49 It is, of course, the burial of Addie that generates the narrative and to which the other characters respond, even while she is, within the collective culture, melancholic and voiceless, her interiority reflecting the dimension of her pain. I read Addie’s character as being crucial to the cultural abjection portrayed in *As I Lay Dying*. As the primary melancholic character, she signifies the definitive death of the religious and patriarchal lineages of which Faulkner is pessimistic. Through associating these lineages with death, Faulkner reifies what is absent within this paradigm: the primacy of the lived body.50

Addie’s corpse in *As I Lay Dying* is a quintessential corporeal metaphor for the repressed aspects of collective life that Faulkner engages with and subverts, including death, the mother, the womb and cycles of life. In many ways, she becomes who she is in death, through the voice that Faulkner provides her in revealing her suppressed interiority. Through Addie’s death, an individuation is enacted and emphasised in the novel—that of a primal separation from the source of life. Early in her discussion in *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva connects the abject with the maternal, noting that it marks the moment when one is separated from the mother and begins to recognise boundaries—the mother is “the other subject, an object that guarantees my being as subject. The mother is my first object,” and thus the “preeminent separation” (*Powers of Horror* 32, 109). It is this boundary, this expulsion from the dead mother, that Faulkner accentuates to illustrate his characters’ metaphorical distancing from a source of embodied meaning and creativity. Faulkner depicts the alienation, lack of communication, family and material losses and their social significations, as having derived from a lost source of life that fails to be acknowledged—the body.

48 Interestingly, Kristeva mentions, in her definition of the “corpse,” that it also means “cadaver: cadere” or “to fall” (3), which is an interesting parallel to the themes in *As I Lay Dying*, including the fall from the ideological paradigms through a descent into the collective unconscious.

49 Faulkner depicts what Kristeva later describes in regards to obsessional neurosis in men, for whom “a veritable ‘buried mother’ resides at the core of their psyche” (qtd. in Oliver 109).

50 In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva recalls how Christianity brought death into the symbolic realm and enlarged the imaginary and symbolic ways of coping with death through identification with the absolute Subject, Christ, who lived the experience of death and resurrection in his physical body (111). *As I Lay Dying* subverts this symbolism from the beginning of the novel, from Faulkner’s employment of a pre-Christian epigraph, through to emphasising the material consequences of death.
Addie’s confession of unexpressed private pain epitomises her feminine oppression, suggesting that she lacked the opportunity to even be born within the patriarchal paradigm.\(^{51}\) She comes out of death, never having had “any other kind” of relatives but dead ones (159). For Addie, life only provided the opportunity “to get ready to stay dead a long time” (169). Addie’s character occupies a liminal space where there is “no beginning or ending” (164), wherein her existence is completely null and invalidated. Her dead father, who she recollects from her childhood, represents the dead paternal signifier from which she has been seeded—he was unable to generate life for her, just as Anse is unable to. Addie expresses her grief of corporeale and symbolic invalidation through anger toward her father for “having ever planted her” (157). This implicitly connects her character, once again, to the earth, to organic life and to birth. Faulkner aborts this through his anti-pastoral imagery—she is planted but cannot grow. Addie’s repressed anger is expressed in violent desires to lash out against her children, those who have come out of her flesh, reflecting her need to assert bodily boundaries in a world wherein she is negated.\(^{52}\) For Faulkner, reifying the corpse is a confrontation with the materiality of death, as much as what has been culturally aborted and buried in preparation to “stay dead” (157). Particularly after childbirth, Addie feels that “living is terrible” (159), because it invalidates her further, through the bodily violation and invasion that she experiences in copulation and giving birth. Addie is depersonified and living a state of death and oppression, signifying Faulkner’s subversion of the embodied, material source of life and birth that is the feminine.

In relation to her voicelessness and suppression within patriarchal culture, I read Addie’s character as both abject and correlating to Kristeva’s description of depressive sexuality. In *Black Sun*, Kristeva writes that in order to become subjects within a patriarchal culture, it is necessary for women to abject the maternal body. However, she notes, they cannot abject the maternal body with which they also identify as women without finding themselves abjected (*Black Sun* 27). Because of this, feminine sexuality is melancholic because, in order to identify as women, females must identify with an abject maternal body. In *Powers of Horror*

\(^{51}\) Another irony in relation to this stagnant paradigm that Faulkner evokes, is the focus on moving Addie’s dead body back in her place of birth, when she already feels displaced from her subjectivity, as if she had never been born.

\(^{52}\) Addie, like Darl, is associated with the land. Comparatively, she is also described by Anse, quite derogatively, as “a woman in the land” (32). She feels that her duty is to what is “alive”—to “the red bitter flood boiling through the land” (163). In *As I Lay Dying*, the land represents the material and embodied space of meaning, while blood emphasises the circulatory system, signifying vitality and rejuvenation. Addie becomes a dead “woman in the land,” signalling the patriarchal lineage that dissociates from life through suppressing the maternal potentialities for creation and renewal.
and *Black Sun*, Kristeva maintains that women are less able to sublimate than men because they cannot distance themselves from the maternal body in order to regain it through words. Describing hysteria in women, she states that “the mother is also a counterpart to that other aspect of the hysterical psyche: its signless sensuality” (*Black Sun* 75). The sorrow of the maternal depressive, is the result of a primary narcissistic wound: “an identification with the maternal body, which has been made abject not only by the infant … but also by the culture at large, which devalues maternity” (Kristeva, “The Subject in Process” 186). This loss of the maternal and its feminine and creative connotations, is a key trope that Faulkner connects with a distancing from the body, that is already socially excluded.

Through Addie, Faulkner challenges collective ideals, embedded in language, that have become disembodied and distant from materiality. Addie challenges the separation between word and deed, the symbolic and material, reflecting that “words don’t ever fit even what they are trying to say at” (100). She perceives her “deed” to produce children as an “echo of the dead word” (163), accentuating her lack of being and melancholic silences. She repeats “dead word” several times during her narrative, signalling her distance from language and meaning. Having experienced deceitful inconsistencies and concealment within patriarchal culture, she believes that words either fill empty space, or represent the empty container itself. This insinuates the lack of meaning of words that are essentially disembodied, like the coffin that fails to contain Addie’s corpse. Words can be “quick and harmless” (162) even while committing violent acts. Just as clothes hide one’s abject and sinful nakedness, separating material actions and sin, words also perpetuates\ the discourses that are validated within collective culture. As Addie is denied entry into language, she is melancholic. Darl worries she will die without words (23), but her corpse, in its abject expression, becomes the loudest silence and strongest presence of the novel—it is the central element of the plot, around which the other characters respond and act. Interestingly, Addie, in her melancholic asymbolia, lacks the capacity to translate symptoms into a cohesive language beyond her own self-referentiality. She can only repeat the pain and dead words that she has experienced. This is best reflected in her repetition of the words “I knew that” six times (159), signifying her conscious awareness that is unspeakable in her social oppression, as she is unable to communicate, mourn and incorporate her pain.

Addie’s corpse is a primary signifier of repressed subjectivity and creativity through which Faulkner challenges a collective culture that is stagnant, and fails to account for the lived body. In her book, *From Modernist Entombment to Postmodernist Exhumation*, Lisa
Perdigao draws attention to the trope of the corpse and entombment across modernist novels, describing it as a “totalizing metaphor” (37). She explains how it represents a “shift from a desire to conceal death, to a desire to represent materiality, to rescue what is lost to figurative language in the process of memorialization … to recover meaning at the site of loss” (3). *As I Lay Dying* signals this modernist interrogation through focusing on the materiality of death and critiquing outdated modes of responding to grief. This is implicit in Faulkner’s representation of Protestant funeral rituals that the characters follow without emotion, blocking the sensory experience with “faces averted” and “nostrils closed” (89).

Also of interest to Faulkner’s representation of Addie’s corpse is, as Sundquist notes, its liminality within social spaces. This is exemplified within the mechanical mourning rites that the characters engage in which conceal the fact that the body “is a person” (42). This liminality is, of course, accentuated by the fact that Addie’s character is already melancholic in being a female subject. In discussing *As I Lay Dying*, Edwards also draws upon this key trope of the corpse that conceals death and personhood, proposing that it blurs the boundaries of the singular body and subjectivity for the characters. Edwards suggests that Addie’s corpse signifies “a more abstract and ubiquitous presence through a figurative corpo-realizing and cadaverizing of … characters’ perceptual, subjective experiences” (739). I argue that Faulkner’s use of this totalising metaphor highlights this broken subjectivity within the family due to the repression of corporeality. The undeniable, abject, sensory overwhelm created by Addie’s corpse is an assertion of the ontology of the body, both dead and living. Faulkner designates Addie’s abject corpse and her melancholic narrative a central position in the novel, as the plot ultimately revolves around burying and suppressing her. This ultimately highlights the collective absence of the body-subject and an aborted capacity to create anew, as the source of life has been dissociated from since birth.

Even after she has died, Addie’s corpse continues to subvert the collective paradigm and reveals—like Vardaman’s abject grief, and Cash’s injury—a tension between the socially-desired clean, pure and self-contained body, and the abject soiling of the body that disturbs boundaries. From the perspective of patriarchal notions of corporeal purity and moralistic idealism of the feminine, Addie’s body is perceived as being clean and untainted and, even in death, as clinging to “a sort of modesty” (88), a perception that denies the body and its organic tendencies. This notion of concealment, “that furious desire to hide [one’s] abject

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Kristeva writes of abjection that: “there takes place a crossing over of the dichotomous categories of Pure and Impure, Prohibition and Sin, Morality and Immorality” (*Powers of Horror* 16).
nakedness,” is so ingrained that Darl can only imagine that Addie would wish to shield her shameful nakedness (41). Even when she is dead; he believes that she would “conceal a soiled garment” (88), if her body were to dirty it. Yet Darl also notices how her corpse destabilises these projections—how, within the coffin, it “breaks free, rising suddenly as though the emaciation of her body had added buoyancy to the planks” (88). Addie’s corpse, pointedly, subverts the design of her coffin, that Cash has toiled over with methodical detail, even considering the stress and animal magnetism of the body and its dimensions within space (75). As the boundaries of Addie’s corpse were predicted in such exacting measurement, a satirical irony informs her spilling out from this container, another way in which the abjection of her corpse thwarts cultural limitations.\textsuperscript{54}

Addie’s melancholic subjectivity is delineated in relation to the patriarchal language that excludes her, where analogous metaphors of containment and lack express the tension between her ontology and voicelessness. For Addie to be herself is to bear children, to not “ask” questions. This signals the suppression of her agency and her inability to interrogate dominant structures. Noticing the gap between words and deeds, Addie recognises that words rather than bodies fill space, evoking the loss of embodied meaning in the collective culture. Words are just pointers, “a shape to fill a lack” (160). Her body, having been invaded through the loss of her virginity, is thereby branded. She recalls: “[t]he shape of my body where I used to be a virgin is in the shape of a …” (161), illustrating that what is lost cannot be conveyed because it is a lack that was never constituted. The name Anse has replaced Addie’s ownership over her womb, symbolic of the patriarchal commoditisation of the female body. Her aloneness, her sense of subjectivity, is “violated” (160) through a sexual relationship in which her body is oppressed and commodified. That the source of life itself is a product of commodity culture and religious servitude, signals the total disconnection from life and the body that Faulkner emphasises—the negated womb has become a corpse. The relegation of the womb to the symbolic exemplifies the loss of creativity that is thematised in the novel, that is suppressed and confined to a “dark voicelessness” (162).

The motif of “wild blood,” that is associated with Addie, emphasises both an abject fluidity and that which is outside of the tame and acceptable in the social order—the space that Addie occupies. Blood is part of the circulation of life force within the body and Addie, though

\textsuperscript{54} Attempts to contain Addie in her coffin are also, metaphorically, thwarted by the elements, signalling the materiality that the characters dissociate from. The coffin is almost lost twice to water when crossing a bridge, and also by fire when Darl sets fire to the barn.
voiceless, is a source of birth and life blood: “my children were of me alone” and “of the wild blood boiling along the earth, of me and of all that lived; of none and of all” (164). This description again associates her with the earth and materiality and emphasises that her children are connected to her by blood. Faulkner associates violence with Addie’s displaced subjectivity through her recollections of whipping her children to assert her bodily being—actions that speak louder than words, imprinting their bodies. She does not say, but thinks: “now you are aware of me! … I am something in your secret and selfish life, who have marked your blood with my own for ever and ever” (157). These recollected acts of corporeal discipline, inspired by her feeling disregarded, signifies both Addie’s absent subjectivity and her desire to emphasise their inter-connectedness within the physical dimension. She imagines that “my blood and their blood flow as one stream” as she disciplines her children, feeling the switch upon her flesh that merges the “blood strange to each other strange to mine” (160, 157). Allowing the family’s alienated blood to amalgamate, indicates a corporeal awareness that is abject within the culture. Where, in the more symbolic realm of language, words separate the blood and bodies of the others, “twisting and never touching” (160), this merging of blood signals their corporeality and evokes the blood that brought life into being. As her children can neither separate from her, nor identify with her, her act of violence and agency reifies the repressed materiality that her character symbolises as a woman, mother and corpse.

Though I lack ample space to discuss Dewey Dell closely, it is notable that her narrative extends on the tropes of her mother’s depressive sexuality. As Kristeva writes in *Black Sun*, all children, but especially daughters, can carry their mother’s silent suffering body “locked in the crypt of their psyches” (29). A similar internal process of melancholic self-negation occurs for Dewey Dell that is present within her narrative voice—like her mother, she is shrouded in death. She feels “the darkness rushing past (her) breast” and embodies the paradox of “dead walking” in her movement (55). This is particularly accentuated after she has become pregnant, signalling that, through pregnancy, she is now moving toward death and nullification like her mother. Her absent subjectivity as a female is revealed within a dream she recalls wherein she feels displaced, implying her unconscious awareness of lost
Dewey Dell recalls: “I couldn’t think of my name and I couldn’t even think I am a girl” (108).55

Through his portrayal of Addie and Dewey Dell, Faulkner engages a representation of the socially ascribed feminine body, which is defined only as a dutiful breeder—lacking access to language, power and subjectivity. The women remain, instead, marginalised in what Addie calls the “gaps in people’s lacks” (162-163)—a liminal space. The motif of aborted creation, associated subversively with the feminine in *As I Lay Dying*, is also signalled in Dewey Dell’s character. Pregnancy, the embodied aspect of creating anew, is subverted through her desire to abort her unwanted child and the portrayal of her pregnancy as an abject invasion of the boundaries of her body—she feels her “body … bones and flesh beginning to part and open upon the unalone” (159). Dewey Dell perceives her pregnant belly in terms of the abject: “it’s like everything in the world for me is inside a tub full of guts. He is his guts and I am my guts. And I am Lafe’s guts” (52-53), a description that evokes the relationship between her and Lafe, the father, in having created new life that is already owned by him. “Guts,” being abject, again evokes the merging of boundaries. In this case, the conception of life is contained by the patriarchal code, even while it is happening within the feminine body. Female bodies, in Faulkner’s descriptions, endure an invasion of bodily boundaries—“the agony and the despair of spreading bones” (121)—which is notably an opposition to the mechanical, rigid and stoic masculine bodies that are idealised as self-contained. This opposition signals a trope across the novels I examine, of an imbalance between the polarities of masculine and feminine gender identifications that inhibits the creation of new life. Instead, the Other is polarised within the self. When Dewey Dell throws herself on her mother’s corpse, mirroring Cash when he injures his leg, this highlights these associations with death and stifled rebirth, annihilating any hope for renewal.

Addie’s corpse is a central abject metaphor in *As I Lay Dying*, through which Faulkner allows space for a modernist mourning. Addie occupies a liminal space between life and death, signifying death and aborted rebirth. It is with a view to interrogating new cycles of meaning that Faulkner represents Addie. Though pessimistic about rejuvenation, Faulkner offers a hint of possibility within her final words: “for me it was not over … because to me there was no beginning or ending” (164). In contrast to the symbolism of Christ that Faulkner subverts,

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55 In recalling her nightmare, which signals the torment of her unconscious mind, Dewey Dell also repeats the assertion that her mother makes several times: “I knew that” (108), signalling her cultural oppression, that is unconscious and concealed.
Addie’s death, resurrection and concealed subjectivity reveal a collective void that pre-empts the possibility of a cyclic rebirth of meaning.

**Conclusion**

In her book *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva writes that the “kind of activity encouraged and privileged by [capitalist] society represses the process pervading the body and the subject” (27). She suggests that “we must therefore break out of our interpersonal and intersocial experience if we are to gain access to what is repressed in the social mechanism” (27). In *As I Lay Dying*, Faulkner reveals the limitations of ideological sources that generate disembodied meaning, highlighting the lived dimension of the body as the site of both habitual entrapment and repetition, and also resistance to cultural ideals. Though his characters remain entrapped, his novel provides a critique that interrogates collective culture, dispelling the ideological illusions of a post-war patriarchal, ascetic culture, that denies the body and polarises the Other.

Unlike the idyllic culmination of *Daybreak*, life is not renewed in Faulkner’s novel. The reader is left with a destitute landscape and protagonists who remain unaware of their enslavement in habitual repetition, much less a capacity to mourn. Yet in creating a dystopia, and transferring awareness from the symbolic into an embodied representation of death, Faulkner restores the lived body as a source of meaning and materiality. He dismantles the representation of hollow, obeisant bodies, that are imprisoned in the decaying ideals of collective discourses. It is through the body that a destitute collective culture is subverted and grieved through Faulkner’s writing. The world spills out beyond the rational parameters of belief systems and externally sourced meaning, through a corporeal release of the abject flowing into each page.

*As I Lay Dying* portrays a melancholic digression into the shadow of collective ideology, interrogating the blind application of ideology. The novel reveals how rigid attachment to beliefs can separate from the fluid source of life that both ebbs and flows, contains and releases. Grief, as the expression of loss, is mostly absent from the culture he depicts, yet it is conveyed melancholically through his depiction of the demise of a culture that separates materiality and the symbolic. What is concealed in dark spaces, the inexpressible pain of separation and loss of agency, is revealed through the body’s abjection and the negated maternal voice. *As I Lay Dying* provides a space for mourning, through illustrating what is
lost, lacking, and separated from culturally—a space with the unharnessed potentiality to give birth to creative life through the body.
Chapter Four: Mrs Dalloway

Let a sufferer try to describe a pain in his head to a doctor and language at once runs dry—Virginia Woolf, On Being Ill

Written in the post-war era, Virginia Woolf’s Mrs Dalloway is centred on English bourgeois society, social oppression and the concealment of death and grief. The narrative is based on a single day in June in 1923, interlacing the thoughts and experiences of Clarissa Dalloway, a middle-aged upper-class woman, and Septimus Smith, a returning war veteran. Both characters have experienced forms of grief that they resist melancholically. Clarissa has lost her sister and suffers bouts of melancholia, while Septimus is experiencing post-war grief following active duty in the war. They both experience forms of social oppression that impact their mental dispositions and embodiment, particularly in relation to gender roles and expectations. Though permitted spaces to grieve, Clarissa feels stifled by the social expectations and social performance that suppresses the full expression of life, whilst Septimus also feels entrenched in the expectations of a war veteran to maintain a heroic identity and self-control—he is unable to mourn through connecting to and expressing his feelings. For both characters there is a distinct absence, within language and society, of a means to express the totality of life and the paradoxes that grief and mourning present to social and gendered expectations.

Discussion in this chapter will centre on Woolf’s representations of power and gender and how they relate to her portrayal of melancholic mourning, narrative subjectivity and the communicability of grief. Woolf’s 1926 novel has been read by critics in many ways, particularly in relation to her portrayal of mourning, grief and death. Many interpretations centre on the text as a war elegy. Mark Spilka, for instance, investigates and draws attention to Woolf’s “impacted grief” in Virginia Woolf’s Quarrel with Grieving, proposing how it relates to the portrayal of her characters. On the other hand, Karen Smyth interprets Mrs Dalloway as both anti-compensatory and elegiac, arguing that Woolf’s “rules of mourning” do not allow for a sincere expression or recovery from grief (64).

Tammy Clewell notes that Woolf herself called the novel an elegy: a “narrative form of mourning” that laments the loss of an era (13, 197). Clewell reads Mrs Dalloway as rendering loss both pathological and melancholic, in that it resists the healing of wartime wounds to reject symbolic forms of consolation. In doing so, she argues that Woolf defies patriarchal frameworks of mourning (6, 2). Lecia Rosenthal, conversely, contends that the novel makes
possible the working through and mourning of modern catastrophes through exploring new ways of writing in response to masculinist tropes. Clewell, amongst many other critics, (N. Marshall; Sharma; Maze), also broaches the issue of gender in *Mrs Dalloway*. She argues that Woolf’s portrayal of the otherness of grief relates to “an appeal to gender reform” through “fram[ing] the idea of the radical otherness of the lost other” (17). The relationship between the representation of grief and gender is a central theme that this chapter will discuss. It is Woolf’s portrayal of the social construction of gender, language and patriarchal discourses, that contributes to her politics of mourning, as represented through the repressed body and feminine. Through these tropes, I argue, a portrayal of melancholic mourning is revealed.

Through exploring the representation of the body and grief within *Mrs Dalloway*, this chapter will illuminate Woolf’s feminist and corporeal politics in relation to personal and collective loss in the post-war period. Her depiction of grief reflects a sense of alienation and political fragmentation that is pervasive in aesthetic representations of discourses and post-war representations of social grief. It also highlights an obscured subjectivity and disembodiment that she perceives in response to this. Woolf’s portrayal of a hierarchical power held by those who dictate social expectation and ideologies, is inter-related to how she portrays the expectations of mourning and gender. Power is portrayed as being implicit, yet concealed, abstract and internalised, in a Foucauldian sense. This perpetuates, in her literary representation, prevalent disembodied belief systems around health, science, history and religion that she perceived as obscuring agency.

Woolf’s engagement with the oppression of femininity draws out a socially suppressed mourning that connects to her portrayal of power relationships, language and grief. Woolf can be seen to challenge traditionally masculine and rationalist tropes that marshal expressions of loss to private spaces and interiority, promoting repression. The patriarchal social order and language denotes a silencing of grief and the body, as the body is notional and placed outside of language and shared meaning. In Woolf’s novel, the body and the potential to console loss is portrayed as being connected to femininity and creativity. In being concealed, the body and feminine expression are represented as sources of hidden power and awareness, a dormant potentiality for consolatory mourning. This is a thematisation that I will draw upon in Section Three.

The invisible presence of power connects to both the body and the feminine and is a motif that signals the untapped resources for resolving and integrating loss through personal
meaning. This motif that is reflected Woolf’s portrayal of the relegation of grief to interior spaces, including Septimus’ invisible wounds to his mental health, as well as the potentiality Woolf evokes for Clarissa’s character to comprehend and accept loss. In the society that Woolf depicts, exteriority is privileged while interiority is hidden and private and largely feminised. In this social context, one’s concealed interiority, and indeed a private experience of the body, holds a potentiality for change outside of the symbolic order—this is intimated in the novel as the “unseen.”

With attention given to the relationship between power, mourning and the body, as well as the trope of invisible presence, this chapter will discuss Woolf’s representation of power relationships and the body in grief in Section One. I will then examine the asymbolia of mourning and lost subjectivity depicted by Woolf through the character of Septimus, contending that her metaphors of embodiment reveal an unvoiced social wounding. Lastly, I engage with the ways in which Woolf illustrates a feminist corporeal dialectic that explores sensory experience, creativity and expression, particularly through Clarissa’s character. Mrs Dalloway advocates a harmonious engagement with life and death, in contrast to the exclusion of both through hollow dichotomies—this is the premise of Woolf’s interpretation of post-war mourning.

Section 1.1 Health is Self-Control: The Absent Body in Woolf’s Post-War England

My reading of Mrs Dalloway, in relation to her portrayal of collective culture, focuses on her representation of hierarchical power and the ways in which social discourses obscure an engagement with grief and the body, in favour of exterior appearances. Woolf’s depiction of post-war bourgeois England, is of a world full of superficial beauty, styled with luxurious houses that contain elegantly presented furniture. The novel is set in stately homes and the extensive grounds of estates that boast elegantly manicured lawns. Those who dwell within the houses are similarly composed and ornamented in immaculate suits and heavy dresses, donning tailored hats and pocket watches. To live within this world, one’s appearance, thoughts and physical constitution, one’s very movements, are mandated—dictated by social law and internalised cultural discourses. Mindfulness in relation to attire is essential, as “ill-dressing, over-dressing” is stigmatised, as there is an inherent “respect for breeding and clothing” (77, 85). There is a sense that the characters themselves are akin to material objects, echoed in Lady Bruton’s description of Richard Dalloway, who “was made of much finer material,” and the “thick, gold-laced man” of the Prime Minister (91, 194). The materiality of
the characters is reinforced by Clarissa’s tendency of “cutting them up and sticking them together again” (91), insinuating Woolf’s portrayal of the abstract superficiality of their social personas.

Woolf’s bourgeois world is one where exterior materiality and social status are of prime importance. Alex Zwerdling states of her depiction of bourgeois life, that it captures a “sense of living in the past, of being unable to take in or respond to the transformations of the present” (123). In a similar way to Scott Fitzgerald’s *Great Gatsby*, which also features the upper class in the post-war era, captures a tension between social and private subjectivity—social worlds that signal fulfilment and a façade of connectedness, are contrasted with inner worlds of ruptured and conflicting identities. Clarissa observes at one of her parties that she has the feeling of “being something not herself,” as “everyone was unreal in one way; much more real in another” (151). This signals a tension between materiality and a façade implicit in Woolf’s portrayal of social life. The surreal presence of this reality is evoked when Clarissa reflects that “these semblances, these triumphs … had a hollowness”—this connotes their lack of essence, as they are “not in the heart” (154). There is a distancing from interiority indicated in the novel and, indeed, in the subjective experience of the body. Socialising is suggestive of the patriarchal paradigm that Woolf interrogates, resembling a rehearsed and militant performance. Guests attending these events “must assemble,” and “the brain must wake ... the body must contract” (165, 145). Like the soldiers who station the streets, this contraction and rigid stationing of the body are exemplary of Woolf’s illustration of socially subjected bodies. That the brain is awakened while the body is stifled, emphasises that thought, rather than feeling, is the primary mode of operation in this social setting.

I examine *Mrs Dalloway* to explore how Woolf portrays a relationship between power and bodily oppression and how this relates to her representation of grief. Woolf represents haute bourgeois conservatism and, within this, its inherent hierarchical power relationships, so as to critique a collective suppression of mourning and the body. She delineates, through her writing, the ways in which disembodied and abstract symbolism of ideologies propagated by those in power. In particularly, she focuses on how these discourses conceal the fullness of life and also render grief unspeakable. Ideologies based on conflict, such as War and social hierarchies, objectify and dissociate from bodies, engendering a separation between interiority and exteriority that conceals bereavement and creates tension within the psyche. The motif of invisible presence, that I discuss throughout this chapter, refers to masculinist forms of power such as religion and science, that are privileged, though abstract and external,
sources of authority. These sources of power that Woolf critiques are disembodied, outsourcing grief from where it can be rectified—in time and space and present awareness, and most of all from within. The obscured feminine and body, that are depicted as potential sources of power, remain invisible yet present within the cultural milieu.\(^56\)

Woolf’s portrayal of inner worlds, in contrast to a hollow exterior, is heightened by her use of the literary technique of tunnelling that she identified in *A Writer’s Diary*. Her literary tunnelling involves telling the “past by instalments,” and “dig[ging] out beautiful caves for behind [her] characters” (*A Writer’s Diary* 59-60). Joseph Hillis Miller discusses this in *Fiction and Repetition*. He argues that the novel is “the resurrection of the past in the present,” including the “resurrection of ghosts of the past” that are “present in the flesh” (189). Through blurring past and present, Woolf highlights collective aesthetics and abstractions that dictate exterior consolation that detract from interior spaces and embodied subjectivity. Through revealing the inner depths of her characters, Woolf juxtaposes an exterior, hollow, social performance with the inner process of grief that is socially invisible for her characters.

In *Mrs Dalloway*, Woolf depicts how this relationship between abstract power and the invisibility that conceals it, maintains and upholds power relationships. Those who hold power in the novel also hold the ability to conceal their presence. The blurring between absence and presence reveals what Woolf critiques about disembodied belief systems, which have become socially valued at the expense of the body and material consequences. Michel Foucault’s theory of the relationship between knowledge-power and the body, draws out this power dynamic that ultimately conceals grief and embodiment. Power is, in similarity to Foucault’s representation of internalised discourses, “visible but unverifiable” (201).\(^57\) In Woolf’s novel, there is a comparable relationship between power and concealment that dictates social knowledge, yet hides its source. Judgement is also perceived as being everywhere, a challenge that Septimus, a returning war veteran, experiences when he is

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\(^56\) This notion of “invisible presence” is referred to in the novel by Clarissa when she critiques Doris Kilman’s connection to spirituality—to “invisible presences” (110). This refers to the disembodied spiritual authorities that Kilman claims to have an affiliation with. My discussion of this trope in relation to hidden sources of power and concealed grief, derives from Woolf’s reference, in “A Sketch of the Past,” to the “invisible presences” left behind after mourning (80).

\(^57\) Foucault understands power to consist of “various forms of domination and subordination that operate wherever or whenever social relations exist” (27), in a dynamic that entrenches bodies into coercion. Foucault describes this type of power as being hierarchical—those with the most power have the option of concealment. Woolf draws on this notion of power and hierarchy—another invisible presence—to illustrate how the outer world operates through encouraging an internalisation of social values. Yet, as will later be discussed, this notion of dominion is subverted by the potentiality of agency that Woolf highlights through interiority.
mourning. This is evident in the early pages of the novel when passers-by view a car of concealed passengers and everybody perceives that “there could be no doubt ... greatness was seated within; greatness was passing, hidden” (11-13). Other modes of socially sanctioned power are represented in a similar way—as “disembodied” and “ghostly,” as “detached spirit” (24, 94). These descriptions all have quasi-religious connotations, as much as they are abstract and disembodied. This trope similarly evoked in the “invisible presences” of religious spirit that become a way in which the character Doris Kilman can influence others. Woolf emphasises how religion and social hierarchies reflect an unsourced and disembodied power, while dictating socially acceptable behaviour and bodily action.

In *Mrs Dalloway*, power, fear and social entrapment are portrayed in relation to the oppression of embodiment. The character Peter Walsh mentions that he cannot perceive anything existing outside of a person except a state of mind (49), indicating the external discourses that encompass a sense of identity and understanding. Writing from a modernist critique, Woolf illustrates the manner in which scientific thought and religious beliefs have had a stifling influence upon the body and mind. Repeated many times within the novel are the words: “for one must be scientific, above all scientific” (18), depicting the rational, masculinist social politics to which grief and the body are subjected in *Mrs Dalloway*. The characters feel like “a weight [i]s on them, a fear,” manifesting in experiences such as the “sudden thunder claps of fear” felt by Septimus (60, 76). Echoing this sense of imprisonment metaphorically, Clarissa alludes to the feeling of everybody being “fellow-prisoners,” and chained to a sinking ship (68). The character Sally Seton similarly queries: “are we not all prisoners,” articulating that a person only ever scratched on the wall of their cell (170). These descriptions of the entrapment within bourgeois society can be seen as comparable to the “perpetual penalty” delineated in Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*. Foucault’s conception of collective power denotes power relationships that are hierarchising, homogenising and excluding, thus normalising individuals within the frames of society. In Foucault, the body is a site of subjection (183). Sally’s description of the feeling of scratching on the walls of cells, insinuates the lack of depth within the aesthetic politics depicted as, in Woolf’s portrayal, meaning is hollow and vacuous, even though it is constraining. Power, in *Mrs Dalloway*, is

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58 At Clarissa’s party, for example, the Prime Minister has the luxury of disappearing into a room, allowing him a type of obscured power. Sources of authority, such as Kilman’s religious presences and Septimus’ doctor, Holmes, are described as being obscured and disembodied. Rezia, for example, views “the large outline of his body dark against the window. So that was Dr Holmes” (132).

59 The novel refers to the patriarchal hierarchy within religion, that “feasts on the wills of the weakly” and “offers help but desires power” (88).
abstract, disembodied, and with nothing below the surface. This power cannot be accessed materially—it is “nothing you could put your finger on” yet it dictates action and remains concealed, in “some plausible disguise; some venerable name; love, duty, self-sacrifice” that “feasts most subtly on the human will”. In such a world, that even “penalised despair”, grief remains hidden and melancholic.

Within the context of this society, the grief that Septimus experiences after the war is portrayed as a fracturing of both mind and body, a splitting from a world in which he cannot understand and communicate his emotions. Septimus’ access to his grief is restricted by a relationship to bodies of power that he has internalised as judgement. These include his doctor’s and psychiatrist’s notions of health, as well as codes of heroism from the war and the “duty” that he has fulfilled as a soldier. Both his doctor and psychiatrist, from whom he seeks an understanding of his unresolved grief, encourage the belief of self-control in relation to his mind and body. They invalidate the “uncontrollable forces” of emotions that Septimus feels privy to. His doctor, Holmes, an allusion to the literary detective Sherlock Holmes, approaches Septimus’ health from a scientific and objective perspective and with rational scrutiny. He tells him that “health is largely a matter of our own control”. Sir William Bradshaw, his psychiatrist, is similarly of the belief that the “unsocial impulses” of ill mental health should be “held in control”. The irony that Woolf implies is that it is they who are controlling Septimus, through forcing him to adhere to their expectations at the expense of having agency and a private interpretation of his experiences. The cultural attitude toward post-war mental illness, that Woolf depicts as an invisible presence, is portrayed across other novels, including The Return of the Soldier by Rebecca West. West’s novel highlights a trope portrayed in Mrs Dalloway—that of the unseen wound of shellshock. In The Return of the Soldier, the protagonist, Chris, is similarly interrogated by those around him, as he experiences no physical wounding—a fact that other people struggle to comprehend. As the character Margaret contemplates of Chris: “I don’t know how to put it; he’s not exactly wounded” (West 12). This misunderstanding around mental illness is represented in Mrs

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60 The evangelistic Kilman, as well as Septimus’ physicians, uphold power due to holding positions in the socially respected areas of religion and science. Kilman, notably, teaches history, which also hints at Woolf’s interrogation of a patriarchal lineage that has delineated selected narratives as truth at the expense of other perspectives—including that of women.

61 This abstract power is also evoked in relation to the suppressed feminine, particularly through reference to Lady Bradshaw who, during their marriage, succumbed to her husband’s authority: “slow sinking, water-logged, of her own will into his” (88). The insinuated oppression of her power is concealed by appearances: “sweet was her smile, swift was her submission” (88). The novel describes how she is “cramped, squeezed, pared, pruned, drew back, peeped through” (88-89), an allusion to the loss of her feminine subjectivity, in relation to her husband’s power and social standing.
Dalloway, as many of the characters, including Septimus’ wife and the physicians who he seeks assistance from, struggle to understand his illness as much as he does.

The appropriation of agency that Woolf’s fiction depicts as being instigated by medical specialists toward Septimus, is inter-related with the challenges of heroic and masculine identities in the post-war era. In Jessica Meyer’s study of masculinity in the aftermath of World War One in Britain, she writes that: “by focusing debates over definition and causation on the ideals of will-power and self-control, both mental and physical, doctors were able to make statements about the qualities they believed necessary in the healthy, functional man” (“Gladder to be Going Out Than Afraid” 9). In doing so, she argues, this “reaffirmed the primacy of self-control in their definitions of the healthy heroic man, even as they questioned men’s ability to retain their self-control” (9). Meyer discusses this doctrine of self-control to which returning soldiers were subjected. These implicit expectations are perpetuated in Mrs Dalloway by the characters that uphold power and a scientific knowledge of the body, including the medical professionals. This propensity to enact an ideal of control over the body is reflected and critiqued in Woolf’s fiction as a product of hierarchical power that disempowers. A personal relationship to the body, identity, and to one’s interior grief process is compromised, so that mourning remains melancholic.

Dr Holmes encourages Septimus to return to “outside interests” (Mrs Dalloway 80), rather than honour his interiority and subjectivity, the process of his grief. His psychiatrist, Bradshaw, similarly controls Septimus’ subjectivity and experience of loss through encouraging him to follow his psychiatric perspective to resolve his illness. Divined by the respect of colleagues and fear of his subordinates, Bradshaw is portrayed as having a “craving for power” (88). His role is to encourage submission and to uphold the authority of socially engendered conceptions of reality, eradicating any viewpoints that he personally considers unhealthy. Bradshaw’s source of power is based on his own belief in a god-like status and his reputation of “understanding the human soul” (84). This notion that Bradshaw has power over the soul, reflects the discourses and power bases that Woolf critiques. While these discourses are socially acceptable, they are mostly without substantiation and, in the case of medical science, even lacking a deeper knowledge. As Bradshaw notes, “we know nothing about—the nervous system, the human brain” (87).

Bradshaw is an archetype of the patriarchal power construct that Woolf interrogates, as those who do not share his world view are classified as either “criminal, victim or fugitive” (85)—
excluded as delusional and socially invalided. This is another allusion to a Foucauldian sense of power that is differentiating, hierarchical and homogenising. Power is ascribed to those who are respected in social life, including the scientific community, in Woolf’s representation. To Bradshaw, health is an “exacting science ... proportion” (Woolf 87). He measures this proportion through relationality and compliance of the body and mind to a standard of physical and mental health, and to his own respected opinion. The notion of “having a sense of proportion,” in his view, is connected to abstract values and ideals: to “family affection; honour; courage; and a brilliant career” (85, 89). This again insinuates his propagation, through his medical practice, of socially valued ideals and scientific paradigms that have power and external authority. These values are placed outside of the individual subject of his patients and their interior process. In relation to Septimus’ medical treatment, Woolf interrogates madness and melancholia as relational constructs that shift in accordance to who is in power and whose story and version of reality is socially accepted and validated.

In Bradshaw’s view, his notion of proportion implies the fundamental ideal of health and embodiment to which everybody should comply. Indeed, those who do not meet Bradshaw’s perspective of proportion are, in his opinion, also physically lacking: weak and with “a lack of good blood” (89). The impact of external power bases that deny his subjective experience of grief, couching it in hollow abstractions and disenfranchising his emotions and vulnerability, causes Septimus to feel condemnation. He feels isolated in the world, as his sense of being who he is excluded. Holmes, in particular, becomes a metaphor for the “human nature” that he conflicts with, that has “condemned him to death” (80). He imagines that the whole world is wanting him to kill himself for their sakes (81). He is, in a sense, socially annihilated because he represents what others dissociate from: a fallen soldier, an unheroic man. In a similar way to Vance Palmer, Woolf portrays the challenge for veterans of internalised judgement, either perceived or real, that affects an integration back into social

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62 Kilman similarly represents the tropes of hierarchy and power, but in relation to religion. Her physical presence commands authority, causing others to feel “her superiority” and their corresponding inferiority (9). Clarissa describes her as being “corrupt; with all that power” (155).

63 Bradshaw encourages Septimus to continue to apply himself to a heroic masculine ideology and shared set of values, a common occurrence that Carden Coyne writes of in her non-fiction account of World War One, describing the “officially sanctioned discourses of reconstruction” that suppressed private responses to loss (14-15). Carden-Coyne writes that such examples of “heroic” language, that was encouraged in the post-war era, obscured grief in favour of ideals of duty and sacrifice. Heroic language concealed the emotions associated with the painful experiences of war (14).

64 Notably, Sir William, rather than empowering Septimus, wishes instead to force him to comply with, and submit to, his values and world view. In response to this, some of his patients “weakly broke down; sobbed; submitted”; other patients, that he sees as inspired by “intemperate madness,” challenge his perspective (89). To disagree with him, is to occupy a space of insanity or illness—to fail as a social agent.
life, enacting a melancholic displacement. Septimus becomes the Other, relegated in his melancholia to being socially invisible. He perceives himself as separate from others, and from himself—as an “outcast … on the shore of the world,” a world that “desert[s] the fallen” (81, 87). Sensing himself a prisoner of power relationships, he internalises judgement for a “crime” (86) he cannot remember, internalising a sense of guilt for the unconscious grief that he cannot express. This suppressed vulnerability and the lost subjectivity that it entails will be explored in the subsequent sections, as to how social values, in Woolf’s novel, have concealed the body and mourning, rendering grief unseen.

Section 1.2 “The Troubles of the Flesh”: Absent Mourning and Suppressed Embodiment

In *Mrs Dalloway*, political ideas are abstract conceptualisations manifest as embodied experience. Woolf depicts the subjection to social ideologies, such as patriotism, duty and healthy proportions, as enacting an imprint upon one’s body. She portrays psychic grief through the body in pain to emphasise the physicality of mourning in the world, and the interior realms of grief that are socially excluded. Woolf illustrates the unseen worlds and the private world of one’s inner body, feelings and interior experience that become Other in the context of social perception and performance. The trope of politicised bodies is depicted in *Mrs Dalloway* through Woolf’s representation of bodies that are shaped by social life and moulded by collective doctrines. Within the novel, power penetrates deeply and bodily, felt “to the marrow of their bones” (152). The “skeleton of habit,” perpetuated by normal social life, is described as enacting a hold upon the human fame. It instigates a feeling of being “hollowed out, utterly empty within” (42), reflecting the abstract discourses that the novel critiques. It is through illustrating a dissociated body and mind that Woolf most distinctly conveys the disconnection between the characters’ social personas and a subjective sense of embodiment. She depicts, in the social sphere, docile bodies that conform to social bounds through appearances, lacking essence. The character of Hugh Whitfield, for example, reflects only “the manners and breeding of an English gentleman,” as he had “no heart, no brain” (4), suggesting a vacuous persona. Clarissa, as a woman within this social context, experiences a dissociation from her femininity. She feels that she “wore” her body and that “with all its capacities, (her body) seemed nothing-nothing at all” (8). This loss of connection to the body is intertwined with a melancholia associated with her gender and class. Her feminine expression is relegated to solitude and inner spaces.
and concealed behind clothing and appearances, in a similar way to Addie in *As I Lay Dying*. Clarissa performs in the social world and then senses “some depression of her own, in her bedroom, taking off her hat” (106).

The portrayal of the young soldiers in *Mrs Dalloway* aptly represents the disempowering relationship between the physical body and social discourse, of which Woolf is critical. The soldiers, who the character Peter observes on his walk, are quite literally inscribed with social expectation. Their facial expressions, in Woolf’s depiction, symbolically reflect “the letters of a legend written around the base of a statue praising duty, gratitude, fidelity, love of England” (44). This echoes the portrayal of soldiers in *Daybreak* who are given over to anonymous purposes, and the utilitarian conception of the masculine body in *As I Lay Dying*. Soldiers, across the novels, are the product of discourses—hollow and abstract, rather than embodied agents. Peter notices, of the soldiers, that they don’t know the “troubles of the flesh” yet (44). This statement hints at their corporeal dissociation and, through insinuating their virginity, a sense of dismemberment from embodied masculinity and agency. Descriptions of the soldiers suggest a lack of power and subjectivity, as they are not agents of their own bodies. They are described as marching in unison and as being “drugged … by discipline” (44), signalling their docility and precarious grasp of a private identity. As an assemblage, they engage in “perpetual movement” (122), resonating with a Foucauldian interpretation of subjected and passive bodies. Corpse-like, they engage a state of action and disempowerment, moving toward death—a striking comparison to the mechanised and utilitarian bodies in *As I Lay Dying*. The soldiers also adopt a sense of renunciation to their fate, further signalling their disempowerment and disembodiment. This is comparable to Ezra Pound’s famous and subversive post-war poem, *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, wherein he describes how soldiers had “walked eye-deep in hell” and believed in “old men’s lies,” coming home to “old lies, and new infamy.” Pound’s repetition of the word “lies” is evident in the contrast that Woolf portrays between the ideals of “duty, gratitude, fidelity,” and the depiction of the soldiers as “stiff yet staring corpse[s]” (Woolf 44).

Masculine bodies sent to war are, in *Mrs Dalloway*, inconspicuous and utilitarian, sacrificed for ideas and valued only as a symbol of strength.65 In Woolf’s representation, soldiers are already corpses, a motif that foreshadows Septimus’ death due to suicide toward the end of

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65 This tendency for characters to become the ideologies they support is prevalent in the novel, signalling a lack of critical thought. For example, Clarissa reflects that “Emigration had become, in short, largely Lady Bruton” (96).
the novel. In juxtaposition to life, “with its varieties, its irreticences,” the soldiers are described as “shovelled together,” and concealed, in anonymity, by symbology (101). They are “laid under a pavement of monuments and wreaths” (101, 44), an image that evokes the mass graves of unknown soldiers after World War One. Through oscillating between archetypes and abstractions of war and identities, and conflicting interior experiences of grief, Woolf unites both soldiers and civilians as victims of a collective devastation that remains unmourned. As Nancy Bazin and Jane Lauter suggest, *Mrs Dalloway* depicts a “portrayal of individuals as victims of war” (14). It is through revealing the private world of feelings and corporeal sensations, that Woolf reveals this lost space of subjectivity.

In *Mrs Dalloway*, grief remains concealed behind the social masks of appearance, just as people remain one-dimensional abstractions in the minds of each other—their interiority, and the truth of their feelings, remain hidden. Kilman, for example, presumes that Clarissa has known neither sorrow nor pain (Woolf 110). The reader, however, becomes aware of the losses that Clarissa suffers in private, and also the obscured corporeal dilemmas of Kilman. For Kilman, the body and the emotions she feels represent an inescapable Other that cannot be controlled, despite her belief in religion and social causes. While invisible power relationships and abstract ideas control and inform bodily action through social performance, the interior experience of the body and emotional laments are described as a juxtaposition to these ideals. Clarissa perceives Kilman as being one-dimensional and disembodied, reflecting only her belief systems and externally observable social graces, such as her immaculate dress. Clarissa describes her as a spectre, hinting at a dissociation that she perceives between Kilman’s beliefs and appearances and her suppression of her body. Kilman herself laments a lack of control over her body as she tries to “subdue this turbulent and painful feeling,” noting that “she had not triumphed; she had not mastered the flesh” (113). This signals her private pain and mind-body separation and the limitation of knowledge bases that exclude the body.

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66 Kilman, who possesses power, still lacks a sense of agency, as she does not have control over her body: she “had not mastered the flesh,” and also yearns to control “the soul and its mockery” (113, 110). Through the character of Kilman, Woolf challenges the social order through reifying the importance of the body and the inner, concealed experiences of life. Kilman’s disempowerment in other aspects of life, is also signalled through her envy of Clarissa’s daughter, Elizabeth, who has the physical youth and aesthetic beauty that she desires and has to falsify through opulent clothing. Envious, she imagines dismantling Elizabeth’s body and exposing her entrails and stretching them, a metaphorical expression of her desire to penetrate and possess the private parts of her being and her body (116). This sadistic ideal reflects a power relationship that seeks to objectify the body of the Other, and the concealed interiority that remains a source of power.
Septimus’ character also reflects an oppression of mourning in social life that Woolf emphasises. Suffering from post-war grief, he is forced to conceal the shame of his illness from the public eye. This expectation of concealed shame is echoed in his psychiatrist Bradshaw’s diagnosis that “he was not fit to be about” and should “rest in solitude” (86-87). So too, his wife, Rezia, also attempts to conceal his condition from the outer world. Septimus becomes, from his own perspective, a social outcast who lay, “like a drowned sailor,” as he “gazed back on the inhabited regions” (81) of the world. The brutal corporeality of social oppression and control is suggested within his words: “the world has raised its whip” (11). In his melancholic condition, Septimus can reason and read, but he cannot feel or taste (76-77), indicating a sensory and bodily dissociation inherent to his suffering. Septimus represents Woolf’s criticism toward a social order that privileges the mind and excludes vulnerability and grief: “his brain was perfect; it must be the fault of the world then that he could not feel” (77).

Detachment from feeling and sensation manifests, for the characters, in repression and an inability to express and process painful feelings. This is exemplified when Septimus reflects on losing his friend Evans, who was killed just before the Armistice, “congratulat[ing] himself upon feeling very little and very reasonably” (86). His private grief and relationship to loss is obscured from him. In Labour of Loss, Joy Damousi examines how experiences of grief and loss were dealt with during and after the First and Second World War, describing this tendency to suppress grief as being necessary for soldiers to cope with the death of fellow-combatants. She explains that the rhetoric of war “insisted that men repress their emotions” (11) as a part of accepting another identity as a warrior. Similarly, in Mrs Dalloway, Septimus remains dissociated from his painful experiences of grief, unable to include his emotions as a part of his heroic identity. While Holmes and Bradshaw exclude his narratives of loss, his wife Rezia also cannot rectify the heroic man she married with his vulnerability. To Rezia, he had grown “stranger and stranger” (66). This is reflective of a polarisation of gender identities that I will discuss in the next section.

Across the novel, melancholic dissociation is the only potentiality of grief, deriving from an inherent gap between materiality and the signifier. This is manifest in vacuous, empty ideologies that are socially esteemed. In Mrs Dalloway, social values are abstract, yet become “enduring symbol(s) of the state”—symbols of what “they all stood for” (13,152). A passing aeroplane seen in the sky by some of the characters epitomises this notion of collective values as being abstract and ascending beyond the body. Described as “a bright spark; an aspiration
… a symbol” (23), its interior dimension exists only as a façade. The character Mr. Bentley interprets the plane as a symbol of “man’s soul” and determination to ascend or dissociate from the body: “to get outside his body ... by means of thought”—even though, as he also notices, the plane is “unguided” (23-24). This indicates the dissociation between materiality and symbology and the notion of social progress, of which Woolf, like William Faulkner, is critical.

Woolf’s critique of religion is inter-related to her interrogation of this form of disembodied power, as she dismantles empty sources of consolation that are not subjectively embodied and externalise power. Religion is portrayed as a cold and dictating belief system that “desires power” (88). It is aptly described as “bodiless” (118), as it fails to calculate the effects on the lived body and the importance of the material world. At the same time as he views the plane, Bentley notices a nearby cathedral, contemplating that it offers “membership of a society” that takes on a disembodied and illusory symbology beyond the cathedral itself. He reflects on martyrs who have died for the symbol of the cross that, like the plane, has “soared beyond seeking and questing and knocking of words together,” and has become “all spirit, disembodied, ghostly” (24). This accentuates how, in Woolf’s portrayal of a post-war society, invisible presences, connected to empty words, have been valued more than life. Indeed, these abstractions have been empowered beyond language and embodiment, even obscuring mortality, that is rendered almost “unbelievable” (108).

This representation of empty symbolism illuminates a loss of meaning in the power bases of progress, patriotism and religious ideologies embedded in a patriarchy that Woolf questions. They are seen to have a transcendent meaning yet, in dissociating from the body, they are, like the active corpses of the soldiers, already dead. Septimus, who becomes detached from the social world, views the same plane in a different light: it is the Other signalling to him. For Septimus, the “unseen” beckons to him as he grapples with his grief (21). His challenge is to uncover the deeper meaning of the Other—to connect the social world from which he feels detached, with the socially marginalised world of his melancholia that he cannot express—“not indeed in actual words” (17)—that is revealed through Woolf’s language of the body.

67 That this ascension beyond the body is “unguided” (24) also hints at the invisible presence of the source of hierarchical power structures and the death of God. Woolf draws on these modernist tropes through her critique of religion.
Section 2 Melancholic Asymbolia and Woolf’s Metaphors of Embodiment

In a collective culture, wherein the body and mourning are concealed, Woolf portrays the ways in which this impacts the expressivity of grief. Grief, for many of the characters, is melancholic and solitary. It is asymbolic, as it cannot be expressed through the language and symbolic structures available. Through Septimus, a melancholic disempowerment in respect to his processing of loss is apparent, and draws out the incommunicability of mourning that Woolf depicts. Even though the novel deals specifically with psychic wounds, Woolf illustrates how these are intertwined with embodiment and corporeal being-in-the-world. She reveals the interior world of mourning, moving away from the abstractions and symbolism that deflect from the lived reality of post-war grief. Through dismantling traditional hierarchies that privilege perspectives and narratives, Woolf’s writing situates the body in grief. Her body metaphors voice a concealed mourning, communicating the silences and hidden pain that is socially invisible.

World War One has been deemed as characteristically indescribable. Writers and soldiers alike have emphasised the inadequacy of language to convey the experience of trench warfare, and to relay the narratives of loss. Woolf similarly interrogates a fundamental unknowability of the body and pain, particularly in regards to language, famously having quipped in her essay On Being Ill, that in the face of being ill, “language at once runs dry,” leaving the subject to carve out new ways of communicating. She writes that, for those experiencing illness: “there is nothing ready made for him. He is forced to coin words himself … taking his pain in one hand, and a lump of pure sound in the other (6-7). So too in her essay, A Sketch of the Past, Woolf addresses an emphasis, even within literature, upon the mind rather than the body which, I argue, informs her focus on the body in grief in Mrs Dalloway. She queries that “literature does its best to maintain that its concern is with the mind,” and yet “the daily drama of the body” has not been recognised—insinuating that this other dimension, of corporeality, is obscured. Woolf questions a separation between mind, body and soul in writing, even wondering whether illness requires a “new language” that is “primitive, subtle, sensual, obscene” (On Being Ill 7-8). Mrs Dalloway explores many expressions of the subtler and socially obscured realms of illness, through emphasising the body in pain, as well as through her critique of the deception of language and its origin in power, which hinders a subjective processing of loss and creating new meaning. Through

68 The inability to describe life in the trenches became, as Paul Fussell has observed, one of “the motifs of all who wrote about the war” (170).
body metaphor, Woolf portrays the hidden realms of loss that are, nonetheless, grounded in materiality and physicality, situating grief in embodied meaning.

In *Mrs Dalloway*, Woolf indicates a relationship between the incommunicability of grief and a hierarchical power that obscures meaning. Those who have social power, such as Lady Bruton, who is “more interested in politics than people” and talks “like a man” (93), have the ability to narrativise within society, aptly reflecting Woolf’s representation of disembodied patriarchal power. Notably, Clarissa recollects her old friend, Sally Seton, who had also possessed “a sort of abandonment, as if she could say anything, do anything,” allowing the two to spend hours “talking about life, how they were to reform the world” (27-28). Sally was, however, frowned upon socially—as Clarissa recalls, her father, in her younger days, had called Sally “untidy” (28), judging her from the perspective of appearance and minimising the power she held to shock people and disrupt conservative values. The romantic passages describing Sally and her kiss with Clarissa, insinuate another concealment in the novel—that of intimacy, love and relationships that are considered socially inappropriate. Clarissa ponders: “[h]ad that not, after all, been love?” (27). The physical and emotional intimacies between her and Sally suggest her bi-sexual inclinations, a reflection of a theme of androgyny between the masculine and feminine in her character, that I discuss later—as Clarissa is better able to move between polarities and experiences of life, with less attachment than some of the other characters. The intimacy that Clarissa feels in her connection with Sally is pivotal to the novel and to her emphasis on the feminine capacity for connection and shared intimacies, that are absent for the masculine characters. With Sally, she “felt the world come closer, swollen with some astonishing significance, some pressure of rapture, which split its thin skin and gushed and poured with an extraordinary alleviation over the cracks and sores” (32).69 This accentuates, through corporeal imagery, how healing the intimacies of the feminine world and inter-connection are for balancing the vacuous masculine world that Woolf portrays.

While the masculinised character Bruton is described as having “a command of language” (96), and Kilman is a history teacher, Clarissa describes herself as knowing “nothing; no language; no history” (6). Clarissa, instead, is more absorbed in her inner experience.

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69 The deep intimacy that Clarissa shares with Sally, contrasts with her marriage with Richard and his inability to express his feelings to her, which he deliberates in his mind. He concludes that “he could not tell her he loved her” (104), which suggests that there is social space for the expression of feelings for Woolf’s masculine characters.
Similarly, Septimus also cannot find the words to express his loss and his interior experience within the social world, including language. His incapacity to communicate denotes his alienation from the world. He recognises that “communication is health” and feels that, if he can communicate, they might “let him off”— but instead he remains haunted by what he conceptualises as “human nature,” a perceived social pressure to conform (81-2). Septimus’ disconnection from the symbolic order is depicted in his struggle with the personal pronoun “I.” He tries to express his feelings to others, but remains in symbolic abdication. He is unable to communicate through the identity that imprisons him and the abstract heroic language of self-control that obscures his emotionality.

Where Septimus cannot access his loss within collective frames of meaning, various body metaphors, including physical sensations, corporeal dissociation and inaction, delineate Woolf’s emphasis on the body in grief. As Merleau-Ponty notes, communication is inherently and phenomenally rooted in bodily functioning: “[s]ense experience is that vital communication with the world which makes it present as a familiar setting of our life” (Phenomenology of Perception 61). So too, body imagery and sensory experiences in Mrs Dalloway draw out Woolf’s portrayal of the materiality of grief. Grief is incommunicable, yet an inherent part of social life. It is situated in an inner experience of embodiment, corporeal relationships and mortality. This is highlighted when Clarissa notes that, in confronting the idea of death, “always her body went through it first ... her dress flamed, her body burnt” (163). In the novel, the hidden realms of the body are a reminder of physically being-in-the-world and the interior experience of the body, that subverts the entrapment of the characters within politicised bodily identities. As the critic Cornelia Burian argues, “the trauma of modernity registers in Mrs Dalloway on the level of metaphor. The wounded, broken body is written into the pages of Woolf’s novel” (70).

Merleau-Ponty suggests that it is through the body that we have access to the world (Phenomenology of Perception 82), and many of the characters in Mrs Dalloway experience a jolt that reminds them of their embodied being in the world. This signals that body awareness is typically concealed. Woolf challenges the notion of abstract, politicised bodies through her portrayal of the visceral sensations of the body in pain. The body’s reactions come in the form of impulses, or “shocks of suffering” felt by the senses (Woolf 117). The characters experience “hot and painful feelings” (110) from within. For Septimus, grief is a “thud, thud, thud” in his brain, as it has been pushed to its rational capacities (163). This onomatopoeia
evokes a language of the body and signals his corporeal dissociation. Clarissa experiences grief as a similar jolt to her sense of being, like an arrow sticking in her heart. Her melancholia is a socially obscured side to her life that has the power to “make her feel scraped, hurt in her spine,” and to “g[i]ve her physical pain,” whilst her soul feels rusted with the experience of grief (5, 9).

Woolf’s portrayal of Septimus depicts, in a similar way to Palmer in Daybreak, inaction as being inherent to melancholia. It is a juxtaposition to the active docility of soldiers. For Septimus, his experience with grief is an “undoing” (140), as he is immobilised in the world, having lost his identity as a soldier that mobilised him toward action. When succumbed to the immobilisation of melancholia, he can barely raise a hand. He engages only in a mechanical gesture of placing his head in his hands (79), indicating a collapse of the brain and the internalised belief systems of which Woolf is critical. In The Phenomenology of Perception, Merleau-Ponty writes that “Consciousness is in the first place not a matter of ‘I think that’ but of ‘I can,’” as much as it is a question of a sense of power (225; my emphasis). It is through portraying inaction that, in a similar way to Faulkner and Palmer, Woolf destabilises the social order that upholds power and dictates thinking. She challenges the patriarchal trope of being a “master of [one’s] own actions” (Mrs Dalloway 89). Where action and being of the “ablest of men” (98) is considered a respectable compliment, Septimus’ inaction, as a man, destabilises this by his being Other.

It is within a state of inaction that characters confront what Clarissa calls “the presence of this thing” (107), signalling her socially invisible melancholia that is concealed and exists outside of language, yet impacts her body and mind. When she lies on the couch she feels an “overwhelming incapacity” (164). The pain of the “brute” that attacks her mind and her physiology, cause both her body and brain to fail in these moments (26). This indicates how, in a state of inaction, she becomes separated from the social order. Comparatively, Septimus, in his response to melancholia, lies down and listens with uncontrollable tears, feeling himself “falling down, like the flames” (124).70 This image metaphorically depicts the liminal space that he occupies, between modes of being.71 Kristina Groover situates the difference

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70 Septimus’ falling is in many ways a parallel to the Theological Fall, as signalled in Chapter One, in that it signifies a change from obedience, to guilty disobedience. This is an intertextual echo of the grief of separation caused by the advent of knowledge that suppressed a state of phenomenal, naked being. Septimus cannot escape the moral code to which he feels condemned, as he pictures himself as a criminal facing judges who condemn him for “falling,” through failing to comply with collective belief systems.

71 The trope of falling, as a liminal space, will be discussed further in reference to the post-9/11 novels.
between the two characters through arguing that Clarissa is “a liminal character who is simultaneously embedded in her social and political world and, periodically, outside of it as a critical observer.” I argue that both Clarissa and Septimus confront the liminality in their politicised identities and this is accentuated through the trope of invisible presence. In *Mrs Dalloway*, feminine identity and vulnerability is concealed by dominant patriarchal values that renders it an invisible presence. For Septimus, the inner world is opaque and un navigated, as it has not been a part of his masculine identity; while for Clarissa, who is connected to her interior world, she cannot embody it within social life.

Septimus’ corporeal reactions have been dismissed, by his physicians, as merely “nerve symptoms and nothing more” (80). His dissociation from the nervous system, tied in closely with the brain, signifies a breakdown in his body’s centre for action in relation to the external world. His condition, characterised by his inability to feel and his disconnection from the social world, is represented physically in the novel. Septimus imagines that his body has become macerated, leaving only his nerve fibres (59)—the carriers of sensory information. In an interesting comparison to the language of the body that Woolf evokes in *Mrs Dalloway*, Meyer, who describes the language soldiers used to narrativise their losses and pain in the aftermath of the war, notes that this communication was often corporeal. While doctors talked of self-control and will, Meyer writes, soldiers used words like “nerves” and “fear” (“Gladder to be Going Out Than Afraid” 205). In doing so, soldiers communicated through the medium of their own experience—the body—allowing them subjective expression. She describes how a language of the nerves evolved, wherein soldiers came to understand their experience through the responses of their nervous system.

Septimus’ unharnessed power is what he is socially marginalised for: an ability to perceive the hollow abstractions of social discourses and an access to creating personal meaning through creatively engaging with his reality. This very possibility is rendered by his psychiatrist, Bradshaw, as a “serious symptom” of his poor health (84). As “he was attaching meanings to words of a symbolical kind” (84), Sir William surmises ironically that there may

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72 The nervous system operates, according to Jakob von Uexkull, as a means for interrogating, organising and responding to forces of the external world (qtd. in Golden and Bergo 74).

73 In *A War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrics*, Ben Shepherd discusses this theme comprehensively, particularly in relation to the long-term impact of war upon the body of veterans.

74 Clarissa experiences a complementary opposite connection to her heart when engaging with presence and awareness, when she feels “that intoxication of the moment, that dilation of the nerves of the heart itself till it seemed to quiver” (154). Clarissa’s sense of being present in relation to the body will be discussed further in the next section.
not be any meaning in the world, signalling again the hollow reality Woolf critiques. Social rejection can offer, Woolf shows, “an isolation full of sublimity; a freedom which the attached can never know” (81). This holds a potential to “renew society” (21) through creative thought. When engaging in his private world, Septimus finds himself in a space of creativity, inspired by new ideas: “[s]ome things were very beautiful; others sheer nonsense” (124). He glimpses another world that tells him a new story—that “we accept, we create,” wherein beauty springs instantly and overwhelms his senses (60). It is a world of sensation and heightened sensitivity. While social understandings reinforce a hollow and visual representation of the world and the separation of dichotomies, what is discovered beyond this is “not the crude beauty of the eye. It was beauty pure and simple” (144). For Septimus, a new mode of being is signalling to him, “not indeed in actual words”—yet this abstract potentiality carries “the greatest message in the world” (73). The interiority of words and their “secret signal[s]” (78), are revealed to him. Through connecting to his inner world, Septimus comes to experience a sense of essence, beyond the veneer—he imagines, for example, that the word “time” metaphorically “splits its husk” and pours riches over him, words flying away (61). The space of his interiority that he accesses is outside time, where words have a rich, embodied meaning that he can play with. This allows Septimus to access his personal narrative trajectory and to reflect, once again, on his friend Evans who died in the war. He imagines a communication between them outside of the boundaries of life and death, a liminal space wherein he can access grief.

While this potentiality to narrativise from a place of subjectivity is insinuated, Septimus remains discontent in his isolation from the social world. He is unable to communicate or find acceptance for his experiences. Isolated and ostracised, Septimus feels that has only one option: “to be alone forever” (128). The separation between the interior and exterior worlds of his grief and creativity are depicted as being too vast for social functioning. This distinct separation is portrayed between the characters’ inner and outer worlds, indicating that grief cannot be shared is, instead, interiorised. In Septimus case, it is excluded within his own psyche. Much like the character Sievright in Daybreak, who experiences the social world as if behind glass, Septimus also perceives others “behind a pane of glass,” as he “looked at people outside” (77).

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75 Metaphorically, when Septimus is experiencing an expansion of the world, his outer flesh “melted off the world” (59). This signals a shedding of the flesh that is associated with the external world and appearances, as he starts to experience his inner body.
Through depicting a tendency for her characters to polarise from the other gender and interiorise their true feelings, Woolf interrogates how separation between the genders can transpire. Raman Selden and Peter Widdowson argue that Woolf’s most significant contribution to feminism is her notion that gender identity is socially constructed and can be challenged and transformed (207). In *Mrs Dalloway*, Woolf depicts how the polarising nature of gender identities can inhibit an incorporation of loss through concealing the other polarity. Rezia, like Jean in *Daybreak*, yearns for the heroic ideal of the man she married, unable to rectify the apparent invulnerability of “a man like Septimus, who had fought, who was brave,” with his “silly unconventionality, his weakness” (124, 39). Attached to social conventions, she believes that “it was cowardly for a man to say he would kill himself” (23).

In a similar way, Septimus fails to connect with and see Rezia beyond her exterior appearance, perceiving her as an archetype of femininity, “with the pursed lips women have” (124). Through engaging with her objectively he reduces her to an image: a “blurred outline; her little black body; her face and hands; her turning movements at the table” (125).76 Rezia critiques this way in which Septimus excludes her and “his lack of the ghost of a notion what anyone else was feeling” (39). This provides an insight into Septimus’ exclusion of the feminine—what he has rejected within himself as feminine, his feelings and vulnerability, are also unseen by him in the outside world.

In *Shellshock and the Modernist Imagination*, Wyatt Bonikowski discusses the gender crisis in the post-war period that Woolf portrays, explaining that a return home from war meant returning to “the status quo of wartime patriarchal authority” (102). This was accentuated by the “soldier’s disturbingly present absence when he return[ed] home” (100). Bonikowski describes the “strange new illness— an invisible wound” that “contained a meaning not only about the soldier’s experience of war but also about the experience of women at home who had to receive him and to try to understand his place in their lives” (95). The “ghost of a notion” (39) of the interior world of feelings that Rezia refers to, signals the invisible presence of the feminine and affective world that is repressed, but remains central to, Woolf’s interpretation of grief. There is a clear distinction that Woolf builds up in the novel between

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76 This description of Rezia signals the trope of feminine voicelessness and concealment, particularly through descriptions of her “little black body” and “pursed lips” (124). This theme, in *Mrs Dalloway*, of the masculine inability to perceive femininity, is inter-related to Woolf’s tropes of power and abstract embodiment. Peter, watching his landlady notes that she is nothing more than “an adorable emblem which only the recollection of cold human contacts forbids us to embrace” (49-50). Peter also struggles with the distinction between his mental abstraction of Clarissa and her presence, which surpasses his ideal of her.
the masculine and the feminine, in regards to power and gender roles, that forbids a physical, or symbolic conjoining of the genders—both internally and externally.

Like the abject corpse of Addie that becomes a central metaphor of an atrophy of loss and creativity in the modern age in *As I Lay Dying*, the concealed corpse of Septimus appears as a totalising metaphor of melancholic mourning. As the “giant mourner” (61) who is socially oppressed and ends his life, Septimus signifies an incommunicable and perpetual grief that Woolf does not imagine consolation for within the depicted social milieu. Clewell asserts, of Woolf’s response to War, that she “sought not to heal wartime wounds, but to keep them open” (198). I argue, that while *Mrs Dalloway* keeps wartime wounds open, Woolf also presents the possibility to mourn that is, much like the feminine, concealed within collective culture. Through Septimus’ liminality, Woolf represents a paradox: he is both “the happiest man in the world, and the most miserable” (73). This hints at the polarities of comedy and tragedy, creativity and destruction, that are inter-woven in the tears and laughter that he experiences. Septimus, however, in a comparable way to Sievright in *Daybreak*, cannot rectify his past identity with a new way of being. In failing to decisively embody either realm that he polarises—social life and his mourning—he remains in relation to his hierarchical society. He is “in their power” (130)—a “principle of his own subjection,” in the Foucauldian sense, having internalised social expectations through his fears of judgement, and “an anxious awareness of being observed” (*Discipline and Punish* 202-3). Ultimately, Septimus fears, rather than protects, his inner world. His captivity in social discourses eventuates in his suicide, when he fears Dr Holmes entering his home. This intrusion penetrates the already compromised space of his interiority and solitude that has contained his socially unacceptable and unheroic grief. In fearing and anticipating Holmes’ judgement and intrusion, Septimus annihilates his corporeal being through ending his life.

Through Septimus’ suicide, Woolf communicates a political statement about the lost subjectivity of soldiers in the aftermath of war, voicing a grief that resists the hollow language, consolation, and expectations of social life. Septimus’ death, deriving from his melancholic incommunicability which penetrates Clarissa’s social world through concealed conversations, is perceived as a resistance to the social order. Death is described by

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77 Septimus’ death is mentioned at Clarissa’s party in lowered voices, with talk of “the deferred effects of shell shock” (162). It is also concealed in Clarissa’s mind when she thinks, but does not say, “here’s death,” just as it impacts her physically, provoking her to consider her own mortality (162-163). This infers that, while death and grief remain hidden, they also disrupt social life.
Clarissa, in the final pages of the novel, as a “defiance,” as well as “an attempt to communicate” (163). This signals the relationship that Woolf represents between melancholia and the body. In contrast to the invisible presence, Septimus’ corpse exemplifies visibly an absence, within a disembodied world of which Woolf is critical. This resistance to the social order is continued in the character Clarissa, through her awareness of the “unseen” of female interiority.

**Section 3 “To Kindle and Illuminate”: Woolf’s Feminist Dialectic of Grief**

*Mrs Dalloway* provides a contrast between the stagnant and repressive social constructs that are interrogated, that conceal loss; and Woolf’s delineation of the potentiality of the hidden realms that co-exist subtly through the body. Woolf reveals how the invisible presence of feminine expression already holds the potentiality for an integration of grief, through acceptance, creativity and a harmony of the polarities created by the mind. The novel explores grief through the feminine, body and interiority: the “invisible; unseen; unknown” (8) within the social context that she critiques. Woolf signals a potentiality to exist beyond oppressive discourses, through inter-weaving in the novel the possibility of connecting to sensation and feeling—to make one’s experience one’s own. This is particularly represented in Clarissa’s character, whose interior world is portrayed as being already open to an awareness of embodied mourning and an acceptance of the fullness of life that is inclusive of grief and pain.

Clarissa’s interior perceptions within hierarchical masculinity holds a key for life that many of the other characters are lacking—of an awareness and acceptance of life beyond a dichotomous separation of mind and body. She perceives life as all-pervasive, and outside of the power relationships featured in the novel. In writing *Mrs Dalloway*, Woolf focuses on, and challenges, classist viewpoints, in addition to religious and scientific discourses. She does this through featuring a particularly privileged class in London society with inherent social biases. Richard Dalloway’s encounter with a female vagrant, for example, illustrates the dichotomies of social life that create concealment, as well as an incommunicability and separation between class as well as gender. Richard considers the vagrant’s “problem,” but remains separate from her in words—he recognises that, though they share a moment in time together, they would never speak. Clarissa’s awareness is significantly more inclusive, as she recognises that “[t]here is a dignity in people; a solitude” (105). Unlike her husband, Clarissa is better able to embrace and accept the depth of other people outside of social masks. She
desires to go beyond the idea of people, implicit in the ideologies inherent in social life: “to go deeper, beneath what people said (and these judgements, how superficial, how fragmentary they are!)” (107). Her position of privilege is interesting and ambiguous within the novel, drawing out Woolf’s representation of grief in respect to gender. Clarissa is privileged, part of the upper elite of high society—yet as a female in her time, she continues to lack a sense of social agency. She is “bodiless” and without a nuanced identity outside of her role as “Mrs Richard Dalloway” (118, 8). Her corporeality, that informs her identity and subjectivity in society, and through which she experiences the world, is described as “this body she wore” (7). Her individuality is obscured in relation to her husband’s as, in bearing his name, she is “not even Clarissa anymore” (8).

Iraj Montashery nuances Clarissa’s struggle with identity in the novel. He argues that, as identity needs to be constructed socially through patriarchal language, Clarissa’s identity as a female is inherently marginalised. As such, socially, she is unable to achieve a stable and unified position as a subject. This trope of concealed feminine subjectivity and communicability, which I also address, is comparable to As I Lay Dying. The character Addie’s loss of subjectivity and words due to the collective language in which she lacks the capacity to express herself, rendered her voiceless and melancholic in a similar way to Clarissa. Both Faulkner and Woolf highlight the concealed feminine and also reveal their voices through interior monologue. Clarissa’s feminine oppression is signalled in different moments, such as when she is “made to hide her dress, like a virgin protecting chastity, respecting privacy” (34). This is accentuated further by her association with cloistering—the comparison to her being like “a nun” as she withdraws into her room (45). This insinuates her repression from her sexuality.

While Clarissa is connected to her emotions and sensory world, her body is socially obscured and, as such, “with all its capacities, seemed nothing-nothing at all” (8). Clarissa’s body is described as “breastless” (24), signifying her inability to fully embody her own female expression within this social context, outside of gender roles and duties. Entrapped in her gendered identity, Clarissa’s capacity to communicate subjectively is socially apprehended. In public settings, she is “the voice of the hostess ... reluctant to inflict its individuality” (43). Though her subjectivity stifled, there is a hidden gift within her sense of illumination at

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78 See also Pamela Caughie, Makiko Minow-Pinkney, and Jane Marcus, for discussions of subject formation and the social construction of gender in Mrs Dalloway.
parties: “it was an offering: to combine, to create” (107). For Woolf in her time of writing, issues of being in a body was still very much attached to being in a gendered body. She reveals, in Mrs Dalloway, a challenge to the limitation of both masculine and feminine roles, and how they signal an incompleteness of self and a separation between interiority and exteriority. Power is foreshadowed and exemplified in Clarissa’s feminine presence, even if it is a passive expression of power, as “she inclined to be passive. It was expression she needed” (119). Through Clarissa’s character, Woolf both critiques a social oppression of femininity, but also depicts the feminine expression and connection to interiority as what is missing socially: a connection to the heart and to the acceptance of grief.

Where pervasive ideologies are without depth and masqueraded on a surface level in Clarissa’s high society, there is a dimension of perception concealed within this that she imagines and explores. What is lost in Woolf’s representation of a post-war society is the absence of “something central which permeated” (26). This image evokes the heart and a sense of nostalgia for what appears to be lost; it suggests an inter-connection between people, as well as a sense of living from a place of self-expression. This trope of the absence of essence is accentuated by Lady Rossiter’s question to Peter: “[w]hat does the brain matter ... compared with the heart?” (172). Out of the masculine characters, it is Peter who comes to ponder the distinction between the mind and heart during one of his walks. Reflecting that a person is left “hollowed out” by habit, he finds access to an escape from his mind. This exit from the mind allows him a deeper connection with himself and “his private name” (42, 45), insinuating his personal subjectivity that is reclaimed. Outside of the “skeleton of habit,” Peter connects to a new force of vitality, feeling, like Septimus, “utterly free … like an unguarded flame” (Woolf 45). This image contrasts with the imprisonment of social life and also evokes the light associated with Clarissa, who “kindle[s]” and “illuminate[s]” during social affairs (3).

When Peter pushes the “shutters of his mind” aside, this allows him to explore the “endless avenues” of possibility of his surroundings (45, 47). This experiential engagement mirrors the

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79 Woolf hints again, in this instance, at the feminine power of presence. However, Clarissa ponders who she offers her illumination for, insinuating a difference between creativity that is a part of social performance and a more intuitive and liberated form of creativity.

80 Woolf stated in a speech in 1931 entitled “Professions for Women,” that issues regarding “telling the truth about [one’s] experiences as a body,” remained unresolved within her cultural context. She reflected on her own contribution to writing of the body, and the feminine, in her talk, declaring: “I do not think I solved [it]. I doubt that any woman has solved it yet.” For women, she believed, there remained “ghosts to fight, many prejudices to overcome.” In Mrs Dalloway, she starts to address issues beyond these prejudices and gender identities and how they limit the potentiality of both genders, particularly in regards to self-expression and subjectivity.
pastoral, sensory connection to the natural world depicted in *Daybreak*, when the characters break free of habitual thought.\textsuperscript{81} The heart, Clarissa notices, allows a dilation of the nerves (154), in opposition to the “hollowness” and contraction experienced when living in fear. Clarissa, in contrast to Septimus, critiques her reality through her capacity to engage in private thought. She ponders: “what did it mean to her, this thing she called life?” (107). Through Clarissa’s perspective, and her emphasis on the concealed body, Woolf reveals aspects of a feminine dialectic that challenges power relationships that obscure vulnerability and sensitivity, including the female body. Clarissa plays an important role in acting as a more successful double to Septimus’ character. This doubling is accentuated through her reflection that “she felt somehow very like him – the young man who had killed himself” (186). Like Septimus, Clarissa also experiences states of melancholia. Conversely she is able, due to her femininity and permissible gender expression, to embrace her despair, due to being socially obscured.

Clarissa’s character is a dialectic to the masculine and patriarchal paradigms of mourning that marginalise and dissociate the emotionality of experience. For example, the character of Peter perceives his own grief at a distance, through poetic language. Rather than experiencing it through private engagement and feeling, he detaches from it and imagines it as a moon rising from afar (36). Clarissa, on the other hand, embodies an undeniable femininity through her presence—she can more effectively connect with, and assimilate, the tides of sorrow. Importantly, she has the capacity to feel grief through the body, as her own, rather than remaining dissociated from it. She reflects that “there are tides in the body. Morning meets afternoon” (100).\textsuperscript{82} Clarissa, who has suffered and is conscious of grief and melancholia as it comes and goes, is more content in accepting an independent, yet inter-connected, way of being present in the world. Noticing the pain, she also recognises the joy of being a part of life. As she exclaims at the start of the novel: “this was what she loved; life; London; this moment” (2). Despite feeling, at times, melancholic, she also “enjoyed life immensely” (68). She discerns, through her thoughts, an awareness of the connection between herself and others through all being part of the same world,\textsuperscript{83} recognising that within “the ebb and flow of things, here, there, she survived, Peter survived, lived in each other, she being a part, she

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\textsuperscript{81} To be socially isolated can be a source of power, as Septimus starts to realise and Peter’s character also notices. Peter observes that “in privacy one may do what one chooses.” (134).

\textsuperscript{82} The motif of the ocean also describes Woolf’s conception of a surrender to creative cycles of loss and regeneration, as it “sighs collectively for all sorrows, and renews, begins, collects, lets fall” (33).

\textsuperscript{83} Clarissa reflects on how “one’s friends were attached to one’s body, after lunching with them, by a thin thread” (99), signalling an inter-connection and intimacy that she feels with others, that is also corporeal.
was positive, of the trees at home” (6). Clarissa’s strength is her presence. Peter notes many times that even though he intellectualises and ruminates on who she is, back and forth, there is an essence to her physical presence outside of this: “there she was, however; there she was” (66). Her presence in the world is a power—a form of agency through being that reflects the depth of her inner landscape. Clarissa has a power that can “kindle and illuminate” (3), suggesting that she inspires others, like a muse. This is certainly insinuated in the male characters, including Richard and Peter, who find her intriguing and alluring.

Montashery suggests that Clarissa’s whole identity and social success depends on her parties and that, without her social mask, she is nobody (127). This may be true to an extent of her persona, and she is in many ways a chameleon of social conformity. However, I argue that her concealed complexity is reflected in her moments of quiet reflection, that embody a profound and unspoken truth. While she plays the game of fitting in socially, Clarissa also possesses an introverted detachment from the social order. She protects her interiority through valuing keeping private spaces for herself, even within her marriage. Like Septimus, she is also “outside, looking on” as she consciously reflects on her world (5), yet she moves more fluidly between polarities of inner reflection and social performance—her interior and exterior worlds. Clarissa’s character has some notable parallels to Jean in Daybreak. Like Jean, she is able to evade the boundaries of identity through being open to “the strange underworld” of the duplicity of life (Palmer 100), which is “the ebb and flow of things” (Woolf 6). In this way, both female characters navigate and accept grief as a part of the human experience within their interior process. This is presented as being easier for them, in contrast to the masculine characters. The two female characters are also comparable in the way in which they connect to the energy of other people. Jean experiences “faint but positive shocks” when she interacts with others, that are “registered in her inner being” (Palmer 109), while Clarissa reflects on an energy that passes between herself and others, that is “attached to one’s body … like a thin thread” (Woolf 99). Through this subversion of the separate body, through a recognition of interconnectivity, both Palmer and Woolf insinuate a capacity of the feminine to connect beyond rigid and abstract concepts of themselves and others. Clarissa realises, in her feminine maturity, that “[s]he would not say of any one in the world now that they were this or were that” (5), which suggests an embrace of polarity and a detachment from identity. This allows her character a sense of private agency, in contrast to Septimus who merges with his social identity and internalised expectations to the point of death.
In *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf writes of an androgyny required in respect to creativity and gender, suggesting that “perhaps a mind that is purely masculine cannot create, any more than a mind that is purely feminine” (71). Through her doubling of Clarissa and Septimus, Woolf portrays a destruction to the psyche inherent in polarising gender roles, that limits an engagement with grief and creativity. The masculine body, in Woolf’s portrayal, is externally visible yet couched in ideology and expectation, characterised by bodies that strive toward abstract and heroic ideals that stifle emotionality and feeling. Clarissa’s femininity and body, conversely, is unseen. Her inner world contradicts the hollowness portrayed of patriarchal culture, yet she does not have social subjectivity. Her socially invisible powers—of creativity, an interior capacity to critique her reality, and her ability to relate to her senses and vulnerability—remain socially concealed. It is the power of the “impenetrability,” of her essence and her inner world—an invisible presence—that Peter observes as her strength (53). Her ability to maintain of “a world of her own” wherever she is (66), for which she is admired, denotes her ability to represent her own private world and sense of being, allowing her to exist within unseen, and potentially creative, territory. Woolf emphasises the importance of balancing out the self-destructive masculine regimes that marginalise suffering and body connection, while reminding the reader that one’s body and interior landscape is one’s being in the world—a private sanctuary. This is summed up in Richard’s solitary reflection: “it is a thousand pities never to say what one feels” (102).

In his critique of *Mrs Dalloway*, Spilka notes the “absent grief” through which he critiques Woolf’s “evasion” or shield from her own grief, contending that she displays a “modesty toward male conventionality” (47, 71). I argue, conversely, that the wounding that Woolf highlights is intentionally concealed, in some respects, to illuminate what she values—the inner world. While her portrayal of mourning is anti-consolatory, Woolf also hints at a hidden source of consolation and creative renewal that balances the patriarchal lineage. Clarissa’s character, in my interpretation, is reminiscent of this balance of power. In being more androgynous, yet politically marginalised, her character remains an unharnessed potentiality of mourning and creating anew. Woolf’s motif of invisible power holds true for this perspective, as the lines between the inauthenticity of social performance and the interior world, are delineated. In *Mrs Dalloway*, Clarissa recognises that the “unseen” is larger and

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84 Clarissa maintains her interiority, emphasising that “no one in the world would know” (108) her private thoughts.
more encompassing than the “apparitions” of the aspects of people that appear momentarily (135).

The feminist critic Elizabeth Grosz argues that true awareness cannot be grasped via an appeal to the visible, but rather to the invisible, as it is precisely the invisible in which the maternal-feminine is positioned and in which the categories of self and Other are challenged (106). Where thought limits and moulds understanding, experiencing through feeling and interiority transcends these limitations toward new possibilities. Clarissa notices that “in absence, in the most unlikely places, [meaning] would flower out, open, shed its scent, let you touch, taste, look about you, get the whole feel of it and understanding” (Woolf 135). Clarissa, and Septimus during the moments of his new awareness, become aware of the impact of the sensory world that is experienced through the body. This awareness constitutes a defiance of succinct beginnings and endings and, importantly, “an absence of all human meaning” (70), suggesting a more expansive realm of potentiality. Presence is depicted as enacting an experience of the fullness of life and creative possibility, while surrender of the mind becomes a means toward revelation and a renewal of spontaneous life. This creative eternity, that is accessed briefly by Septimus and Peter, and more continuously by Clarissa, is connected to a corresponding freedom for the body. It allows spontaneous movement: “a sigh, a stretch of the arms, an impulse, a revelation, which has its effects for ever” (121).

Woof ambiguously portrays both a pathological response to loss, and the possibility to mourn that remains socio-culturally concealed. Woolf’s feminist dialectic is not aggressive. It is, rather, a gentle persuasion and unveiling of her interpretation of the limitations of gender roles for both sexes, that obscure subjectivity and agency and inhibit mourning. She illustrates a social milieu that is governed by rationality, in the wake of the mass destruction of human life for political ideals. In doing so, she critiques a world where words and ideals create bodily suffering and hidden pain. Where power is situated externally within hierarchical structures, obscuring a subjective response to mourning, Woolf portrays interiority as being a source of power that can balance the polarities of the psyche created by

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85 This insinuates again the “disembodied, ghostly” (135, 24) sources of power, that fail to embody meaning, and their paradoxical displacement from materiality.

86 The sense of inter-connection between the polarities, and the otherness of mourning, is hinted at by both Septimus and Clarissa’s characters. Septimus comes to realise that sound expresses a harmony that connects to lack and silence, as much as noise. He notices that “the spaces between [the sounds] were as significant as the sounds” (18), signifying a way in which absence is embraced within presence. Woolf hints that the potentiality to integrate mourning is inherent to life itself, but socially obscured.
gender roles. The novel leaves a clear sense of the possibilities imagined by Woolf, revealing the prospect of balance and opening to interior depths and creativity, as providing a means to incorporate and accept loss. Woolf’s overarching hope is clear in her writing, as she proposes that, hidden in the inner worlds of the characters and the body “the unseen might survive” (135).

Conclusion

In Mrs Dalloway, Woolf challenges a disconnect between subject and world, based on a dissociation between ideas and materiality. She illustrates how this fracture inhibits the potential for authentic agency and the expression of what fails to be socially recognised, including mourning. Through situating psychic wounds back in the materiality of the body, that experiences the world with others, Woolf illustrates how sensory and bodily experiences can become a means to represent the inexpressible, such as the unseen wounding of grief. Through illustrating personal and political wounding through the body, Woolf highlights a balance of polarities that is required to engage with the work of mourning: between mind and body; masculine and feminine; absence and presence; being and becoming.

Woolf’s portrayal of mourning emphasises how grieving within a social context is intertwined in belief systems and power that can disenfranchise mourning, the expression of loss and, indeed, the language to voice pain. In response to this, Mrs Dalloway explores, through the character Clarissa, how feminine expression and the interior world can balance a cultural suppression of mourning. Connecting to one’s inner world and private subjectivity, allows an embrace of loss and merging of polarities, through acceptance and body awareness. While the mind works on patterns and memory, and separates light and darkness to differentiate, it is the world mediated through the body that is the experience itself. This authenticity of lived experience is concealed beneath the symbolism and abstraction, the world of appearances. The body exceeds attempts to capture it in discourse, as it is connected to the senses, the nuances of which are experienced subjectively. Clarissa reflects, “the body alone listens to the passing bee, the wave breaking” (34). It is through emphasising the importance of opening to the sensory world of the body, and of being with the fluctuating tides of experiences, that Mrs Dalloway provides a key for experiencing and releasing loss, through an openness to the Other that is also found within oneself.
Chapter Five: Falling Man

To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event—Cathy Caruth, Trauma: Explorations in Memory

Written in the aftermath of 9/11, Falling Man portrays the dilemma of signifying loss in the context of ideological, political, gender, familial and media frameworks. In Falling Man, Don DeLillo illustrates how constructed identities and responses to loss, associated with these cultural and familial narratives, influence how loss is engendered, experienced or resisted, detracting from a private connection to the body that situates grief in the world. DeLillo draws on a key trope of unresolved grief and trauma—its liminality. Liminality is signalled through the motif of falling, and through a tension between public and private spaces of resistant grief that create displacement: between life and death, home and hyper-space, self-containment and intercorporeality, stillness and movement, mind and body. Falling Man evokes the space wherein grief remains open and unresolved—evoking a world that is “falling away” (246) after the large-scale traumatic event of 9/11, illustrating a potentiality to mourn through re-establishing a connection to the body.

Falling Man focuses primarily on the experiences of the Neudecker family and their lives after the attacks. The novel blurs the boundaries between public and private spheres—between a collective narrativisation of 9/11 through the media, and the characters’ personal responses. Like other post-9/11 novels, including The Good Life by Jay McInerney and Julia Glass’s The Whole World Over, that depict grief in the domestic sphere, Falling Man also imagines the impact of political trauma upon domestic relationships, in order to inter-relate public and private mourning in the aftermath of collective trauma. The novel centres on the divergent narratives of husband and wife, Keith and Lianne Neudecker, and the psychological and physical experiences of grief they face in the aftermath of the event. DeLillo portrays a contrast between the immediate consequences of trauma, and its long-term integration, through these two protagonists. Lianne, though not a direct victim of the attacks, relates to the attacks, and particularly to the culturally iconic falling man, from a place of unresolved personal grief within her family. She has lost her father to suicide and, in the aftermath of 9/11, she is losing her husband Keith to his incomprehensible trauma that causes him to become progressively displaced from the life they share. The novel depicts her struggle to contextualise this personal wounding within a culture and family that repress and resist, rather than accept, the vulnerabilities of grief. The focus with Keith’s character is upon his
unresolved trauma from having recently experienced the event of 9/11 and personal loss. For Keith, his psychic and physical wounds lead to a resistance toward, and displacement from, his body, which is inter-related with his melancholic resistance to being-in-the-world. Keith is, in a sense, a falling man, caught in a liminal space of mind-body dissociation wherein he cannot resolve and integrate his loss. DeLillo portrays how his protagonists navigate their losses in the context of a culture that blurs lines between materiality and the symbolic, absence and presence. The novel’s sub-plot involving a Muslim terrorist, Hammad, provides a parallel to Keith’s propensity toward violence in his state of melancholic disavowal. It suggests a connection between belief systems that exclude the Other and the body, and the perpetuation of interpersonal and collective conflict.

Critical responses to *Falling Man* have primarily engaged with how the novel represents 9/11 and frames the ensuing cultural trauma. Where some critics, such as Sonia Baelo-Allué, praise the novel as a model of psychic and traumatic representation, notably critical responses to DeLillo include Richard Gray and Martin Randall’s essays. Gray argues that DeLillo’s novel, like Keith himself, remains stuck in the solipsism of trauma: “immured in the melancholic state, offering a verbal equivalent of immobility” (28). He suggests that *Falling Man* is evasive of the pressing need for post-9/11 novels to imaginatively construct new modes to interpret loss, stating that DeLillo only displays “symptom(s) rather than diagnosis” (28). Kristiaan Versluys echoes Gray’s concerns in *Out of the Blue*, characterising *Falling Man* as “pure melancholia without the possibility of working-through or mourning” (15). This chapter will argue that *Falling Man* is situated within the very liminal, melancholic space of the aftermath of a traumatic event, but that, in doing so, DeLillo highlights the mind-body disconnect inherent in unresolved grief and how melancholic mourning can become entrenched within collective cultures. My response to *Falling Man* differs from those of Gray, Versluys and Randall, through contending that DeLillo does, albeit ambiguously, signal a possibility for integrating mourning over time, through connecting to the lived space of the body. DeLillo highlights a mind-body disconnection, in relation to trauma and melancholic grief, which needs to be understood in order to incorporate loss.

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87 In *9/11 and the Literature of Terror*, Randall discusses the mood of melancholia in *Falling Man*. Randall critiques how the novel, and others like it, have “set back” the genre of 9/11 through trapping the representation of 9/11 in tropes of trauma and melancholia (135). This chapter will argue that DeLillo’s representation of these tropes is unique in accentuating how trauma ruptures the lived and intercorporeal space of embodiment, creating a dissociation which challenges the potentiality of incorporating the event through mourning.
The liminality represented in *Falling Man*, accentuated by the novel’s title, reflects a space between the trajectories through which Ann Keniston and Jeanne Quinn read the fiction of 9/11—the continuum from “narratives of rupture to narratives of continuity” (3). This is signified in DeLillo’s tropes of corporeal displacement, as the novel navigates the themes of personal and collective melancholia, narrating the “lives [that] were in transition” (*Falling Man* 67). Through evoking liminality, the novel encapsulates the space of trauma. As Cathy Caruth articulates, trauma “is not locatable in the simple violent or original event,” but rather in “its very unassimilated nature”—it entails an “unbearable” oscillation between crises of death and crises of life” (*Unclaimed Experience* 4). DeLillo captures what Caruth describes as an in-between space: “between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival” (8).

DeLillo conveys, in *Falling Man*, an absence, identified by many critics of 9/11, of effective frameworks for making sense of, and integrating, the recently experienced trauma. He responds to this theme of ineffectual frameworks through drawing attention to the influences upon grief in postmodernism, including the media, hyper-spaces and an ‘image culture.’ In *Falling Man*, cultural representations of loss are portrayed as creating a doubling of the event, highlighting a distinction between witnessing and living through and embodying traumatic events—turning them “into living tissue” (DeLillo 220). It is through the experiential sphere of the body that a person can connect to the lived dimension of loss, allowing a recognition and connectivity to a broader collective history.

*Falling Man* highlights the difference between spectatorship and connecting to an event corporeally and viscerally. The novel distinguishes between two responses to loss: a private and embodied connection to loss that allows a person to open to grief and trauma; and a melancholic resistance to loss, wherein a person remains in a liminal space of dissociation from the world and the body. Corporeal dissociation is depicted in portrayals of immediate encounters with trauma, as well as in resistant mourning. The potentiality for incorporating loss, represented through Lianne’s character, derives from placing oneself, corporeally, in the world and recognising and releasing melancholic patterns of identity that resist alterity. This chapter will explore Lianne’s approach to incorporating unresolved grief in her family’s melancholic narratives and her eventual recognition of corporeal agency. This is contrasted with the bodily dissociation, displacement and hyper-realities experienced by her husband, Keith, who has encountered trauma recently. The final sections will draw out DeLillo’s politics of alterity through comparing Keith with Hammad, and discussing his portrayal of
intercorporeality through violent and erotic moments. Ultimately, I conclude with highlighting how unresolved grief, in *Falling Man*, pertains to an absence of the body in the world.

**Section 1.1 “Body Come Down Upon Us All”: Shattered Spaces and Corporeal Spectatorship**

The opening pages of *Falling Man* introduce the reader to an incomprehensible grief that has shattered the city of New York, as prior meanings and associations are ruptured: “it was not a street anymore but a world, a time and space of falling ash and near night” (DeLillo 3). These early descriptions signal a displaced world, wherein the event of 9/11 and its incorporation, like the lives of the characters, hangs in liminal space. The space of liminality is best encapsulated in DeLillo’s portrayal of a performance artist witnessed on the streets, who performs, repetitively, the quintessential and iconic moment of terror associated with 9/11—that of falling bodies from the Twin Towers. Through the figure of the performance artist, DeLillo encapsulates the trope of repeated and unresolved trauma and draws out a tension between witness and spectator in lived experiences of trauma. This divergence creates a doubling of the event, negating the body.

When the character Lianne first encounters the performance artist’s “little theatre piece,” it is disruptive and disturbing, evoking a “collective dread” in those who witness it (33). Traffic stops and witnesses are “outraged at the spectacle,” yet also intrigued and drawn to view it, as it “held the gaze of the world” (33). Through the performance artist’s simulation of 9/11, something that is deeply personal and vulnerable is ruptured and revealed: a loss of control and meaning in time and space, a flight toward death. Through drawing on the encapsulation of 9/11 as an “image event,” DeLillo illustrates the ways in which representations of an event can elicit a spectatorship, rather than engagement and create a detached response to the event. DeLillo critiques an image culture that is centred on visual display, like many instances of contemporary media. As Lianne reflects when she witnesses the performance artist: “there was so much to see” (220). DeLillo’s interrogation of postmodern media, evident in *Falling Man* and in his other novels, including *White Noise,* is encapsulated in

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88 9/11 was famously constituted by Jean Baudrillard as the “Image event.” Baudrillard implies a superficiality to the collective, media representation of 9/11, writing that “the image consume[d] the event, in the sense that it absorb[ed] it and offer[ed] it up for consumption” (*Spirit of Terrorism* 27).

89 This theme of the simulation of trauma, that separates from the lived experience, is also depicted in DeLillo’s *White Noise*, which similarly portrays a distancing between media representation and reality in a postmodern context. In *White Noise*, the protagonist, Jack, notes that “[w]hen death is rendered graphically … televised …
his post-9/11 essay, “In the Ruins of the Future,” wherein he argues that the media can create a doubling of the event that detracts from the lived experience. DeLillo writes of 9/11 that “the raw event was one thing, the coverage another. The event dominated the medium. It was bright and totalizing and some of us said it was unreal” (“In the Ruins” 38). DeLillo, like Graley Herren, is critical of these frameworks, that reflected what Herren has described as a “second kind of history”: perceptual frameworks forged by New Yorkers at Ground Zero, Americans removed from the attacks, and cultural creators and commentators (159).

The original Falling Man photograph, that DeLillo draws upon through his character of the falling man performance artist, has been labelled as “perhaps the most powerful image of despair at the beginning of the twenty-first century” (Thompson 63). The response to this early representation created a narrative of the event beyond its actuality, inspiring a range of commentary on the unknown narrative of the anonymous falling body.90 Through drawing on this iconic image, DeLillo accentuates the in-between space of falling as being comparable to trauma that cannot be placed and resolved, signalled in the trope of the displaced body in Falling Man. As Baelo-Allué also writes of the original photograph: “the man is frozen into free fall … like a traumatic memory frozen in the brain” that “cannot be integrated into memory” (73). The image can be seen to evoke a paradox: a suspension between the mortal consequences of embodiment, and a flight beyond material limitation. In essence, this signals a displacement between body and world, where the body loses agency and is “subject only to the earth’s gravitational field” (Falling Man 221).

DeLillo portrays the response to 9/11, and particularly to images of terror such as the falling body, through critiquing a loss of agency that can occur through becoming a spectator of the event—a voyeur—rather than a critical perceiver of it. As Lianne witnesses in shock the all-consuming performance of the falling man artist, she experiences a narrowing of awareness, reflecting initially that “she could not think beyond this” (169). This reduction of the event is similarly felt by a passing cyclist, who also witnesses an uncanny doubling in the performance. The cyclist is taken aback when encountering this representation of the event, “seeing something elaborately different now from what he encountered” (168).91 Susan

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90 “Faceless and unidentifiable” writes Adi Drori-Avraham in September 11 and the Mourning After, “he was never recognized and never mourned” (293). See Tom Junod’s recently revised article, “The Falling Man,” for a comprehensive response to the photograph and a discussion of its cultural reception.

91 Susan Sontag’s book Regarding the Pain of Others adds an interesting perspective to the shock inherent in this voyeurism. Extending on her earlier essays, wherein she had queried the loss of an emotional connection
Sontag critiques the “voyeuristic lure” that DeLillo signals here, which is inherent in the witnessing of shocking and violent events in modern culture. Sontag argues that this can create a distancing between the voyeur and the subject, that can cause the voyeur to exteriorise the event and the ordeal of the Other (78). Sontag argues that a “sense of reality” is eroded by voyeurism within an image culture (78). This is insinuated in *Falling Man* by the “intense narrowing of thought and possibility” (DeLillo 168) experienced by the cyclist, who becomes a spectator of a collective event that he has lived through. The “puppetry of human desperation” (33) that Lianne witnesses in the performing artist, signals how this spectator culture can be melancholic. The artist exteriorises and performs the work of mourning sadistically and repetitively, without resolution or integration.

DeLillo’s depiction of the “awful openness” (33) of violent displays of trauma, a spectator culture that obscures mourning, is comparable to Mark Seltzer’s depiction of the “pathological public sphere” (5) in “Wound Culture: Trauma in the Pathological Public Sphere.” Writing prior to 9/11, Seltzer highlights the way in which the public and private scopes of the body collide in collectively witnessed violent images that resist an engagement with mourning, creating a “postmodern culture of trauma” (“Wound Culture” 5). He aptly describes this as a “wounding in the absence of a wound” (8). Seltzer’s description of public performances of trauma and violence as “an effect in search of a cause” (8), signals the pathological representation of loss in collective culture that DeLillo also critiques. It is a culture that reproduces images of wounding without a framework, creating shock, confusion, dissociation and unresolved loss. In portraying the relationship between media and dissociated loss, *Falling Man* is comparable to David Foster Wallace’s short story, “The Suffering Channel,” that also subversively critiques American spectator culture and digital witnessing. In Wallace’s story, a cable channel is devoted to broadcasting images of people suffering intense and horrific pain, which audiences watch with morbid fascination and dissociation. Both DeLillo and Wallace portray a post-9/11 American culture as being disconnected from the pain of loss. Authentic suffering cannot be witnessed with empathy, but only as a spectacle—remaining, in this sense, Other.

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through relentless imagery, she argues more fervently here that in modern collective culture a sense of reality itself is eroded. This is trope that is also depicted in *Falling Man*.

92 In a compelling parallel, Seltzer refers, in “Wound Culture,” to a brief story called “When a Man Falls, A Crowd Gathers.” In the story, as in *Falling Man*, the crowd that gathers around the fallen man, in what he names “the emergence, by way of the wound, of the collective-subjective, the mass in person” (25). Seltzer’s critique of the exposure of body and mind of “fallen persons and torn bodies (25), relates to DeLillo’s portrayal of a media culture in *Falling Man*, that creates a distancing from a private comprehension of the experience.
Seltzer’s description of “the excitations of the opening of private and bodily interiors: the exhibition and witnessing, the endlessly reproducible display, of wounded bodies and wounded minds in public” (Death and Life in America’s Wound Culture 253), can be identified in Lianne’s observations of the performance artist through the novel. The performance artist, who she watches with fascination, imitates and evokes a traumatised mind and body: “loomed over the sidewalk, legs spread slightly, arms out from his body and bent at the elbows, asymmetrically, man in fear” (Falling Man 164). Lianne feels as she watches, simultaneous, and conflicting, desires—to know the man, and to detach objectively. Laura Tanner addresses these inclinations in Lost Bodies, in which she critiques the confused blurring between absence and presence inherent in media representations—these responses, she argues, mimic the “taunting rhythms of grief” (89). Tanner argues that the distortion of perception between the body and its representation “assert(s) presence only to disrupt the exchange of intercorporeality that defines perception” (89). This is a key aspect of the lost body in collective culture that DeLillo highlights: that of the ruptured exchange between self and Other, and self and world, upon which an incorporation of grief relies.

In Falling Man, DeLillo represents a pivotal tension between spectatorship and experiential responses to loss. His characters are trapped between contextualising loss and witnessing it, a liminal space that re-creates absence and creates a dissociation from corporeal agency, the lived space of awareness. This is further drawn out by close discussions of his protagonists, Lianne and Keith, who navigate this space.

**Section 1.2 “The Deep Shadow”: Inter-Generational Melancholia in Falling Man**

The novel Falling Man encapsulates the difference between observing an event, and the capacity that the character Lianne finds, “to absorb what she saw, take it home” (201). It is this ability to contextualise her personal response to loss, within personal narrative contexts and trajectories, that allows her to come to a place of acceptance. Lianne’s character is led by a curiosity towards the unseen in her cultural and familial lineage and the surreal media representations of 9/11 that haunt her daily life. She critiques and investigates the spaces between the event as it is signified culturally, and the collective history of unresolved wounding within her family—her “own ruins” (Falling Man 116). Through Lianne, DeLillo highlights the ways in which a previously unresolved and melancholic loss can be understood.
through gaining perspective and subjective ownership. This is gained, in particular, through a recognition of corporeality that allows her to link the past to the present moment.

Caruth’s clarification of trauma in relation to history is useful to this discussion, particularly her discussion of the latency of trauma, that is “not fully perceived as it occurs”—it is “grasped only in [its] very inaccessibility” (Unclaimed Experience 18). For Lianne, the “deep shadow” of her family’s collective melancholic grief only becomes apparent through the traumatic repetition of her grief. This repetition is enacted through her encounters with loss through the event of 9/11 and its aftermath, particularly through the falling body. The falling body, performed through the artist, “burn(s) a hole in her mind and heart” (218, 221), reminding her of this unresolved wounding. Lianne becomes curious about the gap between what is seen and what is concealed. It is the shadow of what is left unknown that allows her to reach a deeper space of understanding.

DeLillo highlights inter-generational wounding, both familial and cultural, in relation to how disavowed losses have engendered collective narratives and influenced a response to loss. Through doing so, DeLillo’s response parallels another notable post-9/11 novel, The Emperor’s Children by Claire Messud, through questioning how identity can be constructed within familial contexts and how people narrativise their lives and the lives of those they love. In Falling Man, Lianne is portrayed as having inherited the wounding of her parents’ resistance of the vulnerable, mortal body, which influences her engagement with loss. While her father is noted as having committed suicide due to his ailing dementia, Lianne’s mother Nina, an art historian, has always experienced a detachment from her corporeality. Both of Lianne’s parents are, notably, concerned with retaining and representing the past, rather than living in the present. In her mother, who dies of old age in the later stage of the novel, Lianne had always noticed “an element of performance” in the movement of her body that allowed her “a certain degree of ironic distance” (10) from her lived experience. Rather than accepting her aging body as her own, Lianne recalls, her mother Nina would “surround herself with it” (9), performing her illnesses. Later, as she ages, her mother dissociates further from subjectivity and corporeality—she begins to “consider herself invisible” (46), denying her encounter with mortality. Nina states, dismissively: “[w]e have our own ruins. But I don’t think I want to see them” (116). In contrast to this disavowal of her family’s lineage and

93 Lianne’s parents also provide a clue as to DeLillo’s representation of collective melancholia in her family. Her mother, an art historian, deals with the history of representations; her father, comparatively, evades his dementia, the loss of his memory, through suicide. Both are stuck in an attachment to the past and to past representations, rather than living, fully embodied, in the present.
approach to grief, Lianne wishes to see the bigger picture, beyond what is unrepresented and invisible, known and unknown, to integrate the displaced absences in her personal history. Nina’s seemingly invisible body as she encounters “the encroachments of age” (10) and mortality, is a distinct contrast to the hyper-visibility of images of the falling body. The vulnerable body reveals the space of liminality, and of approaching death, that Nina attempts to conceal and that Lianne seeks to contextualise.

In the early pages of the novel, Lianne reflects the central theme of the absent body in trauma, feeling “like a skirt and blouse without a body” (23). However, she yearns with curiosity to connect with, and to absorb, the materiality of the post-9/11 world that she shares with others. She wants to connect viscerally, even with “the dust of stray sensation, whatever she could breathe in from people’s pores” (105). Lianne’s subjectivity and perception is highlighted at the beginning of the novel, as she is described similarly to her mother. She appears, at first, dissociated in her corporeal performance like a movie character who tries to understand what is going on in her life by looking in the mirror (47). DeLillo’s portrayal of her displaced subjectivity is signalled in her blurred confusion between self and Other, as she “used to think she was other people. Other people have truer lives” (105). This tendency to interpret reality from the exterior, is also depicted culturally—Lianne notices, after 9/11, that “people, lately, watched her … depending on her to make sense,” just as “all she wanted was to share a look, catch someone’s eye, see what she herself was feeling” (127, 163). While her absorption of the event is disjointed and externalised, she eventually starts to make a personal connection. When she realises that the Alzheimer’s group that she facilitates is “the living breath of the thing that killed her father” (62), referencing the displaced memories that she has inherited as a part of her familial wounding, she comes closer to a private engagement with the collective event.

This blurring between representation and unresolved history in relation to the lost body parallels the themes of DeLillo’s earlier novella, *The Body Artist*. This novella features a protagonist, Lauren, who similarly becomes disconnected from the temporal world and from her own body in grieving her lost husband. Lauren, who is haunted in her home by a ghost, as well as by the metaphorical ghosts of her husband’s past, notices that her body is detached from her awareness. To escape the loop of unresolved loss, Lauren needs create her own, subjective response to loss: a “still life that’s living” (107). This involves “fitting herself to the moment” and embodying her loss within body artistry (*The Body Artist* 107, 122). It is this merging of the body and her personal representation grief, within time and space, that
allows Lauren “a reference … to get [her loss] placed” (47) within the context of her personal narrative.

In the context of her grief, and the melancholic constructs of mourning surrounding her, Lianne similarly comes to recognise the importance of subjec\_\text{tivity}. Taking an interest in art, and particularly in still life images, she notices the contrasts between background and foreground, subject and context, eventually recognising that “the subject of the portrait is the paper” (Falling Man 113; my emphasis). Though initially an objective spectator of her experiences, Lianne’s grief work takes place as she starts to find “some kind of assimilation,” through personally identifying with what she has witnessed in 9/11 (220). In doing so, Lianne starts to “absorb what she saw” in external portrayals of the event—she “wrap[s] it around her” (220). Lianne allows herself to feel the event, particularly her corporeal sensations. This helps to place her as the subject within the context of her family and political history, allowing her to integrate her experiences so that they become “living tissue” (220).

DeLillo employs the motif of the still body in moments of mind-body connection in Falling Man, in juxtaposition to the displaced falling body, to reflect a connection to presence and subjec\_\text{tivity}. The falling body motif indicates a liminal space, rupture and displacement between life and death, mind and body. The still body, conversely, signals a grounded, material awareness amidst an awareness of these polarities. Stillness is, for Lianne, “another kind of eternity … her face and body, outside time” (157). It allows her to contextualise the falling body in the present, rather than separating from or doubling the event. In doing so, she moves beyond idealistic, disembodied abstraction of the falling body that she had previously perceived—the image of a “falling angel” or “dead god” (222).

Encountering the falling man up close allows Lianne to confront what she had previously evaded. As she stands motionless, she connects to the initially distant and obscured facet in her awareness: the body. Lianne recognises, through her awareness, the series of falling and displaced men in her life—her father who “died by his own hand” (218); the performing artist; and her husband, Keith, who has become distanced from his life with her. In doing so, she regains subjectivity within her narrative context through her body, feeling viscerally her own connection to what has been previously abstract or concealed. Merging with the event on

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94 Lianne’s waning faith in her previous notions of a “God,” signals another challenge to disembodied constructs and collective ideologies that is alluded to in the novel. She starts to perceive God as another distanced presence: “the hovering possible presence of God” that created “loneliness and doubt” (236). Conversely, Lianne finds a sense of community within the physical places that represent spirituality that she shares with others, including churches.
a personal level, Lianne feels that “she was the photograph … [t]hat nameless body coming down, this was hers (223). She recognises the event of 9/11 as simultaneously a part of her personal wounding, and beyond her own story—a part of a broader narrative of the precariousness of life “that carried lives and histories, theirs and hers, everyone’s, into some other distance, out beyond the towers” (134). Lianne’s interconnection and awareness from a place of stillness and body consciousness impacts her. She gradually remembers and integrates, in the final part of the novel, an experiential sense of her body in the present from which her parents had dissociated. Lianne reflects on what remains after death as she starts to open to the paradoxes of life and death in the human experience, embracing the “intimacy and ease, the human ruins” (233). This shift in her character signals her growing acceptance and incorporation of loss.

Section 2.1 “Simple Words Lost in the Falling Ash”: Melancholic Mourning and 9/11

Divergently contrasted with Lianne’s realisations and body awareness, Keith’s trauma from 9/11 is depicted through his distancing and displacement from his corporeality. Keith’s character reflects the falling man as he navigates a transitional space between life and death, having internalised a lost world that he is unable to mourn. Falling Man contrasts Keith’s recent experiences of trauma with Lianne’s integration of long-term traumatic repetition. This highlights the dissociation from corporeality, temporality and place, as signifiers of early traumatic rupture. My discussion will focus on the representation of trauma and the body in Falling Man. This follows critics such as Brett Thomas Griffin, Katrina Harack and Sarah McMichael who highlight the trope of embodied memory that DeLillo signals: “a self-awareness carried in the physical self that is interrupted by traumatic loss” (Griffin 52-53). This theme of mind-body disruption will be highlighted through my examination of Keith’s unresolved trauma and how it causes him to dissociate from his corporeal experience after 9/11.

In the early pages of Falling Man, a strange but familiar world is evoked through Keith’s narrative perspective. While falling ash, smoke, rubble and mud fill the pages of DeLillo’s post-9/11 world, an absence of the body is already signalled as Keith witnesses, rather than experiences, “water pass into his body taking dust and soot down with it” (5). Ambiguously, Keith is merged corporeally, but detached from the trauma of the event. His displacement from the world is indicated when he feels that life “happened everywhere around him” (3), but he does not feel connected to it. Keith is amalgamated, indistinguishably, with the event
of 9/11, unable to discern his subjectivity. This is signalled in these early pages as he emerges as “a man scaled in ash, in pulverized matter” (6). He is depicted as losing his sense of self, as his displacement and lack of corporeality becomes his identity to the point where his sense of being alive is “too obscure to take hold” (6). He refers to himself as “the man who used to live here” (27), detached from the objects and identifications from the past that surround him in his world.95

Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of the relationship between the body and space is useful in illuminating Keith’s detachment. As he writes in The Visible and Invisible, “we grasp external spaces through our bodily situation,” as our corporeal schema provides an “implicit notion of the relation between our body and things, and our hold on them” (5). As Keith loses sense of embodiment, he also loses his sense of place and, as such, he is unable to contextualise his subjective response. His ability to communicate remains buried, like “simple words lost in the falling ash” (DeLillo 103). While Lianne looks for signs in her outer world to understand her grief, Keith continues to experience his language, connection and identifications with the external world, as “falling away, street signs, people, things he could not name” (246). DeLillo highlights how Keith’s displacement impacts his ability to contextualise his trauma, as he becomes a spectator in an experience he has lived through. He can attentively listen to others retell the event, “noting every detail, trying to find himself in the crowd” (59), but never connects to his own perspective. Keith’s inability to place himself, corporeally, in the present impacts his subjectivity. This is exemplified as he continually repeats “I’m standing here” (27), attempting to place himself, and to convince himself that he exists.

Keith’s inability to contextualise his loss is intensified by a fallen world that DeLillo portrays in his representation of 9/11. The “crucial anonymity” of the world around him, the “mingling of countless lives that had no stories attached” (203), has created a melancholic silence. This is evoked in the “wordless din so deeply settled in the air” (204). DeLillo depicts, self-reflexively, how the retelling of the event of 9/11 cannot encapsulate the lived experience. That the experience is described as “way too big … outside someplace, on the other side of the world” (64), signals the lack of contextual and collective frameworks for understanding it. This is further evoked in DeLillo’s descriptions of the physical places of

95 Keith’s loss of subjectivity is also suggested in his dissociation from objects that signal his prior identifications: “his passport, checkbooks, birth certificate and a few other documents, the state paper of identity” (27).
New York that have been emptied of meaning due to the many attempts at retelling the event. After so much media attention, places themselves were displaced, such as Midtown, that “sounded naked. It sounded neutral, like it was nowhere” (205). So too, Keith is perpetually “empty of expression, neutral” (70), unable to know or comprehend his trauma, having internalised a lost world.

Pertinent to DeLillo’s representation is Keith’s inability to find himself after the traumatic event, as he has not “returned to his body”; like the falling man, he occupies in a liminal space devoid of a context, remaining detached from “a mind and body that were not his, looking at the fit” (59, 94). Fractured from the present and relating to his body objectively, Keith’s character exists across multiple surreal landscapes, but never within his own body or emotions. As such, he remains dissociated from his unresolved trauma.

**Section 2.2 Simulated Narratives, Hyper-realities and Hidden Wounds**

Keith’s relationship to place draws out DeLillo’s portrayal of his melancholic liminality, particularly in relation to his corporeal displacement in the world. DeLillo builds up a contrast between the domestic and hyper-real spaces that Keith occupies. This juxtaposition illustrates his liminal displacement in unresolved trauma, which is emphasised by his distancing from his home environment. Dissociated from both his physical and psychological wounds, Keith’s character is prone to escapism within realities in which he evades his grief process. Settings such as casinos, glitzy bars and hotels, poker games and the home of his mistress, Florence allow him to avoid his pain. Through highlighting exterior, liminal, spaces in which subjectivity and grief can be evaded, DeLillo critiques a loss of human connection and corporeal meaning in a hyper-technologised late modernity. Within this context, surreal spaces create new disembodied realities that are allusive and elusive, evading meaning and allowing loss to remain disavowed. DeLillo portrays what Tanner defines as “the least accessible fact of grief in a postmodern landscape: the unalterable loss of embodied presence” (169). In *Falling Man*, the post-9/11 world is constituted by “the inescapable presence of simulation” (Tanner 174) through media and the hyper-real, that further distances Keith from connecting to, and acknowledging, his grief.

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96 Descriptions of Keith interacting with his body are often objective and written in the third person. When performing repetitive physiotherapy exercises for an injury to his wrist, he refers to it objectively as “the wrist,” while “he use[s] the uninvolved hand to apply pressure to the involved hand” (235), signalling his detachment.
For Keith’s character, postmodern hyper-realities and simulated spaces are explored perpetuate an entrapment and displacement from the body and obscured grief. These aspects further blur the boundaries for Keith between lived reality, his body, and the event he has experienced, hindering his ability to resolve his losses that appear to exist in another place. Both Christina Cavedon and Nikhil Jayadevan have noted DeLillo’s depictions of the hyper-real in Falling Man, a strategy that I discuss in relation to Keith’s displaced trauma and the collective melancholia that I highlight in the novel. The simulated and hyper-real spaces in the novel accentuate DeLillo’s portrayal of melancholia and displacement in a postmodern culture. In Simulacra and Simulation, Jean Baudrillard defines the ‘hyper-real’ as that which blurs the boundaries between representation and reality in a technologically advanced postmodern social life. In hyper-real spaces, one’s social activities and consciousness of oneself becomes intertwined with reproductions or simulations of these experiences. I discuss DeLillo’s use of hyper-real spaces and simulation so as to accentuate how Keith’s displacement draws out DeLillo’s motif of the juxtaposition between being a spectator and experiencing and living through trauma. For Keith, hyper-real spaces allow him to occupy worlds where his trauma, seemingly, does not exist. This permits him a pseudo immortality that he longs for and an avoidance of vulnerability and intimacy. In these spaces, he can avoid the reminders that enact the “flash of history or memory” (Falling Man 225) of his unresolved trauma. The hyper-realities presented in Falling Man, that include settings such as the hotels he stays in and the casino, illuminate with surreal bright lights and include simulations such as computer-generated mirages. They become a part of Keith’s daily life, affecting his ability to distinguish between representations and reality. For example, a hotel waterfall that he becomes mesmerised by, confuses his connection to what is real, as he realises that he cannot tell “whether it [is] real or simulated” by a digital effect (204). Conversely, his old home, signalling domestic life, appears to him to be increasingly illusory and superimposed, like “something that belonged to another landscape, something inserted, a conjuring” (103). Sensing himself increasingly detached from his home and domestic life, he becomes “the man who used to live there” (27).

The poker games that Keith is involved in, in particular, highlight his transitional post-9/11 life, allowing him a sense of control and illusory simplicity in a world where he no longer feels connected. Evading the “tracings of severed connections” in his life, the poker games allow him to escape to a world of ease, allowing him a structure he that he lacks through “guiding principles, sweet and easy interludes of dream logic” (27, 211). Losing touch with
his domestic, pre-9/11 life, he comes to perceive “nothing outside the game but faded space” (189). Magali Cornier Michael contrasts the tone of masculine bravado in the domestic setting of Keith’s earlier games of poker, with those he experiences after 9/11 when he starts to play poker professionally. Michael notes that the tournaments highlight “an anonymity of both place and people that Keith finds soothing” (170), that allows him to remain an agent of free choice within the structures and stability of the games and tournaments. It is this anonymity, and the pseudo-subjectivity in the ease of binary choices, that Keith craves, as well as a capacity to control his reality and to avoid intimacy. He chooses the company of others who are, similarly, “more or less obscure” or “half there” (213), in simulated realities that mimic social spaces.

Many critics, including James Gourley, Stefan Polatinsky and Karen Scherzinger, have shed light on DeLillo’s use of temporality in Falling Man in relation to how it signals trauma. In Unclaimed Experience, Caruth characterises trauma as having an inherent latency that “explains the peculiar temporal structure, the belatedness” (17). It is this temporal distinction that provides a comparison between Keith’s experiences and Lianne’s, as Lianne can incorporate her grief belatedly, whereas Keith is portrayed in the early stages of his trauma. I argue that, through his depiction of temporality, DeLillo not only evokes trauma but also how the postmodern hyper-spaces to which Keith retreats accentuate a surreal dissociation from the normal patterns of time that keep him in a liminal space. The sporting games that Keith watches provide an example of the comfort and escapism that he finds in predictable and repetitive narratives. Watching the games allow him to experience a pseudo-control in time and space, as he watches fragments of live action and slow-motion replays that appear “a matter of false distinctions, fast, slow, now, then” (211). He drinks beer while watching the television, a dissociated spectator. During the sporting games, Keith is hypnotised as action “moves to the forefront, there to here, life or death … Then it was over, gone in seconds,” signalling, like the poker games, a simulation of cyclicality, of life and death, that is empty of the need to feel or grieve and lacking the element of the unexpected (211). Instead, he can watch the “visceral burst … heat and open emotion” of the other men during the predictable ebb and flow of the game” (211). As he loses connection to time, for Keith “the idea of later

97 As mentioned previously, DeLillo’s inherent critique and suspicion of postmodernism, and particularly of the impact of technology upon the psyche and body, is evident but not exclusive to Falling Man. In Americana, his protagonist, Dave, in similarity to Keith, loses his sense of subjectivity to hollow dissociation, due to the impact of mass media. Dave reflects: “my whole life was a lesson in the effect of echoes … I was living in the third person” (Americana 58).
[i]s elusive,” just as he cannot return to a time “before all this happened” (200, 215). This allows him to evade the events of his past and plans for the future, keeping him locked in his liminality.

In his discussion of the hyper-real, Baudrillard writes of a “strategy of deterrence” (Simulacra and Simulation 174) inherent in representations that have become separated from time and space, that deter from the space of reality. The places in which Keith resides after 9/11 are surreal, bordering on fantasy, further accentuating the contrast between the domestic and the hyper-real. The spaces double and diverge, yet also blur, allowing him to deter from his unresolved trauma. As Keith loses his ability to distinguish what is real from fantasy and representation, this also impacts on his narrative construction of the event of 9/11. He starts to imagine “something better than it really was, the towers still standing … elements of a failed fantasy,” that Lianne views as “eerie enough but without coherence” (102). As he detaches further from his body and sense of place, Keith also compartmentalises his life. He is “double in himself, coming and going” (157), living between the two worlds of his past and present life. This is interesting parallel to Sievright in Daybreak, who experiences himself as having two selves, unable to rectify his prior heroic identity with domestic life after the war.

For Keith, a confusion of the boundaries between reality and simulation further impacts his distancing from his grief and his inability to place himself. With his immersion within tenuous spaces, he is like an actor in a set rendering a performance of his life, as his lover, Florence, notices (88). Lianne also notices that he is “playing out an emotion” (96) and performing his trauma rather than experiencing it. The illusory spaces to which he retreats accommodate Keith’s dissociation and disowned grief—they are “made to his shape” (225), as he is, effectively, shapeless and lacking contextual boundaries. With less of a connection to his body and subjectivity, he “becom[es] the air he breathed” (230). Melancholic, Keith deters from his personal history and social context, resisting his corporeality. He becomes a ghost of his own past and a “hovering presence” in the lives of his family, as he remains separate from others through “a literal distance” (59, 212).98 Keith’s unconsciousness in relation to his body is portrayed as a docile state that allows him to live in habitual automatism: “a deep sleep, a narcolepsy, eyes open, mind shut down” (216). His open eyes

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98 Further drawing out the motif of his ghosting, Keith’s son, Justin, imagines that he takes an X-ray of him when he returns home on a rare occasion, suggesting that his presence is not felt by his son. Keith has become “a figure that looms over the household, the man who went away and came back” (101), signalling his spectral presence.
signal his choice to avoid his interior process of grief, a pain of loss that returns when he closes them and re-lives traumatic memories.

Through Keith, DeLillo imagines how the invisibility and hyper-reality of technologised spaces of postmodernism, that deter from emotional processing and inter-connection, can impact upon a private relationship to the body and grief. The blurring of boundaries of absence and presence in pseudo and simulated realities, create exterior illusory spaces with which Keith merges to avoid his interior process. This further destabilises his identity and subjectivity. Keith’s distancing from flesh, and relegating of his grief to liminal, disembodied spaces, correlates to his dissociation from others. As Merleau-Ponty observes, “we are caught up in the world and we do not succeed in extricating ourselves from it in order to achieve consciousness of the world” (Phenomenology of Perception, 5). This is because we perceive and experience the world through our bodies. Detachment from the world, DeLillo seems to suggest, equates to losing subjectivity and awareness of the body that resides in the world with others, shares spaces, and impacts the bodies of others. These are themes that DeLillo inter-links in a politics of intercorporeality that will be discussed in the final section of this chapter.

Section 3.1 The Flesh of the World: Organic Shrapnel and Slit Skin

Previous discussion has addressed how DeLillo interrogates a culture that is melancholic, in the sense that it simulates and displaces mourning and corporeal connection, obscuring the inner process of grief through exteriorising loss. The psychic and physical wounds of 9/11 are portrayed as a symptom of collective attitudes that undermine body awareness, derived from belief systems that distance from grief and perpetuate conflict. Versluys argues that Falling Man signifies a “pure melancholia without the possibility of working-through or mourning,” through highlighting the “brokenness and unrelieved melancholia” (15, 21) encapsulated in DeLillo’s portrayal of a post-9/11 world. I argue, conversely, that while portraying a melancholic culture, DeLillo also hints at the potentiality to work through mourning inherent in the inner recognition of the body and shared corporeality. This is particularly exemplified through Lianne’s character and the trope of intercorporeality that I will now explore. To revise the definition provided in Chapter One, Merleau-Ponty’s notion of intercorporeality refers to the immediate, pre-reflexive perceptual linkage between one’s body and the body of another, in lived space. In this final section, attention will be placed on a relationship that DeLillo portrays between belief systems and embodiment. In particular, the ways in which
his intercorporeal metaphors depict experiences of pain and pleasure deriving from encounters with the Other, challenge an ideological fracturing of mind and body that creates a perceptual doubling of space and rigid notions of alterity.

In many ways, *Falling Man*’s representation of the parallels between Keith and Hammad is comparable to John Updike’s novel, *Terrorist*, which also explores the question of otherness in relation to post-9/11 politics. In *Terrorist*, Updike queries how working through trauma can bring about a greater sense of responsibility to others, through drawing attention to the shared conditions of vulnerability and mortality. Updike’s novel is set in the near future, through which he critiques American society and culture in the present, challenging post-9/11 discourses that tend toward glorifying American culture. The novel interrogates how cultural discourses create notions of ‘self’ and ‘Other,’ and, in doing so, perpetuate cycles of conflict and loss. Like DeLillo, who includes in his novel a character from the dissenting side of the “War on Terror,” Updike also challenges cultural imperialism through two young Arab-American characters, Ahmad and Charlie, subverting who the reader sides with and, in many ways, creating a depiction of the ‘Other’ as an uncanny double. He illustrates how the construction of Other is inter-linked with a construction of the self. As Judith Butler discusses in *Precarious Life*, traumatic events such as 9/11 reveal “the thrall in which our relations with others hold us … in ways that often interrupt the self-conscious account of ourselves as autonomous and in control” (23). In DeLillo’s representation, it is through the body that alterity is reconciled. His body metaphors attest to an inter-weaving of skin, wounding and the otherness of the traumatic event, that subverts self-containment and reveals where ideologies are constructed and disrupted by the flesh. The lived dimension and intercorporeality subverts the sense of a separate body, challenging both Hammad’s political ideals of creating “one mind” and one ideology and Keith’s pseudo-social, disembodied worlds, to which he retreats to avoid intimacy.

Even as Keith maintains a desire to separate from his skin and the traumatic experience that he has lived through, *Falling Man* places emphasis on the embodied nature of collective traumas that are a part of the lived experience of political events. The intertwining of the flesh of the world resonates with Merleau-Ponty’s concept of the ontology of flesh. For Merleau-Ponty, flesh constitutes the exchange between inner and outer, subjective and objective, as the body extends into the world and physical spaces with others beyond the “idea” of the body, to “its axes, its depth, its dimensions” (*Visible and Invisible* 152). In *As I
*Lay Dying*, William Faulkner subversively ruptures notions of the hollow utilitarian body through metaphors of abjection, revealing the lived body and its dimensionality. DeLillo similarly challenges notions of the separate self through graphic depictions of a merging between self and Other and a merging with the world, in lived and shared spaces. The lived body attests to the communal and shared inter-connection of the lived event, emphasised in the novel. This is an evocation of the lived experience of the event that DeLillo also delineated within his post-9/11 essay “In the Ruins,” wherein: “traces of the dead are everywhere, in the soft breeze off the river, on rooftops and windows, in our hair and on our clothes” (39). This is mirrored in the language of *Falling Man* when Keith remembers the event: “[t]he dead were everywhere, in the air, in the rubble, on rooftops nearby, in the breezes … They were settled in ash and drizzled on windows all along the streets, in his hair and in his clothes” (25).

Both the initial and final pages of *Falling Man*, challenge the character Keith’s mental separation from his experience of the event, through emphasising the corporeality of the lived experience. Even as he dissociates from, and cannot place himself in the event, Keith is merged, bodily, with the experience with “things sticking to his skin, dust particles, smoke, some kind of oily grit on his face and hands” (244). His body is spliced with the event and with the bodies of others, as he emerges from the rubble of 9/11. In this scene, Keith has glass fragments in his face and he is covered with blood that, Lianne notices, is “not his blood. Most of it came from somebody else” (88). As he resists grief, Keith also resists remembering this intercorporeality of his flesh merged with others and particularly the organic shrapnel his doctor tells him about. Keith is told, as his wounds are dressed, of the occurrence of fragments of flesh and bone from suicide bombers becoming trapped in the body of anyone in striking range. DeLillo’s intercorporeal metaphor of organic shrapnel that has penetrated skin during 9/11, of flesh entering flesh is signalled in this passage, where months late, survivors would find “pellets of flesh, human flesh that got driven into the skin” (16). Organic shrapnel is quite literally a merging of the flesh of self and Other, a notion he chooses to forget. Torn flesh, in particular, attests painfully to the Other and to the physical vulnerability of alterity. In *Falling Man*, this blurring of the boundaries of self and Other, intercorporeality, is pathological rather than idealistic, occurring in the lived spaces of political violence.
For the terrorist character, Hammad, the distancing from others implicit in the politically extremist doctrines to which he is exposed, is a distancing from his own flesh. His adherence to his belief system, to the “highest jihad, which is to make blood flow, their blood and that of others,” necessitates that he “be unmindful of the thing called the world” (173). The collective intention to which he must adhere is to eradicate “the west corrupt of mind and body” (79), which entails a destruction of other bodies, and his own, through suicide terrorism. DeLillo illustrates how this disconnection from embodied consciousness, is a detraction from self-identity, the aim being to become “one mind,” and to “shed everything but the men you are with. Become each other’s running blood” (82). In this case, identity is collectivised for political aims, in a desire to find “their place in the world,” and to protect “the feeling of lost history … being crowded out by other cultures” (116, 80), insinuating a lost political subjectivity and the collective melancholia of unresolved losses. Montserrat Guibernau has defined the psychological dimension of national identity as a “‘felt’ closeness uniting those who belong to the nation,” when the “unique character” and “qualities” of a particular nation (135) are presumed to be threatened by an enemy. What DeLillo highlights in Hammad is a loss of self-identification that allows a distancing from self and Other, that is also notable in Keith’s fractured subjectivity.

Through his representation of Hammad, DeLillo highlights how an exclusion of the body, that is necessary for him to maintain his collective identity in the brotherhood, entails detaching from both the biological as well as inter-subjective spheres, deeming the body itself as Other despite instinctual inclinations. Hammad is encouraged to resist his own flesh, and is judged by his brothers for his bodily desires for pleasure: for “eating all the time, pushing food in your face … being with a shameless woman, dragging your body over hers” (82). *Falling Man* connects an unconsciousness of the body with a dissociation from subjectivity implicit in violent, dichotomous doctrines. Forgetting the world means disconnecting from the flesh that is shared in the world, and the lived experience that contradicts this ideological, and biological, separation of self and Other.

*Falling Man* highlights how both personal and political grief, enmeshed in an exterior politics of identity, can lead to polarising the Other and the perpetuation of violence. Like Hammad, who is trained to detach from his subjectivity, Keith starts to experience violent tendencies the more he becomes dissociated from loss and distanced from his body and, like Hammad, he also comes to experience an impulse to kill, manifest from his desire to protect the pseudo-
identity that allows him to evade his fears of loss. Amartya Sen’s conception of identity in relation to violence, outlined in his book Identity and Violence, helps to draw out the way in which DeLillo parallels Keith and Hammad, in relation to their damaged subjectivity. Sen argues that “the denial of plurality as well as the rejection of choice in matters of identity” (67), has devastating political consequences. Like Addie in As I Lay Dying, who, repressed by patriarchal constructs, lashes out against her children to re-instate her subjectivity, the violence enacted by both Keith and Hammad also reflects their loss of self-identity—it derives from a personal and collective loss of power and displacement in the world. As the philosopher Hannah Arendt asserts in On Violence, her critique of contemporary conflict, “violence appears where power is in jeopardy” (56). Writing decades before 9/11, but with an interesting relevance to the 9/11 attacks, Arendt notes that “[n]owhere is the self-defeating factor in the victory of violence over power more evident than in the use of terror to maintain domination” (54-55). This point is made explicit in Falling Man when Hammad notes, of his terrorist group, that “power is helpless against us. The more power, the more helpless” (81). In DeLillo’s novel, both sides lack power and agency, as their violence only serves to dissociate them further from themselves, an inner conflict—as Hammad notes, “he had to struggle against himself first, and then against the injustice that haunted their lives” (DeLillo 83). Falling Man prosecutes a politics of alterity that forewarns of the violent, lived consequences of objectifying self and Other through collective identities: “the blood that happens when an idea begins to travel” (112).

Hammad and Keith are portrayed as being parallel to each other in Falling Man. They both reflect the tropes of lost self-identity, corporeal disconnection, violence and resistance to the Other. Both men are in a state of disconnection and disinhibition from the Other, creating conflict within that they act out toward others. Their repression of their bodies, and projected anger toward the Other, is highlighted as an energetic tension. In Hammad, this is described as an “unnamed energy … sealed in his body, too tight to be released” (79), while Keith experiences a need for bodily release “in his skin” (214). For both characters this energy, the need for “a matter discharged in full” (214), is a metaphor for an inner tension and conflict that is unresolved due to their own repressed alterity. At the height of his anger, Keith projects externally his continued loss of self, when shopping for beds with Florence.99 He

99 Of interesting note is that Keith’s violent altercation occurs when shopping for beds with his mistress, while Lianne has an outburst of anger at a woman playing Arabic music in a neighbouring apartment. Both express a
comes into a physical altercation with another man who, he imagines, judges him. Keith’s over-reaction is evident as he was “ready to kill him,” and he relishes the shift in the space between them that is definitively separate—“hot and charged” (133)—as he asserts and defends himself and Florence. This signals his desire to protect the double life that he has created with his mistress. Keith pits himself against an imaginary Other to maintain a sense of separation. This is further accentuated by his detachment from his body after the fight. Where Hammad’s affiliations to a terrorist group exclude the Other for political gains, Keith’s dissociation and polarising of self and Other allows him to avoid his unresolved traumatic and intercorporeal pain.

DeLillo dismantles notions of self-containment, of disembodied doctrines and identities held by the characters, through their encounters with the Other and pain. The lived experience of the body shatters ideological notions that separate, revealing a space where bodies interact. To Elaine Scarry, who examines the relationship between pain and the body, the body in pain presents itself as Other: “as who I am but also as an alien force that is other to who I am and that negates my sense of myself in such an urgent way that I need immediate release” (52). This is epitomised both in the tension Keith and Hammad experience in their bodies and, particularly for Hammad, during the final moments of a terrorist attack when he becomes conscious of his body in pain. Rather than feeling an idealised sense of comradery with his political group, in having successfully implemented his ideology, he notices “a sensation high on his arm, the thin wincing pain of slit skin” (DeLillo 237). His focus on the mentality of the brotherhood is obliterated by the lived experience of the ideologies that rupture and obliterate his own body. For Hammad, this inescapable physical pain highlights his private bodily experience that is, for him, uncanny and unfamiliar.

During his final moments of life, Hammad experiences a similar stillness to that observed by Lianne when she recognises her bodily presence. He notes that “everything was still. There was no sensation of flight … no motion” (237-8). This recognition is divergent to the falling motif—yet ambiguously so, as he is on a plane that is coming down. Hammad’s stillness in

hidden tension, and a desire to protect a sense of space or ‘home,’ signalling the theme of an uncertainty of place that is disrupted by the encroaching Other.

100 There is, of course, an irony in the comradery of the brotherhood and their merging into “one mind,” wherein “there is no separation” (82, 80). Their political identifications are deeply rooted in separation, excluding alterity to the point of violence. The brotherhood can also be compared to the comradery that Keith experiences with others who are “half there” (213). In both cases, these groups allow, and encourage, Keith and Hammad to evade an individualised sense of identity and particularly a connection to feelings and embodiment.
impending death is an awareness of his own body even as he falls. In suffering pain in his final moments, Hammad reflects that “he welcomed the blood but not the pain” (238). This highlights a contrast between the feelings of his private body and the actions and ideals of his culturally sanctioned ideology. Butler’s discussion of political ethics in *Precarious Life*, responds to the national identity created by Americans in the aftermath of 9/11. In this discussion, Butler suggests a relationship between self and Other that is implicit in the experience of being-in-the-world, that draws out the tension in Hammad’s final moments of life. Butler writes of the otherness of wounding and how it attests to an alterity and vulnerability excluded in America’s national identity: “I am wounded, and I find that the wound itself testifies to the fact that I am impressionable, given over to the Other in ways that I cannot fully predict or control” (46). Hammad’s rupturing of the self-containment of his incongruent ideologies of mind and body is illustrated through the splitting of his body by the outer world. The otherness of his wound reveals a vulnerability to the outer world that he has not accounted for. DeLillo’s metaphors of intercorporeality subvert the patterns of personal and collective conflict that are related, in his portrayal, to acts of violence constituted from displacement and disempowerment. Beliefs that arise and disseminate conflict come from “a misplaced grievance” that perpetuates itself (113). Detached from their original source, these beliefs act like a “virus (that) reproduces itself outside history” (113), attesting to the brutal violence they perpetuate. As the sensations of pain attest to the Other, DeLillo’s employment of moments of pleasure also adds to this discussion of intercorporeality and its personal dimension. This will be discussed in the subsequent section.

**Section 3.2 Pleasure, Presence and the Shared Body—Falling Out of the World**

In his essay on *Ethics*, the philosopher Baruch Spinoza argues that “ethics” is situated entirely within relations between bodies—it is immanent to the operations of existence, rather than imposed from the outside. In doing so, he distinguishes between pleasure and pain in relation to the body: “Pleasure is an emotion whereby the body’s power of activity is increased or assisted. Pain, on the other hand, is an emotion whereby the body’s power of activity is diminished or checked” (178). Just as the moments of pain in *Falling Man* highlight a lived corporeality of bodies, DeLillo portrays instances of sensual and physical pleasure as attesting to a connection beyond bodily boundaries, a dimension of intercorporeality from which his masculine characters dissociate. DeLillo represents an intercorporeal merging through pleasure and an opening to the Other, experienced
particularly by the female characters, that highlights his portrayal of gender and separatist constructs by way of contrast.

In *Falling Man*, intercorporeal erotic liaisons signal a lived dimension where bodies merge and connect in intimacy. This is an intrusion upon notions of the separate body that DeLillo’s masculine characters evade and automate. Hammad recounts that, through sex, his lover, Leyla, wanted him “to know her whole presence, inside and out,” which reflects her desire for intimacy that he does not register (81). Hammad cannot create space for his lover within the “crowded segments” of his life (82). Like Keith, Hammad lives a double life, existing between his lover’s flat and the brotherhood, until eventually he cuts ties with Leyla prior to his suicide mission. Keith’s affair with Florence that commences straight after the attacks, with whom he shares the direct experience of the event, is also depicted as being devoid of intimacy for Keith. While the affair becomes a way for Keith to start to open to his “deep shared self” (157) within a contained space, separate from his domestic life, the dynamics of his corporeal connection with Florence are more habitual, than intimate. Keith describes their sexual encounters as “rituals of anticipation,” as they “took erotic pleasure from each other” (137), rather than sharing the moments together. Like the “automated teller sex” that Lianne imagines Keith has, he continues to lack a capacity for intimacy (233). The “emotion” of their affair is “generated by external conditions” (166), rather than a relationship that is felt between them. As such, their affair is another space where Keith is dissociated, as he experiences the “delirium, the dazed reality” (91) of the time they spent together.

DeLillo highlights a distinction between the characters Florence and Keith and their openness to alterity and shared trauma. In the aftermath of the events, Florence, like Keith, experiences a fractured subjectivity, longing to create “some version of herself, a person who might confirm the grim familiarity of the moment” and sharing Keith’s feeling of being “nearly gone, nearly dead” (91, 108). Like Keith, Florence struggles initially to distinguish herself from her experience, yet attempts to voice and share it, repeating the story of her trauma by “going over it again, claustrophobically, the smoke, the fold of bodies” (90). Where Florence and Keith differ, is in Florence’s ability to identity her subjectivity, even within the context of the “possibly lifelong” emotional distress (90) that she expects to experience. This allows her to narrativise her grief and to start to embody it as part of what she has lived through, to reclaim a sense of self. Keith, conversely, listens to her stories as a spectator, observing and witnessing rather than placing himself in his experiences. His corporeal detachment is exemplified further when he sits and watches her dance in slow motion while, detached from
intentional movement, he “crawl[s] out of his clothes” (93). This juxtaposes their differing connections to embodied agency.

Unlike Keith, who continues to witness rather than perceive his subjectivity, Florence recognises the corporeality of the event: “[w]hat we carry. This is the story in the end” (91). This highlights a distinction between DeLillo’s portrayal of the masculine and feminine characters in relation to expressing and resolving loss through connecting to it corporeally, and opening to the intimacy of alterity and shared spaces. Both Michael and Ruth Helyer have comprehensively focused on the theme of gender in Falling Man. Though I lack the scope to adequately address the complexities of it here, I wish to signal, as I have in previous chapters, how gender appears to be linked symbolically to the capacity to integrate loss and connect to the body. Ultimately DeLillo offers a contrast between the masculine and feminine characters in Falling Man and their ability to process grief and recognise the body and distinguish their subjectivity. Where both Florence and Keith have experienced the event directly, Florence is better able to articulate her experiences and remain open to intimacy. Keith, on the other hand, continues to perform and witness his reality and remains in a melancholic, liminal space. Through Keith and Hammad, DeLillo portrays how a relationship to the body can remain dissociated when ideas and spaces outside of the lived experience of the body are preferred, perpetuating separation. Conversely, the opposite is illustrated through Florence’s character, as “her frank and innocent openness” (88) allows her to open beyond her story and attachments to the past. This is exemplified when she laughs, allowing her to perceive beyond her attachment to her story—described corporeally as “a kind of shedding, a physical deliverance from old woe, dead skin” (90). In contrast, through remaining in self-contained and dichotomous identities that exclude the body, the masculine characters live outside of their own experiences. Keith remains “in a mind and body that were not his, looking at the fit” (94).

Out of all the characters, Lianne comes to a point where she can simultaneously open to alterity, whilst experiencing embodied agency, as she resolves her personal grief in the context of 9/11. Lianne’s openness to alterity is insinuated through her bodily surrender during intimate moments with Keith. She experiences “a laying open of bodies” during which she notices the intercorporeal blur of boundaries during erotic experience, imagining that she might wake in the mind and body of another (68-9). Lianne reflects that “on these nights it seemed to her that they were falling out of the world. This was not a form of erotic illusion” (212). This description evokes an intercorporeal merging of bodies beyond separate corporeal
identities and the “closed world[s]” (212, 47) characterised within the novel, inviting new, shared spaces and awareness. Self-awareness through recognising the body in the world and its relationship to alterity, is depicted by DeLillo as a source of recovery. Lianne begins to probe, in the final stages of the novel, the feelings of her body outside of a clinical sense of it, querying “what’s inside the form and structure” and “normal morphology” (232) after visiting a Doctor. For Lianne, a greater sensory connection within the world and her body, allows her to recognise the necessary function of alterity: “we need each other … people sharing the air” (214). Her desire to connect with others is “a need that had the body in it” (105), that she has felt all along and comes to accepts. She recognises that what she needs in her immediate family is a sharing of space: to “be together, stay together” as, she believes, “this is how we live through the things that scare us half to death” (214).

In a contrast to Lianne’s increasing physical and intercorporeal awareness and moments of stillness and presence as she resolves her grief, Keith remains trapped in liminal spaces. He longs to “fly out of self-awareness, day and night, a body in raw motion” (66). Keith exists in an ongoing melancholic detachment. This relegates his grief and vulnerability to his unconscious, to dreams that feature “the trapped man, the fixed limbs … paralysis, the grasping man … the dream of helplessness” (230). These objective detachments from embodiment and a sense of subjectivity insinuate his inability to recognise himself as the subject experiencing his body’s vulnerability. The flashbacks that Keith experiences in the final pages of the novel, attest to the intercorporeality of trauma and to the violence of the rupturing of skin in Falling Man. This renders the ending of the novel ambiguous after the contrast of possibilities of embodied meaning explored through Lianne’s character. Keith’s melancholic evasion of grief throughout the novel remains contrasted with the memories of his ruptured body, highlighting his mortality and permeable skin. The last page of the novel describes the very visceral and sensory experience with his colleague, Rumsey during 9/11, whose body is blown apart and his physical appearance no longer recognisable. Keith’s revulsion and dissociation during his lived experience of trauma, is linked to the abject imagery of his intercorporeal encounter with Rumsey. DeLillo describes these moments graphically, as Keith struggles to identify his own body: “he smelled something dismal and

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101 The character Lauren in The Body Artist experiences a similar re-awakening of the body to Lianne. Lauren’s epiphany places her back in time and connects her to the living world and her corporeality, after which she desires to connect more deeply with the outer world again through her body and senses: “to feel the sea tang on her face and feel the flow of time in her body, to tell her who she was” (126).
understood it was him, things sticking to his skin, dust particles, smoke, some kind of oily grit on his face and hands mixing with the body slop, paste-like with the blood and saliva and cold sweat … it was himself he smelled, and Rumsey (244). As the novel culminates, Keith remains dissociated and disembodied in relation to his trauma. This is aptly encapsulated in the recollection of his first-hand observation of the falling man in the final sentence of the novel, in which he perceives “a shirt come down out of the sky” (246), rather than a body. Like the liminal space occupied by the falling man, between life and death, Keith is unable to integrate the past. He remains outside of his body.

In the concluding passage featuring Lianne’s character, conversely, DeLillo depicts a further re-awakening of the body wherein Lianne regains her perspective as a subject. This is inexplicably linked to her awareness of the body. As Merleau-Ponty writes, re-establishing contact with the body and with the world, equates to rediscovering the body as the subject of perception, as “to have a body is to possess a universal setting, a schema of all types of personal unfolding” (*Phenomenology of Perception* 326). While she is undressing herself after a run, Lianne connects with her body through becoming aware of her own scent. Unlike Keith, who cannot smell his own body in his moments of horrific trauma, she recognises, through her senses, the body that has been latent to her, in the peripheral of her awareness: “it was just her, the body through and through. It was the body and everything it carried, inside and out, identity and memory and human heat. It wasn’t even something she smelled as much as she knew. It was something she’d always known” (236). Through the body, Lianne can place herself, and integrate her past memories in the present.

Lianne’s awareness of her feelings in relation to the event, and her ability to reclaim her personal history through accepting the paradoxes of the unknown and the unseen, allows her to open to her grief and place herself within it. She accepts the traumatic pattern in her life of falling men—including her father, who committed suicide; the falling man performance artist that captivated her interest; and her husband, Keith’s intermittent absences and disappearance. In making a connection to the interior space of her own body, “the body through and through” (236), she regains agency from her repetitive, melancholic patterns. This permits her to take intentional action from a space of subjectivity in the present, rather than unconsciously repeating the past, which leads to her decision to divorce Keith and move on with her own life. Lianne recognises that the body, through which she experiences the
world, is her own. This is a conclusion that Keith does not come to as the novel closes—he remains a falling man, ruptured by the recent traumatic events imprinted upon his body.

**Conclusion**

*Falling Man* highlights the ambiguous challenges to resolving grief within a context of postmodernism. DeLillo draws on motifs of disembodiment and displacement, to depict the ways in which trauma and unresolved grief, both privately and collectively, open a space of liminality. DeLillo’s frameworks of melancholic liminality apply to his representation of the media, Lianne’s family history, Keith’s traumatic dissociation and Hammad’s political ideals. Ideologies are ruptured by the body, as the pain of slit skin and embedded organic shrapnel incite an awareness of the Other who wounds.

DeLillo provides, through the employment of body metaphors, a corporeal connection to the terror and a politics of alterity, through what he calls a “living language” (“In the Ruins” 34) of embodiment. Resolving grief is depicted as being inextricable from connecting to the flesh and the materiality of collective events, beyond external images, abstractions, beliefs and ideologies which dissociate and suspend the work of mourning. DeLillo highlights how trauma is founded in situations of lived corporeality shared with others. He anticipates a resolution and acceptance that might arise from the recognition of an embodied connection to the world and a sense of place, as well as through opening to alterity beyond one’s repetitive narrative patterns that perpetually wound. Integrating grief, DeLillo’s novel shows, is a process of opening to alterity and the body, that places the subject back in the role as a critical perceiver as the narrator of their experiences.

Ultimately, the contrast between Lianne and Keith illustrates DeLillo’s representation of the distinction between melancholic mourning and the potentiality for an integration of loss over time. Lianne, who becomes aware of a repeating melancholic pattern within her family, gains an awareness that allows her to reconnect and place her body within the lived dimension of space and a broader narrative context. This is contrasted with Keith’s traumatic dissociation from his more recent experiences of trauma which detaches him from time and space, trapping him in-between his ruptured narratives. While DeLillo is ambiguous about the potentiality of his characters to mourn and open to alterity, he portrays a dissociation between mind and body inherent in both melancholic grief and immediate experiences of trauma.
*Falling Man* illustrates a pivotal connection between the body and place, in relation to unresolved grief.
Jonathan Safran Foer’s post-911 novel *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, crosses time frames of cultural tragedies, from 1945 through to 2001, to represent manifold narratives of trauma and stages of grief experienced personally and collectively in the context of family and community life. Like Don DeLillo’s exploration of alterity through intercorporeality in *Falling Man*, Foer also blurs binaries of self and Other, and mind and body, in regards to postmodern mourning, illustrating how, as Cathy Caruth writes, “we are implicated in each other’s traumas” (*Trauma: Explorations in Memory* 5). *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* opens up the work of grief beyond solitary and interior spaces—such as lonely apartments and the highest peak of the Empire State building—returning grief to the shared spaces of neighbourhoods and communities and emphasising the “little nothing touches” (Foer 181) that constitute the sharing of bodies and grief.

*Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* is set in present day New York, following the 9/11 tragedy. The novel centres predominantly on the narratives of a young boy, Oskar Schell, and his grandfather, Thomas Schell, focusing closely on their encounters with personal grief and inter-linking these experiences with private and collective grief within the broader community of New York. In the novel, Thomas is still looking to fill an inexpressible void left by losing his fiancé in the Dresden bombings, much like the character Keith in *Falling Man*. This manifests as a lost relationship to present time and space as the narrative progresses. Unlike Keith, who evades his loss altogether, Thomas attempts to replay and recreate the past. Melancholic, his loss remains unconscious and unresolved, depicted through his dichotomous mindset towards the present. The novel centres on his thoughts, feelings and journals, that reflect the metaphorical lock around his grief—his inability to let go of the past and re-create. The character, Oskar, who has lost his father in the 9/11 terrorist attacks, is represented as being privy to many unresolved narratives of loss within his lineage. As he repetitively listens to his father’s final messages on an answering machine, and upon finding a mysterious key in his father’s closet, he is motivated to search for the lock. His quest takes him across the city of New York, initiating his encounters with others who are also experiencing grief—a journey that is depicted as the key to resolving the melancholic grief portrayed within his family. Another key representation of grief in the novel is that of
Thomas’s wife and Oskar’s grandmother, who is unnamed within the novel. She has also lost family, including her sister, Thomas’s first love. Her emphasis, in contrast to her husband, is on creating a life in the present. This is epitomised in her desire to give birth, which eventually separates the two.

This chapter will continue to focus on the theme of collective melancholia that I engage with across the post-9/11 novels, examining a tension that Foer creates between melancholic mourning and the potentiality for an incorporation of loss through recognising a relationship to the body, place and alterity. Like Lianne in *Falling Man*, whose experiences of awareness of her body’s response to loss help her to examine her family’s distancing from grief and the body, Oskar also acquires inter-generational melancholic patterns from his parents and grandparents’ lineage that he resolves through private awareness. Oskar inherits a melancholic history of familial absences, including his grandfather’s absence and melancholia, his grandmother’s secrecy and silences and his father’s empty coffin. He is also situated within a collective context of media imagery, Google and knowledge bases, that engender how he relates to the world existentially and ontologically. This impacts his mourning process. Through Oskar, Foer represents how his curiosity and a capacity for invention and creativity, allow him to transcend his familial silences and absences and open to the Other. Oskar expands his awareness and connection to place through becoming aware of his embodied agency and alterity. Foer places an emphasis on mourning as being situated in the social world, rather than solitary confinement. He contrasts experiences of internalised mourning with Oskar’s encounters and connections with other people across the city who feel isolated, as he does, in their unresolved pain. In opening up his perspective to include others, Oskar subverts his family’s solitary, melancholic narratives through creating shared, intercorporeal spaces for bereavement.

Scholarly interest in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* has predominantly centred on Foer’s representation of grief and trauma, especially his depictions of self, other and community in the context of collective trauma (Mullins; Saal; Codde). This discussion will specifically focus on this through my lens of collective melancholia. In relation to the portrayal of grief and potentialities for mourning, which I will draw attention to in this discussion, Oana Alena Strugaru analyses Foer’s use of characterisation, arguing that the novel reflects a crisis of meaning. Sien Uyttershout and Kristiaan Versluys examine how the novel in fact provides a lens for socio-political discussions of trauma theory, basing their argument on Dominick La Capra’s theory of trauma and exploring the novel as enacting a
narrative fidelity to trauma. Steven Todd Atchison proposes that the novel offers more than a re-telling of trauma. Atchison argues that it opens up a space for literary transference that holds readers accountable for the retention of cultural memory, making it possible to engage with the novel in ethical-empathetic ways. I will argue that, by employing the mode of comedy and through highlighting the distinction between mourning and melancholia, Foer does open an ethical space that allows an awareness of ways that mourning can be approached without a recourse to melancholic patterns. In contrast to Falling Man, which dealt more with traumatic rupture, only signalling at the corporeal dimension and its potentiality, Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close explores more closely this possibility. Foer highlights the capacity, through the body, to resist melancholic identifications and to move through space in a new way and with ethical consideration for the Other.

Nearly all the scholarship analysing post-9/11 fiction has foregrounded the inability of language, specifically fictional narratives, to represent the trauma of the event and the complexity of issues of alterity. One of those more abstract issues that preoccupy authors of post-9/11 fiction, as Birgit Dawes reveals in her discussion in Ground Zero Fiction, is the brutal awakening to the vulnerability of the human body and a confrontation with mortality, as well as the ensuing physical and cognitive uncertainty that the tragic events catalysed within cultural life (290-91). Returning to Judith Butler’s appraisal of the American political reaction to 9/11, that I have discussed in previous chapters, Butler similarly emphasises the need, after 9/11, for a voicing of the “common human vulnerability” of grief (Precarious Life 31). She finds it of paramount importance to heal the cracks of the “tenuous ‘we’” (20), and the narcissistic tendencies to adopt a universalising narrative that excludes the Other and exclaims a false invulnerability. Of worthy note, in Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close, is the manner in which Foer addresses concealed narratives of vulnerability in relation to alterity. He does this through focusing on Oskar’s personal narrative and connecting this to the stories of grief from others in his community.

Through placing an emphasis on the character of Oskar moving beyond his inter-generational melancholic cycles and recognising the body in grief, I argue that Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close generates what Richard Gray perceives as being necessary within the post-9/11 genre—“renewal, not repetition” (102). In After the Fall, Gray expresses his critique of the genre, including Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close, for being predictable in reinforcing familiar structures and “binary oppositions,” rather than offering possibilities for mourning (66; see also Rothberg), I contend, rather, that Foer’s novel is distinct in employing
imaginative strategies and comedy, particularly through his satirical portrayal of Thomas, who is trapped in a binary mindset, to perceive beyond these narratives and oppositions. Though I concede that Foer fails to explore broader implications and social changes in relation to the political alterity, what he offers is a perspective on the ways in which alterity is constructed within the domestic sphere. Foer infers that alterity arises from inner polarities of unresolved grief, that are projected out into exterior space. It is in this regard that Foer starts to explore where conflicts arise: out of a mental disposition and approach toward the world and grief, that enacted through the body.

This chapter will examine how Foer portrays grief in relation to space and spatial metaphors. My discussion will focus on the two styles of mourning discussed by Sigmund Freud in “Mourning and Melancholia,” to elucidate the contrast inherent in the novel between melancholic mourning and the potentialities for accepting and incorporating loss. Where Thomas’s character is attached to a melancholic identity and displaced from the world and from others, he feels encroached and entrapped within the dualities he has created. Conversely, the grief work engaged in by Oskar involves him expanding his notion of space to include others, allowing him to integrate loss within his psyche, and to free up libidinal attachments, regaining subjectivity and a sense of place in the world. I will examine the relationship between place and the body that Foer portrays, through a Freudian lens of the uncanny, which draws out Thomas’s unconsciousness of his loss and his melancholic displacement from his body. The uncanny, which refers to the return of what is not yet conscious, is both familiar yet threatening, strange yet also familiar (Freud, “The Uncanny” 220). This is signified in Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close through Thomas’s inability to reconcile place and the body, as he remains haunted by his past. Another aspect of Foer’s spatial representation of grief that I will discuss, is the ability to create space around the narratives of loss, rather than becoming attached to stories as an identity. Foer frequently engages with the comic mode and satirical devices to destabilise and liberate narratives from melancholic entrenchment. Oskar’s capacity to laugh, and to remove his metaphorical tragic mask, is a catalyst to releasing him from a rigid attachment to his experiences and his family’s melancholic patterns. This is a strategy that Foer employs to resist post-9/11 discourses and dialectics, through deterring from an absolute counter-narrative to terrorism.

This chapter will continue to draw on Maurice Merleau-Ponty, to highlight how Foer uses metaphors of the body in space to emphasise the lived body in relation to grief and alterity. For Merleau-Ponty, existence is fundamentally spatial. He proposes that every sensation is
spatial and “is itself constitutive of a setting for co-existence, in other words, of a space” (Phenomenology of Perception 346, 257). Foer depicts, through Oskar’s narrative, a growing consciousness of how embodied relationships place a person in the world. As Merleau-Ponty writes, “sensation is literally a form of communion” (246). In this sense, lived spatiality can be seen, not as a container that can be measured in objective terms, but an expression of being-in-the-world and “organic relations between subject and space, to that gearing of the subject into the world which is the origin of space” (251). The subsequent sections will contrast Thomas and Oskar in relation to lived spatiality, in order to draw out Foer’s representation of melancholia and the potentialities for mourning in the aftermath of 9/11.

Section 1.1 “Why I’m Not Where You Are Now”: Corporeal Displacement and Melancholic Mourning

It is through Foer’s representation of the ghost-like disembodiment of Thomas, that the novel delves into a socio-cultural phenomenon of entrapment in fixed ideas and an inability to let go, that signals a melancholic mourning. Through his fictive representation, Foer represents a world wherein this mentality results in a physical suspension from present reality and a continual distancing from one’s body, and the body of others, when engaged in mourning. As Merleau-Ponty writes, the body is inseparable from a view of the world (Phenomenology of Perception 451-2)—rather it is expressive of the operations and acquired views that constitute the cultural world. For Thomas, it is his thinking in relation to loss that keeps him locked into a pattern, reflected in his body and spatial relationships. His mindset creates and perpetuates a pathological, melancholic mourning that he cannot resolve.

The overarching portrayal of Thomas’s character is one of ghost-like disembodiment, as his attachment to time and place is ruptured in his space of unresolved grief. Through over-identifying with his loss, he is portrayed, just like his traumatic memories, as absent and displaced, ghosted from time and space. Like his letters, written during his absence, that weave in and out of the plotline, and his fragmented recollections of asking passers-by the time, Thomas presents uncannily and mysteriously in the novel as Oskar’s grandmother’s renter, who Oskar has never met. Foer depicts the way in which Thomas’s desire for a mental ideal of what he has lost, keeps him locked in the past, rather than embracing the fluidity of life in present time and space. Thomas reflects: “I had buried too much deeply inside me. And here I am, instead of there” (216). Foer’s depicts Thomas’s entrapment in grief as being evocative of an illness—“the cancer of never letting go” (17), signalling a resistant disease
that impacts and destroys the body. This is, to some extent, true for Thomas as he notices that his melancholic mourning is, psychologically, killing him as he fails to embody his life (215). In every sense, he knows that thinking “is the distance that wedged itself between me and my happiness … it wasn’t the bombs and burning buildings, it was me, my thinking” (17), reflecting his idealism and dissociation as he fails to perceive his mental and physical worlds as mutually informing.

Dylan Trigg writes that trauma is “the wound that prohibits the work of restoration,” due to its “unpresentability to consciousness” (240; author’s emphasis). In Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close the wounds of past traumas, to which Thomas remains attached, create repetitive mental patterns that block a knowability of loss, and its creative release through a continuation of life. What makes Thomas’s relationship to loss pathological, is primarily his inability to surrender what he has lost, and his over-identification with the lost object that he has internalised as an ego loss. The novel depicts Thomas’s mental patterns as melancholic, as he remains entrapped in the past and “just kept repeating those same things over and over” (Foer 81). This compares with Sigmund Freud’s early definition of unsuccessful mourning in “Mourning and Melancholia,” wherein he states that a person with melancholia identifies with the lost object, so that “object-loss” is transformed into an “ego-loss” (249). It is this pathological attachment to the past, that haunts Thomas’s ability to embody his life in the present.

A key characteristic of Thomas’s grief is that it remains melancholic—it is unconscious and locked inside him, manifesting in his inability to fully know and express it. In an undelivered letter to his unborn and abandoned son, Oskar’s father, Thomas connects his journey into silence, with his inability to mourn his beloved, Anna, who “was locked inside” him (Foer 17). The very memory that he has strived to hold onto becomes unattainable and unconscious to him, as it evades him in asymbolic abstraction. In a similar way to Keith, in Falling Man, who can no longer name signs and people—his words, metaphorically, lost in the ash of 9/11—Thomas also loses his ability to communicate through speech. He resorts to notebooks and sign language as he loses the ability to connect with the external world. His absence from the world of language mirrors his loss of agency. Like the character Septimus in Mrs Dalloway, he eventually loses the pronoun ‘I,’ signifying his loss of place and subjectivity in the world as he retreats privately into incommunicability.
Thomas’s loss of the primordial and presencing ‘I’ is significant in terms of his ghosting in the novel, as well as his loss of subjectivity, which is mirrored in his physical disappearance and concealment in ‘nothing’ places of his creation. This is an element of the novel that I will explore later in this chapter. The spectral portrayal of Thomas, who moves in and out of absence and presence, and ‘something’ and ‘nothing’ spaces, can be understood phenomenologically in relation to the body. Scott Marratto describes the spectral as a “haunting of the field of presence,” wherein a person cannot perceive the present as a “determinate structure” or anticipate future possibilities (65). He argues that a reconnection with the “living body” (65) is necessary to resolve the spatial incongruence. An interesting parallel to Foer’s use of space to signal unresolved loss is Chris Adrian’s short story collection, A Better Angel. Adrian similarly employs distance and distortion, both temporal and spatial, to address the impact of 9/11. In Adrian’s narratives, the 9/11 attacks haunt his protagonists and possess them, like demons. Their losses are perpetually unresolved as long as they remain haunted. In Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close, it is Thomas’s inability to release and consciously apprehend and process his pain, that keeps him entrenched in re-experiencing the past. This disrupts his ability to physically and intercorporeally occupy his life and his relationships.

In a state of melancholic disavowal and detachment from embodied life, Thomas can only recall the haunted moments in which he connected to his senses through memories of the trauma of the Dresden bombings. Like Keith in Falling Man, his more immediate experiences of trauma, recollected from the event, are portrayed as a mind-body fracture that has continued long-term. His loss of agency is connected to a loss of the body. This is most evident when he recalls, after the bombings, seeing his own name on a list of dead people and believing that he had died (Foer 273). Interestingly, the memories that express agency are those in which he uses his senses to connect to the world around him—as he recalls the event, he recollects that “I saw and heard humans trapped. I smelled them” (214). In his moments of panic and mind-body terror, however, he recalls becoming frightened of his own image, signalling the origin of his lost identity: when he started to dissociate from his mortality and vulnerability through telling himself to “keep thinking” (215). After the bombings, this

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102 The ghost trope plays out in a variety of forms, such as when Thomas is both absent and present in his family’s life through his letters, and the absence of Oskar’s absent father—his empty coffin—at the funeral. Communication is also haunting, ranging from the phone messages that Oskar replays, and letters from different time periods that feature in the novel, some of them blank. The play, Hamlet, that Foer draws on intertextually, also features a ghost as a central character—this intertext will be discussed further in a later section.
reflexive tendency to detach from the pain of the body and world became his way of life, keeping him in a space of conceptualising rather than feeling. This indicates the latency of his trauma, that has resulted in an unconscious, and thus melancholic, remembering. Pre-empting the central theme of intercorporeal connection, in Thomas’s recollection of the immediate experience of the bombings, it is the touch of another that saves his life (214). This sensory, intercorporeal connection is depicted as continually existing outside of the mentality that keeps him entrapped, fearful, and a ghost within his own life.

*Extremely Loud* and Incredibly Close builds up a tension through Thomas’s character, between self-contained images and the fluidity of the body in time and space. The corporeal imagery in the novel encapsulates how separation, created by the mind and a resistance to change, manifests in the material dimension and through relationships with others. Metaphorically, Thomas becomes his loss, signalled by the marble sculptures he continually creates of his lost love, Anna, that also entrench him in a representation of the past—a self-containment. Thomas reflects that, if it were not for his mind, he “could have released sculptures … released myself from the marble of myself” (Foer 33). This indicates that he is only a figurative representation of himself, rather than an embodied agent. Foer’s metaphor of the melancholic body as a marble-like prison, rather than lived and fluid, is consistent within passages in the novel featuring Thomas and his wife. Their lives revolve around “making livings,” an ironic play on words that suggests a dimension of their lives that is habitual, rather than fluid and lived through. As Thomas notes, the dust accumulates on their shoulders (119), insinuating again the statue motif. He yearns not to live in the present, but to re-create the past, signified in his attempts to sculpt Anna through an exact adherence to his mind’s ideal, in order to solidify the image. In *The Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty uses a similar metaphor of the “marble of the other” (30), to describe the peculiar way in which perceptual consciousness constitutes its object, a signifier that is employed in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* through Foer’s portrayal of Thomas’s melancholic attachments.

The passages in which Thomas sculpts his wife as his lost fiancé, reflect Foer’s interpretation of melancholic grief in relation to embodiment. In *Adventures of the Dialectic*, Merleau-Ponty argues that “the unconscious … is interwoven in the life style, in the bodily conduct of a person, as a sub-structure which remains hidden from [one’s] personally, but becomes visible to others” (166). The way in which Thomas relates to the body of his wife in the present, communicates his unconscious wounds. As he sculpts her into a representation of the
past, to signify his mind’s image, he is blocked from her in the present moment and fails to see her. The way in which he positions her, in relation to himself, signifies his affective relationship with the Other: “the positioning was the sculpting” (Foer 84). This indicates his narcissistic desire to control her and to relate to the Other only from a space of domination. His positioning within space also reflects his wanting to know, and re-create his loss, through external and physical validation. This reflection of his mind’s desire to contain and preserve the past, is juxtaposed by the birds that sing in the other room as Thomas positions her (83), drawing attention to a sense of freedom and expression in the present that the two cannot find.

Signalled by her unnamed status in the novel, and Thomas’s failure to see her, his wife, Oskar’s grandmother, plays an important role in the background of both Thomas and Oskar’s lives. Her faintly-sketched character offers hope and a renewal of life and love, when she is seen by others. Her relationship to Thomas early in their marriage, however, signals a loss of subjectivity similar to his. Her desire to please Thomas, at the expense of her own identity, is indicated in her lack of a name and her striving to embody Thomas’s ideals. As Thomas looks at her as he sculpts, he fails to see her. He perceives her only an “unfinished girl” (83), who fails to resemble the image in his mind. Yet, she reflects later that “his attention filled the hole in the middle of me … all that mattered was him looking at me” (83-4), insinuating her own damaged self-image and her fatal desire for companionship and attention. The hole within her attests to her own unresolved losses and her desire for validation to fill a void of lost subjectivity from grief.103 The two characters play out the converse of each other in their unconscious relationship to their mourning—while she yearns to be noticed and is overly open to the Other to the point of losing herself, Thomas desires to be physically hidden and is resistant to the Other. Like the “little nothing touches” (101) that she cannot stitch into a coherent whole, the novel signals how neither can live a fulfilling life with each other. They are both, subjectively, incomplete and unable to connect, signalled in their disengaged love-making. In failing to define herself, she remains the “unfinished girl.” Like Thomas, she is unable to embody the world from a place of subjectivity—in complementary, but opposite, way to her husband. Where both Thomas and his wife are initially out of balance, through

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103 One of the ironies in the novel is that, even though she is unseen and often depicted as hiding and watching Oskar, his grandmother is also very loud, as she has lost her hearing. Oskar finds this embarrassing, wishing for her to be invisible (144). This signals, once again, the blurring between absence and presence in the novel. Foer uses hyperbolic exaggerations, such as this, as a part of his comedic exaggerations which disrupt binaries.
over-privileging either self or Other in their relationship to the world, Foer emphasises that it is a balance between the two that constitutes a healthy relationship to alterity.

In her later years, the grandmother’s opening to interpersonal love, and to the materiality of her shared experiences with others, accentuates Foer’s theme of embodied and shared grief. As Thomas fails to accept his own image, she expresses that, whereas she previously evaded photographs of herself (183), she would now freely send out photographs, suggesting a desire to share and interact in the world as a subject. Recognising her awareness from years of wisdom and grief, she notes, “I’d been so busy searching that I haven’t been measuring myself” (290), suggesting her recognition of having sought external validation, rather than living bodily and knowing the body. While Thomas focuses more on the object that he has lost, and a representation he has retained in his mind, she comes to focus predominantly on the person in front of her in the present and the relationship between them. In direct contrast to Thomas’s sculpting of people, setting them in stone, his wife is more interested in buying jewellery that fits a person, rather than fitting a person to a mental conception. She also tells Oskar that she would measure his wrist twice (79), attesting to her awareness that a person changes and grows over time. Where sculpture contains and moulds the person, jewellery is something a person wears around them—an object in relation to a living human being, as opposed to a human moulded into an object. This signals the fundamental difference in the way she and Thomas relate to others and to the past.

Thomas’s wife’s voracious desire for touch, is also in direct opposition to Thomas’ resistance to touch and physical unavailability. As she tells Oskar, “I could not touch you enough. I needed more hands” (232). In seeing and loving Oskar, she relays one of the more fundamental ideas thematised in the novel: that the beauty of this moment depends on every other moment that has been. As she contemplates, in relation to Oskar, “when I looked at you, my life made sense. Even the bad things made sense. They were necessary to make you possible” (232). This suggests her awareness of the importance of love and connection. Even though she is subject to her husband’s desire to designate space during the earlier time in their marriage, as I will discuss in the next section, her character signals a growing connection to a lived reality and corporeality that her husband, in his absent presence, never occupies.
**Section 1.2 Something/Nothing Spaces and the Uncontained Essence of Grief**

The physical home occupied by Thomas and his wife in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, as well as Thomas’s displacement and attempts to control his environment, signals the uncanny nature of grief in relation to the body in space that Foer portrays. The dialogue within the novel, in relation to ‘something’ and ‘nothing’ spaces of their home, signifies Foer’s representation of unresolved grief as equating to a displaced relationship to space and a lost feeling of being at home in the world. Through Thomas’s binary mindset, reflected in his dichotomous approach to space and alterity, Foer also signals the application of this type of mindset towards the Other politically, and how this can enact a way of living that ultimately excludes the self and the body.

In relation to Foer’s use of place, and its relationship with traumatic grief, I find Freud’s spatial illumination of the uncanny and how it reflects a relationship to one’s environment, a useful framework for understanding his literary representation of grief. Of interest to this discussion, in his essay “The Uncanny,” Freud adopted the German term “unheimlich,” that means “unhomely” or “ghostly,” which bears an important relation to my argument. Through portraying Thomas’s grief and relationship to the world as uncanny, Foer represents, in a similar way to Vance Palmer, how grief can be experienced as a loss of place or home in the world, creating displacement. Like both *Daybreak* and *Falling Man*, Foer inter-weaves the polarities of place and displacement to signify melancholia, illustrating a connection to place as being inter-linked with an openness to intercorporeality and to shared experiences of grief. Displacement, conversely, evokes a melancholic liminality and lost subjectivity that is also a dissociation from the body and other people.

Freud relates the notion of the uncanny to a sense of place, explaining that, when a person is experiencing the uncanny, “one does not know where one is, as it were” (“The Uncanny” 2). He emphasises a connection between the body and place, writing that “the better orientated in [one’s] environment a person is, the less readily will [they] get the impression of something uncanny in regard to the objects and events in it” (2).104 For Thomas, it is a resistance to his environment and to the Other that informs his designation of space in his physical environment into ‘something’ or ‘nothing,’ and his tendency to ignore the blurring of lines between something and nothing, and self and Other. In *The Memory of Place*, Trigg

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104 Of interesting note is Steve Pile’s discussion of psychodynamics and place, wherein he defines the relationship between geography and psychology. Referring to Freud, he asserts that place is socially constructed, just as the social is spatially constructed (99).
illuminates the relationship between the uncanny and place, by arguing that “the totality of experience of place begins and ends with the body” (10). Thus, he contends, the uncanny is when the unity of self-identity becomes vulnerable and when a person “lack(s) the conceptual scheme to put the uncanny in its rightful ‘place’” (28). As Trigg explains, we do not, therefore, encounter place as disembodied subjects, occupying an incidental relation to our surroundings, but rather: “at all times, our bodies are instrumental in placing us” (28). This echoes the premise of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology and the relationship between displacement and unresolved grief that Foer highlights.

In the sense of being uncanny, the physical home that Oskar’s grandparents share becomes a definitive metaphor for their unresolved grief and their ensuing relationship with alterity. It also represents their unconscious connection with home and a place in the world, that is ruptured and unsettled by trauma. In their home, they delineate space through imagined maps in their heads, creating a metaphorical distance from each other. Foer’s portrayal of Thomas’s “marriage of millimetres and rules” (109), where he and his wife are marking off space from each other when they need it, evokes a satirical interpretation of a life that is comically impossible to achieve. Thomas’s ‘nothing’ places in the home allow him to conceal himself from time and space—“for times when one needs to disappear” (110). This reinforces his ghost-like absence from others and the world and evokes Keith’s hyper-spaces in *Falling Man*. Like Keith, Thomas also finds spaces where he can evade his mourning. Even within the dual spaces of reality that the couple occupy, they “never forgot about the ghost” (177),105 signalling the unreconciled imprint of what is lost, that exists uncannily as an absent presence. The trope of liminal space is signalled as Thomas and his wife conserve the past and exist between spaces, failing to release the past and create anew.

The spatial dimensions in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, are described as distances between the possibilities of intimacy and connectedness and a melancholic disavowal of the Other. Thomas realises that he “could not be that close” to anyone without creating distance through the mind, and creates “safe spaces” (179, 176) that preclude him from interconnection.106 His wife recollects: “we’ve wandered in place, our arms outstretched, but

105 The presence metaphorical ghosts of unresolved grief within their environment, draws an interesting parallel to Freud’s uncanny. In Freud’s delineation, the opposite the “uncanny” is “a place free from ghostly influences” (“The Uncanny” 4).
106 Thomas and his wife recognise that they are having “an idea together” (215). They are both living through a mental perception of space, rather than occupying space and building a life together through an embodied connection. This is also signalled in their sexual encounters, which occur in the dark in nothing places wherein, Thomas’ wife reflects “we could not look at each other … and I knew he wasn’t thinking of me” (177). Though
not toward each other, they’re marking off distance” (109), a passage that is evocative of the physical demarcation of space within their home. Thomas idealises an environment that is “forever fixed” (111). He preserves its contents, particularly inanimate objects, through comprehensive insurance that even includes the doorknobs. This is contrasted with his lack of desire to insure or protect anything that is living—his wife reflects: “he never took pictures of me, and we didn’t buy life insurance. (175). The significance of doorknobs closing and opening into space, signals Thomas’s inability to progress from a self-contained, to an interpersonal, paradigm of thought. This keeps him locked in a mental conception of suffering and inhibits him from sharing space.107

In Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close, Foer draws attention to the impossibility of fully excluding the Other, whilst sharing the same world, which comes across as a political satire, as much as a portrayal of melancholic psychic space. The novel emphasises the inevitable cross-over of shadows that occur when “the Nothing vase cast a Something shadow, like the memory of someone you’ve lost” (110). As Merleau-Ponty highlights, the Other is always encroaching on one’s space, and vice versa, as a principle of being in a world (Phenomenology of Perception 147). While Thomas and his wife exist, mentally, between a sense of ‘something’ and ‘nothing,’ being and non-being, the conceptual spaces inevitably merge in lived space, revealing a truth of interconnectedness. Their desire to “build walls … to separate inside from outside,” only creates a “friction” between something and nothing (280, 110)—an organic tension within lived dimensions of space.108 Eventually they find that “the space was collapsing” upon them (228), which accentuates Foer’s blurring of the boundaries of self and Other in the novel.

Foer’s critique, through Thomas, of dichotomies and mourning, indicates his politics of alterity. It also signals the trope of a polarising exclusion of the Other that informs the representation of melancholia, both politically and personally, across the novels under discussion. Thomas’s designation of ‘something’ and ‘nothing’ spaces that dismiss the Other, sensory connection is emphasised as being important to her—“something I lived for”—she only experiences, with Thomas, “little nothing touches” (181).

107 The doorknobs mentioned, and pictured, in the novel, that Thomas protects through insurance, relate to the theme of the lock that Oskar searches for. Oskar is searching for the answers to his own unresolved grief, engendered through familial patterns, to which he already has the key. The key, as the novel emphasises, is found in harnessing new trajectories of meaning through having an open sense of connection to place that includes others, rather than trying to preserving objects, structures and the doorknobs to locked rooms.

108 This distancing from life is further echoed in sensory terms, when she mentions that while, in her youth, the music in life was always getting louder, she is slowly learning to feel less. This is also emphasised by her damaged hearing.
alludes to what Susan Sontag describes as the binary divisions of “us” and “them” (35-7) that arose politically in the aftermath of 9/11. This critique of American politics is inherent in the imagery of the novel. In *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, Foer challenges narcissistic socio-political narratives of resilience that resist mourning through highlighting, satirically, the lived body and spatial dimension that resists dichotomies, ideologies and separation.

Thomas’s melancholic inability to communicate and contain his displaced suffering in time and space, is highlighted and parodied in the novel. He is portrayed as frantically writing, through which Foer critiques the nature of written language to contain the emotions of grief, as the writing runs off the page and he inevitably runs out of notebooks. His inability to express his loss in words, contrasts with the lived experience of writing that Foer alludes to, through which a grounded experience within time and place is already occurring. What Foer emphasises is that Thomas’s pathology is not so much the grief itself, but his inability to accept it, which creates a doubling of past and present. His unsuccessful attempts to express his grief through words only subvert, comically, the possibility of doing so, as there are more words than pages. Written expression replaces his corporeal experience in the present: “all of the things we couldn’t share … [the] conversations we weren’t having” (278). Thomas strives to contain his loss and reach “the floor of his sadness” (280)—yet this is subverted as he is, characteristically, unable to place himself. Foer suggests, through the comedy of Thomas’s attempts to find space for his grief, that mourning occurs within a present and corporeal time and space that Thomas fails to recognise. For Thomas, opening to grief is about accepting, rather than compartmentalising, pain. Literal space is filled with the abstractions of what Thomas cannot accept within himself, encroaching upon the boundaries between mind and body that he resists. Foer emphasises that unresolved grief exists everywhere, in the mind as well as in the surrounding world, just as Thomas notices that his writing is “everywhere, filling the walls and mirrors,” and even on his body (132).

A recognition of the inescapable nature of existence, that begets change and a blurring of boundaries, impacts Thomas and his wife divergently. Thomas comes to recognise, after mentally fluctuating between the polarities of ‘something’ and ‘nothing,’ that, in living, “something ... we must be” (111). Notably, the most important thing his wife conceals from Thomas, in the ‘nothing space’ of her womb, is her pregnancy with Oskar’s father: “the ultimate secret. Life” (177). When she learns of the unborn life contained within her, she realises that she cannot suppress it, which becomes a literal and metaphorical signifier of her relationship to creativity and new life. The novel signals a distinction between completing
mourning, and remaining resistant and melancholic, in relation to the opening to the possibilities of life that arise where polarities meet and merge. In *As I Lay Dying*, new life is resisted and aborted, signalling a stagnant and melancholic culture and an inability to mourn. So too, in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, Thomas’s wife’s pregnancy and her openness to her unborn son, signals her openness to resolving wounds of the past in contrast to her husband, Thomas. For Thomas’s wife, the new life growing within her body connects her to the “secret” of the renewal of life through the body that exists beyond the boundaries of symbolic representations—a perceptual understanding that “came before explanations” (177). Thomas, on the other hand, finds himself immersed in an anxious divergence between communicating ‘yes’ and ‘no’ when he learns of this, leading him to a pivotal realisation prior to exiting their lives; he realises: “I do not know how to live” (181).

Grief cannot be recognised and mourned in the space of the mind that conceptualises and focuses on absence, separating loss from lived reality and the anchored subjectivity of the embodiment. This is a paradox represented in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*. As Thomas tries to resolve his grief through separating spaces in his material reality, this only further displaces and distances him from his life and his body. Thomas occupies spaces of absence, a reflection of the incommunicability of his loss that he cannot ground into materiality. Thomas’s inability to be present for his son’s birth and childhood initiates his prolonged absence. It indicates Foer’s distinction between melancholic entrapment and the new possibilities of life that are birthed through the body.

**Section 2.1 Unlocking the Mind’s Prison: Oskar’s Grief and Intercorporeal Awareness**

Foer’s portrayal of Oskar offers a fascinating contrast to his grandfather, Thomas, in relation to the theme of the body in space. Oskar’s approach to grief, the body and social space, is one of intercorporeal and community awareness that ultimately and metaphorically serves as the key to his grandfather’s imprisonment. In contrast to his grandfather’s melancholic journey in and out of social spaces, Oskar’s traumatic rupture, through the tragic death of his father, causes him to seek an understanding of death in relation to space and his outer world. He comes to recognise how he moves and impacts upon his world as an embodied subject. His recollection of his father’s adage of moving sand in the Sahara through touching one speck (Foer 86), epitomises Oskar’s realisation that he belongs in the world, as a smaller part of a greater experience of collective life. This is accentuated by his journey into his grief, which is portrayed in lived space and through human relationships, involving people he encounters
across the city of New York. Oskar’s primary purpose, in contrast to his grandfather, is to
gauge an understanding of his “raisons d’être” (1). For Uyttershout and Versluys, Extremely
Loud and Incredibly Close features an oscillation between ‘acting out’ and ‘working
through,’ that is evident in the divergent narratives of the two key protagonists (219). This
chapter will similarly discuss the divergence between the characterisation of Oskar and his
grandfather. It will situate this understanding in terms of how they relate to place, the body
and alterity, as well as highlighting how Oskar’s response to loss relates to collective
melancholia.

Foer depicts Oskar approach to grief at the beginning of his experience, as being influenced
by a context of collective melancholia, both familial and cultural. The unresolved losses and
absences of his missing grandfather, his father’s empty coffin, his grandmother’s silences,
and a sense of absent cultural frameworks for loss, confuse his initial approach to his grief.
Oskar’s views toward existence oscillate between his father’s scientific atheism and a sense
of openness to life beyond death, as the emotions of grief cause him to question his reality.
His father represents knowledge and a structured understanding of life to him, so that, in his
absence, he feels an absence of knowing. His incessant need for explanations and knowledge
are parodied in the context of the digital age, that pervades his experience with an over-
abundance of ideas and pictures, complicating his understanding of life. Oskar comes to
recognise how knowledge, within his cultural context, is not always useful and can also be
cumbersome. He reflects: “[i]t was getting really hard to keep all the things I didn’t know
inside me” (154). Ultimately, Oskar recognises that grief is more about surrendering to the
unknown, than accumulating new ideas. The novel illustrates the absurdity of grasping for
knowledge, as Oskar finds himself left with “negative knowledge” (255). Eventually, he
discovers that the more he finds, the less he understands. This recognition signals that the
knowledge of the mind is contained and attached to a perspective, where life itself has
another dimension of meaning.

Initially, in responding to the collective melancholic patterns in which he is situated, Oskar is
unsure about how to express his wounds to others and instead turns his pain inward, allowing
it to hurt him. Mirroring his grandfather’s melancholic containment of himself, he zips
himself up in the sleeping bag of himself (Foer 6), denying the affective pain that he cannot
express or contain. His body tightens up as he feels a violent reaction and a desire for
vengeance on the world and toward his mother. This infers his inability to connect with
others while in his state of resistant mourning, that leaves him “extremely depressed” and
then “incredibly alone” (171). He initially desires to repress his feelings for the sake of his mother and out of fear: “I buried them, and let them hurt me” (181). His therapist queries: “but if you’re burying your feelings inside you, you won’t really be you, will you?” (203). The burial of his grief is particularly evoked through corporeal imagery when he self-harms and creates bruises on his body that he conceals. This signals, like his grandfather’s corporeal disavowal, his inability to relate to his grief and his body, as well as his perception of the incommunicability of his loss.

Oskar’s self-inflicted bodily harm is contrasted with his growing awareness of the embodied nature of his grief, epitomised as he recognises his grief in physical dimensions. He uses an embodied metaphor for his pain, allowing him to contain it. He notes that he has “heavy boots,” signalling the density of his unexpressed emotions within a physical body.109 He starts to become aware, as he suffers emotionally, of the way in which his feelings relate to life and subjectivity. Importantly, he also considers how this is experienced by others, contemplating how other people present, or hide, their emotions. He notes that, while he is in a state of introversion and feeling the pain of his grief: “my insides don’t match up with my outsides” (201). This implies a recognition of how grief is socially concealed. Oskar, on the other hand, starts to consider that “feeling pain is still better than not feeling” (245), signalling his openness and willingness to explore his emotions and process his grief.

*Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* illustrates how Oskar’s inheritance of melancholic, absent narratives, lead him back to the fundamental ontology of living—being situated in a body. In the wake of his father’s funeral, that involves an empty coffin,110 Oskar eventually becomes more concerned with the physiology of the world and who and what he can interact with. He contemplates, in a divergent way to his grandfather, what it means to exist and to connect with objects in the world—how his sense of being affects lived spatiality. This reflects what Merleau-Ponty deems as the “organic relations between subject and space” (*Phenomenology of Perception* 293). After contemplating media images and spatial dimensions, such as skyscrapers above and dead bodies below, Oskar considers another perspective: “what it’s really like, instead of how it feels when you’re in the middle of it” (245). He realises that there is safety and security inherent in interpersonal connections, in being surrounded by others, even if it means that “we’re all trapped” on the top of burning

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109 Oskar also shows an interest in accepting a loss of the body, indicated in his focus on fragmented body parts and the falling body. These notes and pictures form a part of his collection of ‘Stuff that Happened to Me,’ a visual journal that he keeps as a record of events and interests.

110 The empty coffin renders Oskar’s father a doubly spectral presence in the novel.
Oskar recognises a desire for communal connections to share the terror of grief and fear. In contrast to his grandfather’s restriction and designation of solitary space, that eventually collapses upon him, Oskar imagines sharing his pain and transforming a similar situation of melancholic entrapment into togetherness. Recognising private grief in terms of spatial isolation, he reflects on solitary mourning in apartments, contemplating that it is “extremely lonely up there, and you feel far away from everything” (245). This observation, that signals the title of the novel, indicates the physical dimension of mourning that Foer emphasises in relation to the body and space—a distance that Oskar wishes to bridge.

Through the comparison between his protagonists, Foer illustrates the crucial difference between thinking and knowing, and accepting the existential vulnerabilities of the human condition in time and space. Oskar, unlike his grandfather, aims to place his experiences, body and relationships, in the world. This is signalled in his desire to connect with physical objects that his father has used. Oskar reflects that “it made my boots lighter to be around his things, and to touch stuff that he had touched,” just as it also comforts him to look for a page where his father has written words when he was alive. These are “happy, safe things” (36, 249) that ground his loss in the physical world and in tangible objects. Foer’s motif of locks also reflects the distinction between Thomas’s melancholia and Oskar’s shift towards unlocking his own grief and his family’s melancholic patterns. While Thomas finds his past locked within him, which affects his present relationships with others, Oskar believes that he can unlock the understanding that he seeks in the outer, experiential world and with others.

Initially, Oskar projects himself away from life in the present, much like his grandfather—he contemplates: “I didn’t want to be anywhere that wasn’t looking for the lock” (202). Over time, however, as he becomes determined to understand and interact in the world outside of himself, noticing his connection to it, Oskar returns to what he feels is his reason to be. Oskar starts to become, unlike his grandfather, a life-affirming presence for those he loves and even reaches out to connect with others who he comes across. When ironically it comes to light that there is no lock, this emphasises what is, for Oskar, a quest that helps him to accept the

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111 Where his grandmother mistakenly imagines that he suffers as he makes others laugh during his father’s funeral, Oskar feels that helping others to laugh makes his boots lighter (5). He finds his “reason to be” in affecting a positive impact on others. His moments of comedy and social connection, balance out the solitary tragedy of grief.
space of the unknown and the limitation of knowing that is inherent as a part of human experience—a new space of awareness.

**Section 2.2 Being and Non-Being: Tearing off the Mask**

Oskar’s most primitive and protective mechanisms, but also his outward expressions of grief, are metaphorically portrayed during a school rendition of *Hamlet*. This intertextuality with Shakespeare’s play accentuates many of the key themes connected with Oskar’s character, including the blurring between absence and presence, tropes of the uncanny, and his dilemma of being and non-being. Just as Hamlet realises that death eliminates the differences between people, this is also Oskar’s realisation. He discovers his capacity to transcend the boundaries of his constructed identity that inhibit his capacity to perceive outside of his tragedy and create anew. Drawing on this scene in the novel, this section will also engage with the ways in which Foer uses humour to subvert notions of an exclusively melancholic, or consolatory, response to grief, liberating his portrayal of post-9/11 loss beyond collective tropes.

The uncertainty of being and death implicit in Shakespeare’s play is evoked in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* as Oskar reflects on his stage acting. Significantly, he plays Yorick in the play, the unearthed skull of the dead court jester. While Yorick is a signifier of the finality of death, this is paradoxically subverted with his being a jester. This signals the mode of comedy, and a merging between the dualities of tragedy and comedy that Foer draws on. For Oskar, the skull mask is connected to his earlier attempts to disguise the bruises on his body, that signify his feelings, from his mother. He recollects these attempts to conceal his pain: “my shirt was over my head, covering my face like a pocket, or a skull” (173). The passage in which he plays Yorick reveals how Oskar’s grief process is connected to his socialisation, and reflects another stage in his openness and transparency in relation to the world. Through performing Yorick, signalling the spectral and tragic themes associated with his melancholic lineage, he imagines experiencing social exclusion through bullying and becoming the object of laughter. This catalyses an existential crisis of his social being. Oskar reflects on his own private tragedy: “I felt that night, on that stage, under that skull, incredibly close to everything in the universe, but also extremely alone. I wondered, for the first time in my life, if life was worth all the work it took to live. What exactly made it worth it?” (145). He imagines reacting outwardly to his pain, through breaking out of character and

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112 In the play, *Hamlet*, Shakespeare also emphasises the physical consequences of death, accentuating Foer’s theme of the materiality of grief through this intertext. *Hamlet* frequently refers to mortality and to the body’s eventual decay (V.i.174–175).
talking back to Hamlet, who is played by a school bully. Using his imagination, he also pictures himself fighting back “on behalf of the dead” (145). He envisages smashing the skull on the bully and on the members of the audience, including his mother for moving on with her life, and his father for dying. His fantasised act of violence in which “blood [is] everywhere, covering everything” (145), signals a crucial moment when Oskar starts to externalise his pain outwards, into the world, rather than keeping it to himself and letting it bruise his own body. This moment foreshadows a recognition in Oskar, further signalled by his removal of the Yorick mask, when he starts to see himself beyond his suffering.

Foer’s use of the motif of the ghost further highlights the existential crisis of Oskar’s character. Maria del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren define the ghost in literature as “that whom questions the formation of knowledge itself and specifically invokes what is placed outside it, excluded from perception” (9). This relates to F.W.J. Schelling’s definition of the uncanny, to which Freud refers in his discussion in as “that which ought to remain hidden and secret, and yet comes to light” (“The Uncanny” 4). Masked as the undead, Oskar comes to examine the ghosts of his past, signalled in his confrontation with dual consciousness, the light and shadow of experience. He queries the divergence of the polarities, wondering: “when suffering is subtracted from the joy, what remains?” (Foer 269). When he rips off the mask of Yorick’s skull, the incorporeal court jester, this further highlights Foer’s layered engagement with being and non-being through signalling the theatrical masks of comedy and tragedy. Surrendering the mask, Oskar refuses either role, laying bare his desire to match his outside with his inside and to, quite simply, be himself and express an authenticity in relating to his feelings and relationships. Oskar chooses to forego the script and social performance. Instead, he, metaphorically, claims authority in his narrative beyond the liminal space of the spectre that embodies an absent presence. Refusing the polarities of tragedy or comedy, and the fixed identities that keep him in conflict with others, he desires transparency over losing himself in either the chaos, or conceptualisation, of his loss.

In *A Decade of Dark Humor*, that centres on comedy after 9/11, Ted Gournelos and Viveca S. Greene describe humour as “a highly complex rhetorical, social, and political tool” (xviii). This use of humour is a subtle but key aspect of political subversion employed in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* to interrogate collective narratives that resist alterity. Humour transcends the limits of sovereignty. It can allow an identity to be perceived comedically,

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113 This can also be seen as a rejection of models of classical tragedy, that emphasises human suffering and isolation, through moving toward comedy, that emphasises renewal and a sense of selfhood in community.
leading to expanded self-awareness rather than containment. This is evident in Oskar’s character, whose ability to laugh allows him to connect with others, to contextualise his experiences, and to release them through releasing the metaphorical mask of his ego. Comedy also alleviates the entrapment and the expectations of tragedy. It encourages a connection to life beyond the tragic narrative and, in doing so, can signal a way through it. This is evident when Oskar’s mother laughs unexpectedly and then covers her mouth, “like she was angry at herself for forgetting her sadness” (Foer 254). In Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close, laughter is the “kindling” that relieves the “heavy boots” of tragedy. Oskar reflects: “our laughter kept the feathers in the air” (78), a metaphorical image that evokes a sense of flight, in contrast to the isolated entrapment of pathological grief. This liberation, associated with laughter, is described by the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche as “the overturning of experience into its opposite” (98). He writes in Human, All Too Human, that “we play and laugh when the expected (which usually makes us fearful and tense) discharges itself harmlessly” (98). In relation to Oskar, this capacity to laugh, play and imagine, allows him to engage with his subjectivity and to move toward sociality, liberating him from the tragic polarity that his grandfather occupies.

When discussing the postmodern use of comedy, Julia Kristeva proposes, in Black Sun, a postmodern re-visioning of melancholia through comedy. Kristeva writes: “the postmodern is closer to the human comedy than to abyssal discontent,” noting the “postmodern challenge” inherent in using comedy to transcend melancholic narratives (258-59). Even the scenes of Thomas’s melancholic self-division and the ironic incommunicability of his grief, are satirically and ironically written by Foer. Through employing humour, Foer signals the salvaging element in breaking through the boundaries of self-contained narratives. Through satirically blurring the boundaries of private containment, Foer self-reflexively resists the post-9/11 narratives of individualism and universalising allegories that Butler forewarns of in Precarious Life, liberating his representation of grief from political binaries. In Foer’s satirical portrayal of self-enclosed spaces that attempt to resist the Other, the person also loses themselves, rupturing the very identity they are trying to contain.

Though 9/11 has been described as catalysing “the end of the age of irony,” 114 Gournelos and Greene suggest that “humor, irony, and satire were not only shaped by 9/11 and its aftermath,” but that these comedic elements were “pivotal in shaping responses to the event”

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114 Roger Rosenblatt wrote in Time: “One good thing could come from this horror: it could spell the end of the age of irony” (qtd. in Gournelos and Greene xi).
Through employing humour, which is mostly uncommon within post-9/11 fiction, Foer joins writers such as Jess Walter. Walter’s novel *The Zero*, uses satire to critique how institutions commodified and co-opted public grief to serve commercial and nationalistic ends, interrogating the possibilities for mourning. Other notable examples of post-9/11 comedic texts include Giannina Braschi’s *United States of Banana*; and Ben Fountain’s film, *Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk Americans*, to name a few examples. I argue that Foer contributes to this genre through providing a potentiality for emerging from melancholic structures and limitations. He does this through delineating Oskar’s liberation from his personal and collective narratives, and releasing the novel itself from socio-political responses to 9/11 that resist alterity. Foer interrogates structures that reinscribe dominant and narcissistic frameworks, through depicting the melancholic grief in which Thomas encloses himself as a comical resistance to alterity. It is in wanting to understand the liminal spaces, between the inner and outer, life and death, self and Other, that Oskar comes to transform his relationship to place. He starts to locate his subjectivity in embodied awareness and a pivotal recognition that, no matter where he is, “I was still me” (Foer 88).

**Section 3 Boroughs, Letting Go and Inventions: Creating Community**

Oskar’s awareness, his desire to invent and unlock the past in the present and his meeting and drawing together of his community, all characterise his opening to alterity and to embodied relationships in present time and space. For Oskar, understanding his grief means comprehending the wider space of his interpersonal environment. Foer illustrates the way in which the body is vital in grasping the relationship of self to world, and self to Other. Catherine Morley argues that *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* realises new realities of socio-political and personal landscapes of trauma, grief, and loss, introducing a new form of narrative realism (295). It is my argument that these new realities and landscapes are situated, in Foer’s novel, within material spaces—through lived and intercorporeal experiences of the body as it moves through the world.

Oskar’s desire for physical closeness and intimacy, signifies his openness to the world, and to others, as a part of his healing. He yearns for intercorporeal connections: “I wanted to hear their heartbeats, and I wanted them to hear mine” (Foer 288). As Merleau-Ponty has argued,

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115 Braschi’s novel centres on a disaster scene with black humour, describing New York City without the Twin Towers as a mouth unwilling to laugh. Fountain, on the other hand, uses irony to critique the universalising patriotism in the aftermath of 9/11, featuring a flag that speaks and a constant repetition of 9/11 buzzwords in the social world. An even darker comic response to 9/11, is *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country* by Ken Kalfus, that subverts the trauma narrative through hypothesising the survival of a loved one as a disappointment.
and Foer suggests in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, fundamentally we are our bodies, and intercorporeality is related to how we experience our body, world and lived spaces with others. It is Oskar’s motility, awareness and intentionality in the present—his movement into the world—that allows him to transcend his grandfather’s entrapment in thinking that distances him from his lived reality. Conscious awareness, as Merleau-Ponty suggests, is a matter of “I can,” rather than “I think” (159). In his discussion of intercorporeality, Marratto describes movement as equating to “the opening of a self to something other than the self,” that allows a person to remain “open to the possibility of [their] own transformation” (45). Oskar’s quest, that unites people in his community, can be seen to spark new movements in space, and connectivity. This contrasts with Thomas’s repetitive re-playing of the past, that only re-creates separation from others. While his grandfather’s focus is on locks and containment, designating space, comfort zones and evading interactions with others, Oskar gauges an openness to life in his relationship to alterity, realising that “[s]o many people enter and leave your life … you have to keep the door open so they can come in! But it also means you have to let them go” (153).

Oskar’s quest begins with his desire to find the lock to a key belonging to his father, that he finds hidden in a closet after his father’s death. Upon finding the name ‘Black’ on the envelope in which he discovered the key, Oskar sets out to contact every person in New York City with the last name Black, in alphabetical order, in the hope of finding the lock. Foer’s use of minor characters, through the people who Oskar encounters on his search, have a significant relationship with their environment, space, and grief, that enhances the novel’s representation of mourning. Oskar’s encounters with others are mutually transformative, re-connecting feelings, sensations and an expansiveness of space for himself and others. His encounters with others occur outside of the small apartments, narrow townhouses and the highest peaks of the city, in which they grieve in solitary confinement and separation.

Oskar’s interconnection with other New Yorkers is most interestingly portrayed in his encounter with the elderly man, Mr. Black, for whom he restores his sensory world through turning up his hearing aid, allowing him to experience the sound of a flock of birds. This permits Mr. Black a freedom and openness beyond his prior self-containment, as he has not left his apartment for many decades.116 Oskar’s interaction with the elderly man signals a

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116 This scene is diametrical to the one wherein Thomas sculptures his wife, where singing birds are also in the background, beyond their awareness. As Oskar helps the Mr. Black to re-connect his senses, this suggests how the Other can help to expand an awareness of the world—if a person is open to this.
mutual intercorporeality that returns Mr. Black to the present and sensory awareness and an expanded openness to the world. This catalyses him to release unexpressed emotions, as he rediscovers his sense of hearing. When Mr. Black hears his own voice for the first time in years, a recognition of his inner self in the outer world, this juxtaposes Thomas’s experience of the inexpressibility in his isolated mourning. Oskar proceeds to enlists the older man on his quest, which further encourages him to leave his apartment and re-enter the world.

When he meets various people across New York, Oskar learns of different ways of processing and relating to the past. Mr. Black, for instance, remembers the past through creating an extensive catalogue of everyone he has known—he has pounded a nail in his bed for every day his wife has been gone. Georgia Black, on the other hand, has created a museum of her husband’s life. It interests Oskar that so many people he encounters want their lives, and their grief, to surround them spatially. The character Ruth Black also has an interesting relationship to space and grief, as she has lived on the Empire State building since her husband died. The building has become her home, and signals her melancholic attachment to the past. She waits there for her lost love who has died, avoiding the home that used to share, and the truth of his absence, through spatial distance. Perhaps one of the more interesting relationships to space and loss is depicted through Abe Black’s character, who rides the Staten Island roller coaster with Oskar. Abe encourages Oskar to ride the Cyclone with him despite Oskar’s fears, a passage that reflects Oskar’s surrender to the forward movement of life, rather than a fixation on the past and objects and preservation like the other characters.

Foer’s linking of New York and place, with metaphors of the body and grief, bears a similar resemblance to Ian McEwan’s post-9/11 novel, Saturday, which similarly draws out physical and affective relationships between citizens and urban spaces. McEwan represents the body and the architecture of the brain, as signalling and mirroring the spaces of the city, and as a metaphor for urban and global spaces. In Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close, lived spatiality is also highlighted, particularly in relation to intercorporeality. This is exemplified when Oskar imagines his father’s cells “in the lungs of everyone in New York, who breathe him every time they speak” (Foer 169), accentuating the lived and shared experience of 9/11 that the novel emphasises. The parable his father tells him about a missing borough in New York City further echoes the symbolic representation of pathological mourning and lived spaces, that are portrayed in the novel. In the story, the different boroughs of New York start to organically move apart, floating away inch by inch over time, creating separation between
the boroughs. Yet some of the residents try to hold on to their homes as their outer world changes: “they liked their lives and didn’t want to change. So they floated away, one millimetre at a time” (221). This analogy signals Foer’s emphasis on resistant mourning and the primary theme of the novel, as trying to retain the past only creates distance from life and others in the present. The allegorical tale also reflects Foer’s interpretation of bridging spatial distance as, in the story, the children connect corporeally while the heart of the city is being moved: “lay[ing] on their backs, body to body, filling every inch of the park “(221). This metaphor signals the key thematic illuminated through Oskar’s character—of people reconnecting corporeally, through community and sharing from the heart.

In *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, Foer places an emphasis on the comedic, imaginative and playful characterisation of Oskar. This is an aspect that critics, including Jo Langdon and Elizabeth Siegal, have interpreted from a magical realistic perspective, characterising his inventions as signifiers of the fantastic. For Langdon, the use of invention and magical play destabilises the constructed nature of truth, and conveys the “felt experience” of trauma (14). I argue that the novel’s inclusion, through Oskar, of imagination and inventions, highlights the creative possibilities open to Oskar as he opens to his grief and to new ways of perceiving through alterity. Through having distinguished himself subjectively from the frameworks of tragedy within his lineage, he can play with his reality and therefore invent new scopes. He has the capacity to create a new approach to mourning, that “erased and connected the dots in a different way” (Foer 10). Rather than re-creating from conceptualisations of the past, like his grandfather, that limit himself and others, Oskar imagines a way to meet and understand others who think differently to him. Oskar also seeks transparency with others, desiring to speak the language of feelings that he had previously kept to himself, in his isolation and loneliness. Though initially he invents because he feels distraught and disconnected, his creations are all about connectivity and based on encouraging empathic understanding. In one instance, he imagines colours for different moods, coming from water in the shower, that would allow “everyone (to) know what everyone else felt (so that) we could be more careful with each other” (163). Oskar invents new ways for people to know their own feelings, and those of others. He aims to find transparency in the world, as “confusion changes your mood, it becomes your mood, and you become a confused, grey person” (163). Where emotions are usually hidden in the body, he envisions them seen, allowing for understanding, connectivity and support. Unlike his grandfather, who cannot place himself in present or future, Oskar does not seek a hiding
space, but rather the authenticity and clarity to understand his grief and the shared human condition. Oskar journeys into the wider space of his city, negotiating a sense of home that expands out to the whole of New York and his community.

Many of Oskar’s imagined inventions reflect his intention to navigate space efficiently and to help people to connect people within their environment. An example of one of his inventions is his creation of an anklet which leaves a tail of bright yellow dye, so that when a person walks they can avoid getting lost (106). He envisages connectivity between people so that they are not lost and dissociated, but included and brought together. Oskar reflects: “we need pockets for boroughs and for cities, a pocket that could hold the universe” (74). Notably, the connection that Oskar envisages between people is sensory. He imagines feeling others, and vice versa, through the sounds of each person’s heartbeat, “sort of like sonar” (1). While his grandfather’s focus is on insuring and possessing the past, Oskar starts to invent future homes through his openness to creation, new connections and imaginative play.

Through Oskar’s imagination and his quest, Foer offers the “social space and shared language for grief” that Tammy Clewell describes (14)—he offers literary potentialities for mourning that include the Other. Through his intercorporeal encounters, Oskar integrates an awareness of the world and of others. When he finally gives up on the lock and meets his grandfather, who has been hidden to him as his grandmother’s renter, his interest shifts to the materiality of his father’s absence. He journeys with his grandfather to a graveyard to locate his father, which is cathartic for both and a confrontation with the material reality of the past in present space. Digging up his father’s empty coffin unlocks the materiality of the loss that they share, allowing them to let go. This is signalled, for example, in Thomas burying his unsent letters to his son. When Oskar meets his grandfather, “the line where they came together reminded me of a place that wasn’t in any borough” (237). This signals the aforementioned metaphor of the something-nothing shadow of blurred intercorporeality, that unites them and merges their shared experience of loss. The experience helps them both to place their loss in the present.

Like DeLillo, Foer draws on the theme of the falling body and the motif of flight, both through Thomas’s liminal space of mourning and flight from his shared home with his wife, and in the final passage of the novel when Oskar recognises his subjectivity as an author of his story of loss. In different moments of the novel, Oskar recalls the iconic falling man, a

117 Where self and Other became increasingly separated in Thomas’s life, as he and his wife had “arms outstretched and marking distance,” Oskar’s narrative reflects a desire toward continuity and unity, his aim being “to see people reunited” (109).
traumatic image of the event that he replays in his mind. The final passage, when he returns to the image, signals Oskar’s recognition of his ability to create and centre himself in his experiences of grief. Locating again the pictures of the falling body, whom he imagines might be his father, he rips out the pictures, that are arranged in a flip-book, and reverses the order so that the man floats up in the sky. This is a life-affirming moment in the novel, as it signifies a relationship between narrative, perception and embodiment. In Oskar’s imaginative re-creation, the man floats back into the building, finding a grounded connection to place—a space that is no longer liminal. Oskar’s reversal of the body in flight is a significant metaphor that contrasts with Thomas’s inability to release the narratives of his past. In the place before the story, Oskar centres himself as the perceiver of experiences and his narrative journey, both forward and backwards. Foer encapsulates in this final passage a turning point for Oskar. Oskar has started to trust in the power of his imagination and creativity, as well as his power to create and edit his own story, finally providing him a space where his brain is quieter.

Conclusion

*Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* depicts the way in which melancholic mourning replays the past and disconnects a person from a sense of place, affecting an ability to exist in the world in the present. Foer critiques, through his representation of melancholia, the underlying belief systems that inform a dichotomous approach to mourning. He focuses on the body in grief to represent how a resistance to loss impacts alterity in lived spaces. In portraying a tension between Thomas’s melancholia and Oskar’s capacity to mourn, Foer highlights how an embodied approach to grief re-socialises a person in the world, where a pathological response to grief and object loss, distances a person from the world over time. Oskar’s capacity to create, explore, play, and laugh, and to engage with life through his body, contrasts with his grandfather’s attempts to preserve the past, allowing Oskar more space and potentiality in the present, and an anchored sense of place to work through his grief.

The representation of grief in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* is illuminated through metaphors of embodiment, space and intercorporeality. Though he represents grief through the written word, Foer self-reflexively critiques the inexpressibility of loss through language.

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118 The portrayal of Oskar reversing time, signals his ability to assemble and disassemble narrative, through choice and creative design. Through this process, Oskar employs what Peter Dahlgren describes as the storytelling mode, drawing on “the narratological configurations that provide coherence via enplotment” (14), that allows him to make sense of the world, and to perceive himself in relation to it.
He centres on forms of experiential communication, including embodied movements and inter-relationships between people, to return the work of mourning to embodied and shared spaces. His emphasis on this recalls Merleau-Ponty’s premise: that “the world is not what I think, but what I live through” (*Phenomenology of Perception* xviii). It is in the moments of escape from mental attachments, and projected interpretations of self and Other, that new spaces emerge for the continuation of life beyond what has caused grief to begin with: a perceived separation from love.
Chapter Seven: Orpheus Lost

Not until we are lost do we begin to understand ourselves—Henry David Thoreau

In Topologies of Trauma, Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger notes that the “affected events of the Other and of the world are unknowingly inscribed in me, and mine are inscribed in others” in an exchange that “creates and then transforms” (262). This description of the shared impact of political grief, particularly in relation to grief and the body, is explored in this final chapter. Written in 2007, Janette Turner-Hospital’s Orpheus Lost re-envisions the Greek myth of Orpheus to respond to the political milieu of post-9/11 terror, exploring the relationship between private grief, and socially sanctioned discourses that create and perpetuate separation from the Other. The body, as the site of the intertwining between self and other in the world, reveals an ethical politics that Turner-Hospital engages with, one that interlaces with Apollonian and Dionysian elements of tragedy. Through revising the myth of Orpheus, the novel represents these two elements to propose a link between inter-locking polarities in relation both to grief and cyclical renewal. Insinuated in the epigraphs on the first page, the novel “crosses the boundaries … between truth and illusion, reality and imagination,” presenting what “is simultaneously revealed and concealed.”

In the context of postmodern mourning and through a pastiche of rich intertextual references that portray a multifaceted relationship between mind and body, Orpheus Lost reveals and interrogates the socio-political constructions of self and Other in a post-9/11 world.

Set predominantly in post-9/11 Boston, Orpheus Lost interlaces the perspectives of three characters whose lives and experiences of grief are inextricably entangled. The novel switches between these three perspectives as the story progresses, allowing first-person narration of their thoughts, dreams and interactions. The plotline centres on Leela-May Moore, who is a Graduate Student studying the mathematics of music and from the American South. She meets and falls in love with Mishka Bartok, who is of Hungarian and Muslim descent and born in Australia, a fellow post-graduate student of Music. The third protagonist, Cobb Slaughter, is a childhood friend of Leela, who works in counter-terrorist government surveillance and holds allegiance to conservative political values, such as the Southern Confederacy. The lives of these characters interlace, as Cobb is operating a military investigation into terrorist attacks that Mishka is presumed to have a link to. Consequently, in

119 These epigraphs from Joseph Campbell and Theodor Adorno, signal Turner-Hospital’s blurring of seemingly divergent polarities, including mind and body.
a quest to discover his father, a Lebanese Muslim aligned with extremist politics, Mishka is apprehended and tortured by a counter-terrorist unit that Cobb is affiliated with, leaving Leela in a state of anxious grief. The intertwining narratives of the three, becomes the basis of Turner-Hospital’s representation of private loss and the socio-political world.

As Barbara Hoffert suggests in her discussion of *Orpheus Lost*, Turner-Hospital did not intend to write a political novel, but rather to focus on the “personal, emotional response of ordinary people caught up in the convulsions of history” (34). Yet, through doing so, she illustrates the ways in which collective identities impact upon a personal connection to experiences of loss. In a similar way to *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, *Orpheus Lost* centres on collective melancholia through the inter-generational narratives of the protagonists. The characters repeat narrative patterns of the past that are anchored in fear, conflict and control, unaware of the concealed silences and unresolved grief that have informed their belief systems. In her discussion of the mythic origins of the novel, Patricia Goldblatt similarly concurs that the characters are not agents, but rather “pawns in their environments of political and economic unrest” (37). Turner-Hospital portrays relentless patterns of collective melancholia that are manifest in loops of repetitive dogma and repudiation and embedded in media and familial patterns. These ideological patterns also depicted as being central to political discourses that end up causing more violence—such as the horrific counter-terrorist operations that the novel centres on. In portraying collective melancholia, the novel draws upon the motif of falling that features in the other post-9/11 novels. In *Orpheus Lost*, falling is depicted as a fall from egoic self-containment, into the abyss of grief’s liminality.

*Orpheus Lost* has not been the focus of any considerable critical engagement, though I seek to highlight its relevance as a contemporary novel that explores some significant tropes around private and political grief in the post-911 era. Particularly, as Michael Richardson points out in his recent discussion of the novel, Turner-Hospital highlights the barbaric consequences of the “War on Terror,” that other post-9/11 novels fail to draw attention to.

Responding to her use of the mode of the thriller to represent an age of terrorism, Peter

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120 Turner-Hospital’s use of myth has been of primary interest to critics (see Goldblatt; Hoffert; Richardson). In *Multicultural Review*, Goldblatt describes how Turner-Hospital draws on mythic tropes that “ground self and societal behaviour,” to “deconstruct cultures entrenched in stereotypical views” (37-38). Hoffert describes her use of the myth of Orpheus as a “feminist inversion” (34). This chapter will address how Turner-Hospital draws on mythology to illustrate tensions between individual and political boundaries—particularly through a subversion of the boundaries of the body.
Craven praises Turner-Hospital’s “allegorical representation of a world we recognize” (358). Craven notes the “moral gravity” within the novel, as well as the indication of “the hope that shines in darkness … some possibility of a mercy beyond all horror” (360-61). Though not necessarily a novel based on consolatory mourning, *Orpheus Lost* signals the ways in which personal and collective wounding might be resolved ethically through reclaiming corporeal agency. It offers possibilities of alterity and interconnection, an opening to the Other that allows an incorporation of grief. Turner-Hospital depicts how new awareness can be created through recognising inherent biases within one’s belief systems, noticing that have instigated and perpetuated separation and dissociation from feelings and embodiment. *Orpheus Lost* encompasses many of the representations of melancholic mourning that I have examined across the other fiction, including references to pastoral idealism, gothic descent, gender oppression, media influence and inter-generational melancholia. This chapter will explore this spectrum of melancholic mourning and how these themes of grief, illuminated through body metaphors, inter-relate, to reveal a relationship between private and political mourning.

Discussion, in this chapter, will focus on the way in which Turner-Hospital portrays how dichotomous socio-political contexts and polarised belief systems can violently impact the body and repress grief, and how patterns of grief are depicted as arising from encountering the Other, that ruptures a sense of self. I will highlight the trope of strange loops of mental repetition that are depicted as perpetuating inter-generational patterns; Turner-Hospital’s portrayal of the orphic sparagmos as a metaphor of melancholic political wounding; and how a recognition of intercorporeality through a mind-body connection is depicted in relation to recognising and integrating grief and the Other in order to birth a new cycle. Lastly, I will discuss the way Turner-Hospital’s use of the body metaphor, and the myth of Orpheus, interrogate the underlying origins of grief and how this relates to its representation in artistic form.

**Section 1.1 The Myth of Orpheus**

Before I deconstruct Turner-Hospital’s postmodern re-imagining of the myth of Orpheus, I will retell the original myth in a way that highlights the key aspects that *Orpheus Lost* draws on—including the agonising challenge of grief in the psyche and body and the metaphorical shattering and splitting of worlds that it enacts. In the myth, Orpheus loses his lover,

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121 For comprehensive study of the myth of Orpheus, and how cultural responses have changed over time, see *Orpheus: The Metamorphosis of a Myth Studies in the Orpheus Myth from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, by John Warden.
Eurydice, to a poisonous snakebite. Orpheus proceeds to make an agreement with the God of the Underworld, Hades, to express his grief creatively through music, so that he can retrieve his lost lover back into the material world. Hades was said to be so moved by his poetic lament, that Orpheus was given permission to leave the Underworld with Eurydice, his one condition being to not look back until he returns to the world.

The myth of Orpheus highlights a resistance to loss, manifest in an inability to acknowledge, let go, and mourn loss completely. To resolve loss is to accept the paradox of a separation that is created within the psyche that causes loss to be stored unconsciously, creating a fracture between materiality and the unconscious. When Orpheus looks back for Eurydice, he polarises from her, and so she vanishes forever from his world. Losing his love, Orpheus becomes a melancholic poet of interminable mourning, unable to resolve his inner polarities. In tragic finality, he is symbolically torn apart by the maenads, female followers of Dionysus. His body is ripped to pieces and castrated, in the Dionysian rite of sparagmos,122 as his head floats down the river, signifying his separation from understanding his loss. Orpheus cannot bridge his loss from the symbolic unconscious, to the material realm. He remains melancholic—he is unable to relinquish what is lost through grieving it, or to allow his loss to be incorporated in the psyche and material world.

*Orpheus Lost* draws on these themes of an interminable mourning and a splitting of the psyche and body, to highlight a fractured political system and collective melancholia that excludes alterity and mourning in the aftermath of 9/11. In the discussion that follows, I will examine how the myth of Orpheus draws out key tropes of collective melancholia, as well as the possibilities for consolation embedded in Turner-Hospital’s novel.

**Section 1.2 Orpheus is Lost**

Much like the ancestral backgrounds of the characters, *Orpheus Lost* crosses diverse landscapes and multiple eras in history, traversing numerous experiences of personal grief and inter-generational cycles of loss that remain unresolved. The novel depicts a strangely familiar postmodern dystopia in Boston, a city overrun by a “national epidemic” of terrorist attacks that have created “a low-level hum of anxiety that was more or less constant” (93). In a similar vein to Don DeLillo’s depiction in *Falling Man* of an image culture that appropriates collective narratives around loss, Turner-Hospital’s portrayal of a postmodern

122 Sparagmos refers to the Ancient Greek word sparasso, entailing: to “tear, rend, pull to pieces” (Lincoln 186).
culture also engages with the ways in which media narrativisation of events perpetuate fear and dissociation. In *Orpheus Lost*, knowledge is “stored in the body,” while “billboard thoughts” perpetuate “inside the skulls of every person,” dominating the mind in a hypnotising manner (153, 48). Turner-Hospital links this collective milieu of fear and collective conditioning to a disconnection from the Other, illustrating how dichotomous knowledge enacts separation, favouring one ideology while repressing the other. Fear of the Other is thematised as being implicit within this social conditioning that disorientates and controls like an oppressive “enveloping fog” (38).

In a comparative way to *Falling Man*, which connected corporeal dissociation with violence through both the protagonist, Keith and the suicide bomber, Hammad, *Orpheus Lost* interrogates collective narratives from both sides of national conflicts that exclude the Other and thus perpetuate conflict. The novel portrays the hypocrisy of the more concealed operations of counter-terrorism that are aimed at national safety, yet similarly commit abhorrent and inhumane acts to survey and investigate the other side. In the novel, everyone is “fighting their own war” (148). Turner-Hospital portrays a connection between the self-containment of collective politics, and a melancholic distancing from grief and the Other that I will expand upon through my analysis. Turner-Hospital, in this case, critiques the “War on Terror,” through focusing on the terror inherent in ‘counter-terrorism,’ particularly through the scene in which Mishka is held captive and brutally harmed.

The novel also signals a theme of loss of personal space that Judith Butler describes in *Precarious Life*. Butler writes of this aspect of socio-political life, that the post-9/11 world has created “a heightened nationalist discourse, extended surveillance mechanisms, suspended constitutional rights, and developed forms of explicit and implicit censorship” (*Precarious Life* xi). Through focusing on the intrusive surveillance of counter-terrorism, and its undercover operations, as well the invasion of private information and concealed video cameras, Turner-Hospital draws on this theme to illustrate a postmodern dystopia of political terror from within. The impact of these political discourses upon the body is also emphasised as, due to counter-terrorist actions, bodies are unidentifiable, mislabelled and lost (Turner-Hospital 287). *Orpheus Lost* signals a fundamental disconnection from embodiment at the collective level, as bodies are “ghosted”—bureaucratically eliminated, with “no paper trail” (241).
The issue of ghosting detainees during counter-terrorist operations in the novel, is analogous to a melancholic repression of the Other on a political level. This is an ethical issue that comes to haunt Cobb, who is told by a subordinate that ghosting “does not absolve us of responsibility. It only means that our abdication of responsibility is not on record” (226). The trope of the ghost, in a similar way to the previous novels examined, draws out an absent presence of subjectivity—in this case, of the Other. For Cobb, an unconscious disturbance, and the invisible presence of the ghosted Other, continually reappears throughout the novel until he recognises the hidden ghosts of his own past and inter-generational history, recognising the Other within himself. While Cobb tries, initially, to remain personally and politically self-contained, he sees, in the look of the Other, a challenge that “haunted and goaded” him (224). Through the motif of politically ghosted bodies, Turner-Hospital also signals the theme of historical and political bias, when it comes to responding to the Other and narrating history, and how it can conceal acts of violence. In *Orpheus Lost*, political violence manifests in torn limbs and severed heads (253), a metaphor of this dissociation from alterity and corporeality through dichotomous discourses. The allusion to beheadings during underground operations, as well as Mishka’s violent torture later in the novel by counter-terrorist forces, signals intertextually the myth of Orpheus and the fatal sparagmos that results from his unresolved grief.

Turner-Hospital’s portrayal of dichotomous knowledge and power is epitomised in Cobb, who embodies the effects of hyper-rational social conditioning and self-control. These ideals are honed into him by Southern Confederate ideologies, counter-terrorist operations, and by his father. His character reflects the underlying conflict and total repression of the Other, that influences the political sphere that Turner-Hospital portrays. For Cobb, everything is black and white: “there were only two outcomes: switch-flow or surrender” (64). What he calls “switch-flow,” pertains to the notional transference of power from one person to another, which is never shared. The origin of Cobb’s dualistic thinking is connected to his traditional Southern upbringing and his conservative allegiance to the Confederate States. This reference to the corporeal abuse of power, refers to the regressive structures of Southern

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123 The beheadings alluded to in *Orpheus Lost*, signal the acts of terrorist beheadings in Iraq that occurred after 9/11 that were used as a part of the propaganda towards justifying the “War on Terror” (see Jones for a discussion of this political tactic in *Terrorist Beheadings*). In Turner-Hospital’s novel, violent acts of terror occur on both sides; her focus on the similarly horrific actions perpetrated by counter-terrorism, challenges American political discourses.

124 Switch-flow is seen by Cobb as a “power surge in every nerve” that soaks one person in the other’s power, causing them anxiety (72, 59).
America, drawing out Turner-Hospital’s critique of conservative entrenchment within resistant identities. Cobb is disinclined to surrender old power relationships and unconsciously replays inter-generational patterns of power abuse that engender separation in his actions, such as seeking out sexual relationships with African-American women that involve violent role play scenarios. It is through his desire for power imbalances within relationships, reflected in his oppressive sexual desires, that Turner-Hospital portrays Cobb’s character as entrenched in a firm resistance to alterity.

While Cobb perceives his counter-terrorist operations as serving the purpose of protecting social order, morality and safety, the novel depicts the anti-terrorist discourses as disingenuously entrenched in a desire to control the Other. Through revealing these concealed ulterior motives for violent and invasive actions, Tuner-Hospital critiques the unexamined political discourses on both sides. This, once again evokes Butler’s challenge, that I discussed in Chapter One, to the American resilience model, that was based on a combatant and reactionary response to the Other in the aftermath of 9/11, rather than assessing what is lost. These actions of resistance, as Orpheus Lost highlights, render the issue of alterity unconscious and polarise the Other so that one’s own, comparable, behaviour is concealed. As Jean Baudrillard writes, and Turner-Hospital critiques through depicting counter-terrorism and evoking a milieu of cultural anxiety, terrorism has created a culture of fear, causing the West “to terrorize itself [with] the perpetual deterrence of an invisible enemy” (The Spirit of Terrorism 81-82).

Cobb’s power derives from “observing loss of control in others” (Turner-Hospital 230). His surveillance operations allow him to commit violent acts and to enforce power over others, rather than critiquing and observing his own actions. Through doing so, he unconsciously recreates the oppression he has unconsciously inherited through his father’s hidden suffering and hypocrisy as a war veteran, which is only revealed to him later. Cobb desires others to

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125 Cobb’s fetishist desires include putting nooses around the women’s heads, replaying unresolved slavery tropes in his lineage, for which he appears to have unconscious guilt. Cobb’s oppressive mentality is further highlighted in the novel through his African-American subordinate, Benedict, who reveals the truth of the violent counter-terrorist operations his organisation enacts, showing him photographic evidence, which he initially ignores. His unconscious guilt is later revealed as he reflects on his relationship to Benedict, imagining that it is tainted by the “dirty fact” of his family’s history of slave ownership (225).

126 It is notable that Cobb initially feels power only in the conscious world, where he can assert it, where in his unconscious, and in nightmares, he experiences a contrasting impotence and paralysis (62). This is comparable to the character of Sievright in Daybreak, and Keith in Falling Man, both of whom cannot reconcile polarities within themselves. This is alluded to in the haunting of their unconscious through nightmares, in which they experience the vulnerabilities that they try to repress in their waking lives. It is this imbalance between the conscious and the unconscious, that encapsulates and perpetuates a resistant, melancholic approach to loss.
feel the power of his ideological perspective and ordains that punishment for non-compliance must be inflicted upon the bodies of those who transgress. He wants those who he punishes to feel “the wet suck of fear” (50, 40)—a desire that indicates his own terrorist motives. Embedded in the socio-political discourses that he has internalised, lies the notion that “survival lay in forcing,” in seizing and shackling (34, 132) and oppressing others through using government surveillance to maintain social order. When interviewing Leela, his thoughts revolve around a sadistic desire to manipulate her physically, to twist her, to make her skin smoulder and blister (77). Cobb desires to penetrate the body of the Other with an invasive fear that “settled wetly in the very bones and turned them soft” (38), a yearning that signals his disconnection from his own inner body and feelings of vulnerability. Rather than relating to his experience internally, from his own perspective, Cobb enjoys “being outside and looking in” (50), surveying the body of the Other through one-way glass. Through assigning powerlessness to those who feel, suffer, and fear the unknown, Cobb represses this aspect of himself, detaching from his own sensory connection and his private experiences of grief. He identifies only with an idea of power that he has inherited, that perpetuates collective cycles of domination and resists to alterity.

A key theme in Orpheus Lost is the polarity between Cobb and Leela, a theme through which Turner-Hospital portrays the inter-connection that is necessary to resolve mourning. The extremes of Cobb’s character toward rationalist objectification, are contrasted with Leela, who is more in touch with her senses and inner body experience. The plotline intentionally weaves these divergent characters together, as a part of the central theme of grief and alterity. Once companions, and even lovers, “their paths in life had greatly diverged” (42) by the time they meet again, in a scene where Cobb captures and interrogates Leela as a part of a counter-terrorist operation. Where Cobb engages with dichotomous ideologies that exert power and control over the body, Leela shows that there is inherent power in reticence. Leela also desires to merge apparent dualities, which is the focus of her doctoral thesis on the relationship between mathematics and music. Leela is portrayed as being led by sensory stimulus as “sounds, scents, shapes all pulled at her” (40); she is inclined toward an intuitive sensuality and sexuality, that signals her desire to merge with the world around her. These aspects of her character reflect her innate desire towards union, juxtaposed with Cobb’s separatism and domination. Leela yearns for intercorporeal connection with others, reflected in her erotic unions with her lover, Mishka, during which they intertwine, “devouring each other” (14). The images of her erotic entanglement with her lover, in a similar way to Don
DeLillo’s depictions of sexual merging in *Falling Man*, signal the intercorporeal dimension that she surrenders to. This is a diametrical contrast to Cobb, whose sexual experiences are based on oppressive domination, separation and corporeal violence.

Cobb and Leela’s divergence, in *Orpheus Lost*, signals an interrogation of mutually exclusive binaries, which is further accentuated by their names. The neurologist, Stanley Cobb, who refuted the notion of mind-body duality “because biologically no such dichotomy can be made” (*Borderlands of Psychiatry* 19-21), seems ironically associated with Cobb who, at first, denies his body. Leela’s name also signifies non-duality, resonant of the Hindu word “lila” that relates to the divine play of masculine and feminine, consciousness and intentionality.\(^\text{127}\)

Turner-Hospital intentionally blurs, and interposes, boundaries of apparent opposites, including masculine and feminine, mind and body, and the elements of tragedy, to signify a need for polarities to inter-connect in order to integrate wounding. As Goldblatt suggests in her discussion of identity in the novel, “[t]he roles of seeker and sought are conflated in *Orpheus Lost,*” with the characters “moving through internal and external infernos in search of identity pieces to complete knowledge of themselves” (37). Even while conflicting with each other, Cobb and Leela share the same wounds of personal grief, having lost their mothers as children and, throughout the novel, their stories interlace to reveal their inter-dependence on each other to resolve their grief.

Through the trope of inter-locking polarities, Turner-Hospital draws upon the elements of Greek tragedy to signify a suppression of the Dionysian element, which creates discordance. In *Orpheus Lost*, it is through an inter-lacing of these polarities of tragedy—of an Apollonian self-definition and knowing of self, and a Dionysian self-dissolution and surrender of boundaries—that loss is navigated. The polarity created by failing to accept the Other in oneself creates a melancholic stagnancy. This is reflected in the tragedy of Orpheus, who is ripped apart in a Dionysian sparagmos. In resisting grief and rendering it unconscious, Orpheus is engulfed by the Other, unable to integrate loss and retrieve his subjectivity. The tension between the Apollonian and Dionysian elements of tragedy portrayed in *Orpheus Lost*, reveal a conflict between the insoluble and uncontrollable excess of grief that rips

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\(^\text{127}\) This definition comes from Joseph Campbell in *Philosophies of India* and best reflects the blurring of polarities reflected in *Orpheus Lost*.  

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apart static constructions, and the desire to know and maintain control that can create repression.\textsuperscript{128}

In his discussion of the myth of Orpheus and its relationship to literature, Ihab Hassan describes Orpheus as “the victim of an inexorable clash between the Dionysian principle, represented by the frenzied Maenads, and the Apollonian ideal” (464)—a tension that is central to \textit{Orpheus Lost}. Friedrich Nietzsche describes this dialectic between the Apollonian and Dionysian elements in \textit{The Birth of Tragedy}, as pertaining to “two creative tendencies developed alongside one another, usually in fierce opposition, each by its taunts forcing the other to more energetic production” (1). Nietzsche states how the polarities of tragedy are interdependent—the realisation of Apollonian consciousness is only fully possible upon accepting a Dionysian dissolution of self, as self and Other are intertwined. This dialectic is resonant of the tensions between Leela and Cobb, that result in “electrical storms” and an “excess of energy” (Turner-Hospital 114, 25) that is polarising, yet mutually transformative. This is a paradox that Turner-Hospital draws upon to illustrate a politics of alterity that is central to mourning.\textsuperscript{129} As the Dionysian polarity is connected to both transformation and rebirth, the suppression of this creative tension of tragedy, depicted within the novel, signals a stagnancy in relation to integrating grief.

Out of all the characters, Cobb relates with the most objective detachment to past losses, a repression that distances him from himself and others. The novel builds up a tension between maintaining order and control, and the repressed void of the “abyss” (178) of unconscious suffering. In a similar way to Jonathan Safran-Foer and William Faulkner, Turner-Hospital also draws on the polarity between what is locked, contained, and concealed in closed rooms and underground lairs; and an opposing abject force of excess, and the uncontrollable, that

\textsuperscript{128} In the play \textit{The Agamemnon}, line 1074, Apollo “loves not grief nor lendeth ear to it” (qtd. in Hugh). The paradox of the Apollonian aspiration to ‘know thyself,’ is that this can only occur through consciousness of the Other, including the Other within oneself. Apollonian art, according to Nietzsche, reflects the drive to create fixed representations, particularly exemplified by architecture and sculpture, of idealised concepts. The Dionysian aesthetic, on the other hand, works to rip apart the false comforts of the static, constructed Apollonian art by revealing the world as “infinitely and irreducibly complex, excessive and tragic” (\textit{The Birth of Tragedy} 50). Together, these elements connote a building-up and tearing down, that relates to encounters with grief in the world, as well as to cycles of creation.

\textsuperscript{129} Of interest to this thesis, Lopez-Pedraza describes a repression of Dionysian consciousness in contemporary culture in his book, \textit{Dionysus in Exile}. He contends that, in contemporary social life, “anything to do with emotions is put aside,” a repression that renders unconscious the associated psychic conflicts (30-31). Lopez-Pedraza argues that this repression necessitates an “epiphany in the body,” declaring that the image of horror of the sparagmos connects to the hidden shadow in our nature, providing insight into what is concealed (34, 87). \textit{Orpheus Lost}, and the other novels that have been discussed in this thesis, seem to also insinuate that this cultural repression of emotions is a facet of contemporary life, revealing what is hidden through corporeal imagery.
permeates boundaries to expose what has been repressed. Through imagery of memories that flood the mind, rushing blood and overwhelming emotions that threaten identities and rigid social constructs, *Orpheus Lost* reveals the private and collective unconscious where grief is hidden. Cobb reflects that “[h]e had locked his mother’s death inside a box and buried it” (334), to construct a powerful and invulnerable identity. On a political level, the pain caused by his actions to uphold security, inflicted upon the Other, is also hidden—obscured within underground operations and caves. The concealment of grief is experienced by most of the characters, whose feelings and emotions are unmanageable, and the space of not knowing is “unbearable” (199, 338). Grief opens up the notion of something wholly and indefinably Other, an alterity that the dichotomous mind cannot assimilate. The uncontainable excess of grief that the characters perceive, is described as a “deep well” that threatens to swallow a person whole (188-89), alluding to a Dionysian engulfment that shatters identity. In *Orpheus Lost*, the Other in the world is both the cause of suffering, and the key to resolving that suffering, through rupturing self-contained identities that repeat the past and disrupt ethical agency in the present. This theme of encountering the Other, will be examined in the forthcoming sections in relation to Turner-Hospital’s representation of alterity and grief.

**Section 2.1 “His Falling Would Go On and On Without End”: Orphic Encounters with Alterity**

*Orpheus Lost* illustrates how intercorporeal relationships both open and close one’s ontological wounding through focusing on the way in which losses originate from encountering the Other, a meeting that ruptures one’s sense of reality. This encounter is portrayed through the motif of falling, which signals how the Other ruptures a singular perspective of reality to reveal new ways of perceiving and identifying with the world. The contrast between Mishka’s tranquil childhood, and his encounter with a childhood friend who interrogates his sense of self, will be examined in this section. I intend to draw out Turner-Hospital’s portrayal of falling as a liminal space of grief that arises between frameworks of personal and socio-political identity, and the unknown.

Turner-Hospital draws upon the pastoral mode to portray Mishka’s childhood growing up in the Daintree region of Australia. Reflecting upon his idyllic early years of life in the tropics, where his family lived remotely from the outside world, Mishka describes the suspended “little cocoon” in which they peacefully existed—a pastoral solipsism that seemed to exist “out of ordinary time and ordinary space” (162-63). The pastoral landscape he remembers is
a paradise, but also an imaginary illusion. He recalls experiencing a dissolution of boundaries between himself and nature, a belief that “he could fly … he could join the lorikeets in the quandong trees” (171), signalling a freedom outside of the boundaries of self-awareness. His illusive state of being, in the Daintree, preludes identity in the world—a “womb-like contentment” and “state of perfect peace,” outside of the external world (163, 157). The novel draws on descriptions of natural landscapes to depict how Mishka’s family, who carry a heavy history of melancholic grief, cannot integrate with the external world; they retreat, instead, to solitude in nature. The family are like an ecosystem that fails to “transplant,” just as Mishka’s sense of belonging in the world does “not translate into words” (185, 163), extending only to the parameters of the family, rather than the outer world.

Where Cobb’s character has clear social identifications and boundaries, reinforced by his father, Mishka is portrayed in polar opposition to this, as he does not know his father—his father constitutes an “X in [his] identity” (154). Mishka’s experience of womb-like contentment in his childhood, is sharply contrasted with awakening to the unknown loss of his father. This mirrors, intertextually, the Greek myth of Dionysus when he is torn from his mother’s womb by his father—it is through this process that Dionysus emerges into the conscious world and the experience of suffering. Mishka’s entry into the social world destabilises his sense of belonging, separating him through a new identity of otherness. He is “different and peculiar” in comparison to others and realises that he cannot be normal (163, 31). In an act of further differentiation, a schoolmate, Tony, reveals his family’s repressed loss when he visits his home and opens the door to the mysterious room where Mishka has been told that his deceased Uncle Otto continues to exist and play music. Tony opens the door to reveal an empty room, exclaiming: “[t]here’s no one in here … [t]here’s nothing in here” (177). This experience, which reveals the truth of his family’s melancholic disavowal of grief, leaves Mishka “falling” from that day onwards (179).

Turner-Hospital reveals, through this motif of the liminal space of falling, a space beyond ruptured self-contained belief systems that is instigated by an awareness of the Other. Mishka feels the “sensation of falling” as akin to “falling into the river … to where a vast underground cavern opened up … he felt that his falling would go on and on without end” (179). This textual contrast between the self-enclosed container of the cavern that is ruptured and the endless space of falling, signals a rupture of familiar identifications by the unknown

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130 Mishka’s uncle’s name signals, intertextually, the Greek mythologist, Walter Otto, who focused a lot of his research on the Greek God, Dionysus.
that is uncontained. Through the motif of falling, Turner-Hospital illustrates how silences and melancholic losses continue inter-generationally, and how an encounter with the Other inevitably ruptures these preserved aspects of the past. Like Thomas’s character in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, who needs to continue to push away his wife in order to maintain self-contained spaces and preserve the past, Mishka’s mother similarly evades grief through clinging to previous identifications, a melancholic pattern that Mishka learns from her. She tells Mishka: “I’m afraid to remember … to fall back down that well” (189). She avoids the liminal space of falling that grief opens up, so that lost loved ones, like Otto, are preserved in closed spaces, a melancholic disavowal that Mishka inherits through silences.

The sense of falling, specifically for Mishka’s character, signals a transitional space between the illusory paradise of his childhood and his encounter with alterity. Turner-Hospital evokes similar signifiers of falling, to those used in *Falling Man*. Like the falling man of Keith’s melancholic character, who is suspended between worlds, uncertain of what is real, Mishka also experiences a “limbo of not-here and not-now” (Turner-Hospital 182). In this liminal space of the unknown, he feels that “it might never be possible for him to be certain of what was real and what was not” (182). This motif of falling through encountering the Other, is also sensed by Leela when she experiences a depth of grief that she cannot feel or express: her “sorrow on one side and the surrendering of hope on the other … the smallest movement would take her over the lip of the abyss” (178). It is fear of moving forward that keeps many of the characters in melancholic limbo, both personally and politically, as they remain attached to the familiar and afraid to surrender it to the unknown, which threatens a loss of identity and self-dissolution. The characters avoid the silences and absences of their lost loved ones and unresolved grief through forgetting, however, this comes to haunt them as they continue the same cycles. Unable to integrate and incorporate what is perceived as Other, as they remain trapped in melancholic loops of repetitive patterns.

The motif explored in *Orpheus Lost*, of the disruption of a pastoral paradise ruptured by the knowledge of loss and separation, reflects and subverts tropes of the Theological Fall. This particularly accentuates the interruption of a similar paradise, Eden, by the advent of knowledge, evoking the Biblical Fall that created separation, an awareness of shame and, importantly, a concealment of the body. In becoming conscious of the “closed rooms” that, metaphorically and figuratively, contain what he has lost—including his Uncle Otto and his

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131 Encountering the Other and falling, is also associated with falling in love, another intercorporeal rupturing of self. Leela feels, when meeting Mishka for the first time, a “sensation of falling forward, of free-falling” (8).
father, who his mother tries to forget—Mishka struggles to remain in his “private cocoon” (13). The emphasis on solitude and the cocoon of his melancholic losses in the novel, compares to Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the cave that signifies an internalised negation of the world (Notes des Cours 225). This negation through self-containment is the converse of Merleau-Ponty’s intercorporeality and intentionality, that I will draw upon to discuss the possibilities the novel signals for becoming conscious of the world and incorporating grief. Beyond the illusion of self-containment, one’s corporeality is embedded in the world, involving a continuous dialogue with others that is mutually transformative.

Section 2.2 Collective Melancholia and Strange Loops of Disavowed Grief

Orpheus Lost depicts how unresolved inter-generational losses create self-contained identities that marginalise grief and perpetuate melancholic attachment, creating a corporeal dissociation from the world. For Turner-Hospital, a resistance to the Other is strongly interlinked with a resistance to grief, and creates unresolved cycles of conflict and repressed losses. Like Faulkner, who critiques repetitive cycles that inhibit a capacity to understand and incorporate loss, Turner-Hospital illustrates how self-enclosed belief systems engender a “strange loop” with Orpheus, the archetype of pathological grief, perpetuating a separation.

Orpheus Lost portrays, through the protagonists, a socially internalised expectation to control the body and emotions, that is reflective of social and familial conditioning. In a similar way to Vance Palmer and DeLillo, Turner-Hospital illustrates a relationship between a dissociation from one’s body in shame and a dissociation from the embodied Other. This is epitomised in the novel when Cobb recalls his father disciplining him for having a fever as a child and telling him that he “needs more self control” (39). Consequently, Cobb represses his vulnerability and feels ashamed when he is emotional, fearing that he would disgrace himself by crying (49, 334). This connection between grief and shame causes the characters to hide their emotions, even though these are linked to an affective engagement with the world. In a similar way to Faulkner, Turner-Hospital illustrates the inability of her characters to open to the abject otherness of grief. Leela, for instance, feels a “crying jag” that is shameful, as she struggles to breathe, stifling her pain (109). Mishka feels the wound of his absent father so inter-linked with shame and fear that he is unable to express it, noticing that “it has something to do with panic and something to do with shame” (218). His shame is a “phobic dread,” contributing to his desire to want to conceal himself from others, feeling “perhaps quite mad” (153, 182), for his social otherness. Mishka’s shaming emotionality and
madness, both of which indicate the Dionysian polarity, are internalised as he feels a socially-engendered obligation to keep his distance from others—“to be crazy as discreetly and privately as possible” (182).

*Orpheus Lost* draws upon the inherited grief of the protagonists to illustrate how loss can be repressed and unvoiced inter-generationally, creating cycles of suffering. For Mishka’s family, there is a pattern of avoiding loss, where their home in the Daintree was “where they’(d) escaped to” (185). Mishka has been influenced by a history of melancholic mourning and unvoiced grief: his family’s preservation of his Uncle Otto; the silences around his father’s absence; and his grandfather’s experience in a Hungarian concentration camp that “he never spoke about,” and then “simply un-made the past” (Turner-Hospital 180). His family’s relationship to loss is melancholic—his mother, afraid to remember, tells Mishka: “(w)e preserve our lost ones however we can, Mishka. We preserve them as we knew them” (204), signalling her negation of mourning. Like Thomas’s disappearance, in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, into the nothing spaces of his present life that he avoids, Mishka’s family also “live more and more in the past” (Turner-Hospital 290). Inheriting these voids and patterns, Mishka is left without language for his “unidentified pain,” other than his private experiences with music (183). His grief signals “something for which he had no word, something that frightened him”—just like his parents who “didn’t know how to manage that much feeling” (178, 190). Overwhelmed by the liminal space of the unknown that he inhabits, like Orpheus, he plunges into melancholic disavowal and escapism within the music he creates—he “wanted to be alone inside [his] music” (31), a desire to resist alterity through solipsism.

Turner-Hospital illustrates how approaches to grieving are engendered by social, political and familial conditioning, that impacts a person prior to their encounters with loss. Unresolved losses create an inter-generational loop, perpetuated by narrative gaps, including unacknowledged absences, decisions to “unmake the past” (287, 184), and concealed emotions. In similarly to Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying*, *Orpheus Lost* emphasises the way in which cycles can become stunted by unexamined, habitual discourses, that create repetition and perpetuate stagnancy. Mishka’s mother describes the unresolved mourning that he has inherited as the “sorrow gene”—a predisposition to melancholia that comes out in his music, that expresses an unconscious loss. Cobb’s father similarly realises he has “passed the poison on” (325). The poison to which he refers draws out the snake motif in the novel signalled earlier by the Fall. It signals the knowledge bases that unconsciously perpetuate conflict and
violence, due to unresolved grief. Cobb’s melancholic “addiction to the past,” and his allegiance to the “national identity and sanctions” (237, 239), prolongs the same patterns of his father and creates the same suffering. The inter-crossing motifs of the snake\textsuperscript{132} and inter-generational loops of melancholia, signal the way in which knowledge is cyclical and transferred through the body and mind, across generations.

In \textit{Orpheus Lost}, snake-like loops are recurrent around instances of poisonous ideologies and entrapment, signalling cycles of knowledge that promote separation. The fear-based media signals another form of collective melancholia, that reinforces a need to survive through “not allowing terrorists to win” (28). Turner-Hospital evokes repetitive media imagery, oppositional to alterity and insinuating fear, that “coiled and uncoiled itself” (28) like a snake. These hypnotising loops operate “like a cracked record” or a “stuck videotape” (302, 326), signalling how they fail to re-create—a subversion of the embodied fluidity of snakes, that regenerate their skin. The illusion of security created by knowledge bases, is aptly disrupted in the novel when Leela encounters a tower of fallen books in the office of her Supervisor, Berg, that overlap like dominos—snake-like, they slither forward in an avalanche of collapse (115).\textsuperscript{133} The snake is also a symbol of the Southern Confederate that Cobb maintains allegiance to, a symbol that is used to disseminate cycles of violence and to alienate the Other through separatist ideologies. In \textit{Orpheus Lost}, the physiological capacities of the snake and its inherent capacity to re-create is subverted. In particular, the associations between the snake and the symbolism of stagnant knowledge bases evoke this, as they have been employed culturally to entrench notions of separation—for example, the Confederate flag and the Biblical symbolism alluded to in Leela’s religious background. Conversely, Turner-Hospital employs a motif of inter-locking snakes to evoke intercorporeality and unity, which I will discuss later in this chapter.

The mathematic intertextuality in \textit{Orpheus Lost}, similarly draws out the serpentine cycles and their connection to the dichotomous belief systems that Turner-Hospital portrays. When

\textsuperscript{132} The motif of the snake insinuates the Theological snake that led Eve to the ‘Tree of Good and Evil.’ This symbolises the advent of duality, corporeal concealment and morality, as well as snake who bit Eurydice in the orphic myth, both of which are connected to a separation from the Other, and from the body. In the novels that have been discussed, including \textit{Orpheus Lost}, the key trope of falling through encountering loss and alterity, signals a rupture of private or socio-political frameworks of knowing and understanding. These frameworks, as the writers show, have caused separation, limitation and concealment of feeling, embodiment and connection. As such, the writers both draw on and subvert tropes related to the Theological Fall and orphic myth.

\textsuperscript{133} The name of the minor character, Berg, intertextually draws in the philosopher Henri Bergson, who had a view toward integrating memory, rather than repeating the past through allowing past experiences to inform present actions. Orphists, a group of artists, were also said to live by Bergsonian philosophy, which is based on continuity between the intellect and the outer world (see Bernstock 22-23).
contemplating her process of unresolved mourning, Leela recalls the mathematical principle of strange loops, proclaiming: “I’m in a strange underground loop with Orpheus” (303). This mathematic principle to which Leela refers, reveals the source of melancholic disavowal that Turner-Hospital highlights in relation to alterity. The mathematician Douglas Hofstadter describes a strange loop as “a paradoxical level-crossing feedback loop,” writing that people are “self-perceiving, self-inventing … miracles of self-reference” (*I am a Strange Loop* 102, 363). This mathematical notion is evoked, in the novel, to epitomise the mind-centred approach of the characters, who fail to connect outside of themselves, or acknowledge their own wounds, which is reflected in what they reject as Other.134 Hofstadter argues that the ego is constructed as a narrative fiction, created from symbolic data and an accumulation of stories from that data. This “narrative mystery” of math (Turner-Hospital 43) that Leela becomes fascinated in, is connected to a limitation in perceiving the Other135 when a person is entrapped in a socially-engendered construction of “I.”136

In *Orpheus Lost*, the Other interrogates the limitation of these self-referencing loops, that continue the same wounding. This is aptly signalled when Leela revises Cobb’s sketch of the Confederate snake, constructing a question mark with a drop of poison from the snake’s fangs (56). It is through being wounded by the Other, and wanting to know himself, that Mishka comes to query: ‘how will I live without knowing who I am?’ (163). He is conscious of a great bruise upon his being-in-the-world, signalling his absent father. As Merleau-Ponty elucidates: “the Other is a question mark opposite the solipsist sphere, it is the possibility of a divergence between the nothing that I am and being” (*The Visible and Invisible* 58). Mishka’s desire to know his otherness, enacts for him a descent into the underworld that replicates Orpheus sparagmos, signifying a loss of self. It is through the body that Turner-Hospital

134 Hofstadter’s book *Gödel, Escher, Bach* also examines a lot of these themes of knowledge bases that *Orpheus Lost* draws upon, including how formal rules allow systems to acquire meaning and coordination of elements to obtain a coherent whole. It is apparent that Turner-Hospital is drawing on holistic frameworks intertextually to emphasise her juxtaposition between ideas that create separation and continue cycles of grief and resistance. Hofstadter also places emphasis on the nervous system and the unique pattern of activity within it, which relates to Cobb’s later fascination with his nerves in relation to the body.  
135 This is the converse to melancholic characters who cannot assert identity; here, the over-assertion of one’s identity, particularly in relation to national politics, is problematic, an issue I discussed in Chapter One in relation to America’s resilience template following 9/11. 
136 It is also notable that other works of Hofstadter tie in with some of the themes of *Orpheus Lost*. His essay *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*, for example, critiqued the national pattern in American culture of suspicion of the Other, a trope that Turner-Hospital draws upon in her representation of the “national epidemic” (Turner-Hospital 61) of paranoia and terrorism, that is based on an inherent fear of the Other.
depicts both this corporeal fragmentation, and a capacity for agency, that allows the characters to retrieve and incorporate what has been lost.

Section 3.1 Grief’s Abyss: Collective Melancholia and the Orphic Sparagmos

In *Orpheus Lost*, much like the other fiction that has been discussed, concealed grief resurfaces as an experience of the senses and material world, and a reminder of being embodied in the world. The novel depicts this fragmentation, corporeally, through the character Mishka, who desires to know the hidden silences within his family, including his father. This results in his capture and torture in an underground lair—a metaphor for the collective unconscious and the political repression of the Other that Turner-Hospital thematises. The pivotal scene of Mishka’s sparagmos, reflects the political context that tears him apart, as he is linked to two races that are in conflict within his bloodline. The mythic intertextuality, and Mishka’s dissociation from his shattered body, draw out Turner-Hospital’s most crucial corporeal metaphor of orphic sparagmos. This signals a collision between self and Other, and self and world—a representation of collective melancholia that shatters the body.

Turner-Hospital depicts Mishka as a Dionysian artist. Just like Dionysus, he is linked to music and the body—the two merge as he accesses deep pain. For Mishka, music and the body are intertwined: his body is “an extension of his violin,” that “merged with the music and swayed”137 (307, 7). The walls of the studio where he retreats to play, contain and reverberate his melancholic sadness in a “haunting cocoon” (97). Mishka occupies a space of creativity, that reflects a sense of escapism from the outer world, wherein he over-identifies with his music, like Orpheus with his loss—“I am in my music,” he tells Leela (33). Avoiding the chaos of the outer world, that is immersed in the media’s narratives of terror, he retreats to darkened rooms, “cocooned between earphones,” and filling “every cranny of thought” with music (214), in a womb-like cocoon.138 Music is depicted, in *Orpheus Lost*, as having allowing the capacity to express loss, and to transcend language and ideological barriers, reaching others through the senses. As Mishka plays Gluck’s “Lament of Orpheus”

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137 Music, in this sense, encapsulates and voices what is unspeakable within the cultural context—grief. Mishka’s music evokes the sorrow that connects self and Other in the human condition, that “pass(es) from body to body like a low electrical charge” (6), as he plays his violin.

138 It is notable that each of the characters come from collective traditions that desire “pure” language, such as “pure” mathematics, religion and cultural traditions. When Mishka finds purity within music, it renders him separate from the outside world, in solipsist abstraction. This notion of purity, that excludes the Other, is destabilised by Turner-Hospital’s metaphors of intercorporeality and her depiction of purity as an idealistic abstraction.
in public, when he first encounters Leela, she feels his music from her enclosed space and language—her mathematical perspective—through her body, sensing it “graphing itself against her skin … her body calculating frequencies and intervals” (5). Though he can sense his experience of grief corporeally, and express it through music, Mishka feels an inability to communicate his pain into words, even though would bridge his loss with the external world. This is signified in his aching throat, where words are trapped (174). Through the focus upon music as a communicator of grief, and Mishka as a musician of asymbolic grief, who becomes trapped in a symbolic, and then a lived experience, of an underworld, Turner-Hospital draws on another key theme in connection to bridging loss in the material world: the struggle of the artist to birth the symbolic into the material, in order to create anew. In Orpheus Lost, grief, like creativity, requires a similar process of surrender to alterity—as it necessitates connecting to an unconscious loss and expressing it in a world where there are no words for pain.

For the characters in Orpheus Lost, as in the previous novels examined, repressed grief returns through the body, as the body aches to be acknowledged and remembered. Though mental identities dichotomise the worlds of self and Other, the body already communicates with the surrounding world. For Mishka, the pain of not having a father “presses against the levee of his skin with such urgent rapture that he feels it cannot be contained”—it a “river of feeling without a name” (165, 171). The pain Mishka feels about his unknown father is experienced bodily—as an ache in his chest and a small muffled explosion at the base of his spine, that travels in shock waves throughout his bone cage when he discovers his father’s name (177,190). At the thought of speaking to his lost father, his blood knocks against his temples, like a drum, reflected in his heartbeat: “thump thump” (214)—this onomatopoeia signals the sounds experienced through the lived body, just as the visceral experience is indicated as Mishka’s skin receives information from the world, “read[ing] barometric changes in the air” (214, 203). Mishka’s pressure in his rib cage, signalling his unresolved and uncommunicated grief, dissipates as he acknowledges and accepts his desire to find his father, a desire that “[h]e could not speak of” (155, 211). Yet, upon locating his father, he loses consciousness (205), signalling his inability to rectify, in his conscious experience, his divergent identities.139

139 Mishka’s childhood tendency to move with fluidity between worlds, a “rhythm of movement” (200) that felt natural for him, is compromised in the material and political world. In his social life, he learns that his two racial identities need to stay separate—“his two worlds were day and night” (202).
Mirroring his private corporeal torment, and because of his father’s Muslim lineage and political identity, and his searches for him in Beirut, Mishka is presumed, by Cobb’s counter-surveillance group, to be associated with terrorism.\textsuperscript{140} His ensuing capture, and imprisonment in an underground lair, results in an invasive interrogation and torture. This is delineated in the most violent corporeal imagery in the novel, symbolic of the ideological destruction of the body that is rooted in combatant political identities. The deeply metaphorical scene of Mishka’s torture, draws out the relationship between the suppressed body and the unconscious, indicating the collective melancholic mourning represented in \textit{Orpheus Lost}. Reflecting the inter-racial conflict, Mishka’s body, in being of both races, is torn to pieces, signifying the relationship between flesh, knowledge and unconscious grief, in the political sphere.

Turner-Hospital’s focus on the brutality of torture inherent in counter-terrorist operations destabilises political narratives, favouring the justification and necessity of extreme measures of defense. In doing so, she critiques, in a similar way to Kathryn Bigelow’s post-9/11 thriller film \textit{Zero Dark Thirty}, the violence of these facets of American resilience. In \textit{Orpheus Lost}, Mishka is tortured by the counter-terrorists in the hope of finding a “hidden knowledge” (252), insinuating that this is concealed within the body. In his prison cell, Mishka falls into the liminal spaces between reality and nightmare, as his body is violently tortured by political agents, mirroring Orpheus’ sparagmos. In the scenes that feature Mishka’s torture, Turner-Hospital engages with the elements of the thriller genre, and surreal imagery, much like Jess Walter’s Kafka-esque novel, \textit{The Zero}, that similarly inter-weaves and subverts the thriller mode, through anxiety-inducing suspense, coupled with dream-like hallucinations that distort the real with the surreal, rendering “a kind of fever dream” (Walter 101). Through blurring the grim realities of terror and suspense, with surreal and dream-like fragmentation, \textit{Orpheus Lost} portrays the concealed brutalities of the “War on Terror,” evoking, through scenes of torture, the liminal space of shock in response to terror. Mishka’s surreal nightmare is epitomised when he views his body as a stage costume that he can escape from, an effigy, feeling that he is wearing the “stage costume of his body” (246). Mishka’s pain, even to himself, is “obscure and unidentified” (183). This is best exemplified as he attempts to

\textsuperscript{140} Goldblatt argues that Turner-Hospital’s descriptions of these lairs insinuate, politically, “the underworlds of Guantanamo Bay and Abu Graib with her descriptions of dank smells of mold, twisting labyrinth paths, bodies crashing and falling” (37).
“identify one strand of the pain” and to “isolate and catalogue and name” (246) parts of his body objectively, hoping to leave it behind, rather than experience his physical suffering.

In *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry examines how the experience of torture emphasises a distinction between self and body, by obliterating the self through the overpowering experience of pain. She writes that the purpose of torture “is to split the human being into two, to make emphatic the ever present, … latent distinction between a self and a body, between a ‘me’ and ‘my body,’” the goal being to make “the body, emphatically and crushingly present by destroying it, and to make … the voice, absent by destroying it” as “one’s own body and voice now no longer belong to oneself” (48-49, 52; author’s emphasis).

This link between the body and suppressed voice and agency, relates to Turner-Hospital’s portrayal of Mishka’s even more pronounced loss of his voice, and his accentuated corporeal language during his captivity. When tortured, he experiences messages from his body that are “too fast to translate” (Turner-Hospital 254), signifying the overwhelming asymbolia of his experience, that creates a further distancing from his body. This is indicated in his desire to escape his body and leave it behind, as it has become an effigy, a symbol, rather than his own. Scarry emphasises the “dissolution of the boundary between inside and outside” in relation to torture, an experience that renders “an obscene conflation of private and public” (52-53). It is through blurring the boundaries between the body-subject, and body-object, in her portrayal of Mishka’s torture, that Turner-Hospital highlights the connection between political and personal agency and the body. Mishka, like Orpheus, is the ultimate expression of melancholic asymbolia, trapped in dissociation from his personal and politicised body, and occupying a liminal space of disembodiment.

Richardson refers to *Orpheus Lost* in his discussion of torturous affect in literature, as one of only a few literary works to address torture in relation to the “War on Terror.” He argues that Turner-Hospital’s metaphors of torture “perform a dissociation, displacing the pain from experience” (166), through her use of over-signification in the intertextuality that she draws on. He contends that the novel’s “mythic metaphor predetermines the meaning of Mishka’s torture,” that thus “closes off all realms of expression that are not symbolic, not contained in figural language, not dependent on the deconstructive undoings of fixed meaning” (168). Richardson’s perspective is evident in Turner-Hospital’s portrayal of Mishka’s torture, that is accentuated by her multi-layered use of mythology, that associates his torture with a pastiche of intertextual narratives. These devices further accentuate Mishka’s lost subjectivity, that is buried by the counter-terrorist forces who perceive him as Other, ‘ghost’ him, and torture his
body, concealing these acts of violence beneath abstract ideals of national security and defense. During his torture, Mishka’s loss of a coherent social identity is accentuated. He perceives himself as being an archetype, Prometheus, referring to the Greek myth that extols the dangers of disobeying the Gods and stealing fire for the benefit of mankind—for which he is eternally punished.141 This theme of the shattering of boundaries of knowledge, begetting material consequences, is also evoked through intertextual references to the myth of Icarus who, in yearning to fly, ignored his father’s instructions not to fly too close to the sun. Like Prometheus, Icarus suffers the consequence of material limitation, his journey having ending in death as the wax in his wings melted and he fell into the sea. These references to myth evoke Mishka’s fears of having transgressed socio-political boundaries, by being himself and existing in the “two worlds” of his Hungarian and Muslim heritage. The themes of political separation inherent in the novel, and enacted through both terrorism and counter-terrorism, conflicts with his biracial identity that attests to intercorporeality. The mythological intertext evokes Mishka’s dissociation between spaces, as much as it blurs the binaries and boundaries insinuated in the socio-political context that Turner-Hospital subverts, opening up the liminal space beyond them.

The passages describing Mishka’s captivity, and the allusions to the liminal spaces he inhabits, exude a timeless quality that is accentuated further by the layered use of myth. The mythic patterns also accentuate the trope of repetitive loops, and cycles of narrative that perpetuate what remains collectively unresolved. The references to the Icarus myth, evoke a sense of timeless suspension beyond the political world, through the motif of the body in flight—rupturing, for a moment, the limitation of what is known through creative subversion. Signalling Icarus, Mishka imagines that his “wings” are dislocated and ripped and that he is “suspended in flight” (253). As his flesh is torn, he feels like he is falling as punishment for his political subversion—a diametrical contrast to his childhood solipsist beliefs in his ability to fly, prior to being in the social world. The connections made to the myth of Icarus, flight, and to 9/11, resembles the thriller, *The Fear Index*, by Robert Harris. Harris, like Turner-Hospital depicts a culture of surveillance that has derived from a politics of fear. In *The Fear Index*, the protagonist, Alexander, “leaps and falls like Icarus” (314), signalling a comparison Harris draws on between Icarus and the iconic falling man—both of whom rupture of the boundaries of what is known and safe. Turner-Hospital’s focus on the trope of falling can be

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141 Interestingly, Nietzsche connects Prometheus to the elements of tragedy, defining him as both Dionysian and Apollonian in his titanic ambitions and yearning for justice. According to Nietzsche, this archetype signifies a penetration beyond boundaries that necessitates the suffering caused by trespass (*The Birth of Tragedy* 33).
understood in relation to her portrayal of grief, as Mishka’s confrontation with materiality also signals the myth of Orpheus, suggesting the necessity of recognising the mortal limitations of grief and the body. In this sense, the novel ambiguously blurs the boundaries of both “worlds” that encroach upon each other in the material, corporeal, dimension. Mishka, who has merged with creative potentialities and exclusively liminal spaces, is made to confront material limitation in the political world; on the other hand, the political dichotomies that the novel subverts are ruptured by Mishka’s biracial identity. This doubly destabilising encounter reveals how alterity enacts a transformative becoming.

As Mishka’s experiences are blurred in multi-layered abstraction, so too is his sense of reality and connection to time and space distorted, signalling his continued disconnection from the world through losing ownership of his body. Evoking Orpheus’ sparagmos, his flesh is torn by Cerberus, an allusion to the guardian of the underworld in Greek mythology who does not allow dead souls to leave. This accentuates his entrapment in the metaphorical, disembodied realm of the unconscious. While being tortured, he imagines that a vulture tears at his liver with his beak and that “[t]he bird would fix him with its basilisk eye, demanding answers ... [t]he eye burned him” (252). The reference here to both the liver-eating vulture of the Promethean myth and the basilisk, a snake in European mythology, draws out both the snake and bird motifs thematised in the novel. The juxtaposition between the basilisk eyes, that are said to have the power to cause death, and the vulture’s body—vultures being associated with cleansing, transformation and converting life from death—further highlights the ambiguity of Mishka’s liminal space between life and death, and mind and body.

Mishka’s loss of the body and his violent torture, signals an orphic sparagmos, that is his confrontation with the socio-political world experienced through his body. The literary critic Rafael Lopez-Pedraza, describes the metaphor of the orphic sparagmos as “the key literary metaphor of the body in grief,” perceiving bodily dissolution as “the penultimate representation of inconsolable grief and the body” (87). The vicious tearing apart of the flesh and dismemberment that Orpheus endures, a Dionysian rite, symbolises a loss of conscious awareness and intentionality. For Mishka, his corporeal fragmentation evokes the tension between the death that is associated with his politically marginalised identity, and the reticent subjectivity in his having a body that traverses the “two worlds” that are in conflict. Through being mixed race, he bridges alterity through the flesh, signalling a covert potentiality for new life and collective regeneration. Mishka, however, falls further into his asymbolia—a dissociation from the flesh that would that anchor his subjectivity in the world. He retreats
into his imagination, feeling that “the music of the spheres were all around him and he felt no pain at all” (257). As he is unable to, metaphorically, access the pain that would ground his socio-political being. His unique otherness in the material world remains stagnant, as he exists in a melancholic space of non-being.

In his final book, *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty uses the term “flesh” to signal a continuity and fundamental exchange between subject and world. This constitutes what he describes as the reversibility of flesh, and its “primary, chiasmic structure” (183), that establishes a balance between intimacy and alterity, identity and difference, in lived experience. This notion of flesh highlights the reciprocity and inter-lacing of bodies in the world—flesh is the fundamental element out of which arises a mutual relationship between the subject and the world (139). Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of “flesh” illuminates it as a political concept, that is relevant to Mishka’s torture, as much as to the “lost flesh” that befalls the protagonists in *As I Lay Dying*, and the intercorporeal metaphor of organic shrapnel in *Falling Man*, all of which signal a notion of flesh that is both personal and political—a “flesh of the world” (*The Visible and the Invisible* 302). Flesh is chiasmic—arising from an intertwining of mutual relationships. It is this understanding that illuminates the final chapters of *Orpheus Lost*, that feature a recognition and ethical response toward the Other that is necessary to heal loss and to reify alterity. Where Mishka’s violent torture signifies a shattering of the flesh, the resolution of grief is reliant upon recognising an inherent relationship to the Other and the world, through the flesh. It is through retrieving body memory and harnessing a capacity for ethical action that Cobb and Leela reciprocally open to the strengths of one another, allowing Mishka, who represents an inter-locking of polarities and the expression of grief, to be rescued from captivity in the unconscious. Ultimately, Cobb’s awareness of his corporeality and of his capacity for ethical agency toward the Other, bridges the polarities and enacts a creative awakening: a release of the orphic voice.

**Section 3.2 “The Sense of an Inter-Locking Part”: The Orphic Moment in *Orpheus Lost***

Turner-Hospital portrays, at the culmination of the novel, a corporeal connection experienced by the character Cobb, that opens the boundaries of his contained self to an awareness of the suffering outside of himself that he can positively influence. Turner-Hospital’s socio-political version of the myth of Orpheus imagines how the archetype of pathological grief might be released from melancholic loops of suffering created by recurrent narrative patterns.
Ultimately, this occurs through an empathetic recognition of reversible flesh and the capacity to act, mind and body, in accordance with a new ethics that recognises, rather than represses, the Other. This mind-body awareness portrayed in the novel involves a dissolving and sacrifice of the self, in order to transform the loop of self-referencing narratives that relegate the Other to the unconscious.

The pivotal moments, in *Orpheus Lost* that portray a reversible, ethical recognition of the flesh, occur when Cobb recognises both vulnerability and strength within his body. When recollecting a past moment of terror and vulnerability during an intense cyclone, Hugo, he experiences an epiphany of mind-body connection. Throughout his recollection, he notices how his body has retained a memory of the past that he can access in his mind, even as he had clung to survival on the tips of his nerves (224). Cobb becomes fascinated by his visceral bodily memory and the “intricacy of his neural retrieval system” (223). He notices that this mind-body congruence allows him to connect past memories through present perception—a recognition that restores a sense of subjective narrative authorship and responsibility for his actions. Through memory he is reminded of his agency and presence, even within the fearful and vulnerable experience of the cyclone that he recalls, in which he experienced “the euphoric sense of rush, the awareness of exceptional danger, the eerie calm before exhilaration and risk collide head-on” (223).

Shortly after his traumatic recollection, Cobb is reminded of some photographs he has locked away, that provide evidence of the torture, death and ghosting of detainees. Having connected to his own corporeality and forgotten pain, Cobb experiences a “contamination problem,” imagining the blood of other lives upon his own hands (227). Cobb’s intercorporeal moment of recognition of his reversible flesh, becomes the key to an ethical transfiguration imagined in the novel. The photographs that he had previously seen of the tortured bodies only represented the violence he has contributed to, through abstract imagery. Yet he cannot deny the connection he has made to the concealed, unconscious past, that has resurfaced through his body, that has reminded him of the visceral experience of pain, as well as his subjectivity. Cobb’s “contamination problem” signals his recognition of a reversible “flesh of the world” that Merleau-Ponty described in his discussions of the way the hand is felt from within, while being accessible from outside itself: “this crisscrossing … of the touching and the tangible, its own movements incorporate themselves into the universe they interrogate … the two systems are applied upon one another” (*The Visible and the Invisible* 302, 133). So too, Cobb comes
to recognise “a smooth interlock of missing parts” by a “shadow half” (229), signalling his emerging recognition of the Other within himself.

Turner-Hospital’s divergent protagonists, particularly Leela and Cobb, draw out the novel’s signification of a reversibility of the flesh that is mutually transformative for their incorporation of grief, beyond stagnant collective cycles. In Leela’s company, and despite resistance, Cobb feels “something shift at the bottom of the deep well where his own sorrows and angers roiled” (62). In their intercorporeal exchanges, Cobb cannot conceal himself; Leela agitates him so that he forgets his mask (68). Her intense gaze causes him to feel naked (58), as she “slithers,” like the snake prior to the Fall and dualism, “between him and his anger,” interrogating his sense of a separate self through enacting desire, which is always directed towards the Other. Through Leela, Turner-Hospital portrays an equal to Cobb’s resistant masculine identity. Leela refuses the narratives Cobb tries to create around her overt sexuality, and holds her own subjectivity with power: “her eyes were open and direct, meeting his” (336). Cobb reflects that Leela “dissolve[s] every defense he’d so carefully built up against his yearning” (336), which led to their love-making as teenagers. This same metaphorical dissolution of notions of separation, enacted by Leela, leads Cobb to later consider releasing Mishka to alleviate her suffering.

Cobb’s recognition of reversibility through his memory is reinforced as Leela and Cobb both return to their birthplace and happen to meet on the Hamilton veranda, where they had previously made love. Importantly, at this same spot in their youth, they had become intercorporeally merged as blood brother and blood sister, an experience that Cobb had kept buried, along with his mother’s death—a “shadow life” (335). When Leela voices her pain to Cobb, on behalf of Mishka’s innocence—her orphic lament—he is reminded of their intercorporeal connection from the past: “her blood thumping through his veins” (343). His recognition of alterity is furthered again when he returns to nurse his dying father who, as his body degenerates, reveals both his vulnerability and remorse as a veteran, his concealed shame—the “stuff on [his] conscience”—around innocent civilians who had died due to his actions at war (324). In becoming aware of having repeated his father’s pattern, and his

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142 This is a subversion of the blame placed on the feminine for the Theological Fall. In this case, it is Cobb’s desire that opens him to alterity. This releases him from his own self-judgement and the unresolved guilt within his father’s lineage for acts of violence committed against the Other due to collective ideologies. Where the Fall is associated with guilt and disobedience prompting the ascetic sacrifice of the body, best illustrated in As I Lay Dying, in Turner-Hospital’s subversion of this it is personal responsibility that allows an autonomous transcendence of unconscious guilt through the engagement of intentional, embodied action.
capacity for mind-body agency, Cobb feels a sense of responsibility to rectify the inter-generational cycle. This is signalled in a wordless moment when he recognises the intercorporeality between them, and his father’s previously concealed vulnerability: “Cobb laid his head against his father’s naked thigh. He could feel the bone. His father put his hand on cobb’s head. They did not speak for the longest time” (325).

Through the presence of the Other, Cobb differentiates between his true self and his social persona, metaphorically depicted when he imagines his face is being eaten away when he gazes at an old photograph (344). This is comparable to Robert McGahey’s notion of Dionysian “unselving” in his book The Orphic Moment. This moment of self-realisation, and recognition of truth, involves Apollo’s veil lifting to “reveal the Void behind the blank eye-slits of the tragic mask” (58)—signalling the Dionysian abyss of self-dissolution. This surrender of the mask is comparable to the motif used in Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close, when Oskar starts to emerge, as a character, beyond the limitation of prior identities and stories. For Cobb, this metaphor both signals his loss of his egoic self, and his experience of reversibility, as he comes to feel the suffering he has caused indirectly through the underground operations of counter-terrorism, leaving him “floundering in the tunnels” (319) in his nightmares. The contamination upon his hands, and his body’s memory of pain, prompt Cobb’s capacity toward empathy and agency, particularly in regards to Leela’s pleas, as he desires “atonement” (345) in relation to alterity. The ending of Orpheus Lost, and the mind-body tensions encountered in the plot, parallels Ian McEwan’s novel, Saturday that I mentioned in the previous chapter, in the sense that Turner-Hospital similarly concludes with highlighting a predisposition to human empathy and visceral interconnectedness. Turner-Hospital, like McEwan, provides a reconciliation of alterity within the world and within the self. Both novels signal the body as being the medium through which ethical awareness arises.

Like Lianne in Falling Man, who finds a sense of agency in the world through recognising her presence, Cobb can no longer deny or repress his grief when his body has “retained the imprint” (224) of his experiences, and attests to his being-in-the-world. Cobb’s recognition reveals a choice between “Death or Transfiguration” (224), both of which signal a transformation and rebirth. When Cobb remembers his own body and pain, he can act

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143 Atonement, which signals reparations and making amends, can also be broken up into ‘at-one-ment,’ signalling a merging and recognition of reversibility with the Other in the world that Turner-Hospital illustrates as deriving from empathy.
ethically in the present, recognising a reversibility of the flesh that is only concealed by separate identities. This capacity to make new choices in the present transforms his inter-generational narrative of combatting the “terrorist” Other. Instead, he starts to recognise the dark deeds concealed in his own façade of “moral superiority” (226), and that of his lineage, that have perpetuated suffering and conflict. When Cobb rescues Mishka from the underground, which leads to his own death, he surrenders the egoic identity that he obscures and the Other that he holds captive, a corresponding alterity. This signals an act of self-sacrifice for the unity of something greater than himself, rather than perpetuating conflict and destruction. This is the antithesis of the self-sacrifice demanded by war and terrorism, that only engenders destruction and separation. The union of Mishka and Leela created by Cobb’s sacrifice both envisages a reconciliation of Orpheus and Eurydice, as well as signalling a unity of masculine and feminine. Their erotic, intercorporeal entanglement, wherein Leela and Mishka devour each other, reflects the ouroboric snake of non-duality that devours its tail, folding back into itself and prompting regeneration. Like the snake motif employed in Daybreak, it remains a potentiality for new life, signalling the possibilities of rebirth—in this case prompted by a unification with the Other.

As Maurice Blanchot describes of creativity in The Infinite Conversation, when “self and Other lose themselves in one another: there is ecstasy, fusion, fruition” (66). This creation, deriving from self-sacrifice, occurs at what Blanchot formulated in his essay, “Orpheus’ Gaze,” as the point in which Orpheus looks back into the oppressive darkness for Eurydice, who also represents the work of art. Blanchot’s distinction between the object, the gaze-as-object, and that which the gaze conceals, describes Cobb’s transformation from surveillance to inclusion of alterity as he removes his mask and looks into the void of his own otherness. The journey of Orpheus from light to dark, and back to light, is symbolic, for Blanchot, of the artist’s journey from reality to the edges of the surreal, a crossing of boundaries that requires the surrender: “to look in the night at what night hides, the other night, the dissimulation that appears” (“Orpheus’ Gaze” 171). In a similar way, Cobb, in having recognised an inner alterity, surrenders egoic control and releases his own dichotomous limitations, allowing him to transcend them. In subversion to the myth of Orpheus, which forewarns of looking back to the past for certainty—such as when Orpheus gazes back, losing Eurydice—Cobb looks back to unlearn the past, allowing him to surrender his identifications. Through turning the gaze back upon himself, he becomes conscious, allowing him to accept ownership for his past actions. Through taking responsibility, rather than blaming the Other, he can choose
intentional action, a choice that engages new narrative trajectories and a creative rebirth beyond melancholic cycles.

Whereas, in the mythic version, Orpheus desired to gaze upon Eurydice and in doing so re-affirmed his separation, catalysing melancholic loops of perpetual suffering, Turner-Hospital’s post-9/11 version of the myth re-writes this allegorically. In Orpheus Lost, ethical frames of alterity generate unity, through sacrificing the notion of a resistant, separate self. The final pages of *Orpheus Lost* culminate with a transformation of the melancholic cycles of solitary mourning and shame featured in the novel, as Leela visits Cobb’s father in the wake of his son’s death. Their togetherness allows him to express the pain of his emotions, as they hold each other in intercorporeal embrace, sharing the pain of loss.

**Conclusion—The Creative Loops of Orphic Descent**

In relation to literature that portrays grief, Kristiaan Versluys writes that “narrativizing the event amounts to an uncoiling of the trauma, an undoing of its never-ending circularity” (3-4). *Orpheus Lost* interrogates the historical and cyclical nature of patterns of conflict and unresolved mourning, uncoiling repetitive patterns to reveal what is collectively repressed within the context of a post-9/11 collective milieu. Turner-Hospital highlights the ways in which approaches to grief are fundamentally connected to a repressed recognition of alterity and engendered through a history of inter-generational losses and collective patterns. Beyond the alienating prison of the mind that remains trapped in self-referencing loops, Turner-Hospital imagines how an incorporation of mourning is simultaneously public and private, and connected to a recognition of being and becoming, as the known and unknown catalyse a creative tension that continually transforms self and Other.

Turner-Hospital probes a dialectic in relation to grief, depicting a postmodern world that is dominated by a rationalistic approach and political ideologies that repress feelings and the sensory experience. Like Virginia Woolf, she impels the need for a balance between the mind and body, and feminine and masculine polarities, when approaching the work of mourning. Her protagonist, Leela, becomes, like Clarissa—an archetype for the obscured sensory world that is ubiquitous, but concealed, in a mind-dominated world. In the relationship between masculinity and femininity that is thematised, this reflects an important aspect of the myth of Orpheus. Eurydice, Orpheus’ lost lover, metaphorically signifies Orpheus’ feminine counterpart and a reflection of his own image—the Other against which he defines himself.
Orpheus’ quest, in figurative terms, constitutes his desire to possess what he feels is lost and separated from—but is, in actuality, a part of himself from which he has separated.

To polarise the Other as lost, as Orpheus does in the archetypal myth, is to perpetually grieve. It entails losing the Other to spaces of conceptualisation, that negate the capacity to incorporate this lost alterity through successful mourning. Like the characters across the novels that have been examined, what Orpheus has lost is the capacity to move with fluidity and acceptance through experiences of loss, as he sanctions, separates and represses the alterity of loss and the otherness of the unknown, unconsciously re-creating inner and outer conflict and unresolved pain. To accept and incorporate loss, is to let go of past identities and ideals and be in the world, through being present within the corporeal dimension. Through doing so, a person can recognise the reflection of the Other that is found reciprocally within the self, as a mutually transformative presence that perpetually challenges a sense of separation.

Turner-Hospital signals an innate desire within human nature to know, connect and merge with the Other, a source of creative potential inherent in her representation of loss. Where Faulkner’s dystopic representations of separation from the womb indicate his reservations about the possibilities for rebirth within a modernist context, Turner-Hospital signifies how the dark voids of the unknown, and the womb, can instigate a creative rebirth that bridges polarities. This is signalled at the culmination of Orpheus Lost in erotic imagery, as Leela’s sensual desire to pull Mishka’s head between her legs is satiated when he returns home, an image that depicts the masculine surrendering to the feminine, in the flesh. As the lips of the Orpheus character meet the entry point of rebirth, this connection of lips with the mouth of the womb signals a relationship between the voice, expression, desire, creativity and a merging of polarities, evoking the theme of union. This is a potential for creative renewal that is always becoming: “curled up inside the first encounter like a tree inside a seed” (Turner-Hospital 13).
CONCLUSION

Perhaps the only way to overcome a traumatic severance of body and mind is to come back to mind through the body—Geoffrey Hartman, “On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies”

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between private and political mourning through metaphors of embodiment in literary representations of grief. This thesis has specifically focused on literature written after World War One and 9/11, allowing a contrast between representations of loss in modernist and postmodernist contexts. This research has drawn on Freudian frameworks around melancholia and was situated within an understanding of Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of embodiment. Fundamentally, the focus was on exploring a relationship between melancholia, mourning and the body, across six novels that represent corporeality and grief in the aftermath of large-scale traumatic events.

Chapter One examined my methodology and the key themes and tropes surrounding the fiction and its context, particularly in relation to melancholia and the body. Chapter Two analysed Vance Palmer’s Daybreak, highlighting the way in which Palmer uses the pastoral mode to convey a tension between post-war melancholia and consolation, and its relationship to subjectivity, also drawing attention to his emphasis upon Australian land which defined his resistance to transnational politics. Chapter Three examined William Faulkner’s anti-pastoral and politically subversive novel, As I Lay Dying, focusing on Faulkner’s use of corporeal abjection to highlight the melancholic body, as a reflection of a post-war culture in the American South that cannot mourn and re-create. The final novel of the post-war series, Virginia Woolf’s Mrs Dalloway, was explored in Chapter Four to highlight Woolf’s focus on the internalised social construction of resistant identities in the post-war period, such as heroic martyrdom and gender roles, and how these engender melancholia and entrapment, aptly encapsulated in the totalising metaphor of Septimus’ suicide.

My discussion of post-9/11 novels commenced with an examination of Don DeLillo’s Falling Man in Chapter Five, in which I introduced the theme of collective melancholia, through highlighting DeLillo’s portrayal of postmodern grief through the discussion of simulated media representations and hyper-spaces; unresolved familial mourning; and a political resistance to alterity. Particularly DeLillo’s themes of a liminal space of corporeal
dissociation, accentuated through the motif of falling and the inter-subjective space of intercorporeality, were focused on to draw out his portrayal of collective melancholia. In Chapter Six, Jonathan Safran Foer’s resistance of a universalising narrative of mourning, was discussed through drawing attention to his comedic devices and through emphasising the healing implicit in community and intercorporeality. This chapter focused on how *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* represents and counters inter-generational melancholia, through imagining the possibilities of sharing mourning, and playing with narrative frameworks and collective stories, to invent new trajectories. The final novel, discussed in Chapter Seven, *Orpheus Lost*, focused on Janette Turner-Hospital’s use of mythic intertext to subvert discourses regarding the “War on Terror,” through depicting a dystopia of hyper-surveillance, media loops, political violence and inter-generational melancholia. Her use of corporeal and intercorporeal metaphors, and mythic intertext, were examined as signifiers of the relationship between grief and alterity. *Orpheus Lost* culminated this discussion of collective melancholia, through imagining a way to complete cycles of unresolved grief by turning the interrogative gaze back upon oneself and mourning through opening to, rather than resisting, the Other.

One of the key themes to emerge from my analysis, is a divergence between modernist and postmodernist literature in relation to mourning, identity and alterity. This elucidates a relationship between political and private mourning. Both groups of fiction highlight a relationship between private and political responses to loss as being inherent in a politics of identity. The modernist writers of post-war fiction focused on private experiences of melancholia, and represented the loss of subjectivity and corporeality in response to negotiating social identity after the war. The postmodernist writers I examined highlight how political and familial identities that resist alterity and change influence how loss is encountered and engendered privately, impacting a connection to the body and alterity. The modernist fiction illustrates a connection between a failure to mourn privately due to social identities, identifying a need to let go of identity in order to mourn and create anew. The postmodern fiction focuses on similar themes in relation to collective identity, highlighting the need the let go of a history of melancholic collective identities that re-create cycles of conflict.

Although these findings are generally compatible with similar studies that centre on the representation of melancholic grief in literature, including those by Tammy Clewell and Patricia Rae, this study also highlights several areas that critics have not recognised. These
areas include the relationship between literary representations of the body and melancholic mourning and the impact that writers portray of private and collective melancholia upon the construction of personal and political identities, following collective trauma. This study also employs a socio-political critique of melancholia and resistant mourning in the aftermath of 9/11, as highlighted by Judith Butler and Christina Cavedon, to highlight a trope of collective melancholia across the 9/11 fiction. My discussion of post-war and post-9/11 literature proposes a distinction between portrayals of mourning that include national, political and familial cycles of melancholia, in the 9/11 novels; and the representations of private melancholia in the post-war fiction. Through focusing on metaphors of embodiment, this study also provides a new framework through which to interpret politically subversive representations of melancholia, through centring on the experiential realm of identity and agency—where private and political dimensions of being cross over. Through highlighting the lived dimension of grief that writers encapsulate, this draws out the nuances reflected within the literary works, concerning the relationship between private and political mourning and the potentialities, if any, for resolving melancholic stagnancy.

This analysis has focused on a limited scope of fiction, drawing on six novels written in the aftermath of the post-war and post-9/11 time periods. There are a number of discussions that could be extended upon, which came to light during my research, including the relationship between gender identities and mourning. I have alluded to these, but not addressed them in detail, due to the scope of this study. I chose to focus on the broader connections between mourning and melancholia, rather than engaging in a closer study of specific identities such as gender and race, and how they impact upon the body and grief. Further research could examine the way in which specific identities, such as gender, are represented within fiction—particularly how socio-political identities are portrayed as impacting, or impeding, an ability to mourn and reconstruct meaning in the aftermath of events. Another avenue of further study would be to examine literary representations of collective melancholia across other large-scale traumatic events.

Overall, this study finds that the examination of body metaphors in literary representation is useful in deepening an understanding of the politics of mourning, and particularly in defining a relationship between social identity, embodiment, and melancholic mourning that the writers portray. The chosen novelists illustrate a relationship between dissociated corporeality and melancholic mourning, highlighting the complexities inherent in constructing new identities and navigating private and collective understandings of loss, in the aftermath of
traumatic political events. The comparison between representations of melancholia and collective melancholia in this study, highlights a complex inter-relationship between identity and grief. It is through drawing out this inter-relationship, that novelists portray the impact of loss upon the mind and body in the aftermath of collective loss.
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