THE ROLE OF THE (POSTCOLONIAL) INTELLECTUAL/Critic:
TEXTUALIZATION OF HISTORY AS TRAUMA: THE AFRICAN AMERICAN AND
MODERN GREEK PARADIGM.

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

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* * * * *

The Ohio State University
2008

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My dissertation focuses on the political novel (by political I refer to novels which render alternative as well as oppositional to western patriarchal capitalist representations of history and subjectivity). I have selected novels which create new realities and new psychoanalytic languages (forms) through which to depict historical events and political structures as intensely traumatic and understand their psychological effects upon subjects. One cannot study history unless it becomes specific not only in terms of dates, places, and events but also in terms of the economic, ideological, and political causes behind these events and especially in terms of the psychological repercussions upon the Subject of history herself. The political novels I have chosen to discuss come from two very apparently different cultures--but in reality similar in the ways they experienced cruelty, exploitation, and alienation as Postcolonial others--the African American and the Modern Greek. The African American political novel, written by mainly Black female writers, records the effects of slavery and the subsequent racism that followed the lives of African American people after the post reconstruction era. The Modern Greek novel, written by insurgent Hellenic writers, has as its subject matter the recording of the history of the civil war between Left and Right ideologies and practices, and of an oppressive and bloody 7 year dictatorship that exiled and imprisoned a considerable number of the resisting Greek population. Both cultures attempt to re-write their history through a conscious attempt at self definition and self determination which they juxtapose to the reactionary representational modes their colonial masters had produced up to that time.
Dedicated to Amy:

Who knows Karl, Ernesto, and Aris

Paul D asks the slave, Sethe how she managed to
“Run off Pregnant….All by yourself too.”
She replies:
“Almost by myself. Not all by myself. A white girl [called
Amy] helped me.”  Beloved
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

What I owe the dead: those tortured, alienated from the mainstream, fractured in body, psyche and spirit at times—yet never defeated citizens of history, whose lives and deaths have helped me forever searching for my ethical gravitas, for maintaining a sacred wrath against exploitation, injustice and un-freedom.

The studying of Black culture has nourished me in the most difficult times as an alien mother. My living outside the academia, helped me understand more clearly what African Americans women are talking about, both in their novels and in their theory.

What I owe the living:

My children, Ektoras and Alexis, who are smart and compassionate; embodied works of art; full of beauty!

My family in Greece for their transatlantic help and support.

My friends, Pat Barnett and her whole family, Amy Shuman and Amy Horowitz, and Paul Eisenstein, who provided me with ample love and material support. I could not have survived without that.

Those who have harmed me, for they have shown me that my knowledge of history is the right path; their ethical inconsistency one more verification of my treading the right path.
My advisor, Amy Shuman, whose belief in me, even in my lowest and darkest moments, helped transcend the sense of absurdity my marginal place in the academic world has caused me in delaying its confrontation.

My teachers, Mac Davis, Vassilis Lambropoulos, and Gregory Jusdanis who enriched my American learning experience immensely and in different ways.

Professor Valerie Lee, who has offered me recognition and appreciation and whose leadership has been a positive role modeling for me.

Prof Gregory Jusdanis, and Prof Adeleke Adeeko who were so patient with my application shortcomings and inadequacies.

The English department at OSU in general which was for me a great space of inclusion and affirmation, and most of all, freedom for my politically and ethically tortured self.
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CHAPTER 1

PREFACE

“The writer’s function is not without arduous duties. By definition, he cannot serve today those who make history; he must serve those who are subject to it.”

(Albert Camus 1957 Nobel Prize Address)

“sweetly we slept in this world and we woke up violently in another” Theo Angelopoulos Ulysses Gaze

Located in a postmodern, post communist, a-pre-emptive-war-waging highly imperialist America, I tarry with the negative as Hegel has taught me: “Spirit is this power only by looking the negative in the face, and tarrying with it. This tarrying with the negative is the magical power that converts it into being” (Phenomenology 19).

Acrobat-like, I balance delicately between the political impulse and its negating madness one. It is as if I need the Marxist spirit of Brechtian art and the physical cruel sensuality of Artaud via Kristeva’s abject: “the abject is the violence of mourning for an ‘object’ that has always already been lost. The abject shatters the wall of repression and its judgments” (Powers of Horror 15) in both my real and academic lives. Bombarded by the “intolerable lightness” of the entertainment industry, I find “sweetness and light,” to put Matthew Arnold’s idea of the sublime on its feet, as I discovered not in high culture, in other words, but on the narratives of dispossession, oppression and exploitation. The
same way I did not merely enjoy the highly artistic and humorous, often politically correct, Coca Cola commercials, but viewed them in the context of the exploitative labor relations of its production. Sometimes I find some recognition in the voice of Tupac, “God Bless the Dead,” or the concerts of RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE and SYSTEM OF A DOWN, and the surprising historical Hollywood productions such as the Cohen Brothers’ No Country for Old Men and Paul Thomas Anderson’s There will be Blood. What saves the day is that the production of great art is never prescriptive. In historical terms, the enforcement of prescriptive rules in art production is a fascist practice whether dictated by capitalism or communist societal formations. Socialist realism, the set of rules enforced by Stalinist cultural practices, contradicts the position of a Marxist thinking of culture. Marx himself, as Eagleton mentions in Marxism and Literary Criticism, asserts that “Milton produced Paradise Lost for the same reason that a silk worm produces silk. It was an activity of his nature” (Marxism and Literary Criticism 45). My reading of Beloved and Mission: Box hover between politics and madness. And like the end of Haneke’s Funny Games there is not even a faint insinuation of catharsis; experiencing the two novels is much like that of a wounding sculpture: The memorial to our culture of barbarism.

Coming from a working class with a strong leftist background family of the mid-1950s, I had very few chances for a college education. My passing the admittedly tough university entrance examination was considered by family and friends, a social victory. I started my college days at a time when some university professors were still declaring that “the university has been ruined ever since working class children acquired access to it.” Given my class and ideological background, my academic journey has always being
my work towards the ending of any conditions of injustice, exploitation, and inequality: thus my very peculiar and marginal presence in the academic world. My specific class position determined my political awareness and actions, the work of philosophers has empowered my will to desire social change, and these novels and literature in general have given me recognition and identification through which I made the leap from my personal history to concern about the fate of a collective future. The over-determined function of all those factors has led me to a position of a strong desire for agency and change. This agency impulse empowers because it solidifies the sense of calling my role as educator and intellectual, as mother and citizen of the world. Very gradually, I have realized that a personal sense of power does not translate, in terms of a tactical formulation of praxis, which requires the participation of the collective will into social power. In post communist American environments, I often see through the ironic attitudes I witness both inside and outside academia, towards my supposedly obsolete political yearnings. Although wounding at the beginning of my academic experience, I often smile meaningfully when I encounter them now. In my undergraduate years, I started to understand slowly that the conditions of my specific economic and material reality were perhaps not a result of various contingent factors, chaotic and transcendental in their nature. At least they were not only that. Thanks to Marx and Marxist thinkers, the literature I explore, and the influence of my teachers, I began to understand myself in the specific political and social position in a dialectically serious and significant way. My social and political life as a working class student and my gradual education in literature, philosophy, culture, and psychoanalysis have enhanced and solidified my desire to work for social and political transformation within my time. My aim was never
to join the middle class—in economic or ideological terms—but to always retain a position which would allow me to work towards imagining new forms of the social and the political where the desire for equality, justice, and freedom for all people (my work will only be done when those rights, i.e., equality, justice, and freedom will become reality for the last person in the most remote part of the world). It is not a brave stance, I admit; rather one of self preservation in a wider sense. I know that “nobody grazes unpunished in the pastures of the bourgeoisie” as I learned from Karin Struck’s *Class Love*. Only when such a materialist utopia takes place, my role will become obsolete. Yet, after the collapse the so-called existing socialism, a gloomy cloud covered the wishes, desires, and hopes of people who think like me. Now Marxism functions as an unattainable utopian dream once seemed possible about which we remain nostalgic. Resistance has become fragmented; a collective imagining of a more just world has become quaint while the tensions of the struggle are still relevant albeit more difficult to notice because of the abstractive ways of this late global capitalist phase. But having refused to join the middle class, I must find ways in which I can survive its stubborn nature. Yet even as a thinker who belongs to the proletariat, I am condemned by the knowledge I carry of the “what is” and the “what ought to be.” I often discover that my place as an intellectual in a highly normative community—at least in terms of structure—like that of American academia that this knowledge and this dialectic can even prove dangerous during that interaction. Yet, I am reluctant to create yet another more narrative about traumatic history. From Soshana Fellman and Dori Laub to Dominique La Capra, there is very good scholarship on it already. My aim is, and it is an urgent one, to help eliminate those conditions which produce traumatic history. Academic studies in Rhetoric have absorbed and utilized the
best of what the different schools of criticism has had to offer in the last twenty years. I only have to ask then: how effective are they? The social realities of the first eight years of the 21st century are once again very grim. Even if you secure a position in the middle class in the U.S., that is no guarantee that safeguards your existence as that position cannot be thought differently from the state of the rest of the world.

As I try to create a polylogue when I converse with my texts, I need to explain the validity of my experiment, that is, to relate two different transatlantic traumatic historical experiences. The process through which I have brought them together in the round table is that of recognition, identification, and agency. Before examining what this process entails for both the different theories and the novels, I will specify and clarify my role as a reader, a thinker, an educator and intellectual realizing the depressing paradox that knowing the truth about history empowers one intellectually but the lack of common goals of a collective nature makes this idea of agency an illusion in actuality. Louis Althusser, in “Freud and Lacan,” speaking about Freud, discusses Freud’s “theoretical solitude” at a time when Freud through linguistic analysis discerned the underlying structures of the unconscious. His innovative approach came in contrast with the mores of patriarchy in early 20th century. Both Freud and Lacan in the process established psychoanalysis as that discipline, which

is concerned with another struggle, with the only war without memoirs or memorials, the war humanity pretends it has never declared, the war it always it has won in advance, simply because humanity is nothing but surviving this war, living and bearing children as culture in human culture:
a war which is continually declared in each of its sons, who, projected, deformed and rejected, are required each by himself in solitude and against death, to take the long forced march which makes mammiferous larvae into human children, masculine of feminine subjects. (57)

Gloomy as that articulation might be, it speaks a truth about not only gender but also class, race, and ideology, and nationhood more than ever, in our historical juncture.

Marcuse’s views on the nature of developed one-dimensional capitalist societies are eerily relevant today as they were in the 60s or 70s. He discusses the alienating, repressively desublimated nature of a commodified cultural industry in existing advance democratic societies as not real freedom at all but only the illusions of it. What in fact this alleged neutral technological domination doe is to transform negative to positive thinking creating thus a false consciousness for its subjects. Human beings are repressed (intellectually and sexually) and surrounded by false needs (materialist or spiritual) which suffocate true needs that aim toward liberation, autonomy, “political opposition in speech thought and consciousness.” In a multi- dimensional society the employment of negative thinking unsettles the natural homogeneous behavior. Their refusal to accept things as they are is perceived and articulated as a neurotic and impotent kind of behavior which needs fixing or adaptation. All because this refusal would resist the containment of social change that positive thinking aims at. (Marcuse 1964).

I recognize in the above terms the solitude my urgent desire, as an intellectual, for more meaningful transformations of my space that the knowledge of human subjectivity and history has endowed me with. But unlike Freud, I am not a genius and my passionate
energy finds no conduit for meaningful activity. Instead, I struggle with notions that there is historical, ideological, objectivity and that one must try and be as objective as possible because only through this kind of objectivity one can reach truth and acquire justice. My experience in the legal system, for example, has taught me that ideas of truth and justice will always be tainted, carried out, materialized by political and ideological realities. Having arrived from a European space, and from a time of modernity, I feel I must also distance myself from post-modern ideas of historical relativity and of the supposedly unknowable nature of truth. There are for me some glaring truths always defined by historical specificity: the truths about the histories of particular groups’ exploitation, oppression, and cruelty. There is nothing relativistic about them and my source of energy in this study is my passion to expose, reveal, enlighten, make known, record the intricate ways in which western capitalist societies/nation-states—under one form or another--have exploited, tortured, murdered groups of people—the history of genocide—in their desperate effort to maintain control no matter what the cost. It is absolutely imperative that I allow the stories of the resistance of various groups of people and their own versions of recording this experience. I must also talk about the responsible individuals (everyday people, writers, intellectuals, fighters for justice) who made the ethical choices and in the recourse would not be afraid to take sides in the showdowns.

Hegel explains a very important but problematic relationship between State and civil society. What is is “the right that has being in and for-itself” which remains unaltered and “what ought to be” as “the arbitrary determination of what is supposed to
be accepted as right” (*Elements of the Philosophy of Right* 13). There is an abstraction and idealization of what is right in its totality and all the particular versions perhaps that this right acquires in actuality. This concept goes hand-in-hand with notions of objectivity, neutrality, and a-political positions that roam around today in the various social, political and cultural spaces. A position also problematic as Marxist and postcolonial thinkers have noted. For Gramsci this relationship between state and civil society is actually the political and cultural hegemony of a social group over the entire society. The tension is located in the class structures of civil society which are by no means natural or neutral but heavily ideological. A class in its process towards hegemony must conquer and assimilate intellectuals. Gramsci claims that homo faber cannot be separated from homo sapiens. Each man, finally, outside his professional activity, carries on some form of intellectual activity, that is, he is a ‘philosopher’, and artist, a man of taste, he participates in a particular conception of the world, has a conscious line of moral conduct and therefore contributes to sustain a conception of the world or to modify it, that is, to bring into being new modes of thought.

(*Prison Notebooks* 9)

While all people can be intellectuals, Gramsci distinguishes traditional intellectuals (those who either consciously or not serve the interests of the ruling class) from organic ones, as those who constitute (the thinking and organizing element of a particular fundamental social class” (3). Under this premise, in over-determined moments of history, thinkers can energize and direct the will of the people into a collective mobilization for the issues regarding equality, justice, and freedom. Historically, the civil
rights movement in the U.S. and the student rebellion of 1973 in Athens are two examples that are represented—although in different ways-- in the two cultures. The political novel represents such social and political tensions: it articulates anti-capitalist, anti-racist, anti-imperialist modes of thinking by exposing the divisions existing in the social space in terms of class, race, and gender. My current precarious as an alien and oppositional stance to the role of the academia at a moment, which I comprehend as one of intense crisis in its general apathy, only fuels my contempt for all who maintain a middle class life by being part of a state which exists by extreme forms of control, unabashed and extreme exploitation, and most importantly an unseen before violence which sells itself as national patriotism; our inability to create a strong enough movement against this war is a good example. Yet, I realize that I find myself in a position of an utter contradiction: the goal is what will give me some agency; the agency that will give me demands that I comply with the rules of form and do indeed try to write in black and white about a series of painful and bloody nightmares that torture my dreams and waking realities. I call it the tragedy that resides in the fact that I see myself as the duality of a non-entity in this country and the dangerous knowledge I carry: A position that I experience as the slicing of my psyche. I speak therefore also as a postcolonial intellectual. The political art in general, and this novel in Greece, helped many of us on the left because it legitimated our historical situatedness; we were empowered in our struggle by the process of recognition and identification. Although not explicitly colonized, Greece has always been controlled by what we call the Great Powers. The realities of the German occupation and the U.S. involvement in post war Greek politics are represented in the worlds of Alexandrou, Douka, and Zei. Greek people in general
had knowledge of what these Great Powers can do. Many Greek people vehemently rejected the idea that Greece is one more “banana” country; one more protectorate at the whims of American imperialist capitalism; they resisted. It is not accidental how Henry Kissinger voiced once his scathing contempt for Greek people. Kissinger, once a powerful man in Washington, was resurrected from his naphthalene state recently in the current Bush administration. In a speech he gave at a banquet in his honor by big business representatives in Washington in 1994 said:

Greek people are difficult to govern. So we must hurt them deeply in their cultural roots. Then they may have some sense knocked down into them. I mean, we must hurt their language, their religion, their intellectual and historical resources so that we can obliterate their ability to develop, distinguish themselves as a people, and prevail. So that they don’t give us a difficult time in the Balkans, …, the Eastern Mediterranean, the Middle East. So they do not impede us with our plans in that whole—important and of superior strategic significance for U.S. policy--region. (Leotsakos 85)

There are many such instances and attitudes in the modern history of Greece. The novels give voice to some of those. It is for such attitudes, I can not be silent. It is through recognition and identification that the political novels of African American women spoke to me in such a meaningful way. They justify my “unhappy consciousness.” Moreover, I realize that my discussion of an experience that is not mine culturally--though mine in a larger political level--has to be a very careful and tender one. The dialogue I have had
with this literature, Womanist theory, my black teachers and peers give me the guidelines for a worthy interpretation, I hope.

Although the Black and Greek paradigms seem to be so regionally remote—a transatlantic ocean separates them after all—so different in their political, historical and ethnic experience, there seems to coincide in their cultural expressivism and in their effort to attempt to record an alternative to the powerful mainstream historical consciousness and by recording, “changing their words” to both lay out the traumatized collective psyche of a people, to understand effects and scars, and thus to attempt to reconstruct and emerge as a strong new dynamic group rather than the morally exiled stereotyped identity of those who say no to greater authority to its guns and prisons, to its educational and socializing assimilative tactics. In the microcosm of these novels, the effects of cruelty, coercion, oppression, and hatred are very similar because of the material, and psychological conditions, of fear, deprivation, resignation hopelessness and helplessness they create for the people they attempt to exploit and subjugate as the novels show. Difference based on race in the African American novel and ideology in the Hellenic one become the reason for the colonizers’ fantasy, their phantasmic world views and their bloody practices, as well as the disillusionment of the “wretched” positions of the colonized. Gender is another social characteristic that leads to a differentiation in the form of colonization appears in both novels. Finally, class is yet another marker of differentially experiencing colonization as the novels will prove. My intention is not of course to simplistically isolate categories and point fingers blaming race, gender, ideology, and class in one lump, but to see how those categories are intricately structured and subtly, and often invisibly, woven into a whole network of economic, social, and
political circumstances which are always already, in an Althusserian sense, “historically and ideologically over-determined.” Moreover, I need to exemplify how that over-determination is shown in the texts’ “political unconscious” and how those “individual works become symbolic acts,” to use Jameson’s paradigm. Furthermore, how, to use Bakhtinean model, this cultural manifestation is both “dialogical and contradictory” in nature. In other words, in order to display a doomed and tormented experience of a subjugated people, one has to contrast them to that of a dominant and mainstream political and social practice. Activity and philosophy I realize can not co-exist on a synchronic plane. Even Hegel admits that “the owl of Minerva begins its flight only with the onset of dusk.” Meaning that philosophy always comes too late to perform the guidelines of what ought to be.

“Those of who have never been poor claim that ‘money isn’t everything.’ Those of us who have always had stability decency of life claim that materialism is one evil way of thinking and living. Those who are Christian claim that some stratification is necessary while they avoid facing the existence of economic inequality, of slums, homelessness, and hunger (they practice philanthropy to ease their conscience). Those who speak of democracy and freedom do not realize that freedom from material necessity and exploitation is the most basic of human rights on which all other spheres of social and political life are based. The idealists want us to believe that the physical, the body is not important as long as the soul can be saved. This in simple terms is one of the conditions in which the academia finds itself today.”
There is a moment in my explication and analysis therefore when academic discourse fails my representational skills. It is the moment when the discourse of politics and the discourse of madness demand the use of poetic language. Since, silence is not an option, as Aziz Nesin reminds me, I let the poetry speak:

“Be Silent”
Be silent; don’t speak.
Be silent; don’t speak.
Be silent; don’t speak.
It is a shame; stop your voice;
Be silent already.
And if speech is made of silver
Silence is made of gold.
The first words I heard as a child
when I cried, laughed, played
were
“be silent!”
At school they told me half truths; they told me: “what do you care? Be silent”
When a girl first kissed me, they told me “Shhh be silent; don’t say a word”
Stop your voice; and don’t speak; be silent.
This went on until I became 20 years old.
The words of the grown up; the silence of the child.
I saw blood in the streets
“what do you care” they told me “you gonna get in trouble, be silent”

Later on my bosses got angry

“don’t get involved; keep your nose clean; be silent”

I got married, had children; I taught them to be silent

My wife was loyal and industrious and knew how to be silent.

She had a prudent mother who told her: “be silent”

During leap years my parents, my neighbors advised me

“be silent; don’t get involved; pretend you did not see anything; be silent”

We might have not had an envied relationship with our neighbors

But we were connected to them by

“be silent”

“Be silent” this person said and that one.

Those high up: “be silent”

Those below: “be silent.”

“Be silent” said our neighborhood

“Be silent” our city.

We swallowed our tongue.

We have a mouth but no voice

We even formed an association:

“The silent ones”

And there were many of us: a whole country, a big power

But mute

We were successful; we reached high goals; we received medals and rewards
Only with
“be silent”
This “be silent”   a great art.
Teach it to your children, your wife, your mother in law
And when you feel the need to speak
Deracinate your tongue
Make it stop.
Cut it off completely
Throw it to the dogs
It is an unnecessary tool when you don’t use it correctly.
You will sleep well at night this way; no nightmares; no doubts; no guilt
You will not feel ashamed in front of your kids
You will save yourself from having to speak
To say “you are right; I am like you; one of you”
But ahhh!
How
-Wretched me-
How I wish I could speak
But you will not
You will become a salivating verbalist
Cut off your tongue
Cut it off now
Become a mute
Since you are not gonna speak; you should dare that much.

Cut off your tongue.

This way you will be consistent with my plans

With my dreams

I retain my tongue amidst tears and cries

Because I fear that there will come a moment

Where I won’t be able to take it anymore

I will burst out

I won’t be afraid

I will hope

And every minute

I will fill my throat

With one syllable

One whisper

One stutter

One howl

Which will tell me:

SPEAK!
1.1 Introduction

“Communism responds by politicizing art” Walter Benjamin

“We are now prepared to discuss the novel’s aptness as a model of human subjectivity that can, as Bakhtin intimates, redeem historical subjects to a more productive relation with their social reality.” Alan Singer

“Winter is coming and clothes are needed

We must buy cotton

Not sell it

When the cold comes, the price of clothes will rise.

The spinning mills pay high wages.

And there is too much cotton.

What is cotton really?

How should I know what cotton is!

Does anybody know?

I don’t know what cotton is.

I only know its price.” Bertolt Brecht
THE DIALECTICAL METHOD: Speculative and Materialist

In the Preface to *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, Hegel presents an important problematic in his interpretation of the Spirit’s relationship to the “actuality” it defines. He is interested in the polarity that exists between thought and reality:

Thus a conflict may arise between what is and what ought to be, between the right which has being in and for itself, which remains unaltered, and the arbitrary determination of what is supposed to be accepted as right” (13).

Since he places the existence of God in human consciousness, he pursues the truth, knowledge of the truth, which is the object of philosophical thought, in its relation to “actuality” without the mystifying processes of the intuitive and transcendental shackles of religious excitement. He thus declares “the rationality of actuality and actuality as rationality.” Admittedly a great step in the history of philosophy: this attempt to create a science of logic and knowledge. Living in a different historical moment, i.e., in the social realities that the industrial revolution established led another philosopher to once again redefine not only the whole dialectic of truth-seeking, but give a new definition to actuality itself. Marx declares:

My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite. To Hegel, the life process of the human brain, i.e., the process of thinking, which under the name of “the Idea,” he even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurgos of the real world, and the real world is only the external world, phenomenal form of “the
Idea.” With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought.

(Capital 197)

It is now Marx’s turn to demystify Hegelian thought by locating actuality in the actual economic relations, the contradictions existing in the relationship between the means of production and production forces. In Capital, he analyzes capitalist industrial relations by playfully inventing the formula which describes the relationship of commodity to money, i.e., C-M-C being transformed to M-C-M perspicaciously analyzing the relations that labor, commodity, use value, exchange value, and surplus value occurring in the whole capitalist process. Those who read the two philosophers may end up with the following puzzle: in epistemological terms, which is more inclusive: “I think therefore I am or I work therefore I am?” Perhaps, the very question best represents the relationship between Formalist and Marxist criticism. If we believe the Russian formalists, for example, literature—and perhaps art too—re-performs instances of specific external and internal experience in a way that defamiliarizes the process of recognition in human experience. Formalism then in literary criticism tries to codify the aesthetic choices—conscious and otherwise of literature writers. Formalism magnifies and privileges the hows of texts. During times of political crisis in the 20th century, formalists came under attack for concentrating on the surface structures of literary narrative and ignoring the deeper structure of the production of meaning which is always already ideological for materialist thinkers. Conversely, the aim of Marxist criticism, we can say has the opposite aim from formalism; that is, to unmask the codes—dependant on historical and
economic forces—and reveal the defamiliarized text as very specific in both its structure and its function (highlighting its place in the history of humanity as the history of un-freedom, injustice and exploitation). Uncover the lies of apolitical innocence in other words and hurl it in the messy and violent locus of human history.\(^4\)

**MARXIST AESTHETICS**

This project aims to study the novel, specifically the political novel, as the form which records the traumatic moments of history which are a result of capitalist and colonialist practices in the west. Lukacs’s *The Theory of the Novel* is a book indispensable to the readings of novel. As a critic Lukacs compares literary forms to the historical periods of their emergence. He claims that art forms develop in the same manner that their historic-philosophical dialectic changes.\(^5\) The recognition and acceptance of dialectical thinking in understanding the world and human relationships have endowed human logic with an ability to make the connections necessary which would lead it to strive for better organized social formations, better political decisions, and an imagining of communities where democracy could be materialized as the actuality of freedom, justice and equality.\(^6\) Historical materialism furthermore shifts the focus to the actual economic conditions in the life of subjects from an abstract preoccupation with a concept of life which assumes disembodied generally classless subjects whose concerns with grocery shopping, for example, never enter representation. When there is such a premise, in epistemological and ideological terms, then the interest in the political novel may be totally justified. Historical materiality and its ideological reproduction in the social and cultural space constitute the basic building block in literary production.
Politically committed writers (mainly on the left) recognized the necessity for the creation of a weave in story-telling cognizant of a dialectical understanding of the forces connecting past and present and the oppositions in human and social specificity concerning the categories of economic class, racial make-up, gender relations or relationships of geography and ethnicity. The materialist concerns in the creation, production and interpretation of literature from the beginning of 20th century—which in turn led to the creation of multiple theoretical formulations in the humanities—were as important as the spinning jenny in the Victorian era was for the development of capitalism.  

The work of Marxist critics completes the formalist analysis of literature because it illuminates, apart from the internal relationship of a text, the totality of external socio-economic relations. As Raymond Williams, in Marxism and Literature, stated hardly ever anyone becomes a Marxist for primary cultural or literary reasons, but for compelling political and economic reasons. Marxist thinkers articulate such theories in response to the synchronic and apolitical trends in linguistics (and thus criticism) which originated with the work of Saussure, and in this way, they connect structure to the external world determined by class, gender, race, and ideology. Thus, M.M. Bakhtin, Raymond Williams, Terry Eagleton, and Frederic Jameson, have developed a thorough epistemological tool to that purpose. The political dimensions of literature both in terms of form and content recognized and highlighted a contiguity between what writers write and how scholars interpret and suggested that the worlds once represented in Wright’s Native Son or Morrison’s The Bluest Eye, for example, are actually the urban lower class
landscapes represented in the stories told by the more familiar and everyday genres of today such as hip-hop culture, of contemporary film or theatre production. An overt political dimension in the writing of literature is the only way for the “multi-vocal” and “heteroglossic” complex relations of connection that exist in human expressive recording of past and present to be unfolded, as Bakhtin in *The Dialogic Imagination* has suggested. Marxist critics also discuss the relationship between culture, language, and history and offer a review and critique of formalist aesthetics, solidifying thus Marxist literary criticism as a rigorous scientific method. Finally, the work of Marxist literary critics are all influenced by the political and cultural analyses of M. M. Bakhtin, Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser, Theodore Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse who also inform my interpretive method. Their task is to create a dialogue--and a dialectic--between language and society; a society whose basic contradiction maybe be the economic one, but on it is built the different understandings and the disquiet forms of consciousness of the people inhabiting it. In terms of analyzing literary form, the relationship of event and its thinking about is the point of contention.

The novels I have chosen from both the African American and the Modern Greek paradigm display some of the tensions that Marxist criticism sets out to unveil and reveal. From the African American experience, the novels are: Ann Petry’s *The Street* (1946), Kristin Hunter’s *God Bless the Child* (1964), and Alice Walker’s *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970); from the Modern Greek experience the novels are: Stratis Tsirkas’s *The Lost Spring* (1970), M. Douka’s *Fool’s Gold* (1979), and Alki Zei’s *Achilles’ Fiancée* (1987). There are some interesting parallels to be drawn as to how
subjectivity determined by class, race, gender, and ideology and the space (public or private) that this experience is played out, understood, and represented. If history is the external event, the novel is its thinking about it. In fact, I have observed that my particular reading of both literature and theory undergoes three stages: recognition, identification, and agency.

POSTCOLONIAL THEORY

Post-colonial theory sets out to explain dynamics of power: the contradiction of center and periphery, metropolis and colony or protectorate, First and Third World. This split between self and other creates polarities which result in racism, and subalternity, to use Spivak’s definition. Yet this is not only a psychological or discursive matter that we see for example in the work of Homi Bhabha: “history is happening—within the pages of theory, within the systems and structures a construct to figure the passage of the historical” (25); it is rather a specific historic-political situation in this last phase of global capitalism, as Dirlik stresses. The postcolonial thinkers who inform this project are Frantz Fanon, Arif Dirlik, Aijaz Ahmad, and Anne McClintock. Marxist theory of economic relations and history form the basis of their interpretive and representational theories. Fanon’s narratives expose the deleterious effects of colonialism, specifically, French occupation of Algeria, in a painfully intense and wrathful poetic language and explains the construction of the “Negro” by the white man as a symptom of the contradiction between “settled” and “native.” Additionally, Fanon in The Wretched of the Earth is critical of the tactics of the national bourgeoisie which replaces colonial domination in many previously colonized nations: “To them” [the national bourgeoisie],

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he says “nationalization quite simply means the transfer into native hands of those unfair advantages which are a legacy of the colonial period” (152). There are no postcolonial narratives of this kind any more, where intellectual comprehension meets emotional poetic intensity and depth. It is the elegy and the lament before actual mourning. Fanon’s writing becomes the careful taking care of the wound the bloody violence of white colonialism has inflicted upon its victims. Dirlik and Ahmad concentrate their focus primarily on the economic tensions of imperialist attitudes. Moreover, Aijaz Ahmad similarly suggests that although different cultural nationalisms offer crucial forms of resistance in the process of independence form coloniality, they must finally be transcended and they must recognize that, in the last analysis, it is the dialectic confrontation and contradiction between capital and the different oppressed and dispossessed groups that must be exposed. Nationalism is not the answer to colonialism and is rather the unveiling of the exploitive class structured nature of every (underdeveloped, developing, or developed) capitalist society (In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures 1992). Finally, the contribution of Anne McClintock’s “The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term ‘Post-Colonialism,’” is a very significant one in that it helps make specific connections relating to gender, nationhood or ethnicity. She offers a no-nonsense critique of U.S. both internal and external politics. Her term “internal colonization” as that social and political practice--which treats a group of
people as a foreign colony within the same country—and her introduction of the gendered experience of such a practice, i.e., “‘no postcolonial’ state has granted anywhere women and men equal access to the rights and resources of the nation state,” (92)—since even for Fanon “colonizer and colonized are unthinkingly male”—accounts for the economic, social, and cultural realities that surface in the work of African American women’s novels. On the other hand, her extensive analysis of U.S. foreign policies and practices, which she calls, “imperial colonization,” “involves large scale-scale, territorial domination of the kind that gave late Victorian England and the European ‘lords of humankind’ control of 85% of the earth” (92), and her reference to U.S. tactics in Latin America involving the support and establishment of dictatorships as a means of actual control of the economic resources of those countries, made me recognize the social and political contingencies of post war II Modern Greece. Yet, Greece’s position is a peculiar one; it is not raw materials that it can offer, but a strategic geographical position, a bridge, between east and west offering the western world access to the riches of the middle-east. Moreover, what the literature reveals is that, in this particular case, apart from the effects of external colonization, the Greek leftist population experiences an internal colonization as well: the one linked to leftist ideology and praxis; additionally, there are fragments of gender-structured worlds even within leftist communities and African American ones. Last, the novels in both cultures written during this period reconstruct and represent the tensions issues of class, gender and ideology as the basic elements constructing the novelistic raw materials.

PSYCHOANALYSIS
With the novel, according to Lukacs, the esoteric life of the hero begins. Psychoanalysis examines the psychological underpinnings of a hero’s development. Freudian Psychoanalysis was born from the need to interpret the aberrational symptoms of patients, especially women, who could not be regularized to fit the demands of early patriarchal 20th century societies. They became thus theories that explained the sexual nature of socialization demanded by modern structuring of capitalist societies. Next, the work of Lacan refigures psychic realities and inserts them in a more abstract Hegelian formulation of the function of patriarchal capitalism and the manifestations of gendered relations in them. Their theories, innovative as they might have been, are often alienating and are often rendering explications of existential and political fragmentation. In contrast, the work of French feminist psychoanalysts is the space where some recognition may occur. The work of Julia Kristeva and Melanie Klein speak the multileveled realities of womanhood and motherhood within western patriarchal capitalist societies more relevant to my understanding of reality.

However, since the project wishes to illuminate the traumatic dimensions of subjectivity Kristeva’s “Psychoanalysis and the Polis” (1982) suggests that Marxist political theories of social transformation as the only forms of acquiring a true meaning are no longer adequate. She stresses that political analysis alone as a tool is inadequate in fulfilling the desire to interpret or change the world; it had to be supplemented by “delirium,” the psychoanalytic discourse which creates spiral interpretations rather than linear renderings of meaning: “there is a meaning,” she says “and I am supposed to know it to the extent that it escapes me.” This mode of understanding subjectivity for Kristeva is liberating and not normative. Kristeva’s discourse in most of her work exemplifies this
embracing of the psychoanalytic as the language that shutters any attempt at reaching “One” meaning and it is best exemplified in Revolution in Poetic Language. She argues that in the signifying process the subject is dialectically involved in both semiotic and symbolic modalities by family or social structures. Understandably, the symbolic is the language of the law, of socialization into patriarchal capitalism, I would add. But the interesting point here is the notion of the semiotic which she describes as *chora* = “a non expressive totality formed by drives and the pre-oedipal stage.” This *chora* has no spatiality or temporality and is represented as rupture, but it is also nourishing, maternal, and maybe is manifested as mad discourse and delirium, as poetry. Kristeva’s form of psychoanalytic language following Hegel, following Lacan, creates a style that is thick, complex, and often indecipherable precisely because subject perception of the other is always already occurring in mediation. Her choice of style is a response to simplistic psychological explanations of subjectivity the way Lacan’s style is also a challenge to easy comprehension or popularization of ego-psychology. Klein’s psychoanalytic theory in the beginning of the 20th century was of great importance because she expressed it through a linguistic symbolization which had the mother as the focus of object-relations. It is no longer the longing for the male penis but the child’s relationship to the feeding breast that defined their entrance to the social/symbolic. Kristeva very astutely observes, that although the unconscious was first attempted to be systematically observed with Freud, we are far from its equivalent Copernican revolution in the natural sciences. The idea of the soul as related to body and language can not be explained with mere rationality, even Aristotle early in the human account of civilization admitted that our interpretive capabilities stop when we are confronted with the language of poetry. (And
what is that but the maternal poetic Kristeva calls *chora*?). While studying mental illness, Freud managed to formulate a theory of the human unconscious the knowledge of which led to the liberating of the human soul. Through observing human pathology, knowledge of the thin boundaries between health and illness is acquired. Freud’s incorporation of sexuality as the basic ingredient in the structuring of that which is not bodily was the 20th century’s Archimedean “eureka.” The psyche is the locus where the unconscious/preconscious/conscious manifestations of subjectivity take place. “The unconscious possesses a structure,” Kristeva claims, “all its own and can not be limited or defined by familial shame or social mores. Female hysteria offered Freud a path into the labyrinth twists and turns of the unconscious. “The psychic bisexuality that psychoanalysis uncovered led to the paths of subjective emancipation.” What Klein moreover did was provide a different metaphor/symbolic language to account for the stages of infant socialization. If Freud gave us a dialectic relationship between anxiety and pleasure, *eros* and *thanatos*, Klein recognized this death drive as a basic element of our being in the world-in-pain. This plunging into the madness that characterizes the human psyche both limits and energizes it. Both Freud’s and Klein’s theories were developed as ruptures of the accepted norms of *beingness* in the world. They (and Lacan) are the leading rebels in a revolution that is peculiarly without an obvious physical collective. Klein’s rebellious move, according to Julia Segal’s *Melanie Klein*, was that she brought the insights of the mother into psychoanalysis. Mother constitutes the primary focus into the process of subjectivity creation. The role of the father is secondary. She herself a mother, and having lived in an unhappy marriage for too long, observed the manifestation of guilt, anxiety, love, and hate in the infant’s relationship to
the mother. Moreover, Kristeva’s narrative style contains an original emotional intelligence in “Stabat Mater” the way Beloved’s narrative style avoids a trivial representation of slavery. Surprisingly though, when she explains Kleinian psychoanalytic theory, her language is much simpler following perhaps Klein’s scientific language.¹³

Such theories enable the reader to penetrate into the esoteric lives of the novel’s characters and make the connections of contiguity and recognition. The wounds inflicted on the characters during their cumbersome and lonely road they experience in their lives are not merely manifestations of existential anxieties but the repercussions of limitations and poisonous effects of economic dispossession, racism, sexism, and ideological persecution of ordinary, everyday people. Such tensions can also be found in the narratives of African American women and the Hellenic socialist ones. Last but not least, in the case of African American novels the work of Womanist theory, where African American women writers, mark the territory of their self-identification and interpretive threads is very important since the recent and delayed academic interest in the regenerative formulations of the African American experience, by non-African Americans, created problems of reification cooption and distortion on an ethical and other levels of the meanings of blackness.¹⁴

POLITICAL NOVEL

Scholarship in the study of the political novel originally defines its nature and purpose in the role it plays in society. Morris E. Speare (1924), Joseph L Blotner (1955) and Gordon Milne (1966) suggest that this novel’s focus should be on prose that deals
with overtly political issues and themes e.g. the legislative and governmental elements of society as the main thread that structures its elements. Whether opposing or supporting governmental tactics those should be the primary focus of the novel or stressing ideas rather than feeling and a larger political setting rather than the familial space. Irvin Howe’s *Politics and the Novel* certainly expands the definition. The connection with the social and the familial is Howe’s suggestion that the politics of the writer and the inequality of dominant and dominated cultures was an effort to complicate the issues. Issues of gender and race or ethnicity and ideology have been added. The connection between the personal and the political became unavoidably apparent. There is a need for direct purpose and a didactic dimension to the study of the novel. This take on things is certainly an expansive understanding of the political: political is everything that happens in the polis. It has transformed my idea of the political as being that form or genre that presents insurgent subjectivity with a desire to transform economic and political aspects of social reality by locating and highlighting contradictions which determine and define not only formal aspects of the novel but also attitudes and actions of the characters intertwined in their worlds. Analysis of the specific worlds of particular novels will discover those emergent specificities and their ideological preoccupation.

My dissertation focuses on the *political novel*: for many the political is everything and anything which manifests itself in the *polis*. By political, I refer to novels which render alternative as well as oppositional (to western patriarchal capitalist) representations of history and subjectivity in what came to be known as western constitutional state democracies. The novel, moreover, apart from being a product of
history in western nationalist capitalism in this case, creates microcosms in which political, psychoanalytic, and social realities and tensions are unconsciously reflected. I have selected novels which create new realities and new psychoanalytic languages through which to depict and understand historical events, political structures, and their psychological effects upon subjugated subjects. I argue that one cannot study history unless it becomes specific not only in terms of dates, places, and events but also in terms of the economic, ideological, and political causes behind these events. Furthermore, this study highlights the psychological repercussions upon the Subject of history herself. The political novels I have chosen to discuss come from two very apparently different cultures—which are nonetheless similar in the ways they experienced cruelty, exploitation, and alienation by being subjected to very peculiar forms of colonization--the African American and the Hellenic socialist.

AFRICAN AMERICAN

From the vastness of the agrarian space of the plantation which is the historical context in *Beloved*, black subjects were forced to either look for “happiness” in the North where they discovered the narrowing of space in their inability to acquire property which became symbolic of safety, or the narrowing of possibilities in the post-reconstruction era. This concern with space is represented in the African American novels and on it depends the failures and accomplishment of the characters’ quest.

On the African American side, ideas of race and racial prejudice, although sometimes kept on the margins, they decisively dictate class positions. If the lack of community, solidarity, or tradition (grandparents) is detrimental to the lives of poor African Americans, poverty manifested in the form of the desire to possess a home/house
constitutes the basic class issue. The communities presented by the authors prove to be devastated by the synergy of class and race under patriarchal white capitalism and ultimately has a deleterious effect upon gender relations as well. When there is an absence of any back up/support provided by communities or tradition--when the plight of the subject in question is presented as specific, peculiar, and private, moreover--the family is destroyed. The existence of the love and nurturing provided by these communities--realization as belonging to some collectivity rather than being an isolated individual--may save these political subjects and provide some hope for their salvation.

If “a word is a bridge thrown between myself and another” (Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* 1929 86), then the fact that I may link the condition of being hungry (dispossessed etc.) with that of others might result not in the guilty feelings of shame, loss of dignity, or resignation, but as a realization of the existence of a common/collective and public fate which may lead to activation and mobilization.

With the end of slavery and the dawn of the post reconstruction era an *icy freedom*, as Fr. Douglass suggests in his *Narrative*, came into the horizon. With it came the beginning of lynching of African Americans recorded by different narratives like Ida B. Wells’ *A Red Record* or James Baldwin’s “Going to See the Man.”. Since there was no planning for economic reparations or material welfare of a large number of people who lost their *spacial* (dismal as it might have been) belonging and began their long quest for justice, equality, and happiness in a country that prided itself of those exact principles for all, what was in fact created was a colored underclass which provided cheap labor hands and which was constantly forced to social and political concessions, humiliations, and existential and ideological marginalization.
In these novels economic dispossession (often manifested as a strong desire to possess a home by the characters) plagues African Americans and leads to deflated dreams, problematic gender relationships, disillusioned familial relationships, and finally in psychological terms, the internalization of self contempt of the colonized by a white majority. This white majority, furthermore, although it occupies a very limited space in the novels themselves, it becomes the decisive (and is recognized by the characters as such) factor for the characters’ personal and private failure to acquire the American dream. African American women’s writing thus gives voice to the subject’s personal experience burdened by race, class, and gender issues while the political—in the form of collective self realization, resistance, agitation, and insurgency—remains in the background. Characters do not participate in it directly; they form no alliances, no collective political consciousness, in other words, and they manifest no desire to act collectively. What is remarkable in Ann Petry’s *The Street*, for example, is that although the reader cries for a formation of an alliance between Lutie, Min, and Mrs Hedges—all black marginal women who are exploited in different ways—that alliance never materializes and some of the women are crushed by the material conditions of American individualistic and private democracy. In periods of crisis, the realization of a collective identity is absolutely necessary; post modernist subject positioning ala Laclau and Mouffe is a historical leap that is not possible. There are echoes of political participation, the Civil Rights movement in Hunter and Meriwether but there are very marginal. There is a stronger representation of the political in Walker’s *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* at the end of the novel when it is actually suggested that Ruth, who comes in
contact with the Civil Rights movement through her (prospective) boyfriend, may actually participate in it after Grange’s death.

MODERN GREEK

Economic dispossession is the background on which the over-determined historical moments are based in the Hellenic socialist novel as well. It is insurgent subjectivity which is fore-grounded; the subject has a specific knowledge of their historical situatedness (in imperialist capitalism and/or specific class and ideological consciousness); they are involved in socialist agitation and open confrontation with a military status quo which answers with oppression and physical violence. The political (characters’ involvement in everyday dangerous political praxis) and the subject, who had internalized feelings of inferiority due to class and ideology, become the focus of the novel. In a sense their involvement in politics is their liberating factor despite the psychological or physical torture they suffer in the hands of police and the parakratos (=a group of lumpenproletariat who carries out the dirty work of right wing military hegemony). Moreover, apart from the participants’--what Tsirkas names “the Sisyphus people”--having a collective politics of rebellion, agitation, and resistance (which is socialist national and international at the same time), they are also able to practice a critique of the means and practices of liberation (of socialist party politics in other words; they also depict the problematic/oppressive nature of gender relations within socialists themselves). The space in which subjectivity is enacted in the Hellenic socialist political novel is public par excellence. Psychic wounds are connected to class positions and are delineated so that they can accentuate the rift between capital and communist tactical intervention. To use the Gramscian terms, the struggle in these overdetermined
moments that the novels puts forth are political struggles which may use military tactics like “war of movement,” strikes, insurrection of students; “war of position” boycotts or “underground warfare” (through armed resistance).

Furthermore, economic dispossession is portrayed as an experience of violence upon the bodies. If racism creates a wounded psyche, economic dispossession renders people especially women (and mothers)—what Alice Walker calls “the saints”—extremely vulnerable and defenseless; the existence of such disadvantageous position leads to some kind of psychological maiming through the internalization of the hegemonic hateful gaze which is directly linked to gender oppression by the colonized same (or as Gilroy would say since it creates “violence internalized and reproduced” The Black Atlantic). This historical situation creates a challenge for African American women writers who offer alternative representations/perceptions/praxes of everyday life by introducing the importance of community, folk tradition, nurturing, grandparents, and love. Political choices are absent in Petry (her model is B. Franklin and the Protestant work ethic which provide no collective realization of dispossession in the Marxist sense).

[Does one talk about false consciousness in Althusserian or Luckaksian terms? Is Hall’s suggestion of using caution in our (problematic) assumptions that we can be the ones to place ourselves outside ideology so that we can claim that we see its true nature? I will have to deal with issues like that in my study.] Lutie finds herself in an environment of economic determinism based on the racist tactics of a social reality constructed by a dominant white majority. Lutie’s body becomes the prey for violence. She is susceptible to all kinds of violence of external forces like the wind that is inexorable to the suffocating walls of Lutie’s miserable apartment on 116th street. Because she is a
single mother she is also vulnerable to the violent gaze of both white and black masculinity. Her body is prey not only to the white man’s, but also to the black marginal man’s gaze. A whole new dimension is unfolded, that of gender. Men and Women do not in fact experience capitalist colonial exploitation in the same manner.

Some of the same issues appear in the Hellenic socialist novel. Eleni, the narrator of Zei’s Achilles’ Fiancée, becomes the conveyor of memory for the historical and political realities of periods of crisis. Eleni describes the physical violence enacted on the bodies of the “Sisyphus people.” The cells of the security police “are breathing” with the short breaths and the painful moans of tortured young socialists. There is a young girl, Matina: she is wearing white pumps when captured. What Eleni is left with in the cell is the blood stained one shoe she finds after Matina has been executed by police. That image steels Eleni, who had entertained thoughts of signing, with new strength and courage and manages to hold on. This ability to endure physical violence and not sign (precisely because one links one’s fate with the common fate of the group) was perceived as the most heroic form of resisting the State and its military brutes.

The study of these two kinds of novels then becomes a transatlantic/transnational effort to articulate postcolonial subalternity under imperialist capitalism as Spivak would say. They both make the connection between imperialist capitalism and gender domination. In both novels colonization is performed upon bodies which become loci of the struggle between colonial capitalist tactics and the subjects’ resistance attitudes in the private or public domain. As violence is enacted upon them, they become both symbols of suffering, but also resistance and heroism. Bodies are always placed in spaces where they must respond one way or another. The actual writing of these two different kinds of
texts becomes an exercise in historical memory which renders counteractive representations of their character, their being, their humanity, and unwittingly play a great role in the decolonization process of what has been called the postcolonial other. Although in different forms, both cultures realize the importance of forming alliances as a means of fighting fragmentation, isolation, and self contempt that imperialism and capitalism forces upon its subjugates.
Hegel formulates a dialectic which would allow the Spirit to accurately define “the unrest of life”; this process, which includes both the affirmation and negation of its substance, is the actual articulation of substance: “This in-itself has to express itself outwardly and become for itself, and this means simply that it has to posit self-consciousness as one with itself” (Phenomenology of Spirit 15). Hegel’s version of the dialectical process, revises previous attempts by philosophers such as Aristotle, Plato, etc. to create a science of thinking which may lead to truths about the external world, “the individual and World-Spirit.” Since our task as critics is to analyze the textual manifestations of the pictures of and about the world that literature provides, it is important that we, ourselves, formulate such a methodology of deciphering.

I consider this section of Capital, “The Critique of Capitalism,” of Marx’s explanation of how raw-material, coat or linen, is turned to capital and how money becomes an end to itself as the most exciting. Commodities apart from having use value in their physical form, they are transformed and mutated to depositories of value in their exchange form. His task is to trace this genesis of money. In this way, “the social relation between men assumes... the fantastic form of a relation between things” (217). This fact exposes the fetishistic character of commodities in the capitalist process. He exposes the circulative function of money as a profit making one, an end in itself; that is the greed of the capitalist.

F. de Saussure’s Course in General Linguistics marks the beginning of linguistic studies in modernity and gives birth to structuralism. In a sense, it is the critique of philology in general which seeks to penetrate the essence and original spirit of the ancient text. Structuralism’s concerns are strictly synchronic; it views language (and literature) as the means for the signification of reality and not its reflection. The relationship between signifier and signified is an arbitrary one. The aesthetic element is of primary importance; not the communicative in formalism. A formalist trend—unlike the Marxist one-- declares the autonomous and apolitical aspect of literature. A dialogue between the two trends has resulted in the area of Marxist aesthetics. Toni Bennett’s Formalism and Marxism gives a very clear overview of both Formalism and Marxism and a thorough explanation of how they may complement each other. Regarding Marxist criticism, he argues that “its raison d’etre is that it should work upon literary texts, wrenching them from the forms in which they are customarily perceived or interpreted, so as to mobilize them politically in stated directions” (142).

Volosinov in Marxism and the Philosophy of Language, although impressed by the impact of Saussurean linguistics, articulates a materialist aspect of the role of language. Volosinov considers a verbal sign as “a speech act” which is in fact ideological. It is a creation between individuals, a creation within a social milieu: “Consciousness takes shape and being in the material of signs created by an organized group in the process of its social intercourse” (13). Existence reflected in sign is not merely reflected but refracted. This happens through the intersection of different oriented social interests within one and the same community: by the class struggle. The sign becomes the arena of the class struggle. Every sign even the sign of individuality is social, he argues. Unlike structuralists, it is “utterance,” i.e., parole and not langue that he is interested in. A word is the product of the reciprocal relation between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee. A word is a bridge between my self and other and not a result of the either “Individual subjectivism” or “abstract objectivism” trend.

Lukacs recognizes art forms as products of what he calls integrated or problematic civilizations. If the epic is the form of an integrated civilization, he calls the novel the result of a problematic one. It is not the intentions of the authors that matters, he claims, but their historico-philosophical realities. In the novel, what is delineated is the character’s psychological state in a gloomy world of “transcendental homelessness”; the process towards self-recognition is a problematic one since the novel is “the epic of a world which has been abandoned by God” (88). The hero’s perception of the relationship between the subjective and objective world, his individual presence in the totality of life, is meaningless; conveyed by irony (M. Lambridis 27).

The powerful simplicity located in the fragmented philosophical thought of Herakleitus is indisputable here. He not only recognizes that “change alone is unchanging,” (23) but also sees it in the search for truth: “In searching out the truth be ready for the unexpected, for it is difficult to find and puzzling when you find...
in a vacuum but is significantly conditioned by the everyday life of the critic” (125). Fervor. I do not trust fervor” (9). In Marxist, and cultural terms, he exposes the economic contradictions without being burned. These truths do not have to be hurled in men’s faces. They are not intended to ignite these truths were a fire in me then. Now I can tell them to my status as an alien and non-citizen. In fact, slightly disturbed, I thought to myself: “They tell me I am either economic or political terms, like the limited financial resources, or the constrictions that are related to the postcolonial intellectual and I am supposed to feel cultural inferiority; however, my Hellenic socialist theory cannot know itself, to manifest those conditions of its making about which it is necessary silent” ( ). The categories of materialist criticism, Eagleton uses for his analysis pertain to the constituents of general mode of production, literary modes of production, general ideology, authorial ideology, aesthetic ideology all of whose aim is to illuminate the text. Fredric Jameson is another critic who studies the relationship of language and culture in similar terms, by considering texts as always already read: “interpretation is an allegorical act, which consists of rewriting a given text in terms of a particular interpretative master code; he calls this: “the political unconscious.” He gives priority to political interpretation of literary texts. It is not an auxiliary one, like the psychoanalytic or stylistic one, but it is “the absolute horizon of all reading and all interpretation.”

I encountered the term when I enrolled in the program at Ohio State University in 1994. I saw the symptoms of the difference between Greekness and Ameri canness in the various practical aspects of my life here. However, this difference was never experienced by me as nothing other than my accessibility in either economic or political terms, like the limited financial resources, or the constrictions that are related to my status as an alien and non-citizen. In fact, slightly disturbed, I thought to myself: “They tell me I am the postcolonial intellectual and I am supposed to feel cultural inferiority; however, my Hellenic socialist comrades and I have never felt inferior in any sense. We knew we were oppressed and we knew our nation was being used as U.S. “protectorate” assisted by our own Hellenic (sic) State and its bourgeoisie (representatives) ready to sell everything to capital. But we felt superior culturally, ethically, and ideologically (we saw ourselves from outside the U.S. territory and not from inside it) because (1) we were not on the side of the ones who exploit, and most importantly, (2) we saw through their lies.” So as Arif Dirlik would say “postcoloniality is the condition of the intelligentsia of global capitalism” rather than an ideological or ontological condition of the exploited other. What they call postcolonial people therefore do not care nor embrace American/Western dominant representations; they in fact define themselves socially and ideologically in opposition to dominant representations of the West. The only reason those voices are not heard is because of the economic imperialist structures of power which may allow different voices to be heard.

In Black Skin White Masks, Fanon sets out to expose the consequences of racist colonialism. Fanon’s narrative is one of painful intensity, wrathful indignation, and poetically regretful, at times: “This book should have been written three years ago. . . . But these truths were a fire in me then. Now I can tell them without being burned. These truths do not have to be hurled in men’s faces. They are not intended to ignite fervor. I do not trust fervor” (9). In Marxist, and cultural terms, he exposes the economic contradictions of
the polarity of black and white, the perceptual connotations of this split, and all the elements of the cultural ways of stratification. “If there is an inferiority complex, it is the outcome of a double process: primarily, economic; subsequently, the internalization—or, better, the epidermalization—of this inferiority” (11). Moreover, in his *Wretched of the Earth*, he attempts to account for “the psychopathological and philosophical explanation of the state of being a Negro” (13). He observes the destructive effects of racism in the specific stories of the real cases he has observed in his practice as a psychiatrist. He denounces notions of objectivity in this process since he understands the relationship between colonizer and colonized as a hegemonic one in exploitive capitalist societies. His aim is not only to formulate processes of the dis-alienation and decolonization of the oppressed people but also the exposing of the hypocrisy of tradition practiced by the Black nationalist governments which replaced colonial powers in Africa.

Ahmad, in *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*, offers a materialist understanding of post-coloniality. He is clearly against the textualization of Marxist or postcolonial positions. The idea of migrancy, as is often expressed in the theories of Bhabha, Spivak, and others acquires “an ontological condition” (13). The rhetoric of their postcolonial articulations furthermore is so dense and so indecipherable, at times—blame it on influences of deconstruction—that they mystify and obscure their predominant ideas rather than clarifying them. Theories of decolonization and socialism can not be thought of apart from one another. He sees in such attitudes the death of politics, a politics which should focus on the oppressive and exploitive of class-structured, capitalist society. The example of Vietnam he cites is a pivotal one: “the predominantly (and after the mid-70s, increasingly) anti-communist Left of the metropolitan variety, having already dismissed the discussion of material realities as ‘vulgar Marxism’ and ‘economic determinism’, held the Vietnamese themselves responsible for those failures, then consigned them to the remotest margins of its own memory. Thus it was that Vietnam, the great victor of anti-imperialist war, became a showcase not for socialism but of the impossibility of building socialism” (29). Similarly, Arif Dirlik, in his “The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism,” he argues that postcolonialism is complicit to hegemony since it pays little attention to the socio-political and cultural dominations of imperialist countries. The identity of the postcolonial critic as a result is “not structural but discursive.” Since both colonizer and colonized have a problem with identity, postcolonialism does expose the relations that shape all of the term a seeming shapeless world. He suggests that rather it should formulate a discourse.

Klein, although influenced by Freud’s theories of sexuality, has a distinctive view of the inner world, the world of fantasy and its relation to the external world children relate to their external world through their unconscious *phantasies* (28). She turns Freud’s idea upside down as she felt that ‘object relations” were very important because they are about doing something to someone: an object distinct from self. It is a two person interaction within the psychoanalytic economy. Klein redefined Freud’s developmental stages (oral, anal, genital) by positions.

1. The paranoid-schizoid position:
   This stage is related to the infant’s *phantasies* of the nipple: the nipple as loving, feeding, creative and good; the infant must also be kept at a distant from the nipple which is biting, hurtful, and terrifying. Without this split, the baby is not able to make the connection between love and cruelty and feed trustingly. [This develops normally but in cases of child abuse this upturn of that balance it creates confusion.]

2. The depressive position
   This appears when the infant is around 3 months old; in this stage, the baby begins to integrate experience rather than split it. Awareness of objects as whole with both loved and hated characteristics is developed. Once the baby reaches this stage, it can contain thoughts and representations of the absent mother as good. Disappointment with the mother is no longer feared as something wholly bad and dangerous. In this way the baby achieves a sense of internal strength.

If we accept a relationship between psychoanalytic and feminist theories, we might begin to understand the manifestations of cruelty, and thus understand traumatic history. Thus the dialogue between feminism and psychoanalysis was born. I suggest that that relationship is, in fact, triadic: Marxism plays a big role in offering us a means of understanding history, and specifically the history of exploitation. We now know that we speak about Feminisms. But originally in the 70s and 80s we connected Feminism with political agitating tactics, with a desire to change our social realities in the work force, in the judicial system, in the family. Since we discovered that changes in the judicial system, for example, (i.e. Greek family law) or
the political system (the state of women in the Soviet Union) did not necessarily result in subsequent changes in familial relationships or interpersonal relationships, psychoanalysis then became a very important field through which we understand our roles as women in the political but also interpersonal space. (Remember it was not Freud but Tolstoy who said that the liberation of the woman begins in the bedroom).

14 The term Womanist was coined by Alice Walker in *In Search of Our Mother's Garden: Womanist Prose*. The work of womanist critics such as Barbara Smith, Barbara Christian, Linda Alcoff has enlightened me to notions of ethics and appropriation when “speaking about the other.” Since, “in matters of race, silence and evasion have historically literary discourse . . . because black people signified little or nothing in the imagination of white American writers,” (Morrison *Playing in the Dark* 15), both writers and critics in the African American culture set out to voice a very rich in imagination and beauty—but also wisdom and pain—to redefine their experience. The ubiquitous presence of African American literary work in the academia, in our time is testimony to its worth and educational value.

15 I found Sharon M. Harris’s book, *Redefining the Political Novel: American Women Writers, 1797-1901*, very helpful in its summary of what the concept of the political novel had been and how she expands the categories of its definition very helpful here.

16 Police presented political prisoners with a piece of paper in which if they denounced communism and revealed names of comrades, they would be spared the torture; in the opposite case, the torture would start.
CHAPTER 2

RECORDING HISTORY RECORDING TRAUMA THROUGH THE
POLITICAL NOVEL: BELOVED AND MISSION BOX

In capitalism lies the desire to own and profit. To achieve that, the system must become imperial: there lies its desire to rule. Between capitalism and ownership lies cruelty.

“What else is Marx’s philosophy of history, but a tragedy about deprivation and oppression with a happy ending?” Gina Politi

In her essay “Selfhood and Community: Psychoanalysis and Discourse in Beloved,” Jennifer FitzGerald argues that: “Literary criticism examines texts, not people; it analyzes discourse, not psyches” (670). This mode of thinking, to disembodied the text from the experience of real historical subjects, is the general attitude and trend in academic critical work. Yet, it is because of that experience (at least the one recording trauma) that this kind of literature is written; it is because of that experience some critics may desire to retain the dimension of the history of real corporeal beings in the past, present and future in literary criticism. Tragedy has no temporal or spatial coordinated mark. The study of history so far, and in this case as it appears in the writing of novels, has brought to light a new ethics in the aesthetics in which traumatic experience is
brought to light. Often periods of acute historical or social tragedy follow mourning as the only way to deal with the trauma that has been experienced, the trauma that temporal distance has enabled its participants to think about or speak in the terms which will give it the character it deserves and the opportunity to understand it in relation to the what-is-in-the-now. Based on actual historical events, the political novel, whose basic underlying experience can be historical trauma, especially in the case of *Beloved* and *Mission Box* becomes symbolic of three centuries’ collective experience of Black people, and the gruesome realities of a nation’s class and ideological conflicts during a crucial moment, a civil war between nationalists and communists, in Modern Hellenic history. The writing of these political novels aims to record historical events, painful and polarized—engraved in the unconscious of the people whose history they reveal—as they offer articulation where previously was silence caused by the effacing repercussions of *lethe*; they offer re-articulation where there was deceptive and distorted recording of the past because of the repressive tendencies of hegemonic power structures practiced in the state. The intention of their writers is to bring *aletheia* where there was *lethe*: restoration of justice where there was criminal negligence or distortion regarding historical truth.

Luckily for the history of humanity apart from the desire for comfort, resignation, cooptation, there also exist a desire for meaningful and effective agency, recognition of a shared fate which leads the inhabitants of this planet to look with concern at what has happened to the subjects of history and dare desire the rewriting the future map of human citizenship. Thus what the writers achieve is to tell the truth about important historical moments as they give very fine and delicate accounts of the political, social, and psychological affects of cruelty upon the colonized victims.
Marxist and Postcolonial theory, sheds light onto the causes for the cruelty encountered in the specific representations the novel affords of history. Colonization is a form of domination in space. Western Europeans look around and search for forms of power display and domination. Countries in the west from the 16th century onwards are troubled by multidimensional internal conflicts. The west produces a civilization which is aggressive as well as exploratory; exploratory thus unavoidably aggressive. The conquering and possession of space, which offers control of people and resources, become the driving force behind Europe’s strongest nations’ desire to expand and prosper. Vastness and narrowness of space becomes a predominant metaphor in the novels of African Americans of the 20th century. As if the writers take their cue from Harriet Jacobs (and all the escapees whose stories have never been voiced, who alarmed by the vastness of the place of slavery, places herself in a claustrophobic and dangerous situation, but the only way she can exercise her humanity, her resolve and desire to act as an agent, a free human being.\textsuperscript{1} Marxist and Postcolonial theory, furthermore, sets out to explain the dynamics of power which create racism, otherness, subalternity.\textsuperscript{1} The political novel is the perfect locus where these tensions emerge and can be studied.

Both the African American and the Modern Greek paradigm deals with literature that writes history, in particular, painful history which is experienced by the characters inhabiting that fragment of history as trauma. It was writing about the holocaust that gave impetus to this field and recognized it as a field where witnessing and testimony play a great role in recording historical trauma. In order for Beloved and Box to record this traumatic history, they need to reinvent form, by employing a language which is symbolic and a narrative which is complex, non linear, non Aristotelian, often the
language of the nightmare. The texts need to do that as a way of expressing the impossibility of actually trying to articulate the horror of that experience. Only literature can create that kind of language which will attempt to articulate the unspeakable.

Psychoanalysis, on the other hand, sheds light onto the ways historical representation is transformed from recordings of events, dates, and names to the long time social and psychic effects they have upon the represented historical subjects who experience that moment of history as a traumatic one. A psychoanalytic perspective of history, therefore, as it encoded in literature, offers the best testimony of trauma, which may be witnessed on a personal level, but it is also embedded and sedimented in the collective experience and self-understanding of a whole people (Caruth 1995). Testimony of World War II holocaust survivors, as it was analyzed by psychiatric and psychoanalytic discourse gave impetus to this field and recognized it as a field where witnessing and testimony play a great role in recording historical trauma.¹ From a psychoanalytic perspective therefore, the elements that the two novels share are the following: 1. they both employ a narrative form, which is non-linear, repetitious, circular, and elliptic; 2. they re-present historical and personal truth as problematic memory which leads to a crisis of truth; 3. the mode of rendition the survivor uses, i.e. testimony, creates the psychoanalytic dialogue.

This form of temporal economy is based on Freud’s formulation of the belated nature of traumatic experience which needs to be repressed while still raw and whose truth is revisited, “rememoried” in Morrison’s term, at a later stage only to be comprehended as: “the crisis of that truth” (Caruth 1995). Freud, who studied post-traumatic stress disorders in World War I soldiers, defines as traumatic “any excitations
form outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield” (“Beyond the Pleasure Principle” 607) The symptoms of such a shattering experience described are anxiety, fear and fright.¹ My study is examining how the political novel, written about slavery in the U.S.A. and about the post World War II civil war period between communists (The Liberation army) and nationalists (Government forces) in Greece, becomes historical testimony of the two oppressed and colonized peoples. The writers of the two novels, Toni Morrison and Ari Alexandrou are employing certain similar narrative forms, historical and psychoanalytic methodologies, in order to record history in this genre. Both texts can be conceived as historical and psychoanalytic representations of acutely traumatic moments occurring caused by capitalism, or the people’s struggle against it, determined predominantly by race in *Beloved* and ideology in *Mission Box*. While they retain their own cultural and geographical specifications, these texts carry in their specificities common messages and perspectives on notions and practices regarding love and rebellion, and make a statement about historical truth, i.e. who gets to be its agent and how it can inform social, political, and ideological realities in the present. Although there is a lot of scholarship on both novels, only when all discourse levels (the historical, the political, and the psychoanalytic) are carefully examined can there be a possibility for a thorough illumination of the somber complexity in the creation of the two novels.

2.1 Imperialist Economic Exploitation and the Postcolonial Narrative in *Beloved* and *Mission Box*
The bourgeoisie has torn away from the family its sentimental veil, and has reduced the family relation to a mere money relation. . . . It has resolved personal worth into exchange value. The Communist Manifesto

Paul D hears the men talking and for the first time learns his worth. He has always known, or believed he did, his value—as a hand, a laborer who could make profit on a farm—but now he discovers his worth, which is to say he learns his price. The dollar value of his weight, his strength, his brain, his penis, and his future. Beloved

In the juxtaposition between the dogmatist communists and Leninists, the narrator recognizes that the tactics of the dogmatists are the same with those of fascist regimes: “Fanaticism, dogmatism, new pedantic tendencies, Middle age mentalities, infallibility, authority, eksousia is what Alexandrou’s rhetoric is constantly and uncompromisingly rejecting” (Raftopoulos 119). Kotzias also notes that what creates the problem is “the blind adherence to a highhanded mechanism which enforces violently humanism in the universe” (Kotzias 1). Also in another essay Alexandrou uses another example: “Brecht’s Galileo is a man who does not fear to explore objective reality even if he perceives, even if he is certain that his research will lead him to the overturning of all official and documented by everyone point of views” (Alexandrou 1982 96). Still the narrator in The Box wants to make sure that what he records needs to be confirmed by the authority. Moreover, this becomes an obsession especially when the narrator needs to verify and confirm with the authorities of how many dead and how many living are left at every stage of the mission. The narrator becomes obsessed with numbering, with naming
the names of the dead and the living, with the mathematical procedures of logical
addition and subtraction as to who is dead and who remains alive at what stage in time
and what point in the map (Argyriou 1989  27). From a historical aspect, both novels are
examples of post-colonial texts. But, how are they so? What are the specific historical and economic conditions which give
birth to these texts and make them so intensely political? In the two kinds of novels and
the cultural experience they speak, two forms of colonial exploitation emerge: Internal in
the case of African American people and imperialist in relation to the Hellenic
experience. 1 In other words, the specific historical materiality of colonization and
exploitation constitutes the kernel in the narrative of these two novels, as they form a
dialectic relationship to their readers, since “history is the text of ideology, and our desire
to find ourselves in the structural order of history is analogous to our reasons for reading
novels” (Singer 21). Marxist and postcolonial theory, as it attempts to interpret the
dialectic and linguistic forms that the writing of history takes in the writing of literature,
it also challenges simplistic ideas of human subjectivity in-the-world while they link
economic, political, and psychological issues to notions of oppression, representation,
and their relation to the maintenance of the imperialism of monopoly capital; in the case
of Box, the shortcomings of communist party practices during the anti-capitalist, anti-
imperialist struggle. 1 By recreating contradictions and juxtapositions which deal with
issues of center and periphery, homogeneity and difference, the novel becomes “a model
of human subjectivity that can . . . redeem historical subjects to a more productive
relation with their social reality” (Singer 97).
Beloved and Box are two texts which display these precise novelistic characteristics as they escape a mono/static existence and they become texts of multidimensional and dynamic agency. The texts bring to the forefront ideas of material necessity, power, colonization, their destructive effects upon the subjects of history, but also tell a lot about the political/ideological ways in which the subjects of history make sense of their positionality. Private and public space become very important in the ways subjectivity understands itself in the larger social and political realm. What we call society, i.e. the political and economic forces which create power relations, patricians and plebeians, hegemones and subjugates—polarities, in other words, based on different criteria depending on different cultural environments--propagates obedience, disciplined docile bodies, subjugation, stratification according to different characteristics: race, gender, class, ideology. 1 Private and public spaces are in dialogue in both of those texts. It is right that Homi Bhabha also notes that:

Private and public, past and present, the psyche and the social develop an interstitial intimacy. It is intimacy that questions binary divisions through which such spheres of social experience are often spatially opposed. These spheres of life are linked through an ‘in-between’ temporality that takes the measure of dwelling at home, while producing an image of the world of history. (The Location of Culture 13)

In African American feminist criticism furthermore it will acquire a more synergistic nature in any process to “reconstruct womanhood” in the sphere of cultural studies: “social political and economic analyses that use class as a fundamental category often
assert the necessity for white and black to sink their differences and unite in a common and general class struggle” (Reconstructing Womanhood 17).

If nothing else, this project sets out to discover the common elements in the historical experience of the two peoples, who although geographically remote and culturally different, they carry in their literatures the mapping of equally soaked-in-the blood-of-the-people traumatic moments.

2.1.1 BELOVED

Go down, Moses,
Way down in Egyptland
Tell old Pharaoh
To let my people go.

……………………..

Over my head
I see freedom in the air
Over my head, Oh lord
I see freedom in the air
Over my head
I see freedom in the air
There must be a God somewhere

……………………..

We raise de wheat,
Dey gib us de corn:
We bake de bread,
Dey gib us de crust;
We sif de meal,
Dey gib us de huss;
We peel de meat,
Dey gib us de skin;
And dat’s de way
Dey take us in;
We skim de pot,
Dey gib us de liquor,
And say dat’s good enough for nigger.

........................................

Southern trees bear strange fruit,
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,
Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze,
Strange fruit hanging from poplar trees. ¹

The birth of capitalism needed a great number of hands to expand itself. The need for profit necessitated the creation of an underclass whose fragile existence would force it to surrender itself to the worst working conditions so that it could survive. ¹ In America in the beginning, the problem got solved by the kidnapping of hands from a continent greatly colonized by western capitalism whose cultural difference and different modes of
progress made it vulnerable to the white man’s voracious demands for profit through exploitation: thus Morrison’s “sixty million or more.” For such a hegemonic relationship to be sustained apart from its economic terms, new terms had to be created on a “superstructural” level in the realms of politics, ideology, and culture for this kind of polarity to be sustained and reproduced. Modes of representation needed to be invented thus for the formula to work. A colonization of the image of the exploited other needed to take place as well so that difference can justify violence, injustice, and inequality. By representing black as other, “white people believed that whatever the manners, under every dark skin was a jungle” (Beloved 198), white capitalist patriarchy found a way to perpetuate this profitable economic and ideological contingency. One has no difficulty accepting this form of exploitation; moreover, one has very little problem with the realities of cruelty it exercises during its application. Frantz Fanon makes such a connection of the “detached complicity between capitalism and the violent forces which blaze up in colonial territory” (Wretched of the Earth 65).

In the case of the African American experience, apart from economic issues, race enters the analysis of capitalist exploitation. The kidnapped African becomes the raw material which has to be extracted from his/her native land for profit. As Marx has explained it, “labour power, is therefore a commodity which its possessor, the wage-worker, sells to capital. Why does he sell it? In order to live” (The Critique of Capitalism 170). “Yet, labour was not always a commodity.”1 Furthermore, in order for the repercussions of such a set up to be understood on the level of their effects upon the actual human beings--one needs to humanize the other in order for one to be able to take that step--one needs to look at the psychological realities of these numbers. This act
would be the beginning of the re-writing/reconstructing this reality and this history. Post-
colonial theorists like Fanon and Said have called the process, “decolonization.” It is a
process whereby those who suffered colonization will be the agents of its overthrowing,
its termination both in material and ideological terms. That overthrowing, however, as
Fanon knows it well, will also be unavoidably violent (as violent and as horrific its
establishment had been) as well as tedious and a long term investment in effort and in
time. Regarding forms of representation, the black oral tradition, slave autobiographies,
anthropological studies might be some of the ways African Americans learned about their
history as dominant white school education would not do that, as we know. Morrison
writes *Beloved*. While the novel rests on the slave narrative, in the modes of Frederic
Douglass and Harriet Jacobs, it becomes a “revisionary rereading—of the slave narrative
plot of the journey from bondage to freedom.” Moreover, “Morrison’s text challenges
the Western notion, of linear time that informs American history and the slave narratives”
(Mobley 192), while according to Woidat: “Morrison thus revises both black and white
nineteenth-century texts, offering a counter narrative to women’s slave narratives and to
the works of ‘the schoolmasters’ of young America” (1993).

In fact, *Beloved* ruptures its form and de-structures accepted notions of time,
memory, or prose narrative, bringing to surface the personal story and making it work as
a symbol of that which had not been symbolized or rather as a symbol of that which
resists symbolization.¹ She both sets the historical background as well as records this
history as the experience of actual slaves, as the history of cruelty which is both turned
inward and outward because in it is concealed the history of love, rebellion, and violent
acts. For Aime Cesaire, this history is bloody. The “I” of subjectivity asserts its potential
violent howl: “It was I, even I, and I told him so, the good slave, the faithful slave, the slave of slaves, and suddenly his eyes were like two cockroaches, frightened in the rainy season. . . I struck and the blood spurted; that is the only baptism that I remember today” (Aime Cesaire qtd in The Wretched of the Earth 88).  

Beloved becomes the first all-inclusive memorial ever created to observe one of the darkest moments in U.S. history. In Rushdy’s terms “Beloved is, in effect, a requiem that is a resurrection.” Specifically, it is the story of “the ghost of Margaret Garner’s ‘unnamed child,’” who returns as a ghost to acquire her rightful place in the history of this country (Rushdy 1992).  

She represents the collective spirit of all black women under slavery whose stories have never been told as well the spirit of “all the Black women in America trying to trace their ancestry back to the mother on the ship attached to them” (Horvitz 1989). Sethe’s “thick love” for her lost daughter delineates and symbolizes the huge amount of love an author must have to revisit and bear witness to the untold horror story of slavery on both a personal and public level. As critics have suggested “while Beloved is evidently a politically engaged novel, it is also a novel of extraordinary psychological reach” (Rody 94).

“Halle and Sethe,” and characters like Sixo, “insist upon not only living but loving as free, committed individuals” (Ridley 155). To use Jameson’s idea, “the individual text,” in the Bakhtinean sense of the utterance, “becomes a symbolic act: text, he argues “has been reconstituted in the form of the great collective and class discourses of which a text is little more than an individual parole or utterance (The Political Unconscious 76). In a similar way, while never mentioning Marx, Morrison makes white capitalist patriarchal exploitation the canvas on which she will stitch the picture of black motherhood under slavery. From the mention of the wedding dress Sethe insists on
wearing while being allowed to marry, although a slave: ‘Well, I made up my mind to have at least a dress that wasn’t the sacking I worked in. So I took to stealing fabric, and wound up with a dress you wouldn’t believe” (59), to her decision to escape Sweet Home so that she not only frees herself but also claims ownership of that freed self (95), Morrison makes issues of market value, commodity exploitation, and self-determination within the slave community abundantly clear. While keeping white patriarchy at the margins of the story, she creates narrative strands of what form that economic exploitation takes place in the specific microcosm of the novel. Sethe’s huge love for her slain daughter allows her to exchange her market value as a sexual being for the engraving of the seven letters in the word “Beloved” on the headstone: “Ten minutes, he said. You got ten minutes and I will do it for free” (5). Property-less, essentially the Lacanian erased subject (Lacan 1985), she needs the white man’s chisel; she needs to commodify her body which must open “wide as a grave” so that for one moment she can “name” the character of her slain daughter (Lawrence 1993). As Margaret Atwood suggests “this act, which is recounted early in the novel, is a keystone for the whole book: in a world of slavery and poverty, where human beings are merchandize, everything has its price and price is tyrannical” (144).

On that wide context of economic exploitation where the black body is used as commodity, as merchandize and where white male patriarchy both in the form of the seemingly benign white masters of Sweet Home, the Garners, “who had raised [their] slaves into men” and paid their labor, there will always be schoolteacher in the form of Four riders who come to Sethe’s home to claim their property, i.e. the slave Sethe and her children, is embedded the dimension of Beloved as a text which is a product of the
internal colonization of the black people in colonial America. In fact, this dimension of the novel seems to be the most seductive for critics and it seems to offer the most eloquent and well-written scholarship. Starting from the introduction of Sethe’s “iron eyes and backbone to match” (9) early in the story, which are finally erased with the arrival of schoolteacher, who not only “punched the glittering iron out of Sethe’s eyes,” but also broke the iron will of the male slaves, Halle and Paul D, Morrison sets the postcolonial historical context of the cause of the “wave of grief,” what Baby Suggs calls “negro grief in every household” that soaks the lives of the characters and brings back the full-of-rage ghosts of history. With Sixo, the character Morrison creates as the one who will not be broken and the one who refuses to be told who or how to love, she presents the issue of colonization in terms of the use of language, the function of naming, by introducing the juxtaposition of “definers and defined.” Sixo gives schoolteacher a very smart answer in a problematic situation that occurs. His intelligence is, not only, not recognized but he is punished by flogging: “Clever but schoolteacher beat him anyway to show him that definitions belonged to the definers—not the defined” (190). Morrison presents the polarity between definers and defined as the flip side of the master/slave situation. She begins the de-colonization process by writing this novel; she outsmarts white patriarchy like Sixo did and renders a novel which not only revises history, as critics have claimed, but explains the hows and whys such horror has occurred and how they relate to the positions white and black America finds itself today. The body, (Sethe’s, Beloved’s, Paul D’s”), and its relationship to outside (nature, the white man, white society, and black community) become the battleground of the social and the historical, the primary stages of existence.
In an Althusserian moment, Morrison brings in the representatives of the status quo, the four riders: “when the four horsemen came—schoolteacher, one nephew, one slave catcher and a sheriff—the house on Bluestone road was so quiet that they thought they were too late” (148). Critics have discussed this moment in the novel in its Biblical apocalyptic, post-apocalyptic context, while it might be considered a vulgar Marxist move to regard it in terms of the State and its ideological apparatus (Pesch1993; Bowers 1990). Yet a Marxist analysis of the conditions of “the reproduction productive forces” in capitalism seems to have a solid ground here. Schoolteacher’s educational skills will secure the conditions of ownership through the continuous reproduction of the ideological sphere that this order will be maintained; the other one of course being the whip as Sixo and the characters in Beloved know all too well. Baby Suggs and Sethe, unlike the rest of the community, sense the moment of the arrival of the Four: “Not Ella, not John, not anybody ran down or to Bluestone Road, to say some new whitefolks with the Look [my stress] just rode in. The righteous Look every Negro learned to recognize along with his ma’am’s tit” (157). But Sethe, who recognizes the white man’s gaze “the Look,” will instinctively snatch her children and run to the shed with “the shovel and of course the saw.” Moreover, Sethe’s witnessing schoolteacher’s mapping hers and her children’s animal and human sides which—in voodoo like terms-- felt “like somebody was sticking fine needles in [her] scalp” (193). Shocking and hurtful an encounter as that might have been, because Sethe has the power of rationalization, she has not internalized schoolteacher’s vicious ignorance by actually mocking his ways: Schoolteacher was teaching us things we couldn’t learn. I didn’t care nothing about the measuring string. We all laughed
about that—except Sixo. He didn’t laugh at nothing. But I didn’t care.

Schoolteacher’d wrap that string all over my head, ‘cross my nose, around my behind. Number my teeth. I thought he was a fool. And the questions he asked was the biggest foolishness of all. (191)

Such manifestations of inane cruelty steel her with the decision to escape: “Ha, ha. No notebook for my babies and no measuring stick. West and hooks also relate Black power the ability to “remember, reclaim, and renew” (1991). While the trauma will always exist there in history, its rethinking and rewriting may help black people understand their historical, material, and psychological situations a lot better as well as reformulate identities which will help them regenerate their self-respect. No other character does that better in the novel than Baby Suggs.

Baby Suggs sets out to retrace the dimensions of the spiritual; people need to believe in something higher than their material existence. Knowing the position white Christianity had taken during slavery, white Christian beliefs or practices will not do. ¹ They are replaced by a new theory, maternal in its nature, one that encourages love and happiness instead of fear of sin or retribution:

“Here, she said, “in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs: flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. They don’t love your eyes; they’d just as soon pick em out. No more do they love the skin on your back. Yonder they flay it. And O my people they do not love your hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop off and leave empty. Love your hands! Love them. Raise them up and kiss them. Touch others with them, pat them
together, stroke them on your face ‘cause they don’t love that either. *You got to love it, you!* And no, they ain’t in love with your mouth. Yonder, out there, they will see it broken and break it again. What you say out of I they will not heed. What you scream from it they do not hear. What you put into to nourish your body they will snatch away and five you leavins instead. No, they don’t love your mouth. *You got to love it.* *(Beloved 88)*

One of the most brilliant passages in Morrison’s writing, Baby Suggs sermon at the Clearing, eloquently articulates the importance of the material part of what it means to be a human being (the body) as well as the necessity of nourishing that body with what resides in the psyche, the feeling of *love*, particularly, self-love, as the only means of coping with the chasm that the “here” and “yonder,” Dunbar’s “mask,” DuBois’s “veil,” “the “double consciousness” of the critic, the institution of slavery creates in the lives of its victims. No amount of Marxist, Postcolonial, or Psychoanalytic theory could speak this experience more effectively. The claim of the African American woman critic that African American women writers theorize through literature about this experience could nowhere else be more legitimate:

> For people of color have always theorized—but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic. And I am here inclined to say that our theorizing (and I intentionally use the verb rather than the noun) is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, since dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking. *(“The Race for Theory” 336)*
Additionally, Barbara Smith has claimed the importance of the political element in Black feminist criticism. “Logically developed, Black feminist criticism would owe its existence to a Black feminist movement while at the same time contributing ideas that women in the movement could use” (“Towards a Black Feminist Criticism” 175).\footnote{1}

Many different voices sculpted the inherited memory of a once lived historical tragedy. No matter how confusing the plot structure, certain images of cruelty, endurance, or love are not difficult to comprehend in this novel. The performative quality of this text allows it, among other things, to speak truth to its reader on a visceral level: it will surprise the reader; it will shutter any serenely naïve sense of history; it will penetrate into the undiscovered corners of the soul; it will illuminate and educate.

What is Beloved?

Beloved is a quilt

much like the one Baby Suggs who starved for color but there was none except for two oranges squares desires

much like a quilt in Sethe’s eyes even if the only color she remembered was the pink chips in the headstone of her baby girl

it is a story of memory about real people with unique worldviews and immesurable emotional depth

Beloved is the love story of Sethe for her children a love story of Baby Suggs for all the men the women and children she nurses and nurtures under her wings in the clearing
and of Amy a throw-away person who looking for velvet found instead the smooth edges of healing and willing life

Beloved is a story of resistance and of rebellion for Sethe more and for Sixo

Beloved is a story of strong family ties for nobody saw them fall

Beloved is the funnel that channels the howl of the “sixty million and more” from the death ships the refuge for the whip-chiseled cherry coke tree-carrying backs the skin and hot blood cooked in a lynch fire negroes

Beloved is a poetic memorial about the true story of the people with color and the men without skin

Beloved is the black woman under slavery and beyond mother and daughter who Madonna like stoically sitting at the crossroads of history cries blood from the black of her eyes

2.1.2 MISSION BOX

In spite of everything, I did not kill myself.

Have you ever seen a fir tree leading itself to the sawmill?

Our position is in the woods

With severed branches and half-burned trunks

With roots stuck among the rocks.

Ari Alexandrou¹
Earth foddered by so much blood
Our big brothers’ earth
You are liberated from lies
And can see first the new dawn

We are your children, Hellas
Gathered up in the mountains
And for you and your liberation
We will all struggle wholeheartedly

Morning comes and night falls
In my dark cell
At my window I see
A guard night and day

Children get up and go to the streets
Men and women with weapons on your arms
Always loyal to the red banner
Next to the trumpet calling us

Popular Rebel Songs of the Communist Guerrillas ¹

Historical Background
December 23, 1947, civil war starts again more viciously than ever. On February 1947, the British Government informs the U.S.A. that it is no longer able to carry out its responsibilities towards Greece and Turkey. With the Truman doctrine, according to which “the U.S. is obliged to help Greece retain its democratic government” (12 March 1947), starts the direct intervention of the U.S., which succeeds that of Great Britain in the role of protector. Thus a new American policy is inaugurated, which abandons insularism and aims to exercise its hegemony towards the western coalition. (143 Svoronos, my translation)

A brief mention of the general historical background since Nazi occupation is necessary here to place the novel in context and try and find its place in postwar prose writing in Greece. The modern history of Hellas since her liberation from 400 hundred years of Ottoman occupation in the 1830s, is a history of the people’s struggle to resist occupation after occupation by the Bulgarians, the Italians, the Germans, and the postcolonial/neocolonial attempts at exploitation of Hellas’s strategic position in the Mediterranean (at the crossroads between East and West) by the British, the Turks, and the Americans. It was very difficult, almost impossible, for the Great Powers to imagine a Hellas free and independent; she must always be subjected to one influence or another. Such attempts of blatant colonialism have created a people who have a constant need to resist. Marxist ideas found very fertile soil in the people’s struggle. The People’s Hellenic Liberation Army (ELAS) was the major force in the struggle against fascism during the German occupation. By the end of the World War II, the left had constructed a very powerful army. A civil war between the right and the left ensued until the left was forced to surrender. A period of right wing governments followed when poverty and
persecution of members of ELAS, and the common people who supported them, was the main experience for the majority of the left wing people of Hellas. The possibility of a moderate government in the sixties assisted by the left was a threat to this sensitive region where the great powers of capitalism had serious strategic and economic interests. In 1967 instead of tolerating such a government, the reactionary right with the blessings of the bourgeoisie, the king, the *pakratos* (= a group of people who exercised a strange form of power by using criminals or members of the lumpenproletariat to eliminate dangerous members of the opposition or perform other criminal activities with the toleration of the official government), and the help of U.S.A., a military coup occurred (21 April 1967) and a seven-year dictatorship ensued—which placed Hellas in the dark ages—and ended with the student revolt on November 17, 1973.¹ Left-wing citizens were put in concentration camps, tortured, and murdered while being asked to deny their communist ideology and allegiance to the party. The political novels (called also, resistance literature, committed literature) written about this period then depict such part of the history and, while they expose the evils of capitalism and imperialism and its cruel practices, they also present the communist of the exterior (the Soviet Union)’s hegemonic (and often cruel) party politics and the leadership’s inflexible and often corrupt tactics. There is a distinction made between party politics of the left and the pure and enthusiastic, self-sacrificing, often self-destructive people’s struggle against the evils of capitalism, and any kind of imperialist tactics, and the cruelty they exercised.¹

*Plot Summary*

The time is the Greek civil war specifically summer of 1949. A group of 40 communist fighters are asked to go on a mission, which, as they are told, will determine
the outcome of the social struggle. They must carry a box from point N to point K. The mission is highly classified and the forty selected fighters must guard it with their lives. Nobody has any idea of the contents of the box or their ultimate destination. The strict orders are that there can be no delay and the wounded soldiers or unable to keep up with the pace of the mission must be cyanided. The mission lasts 2 months (July-September 1949); the only surviving member, completes the mission and delivers the box to the people in charge. When they open the box, they discover that it is empty. The narrator is apprehended and jailed. And he testifies in the interrogating authorities as to what has intervened. During writing the narrator, whose name remains unknown, will account for the absurdity in the cruel death of fellow fighters, some of them commit suicide for not being able to follow at the pace of the mission others for trivial or absurd reasons. As the narrator tries to account for the dead and the circumstances in which they died, he comes up with different versions. In his attempt to remember/revisit/interpret things past the narrator keeps on finding different twists to them. The metaphor of what the box is unsurpassable; a whole generation of socialist freedom fighters have being carrying/guarding a box, the leftist movement, which is empty/empty of meaning. There can be ideologically at least no more tragic situation than that.

Fascism has no sides; knows neither right nor left. In the promethean world, Zeus enslaves the visionary citizen with the help of Kratos (State power and control, Might) and Via (Violence); Prometheus, in an unpredicted enlightened moment of history, escapes the state of the “I” and by imagining a place of “we”–where the gifts of life would be shared; he defies the decrees of Zeus, the god of all gods, and transfers some of the power of the great Father to the common people. In a world of power relations,
Prometheus is Bound for two reasons: because he is a dreamer; and because he is a rebel. The promethean moment marks the dawn of western civilization; historically, it is the earliest sign of the tensions existing in organized (civilized) societies. The state reproduces its conditions of existence through injustice, often violent oppression, through different modes of repression, and finally through the practice of obscurantism by cultivating transcendental mystification about the origins of life, through a sterile formal (anti-dialectical) a-historical approach to social and political contingencies. Since the state has no memory, allows no mourning, and censors any attempt to articulate the truth of what was or will be, Benjamin would suggest that a historical materialist must recognize the horrors of the past because “there is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism” (“Theses on the Philosophy of History” 256). Furthermore, the Lukacsian observation of “false” consciousness does not require an immanent mode of knowing things independent of the subject’s historical specificity: “on the contrary, the mere aspiration towards truth can only strip off the veils of falseness and mature into historically significant and socially revolutionary knowledge by the potentiating of consciousness, by conscious action and conscious self criticism” (72-73). Since:

class consciousness is identical with neither the psychological consciousness of individual members of the proletariat, nor with the (mass-psychological) consciousness of the proletariat as a whole; but it is, on the contrary, the sense, become conscious, of the historical role of the class” (History and Class Consciousness 73).
No matter how quaint or obsolete these statements might be for some, they still hold their own irrefutable grounding in post-modern, post-capitalist societies.¹ Economic hegemony, which is today masked as the ability to have the freedom to choose between a Toyota Corolla or a BMW, i.e. the freedom to choose between brands of different products, is still alive and well no matter what ability the low-paid working person might have to buy shares in a corporation when the minimum wage and the accessibility to health insurance are what they are in the U.S. today, for example; or the problems of diffusion and dispersion of interests that might arise with replacing class positions with subject positions (Laclau and Mouffe 1985).¹

Alexandrou will take up this challenge regarding the relationship between ideology and power as they pertain to the exercise of fascist practices within organized communities and groups of any kind. At first sight, the narrator of Box seems to be appealing to his superiors’ understanding and integrity regarding his predicament. While incarcerated, he is asked to narrate events of the past so that he can prove his innocence; he suggests that the medium he chose, i.e. writing is the most effective since he intends to record everything slowly and calmly. ¹ Paper, ink, and pen will be the tools of his testimony. He thus goes on to explain in the first chapter how he is going to use this writing: to record events without interruption; to clear up misunderstandings in the narration of events; to write the events without the fear of being considered a suspect himself, and thus legally deposed. This kind of writing, he confesses, is really an easy task since it relies on recalling the already-experienced, and it will finally prove that he is loyal to the party. In the beginning, the narrator’s sincere intension and humble attitude aim at positively predisposing his interrogator towards him. From the beginning of the
book (Friday, September 27, 1949) and until page 177 (Tuesday October 22, 1949), he addresses his interrogator as “Comrade Interrogator.” Although his original intention is not to tire him with details, and he apologizes when he does, by Thursday October 3, 1949 he states the following:

Comrade Interrogator, I shall now return to narrating the events of our expedition in chronological order, showing, that is, precisely when and how thirty-three of our squad were killed, or forced to swallow cyanide, after which I was left alone. (As yet you have raised no objections, which means you acknowledge, do you not, that after the execution of the five there were thirty-four of us that set out on the mission?) (71)

But, Eksousia (fascism) does encourage debate. Despite the narrator’s continuous addressing and questioning his interrogator, he is never given an answer; his writing is met with silence. In the chapter dated Saturday, October 12, 1943, this persisting effort to have some kind of verification of the events narrated, on the part of his interrogator, is signified by the repetition of a small phrase: “Ετσι δεν ειναι;” (“wouldn’t you say?”). Five times he asks for approval in this way from his superior, Comrade Interrogator, to no avail. On Sunday October 13, 1949, he dares to confront him more aggressively:

Comrade Interrogator, at this time I must inform you of the doubts that have been plaguing me of late. It has repeatedly crossed my mind that you may not actually be a comrade. Or rather, to speak straight from the shoulder, I am beginning to feel convinced you are not one of us, and I say this even though it may ignite your fury. If you view things from my perspective, you will see that the situation has become downright absurd.
I have narrated countless incidents, reported a slew of facts, names, dates, reviewed myriad details, clarified key issues, and admitted there have been instances where I introduced half-truths. Yet you remain silent, giving me no indication that you intend to assume your proper role. In other words, you show no sign of helping me focus on Mission Box from a general or personal perspective. Instead, you force me to guess the questions which are on your agenda. What do you take me for, a medium? (169)

Until the interrogator’s eloquent silence forces the narrator to the following statement on Tuesday October 22, 1949:

Comrade or Mr. Interrogator, whoever you are, I’ll use no form of address from now on. Instead, let it be understood that I am directing this to whoever happens to be in charge, for now the issue of whether you happen to be a Leninist or dogmatist or even a government interrogator is of secondary importance to me, since I have begun to have doubts about something even more crucial: I suspect that you aren’t even reading my deposition. (177)

In these progressively frustrating attempts of an inferior to explain and justify certain events towards his superiors, under a repressive and implicitly threatening atmosphere, the narrator and his readers will be faced with the problems inherent in recreating such traumatic collective memory when there is no margin for a meaningful debate between the historical Subject and Eksousia. What they think they will witness as audience will be this character’s honest efforts to narrate very specific historical events, i.e. the mission in which a special group of forty comrades are to transfer a box from point N to point K.
The character/narrator will bear witness to the events that occurred during this mission. As the narrator sets out on this journey, however, he (and his audience) will be faced with a process of narrating which is problematic; a process which puts the power of language to attain truth (historical truth) to the test.

Although the narrator’s intention to perform this task seems to be pretty solid in the beginning, he will soon be faced with difficulties and ultimately resign from the task altogether. Although he is entrusted with a “calling card” (επισκεπτήριο) which supposedly contains an important message he must deliver at the beginning of the mission, when he reaches point N, major Velissarios does not require it from him (in fact nobody ever does). This omission creates “anxiety” (εκνευρισμός) and “suspicion” (καχυποψία) for him very early in the novel. This suspicion, which he feels indistinctly in the beginning of this mission, will develop in the following chapters into an anxiety about his actual ability to narrate that experience, into a neurotic retelling, revisiting, revising of the nature and truth of that experience. Thus, although in the beginning he states: “Thus, I can easily record the details of the operation in which I took part, since I have both witnessed the events and reviewed them in my mind’s eye” (10), by the last chapter the reader has realized that this is no longer possible. In the last chapter, the narration becomes asthmatic: he is panting either because the weight of the content/meaning of what he has undergone and what he is telling is unbearable or because he wants to make sure he records everything in a hurry since he lives under the fear of being executed himself: “The asphyxiating atmosphere becomes status-quo from which he cannot escape and the first person alternating question/answer is indicative of the impasse he finds himself in” (Raikopoulou 73). What in the beginning of the
narrative was certainty for him regarding the reliability of his writing down the events of the mission, i.e. as the uninterrupted recording of events, as the clearing out of misunderstandings, as his response to his indictment, as his confessing, as the easy access to lived experience, and as the proof of his party loyalty, will be enveloped in the absurd indistinct confusion of a Kafka-like narration: “The defendant has to face and indictment. . . he must therefore illuminate all of life’s furrows, display all the facts, clearly articulated and annotated from every perspective.” In the same manner, the unnamed narrator/defendant, in Box, like the faceless character, Joseph K in Kafka’s The Trial, will realize that “what is at stake in this phantasmic trial/interrogation is in fact the meaning, of his whole life” (Tsirimokou 318-319). In Box the narrator will produce written speech which uses no periods but a continuous apposition of commas, parentheses, hyphens, and question marks: a writing which indicates an anxious desire to get it over with, to see it all articulated, recorded in view of the implied threat regarding the unpredictability of his future:

-I’ve said everything, I’ve confessed everything, I’ve clarified everything, I’ve even insisted on spurious details about old and new systems of rank, former and present ranks, promotions, demotions, and changes from one platoon to another, inscribing all the changes, dotting every I and crossing every t, without making a mistake anywhere; as regards that I am sure everything happened as I said (that is the second time, in agreement with map No. 2) for I sat and remembered everything bit by bit, straining my memory for a multitude of details, visualizing the faces of my comrades clearly, so I wouldn’t confuse the events of the first with those of the
second passage in the vicinity of the Big Lake, as if it had the slightest significance to you at what point one man or another died or was cyanided, since all you needed was an official list of casualties-futile therefore and foolish all those details, since you don’t need them, since no one needs them, and I surely there are a host of additional details just as futile. (325-6)

At this point, the reader recognizes the impossibility of this task and those who know Hellenic history may furthermore understand the impossible task of accurately depicting Hellas’s post-World War II history. In the popular imagination Hellas is an entity that transcends geographical specification. Ripped apart by centuries of occupation, Hellas is represented as a woman much-suffered. No work of art has expressed this better than Demetriades’s *Dying as Land*. Demetriades’s *chora*, unlike Kristeva’s maternal pre-oedipal semiotic (1984), is the nightmarish locus where birth and death are equal where narrative is a continuous negation of civilized structures where the unfathomable cruelty of history is actually ineffable and lies within the parenthetical ellipsis of the narrative. In an apocalyptic rhetoric, Demetriades presents familial and national structures as bankrupt where massive suicides and deliberate homicides are part of the everyday. There is a Hellas that has nothing to do with the aquamarine of the Aegean, the wisdom of the Hellenic intellectual achievement, the beauty of artistic creation (the love for the Beautiful, the Great, and the True) from the antiquity to this day. There is a Hellas of metallic grays and rusty reds; of poverty, misery, and injustice. There is a Hellas full of buildings under repair, old scraps of metal, old cans, empty
barrels, and rusty barbed wire like the materials the comrades use to cover the bodies of the first executed five.¹

Alexandrou’s narrator, having gone through the events over and over again in his mind, becomes suspicious and cognizant of the significance of the smallest of details. While waiting in the Old Gymnasium for the mission to be organized, the 40 comrades are occupied in different ways. During a break from work while lying down, the narrator notices the word “Death” on the blackboard. What strikes him as odd is the fact that this word is just dangling there:

*We arrived at the former Gymnasium burdened with those heavy tree trunks, and I was thinking that if the writer had wanted to complete the slogan on the board (“Death to Fascism”), he should have been able to do so in his own time. For the word to remain dangling suggested that something suspicious may be going on.* (23-24)

This mention provides the first clue, foreshadows in a sense the slow absurd process towards death for the members of the mission. The narrator, who unwittingly becomes the detailed recorder of the historical journey of communist fighters, slowly realizes that he cannot, at least not calmly, sit and recount the events of their traumatic past. His sense of time and the language in which he attempts to account for certain events will be fractured. The problem starts when the story of the past is rendered in the word “Death,” and not “Death to Fascism.” A “Death to Fascism” proclamation is like the irrefutable threat of the intense and fierce buzzing of a swarm of killer bees much like what Benjamin calls “the state of emergency” as the only condition for the struggle against fascism: “One reason why Fascism has a chance is that in the name of progress its
opponents treat it as a historical norm” (257). Alexandrou, like Benjamin’s “angel of history,” has his face “turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage after wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet” (“Theses” 257). In his essay “Ascertainties and Proposals,” Alexandrou tells it like it is: “For 149 years now the Greek people struggle for their freedom and independence. They are a Sisyphus who tries to carry the rock to the top and the rock slips from his hands the last minute” (174). The people of Hellas struggle against all attempts at subjugation whether from the right or the left, whether that attempt of colonization comes from the U.S. or the Soviet Union. Resistance is the only attitude. Even if that sounds as a utopian desire:

Utopia you will say. But the deepest desire of a people is not utopian at all. It is already a reality. . . . Historical circumstances are forcing us to choose; they are asking us to be either a friend of the Americans or the Soviets. It is high time we struggled against historical circumstances” (Telling it like it Is 178).

The people of Hellas, “the Sisyphus people,” as Stratis Tsirkas has also called them, who carry a long history of occupation and internal social struggle, know this reality very well.¹ The civil war period is an important one and a difficult one to represent, since its participants are still alive, the memories are still vivid, the divides, although subtle now, are still at work, and the wounds are often still open and oozing the blood and pain felt. The writers of this era have produced greatly diverse (both in terms of form and ideology) novels which explain the complexities, contradictions, and causes for such a tragic polarization of the Hellenic population.¹ *Box*, however is unique in
transcending the limitations of its period and presenting a critique in the tactics of the
supposed bearers of a hopeful and equitable new society. Another significant writer who
deals with the same historical period is Thanassis Valtinos. His novels are written, in
what has been called a Doric form, the everyday language of common people irrespective
of partisanship, peasants and workers, and in cinematic sequence like narratives. If
Alexandrou creates a critique of what is considered “ours,” the familiar ideology,
Valtinos presents narrations of what Gina Politi calls the “silent subject of history,”
where despite the division of the Hellenes to rightists and leftists, what is delineated is the
tragic story of everybody people whose fates are determined by the machinations of
imperialist powers assisted by right-wing governments.

The narrator’s obsession with the conditions under which his 39 comrades have
died, may be viewed as primarily language’s failure to record historical truth: “the
meaning is constantly shifting and nobody can conceive it” (Thalassis 100), but it is more
that that. Historically speaking, it is a clear manifestation of the narrator’s obsessive
preoccupation with the exact manner in which those deaths occurred which becomes
indicative and symbolic perhaps of the ethical dilemmas facing Marxist fighters and
intellectuals at that point in time. This inability of language to arrive at certain clear cut
formulas as to how one behaves in such critical times, rather signals the problematic
nature of ideological choice at a time when Hellas, devastated by continuous right-wing
governments and policies and brought to her knees by the fascist German occupation,
could no longer look upon Marxist/Socialist movements with great hope or assurance. A
good example from the novel here could be the death of Nikitas: he is one of the first
five to be executed before they even set off for the mission. They thus hear that the five,
Vlasis, Kostas, the other Kostas, and Nikitas, “those five poisonous snakes” as the authorities declared, “were sentenced to death by an emergency court-martial” (41). The party itself cannot be the conveyor of social transformation since it is split into two factions: “the dogmatic Marxists” and the “Leninists.” The polarization is no longer between Government forces and Liberation army, but it becomes internal within the party itself: “In the case of Box what “is clearly discerned are the party tactics of entrapment and retrogression on the part of the Left, which are accountable for their members’ crises and impasses” (Raikopoulou 73). He revisits Nikitas’s moment of execution, trying to explain all the ways he tried to avoid participating in his death. The narrator is one of the chosen for the firing squad: Nikitas’ last words “Comrades!” remain indelible in his mind. Comradeship is the only relationship which will be multiply meaningful during the novel. After they buried the 5 members, they set fire to the iron door and the soil by pouring gas:

After a while someone observed that we shouldn’t leave the blood on the ground, in front of the garage door, and Lt. Telemachus had us pour on some gasoline and set it afire to burn the blood away. . . . the twenty-nine of us remained inside, while the four of the burial detail cleared a space next to the wall of the parking area pulling aside old steel scraps, cans, and an empty drum, digging a large ditch, throwing in the five executed, refilling the ditch with ground, throwing back on top the old steel scraps, cans, and the rusty drum. (103)

The newly established social unit—much like the tactics of the governmental forces—will wipe out, by burning with gasoline, all evidence of cruelty it has to exercise on its
members; once again the new struggles are fought not with the participation of the people but in their absence.  

This anxiety turned neurosis towards the end is indicative of the meaning the political had for that generation: “Politics for the generation of the resistance and civil war was not a matter of choice but of fate” (113). Dimitris Raftopoulos notes that the narrative in *Box* is “both subjective and objective.” In other words, the mission can be understood as the experience of the 40 fighters, but that experience becomes symbolic of the expression of a whole generation in that critical part of history. Raftopoulos also distinguishes three levels in the narrative which deal with the time of experience and the time of the poetic process: The Psychological/Repressed, the Political/Neurotic, and the Metaphoric/Symbolic (“The Brotherly Alone and Free” 128). Today we know that the psychological may well be the strongest one since the whole text is obsessed with counting and recounting the death of comrades referred to and mentioned again and again by their name. It is this attempt to uncover the extreme pain and anxiety (the outcry of love for the lost comrade, co-fighter, friend; for the deleted hope; for the elimination of the future) that lies underneath the seemingly objective and “colorless style” of this novel: Tsirimokou calls this manner of narration “a process of radical revision of novelistic language” (322). As will be seen in the psychoanalytic reading of the novel in the next section, in terms of explaining the absurdity of the mission and the anxiety of the narrator’s testimony, *Box* is the perfect text to record this extremely traumatic part of Hellenic history. A multi-leveled reading of this text is imperative if all folds of its history must be unfolded. There is too much blood underlying the subtext of this book (both underneath its writing and underneath the historical period); too many lives have
been at stake (many more have been lost) over the years. The stories are engraved on the bodies of the survivors much like the cherry-coke tree growing on Sethe’s back. They are also engraved in the individual and collective memory of the people who were fated to become part of the formation of Hellas from a protectorate of the west to a democratic independent modern state within the context of constitutional democracies.

Since a dialectical process of arriving at the truth is what party politics does not allow, Alexandrou’s text, precisely because it utilizes contradiction, opposition, refutation, and revision manages to escape the polarity existing between the one-dimensional, oversimplified, and un-dialectical rhetoric of capitalist democracies and the equally at times, obscurantist, infantile, still un-dialectical rhetoric of dogmatically applied communism. The transfer of power from nationalists to communists, Alexandrou implies, does not automatically imply the transformation of the members of that society. Even for a revolution to occur (to say nothing of a more significant social transformational process), Althusser would argue, one simple contradiction is not adequate. “Contradiction needs to be overdetermined” A whole set of historical contradictions need to be accumulated and exacerbated. The writer seems to me to have found himself in the midst of that accumulation of contingencies:

A revolution in the structure does not by ipso facto modify the existing superstructures and particularly the ideologies at one blow (as it would if the economic was the sole determinant facto). . . . The new society produced by the Revolution may itself ensure the survival, that is, the reactivation of older elements through both the forms of the new superstructures and specific (national and international) ‘circumstances’.

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Such a reactivation would be inconceivable for a dialectical deprived of overdetermination. (For Marx 115-116)

This is exactly what Alexandrou’s narrator finds himself doing when, all is not what it set out to be, all factors manifested in the journey prove to be absurd, all is lost. In the last chapter, the narrator will refer to the nature of the mission and the contents for the box quite a few times giving six different versions, six probable causes of the failure of the project.

Many critics and philosophers of the left realized very early in the history of the movement, the problems arising from an austere, stubborn, unexamined, and un-tortured acceptance of party or ideological dogma. Alexandrou, in this novel, makes an unexpected aesthetic choice when he creates a disruptive narrative which attempts to portray the impossibility of articulating that which is politically correct but ethically objectionable. Alexandrou’s novel is furthermore burdened by an extra factor: if the left constitutes the essence of what is needed at this time, for the long-sought-after social transformation, and what must be done on the political level this period in post war Hellas, he assumes a great as well as risky responsibility (as an intellectual and as a fighter) to present a critical view of communist party politics at a time when the communist party is seen by many as the only hope. In fact, this is the basic contradiction at the kernel of the narrative and it does not discourage him. He realizes that this is the thinker/fighter’s only ethical choice because of the maturity his informed position as a dialectic materialist makes possible for him. Alexandrou’s narrative thus may be taken as the narrator’s (the simple, pure fighter’s) race against death. The love for the future of humanity is the driving force behind theory and praxis. Love is the subject here also: the
leftist’s fighter’s love for the future of humanity. His written testimony will be his means of survival despite the meaninglessness in the decoding of the act of transferring the box itself. The narrator’s ability to uncover the emptiness in the contents of the edicts of an eksousia (party orders) that knows no dialogue, and to expose the meaningless worship of the body of history, which turns to be a hallow corpse since it does not include inside it the desires of the every day people, is the greatest achievement of this mission. The only way the pursuit of historical truth can be realized is through constant researching, reevaluating, re-telling—or as Herakleitus would simply say through constant change: “change alone is unchanging” (Fragment 23) which may prevent pacification, disinterest and cooptation. ¹

For anyone who recognizes such truth, can see with clarity that what Alexandrou creates in Mission Box is the difficult, painful, and often bloody journey the politically conscious citizen must undertake. Within the high walls of every repressive form of government lurks the violence against those who dare to passionately desire the dream and fearlessly act towards attaining it. The narrator realizes that his comrades have been unnecessarily and absurdly sacrificed for carrying the empty corpses of bankrupt ideologies and modes of being where the only nexus connecting human beings is self-interest, aggressive conquest for property through deceit, manipulation and cut-throat competition, which are the ingredients of contemporary capitalist democracies. ¹ Only the unnamed narrator survives: who is he exactly? How does he go from a state of trust to a state of suspicion and implicitly a state of liberation from allegiances and illusions? Perhaps somewhere there in the labyrinth-like political consciousness of Alexandrou’s narrator, i.e. in his mind’s ability to continuously move towards the truth regarding the
horrors relating to the body, the mind, the soul as he witnesses the slow demise of his comrades, the reader may glean a small ray of hope. If omissions are significant, the big meaningful absent, as a character, in this novel is the symbolically monumental place that Aris Velouhiotis (and fighters like him) occupies in the collective memory of Hellenes (both those who adore him and those who loathe him). For those who know the history of the uncompromised Aris the narrator’s following indignant statement:

What purpose was achieved by that-how shall I put it—that unofficial ceremony of volunteering? I mean what else was each of us squad members, what else was I personally from the very beginning, if not a volunteer? Why, hadn’t I committed myself, hadn’t I enrolled in the Party, hadn’t I devoted myself to the cause at the time of the Metaxas dictatorship, by my own free will? What else was my friend Haris, who was executed in 1942 at the firing range of Kesariani? (58)

Or the following detail about his background: “So I was an apostate from my class, and from the material point of view I could only lose in committing myself to the movement, believing that it was my duty as we said to struggle for social progress and the total liberation of the proletariat” (59) sound eerily familiar and coincidental with what Aris represents.

At some point in his life, Aristotelis Vasiliades becomes Ari Alexandrou the way Thanasis Klaras becomes Aris Velouhiotis. Perhaps the unnamed narrator is a part of Aris Velouhiotis’ legendary persona.

“Ετσι δεν ειναι;” (wouldn’t you say?)
“If the enemy has tanks, the air force and guns, we have our rustic shoes; we have wings in our feet. We will take their guns like Kolokotronis and Karaiskakis took them from the Ottomans. We will fight and we will win. We will win because we are fighting for justice. We are starting a new 1821,” he would tell them. They followed him. ELAS started as an army of a fistful of fighters with Aris their leader. He reached the point where he would immobilize nine German divisions, determining thus the supply of the African corps and the outcome of the war. Two years later, June 17, 1945, the National Guard and the lumpenproletarial hang the heads of Aris and his loyal comrade Tzavelas from the lamp-posts of Trikala square. If Karaiskakis slaughtered Turks and Turk-sympathizers alike, Aris slaughtered Germans and German-sympathizers. The Turk would hear Karaiskakis’ name and run faster than the wind; the German sympathizer would hear the name Aris and have a heart attack. For some Aris is an abominable murderer of women and children, for others a betrayed by his own comrades hero like Karaiskakis. The moral perpetrators for these two wanted and murdered heroes are Zahariades and Mavrokordatos respectively.

“ARIS Tribute: 50 Years since the Loss of the First Captain” Eleftherotypia June 15 1995.

“But Thanasis Klaras is neither fierce looking nor well dressed; a simple corporal who just came back from the front. His speech is strange. He tells them not to lay down their weapons since the war has just started. Surely many think he is a madman. But Mr.
Thanassis Klaras, the blazing herald, continues to encourage them to return to their villages and their struggle, armed; ‘he did not express the views of any specific party or organization’ just his own.”

“A few days later, May 15, he speaks to a group of citizens one night at a park in Kesariani. The men listen to him with suspicion. They listen to him elaborate on the one and only unique way of resistance: The armed warfare. The guerilla war. The new 1821, as he often repeats.

His words have no logic. The German war machine has leveled Europe. Athens and the whole of Hellas are flooded with armed forces and Mr. Klaras speaks to them of a mountain guerilla war.

They don’t believe him; but they like to hear him speak. By 1942 a whole lot of diverse kind of people would follow him: peasants, officers, robbers, communists, royalists, democrats, priests, policemen and children will gather behind him, in a unrelenting process towards freedom; they will adore this man-with- a-new- name, Aris Velouhiotis, to death.”

“The people will be the superior apparatus of the group. Only their assembly can deprive of rank or promote a guerilla, and the people are the only ones qualified to give punishment. This way the real power is not, like in the tactical army, at the hands of superior officers but at the jurisdiction of the collective.”

“He ‘felt deep inside him he will not live. He had confessed as much to his friends many times. ( . . . ) Even from the beginning, when the first skirmishes with the Italians started and the guerillas got their first loot, somebody offered him a brand new gun, an Italian Berretta.
Aris did not accept it.

-I already have one, he told him. Give it to somebody else. This is enough for me and he pointed to an old golts.

-But that one is old, why don’t you take this one: it is automatic.

Aris smiled and in his look there was again the same indistinct sadness.

-Comrade, he told him, do you know why we keep the revolver?

-To fight he answered, a little lost.

-The rifle is for the battle; and the machinegun. The revolver is for right here, and he pointed to his temple. And when that time comes, you don’t have to have a Berretta. An old golts is good enough.

He had precisely described his death.

Aris: Leader of the Unruly Dionysis Haritopoulos

“The government poster read:

WANTED THANASIS KLARAS a.k.a. MIZERIAS a.k.a. ARIS VELOUHIOTIS

The walls in Athens are not white but full of graffiti which informs people about the victories in Stalingrad but mainly about the victories of the guerillas in 1943. re are the messages about the free Hellas of the mountains, where is resurrected the old epos of 4 centuries of resistance from the Ottoman occupier, and the persisting intention of Hellas to remain Hellenic. There, in a place bare and dry, the traditional rebellion of the mountain people springs out, following the examples of the old captains.

The captain whose name will replace the first stanza of the demotic songs is the own who resurrect the mythical guerilla war, he is Aris Velouhiotis.
Thanasis Klaras, son of a liberal middle class family, got his last name from the Velouhi mountains where he was from; his first name will be: Aris, god of war from now on. Because he signs a declaration of denouncing the party when he is imprisoned during the Metaxas dictatorship, he becomes disgruntled and he will also be called Mizerias (miserable).

Even Chris Woodhouse, a historian not too sympathetic to him, would call him in his Memorial “the military genius of ELAS.”

The Captains: Greek Civil War (1943-1949) Dominique Eudes

What is Mission Box?

Who is the historical subject murdered 39 times while the survivor agonizes over the why and the how? Alexandrou has awakened his readers into the realities of futile missions. But he has taught us the dialectical processes through which we recognize the coffins and only follow with respect if the fallen are our true heroes. How do we know that? His narrative form shows us that we have to think and question the facts in front of us. There is no such thing as papal infallibility.

For most critics Alexandrou’s novel ends in despair; for me, having followed his designated dialectical process it is the most hopefully didaktiko (didactic in its ancient Greek significance of the tragic play as medium of popular education) novel I have read although there is no sign that such is the novel’s un/conscious intention:.

Alexandrou’s narrator has no name. Such omission is pregnant with meaning. He represents the selfless and pure, sometimes wily, promethean rebel who does not compromise, and whose ethical position does not suffer from the malaise of relativism.
Alexandrou’s subject of history is the unnamed, impractical, stubborn agent who surpasses in selflessness even the highest of symbols in Christianity. There are no rewards in practicing the ultimate good and following the utopian desire towards a constant willing of justice. There is no personal benefit or investment in it; just the pursuit of truth and justice for their own sake.

The role of thinkers of this kind of experience is not to play with language or creative narrative for self-benefit or out of narcissism. The ones that explore those bloody paths must be very cautious in becoming the absolute prophets of the meaning of such texts.

Alexandrou’s narrative towards the death of language’s ability to make sense is saved by the dialectical skill the subject of history develops in order to understand its place in history. It is a skill not monolithic and one-dimensional but always in progress. Hypothesizing, questioning, tentatively providing answers, reformulating statements when confronted with the nonsensical tactics of sterile power is the skill manifested here. The realization of such ability will allow certain effective tactics in over-determined moments in the history of humanity. There can be a science of history the knowledge of which would render the majority of current political discourse inane and gibberish; it would silence it. Had Derrida known the work of Alexandrou, he would not have taken so long to recognize the ominously dangerous Specters of History.

One more important point: The ability to use dialectical logic must not stop at the rhetorical level. It must become every day practice on the personal level too. Recognizing issues of power regarding class, race, and gender in cultural studies today is not enough. The challenge—and by no means an easy one-- lies in how that
recognition becomes part and parcel of everyday practice. The adopting of communist or other internationalist ideas does not stop at academic discourse either published or presented in conferences. If nothing else, the life and work of Aris Velouhiotis, Malcolm X, Ernesto de la Serna Guevara, is that of early death; but their gifts are not lost; just lurking. . . Their lessons are the best weapon against “false consciousness.” Or what else means the suggestion that we become “socialists in our instincts?” as My teacher, Mac Davis has taught me.

The term has been used by G. Spivak in her famous essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” where she tries to explain modes of representation of third-world subjects, and specifically, certain rituals related to Indian women (e.g. the abolition of widow sacrifice) by western intellectual production (271).

Henry Krystal, who did psychoanalytic work with holocaust survivors for many years, discovered the main psychosomatic symptoms emerging in his patients and speaks about the effect of massive Holocaust trauma on the survivor’s aging process, for example. He asserts that those who are unable to “grieve effectively become depressed, become ill, and die early” (97).

“‘Anxiety’ describes a particular state of expecting the danger or preparing for it, even though it may be an unknown one. ‘Fear’ requires a definite object of which to be afraid. ‘Fright,’ however, is the name we give to the state a person gets into when he has run into danger without being prepared for it; it emphasizes the factor of surprise” (Freud 599).

I find McClintock’s terminology of the two forms of colonization very astute and also useful here: “Internal colonization occurs where the dominant part of a country treats a group or a region as it might a foreign colony. Imperial colonization involves large-scale, territorial domination of the kind that gave late Victorian and European ‘lords of humankind’ control over 85% of the earth” (“The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term ‘Post-Colonialism’” 88).

As Dimitris Raftopoulos states: “Fanaticism, dogmatism, the new pedantry, the middle ages, infallibility, authority, eksousia is what Alexandrou’s narrative always rejects. As Alexandrou asserts in one of his articles: “Fascism does not debate” (*Literature of Crisis* 119).

Although speaking about the creation of the obedient soldier in 17th and 18th century societies, Foucault’s observations as to how discipline and punishment works in creating “docile bodies” is important to me: “In every society, the body was in the grip of very strict powers, which imposed on it constraints, prohibitions or obligations” (136). “Those methods, which made possible the meticulous control of the operations of the body, which assured the constant subjection of its forces and imposed upon them a relation of docility-utility, might be called ‘disciplines’ (137). Even though, he suggests that these relationships are manifested in a different manner in slavery conditions, I can still recognize a more general or even symbolic similarity here; in fact, the disciplinary actions of the controlling state may dissociates power from the body, but it still reproduces a dialectical relationship between them: “If economic exploitation separates the force and product of labor let us say that disciplinary coercion establishes in the body the constricting link between an increased aptitude and an increased domination.” (138). A psychoanalytic approach of the two novels, in the next chapter, may bring to light some of these relationships in the two novels (*Discipline and Punishment* 1977).

“You can lock my body but my mind is free,” sings a rapper. No matter how repressive a regime, no matter what heavy chains ties around its victims, people will sing their fears, their hopes and their desires. The first compilation of Negro spirituals was gathered by the church in 1801. The gospel, black sacred song, will give historical voice to the black people’s tortured experience under the boot of the white man and sing about freedom land. Secular working songs will record the material conditions in the life of slaves. And Billy Holliday’s rendition of “Strange Fruit” will become one of the most powerful artistic mediums bringing to the public the unspeakable horrors of lynching.

I can not avoid mentioning Engels’ study of *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, in mid 19th century. In the chapter, “The Great Towns,” he is set to record the condition of the working poor and juxtapose it to the bourgeois way of life: “And if we make ourselves acquainted with these unfortunates [working class families living in London], through personal observation, if we watch them bowed by illness and want of work, we shall find such a mass of helplessness and misery, that a nation like ours must blush that these things can be possible” (62). Or in another case: "but let all men remember this—that within the most courtly precincts of the richest city of God’s earth, there maybe found night after night, winter after
winter, women young in years-old in sin and suffering-outcast from society—ROTATING FROM FAMINE, FILTH, AND DISEASE. Let them remember this and learn not to theorize but to act” (66).

1. The unpaid labor during slavery appears in Marx’s analysis of the specific relationships existing in the American paradigm: “these component parts of capital are creations of labor, products of labor, accumulated labor. Accumulated labor, which serves a means of new production, is capital.

So say the economists.

What is a Negro slave? A man of the black race. The one explanation is as good as the other.

A Negro is a Negro. He only becomes a slave in certain relations. A cotton-spinning jenny is a machine for spinning cotton. It becomes capital only in certain relations (Capital 176). Although according to the fetishism of commodities, there is a certain social character to commodities because of their exchange value of the labor that produces them, this social nature is denied in the case of the Negro (Capital 217).

1. Both Caruth and Fellman discuss the nature of literature testifying to the truth through memory of highly traumatic events (1995).

Barbara Rigney mentions the role of the mother-daughter relationship in African lore—like in the Greek myth of Demeter and Persephone—and observes that “if the continuity between earth-mother and child is broken, as it is so violently broken under slavery, then it cannot be restored without further violence.”

1. The story of Margaret Garner has fascinated writers and critics alike. In E.W. Harper’s, *Iola Leroy*, it is mentioned in a dialogue between Iola Leroy and her school friends. Iola, who is herself of mixed blood unbeknownst to her, defends slavery while her friend mentions Garner’s case without mentioning her name, as an example of the potential horrors in slavery (Rushdie 1992). Angela Davis mentions a number of rebellious women who were tortured and flogged but never gave up their will to be free: an Ann Wood who finally escaped to the North; another, although tried repeatedly to escape, was not successful, and was brought back: “she was eventually held prisoner in a heavy iron collar—and in case she managed to break the collar, a front tooth was pulled as an identification mark” (21). And without doubt the case of Margaret Garner who killed her own daughter and tried to kill herself, declaring: “I will go singing to the gallows rather than be returned to slavery” (Women, Race and Class 21).

1. “The narrative does not drive toward the apocalyptic moment, but recounts the struggle of living through and beyond the reign of the Anti-Christ and of surviving the ‘numbing of the black and angry dead.’ *Beloved*’s focus on the past may seem contrary to the forward—looking spirit of apocalypse, especially in American literature, where the apocalypse is considered fundamental” (Bowers 1990). Pesch elaborates on this point: “What Bowers is describing here is a significant deviation from the traditional apocalyptic mode of writing, a writing in which the apocalypse has already taken place and which should thus properly be called ‘post-apocalyptic’. After all, the specific apocalyptic of *Beloved* has happened eighteen years before the novel begins. When the four horsemen—schoolteacher, one nephew, one slave catcher and a sheriff—arrive (*Beloved* 148). The story is told from a point of view in which the apocalypse is a (distant) memory. Thus, it can hardly be surprising that there is very little drive towards apocalypse. How could there be when it has already happened?” (Pesch 1993)

1. In his “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” Althusser presents the state not as a neutral system of government but as a repressive machine whose only aim is to retain the status quo. While the repressive state apparatus functions by violence the ideological one by ideology. The nephew, the sheriff, the slave catcher are in essence the plantation owner, the Law, assisted by the *lumpenproletariat*. But they cannot exist safely without the contribution of the schoolteacher, the educational system, whose role is to reproduce the fantasies of ignorance that will reproduce the conditions of slavery. Morrison, although a devout catholic herself, presents the religious establishment in an indirect perhaps ambiguous way. The spirituality of Baby Suggs exists in the pre-oedipal sphere, what Kristeva has termed, the *chora*, the semiotic before the workings of primary processes, before the law of the white man as it is affirmed through the workings of established Christianity.

1. Baby Suggs’ sermon in the clearing brings to mind Pazolini’s *Gospel accoring to Matthew*. Pazolini exposes in this film the tendency of Christian sermons, in the film delivered by Jesus himself, to speak about sinning. We see in one see Jesus preaching to a group of peasant field workers whose faces seem puzzled as to what that would mean for them. To me, the scene signifies the absurd idea of highly exploited people finding the time to commit sins; perhaps sinning is a luxury they can’t afford. The reality is, as Fanon suggests “white Christian religion endorses the master and the oppressor. In fact the colonial bourgeoisie is helped in its enterprise by religion (*The Wretched of the Earth* 42).
Passages like Baby Suggs’ lead me to think that *Beloved* functions best as a tragic play and a cinematic rendition could never capture the immensity/intensity of its essence. Once I read this passage and June Jordan’s “Poem about My Rights” at an Open Mike, and the audience was left speechless. For days afterwards I would meet people I did not know, who had attended that reading and they would ask me for information about the texts, which ultimately led into my teaching a course on Morrison the following semester.

1 “Inside the Rocks,” from Alexandrou’s collection *Poems (1941-1974)*. Ari Alexandrou was born in 1922 in Leningrad from a Greek father and a Russian mother. In 1928 they immigrated to Greece. In 1940 he became a student at the University of Athens and in 1941 he joined the resistance movement against the German occupation. During the civil war and the dictatorship, he was exiled in concentration camps in various islands (from 1947 to 1951) and jailed (1953-1957), and although he denounced communist party politics very early, he remained an individual fighter against fascism and social injustice and adhered to the basic Marxist concepts of social transformation outside communist party participation. Dimitris Maronitis, distinguished critic, who wrote on Alexandrou’s poetry, identifies his work as follows: “Poetic tendency and political conscience [or consciousness] constitute the basic corners of a triangle which can be formed with what I called poetic and political ethos at its peak” (“Poetic and Political Ethos” 48). Alexandrou’s work and life fit perfectly in this metaphorical geometry of the critic.

1 From a selection of resistance songs, titled *Guerrilla Songs: Collection*, compiled and edited by Kostas Gazis, member of EAM during the resistance. As he admits he published this book out of an act of nostalgia for a beautiful and tragic era, accompanied by “the flame of youth and the tragedy of death” (9). These songs may, admittedly, represent a romantic perhaps naïve attitude towards rebellion. But they managed to encourage fighters during intense repressive historical circumstances. One might hear them sung today during demonstrations or the rallies for the commemoration of November 17, 1973.

1 Even moderate historians, like Richard Clogg, who wrote on Hellas acknowledges this fact: “As often in its history the direction of events in Greece was to be determined by the interests of the great powers rather than by what was happening on the ground in the country: ‘Let us settle about our affairs in the Balkans. Your armies are in Roumania and Bulgaria . . . Don’t let us get at cross-purposes in small ways. So far as Britain and Russia are concerned, how would it do for you to have ninety percent predominance in Roumania, for us to have ninety percent of the say in Greece, and go fifty-fifty in Yugoslavia?’ Churchill to Stalin, Moscow, October 1944” (133).

1 Only to remember here Marx’s account of the failure of Bonaparte’s 18*th* Brumaire revolt, because of the petty nature of the bourgeoisie demands, and because of the absence of proletarian participation one of whose consequence was the outlawing of universal suffrage. Marx cannot hide his contempt for Bonaparte and the *lumpenproletariat*: “This Bonaparte, who constitutes himself chief of the lumpenproletariat, who here alone rediscovers in mass form the interests which he personally pursues, who recognizes in this scum, offal, refuse of all classes the only class upon which he can base himself unconditionally, is the real Bonaparte, the Bonaparte *sans phrase*” (*The 18*th* Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* 75). The role of the lumpenproletariat in modern Hellenic history is very similar.

1 As it has often been acknowledged Alexandrou is one of the first thinkers and freedom fighters who acknowledged the cruel tactics of Communist party politics. He would declare his position without fear: “I feel solidarity and common responsibility with everyone who fought, is fighting, and will fight against all tyrants, crowned, cap-wearing, against all, either medal wearing, or clergyman-frock wearing, despots” (138 *To Dendro*). As a poet, “Ari Alexandrou only as a cracked human being manages to shoot, not write words and lines” simply because he knows very well “what it means to be alone” (*Second Reading* 14-15). The continuously thinking and questioning intellectual and fighter, Alexandrou suggests, is the one who longs for ‘Hellas to be genuinely independent; to become neutral’ (*Telling it like it Is* 177). The echo of this statement would be very vividly heard during the insurrection or demonstrations of the student body during the 70s and 80s in the chant: “Neither the U.S nor Russia; National Independence.”

1 Aijaz Ahmad, in *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*, provides a very good example that pertains to this tendency in academia to silence class issues in Marxist analysis. He uses the example of Vietnam when he states: “The predominantly (and after the mid 1970s, increasingly) anti-communist Left of the metropolitan variety, having already dismissed the discussion of material realities as ‘vulgar Marxism’ and ‘economic determinism,’ held the Vietnamese themselves responsible for those failures, then consigned them to the remotest margins of its own memory. Thus it was that Vietnam, the great victor of anti-
imperialist war, became the showcase not of socialism but of the impossibility of building socialism” (29). He also opposes the valorization “of ambiguities in the “rhetorics of migrancy” in cultural studies because this attitude forges “a kind of rhetoric which submerges the class question and speaks of migrancy as an ontological condition” (13). Arif Dirlik in his “The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism,” expresses the same concerns about the discursive nature of Postcolonial criticism which often lacks a materialist critique of ideology and the imperialist tactics of the metropolis. What is lacking from the critique of imperialism in the academia is a solid materialist analysis using the language of the group that would go beyond the textualization of subject positioning Ahmad would add.

1 The debate as to the nature and role of ideology—and the working of false consciousness—is a very problematic one since members of the disposed and powerless in a highly stratified in economic terms, do not easily identify with one another and form coalitions of collective action towards change. Stuart Hall, in his essay “The Problem of Ideology: Marxism without Guarantees,” asks a legitimate question. He says: “Now it is not difficult to see why these kinds of formulations have brought Marx’s critics bearing down on him. ‘Distortions’ opens immediately the question as to why some people—those living their relation to their conditions of existence through the categories of a distorted ideology—cannot recognize that it is distorted, while we, with our superior wisdom, or armed with properly formed concepts can” (31). I have been thinking about this challenge that Hall has presented to literary critics and thinkers. I assume that the “we” who are supposed to know he is referring to are critics or intellectuals a thing problematic in itself because, although both thinkers, the college instructor no matter what race or gender, does not make as much as Fredric Jameson or Cornel West, for example (or any full time professor for that matter). The “why” it would be easy to answer, I guess: simply because our job is to think, study history, and hopefully make revelatory as well as logical connections regarding issues that matter. We do not build cars, but think about the tensions that are created in the juxtapositions of labor forces. No matter how we think about ideology, the unskilled worker will still make 5.50 an hour and often have no plan for health insurance.

1 The word syntrofos, comrade, is a very dear word in the Greek language; maybe be because it means they who dine together.

1 There is a part of Hellas that lives close to industrial areas with dilapidated humble two-room-andouthouse houses, polluted air, junkyards; the is a Hellas of citizens trying to survive their everyday in a society where class and ideology determine quality of life. All this is left unsaid, silenced, “non-said” (Macherey 1975) in the novel, but the reader who has lived the period and its cruelty recognizes the significance of the silence as to the status quo which the text’s new authorities replaced. It is this Hellas on behalf of whom this struggle is fought. It is under such a part of Hellas the burden of the peasant’s/proletarian’s life that the fighters for social justice are buried. Finally, it is this Hellas which hundreds of people (peasants and workers, from city and country) in the fifties and sixties left to immigrate to West Germany (and around the globe) where they became the lowest paid proletariat. Hellas is raped and subjugated by “παρθένοικαπηλος” (this is a word which signals the tactics of a group of scoundrels: perhaps jingoists) who use the idea of patrida—one’s home country, nation—and the sacredness that this idea has been invested with for the benefit and unethical aims of these executors of power) politicians: “I hate this land. She ate my insides. I am writing to you because we both desired for these insides to be fertile and that desire brought us together night after night” (Dying as Land 79).

1 See Tsirkas’ Last Spring where the people know of the coming of the dictatorship in 1973: “Here is where the spring in Athens would end. The most open city in the world... it wasn’t but an illusion of joy. The Sisyphus people. There was no doubt. The mechanism of the dictatorship had started moving” (210).

1 What Alexandrou leaves unsaid about this period in his novel, other writers take on. Andreas Fraggias writes about the horror and absurdity of life in exile; in the concentration camps of Makronisos, Yaros, and Ikaria in his novel Plague and about the tragic fate of an after civil war generation who lives and fear and in panic because of the reign of terror, after the laying down of the guerrilla weapons at the Varkiza Agreement in 1945, whereby the communist supporter were hunted, arrested, and tortured in Wrought Iron Gate. Thanassis Valtinos, in his Orthokosta, will resurrect the experience as a personal polylogue; one where there is no heroism and there are no sides. Another autobiographical novel, narrated from the point of view of a child, is Where is your Mother, Bitch? by Demetra Petroula. Nicos Bakolas’ The Great Square and Land-grabbing are also worthy of mention.

1 Valtinos, in The Descent of the Nine, describes the last days of a group of nine rebel fighters. Unlike Xenophon’s heroic “myrio=10 000” soldiers during their descent from Persia in his Hellinika (but very
like them in their enthusiasm in reaching “thalatta” = the sea, the descent of the nine is nothing other than a process towards death. Cut off from their comrades, they are trying to survive the rough, rugged terrain and the hostile attitudes of the mountain people of the Peloponnese. Their journey is presented as the harsh and lonely journey towards a dead end since by 1948 there is no victory in sight for the rebels. The writer refuses to beautify or romanticize their existence. Exhausted from the heat, the lack of water and food, and fear of apprehension, they hide by day and travel by night. There is no more thoughts of victory; only loneliness:

‘It is a scorcher,’ said Bratitsas.
At dawn again.
We must leave.
So much dreaming, hey?
Don’t even go there.
Doesn’t it bother you?
Leave it alone.
So much blood. And then there is no destination. (61) These larger than life communist fighters, these heroes in the imagination of the people as the songs express, are trapped and hunted like animals, knowing that there is no rescue: “Do you believe we will escape? “No said Nikitas and turned his head” (49). In other words, there are no more doves flying from the larger-than-life fighter’s beard, as the poet would say; just an unspeakable loneliness and bitter sadness, an unfathomable exhaustion, and an unbelievable fatalism and resignation.

Towards the end of the novel we’ll get yet another version of Nikitas’ death. It was not the narrator’s bullet which killed Nikitas, but “χτυπηµένος προφανώς από κάποιον άλλον, γιατί εγώ σηµάδεψα το χοντρό, µπρούτζινο λουκέτο…” he died probably hit by somebody else, because I aimed at the fat, brass padlock.” (199)} While we are speaking about truth, patriotism, χαφιεδισµό (the state where people turn against each other and report to the authorities words and actions of other people which might incriminate them: something similar to what was happening in American during the McCarthy period), the new order of things, what comes back again and again in the novel is the death of the 39 comrades.

One cannot but mention the despair regarding the application of communist ideals in the Soviet Union pervasive at the time. Roman Jakobson, in his essay “On a Generation that Squandered Its Poets,” discusses the work and fate of the Futurist Mayakovski and denounces Stalinist tactics in communist Soviet Union. While praising Mayakovski, he explains that poets have to juxtapose their creative urge to “a stagnating slime,” the Russian word byt. The word functions as an objective correlative describing the horror of Stalinist cruelty which might have led to Mayakovski’s suicide. Mayakovski’s disillusionment, says Jakobson, came in the later years of the revolution when the future became a disappointing present.

Tassos Demou, in his book A Carnation They Did Not Let Bloom, discusses the Greek Communist Party’s (KKE) tragic mistakes: he claims that “on the one hand, the truth is twisted, and every virtue and contribution is buried; on the other hand, what is rewarded is servility, hypocrisy, arrogance, and blind fanaticism” (27). Demou claims further on that the fragmentation of Leftist powers is to none’s benefit. He suggests that people should retain what is noble in this struggle and discard what darkens it: “We will keep the communists’ virtues, their love for their patrida, for humanity, for ethos, self-sacrifice and heroism; their deep belief in a better future for Hellas which they will built with love and compassion towards the citizen of Hellas. . . while at the same time we will reject the tactics of the Directorate and of the para-party mechanisms, the bureaucratic sterility(90-91).

Best example of the realities following the defeat of the left is in Fraggias’ Wrought Iron Gate. “Fraggias recognizes the role fear and panic the psyche of the people at the time. . . . The writer approaches his world with circumspection and a great degree of tenderness and sensitivity”). The characters in the novel, Aggelos, Antonis, Efthyis all idealist fighters during the war, have difficulty surviving this defeat. They try to keep a balance between their beliefs and the new kind of circumstances that demand them to exist within the cut-throat world of capitalist competition: “The young people, who are at the center of a new problematic, belong to the Resistance generation. They became men with the vision of a creative and loving way of existence. Instead, they experienced the unexpected turn of events: a defeat they did not deserve; the dragging through the mud of their ideals; the mockery of their values and the chaos of their lives. They themselves struggled as much as they could but they became exhausted. They were not the
strong ones. They tried to reevaluate their lives with constant compromises, and the substitution of their dream with the pursuit for a personal victory of any kind” (Raftopoulos 1965.
2.2 Dialogic Testimony as Circular Crisis of Truth-telling

“The horror of Makronisos is too large to fit in books; it is read in the eyes of its mad inhabitants.”

“In the terrible years of the Yezov terror I spent seventeen months waiting in line outside the prison in Leningrad. One day somebody in the crown identified me. Standing behind me was a woman, with lips blue from the cold, who had, of course, never heard me called by name before. Now she started out of the torpor common to us all and asked me in a whisper (everyone whispered there):
‘Can you describe this?’
And I said ‘I can.’
Then something like a smile passed fleetingly over what had once been her face.”
Anna Akhmatova “Requiem: 1935-1940”

"'We got to burn out what they put in our minds, like you burn out a wound. Except we got to keep what we need to bear witness. That scar that's left to bear witness. We got to keep it as visible as our blood.'" Gayl Jones Corregidora
Post Newtonian science has opened the paths to issues of uncertainty. If the knowable is only what can be measured, then there must be some space for that which has not yet been explained. The uncanny has had a special place in literature.\(^2\) If “feeling and desire are the motive behind all human Endeavour, and human creation,” as Einstein has suggested, then a whole lot of human experience related to the psyche, to feelings of fear, despair, or euphoria exists that can not be accounted for by a scientific measuring stick (“Religion and Science” 452). The existence of ghosts is such an area. Ghosts are also part of the human lore; they are metaphors often used for unexpected powers developed during humanity’s struggle to survive. They come back from the past seeking revenge for injustices performed against them or threaten the future with changes that can not be foreseen or imagined. Ghosts are also the ambiguous, persistent, and unforgiving elements that reside in the historical collective unconscious of a people. Sometimes they manifest themselves as a promise like the ones in Marx’s specter Europe: “haunting Europe,” Communism,” which is a threat to what he sees as the unholy alliance of the powers of Europe, the “Pope and Czar, Metternich and Guizot, French Radicals and German police-spies” (*The Communist Manifesto* 8). Marx, who studied history, as the history of the exploitation of human labor through the centuries and subsequently explained history in terms of division of labor with the birth of capitalism, poignantly used the metaphor of ghosts. If the cruelty of exploitation creates ghosts out of the masses of people who lived and died as part of the state machine in whatever form it would take through the centuries, he juxtaposes a new reality whereby a new “specter” that of “communism,” i.e. that of collective consciousness and action, in its turn is now haunting the contemporary powers in Europe. His metaphor, and his
sarcastic lyricism moreover are not mere language play; his choice of language style is rather a result of his seriousness regarding the class struggle and his critique of bourgeois tactics in the newly formed capitalist societies of his time. They appear again in his study of the role of the working class in the 1848 revolution in France. He says:

The awakening of the dead in those revolutions served the purpose of glorifying the new struggles, not of parodying the old; of magnifying the given task in imagination, not of fleeing from its solution in reality; of finding once more the spirit of revolution, not of making its ghost walk about again. (*The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* 17)

The past, the having been experienced on a personal or a collective level, returns transformed either as threat or caution for the now which lasts for ever. Sethe can not believe in time. For her “some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know some things you forget. Other things you never do” (35-36). For Sethe, “the future was a matter of keeping the past at bay” (42). Things go but pictures of things remain. Rememory is the residue of the pictures that slavery has engraved upon the surface of black collective memory. They come back as ghosts symbolic of what has passed on. They are hungry for the past; they have no interest in the future: “Morrison’s novels, studies in the process of rememory in characters’ lives, are especially concerned with how anamnesis serves and conserves a sense of self” (Rushdy 138). Moreover, in the case of Beloved this anamnesis does not only serve that of close friendship, or family, but a collectively “subjugated culture” (153).

Morrison in Beloved creates a text which is unsettling in terms of form and linear logic. The laws of nature regarding the relationships between human beings, and
specifically between the relationship of mother and child, have been distorted under the conditions of slavery. The devastation becomes even more horrific when the most primal of instincts, that of motherhood, is obliterated with infanticide. Underlying the narrative are the ethical implications of the historical context on which the novel leans. The presence of the white slave-owner—in this case a benevolent one at that—is kept at the margins of the narrative; very little narrative time is given to him and white society, in general. However, the repercussions of his role in terms of the effects upon the community of slaves are at the center. The text creates the psychoanalytic dialogue with the reader in a way that the two share the ethical responsibility of that witnessing. The narrative voice is tormented in the process of passing the story that “is not a story to pass on.” The reader, if white, must deal with a traumatic story that he/she is implicitly responsible for, even if indirectly. The reader, if black, will recognize the stories carried through from generation to generation like the “grandfather’s” curse that haunts Ellison’s character, in *Invisible Man.* Only such understanding of the novel can connect the past with the future so that the ghosts may rest awhile. Identification with the heavy burden of the plight that slavery creates is the next step toward responsible and ethical agency on the part of the perpetrators. Alexandrou, on the other hand, structures his narrative in a parallel not similar way. The setting, the geography, the participants are different; what is parallel is the symbolism of the role of truth-telling about a traumatic historical event; the gradual extermination of the 39 comrades representing the thousands killed during the German occupation and civil war. In *Box,* there is a distortion of not a natural order, but of an ideological one, that of communism, which failed to fulfill the people’s expectations and utilized the same repressive mechanism against which it set out to
destroy. The realities of the so-called communist leadership are experienced by the participants at the center of the narrative. At the margins there exists the historical context, that of an occupied by Germany Hellas, and right wing governments that had internally colonized, repressed and exploited the dispossessed and leftist citizen through the process of othering racial and ideological respectively. Fanon discusses the phenomenon of “Negrophobia.”:

‘Look, a Negro!’ The circle was drawing a bit tighter. I made no secret of my amusement. ‘Mama, see the Negro! I’m frightened! Frightened! Frightened! Now they are beginning to be afraid of me. I made up my mind to laugh myself to tears, but laughter had become impossible, (Black Skin, White Masks 112)

White culture denies self definition to blackness. Through the white hegemonic gaze the Negro “is fixed” and objectified in non-human terms. For white hegemony, the Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly; look, a nigger, It’s cold, the nigger is shivering, the nigger is shivering because he is cold, the little boy is trembling because he is afraid of the nigger, the nigger is shivering with cold, that cold that goes through your bones, the handsome little boy is trembling because he thinks that the nigger is quivering with rage, the little white boy throws himself into his mother’s arms: Mama, the nigger’s going to eat me up. (113-114)

This irrational and unjustified fear of the other is not alien to the leftist Hellenic population. “Negrophobia” now becomes “Communistophobia.” The state distinguishes between real Greeks of the Greco-Christian, right-wing ideal and the miasmata, the
abominable others, the leftists and communists, who need to be isolated, marginalized, exiled and imprisoned, and in the last analysis, annihilated all together. This is not represented as a critique of right wing tactics by becoming the focus of the narrative but rather by exposing the failures of its replacement. The Greek reader, however, irrespective of his ideological positioning recognizes its truth. Although, in the margins, the state of poverty and repression of the political realities of the time constitute the very essence of the ethics of writing itself. Moreover, there is a double jeopardy in the case of Box; that is the ethics of a writer who is not afraid to expose the shortcomings of a repressive system even when that system constitutes the only hope for social transformation. It had been the stance of many leftist intellectuals and thinkers, from Mayakovski to Althusser, who early distanced themselves from the autocratic practices of the Soviet Union while retaining an allegiance to Marxist ideas. The paradox in both novels, between what is central and marginal and what is seriously at stake when the historical subject encounters the contradiction-loaded past, is of a similar nature and its traumatic repercussions greatly felt by both characters and readers. The process of recognition and identification may work in a similar way for the step of agency to be taken. Their articulations are parallel. The dialogue they create with the reader challenges and resurrection the ethical considerations of responsible citizenship which would respect and consider the ghosts of history.

The step towards agency and empowerment is different in the two novels: in Beloved Denver steps outside the complications of “124 Bluestone Road” claiming for herself a different occupation of social space, promising thus a hopeful and regenerative turn of events. In Box that step is taken in the actual process of the narrator’s slow
realization of the shortcomings of the new order of things. In that case, although the narrator’s fate receives no denouement, the actual process of witnessing and de-mythefying the notions of a linear and uncomplicated process towards the construction of better societies rescues the dream from the sutures of idealism. It is not so much the outcome of the journey towards Ithaka but the riches acquired through its gradual experience. The concerns, and problematic that both texts bring to light are highly political not only regarding the clouds that loom over the rememory of accounts of collective death cases occurring in different, equally un-free, exploitive, and repressive social environments. They also become indicative of the significance of the policies and practices they inform in the future.

2.2.1 BELOVED

The writing of Beloved has placed Morrison in the pantheon of tragic poets. The coming of Morrison’s Beloved baffled critics and energized their desire to decipher its complex, difficult, and confusing structure as well as the nature of the character of Beloved, who represents the desire and decision to represent such traumatic collective rememory. Freud tells us results in a crisis of truth. Writer and reader do not directly participate in the event; they only witness the difficulty of its recognition and identification. In the process of recalling therefore the narrative loses any linear understanding and becomes confusing, elliptic and repetitive, and circular. What is Beloved? Who is Beloved? Are time references consistent? What kind of psychoanalytic patterns does the text reveal or employ? Rigor, as well as theoretical consistency, account for what the novel is. The majority of scholarship explores the relationship
between private and public, the personal and the political, the individual and the collective regarding people’s relationship to an unbearable past; it also focuses on the relationship of history, memory, and trauma. Morrison’s text baffles and puzzles critics but also energizes them; the novel forces and enables them to write eloquently. There are cultural studies readings, Black feminist perspectives, and Psychoanalytic, Marxist and Postcolonial ones. Yet the words “ghosts,” “ghostly,” “haunts,” “haunting” seem to be favorites amongst critics writing on Beloved. There is always a desire to play with the imaginings of the spirits that haunt the corners of the history of slavery, which always comes forth and returns as memory/rememory. The scholarship is thorough in illuminating the themes relating to the function and significance of traumatic memory.  

Beloved has been recognized as a multileveled text where history, motherhood, specifically black motherhood under slavery, the political and the psychoanalytic dimensions of experience are combined and manifested. At the heart of the narrative lies the event: infanticide (one of the most severe violations of the survival of the species instinct) within the slavery framework is at the center of this story. The earth-shattering core produces the ripples, the different threads of narrative which reveal its significance in historical, economic and postcolonial terms. The story of a single family of slaves, Sweet home, and a single mother and her children become emblematic of the fate of the “sixty million and more.” The event, like all traumatic experience, is at the core of this story recalled as a flashback unexpectedly in different points of the narrative through the minds of the characters, Sethe, Baby Suggs, Stamp Paid, Beloved and Denver. It is either hinted at elliptically as a “dark and coming thing” (138,) “this dark and coming thing” (139), “feeling a dark and coming thing” (147), “the shed” (157), “the Misery” (171)
“the slaughter yard” (185), “the rough time” (185), “the handsaw” (187), “Sethe’s rough response to the Fugitive Bill,” the white man’s “coming into her yard and he is coming for her best thing” (262), or recalled circuitously by different characters who rememory in great detail the raw and brutal realities of the horrific that bind mothers and children in the history of slavery. This event, indicative and symbolic of the “unspeakable truths” so far “unspoken” of the regular practices of slave economy, becomes the centrality of the fate of millions of people who experienced the violence of its conditions for hundreds of years, inflicted upon them ironically by a newly founded democracy which was established by fleeing the conditions of violence and persecution in their metropolitan countries. Moreover, if the Garners were good masters, one cannot imagine the implications in terms of physical and psychic cost on the part of slaves in case the masters were mean.

The presence of Beloved presents issues of memory in recalling the truth about slavery; the repeated coming back to the event creates confusion which leads to the crisis of truth. The interpretation of what the confusion—in its crisis of truth—that the narrative in Beloved displays has been a challenge to readers. As Shlomith-Rimmon-Kenan suggests: “This leads me to speculate that ‘one’ purpose of the ambiguity of Beloved is to dramatize the difficulty of gaining access to and making accessible an unbearable reality” (120). He refers to Phelan’s position that for him it signifies the impossibility, in ethical terms—of “mastering the experience.” As a white male he exclaims “to presume mastery here would be to flaunt my hubris.” For Rimmon-Kenan that “the ambiguity can be said to enact both the representational impetus and the obstacles it encounters” (120). The use of the word “mastery,” I find interesting. I see as
a word that defeats the experience that is the reading of *Beloved*. In rhetoric the word “displacement” that, in psychoanalytic terms, the text causes signifies an interest in terms of *Beloved* as a text for literary analysis. As I have mentioned elsewhere, *Beloved* is a text that enacts a dramatic in its trauma-telling—in ancient Greek sense—experience that involves always-already “a performative representation of the response to trauma on the part of the characters on the part of the characters, the overall narrator, the author, and the reader”(120). This kind of *methexis* of character, narrator, and reader is a multi-vocal heterogeneous signifying process to go back to Kristeva. Any metalinguistic attempt to give concrete substance to the essence of text, in the last analysis, is an attempt to homogenize its significance. But the crisis of truth and the repetitive and circular coming back to *the event* because of its intensified—not only due to the immense horror of the violence that it contains, but also in terms of the number of bodies that it has been inscribed on—traumatic nature. In its quality as a tragic poem, for what else is the novel but the epic of our time as Lukacs discovered, *Beloved* requires a multiple level voicing; much like Kristeva’s suggestion that of a poetic language making free with the language codes; music, dancing, painting, reordering the psychic drives which have not been harnessed by the dominant symbolization and thus renewing their own tradition. (“The System of the Speaking Subject” 30)

The act of reading is in fact the act of its impossibility of signification. The text perhaps will require its ultimate sutured signification with the end of the violence caused by racism. Until then all it can do is to create an impulse on the part of the reader to perhaps desire to perform symbolic notions of *praxis*, like the granting of economic reparations to
the descendants of slaves or the white population’s symbolic washing the feet of every black mother in this country.

First mention of the event occurs when the house on 124 Bluestone Rd is dominated by the rage of the ghost of a little girl whose unsettled soul is embodied in the character of Beloved whose both absence and presence torments Sethe. The event makes her understand “the baby’s fury at having her throat cut,” since her life is burdened by “the baby blood that soaked her fingers like oil (4), what for Baby Suggs signifies “Negro grief” that is an ingredient of every household. Critics have located the problem of simply using psychoanalytic formulas of western origin to analyze the slave narrative and specifically the relationship between Sethe and Beloved. Critics have analyzed the novel in terms of Kleinian or Kristevan models of understanding motherhood, although they illuminate the gender relations of socialization in patriarchal law, are not enough to explain such complexity. Object-relations according to FitzGerald (1993) and Abel explain familial socialization. However, such an understanding can not really account for position of the Black mother to the child: In fact, “the discourse of slavery privileges humanity, autonomy, and participation in a family-by denying these values to slaves” (Fitzgerald 670). Infanticide must be placed on the economic, political, and postcolonial contexts which are the conditions of slavery. It is not simply a mother who experiences the aggressive behavior of an infant in object-relations theory as a form of transcending the pre-oedipal stage in the process of socialization (FitzGerald 1993). Infanticide in Beloved surpasses the boundaries of the tragic encountered, for example, in Euripides’ Medea or Papadiamantis’ The Murderess. It is the always-already defeat of symbolization of four centuries of unspeakable cruelty and unfathomable malice as well
as the residual traces that the burden of such history creates on its descendants. Kristeva attributes to

the problematic space, which innumerable religions of matriarchal (re)appearance attribute to ‘woman’, and which Plato, recapitulating in his own system the atomists of antiquity, designed by the aporia of the *chora*, matrix space, nourishing, unnameable, anterior to the One, to God and consequently defying metaphysics. (“Women’s Time” 191)

Such is the process of feminine symbolization and self definition in western cultures. Morrison creates a text which defies the rules of the mapping of black womanhood by white registers. The recognition and identification of the fleeting essence of the nature of the character of Beloved, her aggressive, depressive, as well as erotic relationship to her mother, Sethe, a process beloved by critics, may result in the impossibility of any kind of possessing its secret. If infanticide is the ultimate act of revolt in slavery—as it conquers that of the strongest of instincts; the maternal one at the same time that rejects slavery’s unnatural unethical order -- her text is also the ultimate revolt; an art—unwilling to facilitate the “mastery” of its significance by those who are supposed to know. In the absence of any memorial Morrison builds a memorial of an unbearable magnitude, since no other monument has materialized—in a way that forbids the trivialization of its significance. It is “reconstruction and resurrection” rememory of the incidents that have gone untold, because their victims were made into ghosts either by being denied a full role in the lives and memories of those around them, or being violently denied a life at all. “If the continuity between earth mother and child is broken, as it is so violently
broken under slavery, then it cannot be restored without further violence.” (Moreland 523)

The next return to the event is contextualized by the coming of the four horsemen: the scene is rendered as a long shot through the white gaze. When they see—there is nothing to claim (no surplus value from these damaged slaves) they can’t claim that image, they realize “that there was nothing there to claim.” What the four horsemen in fact see are “a couple of crazy old niggers heading towards the shed”:

Inside, two boys bled in the sawdust and dirt at the feet of a nigger woman holding a blood-soaked child to her chest with one hand and an infant by the heel in the other. She did not look at them; she simply swung the baby toward the wall planks, missed and tired to connect to a second time, when out of nowhere—in the ticking time the men spent staring at what there was to stare at—the old nigger boy, still mewing, ran through the door behind them and snatched the baby from the arch of its mother’s swing. (149)

As Sethe remembers when she saw them coming out of instinct, she flew. In the effort to revisit the event she articulates what in essence is the core of traumatic experience: “if they don’t get it right of she could never explain” (163). Morrison knows that they won’t get it. The thought of schoolteacher getting close to her life again she felt that little hummingbirds pierced her head with needles:

‘No. No. Nono, Nonono.’ Simple. She just flew. Collected every bit of life she had made, all the parts of her that were precious and fine and beautiful and carried, pushed, dragged them through the veil, out away, over there where no one could hurt them. (163)
Sethe is going to save her best thing; Sethe’s safety for her children comes “with a handsaw” in the slaughter yard. Page 251 is fraught with references to psychoanalytic but also historical political aspects of what it means to be a slave. As Denver thinks about the event she understands the connection between her mother and Beloved: “Sethe was trying to make up for the handsaw; Beloved was making her pay for it.

Stamp Paid revisits the event in his dialogue with Paul D by not telling him of the event although he revisits it in his mind:

So, Stamp Paid did not tell him how she flew, snatching up her children like a hawk on the wing, how her face beaked; how her hands worked like claws, how she collected them every which way… nothing was in that shed, he knew having been there early that morning. Nothing but sunlight shavings a shovel the ax he himself took out nothing else was in there except the shovel—and the of course the saw. (157)

While Stamp Paid carries out Baby Suggs to bury her by the baby with its throat cut, he sums up her life mentioning to her conjure powers which “all had been mocked and rebuked by the bloodspill in her backyard” (177). “She ain’t crazy. She loves those children. She was trying to out-hurt the hurter. (234). Ella, on the other hand, discusses the event in a much more critical way: “I ain’t got no friends take a saw to their own children” (187) representing the voice of how the black community views the event.

2.2.2 MISSION: BOX

These are the names of the 39 communist fighters participating in the mission. The narrator, whose name is never revealed, is the 40th. Their fate is visited again and again by the narrator always providing a new twist and new detail to their story. The repetition of their names, in bold, represents the narrator’s process of rememory: his revisiting the circumstances of their death.12 Alexandrou’s offers witness of this absurd process towards death not only with the threads of his story-telling in the form of legal-testimony-giving, but also in the peculiar revisiting of a schematic both in the way he mentions the names of the comrades, but also providing two maps of the territory in the background of the novel, on page 73 and 154.13

If history could leave a physical presence, a cadaver, like forensic pathologists, we could examine the signs of its demise and create a science of history. Unfortunately, all there is ghosts, traces of witness, and the abstraction with which the passage of time homogenizes memory. Although a lot has been written on Beloved, scholarship on Box is limited. Moreover that scholarship is mainly political; it always examines the novel in
the context of its historical moment and foregrounds Alexandrou’s position as an intellectual. The fate of the innovating thinker, Althusser tells us, is theoretical solitude. For Alexandrou it was more than that: “Isolation, solitude, creates a void around you; and that void has a bitter taste.” Poetry has its own ethical logic. Poets do not lie. The only attempt at a psychoanalytic reading, a Lacanian one, of Box is performed by Giorgos Thalassis. Dimitris Raftopoulos, although he briefly mentions such an understanding which he calls “the psychological/repressed” having to do with “memory, nostalgia, and emotion” only a very narrow one” (126), he asserts that “his intention is not to find a psychoanalytic or psychological character.” In fact “a psychological level does not present much interest” (128).

In my case the act of reading of the novels was a process of associating the political space with the personal one. If, I have claimed, that reading is a process of recognition, identification, and agency, then how is this materialized in Box? Does the text offer itself to a psychoanalytic reading which avoids the abstractions of Lacanian theory? Caruth suggests that might in fact be possible:

> It is indeed this truth of traumatic experience that forms the center of its pathology or symptoms; it is not a pathology, that is, of falsehood or displacement of meaning, but of history itself. If PTSD must be understood as a pathological symptom, then it is not so much a symptom of the unconscious, as it is a symptom of history. The traumatized, we might say, carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess. (5)

Box is a novel which is structured around that same premise but takes place in modernity, due to Hellas’s marginalized position in the context of European
structure of domination. There are two narrative times: the narrator sets out to narrate the events that took place from 14 of July to 20 of September 1949 in the period from 27 of September to 15 of November 1949 while he is incarcerated. During this narration there is a transformation in the aim of telling: from certainty in the narration of events (and hope of recognition of valor) to the anxiety/confusion—the breaking down of language-- about the ability to do so. My argument will be that this breaking down is not simply a deconstructive technique in which Lacanian desire presents itself as the unfulfillable process of human history, but it is rather a result of the narrator’s intense encounter with the fear, fright, and anxiety which he experiences in his witnessing of his comrades (often violent and bloody) deaths and his constant realization of the possibility of his own death:

Freud’s difficult thought provides a deeply disturbing insight into the enigmatic relationship between trauma and survival: the fact that for those who undergo trauma it is not only the moment of the event, but of the passing out of it that is traumatic; that survival itself, in other words, can be a crisis. (Caruth 9)

In narrating traumatic events there is a haunting quality which prevents the participant to comprehend the reality while trauma is going on: “trauma cannot be fully perceived as it occurs. History can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence.” (Trauma 8).15

The novel is structured in very specific chronological order. The story is set between Friday September, 27 and Wednesday November 15, 1949. Its definitive
framework—in terms of day, month, and year—can not but be noticed—will be undermined by the narrative’s form, the repetition, the confusion, the spiral unfinished threads of it recording. The ability to define time is foreshadowed early in the novel with reference to the broken clock and whether or not it should be repaired. Commander Velissarios thought that it should since it would be an affirmation that would “persuade the people the people of N that our armed forces and our party are in a position to repair the damage caused by the enemy” (28). After we are introduced into the situation where our abilities to determine certainty are undermined; the traditional concept of time is fractured. The narrator decides not to fix the church clock although the damage was insignificant and his skill of clock fixing could have taken care of it easily: “In Ikaria, in 1947, I would fix my comrades’ watches and my fame was so widely spread that even the inhabitants of the village would bring me their ‘onions.’” There are two serious matters hinted at here: first the absurdity of the whole situation the narrator finds himself in is revealed by making a whole issue out of the function of the clock: four soldiers are to move the hands and four supervisors to make sure that the hands are moved raising a trivial matter into a level of seriousness. Second, there is an opportunity for the narrator to make some indirect references to the historical period external to the novel’s temporal or ideological intentions. That is the critique of the repressive and surveillance social conditions in the governments following the liberation from the German occupation. He was exiled in Ikaria, one of the islands used to exile communist political dissidents as prisoners.

In this case, just as circumstances allow it, he becomes an agent in distorting their temporal relationships. However, although the individual member of the party wills the destruction of traditional temporality, the party politics will always seek to violently and
coercively restore order. Thus the order to keep on moving the hands of the clock by the soldiers as an indication that the movement is alive and its communal presence is strong is another indication of the meaninglessness of the edicts of power:

He ordered me to run and move the hands. I obeyed. In half-an-hour he sent four soldiers so that I can train them in the movement of the clock’s hands. . . . To be even surer he placed four inspectors who were watching the movement of the hand, while sitting at the window of the State house on the opposite side of the square. (29)

Yet the fact that the fixing of the clock was an absurd and ridiculous temporary solution, as the narrator comments, it was an occasion for the reactionary part of the community, to deride it: “But the way in which the clock was fixed gave the local authorities the opportunity to be sarcastic towards us and to conduct their malevolent propaganda saying that this is the way we would also fix society” (31). From the absurdity of manually moving the hands of the clock so that they give the impression of the good function of the newly established order, the reader moves into the absurdity of witnessing a mission that has neither logical nor political significance; a mission of suicide; a mission empty of revolutionary will.

The anxiety that underlies the narrative is caused not only by the conjectures and revisions of the different versions regarding the truth of the mission, the box, party politics and the soldiers of the revolution, but by the description of the torture of the body, whipping, hunger, thirst, fatigue, exhaustion, and the resulting death itself in the different forms of execution, cyanide, shooting. If slavery is inscribed on Sethe’s cherry-coke tree on her back, revolutionary history is measured by the bloody bodies of its
participants. Morrison creates a memorial giving voice to a people’s past that was silent. The focus is on the mother-daughter relationship that cannot be, because slavery does not allow subjectivity to transcend the depressive position in object-relations and because child-bearing is not performed “in pain but gives birth to pain,” to remember Kristeva. Alexandrou’s pessimism for ever fixing society like fixing a clock is enacted in an all-male community. There are no women in *Box*—except for the brief presence in the incident where the narrator meets his wife, Rena. Additionally, the casualties can be measured no matter how difficult and circuitous that numbering can be. In *Beloved* the casualties can only be approximated: “sixty million and more.” Alexandrou’s ending is a pessimistic one; for him there is only the maddening thunder of the barren possibilities of silence where Morrison’s ending a hopeful one through the voice of Denver who escapes the impossibilities of 124 Bluestone Road.

It is not easy to represent the horrors of history. The body of history needs to be examined with the precise and detailed discourse of a science: with the rigor of political philosophy and the structured language of the unconscious. Like forensic pathology, which uncovers the truth about the violence performed on the body, the science of dialectical interpretation makes it possible for the readers to make sense of the puzzle in an effective way. But this is what our politicians and historical pundits do not want us to do.
As Menelaos Loudemis precedes one of his novels on the horrors of being sentenced to exile in that—most dreadful island with this sentence, I go back to Benjamin’s suggestion that the storyteller—unlike the novelist—requires the performative to tell the particular story as the story of a whole life of human experience, “the raw material of experience, his own and that of others, in a solid, useful and unique way” (108). It is with his voice but also his hands, his eyes, his body in general that proves him to be an artisan, a sage, and a teacher and thus “the storyteller [becomes] the figure in which the righteous man encounters himself” (109). The storyteller embodies the ethical position in a vociferous way whereas the novelist prescribes his unique stories in a lonely silence of both himself and his readers. Einstein asks humanity to free itself from the shackles of selfish interest. In a very peculiar yet surprising way I decipher this in a parallel way as I try to write academically about trauma. In capitalism, which is the most selfish form of societal organization, the process of learning and writing about experience materializes in utter silence. The absolute lack of the ethics of story telling in academic discourse as a rule allows for that fragmented and isolationist attitude [do they call it disinterested objectivity now?] which allows the university to be a place of seeking academic excellence at the same time that the university applies the most vicious rules and demands of market capitalism. Yet, you sign a contract and you must abide by the rules or they will spit you out violently. Writing about trauma in an ethical way requires two things: you must analyze stories of the past in order to create an awareness and the material conditions which will make the necessity of your writing obsolete. You study history to make it a tool for the future. The question for me then becomes: how does one become a story teller in the Benjaminian sense when there is no way to howl scream and cry my novel’s bloody content? How do I resurrect the sparrow’s (Edith Piaf) delicate hands?

Psychanalytic readings of Beloved use Freud’s notion of the uncanny or “unheimlich as an ambiguous entity which carry in itself two different sets of ideas: “on the one hand it means what is familiar and agreeable, and on the other, what is concealed and kept out of sight” (224-225). See also Iyunolu Osagie 1994 and Jean Wyatt 1993. Freud’s aesthetic study of the repressed which appears in ambiguous ways is very useful in exploring the nature of Beloved’s character. The intensified language of artistic expression facilitates the sense of uncanny expression.

Derrida, a magician of language, in Specters of Marx, discusses issues of Dike and Adikia, justice and injustice respectively, all a result of the dejavu of bring the most basic text of Marx, The Manifesto, to center stage.

James Baldwin in “Sonny’s Blues” presents this form of familial “rememory.” Every Sunday afternoon the family sits in the living room where the adults are telling stories of past and present; the children gather around and listen. When darkness comes, nobody turns on the lights. When that happens “the child is filled with darkness. He knows that every time this happens he’s moved just a little closer to that darkness outside. That darkness outside is what the old folks have been talking about. It’s what they’ve come from. It’s what they endure. The child knows that they won’t talk anymore because if he knows too much about what’s happened to them, he’ll know too much too soon, about what’s going to happen to him” (28-29).
I admit that this suggestion might be viewed as an essentialist one. However, how does one deal with attitudes of indifference or exhaustion on the part of white audiences? How can any effort be made towards recognition of the past? I am not sure that there is another way, but the one that we can glean from Black literature and theory.

This reading of *Beloved* is not an easy one, admittedly; however, the inclusion of this text in the secondary education curricula could be immensely educational. The fact that we still have residues of racist behavior on all social levels, and that lynching is still practiced sporadically; the examples of Vidor, Texas; Jasper, Texas, etc., speak eloquently on that. Anti-racist education has to begin in high school and not only in college as it is now the case. The interesting observation here would be that criticism centers around the individual and the collective, the personal and the political as they emerge in the novels as a study of the past which informs the future. What is the need of revisiting these bloody and attention and justice demanding ghosts? How is the examination of the individual and the collective relevant in this historical moment and how can it motivate individual readers and collective organizations who are dedicated to issues of equality, justice, and the end of violence on a global scale today? How can this ghostly spectrology be meaningful in another than discursive way? A way that goes beyond discourse and in which the sacred energy that is born by a revisiting of a brutal past would become a vowing of a creation of a political order where the knowledge and energy is used to significantly transform the here in the now?

The relationship between ancient Greek ideas and Nazism is well-known. “Makronissos, the small, uninhabited island of the Attica coast, was the location of the most notorious concentration camp set up by the Greek government during the Civil war (1946-1949). It was a place of brutality, torture, and death, but its distinctive feature was its role as an indoctrination center for many thousands of political dissidents (mostly left wing soldiers and citizens but also ethnic and religious minorities, who, after they were re-educated in the national dogmas, were sent to fight against ex-comrades. Classical antiquity was one of the main ideological foundations of this experiment, the audience for which was the whole of Hellas and the international community. In the island still known as the new Parthenon the redeemed inmates were encouraged to build replicas of classical antiquity and the regime’s discourse emphasized the perceived incompatibility of the inmates’ destiny as descendants of ancient Greeks with left wing ideologies.) As Hamilakis claims, the whole Makronissos experiment was aiming at “at inscribing upon their bodies the idea that not only is Greekness at odds with ideologies such as communism, but also that the Civil War was just another re-run of the millennium old national drama wherein Hellenism fights its others.” Those of us who happened to be on that side of otherness remember the hysteric, C.Papadopoulos, promising to cure the sick Hellas by putting the sick Hellas in a cast. It seems that the silence of mediation (see critical theory) will always already be a product like one in many [that which Benjamin the abbreviating nature of modernity] when it is not that by nature.

Understanding Greek tragedy has been a long life journey for me. Aristotelian poetics has never been adequate in the explication of what constitutes “pity and fear.” I am indebted to Cornelius Castoriades’ “Aschelean Anthropogony and Sophoclean Self-Creation of Man.” He tries to answer the question of “what is Man” that the tragic poets explored and talks about the essence that constitutes that question as had been exemplified by Aeschylus and Sophocles respectively. As he argues “Aschelus’ description renders the state of humanity “before” or “outside” the institution of social life—of the arts, of labor, of logos. What is described here is how man would be if he had body and soul—but no opinion” (210). On the contrary, Castoriades argues, the Sphoclean moment is that of self-consciousness and thus-I would add, alienation. “If human beings were to get out of this pro-human condition, they should learn the first and last of truths, that they are mortal” (214). “Sophocles displays an anthropology which does not presuppose anything and where capabilities and possibilities are created by the people; he simply posits clearly and emphatically humanity as self creation. Human beings took nothing from the gods; no god has ever given them anything” (216). Hubris creates man as deinos. He thus produces pity, fear, and terror—horrible, terrible, and dangerous. This state can render man apolin, without polis. This understanding of humanity is contiguous to the existential, psychoanalytical, and political level. This understanding, as a result, informs my interpretation of the novels.
The theme of ghosts intrigues critics who explore the issue of the nature of the character, beloved. Broad argues that *Beloved* re-collects the history of all the ‘disremembered and unaccounted for’ who fell victim to the African American genocide” (192). Thus *Beloved* has no end and the memory of Beloved cannot be exorcized (406). Moreover, “*Beloved* may be unique in using the ghost story to shock its readers into locating the source of horror in the repressed and unclaimed realities of the factual, historical past” (414).

I agree with Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan that “many critics, in different contexts, have characterized Morrison’s project as motivated by the desire to rescue history from the oblivion to which both victimizers and victims have condemned it and to grant subjects—in the ruthless and racial sense of being ‘in ‘subjection’ (OED)—an access to self. What they have shown, I believe, is the role the act of narration plays in both the destabilization and the retrieval of history and of the self.” He focuses his analysis on the act of telling itself; the narration becomes “the basis for a birth into self.” Kristeva speaks about a “subject-in-process” whose make-up is the heterogeneous logic of signifying process. The semiotic disposition will be the various deviations from the grammatical rules of the language since in it occur “the release and subsequent articulation of the drives as constrained by the social code yet not reducible to the language system as genotext and the signifying system as it presents itself to phenomenological intuition as a phenotext; describable in term of structure, or competence and performance, or according to other models” (28).

Melanie Klein unlike Freud placed the mother as the focus of object relations. What Klein did was provide a different metaphor/symbolic language to account for the stages of infant socialization. If Freud gave us a dialectic relationship between anxiety and pleasure, *eros* and *thanatos*, Klein recognized this death drive as a basic element of our being in the world-in-pain. This plunging into the madness that characterizes the human psyche both limits and energizes it. Both Freud’s and Klein’s theories were developed as ruptures of the accepted norms of *beingness* in the world. They (and Lacan) are the leading rebels in a revolution that is peculiarly without an obvious physical collective. Klein’s rebellious move, according to Julia Segal’s *Melanie Klein*, was that she brought the insights of the mother into psychoanalysis. Mother constitutes the primary focus into the process of subjectivity creation. The role of the father is secondary. She herself a mother, and having lived in an unhappy marriage for too long, observed the manifestation of guilt, anxiety, love, and hate in the infant’s relationship to the mother. Klein redefined Freud’s developmental stages (oral, anal, genital) by positions.

i. The paranoid-schizoid position:
This stage is related to the infant’s *phantasies* of the nipple: the nipple as loving, feeding, creative and good; the infant must also be kept at a distant from the nipple which is biting, hurtful, and terrifying. Without this split, the baby is not able to make the connection between love and cruelty and feed trustingly. [This develops normally but in cases of child abuse this upturn of that balance it creates confusion.]

ii. The depressive position
This appears when the infant is around 3 months old; in this stage, the baby begins to integrate experience rather than split it. Awareness of objects as whole with both loved and hated characteristics is developed. Once the baby reaches this stage, it can contain thoughts and representations of the absent mother as good. Disappointment with the mother is no longer feared as something wholly bad and dangerous. In this way the baby achieves a sense of internal strength. Kristeva recognizes Klein’s creation of the cult of the motherhood and especially matricide. The mother must be killed so that knowledge can be achieved. This can be seen in Klein’s use of the myth of patricide and matricide. *Orestes* is freed by his murdering Clytemnestra while the Furies keep him in a state of guilt, but he escapes his own demise, demise (at least structurally) required for the catharsis of this form of hubris. Simply because it is because it is Electra who is burning with the desire to have the mother killed. The need for symbolization for Klein is the mother’s insufficiency to provide emotional fulfillment in the child’s process of socialization.

The map is another interesting moment in this novel and its visual significance has not been recognized adequately: there are two versions of it. The second one is much more dense in its noting in its writing down in more detail of the process of the mission. Repeatedly the narrator is counting and re-counting; he is repeatedly asking the interrogator’s verification as to the correct number of dead and living: “because 34 of us set off: no objection regarding this number, isn’t that so?” Although the interrogator is silent, the narrator keeps on desiring to draw *eksousia* into the dialogue so that he can verify how the deaths have occurred.
My first reading of *Box* happened in 1977. It filled me with fear but also recognition. What he narrates in the novel was my high school experience during the dictatorship in Greece 1967-1973. Our everyday living apart from its economic disadvantages entailed an everyday fear of being careful regarding what we said or read or listened to because we felt under surveillance. Some of our teachers would carefully and clandestinely read us or refer to the forbidden cultural products that were censored. It was my reading of *Beloved* in the 1990s in the U.S. which actually started my connection. I recognized in it fragments of my past both in experience and its representation in literature. My subsequent reading of *Box* clarified the effect it had. Psychoanalysis about trauma has helped me understand it as a narrative confusing, circuitous, and elliptical symbolic of the inability to fully understand its truth since it carries so many wounded subjects.

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I am indeed puzzled here. How is it that I can make the connections that serious critics have not recognized?

If one looks at this kind of novel written this period, one can recognize that most novels which deal with extremely painful and bloody events such as the civil war, the dictatorship, the uprisings, one may recognize that the form in which the novels are written is in fact not realism. Fragias’ *Plague* is also an allegory extremely nightmarish in its structure and style. Kotzias’ *Resisting Arrest*, recounting the three nights of the student rebellion from a policeman’s point of view, also uses a language which simultaneously deconstructs the validity of the cop’s narration as well as allows a whole underworld subculture and its peculiar language to surface.
CHAPTER 3

THE AFTERTMATH: THE NOVEL AS A DIALOGUE BETWEEN SUBJECT AND HISTORY:

THE INDIVIDUAL (PERSONAL) OR THE COLLECTIVE (PUBLIC) PSYCHE?

“For my people lending their strength to the years, to the gone years and the now years and the maybe years, washing ironing cooking scrubbing sewing mending hoeing plowing digging planting pruning patching dragging along never gaining never reaping never knowing and never understanding”

(From “For My People” Margaret Walker)

"Of all things upon the earth that bleed and grow, a herb most bruised is woman"

(Brown Girl, Brownstones 29)

“Did u hear about the rose that grew from a crack
In the concrete
Proving nature’s laws wrong it learned to walk
Without having feet
Funny it seems but by keeping its dream
It learned 2 breathe fresh air
Long live the rose that grew from concrete
When no one else even cared!”  “The Rose that Grew from Concrete” Tupac Shakur

At the dawn of 20th century, slavery is no longer a social practice in America; reconstruction and emancipation are the new energies supposedly rebuilding post civil war society. In reality, the era can be described as the pernicious beginning of non-freedom, material dispossession, and systematic murder for the Black race.¹

African Americans are challenged and provoked by their having to deal with the different forms of cruelty white society inflicts upon them. They either have to cope with whatever form the historical and social circumstances post slavery-America took in the south, or travel the way north with the hope of a better life and the “dream of the city as a place of opportunity, wealth, and progress” (Bernard Bell, 106). Neither, as the novels reveal and history’s unfolding has proven, is an easy or free of danger task for the Negro people. On their way north, they must actually survive the smell of burnt flesh, the sight of hanging-from-tree-branches bodies, in other words the black people’s being-hunted-down realities.² Morrison’s Beloved speaks about a reality testified by many. It echoes Paul D’s inability to fathom the nature of a people, who could actually practice such cruelty; hence he exclaims “what are those people? You tell me, Jesus. What are they?”³ Assuming that black people could escape all that, when they reached the north, they’ll be faced with a situation (in Harlem, in Detroit, in Chicago, etc.) where space will be
formidable again not by its vastness this time, but by the suffocating narrowness, that is, the narrowness of opportunity and hope that urban life offers. Confined by the suffocating space of racism, economic inequality, lack of communal or cultural points of reference, the underground hero of Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* (1952) discovers ultimately that the fate the white man has dealt for him, an intelligent and aspiring young black man, is one of perpetual quest, strife without telos or profit. What in Ellison takes the form of an absurd condemnation of young black men to an incessant running in pace, running in circles, running through a labyrinth without an exit, in Richard Wright’s *Native Son*, becomes a much more realistically nightmarish depiction of the inescapable criminalization of dispossessed blackness in the Harlem of the 50s. Richard Wright touches the nerve and the pulse of the period: Bigger Thomas’ anguished desire of wanting “to lie down upon the floor and sleep off the horror of this thing” (92) is not realizable; there is no escapist voluntarism in the black man’s reality in America. The heroes in the novels will be finally annihilated by a system which, although it originally needs to invent them, in reality, has no way of sustaining them. The African American novel thus focuses on representing these complexly disturbing relationships in the economic, the racial, the political, and the cultural sphere and unconsciously uncovers master/slave relationships, connections of hegemony/supremacy and oppression. The same issues will be undertaken, magnified, and expanded in the novels of African American women writers as well even if they will be recognized only in the latter half of the 20th century. Their range is wide and their scope varied. Additionally to racism and poverty, sexism also dominates their themes. The novels of African American women
writers like Ann Petry, Toni Morrison, Dorothy West, Kristin Hunter, Alice Walker, Paule Marshall, and others will undertake this task in the 20th century.

Marxist, Black Feminist/Womanist, and Psychoanalytic theories as both political movements and philosophical world-views are informing the writing and interpretation of these novels. Afro-American women writers are doing serious work in depicting a world of poverty and ugliness, oppression, and traumatization, but also resistance and regeneration. In this respect, novels such as *The Street, The Bluest Eye, God Bless the Child, The Living is Easy, Brown Girl, Brown Stones, The Third Life of Grange Copeland* take material deprivation as the origin of degradation aided by the ugly realities of racism, and ultimately exacerbated by the complex truths of gender cruelty within the black social and familial space. Hazel Carby makes a great observation on this subject in *Reconstructing Womanhood*:

Afro-American cultural and literary history should not create and glorify a limited vision, a vision which in its romantic evocation of the rural and the folk avoids some of the most crucial and urgent issues of cultural struggle—a struggle that Larsen, Petry, West, Brooks, and Morrison recognized would have to be faced with inner cities, the home of the black working class. (175)

Although celebration of blackness and black womanhood, in particular, through tradition and folklore offers empowerment and vindication, one must always not lose perspective of the crippling effects of American capitalist, racist, sexist ideologies and practices. And although novels such as Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Naylor’s *Mama Day*, Shange’s *Sassafras, Cypress and Indigo* celebrate blackness and womanhood, the
realities of *The Street* are very important—and it is interesting that they do not have the appeal they should have in academia. 5 They constitute the basis for any radical and honestly incisive class, race, and feminist study of black culture and specifically black female culture within the American paradigm. The un-romanticized dreariness of black urban life becomes the subject matter of the novel and behind the picturing of this dreariness attempts are made to understand the historic-economic and psychological reasons of this picturing. 6 African American women theorize through their literature on the political and the psychoanalytic. Historical understanding and self-consciousness (the legacy of Marxist thought, as a form of—utopian in our days—quest for resistance, mobilization, equality, and ideological clarity) becomes important for the understanding of one’s positionality as an individual within the presence or absence of a collective material or ideological formation. Understanding one’s parameters of exploitation, finally feeling the chains in one’s legs (even in post slavery, post-civil rights times) is the first step into devising ways of rebellion, mobilization, and self-definition. Theory as a result, informed by politics, collective experience, ideology, and language allows for examination of the novel where form and content are also intertwined and they both speak of the dialectical/dialogical relationship between history, historical specificity, and subjectivity as always already constructed in the narrative process. The structure of the narrative and the construction of subjectivity these novels employ, illuminate the forces behind this specifically political artistic expression, i.e. the political novel. Their unconscious inner form, that is, the way they create relationships between poverty and wealth, between (focused) black worlds and (marginal) white worlds between womanhood and manhood only make a polyglotic, in the Bakhtinean sense, statement about the general historical
situation they actually take their material from. With the Althusserian concept of “structural causality,” (*Reading Capital*) the causes of material dispossession, the pernicious effects of the white gaze, the exponentially disproportionate, for American society, failures of black male/female relationships, and finally the complete corrosion and woundedness of the black psyche can be explained:

Only from history in thought, the theory of history, was it possible to account for the historical religion of reading: by discovering that the truth of history cannot be read in its manifest discourse, because the text of history is not a text in which a voice (the Logos) speaks, but the inaudible and illegible notation of the effects of a structure of structures. (17)

One can actually go as far as saying perhaps that while the representation of successful agency (in other words the ultimate acquiring of the American dream) under such historic-economic and ideological circumstances is contingent upon those factors, i.e., the inequalities due to class, race and gender, in actual fact, the materialization of this dream has extremely slim potential, in fact the most probable outcome—that of failure—is guaranteed precisely because those factors. The ideological implications of “false consciousness,” to put it in the most raw Marxist a-la- Lukacs terms justifies the models characters attempt to emulate, and explains the traumatization of the black psyche through the demonization of blackness because of racism. Such an analysis will account for the historical/ideological residues of the brutality of the black male as re-enacted on the body of the black woman. Under such circumstances, familial and social relationships are experienced in a distorted way as the novels show. As Wade Gales puts
it, social space in America is like a series of circles one within the other which never profitably meet:

There is a large circle in which people, most of them men, experience influence and power. Far away from it there is a smaller circle, a narrow space, in which black people regardless of sex, experience uncertainty, exploitation, and powerlessness. Hidden in this second circle is a third, a small dark enclosure in which black women experience pain, isolation, and vulnerability. These are distinguishing marks of black womanhood in white America. (*No Crystal Stair* 4)

Apart from being defined by class, “black women are thus confined to both the narrow space of race and the dark enclosure of sex. This ‘double jeopardy’ has created a complex, painful, and dehumanizing reality in which they have struggle for both freedom and selfhood (Wade Gales 4).

Theorizing on the concrete realities the novels confront us with, one can discern a dialectical relationship between what is abstracted totality, i.e., history, economy, politics, and ideology in the U.S. social space (the very general and wide context) and the subject’s specific historical situatedness. The minute scale personal experience of characters caught in the violent whirlwind of the unfolding of everyday living is represented not as an overlooked detail, but as the main focus of the narrative. The personal story in fact becomes the building block of general and shared historical experiencing and understanding, i.e. of the life experiences of African Americans as seen from the perspective of African American women in these novels in other words. The notion of abstracted totality hence can not be misconstrued as a Hegelian speculative
investigation (the process and search phases of a “pure essentiality of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*”), but as a complex conduit of awareness and enlightenment informed by Marxist, Feminist, and cultural studies viewpoints and methodologies which enable readers to understand literature not as a private metaphysical intuitive expression but as a wholly “socially symbolic act” with historically specific ramifications to use the Jamesonian language that influences and determines the lives, deaths, loves, hatreds; the greatness and smallness of everyday human beings in action. To speak about history relating to African-Americanness, one must “speak about the past as painful, dangerous, and sad” as Walter Benjamin would suggest: “For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably” (255). Forgetfulness is dangerous for the oppressed although a convenient tool for the oppressor. But those on whose backs and bodies history has been violently written know that “nothing is lost in history” as the novels of African American women writers exemplify with perspicacious specificity. Writing is the inscription of the (traumatized psychic) historical realities due to class, race, gender, and culture (tradition) in both content and the subtle, undercurrent ways, the forms, those contents are presented in. In locating thus the complex relationships that go into the writing of this kind of novel and the always present rewriting process of them by audiences, by readership, I have come to discern and identify the different points of drift (or failure or handicap: in the moment of what Kristeva names that of enunciation) in the novel revealing the points of coincidence and confluence recognizable in epistemological terms.
1. The ideological incongruities existing between the traumatic historical backgrounds which form subjectivity to a great extent and the daily performative modes by characters.

2. The significance of the discursive lapses, silences appearing in the novels to the degree of forming collective alliances of a working environment or opportunities of support within the various other communities which may ultimately lead to

3. the impossibility of the subject self re-imagination in decolonized and thus more politically resurgent and effective ways.

   How can the notion of Bakhtinean polyphonic novel, in other words, be accounted for with to the state of aphony (lack of voice) or apnia (lack of breathing) that Lutie’s son Bub will be left with at the end of the novel and Lutie’s departure as the act par excellence of desire for reaching a land of forgetfulness which is equal to death for the state of black womanhood.

3.1 African American: Post Slavery Experience of Internal Colonization

Houses are the subject of the dream in the novels. They are for the women characters symbols of security and privacy; houses are the wombs (warmth and coming home); houses are elements of desire which are finally canceled for the main characters in the novels. Houses are also signs of upward mobility exemplified, for example, in Cleo's determination to get a big house so that she can protect her sisters in Dorothy West’s The Living Is Easy, Rosie's ostentatious insistence to "be moving in" to places where "her mother had only asked to be admitted to their front doors" in Kristin Hunter’s God Bless
the Child (200), or Silla Boyce’s insensitivity to her husband's fragile needs as she is determined to get her brownstone "by figuring this thing out" (how to sell her husband's property in Barbados) in Brown Girl, Brownstones. Houses can also become elements of destruction and the utopia they represent for a certain part of the population as in Ann Petry’s The Street.⁹

Space plays a great role in human experience: it can be felt as the source of survival and a place of security, but more often the cause of alienation, loss, and failure. One of the recurrent motifs in African American women’s literature is a very specific and material desire, i.e. the desire to own a home that dominates and pervades the novels thematically. In economic and political terms, the ownership of property, which translates in the ownership of a home, constitutes the basis of the American dream, i.e., aspiration into the transcendence to a secure middle-class life. There is an interesting contradiction working here. This dream, as history has proven, is more easily dreamed about and desired than actually achieved and fulfilled as the novelistic unfolding reveals for African Americans. Moreover, it is a contradiction that has no fertile aufhebung because it has been based on the negation of the humanity of a group of people, who experience the most flagrant forms of oppression:

Petry’s novel is particularly interesting from the vantage point of class definitions, for on one hand she gives us a character who is working class, and on the other hand has that character aspire to values of the ideal upper middle class lady. The Street is a story that emphasizes the tragedy that can result from such a contradiction. (Christian 73)
In the US space, it has predominantly been based on color; in other societies it is invented/constructed based on other characteristics (and it is usually the group that for some reason, at the specific time and place, seems to function as a threat to the status quo as we will see in the Hellenic paradigm). This contradiction leads to frustration and confusion and, as seen in the novels, to the desire for property ownership at any cost, which for African Americans is a sign of security and protection from a white hostile social environment. Struggles are never one-dimensional, meaning that there is a whole network of factors that make the task from a very difficult one to an impossible one, and the dream/desire always fleeting and deferred. Factors such as class, race, and gender, as well as issues of culture and individual psychic peculiarities are all entangled in the thematic unfolding of the novels, and they determine the outcome of such desires. While the representation of successful agency (in other words the ultimate acquiring of the American dream) under such historic-economic and ideological circumstances is contingent upon those factors, i.e., the inequalities due to class, race and gender, in actual fact, i.e., the materialization of this dream has extremely slim potential, in fact the most probable outcome, that of failure, is guaranteed precisely because those factors. The ideological implications of “false consciousness,” to put it in the most raw Marxist a la Lukacs terms, justifies the models characters attempt to emulate, and explains the traumatization of black psyche through the demonization of blackness because of racism. Such an analysis also accounts for the historical residues of the brutality of the black male as it is re-enacted on the body of the black woman. Under such circumstances, familial and social relationships are experienced in a distorted way as the novels show.
As Wade Gales puts it, social space in America is like a series of circles one within the other which never profitably meet:

There is a large circle in which people, most of them men, experience influence and power. Far away from it there is a smaller circle, a narrow space, in which black people regardless of sex, experience uncertainty, exploitation, and powerlessness. Hidden in this second circle is a third, a small dark enclosure in which black women experience pain, isolation, and vulnerability. These are distinguishing marks of black womanhood in white America. (No Crystal Stair 4)

In the microcosm of the novels, characters are trying to adapt to the space allowed to them by the dominant culture (white capitalist and supremacist society) and they are expected to make the best of it. They are expected to achieve the whole of it, the American dream, work, home, and security. The having of a home is the sought for and desired in these novels; the absence or presence of it as well as the ways of its acquisition torment the unconscious of African American women writers. Narrowing of space serves as a symbol for the closing in of opportunity, as it is evident in Ann Petry’s The Street and Paule Marshall’s Brown Girl, Brown Stones. Expanding of space may be symbolic of an (illusionary) opening up of possibilities because of the historical/material forces undercurrent as we see in Kristin Hunter’s God Bless the Child and Alice Walker’s The Third Life of Grange Copeland.10 What the narrative structures and their representations of black female (and male) subjectivity in these novels are suggesting, in the last analysis, is that African American women’s desire will be rescinded by the always-already existing historical, political, and cultural U.S. reality. It is a reality which
constructs them as internally colonized subjects, to use McClintock’s paradigm, under the hegemony of white supremacist America:

While U.S. capitalist society and its cultural apparatus reflect keenly their productions—prosperity, security, civil order—they at the same time, unaccountably and implacably, reflect their expenditures and residuals—the Third World, the African American poverty and violence. (Barrett 98)

The novels appear like haunting skeletons hidden in the cramped apartments and dark damp basements of white capitalist exploitation. For those who experience its brutality in their everyday lives, moreover, they are a result and a consequence of well-oiled white supremacist machinery. Ann Petry’s *The Street*, Kristin Hunter’s *God Bless the Child* and Alice Walker’s *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* are three novels that display several similar themes and are indicative of their era. The axes traversing the narratives are the junctures of class and race and gender; the absence or presence of family and community and the germination of the tricky function of ideology. What is centered and marginal in terms of narrative are also indicative of their historical juncture. The form in which narratives are constructed is also semiotic of time, i.e. when the texts are written in relation to the presence or absence of a general political movement; the civil rights. In all three novels issues of class are closely connected to those of race. One of the common elements is the ability to possess a house which becomes a symbol of security and success.

Petry’s *The Street*, is a novel that allows the historic-economic realities of mid-forties Blackness to surface. In terms of form, the narrative is tight and dark, reminiscent of a pessimistic determinism understandable in a pre-civil rights time in America. Lutie
Johnson, the heroine finds herself alone with a child in Harlem, coming from a failed family life in Jamaica because she had to go out and seek work, since “what else is a woman to do when her man can’t get a job?”(63). She thus becomes a domestic servant in white American suburbia where

the sink had belonged to someone else—she’d been washing someone else’s dishes when she should have been home with Jim and Bub. Instead she cleaned another woman’s house and looked after another woman’s child while her own marriage went to pot. (30)

She discovers the price of her choice when “she walked into her own house to find there was another woman living there with Jim” (53). She realizes that:

The men stood around and the women worked. The men left the women and the women went working and the kids were left alone. The kids burned lights all night because they were alone in small, dark rooms and they were afraid. Alone. Always alone. . . And the street reached out and sucked them up. (388)

Petry is theorizing in the novel the wider social implications of white patriarchal capitalist hegemony. She is not only presenting women in adversity, but she makes all the connections related to that subject: As Wade-gates suggests: “Young and old, the faces of the women of 116th Street "have a look of resignation, of complete acceptance" which betrays their inability to protest against anything. (118) Petry uses the past (Lutie's grandma greatly felt absence); she explains things in terms of gender relations (her past)--the fact that her husband did not wait for her; she attempts to explain them in terms of class issues--the fact that she has to go away and work at white people's houses to support her family; and,
finally, she explains them in terms of community (or the lack of it) since she has no ties with anything or anybody in particular (except for her grandmother's memory). There are common links between the three—greatly oppressed—women in the novel; Lutie, Min, and Mrs Hedges. These three women will never find a common thread in their lives, nevertheless. Perhaps it is too early in the history of awareness to demand such a move on the part of this novel's characters. This estrangement and isolation causes Lutie's complete and thorough vulnerability in living alone and isolated in an effort to catch the American Dream. As Barbara Christian suggests:

> If they [the women] tried to live by the female version of the American Dream, as pure, refined, protected, and well-provided for, they were often destroyed, as is Lutie Johnson, Ann Petry's heroine in *The Street* (1946).

> And even if they secured a measure of the Dream, some like Cleo in West's *The Living Is Easy* became destructive, frustrated, alienated from self.

("Trajectories of Self Definition "236).

Her move to an apartment at 116th street, in Harlem exacerbates her feeling of despair. The inimical atmosphere of the streets of Harlem is enhanced by the narrowness of the apartment itself where “the halls were so narrow that she could reach out and touch them on either side without having to stretch her arms any distance,” and where also “the rooms were small,” that “instead of her reaching out for the walls, the walls were reaching out for her-bending and swaying toward her in an effort to envelop her” (12).

Life closes in on Lutie and her son, Bub, every time she tries to make a break. As she says: “it seems like life is going past me so fast that I’ll never catch up with it, and it wouldn’t matter particularly, but I can’t see anything ahead of me except these walls that...
push in against me” (83). If only Petry’s mode of narration was not so brutally naturalistic, so darkly Dostoevskian, the reader feels. The novel starts by depicting nature’s animosity to Lutie’s plight: “Lutie braced her body against the wind’s attack determined to finish thinking about the apartment before she went in to look at it” (4). Lutie experiences a closing in feeling over and over again as she tries to live a new life, as she tries to exercise some kind of choice in giving her and her child a future; her dislike of mountains speaks to that effect too (160). Lutie struggles on and on hopelessly. The narrowing of space here is a symbol for the ultimate entrapment and annihilation, which is not presented as accidental in the novel, an action of fate, god’s will, but it has very specific historical and economic origins. Larry Andrews (1995) describes the situation presented by Petry in sensory, physical, and psychological terms: the issues emerging from his reading are class, racial, and gender ones. This is in fact the case. But the argument I think needs to become more clearly stated as an understanding (and critique) of the nature of the economic framework that the whole perverted schema functions: the effects of class exploitation and oppression within American capitalism. If the wind pushes people discouragingly off 116th Street in The Street, it does so to contrast the hostility of the street to the security and protection the apartment would provide. If other people submit to the wind Lutie resists it: "Lutie has no such conditioned response, for she is a newcomer to this environment of poverty, violence and helplessness” (Wade-Gates 150). Lutie's moving into the apartment was a small victory in the beginning as it distanced her from the past of a drunken father and his bad influence upon her son, Bub. As the focus comes close to the apartment, however, she will notice: "the rooms are so small. . . they seem to come in toward her, to push against her" (78-79). Even though a step up from her
previous position the apartment closes in on her; its walls suffocate her existence. The apartment becomes a suffocating place, the street, on the other hand, becomes a trap because of the dangers it includes.

Petry’s novel allows no hope because the U.S. is a hostile environment for Black Americans, for black women in particular. For this simple reason the novel is an excellent dissection of the causes and ills of black urban poverty, isolation, and alienation, and “the betrayal of democracy in Petry’s novel becomes the destruction of human feeling in the world” (Pryse 129). If white society is not willing to accommodate her very humble dream, i.e. steady job, secure home, child rearing, the street becomes home but a dangerous place for Bub at the same time. This is a street destined for black kids and it is contrasted in the novel with “The Chandlers’ street which is wide and lined with elm trees whose branches met overhead” (Pryse 121). It is the only place a black kid could ultimately own and they own it only because white supremacy and the greed of capitalist practices allows it so that it can name it the place of gangster criminal behavior, so that it can condemn it as a place of otherness, so that he can have a legitimate right to introduce the state’s oppressive mechanisms to silence and control rebellious and growing violent black male young population.12 As Barbara Christian suggests “in many ways The Street is akin to Native Son (1941) and its relentless presentation of the dreary despair of the inner cities and the illumination of the causal relationship between social and personal crime” (11). What the novel’s bleak ending suggests is that a Black woman can have no security any place no matter where she goes no matter what little space she is willing to occupy. Her failure was almost predetermined not in a metaphysical sense, but in the terms as long as she has a means to survive7.
It is on situation, setting, and environment that this novel focuses. Lutie Johnson might be one of the hundreds of thousands of black women living in Harlem in 1946, women whose hope for a better life was the only thing that kept them going. Lutie is seldom further delineated as a particular person, with a particular make-up. Her plight is actually the major character of the novel, a plight that can only lead to crime and tragedy (Christian 12). Although success is there waiting and some people can achieve it, this reality is the exception rather than the rule. Yet, as Marjorie Pryse puts it, ironically, in light of the forces the novel proposes to counter the laws of the street in a world created by white gods, Petry presents Lutie as simply making the wrong choices, following the wrong models; but finally, the power she needs in order to counter the white world already exists, on the street itself. (123)

The ending of the novel is indicative of the narrowing of space of all the false expectations and hopes of success and redemption:

when Lutie murders the black band leader and pimp, Boots Smith, who has tried to seduce her, and abandons her son to reform school, we are disappointed and depressed—like some of Petry’s earlier reviewers and critics—even though we knew, both from our knowledge of our society as well as by means of Petry’s use of dramatic irony—that the model of he self made man that Benjamin Franklin represents does not, was never intended to, include women or Black men. (Pryse 117)

The constraints and limitations of class position are also evident in Hunter’s God Bless the Child. Written in 1964 the novel occupies a much different form and presents
female characters in a much more intricate and interesting way. Hunter creates a
dynamic character in Rosie Flemming; a rebellious, adventurous, extremely intelligent
and energetic character who vows to escape the “three generations of cockroaches”
residing in her apartment which keep her company in the beginning of the novel. While
her grandmother, Lurinda, is constructed as absurdly arrogant because of her position as a
domestic in a wealthy white house, displaying the perfect characteristic of false
consciousness, Rosie’s dream to acquire such a house for her granny, leads her to
exhaustion through working for it because she exceeds her physical tolerance. Although
there is a community of friends, the familial fabric is presented dysfunctional. The
relationship of Rosie to her mother is an antagonistic one while her relationship to her
grandmother is a destructive one. Rosie’s relationship to her mother is problematic:
“Mom was generous to everyone. Except her own daughter. The grown-up day time
Rosie didn’t give a damn, but the child in the lonely dark could not help caring” (70).
Her unnatural relationship to her grandmother however, where Rosie acts like the
parental figure that needs to nurture the adults, is that which leads her to destruction. Her
determination to acquire a house for granny through working constantly is the one that
will end her life. When the love and wisdom of a grandmother is absent, the new
generation cannot survive. Not as pessimistic as Lutie’s world however they realize the
same realities: the economic constraints of a racist society. Harlem deflates the dream
because it entraps its inhabitants. Hunter in an interview with Claudia Tate admits: “I
knew a girl like Rosie in God Bless the Child, too. I met her only once, and I knew she
was working two jobs in order to buy a house. I went home and said I was going to write
a book bout her. Of course nobody believed me” (82). The novel reads like a blues song
too. In a form that may fool the reader as entertaining, Hunter presents us with the always already canceled fate of average black womanhood. Like Petry’s *The Street* this novel is also about the inescapable fate of blackness, poverty, and female identity. Environment is once again important. Yet, space functions slightly different here. Our heroine, Rosie, a young woman who grew up in a roach infested crummy apartment is not going to accept that reality as her fate the way Lutie also did but in a very different mode of movement:

The cockroaches came crawling out of the cracks in the walls and the ceiling and the mouldings and the little crevices under the edges of the linoleum. Three generations of cockroaches, all sizes: long, skinny granddaddy cockroaches and fat mama cockroaches and baby cockroaches smaller than ants. They had fed on the grease that glazed the kitchen walls and now they marched, plump and stupefied, across the counter where Rosie was making her breakfast. The counter was three feet high and eighteen inches deep. Rosie could just reach the back of it by standing on tiptoe. (11)

This is where Hunter’s realistic description of the setting in such plain and slightly playful tone sets the material conditions but also the condition of misdirection until the next section. The portion of family relationships that Rosie is experiencing is set out here. Her mother is a wasted life. She feels sorry for her while her mother is presented as ignorant as well as alienated:

For a moment Rosie felt sorry for Mom and wished she could feel more for the fleshy, exhausted woman on the bed. The word, ‘Mom,’ was a
hard lump of coal in her throat. She moved toward the bed and tried to
make it come out.” (15)

This discrepancy is supposedly counterbalanced by the presence of Rosie’s grandmother, equally selfish and equally alienated, whom she seems to be fond of because Rosie can not see her as she really is. The writer pokes fun of at Granny’s folly and presents her as “proud and dainty as a queen” arrogant and condescending when she comes to visit Rosie and her mother’s rancid smelling apartment building:

Some how it was all right for Rosie and Mom to smell these odors, but
Granny was different Granny did not live there; she lived across town in a white palace with marble stairs and crystal fountains, and when she came to be with them on her Thursdays and every-other-weekends, she was company. (16)

And when she talks to Rosie it is about all the wonderful things that her white masters are doing thus introducing Rosie into a kind of dream of another life which will become Rosie’s driving force into trying to acquire these things for her granny and herself. One cannot but recall the scene where Pauline encounters her daughter Pecola, in the white people’s kitchen where she works, and scolds and treats her as human waste while she plays mother to the beautiful white child in Morrison’s the Bluest Eye.

Yet, Rosie can not avoid ending the way she does since the two women who are supposed to nourish her she has to ultimately mother herself. In the next section we see Rosie widening her spacial possibilities following the puritan work ethic but also the beginning of a consumer society where the acquisition of a large house and fineries on credit leads the heroine to destruction as well. Although times are different—there is an
echo of the civil rights movement in the novel’s margins— the synergy of class, gender, and race will leave the end hopeless and inescapable too. Rosie’s struggle to realize the American dream is a self-destructive venture. There is a realization that the fate of class inescapability is a bleak reality for most black Americans. Harlem is a place of black cultural and racial identification with its jazz clubs and its constantly flowing black humanity but it is also a trap, especially for those alone and psychologically and historically ill-prepared. The American dream is once again deflated for a specific group of people in a specific time. Like Francie, in Meriwether’s Daddy Was a Number Runner, Rosie is only seen as a commodity because she is a poor black woman. Rosie has a grandmother in the novel. Yet, Rosie’s grandmother offers no possibility for relief and regeneration because this particular grandmother—unlike the ones we generally see in women’s fiction—has not managed to escape the results of white supremacy. She is an alienated being selfish and antagonistic to Rosie’s mother. She is incapable of understanding Rosie’s real needs and contributes to her destruction. Rosie, Francie in Daddy Was a Number Runner, Selena in Brown Girl, Brownstones and perhaps Claudia in The Bluest Eye are young heroines in the fiction of this era that all try to survive poverty, racism, abuse and who try against all odds to create a life despite the adversity.

But there is of course the racist historical reality of the employing Chandlers, “the colored people’s smell,” and then finally as the smell of Harlem itself—bold, strong, lusty, frightening” (328), and educational system labeling minority children

They’re like animals—sullen temper one moment, full of noisy laughter the next. Even at eight and nine they knew the foul words, the mot
disgusting language. Working in this school was like being in a jungle.

White supremacy seems to be there only to function as a way of reinforcing stereotypes and marginalization in economic and psychological terms so that the internalization of hatred on the part of the black population may lead them to numbness and ultimate self-destruction:

Although Lutie Johnson may seem initially naïve in taking Franklin for her model—even when she learns at the Chandlers house that white people view black women as whores (p 45), she fails to recognize the stigma of her race and sex and her consequent disqualification for achieving her particular version of the American dream—by means of dramatic irony as a narrative technique Petry makes sure that the reader understands the limitations society places on Lutie even if she herself does not.(Pryse 117)

By presenting a microcosm under duress and in crisis, under an absolutely inescapable situation, Petry makes the following comment implicitly: historical realities create material and psychological realities for a poor black woman. Characters are irrevocably traumatized in a way they can not reclaim their wholesomeness or integrity anymore. By the 1980s, Morrison will create a world in Song of Solomon in which the protagonist, Milkman racially and culturally alienated by his father’s false consciousness will go on a quest for cultural identity for search for roots which will ultimately connect him to the glorious folk story of the “flying African children,” “Solomon’s children,” the Iboos. Yet, in the mid-forties Petry has no hope because the material and the historical weigh
very heavily upon her (the way they did for Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison).

Complete traumatization of a psychological and cultural nature results in the breaking
down of a set of relationships required for black people and especially black women to
survive under western racist capitalism.

Petry's novel is particularly interesting from the vantage point of class definitions,
for on one hand she gives us a character who is working class, on the other hand has that
character aspire to the values of the ideals upper middle class lady. *The Street* is a story
that emphasizes the tragedy that can result from such contradiction. (Christian 73)

Similar issues are raised in Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*. In its
small world we can see how racism first of all destroys Brownfield's life not only because he
is condemned to poverty and loneliness, but mainly because Walker shows us the
psychological affects that such a society has upon its members. What, further on, Walker
also shows is that even though racism constitutes one of the elements of oppression in
destroying people's lives, poverty (the material aspect of human beings, the possession or
not of property) plays an equal part in determining one's well being, and finally sexism plays
another important role in the two characters' (Mem and Brownfield's) devastated lives and
their constant struggle to coexist. What is extraordinary about Walker's novel is that it
hovers over extreme opposites; the thesis that Mem's life signifies (the love that she inspires
in Brownfield and the hate that she finally causes in him); her constant and Sisyphean
struggle to establish a decent home for her and her children as well as the constant
cancellation of that effort by the destructive and hateful actions of Brownfield. Grange
Copeland, the man from the past--the one who also denied his children (Brownfield)--but
learned from his mistakes (unlike Brownfield) and in his Third Life will provide the
nourishment that his granddaughter needs in order not only to survive in this world but to live well: "survival was not everything. He had survived. But to survive whole was what he wanted for Ruth" (298). Grange Copeland provides the synthesis in this dialectical exposition of class, race, and gender issues in the book. Walker with great care and sensitivity it seems to me --even though she has been accused for creating such a irrevocably irredeemable male character as Brownfield--constructs this world in order to show the plight of the African American woman. Does it represent reality per se? This is an irrelevant as well as misleading question. Can writers or philosophers ever represent reality as it is? The answer is no! Simply because that is never a pure "unrefracted" reality; it is always filtered by ideology--the ideology of those who own the means of production and whose benefit is the perpetuation of the existing power relations.

Walker thus does not reflect reality. She refracts it. She is constructing a theory out of the small, dead end world of her the Copelands. Mem is not realistic; in this sense Mem is the eternal mother, mother earth, the ever life-giving-and sustaining anima who as Walker says: "Like Mem, a character in The Third Life of Grange Copeland, my mother adorned with flowers whatever shabby house we were forced to live in" (In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens 241). Mem, who is called a saint by Grange after her death, (the way Walker calls our mothers the saints, the perpetual strivers), was that endlessly loving and giving figure who due to Brownfield's distorted nature became "from a plump" and beautiful woman to a "skinny" and ugly witch incessantly trying to fix up her environment, in the various houses that Brownfield forced her to abide. She hated leaving a home she'd already made and fixed up with her own hands. She hated leaving her flowers which she always planted whenever she got her hands on flower seeds (84). Mem, like our mothers, makes gardens and quilts;
she "makes a way out of no way"; she attempts to transform the life that white supremacist society has given her. If Walker has been attacked, it is because in this novel the responsibility is not simply or abstractedly placed upon capitalism or white supremacy; the responsibility is placed upon Brownfield and his share of guilt in the destruction of their lives. This is not done haphazardly, moreover. Walker is carefully crafting Brownfield's life explaining the social or psychological reasons (racism, poverty, lack of motherly love) which lead him to that resigned and criminal behavior. She carefully explains the causes behind his behavior:

His crushed pride, his battered ego, made him drag Mem away from school-teaching. Her knowledge reflected badly on a husband who could scarcely read and write... It was his rage at himself, and his life and his world that made him beat her for an imaginary attraction she aroused in other men. His rage and his anger and his frustration ruled. His rage could and did blame everything, everything on her. (79)

Walker understands the causes but she will not justify the actions; she will not exonerate Brownfield's share of responsibility of Mem's tragic murder. As Wade-Gates points out thus "Walker suggests a tour-de-force of black male-female tension. Her characters are powerful; her pictures are worth hundreds of documents" (108).

Walker will examine the sexism that exists in gender relations. This fact makes her work not merely prescriptive but also both pragmatic and ideological. If Feminist theory is to have any value, it must represent the power relations involved in oppressive situations (regarding class, race, and gender the way Angela Davis has done, for example) as well as the material and ideological workings behind the mere description of events. Mem's dream
like Lutie's is a house and the decency and security it would signify for her and her children. Brownfield resists that move. Their juxtaposition resembles that of the showdown between peasants and workers; the city and the country; the urban and the rural areas and their inhabitants. Brownfield represents the peasant's inability to form a whole kind of consciousness because of the geography of his life which does not allow him to make the connections easily. Brownfield does not want to work in a factory because, I guess, it would imply looking at reality on the eye, realizing that self-hatred or hatred of Mem does not cause his predicament or alienation, but his position in the process of production. What Walker is also interested in depicting in terms of theory I think is that the African American woman's position is peculiar and distinct because of biological reasons (motherhood and the trap that it can become) as well as material ones.14

In Lutie’s case understanding of her predicament is presented in a two-fold contradictory way, moreover. Although she understands issues of race in her life with clarity:

Damn white people, she thought. Damn them. . . . It’s your fault. That’s right, but the reason Pop came here to live was because he couldn’t get a job and we had to have the State children because Jim couldn’t get a job.

Damn white people, she repeated; (179)

This understanding, nonetheless, is proved to be limited and narrowed by her inability to understand her class position as an extension and/or as an addition to her predicament because of race. She fails to see the historical causes of her specific social predicament; any kind of true historical understanding of her life is impeded by the fact that Lutie can not see, as Petry implicitly presents in the novel, that where “the rise of capitalism has
left no other bond between man and man than naked self interest, than callous ‘cash payment’” (Manifesto 11). The veil of naturalness and voluntarism, “the pseydos proton” of Volosinov, of self-will in the class-structured, but also gender-stratified society, the real substratum and the skeleton whereupon relationships of exploitation and oppression are maintained and flourish in a mid-forties Harlem. Author/narrator, character, and reader often do not share the same access to the truth about her life; they do not share the same understanding of life’s and fate’s apparent whimsical unfolding. Lutie believes she is an agent and her mere willingness and hard work will give her fulfillment of her dream. Petry has Lutie understand her predicament in psychological terms, i.e., as a sense of enclosure. Lutie thinks: “it seems like life is going past me so fast that I’ll never catch up with it, and it wouldn’t matter particularly, but I can’t see anything ahead of me except these walls that push against me” (83). Although she sees the white male figure as the cause of her enslavement, she unwittingly and unconsciously identifies with him and wishes to employ what she thinks are the true factors for success, his. She is willing to work hard, in other words, so that the sense of “small victory” she had when she moved from her previous situation would give her strength and help her conquer any sense of fear she might have “for she would fight against it.” She would never let the street destroy her life, “non of those things would happen to her . . . because she would fight back and never stop fighting back” (57). This kind of blindness is presented in the narrative process as the handicap that leads fragmented subjectivity to the loss of connectedness with people of similar predicaments or to a sense of collective experience which could combat political alienation and help lead to a possible effective formation of alliances. Her lack of understanding the political framework of colonization is owed to
the confusion about her class position. Volosinov’s paradigm, I think, may help illuminate some of the causes behind Lutie’s failures and powerlessness and Sheila’s apparent calculating coldness. Those may also be understandable, to a great extent, in retrospect; we are at a position today after the intervening of history to have an insight a poor black woman in hostile undemocratic America of the 50s might have not had. We can look at the multiple veils obscuring sight and understanding and get to the source of exploitation which is the result of capitalist greed disguised in the form of the psychology of asphyxiation in Petry or the form of assimilation into Bajan middle-classness in Marshall. Petry to a great extent uncovers Lutie’s folly. She purposefully deflates the Protestant work ethic, the medium of success, which will not work in this case because of race and gender and because of an individualistic culture. Lutie thinks that by showing frugality and restrain in the little things in life, by working hard and saving big, she can get there, even if she is self mocking on the way “You and Benjamin Franklin. You ought to take one [roll] out and start eating it” (63). However, if in the beginning of the novel Lutie thinks she has a chance, by the end of it this becomes no longer possible: “She was running around a small circle, around and around like a squirrel in a cage” (323). “She is struggling to survive, working overtime, no longer bearing the legal status of the slave, but a slave nonetheless in the framework of society” (Christian 11). Self-knowledge is a state none of the three heroines, Lutie, Rosie, and Mem can acquire. Their understanding of their historical moment will always be masked and veiled by the tricky ways in which self-understanding and the world, that is ideology, is always already interpellated in the Althusserian sense. Yet, as Christian suggests:
The heroines of this period, Lutie Johnson in *The Street* and Cleo Judson in the *Living Is Easy*, are defeated both by social reality and their lack of self-knowledge. Self-knowledge was critical if black women were to develop the inner resources they would need in order to cope with larger social forces. (175.

Lutie finds herself in the same entrapping situation and appears as helpless as Min, and Mrs. Hedges, the other, in different ways trapped females of the novel and so does Sheila in Marshall. She realizes: “Streets like the one she lived on were no accident. They were the North’s lynch mobs, she thought bitterly; the method the big cities used to keep Negroes in their place” (323). The acquiring the female version of the American dream is impossible for Lutie, Rosie, and Mem. The end result of the effort will be destruction, alienation, frustration (174); for Rosie and Mem moreover it will result in death.

In pre-civil rights movement white America, Lutie’s effort is doomed to failure because the violence that awaits her and her son is inevitable under the circumstances. In a certain tragic moment, her accumulated rage springs out like a torrent at a time of crisis relating to her role, her responsibility, and her vulnerability as a struggling black mother. Her rage, not having a political outlet—which might be due to a flaw of her character but also a consequence of Petry’s silence on matters of a certain class and work consciousness—is going to be misdirected towards the first person who happens to pressure her in an extremely overdetermined moment, i.e., the black man:

she twisted out of his arms with as sudden, violent motion that nearly sent him off balance. The anger surging through her wasn’t directed solely at him. He was there at hand. . . . He happened to be within easy range at the
moment he set off the dangerous accumulation of rage that had been building in her for months. (428-429)

Although Boots is presented as yet another alienated and devastated character in the novel, the moment she strikes him dead with the iron candlestick, it feels as if she was striking, not at Boots Smith, but at a handy, anonymous figure—a figure which her angry resentment transformed into everything she had hated, everything she had fought against, everything that had served to frustrate her. . . . First she was venting her rage against the dirty, crowded street. She saw the rows of dilapidated old houses; the small dark rooms; the long steep flights of stairs; the narrow dingy hallways; the little lost girls in Mrs. Hedges apartment; the smashed homes where the women did drudgery because their men had deserted them. She saw all of these things and struck at them. (430-431)

The moment is all too easily recognizable. Social commentators and critics have spoken about the dangers and pitfalls of social and political anger turned inwards: how it leads to self destruction, inability, and helplessness to meaningfully oppose one’s tormentors. In Petry’s short story, “Like a Winding Sheet” the hero, who is eerily called Johnson, and who believes he “couldn’t hit a woman,” after a day at work and after absorbing the usual, commonplace (and seemingly) ubiquitous traces of racism when he gets back home (and at an awkward time when somebody says the wrong thing to the wrong person at the wrong time) he, like Lutie, strikes. Although the gesture is symbolic, the materialization and effect is very real and it is directed against one’s own self in a way. Johnson brings all the frustration and hatred he thought he saw outside into his house and
lands it upon the wife he actually loves: “There was a smacking sound of soft flesh being
struck by a hard object and it wasn’t until she screamed that he realized he had hit her in
the mouth” (1484). Once again Petry’s character has no control over the psychological
effects of racism upon her characters:

He had lost all control over his hands. And he groped for a phrase, a word,
something to describe what this thing was like that was happening to him and he
thought it was like being enmeshed in a winding sheet—that was it—like a
winding sheet. And even as the thought formed in his mind his hands reached for
her face again and again and yet again. (1484)

The tragedy is caused mainly by poverty and also by the racist and sexist society African
American characters find themselves in. In Lutie’s case it all leads to yet a greater failure
that of managing to be there and show her unconditional love in a time of need for her
son. Lutie’s tragic situation is presented by Petry through the novel’s narrative
structure—what the critics have called deterministic—and what proves to be—and must be
stressed as—a process of inevitability because of the synergy of race, class, and gender
under white supremacy capitalism. Lutie, to a great extent, recognizes her situation as
personal failure—the individual never materializes within the collective as political agent
in a collective experience (unlike in the Greek novels as we shall see)—sees it as a
personal kind of inadequacy.

Thus, there is a rift between the subject’s desire and their historical situatedness.
The suspicious reader, provoked by capitalism’s flagrant cruelty, thus can identify the
dialectical correspondence in the conditions of living in Lutie’s world and the wider,
more general historical background. Since our being in the world is a being of many
intricate relationships of the material, the political, the psychological, we can no longer
afford to view the novel as that reading we do or the understanding we achieve in
isolation. As Bakhtin would say “we are most inclined to imagine ideological creation as
some inner process of understanding, comprehension, and perception, and do not notice
that it in fact unfolds externally, for the eye, the ear, the hand. It is not within us but
between us” (The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship 8). One recognizes the
parallels in living, the contradictions in that life, but also the gaps and silences in the
course of the narrative which the critic recognizes as formative elements in human
subjectivity. Lutie can not see her life in a more generalized ways, in a more politically
delineated context, or when she does (as, for example, when she recognizes the role
money plays in life: “money made all the difference in the things you could have and the
things that were denied to you” (164), or the most critical moment when she thinks she
needs the 200 dollars to get legal advice as to her son’s fate), she still insists on using the
methodology and the ideology of white supremacy in her effort to regain her life. The
notion of the complexities of artistic creation and the ways of ideological filtering may be
helpful in our understanding of the ways in which the best interpretive approach can be
reached: “For a genuine sociologist, of course, the hero of a novel or an event of plot tell
much more as elements of the artistic structure (i.e., in their own artistic language) than
can be learned from naively projecting them directly into life” (Formal 21). In our case
they are the results of a very subtle form of colonizing a people within the perimeters of
the law--what we call institutionalized racism-- within the rules of social tolerance or
indifference in mid-forties America. We see at the start, although 116th street is not
much we now understand the contradiction at work here. It lies in Lutie’s desire and will
to make it by herself, to exercise agency, in other words, to achieve success and happiness for her and her son through hard work, patience, and perseverance. She assumes that, given the set of social parameters existing in her world, her mere resolution and work ethic will be rewarded and she will be able to reach her dream. The presence of the other devastated black female lives could function as a warning for Lutie, but they don’t. Lutie’ understanding of life is isolated and fragmented because her consciousness is self-consciousness, an understanding of an individualistic and thus apolitical mode of being in-the-world. White supremacist hegemonic historical and cultural reality, with its power of material determination and ideological reproduction, will function as an ideological re-enforcing of the feeling of wretchedness in the fact of blackness one can do nothing but remember Fanon’s words: “in the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema” (Black Skin 110). This is a fact, a truth, a reality which limits both the material possibilities for black people but also creates a sense of falseness in their understanding of the conditions of their material and social inequality and oppression. In many cases in these novels—what we call false consciousness—regarding class matters is the presentation of an imaginary set of situations as their real life circumstances and contradictions, and thus any failures are experienced most of the time on a personal and not a collective level. In terms of Lukacs:

the mere aspiration towards truth can only strip off the veils of falseness and mature into historically significant and socially revolutionary knowledge by the potentiating of consciousness, by conscious action and conscious self-criticism. (History and class Consciousness 72-3)
Althusser similarly suggests that “ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence (“Ideology” 162).

Economic and social conditions narrow a young woman’s possibilities into ultimate annihilation since there are no residual possibilities for redemption in an America that banishes black people to a state of invisibility and categorization. In those terms, Petry’s *The Street* is a great novel because it depicts quite clearly the causes of the historically tragic situation Black people in general, and black women in particular find themselves. She illuminates their struggle, their strength their determination but also exposes their foibles and naiveté, by denoting that when you are caught in such a net, capitalist tactics will not help. They bring the characters to a dead end. There are other ideologies and social and political practices to be discovered with a sense of a more collective consciousness not Benjamin Franklin but Karl Marx perhaps, not the Chandlers but the toiling black women of the Marxist feminist movement.

*The Street* also theorizes about race upturning the relationship between center and periphery by structurally placing the white family on the margins, but making sure to show how the perceptions of race are formulated: "the Negro was never an individual. He was a threat, or an animal, or a curse, or a blight, or a joke" (199). White people did not see her in the place of her work. She became aware of her own invisibility:

the Chandlers and their friends in Connecticut, looked and her and didn't see her but saw instead a wench with no morals who would be easy to come by.

(199)

This invisibility of Black people has been repeatedly discussed by theorists and philosophers. If Lutie is led to failure concerning her life, it is not, Petry seems to say,
because she did not try hard enough. It is because her effort is doomed to start with. White supremacy, capitalism and (black) male indifference and insensitivity create an inimical place for African Americans thus creates a situation which is "like a war that hadn't got off to a start yet. . . were filled with violence"

By the time of Walker's novels, the civil rights movement had been born. A whole world exists out there ready to be challenged in political terms, as the end of the novel suggests. The idea of community starts to materialize and the novel's resolution will not be a dead-end in the manner that The Street is. Ruth will be nourished by her grandfather and tradition (the becoming and its maturity in the face of Grange who manages to be transformed himself); hers will be a childhood with sweet memories and a prospect in life borne out of both love as well as having a house to be loved in. Ruth will step into the seventies with property of her own—the object of her mother's desire. Ruth is the new generation hopeful, educated, protected as well as made aware and suspicious of questions of history and representation. It will take sacrifice (Grange's); but how else is the younger generation fostered but through the older generation’s sacrifice whatever form that may take. Sherley Anne Williams suggests it best in the ending of Dessa Rose: "Oh, we have paid for our children's place in the world again, and again. . . " (260). How else could Walker have theorized about gender, class, and race relations than what she did in this novel? If Petry's novel affects us by the suffocating images its claustrophobic world it presents or the raw explanations it offers on the form that racism, poverty or sexism take, Walker's novel fills our hearts with joy despite its depression: simply because it offers some light at the end of the tunnel.
The suggestion that political involvement, rereading of history, as well as securing the material means of existence and asserting one's existence in opposition to whatever it is that threatens it (even when it is one's own father in Ruth's case). Walker's suggestion is that: yes, there is a Sisyphean dimension of absurdity in human beings (women's especially) constant struggle but there is also rebirth, awareness, and transformation--one's Third Life.

The exercise of suspicion on the part of human beings will be the beginning; the application of that suspicion upon everyday life will be its praxis. This is a point all women theorists understand, stress, and propagate today. We should not allow Morrison's Pecola to self-destruct. We must open our eyes, Morrison suggests, because poor black people are not only invisible to white people, but also to black people who are better off than she is:

All of our waste which we dumped on her and which she absorbed. And all of our beauty, which was hers first and which she gave to us. All of us--all who knew her--felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. (The Blueest Eye 159).

Although Morrison's reflection is much more depressing and pessimistic it does not cease to remind us of collective responsibility. A collectivity also much discussed by African American writers. A collectivity much earlier suggested by (male) writers being expressed through thought and language as being "not within us but between us" (Bakhtin 28).

Barbara Christian also suggests that Morrison and Walker especially in The Third Life stress this need of African American Communities to form closer ties among themselves and to develop the language of inclusion which would empower them. This language would allow them to examine the gender relations and attribute power relations not on racism alone, but on the sexism which exists in black communities.
Black Womanist theory has managed to accomplish this fact in my opinion supported by the great art (African American Women Writers) that it had to base its perception on. The African American novels display the intricate ways in which issues of class, race, and gender affect the lives of the characters. Given that the political system in which these familial and social relationships are enacted and materialized are the absence of democracy, justice and freedom for a particular group, the heroines and their desire to create secure and wholesome families their dreams and hopes are never materialized. Petry’s narrative in terms of form can only reflect the dark times of a pre-civil rights movement. In Hunter the narrative is lighter; humorous at times and playfully ironic it charts the spirit of the particular community in which Rosie lives, breathes, and finally expires as a slow at times, sorrowful blues song, and explosive tachycardic and accelerated as it regards Rosie fast track rush to fulfill her dreams quote her being old. The political as dissent, occupies little space in God Bless the Child. Walker, like all three writers, keeps the presence of white America minimal in terms of the narrative economy, like is the case in most African American fiction, but again here—like in Beloved—the ramifications of its hegemony are felt and explained in a dialectical manner. She creates a saint in Mem, her tragic character, who finds a violent death, a result of intra-racial violence. The unbearable and poisonous conditions of mainstream hatred are turned inwards since there is little possibility of opposition. Yet Walker’s novel is the most hopeful one, not only because is self-critical of its particular culture, but because in his Third Life will nurture and educate his granddaughter, Ruth, so that she can escape the vicious circle of violence. The civil right’s movement moreover acquires more narrative space; in fact in Meridian it will take center stage.
The processes of recognition, identification and agency were the means through
the experience recorded in these novels caused the associations with the novels which
described otherness in modern Greece. Unlike the African American novels, the culture
of dissent is center stage. The actual historical and political contingency is intricately
intertwined and closely-knit to the political stage of the time. Placed in politically and
historically overdetermined moments, the writers also present the contradictions inherent
in issues of class gender, and ideology. The African American novels display the intricate
ways in which issues of class, race, and gender affect the lives of the characters. Given
that the political system in which these familial and social relationships are enacted and
materialized are the absence of democracy, justice and freedom for a particular group, the
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tachycardic and accelerated as it regards Rosie fast track rush to fulfill her dreams quote
her being old.
When white Europeans in America were acquiring property and accumulating wealth, while establishing the perimeters of modern capitalist exploitation, African Americans—not to mention the violent and bloody land-grabbing from Indigenous people in this land, not the topic of this project—were trying to primarily stay alive and then to acquire the most basic means for survival. Under these circumstances, they were experiencing impossibilities in familial, professional or social spaces through the obstacles placed before them by the white patriarchal capitalist racist societal, political, and cultural attitudes widespread at the time. What was the desired on the part of African Americans was a space where they could protect themselves from the institutionalized racism. This hunting down of the Black body allowed a big part of the white American population profit and prosper and make the religious and moral claims that white mainstream America has been making for centuries and is still making today. One need only recall Ida B. Wells’ argument in “A Red Record” (1892): “The slave was rarely killed, he was too valuable; it was easier and quite as effective, for discipline or revenge, to sell him ‘Down South.’ But Emancipation came and the vested interests of the white man in the Negro’s body were lost. . . . Not all nor nearly all of the murders done by a white man, during the past thirty years in the South, have come to light, but the statistics as gathered and preserved by white men, and which have not been questioned, show that during these years more than ten thousand Negroes have been killed in cold blood, without the formality of judicial trial and legal execution.” Many a text has been written about this subject. From James Baldwin’s “Going to See the Man” where racism receives its best representation in the face of the psycho-sexual sadism of the white police officer who can only achieve sexual gratification when he imagines the subjugation of the black female body or the hanging from a tree male one. None is better than Morrison Beloved: “Eighteen seventy-four and white folks were still on the loose. Whole towns wiped clean of Negroes; eighty-seven lynchings in one year alone in Kentucky; four colored schools burned to the ground; grown men whipped like children; children whipped like adults; black women raped by the crew; property taken, necks broken. He smelled skin, skin and hot blood. The skin was one thing, but human blood cooked in a lynching fire was a whole other thing.” (180) Billy Holiday’s “Strange Fruit” is yet another example of this theme. Written by Lewis Allan, “Strange Fruit” would be sung by Holiday with lights dimmed and in complete silence as she tried her performance to rise up to the seriousness of the subject matter: “Southern trees bear strange fruit/ blood on the leaves and blood at the root/ black bodies swinging in the southern breeze/ strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.”

James Baldwin’s “Going to Meet the Man,” is a superb example of the lynching realities of the time. His story places the issue on its political level but mostly illuminates the psychoanalytic complexities of racism as a sadomasochistic perversion of the representatives of the law.

A lot has been said about the role of the blues in African American culture. Nobody says better, in my opinion, than Gayl Jones in Corregidora. When Ursa Gorregidora is asked: “What do blues do for you?” She responds: “It helps me explain what I can’t explain” (36). What is unfathomable can be explained “in blues, without words, the explanation somewhere behind the words” (66). When “the officials burned all the papers because they wanted to play like what happened before never did happen all the papers” (79), the incest, the abnormal, and the abominable, the singing of the blues becomes the bearing witness. It is the food that informs the language and form of the blues both in racial terms and intra-racial gender ones.

Cheryl Wall, in the introduction of Changing Our Own Words, discusses the work of Afro American women and how they “have written themselves into the national consciousness,” but also how they have used writing and have reclaimed to right to speech because as she suggests “claiming a right to speak is a requisite part of claiming a self.”

Since poverty is viewed as a sin in this country and not a call to action or a source of pride for those who do not for one reason or another participate in the capitalist game and gain one may wonder who pays for groceries in Gloria Naylor’s Mama’s Day, for example, African American women writers create communities that transcend western European patriarchal representations of communities and they project different, influenced by matriarchal African lore, the female spaces of freedom and communal feeling of brotherhood and sisterhood which Kristeva also describes as the ones escaping the Law of the father.
“Being poor but clean and happy,” as Morrison’s realities in *The Bluest Eye* indicate is a myth that exploitative and oppressive societies have always very skillfully cultivated in order to obscure the function of ideology, annul resistance and political action is very realistically reproduced and represented in the novels.

Volosinov, in his *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, makes a very clear distinction of how experience may be cloaked in linguistic terms depending on the different ideologies that speak them. Language, he claims, can not be reduced to an abstraction, but has to have a historically very specific function. The study of the “utterance” can provide insight into our historical situatedness. He makes a distinction between the “I-” experience and the “we-” experience. “The ‘I-experience’ actually tends towards extermination: the more it approaches its extreme limit, the more it loses its ideological structured nature and, hence, its apprehensible quality, reverting to the psychological reaction of the animal.” On the other hand, the ‘we-’ experience is not by any means a nebulous herd experience; it is differentiated. Moreover, ideological differentiation, the growth of consciousness, is in direct proportion to the firmness and reliability of the social orientation. The stronger, the more organized, the more differentiated the collective in which a individual orients himself, the more vivid and complex his inner word will be. (88) Volosinov goes on to give an example: the example of hunger. In the “I-experience” mode, the person who is hungry considers himself and others as down on their luck, and feel shame, and they are maybe resigned to accepting this situation as fate. In the “we-experience” this is no longer the case: A completely different experience of hunger applies to a member of an objectively and materially aligned and united collective (a regiment of soldiers; workers in their association within the walls of a factory; hired hands on a large-scale, capitalist farm; finally, a whole class once it has matured to the point of ‘class unto itself’). The experience of hunger this time will be marked predominantly by overtones of active and self-confident protest with no basis for humble and submissive intonation (Volosinov 89).

The legacy of slavery is echoed over and over again in the prescribed present in many different—sometimes contradictory forms. From Harriet Beacher Stowe’s” uncle-tomism” to Harriet Jacobs’ limited Victorian mode of writing to express womanhood in rebellion, to Morrison’s fearless, sculpted wounding texts.

“Being poor but clean and happy,” as Morrison’s realities in *The Bluest Eye* indicate is a myth that exploitative and oppressive societies have always very skillfully cultivated in order to obscure the function of ideology, annul resistance and political action is very realistically reproduced and represented in the novels.

To some extent this is true in *The Living Is Easy* and *Daddy Was a Number Runner*. As Jameson observes for the Marxist critic “the emergence of the economic, the coming into view of the infrastructure itself, is simply the sign of the approach of the concrete” (*Marxism and Form* 322).

This is so painfully truth in the way the black family has evolved as sociologists like Angela Davis observe. Circumstance have made impossible for black women who are alone to raise their children in safety. The street became a place of contestation between gangs.

hooks in suggests that “homeplace” is the physical and cultural location where African Americans can experience protected community and see themselves as “subjects not objects.” “Thee images of shelter stress the fundamental need for secure and protected space which can allow the inhabitants to rest, heal, and then daydream—a space that is typically unavailable to working class black women for both financial and gender based reasons (a woman of any class dependent on a man, with or without children, is not is not guaranteed either safety or privacy” Drake 71. Similar realities identified in 21st century U.S. make me think of Sartre’s idea that “a going beyond Marxism,” especially after the failure of applied Communism and the uncontrollable expansion of global capitalism, “will be at worst only a return to pre-Marxism” (*Search for a Method* 7). Ideologues and philosophies of social transformation have failed; as a result the crises of class relations are as tense as ever. The thing learned in the process is that the contradictions of class are not the only ones defining the struggle; contradictions regarding race, gender, ethnicity, etc., have become emergent and the desire for transformation a widely inclusive one. But Althusser has spoken about it in his “Contradiction and Ovedetermination.”

“Motherhood is a killer” says Sethe in *Beloved*. This idea is represented in different ways in the novels. Pauline in *The Bluest Eye*, Helga in “Quicksand,” Mem and Lutie all are transformed—sometime to destruction—by the childbirth experience. Kristeva gives a semiotic rendition of this exact issue: “My body
is no longer mine, it doubles up, suffers, bleeds, catches cold, puts its teeth in, slobbers, coughs, is covered with pimples and it laughs. And yet, when its own joy, my child’s returns, it smile washes only my eyes. But the pain, its pain—it comes from inside, never remains apart, other, it inflames me at once, without a second’s respite. As if that was what I had given birth to and, not willing to part from me, insisted on coming back, dwelled in me permanently. One does not give birth in pain, one gives birth to pain: the child represents it and henceforth it settles in, it is continuous” (“Stabat Mater” 167).
3.2 Hellenic Post Civil War Experience of Imperial Colonization

“Strike”

The price of pain heavy

Don’t show compassion at all

Every moment must remind you of justice and injustice

Man and beast

Crime and duty

Strike

This is your contribution

Your shame

Builds up

Our magnificence

Your bestiality hastens us

To the uphill of Golgotha

Leading us to resurrection

Strike

Unbending will

Mixed with pain

Baptized in blood

Rooted in ideals

Keep in the positions of the Struggle “Strike” Alekos Panagoulis
The novels under discussion focus on the historical realities of a post civil war Greece fraught with problems of modernization and national dependency on colonial powers. They tell stories of a personal as well as political struggle, while their lives are intertwined with the political contingencies of the persecutory realities of extra rightwing governments, the end of civil war, the apostasy of July 1965--which marked the end of dreaming for a democratic social formation, and resulted in the coming of the colonels--is the background for the three novels. The narratives allow the reader to witness the personal struggles of the heroes, and specifically the heroine’s Myrsini and Eleni as they rememory their traumatic pasts. This process of becoming politically conscious at a seminal historical moment leads them to a self-realization the kind of which allows them to think about their gender specificity. In Maro Douka and Alki Zei, in particular, the above mentioned processes are presented in a complex narrative thread which is characterized by temporal distortions. The class struggle, the critique of U.S. colonial tactics, and the critique of patriarchy are fore-grounded. Irony is very important in the narrator’s voice. It is developed gradually and it leads from the heroines’ innocent naïveté to their maturity but also pessimism. I chose to discuss Tsirkas, although there are other novels which more adequately represent the oppressive state, because of the realism in which it is written and through which the reader can make the connections to the actual historical moment. These novels present similarities with the novels of African American women especially in their explications of class and gender issues.

The processes of recognition, identification, and agency in the African American novels are the signifying tools through which the association with novels of a different
historical and cultural background, i.e., the Modern Greece ones are made. Unlike the African American novels, *The Lost Spring, Fool’s Gold, and Achilles’ Fiancé* the culture of dissent is center stage. The actual historical and political contingency is intricately intertwined and closely knit to the plot structures of the novels, which are placed in politically and historically overdetermined moments. As Althusser explains in “Contradiction and Ovedetermination”:

> the whole Marxist revolutionary experience shows that, (it has already - been specified: the contradiction between the forces of production and the relations of production, essentially embodied in the contradiction between two antagonistic classes) is sufficient to define the situation when revolution is “the task of the day”, it cannot of its own simple, direct power induce “a revolutionary situation”, nor *a fortiori* a situation of revolutionary rupture and the triumph of the revolution. If this contradiction is to become “active” in the strongest sense, to become a ruptural principle, there must be an accumulation of “circumstances” and “currents” so that whatever their origin and sense (and many of them will necessarily be paradoxically foreign to the revolution in origin and sense, or even its “direct opponents”, they *fuse* into a *ruptural unity*. (99)

Such a moment of class-based contradiction however can not by itself create the surging power needed for insurrection. That moment Althusser names the “fusion” of an “accumulation of contradictions.” This moment of overdetermined contradiction, when a transcendence from one form of social organization to a different to occur, will depend on certain cultural and social specificities as he explains was in the case of the Russian
revolution of 1917. Moreover, what is most important in such theory—and the novels
represent that the mere existence of accumulated contradictions may not result in
successful outcomes—is that the class conflict needs to be considered side by side with
the specificity of “superstructures,” ideologies, ‘national traditions’ or the customs and
‘spirit’ of a people,” (115). As a result, Althusser very succinctly observes:

1. a revolution in the structure does not ipso facto modify the existing
superstructures and particularly the ideologies at one blow (as it would if
the economic was the sole determinant factor), for they have sufficient of
their own consistency to survive beyond their immediate life context, even
to create, to “secrete” substitute conditions of existence temporarily; 2
that the new society produced by the Revolution may itself ensure the
survival, that is, the reactivation, of older elements through both the
forms of its new superstructures and specific (national and international)
“circumstances.” Such a reactivation would be totally inconceivable for a
dialectic deprived of overdetermination. (115-116)

2

The novels explicate these limitations in terms of successful agency. Fool’s Gold and
Achilles’ Fiancé, in particular present a critical stance towards the residues of sterile
tradition, and patriarchal values in the guerillas and revolutionaries, themselves. Myrsini
and Eleni, both leftist fighters, recognize this reactivation in their relationships with
others in terms of gender, and ideology.

3

The Lost Spring, written in 1976, represents the political becoming of twenty very
crucial days in the Greek people’s struggle for the establishment of democracy and social
and economic progress and prosperity for all people, irrespective of class and ideology.

4
The style of the novel is half documentary in its recording of the political events from July 4-23, of 1965, and half fictional, in its alternating narration of the personal story of Andreas, an ex-left wing fighter, recently returned to Greece from exile, and Flora, a Dutch/Swiss ex wife of an American citizen finding herself living in Athens at this time. The long oppressed suffering Greek population from the German occupation, the civil war, the exile and extermination of leftist fighters, and the economic crisis established and perpetuated by rightwing governments under the auspices of King Paul first and Constantine later, were the causes for bringing to power the centrist party of Yeorgios Papandreou, who was keenly interested in social and economic reform. Yet, neither capital nor the colonial powers, i.e. American involvement and intervention in the political process, whose interest was mainly the containment of the leftist movement and their securing of their hegemony through the multiple American representatives, the CIA spies, and the presence of the 6th fleet in Greek shores present in Athens at the time wish such political and social change. Political intrigue and the betrayal of a part of the democratic force, i.e., Mitsotakis, forced Papandreou to resign. The novel ends with the political assassination of Sotiris Petroulas, young student and leftist fighter, belonging to the generation of Lambrakides.5

The political narrative is unmediated and dates and political personas are mentioned as they took place. What is also highlighted is the role of the American presence during these events. A plethora of American names and characters are mentioned who work and loiter in Athens sometimes presented as sympathetic to the people’s struggle but most times expressing a hegemonic view of the political process. At a party that Andreas attends the dialogue is often sharp and reflects the different
ideologies floating in the everyday discussions that the Athenian bourgeoisie, in which Andreas unwittingly finds himself, was engaging in. In a discussion Andreas angrily exclaims:

    Just a minute! What right, even as friends and allies or otherwise because we are friends and allies, we want to overthrow a prime minister, who came to power with 53% of the people’s vote? Are these the democratic principles NATO defends?” (47)

To this Berty mumbles:

    The democratic principle of the masses? Can’t you see the daily strikes, the rallies, the students who struggle with the police in the streets? Ask shop owners who want to shut down businesses, because if they don’t sink from debt, hoodlums will break into their storerooms. . . Papandreou is burying the national economy, devalues the drachma, which had been stabilized by such efforts from his predecessors. Did you not hear the fanaticism of the masses in the evening of June 27, who responded to the message of 114 through the loudspeaker? Don’t you see the Lambrakides who organize striking groups in order to slaughter the bourgeoisie, when Moscow gives the signal? (47)

What for leftist fighters and intellectuals is the people’s rights to voice their opposition to the intrigues of the state, the palace, and the representatives of the CIA, becomes the actions of a hoodlum movement which threatens the lives of the bourgeoisie for Americans. Parallel to this explosive political narrative, there is an equally explosive personal one, enacted in the erotic relationship of middle-aged Andreas, first with
Flora—the self-exiled, alcoholic, nymphomaniac—and then with Matilda, the organized in the leftist movement student. Tsirkas creates an exceptionally untamed sexuality which is equal to the intensified political narrative. The dialectic of Eros and Thanatos becomes that of Eros and Revolution all parts of the Eros and Civilization context. This eroticism, however, is “concentrated, mainly, on the pure physical connection, without the specified complexities, and internal vibrations that the erotic relationship of the hero of the trilogy” (Kotzias 166). Tsirkas’s novel becomes a testimony of the people blending documentary and fiction. It is historically specific; it expresses the collective desire of a people as well as the conflict between the left, the right, and the role of foreign neo-colonial intervention serving the interests of capitalist imperialism. If African American women theorize through their literature and invent their own forms of truth-telling about history and society, providing recognition, identification, and conduits to agency, modern Greek writers theorize through their literary work, be it novels or poetry, the traumatic and difficult moments of their history. In such a way, when the writing is masterful, the balance between private and public, personal and political are enacted.

“When you play the fiddle at the top of the state,” says Marx, “what else is to be expected but that those down below dance?” (The 18th Brumaire 66). When the state, the palace, assisted by colonial powers, annul the democratic process because the bourgeoisie fears it will lose their privileged position, what else can the historical subject do, but rebel? When the people struggle with their passion, their intelligence, and their fists, what else can the state do but bring its apparatuses, the police, the military, and the judicial system to contain its wrath. Maro Douka and Alki Zei display through their novels the ways in which a personal journey in turbulent times transforms their political consciousness which in turn
may lead them to praxis; that kind of experience, moreover, in its turn may result in their personal liberation through the enrichment of self-understanding and self-definition.

Dimities Tziovas in his “Fool’s Gold and Achilles’ Fiancée: Politics and Self-Representation” performs a very thorough and detailed interpretation of the two novels in terms of their plot structure concerning female self-representation and agency in the novels. As he explains, the two female characters, Myrsini and Eleni respectively, relate their stories in a subtle way, showing the impact of history and politics in their lives. In their narratives major historical and political events of twentieth-century Greek history are confronted: the German occupation (1941-1944), the civil war (1944-1949) and the military dictatorship (1967-1974). The polarized postwar climate in Greece was diffused after 1974 and particularly after 1981 when the first socialist government came to power, the return of all the political refugees from Eastern Europe was completed, and the left-wing resistance during the German occupation was recognized. As a consequence, public discussion about the civil war was encouraged. (216)

This is in fact the case, but I would argue that writers—especially on the left--were writing even during those times; their texts came to be published when censorship was no longer a practice with the fall of military law, and the writers as well as their readers could breathe the air of freedom and express themselves openly. One could even argue that the post-dictatorship period did not ipso facto, to remember Althusser, brought about the democratic changes everyone was waiting for. That only happened with Andreas Papandreou’s role in the culture of allage (change) and laiki symmetohi (the people’s participation) during the
1980s. Tziovas further argues that the narratives in the two novels, unlike Tsirkas’ *Drifting Cities*, “sought to highlight self-discovery rather than political involvement” (217).7

The story in *Fool’s Gold* is told through the point of view of Myrsini, the main character of the novel. It starts Christmas 1974 when an old acquaintance of hers asks her to join some organization and gave her a questionnaire to fill in. That fact triggers her curiosity and initiates the process of going back to personal and political events through memory. The narrative alternates between her accounts of the past, her thoughts of the present and the revisiting of people and places of a personal and political nature which marked her development as a woman. Daughter of a wealthy upper class family, Myrsini’s relationship to the political is a very peculiar one: “

> Ever since I’d joined the Left, in the way of things at that time, I’d been constantly having to account for myself. To the point that even though nobody else bothered to cross-examine me, I’d put myself in the dock, it had become second nature for me. (9)

This is a pivotal statement in terms of issues of class and ideology which will become apparent in different points in the narrative. Allowing the reader to eavesdrop in the various debates her family is having about politics, the reader gets to learn about the various points of view regarding class and the manner in which they are embodied in their everyday lives. The junta had directed a curfew because of the turmoil at the time, an opportunity for Victoria to formulate her views on the working class:

> Victoria was blind drunk, overjoyed to be freed from strikers for ever more. The idle buggers have gone too far you see. Her old dad when he was alive, now, had said: the worker’s got to know his place. Give him an inch and
he’ll take a mile. Let a strike take hold—you are finished. Of course you’ve
got to treat your worker fair, agreed. (38)

Further on, on the same topic, Myrsini’s father declares that

My father had adjusted to the situation by taking refuge in the
unconventionality for which he was well known, and now habitually sat
lowering in the office. It’s a notable fact that when he came back from his
years in Paris my father had give up wearing a tie. The working class, you
see, wears a tie so as to look like something better. A gentleman on the other
hand, is already quite aware of his superiority, and so has no need to prove
something better. And so, you see, unconventionality is the hallmark of the
gentleman while the working class cannot help but conform. (41)

Myrsini reflects on the state of a bourgeoisie suffering from ennui:

But it would be too narrow of me to make too much of the wretched
triviality of my parents’ lives. That’s the Greek middle class all over, that’s
sold out all along the line, as we’re told, to foreign interests, any how we got
rich without getting bored. And we were not even waiting for Godot. (50)

And while bourgeoisie discusses class structure and social etiquette during evening parties,
those who are insurgent experience the dangers of the street; a street where the presence of
military tanks will soon become an every day sight. Myrsini’s biting irony is a result of
such realizations and she recognizes them not only within the bourgeoisie but also within the
ideological representations of the leftists’ attitudes themselves regarding the nature of “the
perfect communist party of the future. Hardliners, like Fotis, would argue that:
the dictatorship was purely the concern of the bourgeoisie; it wasn’t in the interests of the revolutionary avant-garde to dissipate its energies in combating it. He used proudly to declare that he’d managed to bypass the Lambrakis youth, he’d not been corrupted by revisionists. That was Fotis all over, and that was the level of our arguments. Politics apart, he was conventional to a fault. (88)

Through Myrsini’s recollection of things past, one discerns Douka’s concerns with issues of class position vis-à-vis ideological articulation. The questions underlying these repeated debates have to do with the essential nature of the true revolutionary: who is the true communist? Who has the right to be one? How does a communist behave in his personal as well as his political dimension is a crucial and much debated and argued for and against political issue. In the process of recollection she is in a position to view the different attitudes from a distance and acquire a much wider sense of how history works. Irony helps confronts not only hers but a whole generation of leftist thinkers’ illusions:

In those days we were proud of ourselves if we could put our comrades up against the wall—it was known as ideological conflict. As for me, I’d already gotten myself up against the wall, and even splayed across it, for no other reason than to deprive them of the satisfaction of putting me there themselves. (142)

Myrsini’s character is representative of the spirit of that generation’s youth, the generation of the Polytechnic as it is called, who matured through some very grave history, while manifesting a great and dynamic idealist enthusiasm in terms of political will and action, but realized at the same time the dead ends and impasses in terms of their personal development
and growth regarding certain other cultural issues like gender. As Myrsini tries to cope with the contradictions between her family’s bourgeois liberal ideology and their—-at times—-morally bankrupt dysfunction, the consistency between her mostly male comrades’, some of whom were her lovers, political logos and their everyday behavior, she develops a self-consciousness which results in her voluntary self-effacement, in her relationships with her lovers whose presence in her life marks the before or after of historical events. However, Myrsini like many of the youth of the time develops this self-examination, once she comes into contact with the Marxist narratives of social transformation circulating at the time, which had been silenced by oppressive forms of government and military law. Her political involvement provides her with a dialectic understanding of history provided that one had a general ethical decency and the intelligence to appreciate such a mode of thinking. Myrsini’s self-effacing, self—loathing, and critical of everything attitude constructs her as a reliable narrator whose fearless humility constitutes her as the subject who can speak credibly about history. Douka creates a character whose recollection of painful history, the history of the leftist resistance during the dark days of junta, which is culminated by the student rebellion, possesses a gravitas that cannot be refuted. Transcending the comfort of her privileged class position, when faced with the dilemma of “who you are going to go with and who you will behind,” as the poet ponders, she steps into praxis consistent with her ideological choices. For even in this case, she recognizes the difference between the then and the now: “I learned to divide people up onto those who fought for the dictatorship and the rest who shrugged their shoulders” (61). For a materialist dialectic of the political moment can be embraced both as an ideological choice, and an actual class position. Myrsini’s narrative verifies Douka’s position as a Marxist thinker and writer; it cannot be processed nor articulated
without an ironic disposition as is evident in Marx’s style of writing. When this becomes
the position of human subjectivity, then the quality of the organic intellectual can emerge,
no matter what profession or place they hold in society. Myrsini, like thousand of others in
her position, understood that the decision for collective action can cause social
transformation through strategic movements what Gramsci calls “war of movement and war
of position” in his discussion of the relationship between state and civil society (Prison
Notebooks).\(^1\) It leads to the moment when the frustration and discontent of each individual
living under fear and oppression, is somehow concentrated and materialized in the insurgent
wrath of the collective will. In that overdetermined moment, the collective will conquers
fear and mutates into rupture by turning silence into a loud deafening howl, as it happened
during the three-night barricading of students and ordinary people in the polytechnic through
the setting up of a free radio station which challenged the official voice of the repressive
state and found a conduit for the truths of politics and society. The only way the state knows
how to react to such a threat to its preservation is to mobilize the accoutrements of its state
apparatuses. That is what a dialectical reading of this novel would render. In a sense, the
traumatic event in this novel is the representation of the prison experience and the moment
of insurgency. The moment is not marginal, as Tziovas suggests, but central and pivotal.
Ideological differences aside, the committed people of the time did not disappoint their own
or others’ expectations. I disagree with Tziovas that “historical events cease to be the focus
here and form instead the backdrop to the search for identity on the part of the protagonists
of these novels” (217). On the contrary, the political, which he briefly mentions himself, is
the canvas on which the personal story of Myrsini drawn and could not be imagined without
the wider social one. In all three novels, in fact, the major historical events of Greece are
mentioned, i.e., the German occupation, the civil war, the apostasy of Mitsotakis, the U.S. involvement, and the events leading to military rule. The images of the torture experience are as significant and within character as Myrsini’s irony:

The week before they’d taken me up to Tourkovounia. I’d seen the moon sailing between clouds, I’d been stripped and bitten. The moon sank down in the sky, later when I’d opened my eyes I’d been back in the cell. My teeth were chattering violently and I vomited. I concentrated on making myself as small as possible, huddled up in my corner in the shape of a hoop, I was shivering and the soles of my feet were on fire. (127-128)

While recollecting her three months in the cells of the security police, Myrsini signifies the gravity of the moment:

This would go on until I told them everything I knew. The torturer bears his fine teeth in a laugh: how would you like me to chuck you out of the window? . . . Before they took me to the terrace the policeman with the fine teeth and clear blue eyes had brought his cigarette up to my eyelids. The smoke seared me, if I blinked the ash would blind me. I bore it until the tears rolled down. Each time they took me up to the Fourth floor, I was terrified I would break down and talk. And each time I held out. They filled the room with such menacing hatred that it sustained my anger as a weapon against them. (128)

Violence felt on one’s and others’ body does something to the rebellious instinct. It triggers, it seems, something beyond the average human capacity:
And I who will always stand out against slogans and easy visions of the future, will never let go at them either, with tears in my eyes, as I cannot forget the sight of a boy propped up against the classroom bench, his chest a mass of blood. We stared at him, at a loss to help. He laughed and joked to keep our spirits up, and we stared as though hypnotized at the spreading stains. . . . I was blinded by the blood. (259)

Myrsini realizes however that collective action of a limited scale cannot a qualitative transcendence make. At 11.30 on the last day of the barricade in the Polytechnic, the tank invasion will cease the voice of the young people of the polytechnic:

It occurred to me that if all the apartment blocks in the neighboring streets were to throw open their doors and windows, if all the rooms and balconies were suddenly to be illuminated, then we could not be massacred this night. All I knew that whatever was to happen here tonight, would happen with the complicity of the apartment block—of the silent majority. And what Frantz Fanon says about cowards and traitors, could be applied with perfect truth here. (262)

Yet, within the moment of insurgency, the coalition of different social groups becomes hair-raisingly apocalyptic:

Today comrades I told my boss what I thought of his wages and chucked it in. Thought I’d be more use here. I am a practical man you see, I work with machinery. And I done karate once, for six months. I am ready for a fight if need be. I’ll help you finish off the colonels all right. For a moment you could not have heard a pin drop. We were seized with embarrassment and
regarded him as though he’d escaped from a lunatic asylum. There he stood, a tubby little man in deadly earnest in the middle of the platform. Suddenly the hall was shaken by applause and the old codger was hailed as a comrade in arms. . . . Our first workingman, and there was proof for the doubters that the student movement was part and parcel of the wider popular movement.

(277-278)

In May-1968-Paris moments like this one, is represented the powerful imagining of a collective will. The Epos of the Polytechnic, as it has been called, created the moment of a future without the colonels.

Within the critique of oppressive capitalist tactics, Douka inserts the issues of patriarchal ideologies and the manifestations of sterile cultural tradition even when they come from the place of leftists’ revolutionaries. For this reason those who insisted on the Marxist explanation of history developed different modes of discourse and activity, and were recognized as dogmatists and revisionists. Myrsini ends up “alone and strong.” Her partners who defined for her, her understanding of the recollection: “before or after Pavlos or Yiorgos” recognizes the anti-dialectical nature of the relationship within the sexes. So Myrsini realizes considering her future mother-in-law’s, Euthymia’s, peculiarities by saying: “I was supposed to be understanding. It is natural for a mother, when she feels another woman stealing her son away from her, to put up some kind of resistance” (255). Adhering to sterile tradition in her personal life could not be Myrsini’s position anymore. Thus she finds no way to relate to her lover: “And so a wilderness began to open between us. We went for walks together and didn’t see the same things, we walked and each of us meant something quite different” (256).
Myrsini discovers fairly quickly that women do not experience the same form of colonial oppression. African American women writers theorize successfully on that. The general violence that might be experienced as a consequence of race, does not necessarily imply that the marker of race cannot fall into the same traps regarding issues of gender, for example, thus the characters of Boots, and Brownfield. Although there is no essentialized position of privilege, even in a revolutionary moment, the realization of a common strategy on the level of social totality, i.e., class or race must be adopted for praxis to occur. As Althusser explains the reactivation of old elements can still be working, because the subject is a place of idiosyncratic complexity. Thinkers like Stuart Hall and Mac Davis make the suggestion of becoming socialist in our instincts. ¹¹ In terms of theory, the objective of psychoanalysis, which is to understand and theorize the importance of gender sexuality plays in the subject’s process of socialization. If only dialectical thinking was encouraged during the early educational process.

For some reason the blend of personal and political is much more part of the writing process in the novels of Greek writers.¹² What is observed in the Greek novels is that the protagonist is in a state of constant affirmation and refutation regarding the instances in her personal and public life. That does not stop Myrsini from making the ethical choice, in overdetermined moments, now matter what they cost. As Maro Douka admits, “the ideology of a person without praxis is an empty logos” (To Dendro 21). Argyriou affirms furthermore that “only with prose writing which is history itself, we can have irreplaceable witnessing” (51). For the characters in prose “salvage a part of the psyche of a period” when they in their personal narrative reflect and refract the truth about their history (53).
Douka reenacts her student characters as “apprentice intellectuals,” to use Maronitis’ term (‘’The Role of the Intellectual’’ 152).
There is a lot of poetry written during and about that time. A lot of it was put into music by Mikis Theodorakis and other composers. They created songs, much loved by the people and, when they were banned, in times of un-freedom, functioned as a means of resistance. I call it the music of “the wounded, the insurgent, and the heroic.” Alekos Panagoulis, a legendary fighter against the junta, wrote some of his poetry while in exile and some while incarcerated.

I thought that the precise long quoting of Althusser was necessary here since his discourse although characterized by philosophical clarity, is still dense and difficult to follow in its form.

This premise, I think, applied to the construction of the African American novels I have selected. The horrors of slavery have been engraved on the bodies and psyches of the many generations of slaves. The historical conditions formed with the post-Reconstruction display that, although the class contradiction is no longer a feudal one, where slave labor produced only an accumulation of surplus value, and thus the physical and bodily substance of the slave was absolutely necessary, the social and political realities, as represented in the literature of post slavery carry residual elements of its practice even when slavery is no longer a state practice. In fact, it mutated into the institution of racism, which resulted in the white patriarchal population’s desire for the extermination of the black body, resulting in the horrors of lynch practices. It is very disturbing to me that the ideology and practice of racism has never been outlawed through legislative transformation. If legislation has been introduced regarding pedophilia, for example, why is there no law against the violence (physical and psychological) of racism? Furthermore, African Americans experienced different horrors during most part of the 20th century—and in some ways they are still experiencing it on the level of the state apparatuses, in court, in the streets, in the place of employment and on the planes of culture. Moreover, slavery in its colonial form emerges often in the collective unconscious of the people. The bodies (especially female bodies, of Sethe’s, Lutie’s, Rosie’s, and Mem’s) and psyches are scarred in novelistic time by the connective factors of white capitalist patriarchy, but also, by the reactivation of violence intra-racially. Similarly, the residues of the peculiar colonial practices within developing capitalist societies are felt by the characters, in the Modern Greek novel, inhabiting both the central rightwing hegemony and its refutation, which is the leftist movement which remains unforgivably patriarchal and also leads to the torture of the body, but also to the inability of transcendence through the revolutionary moment into a better society. A revolutionary movement which retains for too long the residues of patriarch, ceases to be revolutionary: it creates the traumatic moments of Box, where history is unfolded in different layers the way one opens a Russian doll.

Tsirkas actually experienced the novel’s historical moment as he moved to Athens in 1963. The political scene will inspire his writing of the novel. Although not as great as his trilogy, Drifting Cities, which has given him the recognition of his artistic narrative mastery, I chose this novel because the personal and the political are constructed in a very raw and (too) obvious for some critics, plot structure. In The Lost Spring, in the duration of 20 days, he will condense the events of apostasy and the political intrigue which were the precursors of the ultimate national disaster (Mendrakos 123).

The assassination of an up-coming political figure, that of Grigoris Lambrakis, who represented the new, Eurocommunist ideals of the left, has been recorded by Costas Gavras’s Z. It inaugurates the “leap years” in the political scene of the times. As critics have observed, the period after the Iouliana, where the nullification of the democratic process occurred, lead to the years of defeatism exacerbated and reached its height with the establishment of the junta. This is considered “the literature which expresses the psychology of defeat whose scope is bleak because of the mistakes and criminal behavior of the communist party and its captains of ELAS, who are now beggars in Panepistimiou street” (13). Moreover, “Tsirkas’s sadness which permeates The Lost Spring is due to his disappointment with the labor movement, but also for personal reasons” (Valetas 13-15). After all, he was part of the anti-fascist conference which took place in Paris, in 1937, in which giants of the intellectual world participated: Tolstoy, Aragon, Brecht, Nerouda. In a heightened moment, “Stratis Tsirkas—the younger member of the participants—composes with Langston Hughes, the “Oath” in honor of the assassinated Federico Garcia Lorca” (Politis 42):

"Oath to Lorca"
In your name, Federico
Garcia Lorca, you who died
In Spain for the freedom
Of free speech,
We, poets from many other countries of the world, who

In your name, Federico
Garcia Lorca, you who died
In Spain for the freedom
Of free speech,
We, poets from many other countries of the world, who
Speak and write in different languages,
We take an oath, all of us,
That your name will never be forgotten
On this earth,
And for as long as there is oppression
We promise to fight against it,
Not only with our words
But with our lives
Mendrakos (119).

6 This poem was written during the nights of the student barricade:

"Here is the Polytechnic"
The fires were burning
For three nights
During the last one
Bells were heard
Our lives are enacted somewhere else I thought
And then I saw him
Flamed from the hurrahs
Alexandre, I called him
Alexandre
And then more harrowingly
Hey Alexandre again and again
As I kneeled to lift him from the road
I found nothing but ashes
In every street
Soldiers were shooting their fear."

7 My reading of the novels had the opposite effect on me. I would argue that what the novels actually display is that the personal growth of the heroines cannot be understood independent of their political involvement. Political awareness of how the capitalist state functions may lead to knowledge about the world which is not merely celebratory in its mystical religious sense, but rather leads to sadness, to "unhappy consciousness."

8 Douka in fact says that becoming a Marxist helped her understand her historical situatedness in a much more significant way: Even if it sounds corny, Marxism helped me emotionally and intellectually, without ever being able to argue that I was an exemplary Marxist; I never intended such a thing, anyway” (Interview in Diavazo 51).

9 Myrsini acquires self-knowledge through her relationship to her lovers, Paylos and Yiorgos. In this term, she is similar to Janie, the female character, in Their Eyes Were Watching God. She also acquires her identity through the different men she marries, and finds herself “alone but strong” at the end of the novel. The only difference is that Douka’s narrative is first person participant while Hurston’s third person with the use of vivid dialogue. This difference creates in Myrsini a cynical at times narrator whose certainty is undermined through the use of irony that can allow the contradictions of political struggle to account for and illuminate the contradictions in her personal life.

10 Gramsci discusses the case of Greece in his “State and Civil Society.” He argues that according to the Spanish paradigm, in that of Greece also “military government is a parenthesis between two constitutional governments. The military are the permanent reserves of order and conservatism; they are a political force which comes into action "publicly when legality is in danger (215). The case of Greece proved that the general passivity of the masses allowed the military to be in power for seven years. Gramsci is right: “neither in Greece nor in Spain has the experience of military government created permanent and formally organic, political, and social ideology—as does in those countries which are so to speak potentially Bonapartist” (216). The absurd tactics of the junta provoked a rebellious sentiment on a part of a population which could not but erupt ultimately and create a rebellious movement and an explosive moment.
The work of Walter Davis both as educator and intellectual has enriched me immensely. I found recognition in terms of both the political impulse and the madness one. His book *Inwardness and Existence* has been a great tool for the issues that concern me.

As to why that occurs it is still not quite clear to me. The marginal presence of the narrative of civil rights, in the novels as opposed to that developing in the country of the time is still a mystery to me. In the same way I am puzzled by the absence or at times negative representation (see Hunter) of the Christian position, when the church plays such a seminal role in African American culture is an interesting one.
CONCLUSION

I have situated myself as a suspicious reader in a position where elements of both cultures, African American and Modern Greek, present themselves differently in form and content, coming from different cultural forms of expression, similar in their regard of a people’s difficult process towards the acquisition of basic human rights issues, i.e. those of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” My very specific ideological and material position as educator and intellectual informs my reading and writing on those texts. The novels I have discussed perform a dialogue with their historical moment but also with the past and thus render themselves fecund to the understanding of their totality in the future. In the narrative voices witnessing the traumas of the past, I recognized the commonality of the subject’s desire for survival through love and joy, and through an affirmative move to the deleterious effects of trauma pushing the “pleasure principle” “out of action,” as well as, their encounters with violence when that ability was not realizable in stratified societal organizations.¹ I identified in those two cultures, i.e., the African American and the Modern Greek, similar strong drives towards the acquisition of democracy, freedom, and justice as their point de capiton through the process of recognition.² Hegemony, a result of what is most primitive in pre-promethean human nature, whether economic, cultural or ideological, is only the one part of a social contradiction; the other part is the reaction to it by the subjugated, which appears in the form of conflict, discontent, and unrest. This specific unrest between the interests in the survival of the many and the practices of leadership constitutes the realm of politics.
In this project, I have examined the political tensions of the two cultural experiences, i.e. the African American and the Modern Greek, as they manifest themselves in the form of the novel which is in its turn political. I have recognized two basic stages in the representation of the historical experience of the two particular subjectivities. These stages are based on the specific moments of capitalist economic development. In the African American paradigm, the economic context, although pre-capitalist, in its feudal dimension of plantation ownership in the south in its American manifestation, carries none of the idyllic nature in the relationship of the feudal lord as donor to that of the vassal that Marx is describing. The plantation owner resembles more the factory owner of the industrial period in England; moreover, his behavior exceeds any imagining of any relationship of master-slave—with the exception perhaps of the Roman period—in its degree of barbaric cruelty based on skin color. The world of *Beloved* is center-staged in such a moment of history, since one of the functions of the writer is “to metabolize what is political to the artistic language of the personal” (Galanaki 15). In the Modern Greek paradigm, although *Box* is centered in the critique not of capitalism, but the tactics of existing applied communism, such a synchronic mode of interpretation illuminates only the surface of the novel’s structure. In it or through it, Alexandrou writes the particular moment in the history of capitalist development in Greece, which is a delayed one in its application of modernist ideas and practices. A diachronic view of the novel, moreover, one that creates a dialogue with both present and past, evident in the historical realities of a post-German-occupation Greece in terms of division of wealth and accepted modes of ideology, must make the connections within the different temporal structures for an overarching mode of understanding.
economic dispossession of the majority of the agrarian and urban population can only be matched by its oppression in the world of ideology and social practice by institutions of right wing ideologies as the only self-evident and natural ones. Its uniqueness lies in the fact that, when, at the level of communist leadership, the same tactics of rightwing oppression are enacted, the politically aware thinker can not but be critical of those as well what for Derrida is the anarchic instinct: “The alliance of a rejoining without conjoined mate, without organization, without party, without nation, without State, without property (the ‘communism’ that we will later nickname the new International)”  

(Specters of Marx 29). If one views the novel merely as a disconnected and synchronic structure, then one may arrive at the conclusion of the unknowable nature of truth in the ideological—and thus the sphere of history too. A dialectical understanding of the novel however would take into account Alexandrou’s ethical stance as a thinker and fighter, who never repudiated the ideologies of the left although he remained alone, in a sphere of “a Marxism without guarantees” as Stuart Hall identifies it because “the post-marxists use Marxist concepts while constantly demonstrating their inadequacy” (25). In other words, Marxism gave the common people (and theoreticians) the medium to transcend even its own limitations. 5 Moreover the novel’s flashbacks into the lives of characters defined by their class or their choice of resisting the German occupation are as pivotal. This in fact constitutes the ultimate ethical position. Fanon makes the same move when, in a time of decolonization in Africa, he chooses to mark the failures of African nationalist tactics in the decolonized countries. Similarly, Walker chooses in a pivotal for the civil rights movement moment to create the character of Brownfield as an irredeemable black male character within the black culture although black maleness had
already been rendered through the white gaze. Walker, in this way, starts the dialogue between individual responsibility and the historical burden as critics have noted. The emptiness of the box not only signifies the emptiness of communist leadership but also the process through which many sympathizers recognize that emptiness. Marxist ideology is the medium through which followers can condemn un-Marxist tactics. If not seen in this light, the traumatic collective experience of a group may fall prey to its antithesis, i.e. conservative, or sexist ideologies within the same cultural experience.

Overall, both novels received and continue to draw serious critical attention. They can be thought to be superb memorials of traumatic memory through their use of complex structures and innovative metaphoric language. *Beloved*, while it tells stories of enslavement, materializes the language of freedom. The spirits of the victims create spiteful houses and ghosts full of rage returning to demand their rightful share of love and acknowledgment. The liquid nature of their experience, appears sometimes as the stolen milk; other times as their production of the ink that inscribes the violence performed on them; as the mixture of water and urine that are the primal and elemental particles of physical life that can be recorded as the continuous thirst of the stranger who appeared from the water, indicative of the thirst of the inhabitants in the ship hulls where they find themselves when they are forced to cross the Atlantic ocean; or as the stubbornness of life force in child birth in the case of Sethe’s child birth experience. They aim to dismantle their representation by the master’s narrative and can result in the scattering of the written word as is seen at the end of the neo-slave narrative, *Dessa Rose*, by Sherley Anne Williams: “The pages wasn’t bound in the cover and they fell out, scattering about
the floor. Nemi started grabbing the papers, pushing them in the sheriff’s hand, into Miz Lady’s” (255).

Box’ central metaphor of the transportation of a box as the sign of the emptiness and nothingness and the futility of self sacrifice in the process of social transformation, can only be paralleled by the symbolic ritual of being allowed to have a last cigarette for those who are about to die. As Tsirimokou observes: in the ritual of being cyanided belongs “the last cigarette: the one who is going to die, before swallowing the cyanide is allowed to smoke for the last time” (244). This ritualistic act is intensified by the absurdity of the act of hope that the carrying of the box symbolizes. Yet, the reader cannot help but think that, in its superb bravery of articulation, the box of history is always in dialogue with the other texts who write that specific historical moment. Petroula’s Where Is your Mother, Bitch? for example is one of those texts. In it the civil war experience is narrated as the memory of the surviving member of a family of Ellasites, communist fighters, seen through the eyes of a four year old girl, who witnesses the horrific slaughter of her family by the Chites, “the rightwing communist-eating” guerrillas, some also German occupation collaborators:

The image of spilled brains, the spilled intestines had filled the soil. The image of my mother’s right hand, which was skinned, and a twisted white bony thing remained somewhere inside me. I don’t remember my mother’s face, I only remember that she was laying face up, a few meters in front of me with her arms wide open and some red stagnant waters spilled in various places on the rocks or the pebbles. Those images did not
produce any feeling in me at that time. I was just looking as if all of that
was happening somewhere else and had nothing to do with me. (25).

Those images inscribed upon the body of the inhabitant of history whether in the form of
the choke-cherry tree back and the iron ring around the neck or the lashes on the body of
the fighter who carries the burden of social transformation are never deleted. Memory
carries them in the future. Beloved and Box are the cultural artifacts that attempt to
represent the un-representable. Their superb artistry demand careful and painstaking
examination. They are symbolic of the magnitude of the damage caused to them, and
they demand a lion share of our attention if comprehension of the present and building of
the future can be achieved. They dictated the length of my writing time in this project.

The second stage, which I call the aftermath, represents the realities of the first
half of the twentieth century in the African American and Modern Greek paradigm
respectively. From the frightening vastness of the plantation, the emancipated slave had
to look for a space of freedom and prosperity for him and her self. As the novels of
Petry, Hunter and Walker display, that space was never allowed to the hunted ex slave.
What follows is in fact the narrowing of space in the narrowing of the possibilities the
new order of things presented. The streets of the urban landscapes become places of
entrapment and imprisonment; the securities of property ownership are cancelled by the
state’s refusal to accommodate the American dream for the Black population similar to
the refusal to grant the “all men are equal” of the colonial period. The effects of racism
are ubiquitous in the representations of totality the novels attempt. Nobody blesses the
child, because the characters’ dreams of assimilating into the American reality result in
nightmares. The heroine’s actual efforts of acquiring security will fail because apart from
the material inequalities, the effects of the race war will lead their heroes back to the roach infested and cardboard box structures they are trying to escape. Inserted in those will be the acknowledgment of the war of the sexes. The new realities are equally brutal because freedom for the Black population was prevented from being the freedom from necessity. On it was built a loathing hatred within the institutions of education, justice, and police tactics. Any serious effort towards a containment of acts of hatred would imply the introduction of effective legislation punishing the ideologies and practices of racism and not considering them on par with the usual violence human beings perform on one another. Only recently, with the scientific advancement of DNA testing for example has there been some moratorium of the death penalty instances because of the exorbitantly big numbers of black men in the population of prisons. A reality I have come to recognize as “breathing while black.” The instances of institutionalized racism have amply being discussed by many Black intellectuals from the time of Du Bois to that of Cornel West, and Angela Davis.

The aftermath takes a very specific form in the narratives of the Greek novels. The much celebrated by the people end of the German occupation created hope for the Greek people. The end of the civil war however marked the end of hope for a big part of those who had worked for a social transformation which would end the economic and social inequalities of the time. The new forms of control with the ever present colonial powers dictating the internal affairs of the country would cancel the democratic process as we have seen in Tsirkas. The conditions of yet another painful and brutal phase in the process of the conflict between the greedy bourgeoisie—which resisted the changes demanded by the people—and the people’s struggle for freedom would build the context
of Douka’s novel. Zei, in Achilles’ Fiancée represents the conflicts of class and ideologies in a remarkable way simply because its scope includes the civil war and post dictatorship realities which determined the historic outcome. In both novels the war of the sexes is portrayed as that gap of gender coexistence not only in the bourgeois capitalist space but also in the microcosm of the insurgent groups.

I began by arguing that reading is a process of recognition, identification and agency. When I read Beloved, I recognized a history of a people that I knew from somewhere else. In both Beloved and Mission Box I recognized the trauma of the event—killing a child/betraying your comrades. These texts convey a heightened moment of woundedness. Although I am Greek, I identify as Black. I understand Morrison is asking us to understand her text as constructing her readers. Beloved constructs its readers as black. I am not arguing for essentialist readings; I am not saying that my experience dictates my Marxist reading of Mission Box or my understanding of Beloved. I am not suggesting what an ideal reader might find. Rather, I am arguing that these texts construct their (willing) readers. Both texts demonstrate the ability to transcend rigid Marxist thinking and go back to examine details. The possibility that someone can do that, i.e., that we can return to the betrayals and woundedness and examine the details in a particular moment of history is the moment when agency is enacted. The ability to distance yourself from ideology and have control of the narrative gives you agency. What is the sought for is the discovery of historical truth as a reformatory educational tool for present and future. This desire moreover, provides no mastery but demands the coming back again, and again, and again (?)
Freud’s important contribution in “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” is the dialectic he presents between the pleasure principle and the death drive. The dialectic of eros and thanatos in a crucial one in our understanding of ourselves as gendered physical but also social beings: life is nothing else but the circuitous path to death as return to an inanimate state. But this process needs to follow its own temporal rhythms; in the opposite case it creates the anxiety we have seen manifested in the novels as trauma in the cases it was untimely.

I recognize Zizek’s use of the Lacanian term as a very fruitful one, because it marks the “‘nodal point’, a kind of knot of meanings.” It is that element, that “word which as a word, on the level of the signifier itself, unifies a given field, constitutes its identity: it is, so to speak, the word to which ‘things’ themselves refer to recognize themselves in their unity” (The Sublime Object of Ideology 95-96).

Discussing the bourgeoisie’s “revolutionary role in history,” he claims that “the bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his ‘natural superiors,’ and has left no other bond between man an man than naked self-interest, than callous ‘cash payment’” (11).

Marx studies historical process, makes predictions about the future progress but the most significant thing that Marx does, I would guess, is that he chooses a scene (his time) and freezes it. He then carefully and minutely studies all the details which construct this particular scene. Marx, like Saussure after him in linguistics, stopped time and studied a specific system, i.e., capitalism, trying to figure out how it is that the system worked for some people but overworked others reproducing thus its own existence. Godelier links structuralism to Marxism (wants to create a dialogue between structuralism and Marxism) and prioritizes the study of structure in capitalist societies over the system’s genesis and evolution. Marx starts from the theory of value to introduce exchange of commodities, exchange value and finally comes up with a theory of capital formation. Thus Marx formulates a theory with which he can analyze the internal structure of the capitalist system (science for Marx must reveal the system’s hidden internal structure) because if the elements of the system are explained internally, Godelier says, the development and the contradictions of a system can also be explained: “Marx analyzed the production mechanism of surplus value and showed that it consisted of production from unpaid labor” (Godelier 346). This relation becomes invisible when it is introduced as profit and when it is juxtaposed to wages. If seen this way, then we can thus say that Marx is the first structuralist in social and economic anthropology. (One could, easily in my opinion, see this relationship of Marx to structuralism, the parallel to Saussure. I became aware of it before I read Godelier. How could orthodox Marxists have missed it?)

Derrida himself discovered finally, although belatedly, the kind of world a world without Marx would be: “when the dogma machine and the Marxist ideological apparatuses (States, parties, cells, unions, and other places of doctrinal production) are in the process of disappearing, we no longer have an excuse, only alibis, for turning away from the responsibility. There will be no future without this. Not without Marx, without the memory and the inheritance of Marx: in any case of a certain Marx, of his genius, of at least one of his spirits: there is more than one of them, there must be more than one of them” (13).

Jameson makes a great point regarding the relationship between dialectical thinking and the act of reading. What the naive reader would intend to do when faced with obscure poetry, for example, is to attempt “to resolve the immediate difficulties back into the transparency of rational thought; whereas for a dialectically trained reader, it is the obscurity itself which is the object of his reading, and its specific quality and structure that which he attempts to define and to compare with other forms of verbal opacity” (Marxism and Form 341). There is no mastery of reading as a result.
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