

Mourning, Melancholia, and Death Drive Pedagogy: Atwood, Klein, Woolf

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He scans the horizon, using his one sunglassed eye: nothing. The sea is hot metal, the sky a bleached blue, except for the hole burnt in it by the sun. Everything is so empty. Water, sand, sky, trees, fragments of past time. Nobody to hear him.... He listens. The salt water is running down his face again. He never knows when that will happen and he can never stop it. His breath is coming in grasps, as if a giant hand is clenching around his chest—clench, release, clench. Senseless panic. (Margaret Atwood)

We keep enshrined in our minds our loved people. (Melanie Klein)

Introduction

In this paper I examine Kleinian mourning, melancholia and the notion of 'object-loss' in an analysis of Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*. Little did I realize when I picked up this novel last summer that with the outbreak of BSE in Alberta, the SARS epidemic in Ontario, widespread wildfires across the entire northwest and even more recently with the outbreak of Avian Flu in Vancouver how shocked I would be to discover that this dark dystopia, in keeping with true modernist form, completely blurs the boundaries between fiction and reality. Atwood's novel is a powerful and disturbing reminder of our times.

Atwood sets up a parallelism in the opening epigraph between Woolf's 'Lily' in *To The Lighthouse* and Atwood's central protagonist, 'Jimmy,' in *Oryx and Crake*. As such, I will read Atwood alongside Klein and Woolf, as Atwood's novel illuminates Kleinian theory in a contemporary context,

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while at the same time receiving its inspiration from the lyrical prose of Woolf. Moreover, in the course of writing this paper, I have come to understand that not only is it crucial to read Atwood and Woolf together, but in the same sense that *To the Lighthouse* is a memorial to Woolf's own mother, we can read *Oryx and Crake* as both a tribute to Woolf and a poignant reminder of the need for contemporary global and youth culture to work through its melancholia and mourn the "cultural and emotional losses of our pasts" (Sanchez-Pardo, p. 388). Which raises the most important question with respect to Kleinian melancholia and relates to the question posed here today by this symposium of what constitutes the condition of responsibility—and that is—"Where does the labor of melancholia end, and how, if at all, can we begin the work of mourning?" (Sanchez-Pardo, p. 15).

Kleinian Metapsychology and Consuming Identities

In the small hot room he dreams; again, it's his mother. No, he never dreams about his mother, only about her absence. He's in the kitchen. Whuff, goes the wind in his ear, a door closing. On a hook, her dressing gown is hanging, magenta, empty, frightening.... He wakes with his heart pounding. He remembers now that after she'd left he'd put it on, that dressing gown.... How much he had hated her at that moment. He could hardly breathe, he'd been suffocating with hatred, tears of hatred had been rolling down his cheeks. But he'd hugged his arms around himself. Her arms. (Margaret Atwood)

There is no subject without an object that is already lost. (Sanchez-Pardo)

Oryx and Crake offers up the melancholic figure of Jimmy ("Snowman"), who with the exception of a few bio and transgenetic life-forms—the Crakers, pigoons, wolvogs—is left to wander the crumbling and desolate remains of what is contemporary culture, brooding in isolation for something that is irretrievably lost. In the same way that *To The Lighthouse* portrays the loss of Mrs. Ramsay (Woolf's mother) set against the back drop of the two world wars, Jimmy's account of his personal loss—first of his mother, then of Oryx—is set against the traumatic destruction and loss of western culture. Like Mrs. Ramsay, who is identified with purple passion flowers and is associated with the maternal realm and primary identification, Jimmy's mother is symbolized by her 'magenta' bathrobe. And, like Mrs. Ramsay who dies very suddenly, Jimmy's mother simply slips away one day, leaving Jimmy 'enraged' and bereft. Snowman's journey, back into his past and back to 'Paradise' (the high-tech bubble dome where the Crakers were created) tells the story of his attempt, albeit unsuccessful, to restore the lost object of love.

Introjection and Projection

In Kleinian melancholic theory, personal and social loss is associated with the unmourned or unacknowledged death of the mother. Central to Klein's theorization are the notions of *introjection* and *projection*. In a Kleinian framework, the infant, after experiencing the originary phantasy of violence, marked by the trauma of birth, will attempt to restore the lost loved object (the mother) through a process of introjection. In an infant introjected objects are associated with nursing and the breast. The mother is seen as someone who both gives and withholds gratification. As such, objects are divided into good and bad internal objects. The introjection of good objects is associated with the infant's feeling of satisfaction and pleasure, while the introjection of bad objects is the result of frustration. According to Klein, feelings of frustration during weaning give rise to aggression and sadistic oral impulses to destroy the mother (the sadistic oral stage). The *death drive* or death instinct is an individual's fear of becoming overwhelmed or annihilated by the introjected objects. Projection (the anal sadistic stage) is the mechanism by which the child expels objects which he perceives as hostile to him out of the self and into the world (Sanchez-Pardo, p. 61). Projection is a defense mechanism employed by the ego to prevent the build up of introjected objects. Klein concludes that subject identity formation is set in motion as a "result of an interaction between the projection of the individual's sadistic impulses and the introjection of his objects" (Sanchez-Pardo, p. 63). Thus, introjection of the lost object of love is the first mechanism of melancholia. I will return to this a little further on.

Phantasy

Closely related to introjection is the phantasy of incorporation—incorporating loved and hated objects. Phantasy in Kleinian thought is the unconscious mechanism which mediates between drive instincts, what Susan Isaacs refers to as "tissues of phantasy" and an external object (imagos)—a real loved person or part of a person or equivalent. Isaacs explains: "An instinct is conceived as a border-line psycho-somatic process. It has a body aim, directed to concrete external objects. It has a representative in the mind which we call a 'phantasy.' Human activities derive from instinctual urges; it is only through the phantasy of what would fulfill our instinctual needs that we are enabled to attempt to realize them in external reality" (p. 166). In other words, "phantasy is the operative link between instinct and ego mechanism" (p.166). And desire, according to Isaacs, is experienced as a "specific phantasy" (the first hallucination) which translates into 'I want to suck the nipple' or "I want to eat her [my mother] all up" (Sanchez-Pardo, p. 165). Kleinians suggest the phantasy of incorporation—devouring,

consuming, absorbing—originates in frustration—the impossibility of ever satisfying desire.

Descriptions of consuming and devouring pervade Atwood's novel. We find both phantasies of incorporation associated with the introjection of good objects, which in Jimmy's case are generally linked to sexual gratification, and bad objects, associated with hunger, which generate feelings of frustration, hostility and aggression. For instance, Snowman speaks of his 'bestly appetites' and 'monstrousness' where the Crakers "keep their distance and avert their eyes while he crams handfuls of fishiness into his mouth and sucks out the eyes and cheeks, groaning with pleasure ... a rending and crunching, a horrible gobbling and gulping" (Atwood, p. 101). Or, in this passage, where he exhibits oral sadistic impulses towards a luminous green rabbit, a transgenetic experiment associated with Oryx, nature, and the feminine realm:

In the half-light the rabbit looks soft and almost translucent, like a piece of Turkish delight; as if you could suck off its fur like sugar... This one has no fear of him, though it fills him with carnivorous desires: he longs to whack it with a rock, tear it apart with his bare hands, then cram it into his mouth, fur and all. But rabbits ... are sacred to Oryx herself, and it would be a bad idea to offend the women. (p. 96)

Like an infant robbed of the breast, Jimmy is 'stupefied' and "can almost hear Oryx, laughing at him with indulgent, faintly malicious delight." (p. 96)

The incorporation of good objects, on the other hand, is represented by Oryx's fetishized fingers and the consumption of food during moments of erotic jouissance, as in this passage where Snowman remembers "the pizza, then Oryx's fingers in his mouth ... then joy, crushing his whole body in its boa-constrictor grip.... Oh stolen secret picnics. Oh sweet delight. Oh clear memory, oh pure pain. Oh endless night" (p. 122). Or when he contemplates her fingers in his mouth in a very conscious act of incorporation, which we may understand to be an example of introjective identification where the mother is no longer felt to be a separate individual but is felt to be the good-self:

She licked her fingers, tore a Nubbin into bite-sized bits, fed one of the bits to Jimmy. Then she let him lick her fingers for her. He ran his tongue around the small ovals of her nails. This was the closest she could get to him without becoming food: she was in him, or part of her was in part of him.... *I'll make you mine*, lovers said in old books. They never say, *I'll make you me* (p. 315).

Death Drive

The death instinct is an individual's fear of annihilation or death caused by the introjected objects. The way an individual deals with this is through

projective identification with the mother. In a Kleinian view, sadistic impulses (aggression and hate projected onto the loved object) give rise to feelings of anxiety, guilt, and self-persecution. Klein writes that these feelings of anxiety and guilt and the reparative impulse are at the origin of the subject: "The feeling that the harm done to the loved object is caused by the subject's aggressive impulses I take to be the essence of guilt.... The urge to undo or repair this harm results from the feeling that the subject has caused it, i.e. from guilt" (Sanchez-Pardo, p. 144). In addition, writes Sanchez-Pardo, "anxiety, guilt and the reparative tendency are only experienced when feelings of love for the object predominate over destructive impulses" (p. 144). Thus, it is guilt, as a result of the subject's own hatred and aggression that gives rise to the need to restore, re-create and make reparation.¹

These feelings of anxiety and guilt linked to sadistic impulses play out very nicely in the relationship between the young Jimmy and his mother. Jimmy's mother, no longer able to live with her husband's work in genetic engineering, which she has come to find morally reprehensible, yet unable to leave the walls of the organic compound where she feels 'like a prisoner,' is in a deep depression when we first meet her in the novel. However, when she refuses to take 'new pills' for depression, Jimmy's father states, "She's got her own ideas," foreshadowing her imminent departure (Atwood, p. 25). She tries to explain to Jimmy why she objects to his father's work at OrganInc Farms, but becomes discouraged when he resists her and pretends that he does not understand her even when he does: "these were the worst moments, for both of them" (p. 21). Jimmy remembers "more than anything" he had "wanted to make her laugh—to make her happy" yet at the same time the effects of his antagonistic behavior please him. He recalls:

the crying, with her head down on her arms. She would shake all over, gasp for breathe, choking and sobbing. He wouldn't know what to do then. He loved her so much when he made her unhappy, or else when she made him unhappy; at these moments he scarcely knew which was which. He would pat her, standing well back as with strange dogs, stretching out his hand, saying, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry." And he was sorry, but there was more to it: he was also gloating, congratulating himself, because he'd managed to create such an effect. He was frightened, as well. There was always the knife-edge: had he gone too far? (p. 33)

Jimmy's feelings of guilt and remorse display signs of a strong-super ego, more characteristic of the melancholic and the feminine attitude. After Jimmy's mother flees the compound, taking his one beloved possession with her, his pet rakunk, "He felt he'd disappointed her, failed her in some crucial way. He'd never understood what was required of him. If only he could have one more chance to make her happy" (p. 68). The confused

mixture of emotions—love and hate—Jimmy exhibits towards his mother after her departure is in sharp contrast to Crake’s lack of emotion altogether over his mother’s death. When Crake describes the ‘froth’ coming out of his mother’s mouth after an invasion of a deadly transgenetic staph, Jimmy cannot understand how he could be so ‘nil’ about it—“it was horrible, the thought of Crake watching his own mother dissolve like that. He himself wouldn’t have been able to do it” (p. 177). According to Klein, this lack of emotion, such as feelings of guilt, anxiety and remorse are the result of excessive projection, which leads to an aggressive object-relation (Sanchez-Pardo, p. 140).² “If projective identification is excessive, good parts of the personality are felt to be lost and the process results in an impoverishment of ego...[and] the loss of the capacity to love” (p. 140). In other words, excessive projection, which may take the form of aggression and violence, go hand in hand with a defective super-ego or a lack of moral conscience. Which in Crake’s case is extreme. After Crake releases the deadly RejoovenEsense virus on the public and the epidemic begins to spread, Jimmy recalls how “the fear, the suffering, the wholesale death—did not really touch [Crake]” (Atwood, p. 343). We might pause to ask, what leads to this kind excessive projection? Something we might equate with the Columbine massacre or other forms of wholesale violence and aggression we are witnessing today amongst youth culture. With her usual dark humor and wit, Atwood spells out one likely cause—the adolescent Jimmy and Crake spend hours on the Internet viewing pornography sites, assisted suicides sites (nitey-nite.com), and public executions (Brainfrizz.com). Jimmy and Crake are unable to distinguish reality from fantasy, even culture’s most solemn punishment, death by law, is called into question:

Crake said these incidents were bogus. He said the men were paid to do it, or their families were. The sponsors required them to put on a good show because otherwise people would get bored and turn it off.... Two to one it was all rehearsed...

“Do you think they’re really being executed?” [Jimmy] said. “A lot of them looked like simulations.”

“You never know, “ said Crake.

“You never know what?”

“What is *reality*?” (Atwood, p. 83)

Susan Isaacs writes that “reality-thinking cannot operate without concurrent and supporting unconscious phantasies; e.g. we ‘take things in’ with our ears, ‘devour’ with our eyes, ‘read, mark learn and inwardly digest,’ throughout life” (Sanchez-Pardo, p. 168). Phantasy underlies introjection and works at establishing boundaries between the inside and outside world. But what happens when the boundaries between phantasy and reality become blurred as they have done over the Internet in Atwood’s account (and I am

sure I need not mention contemporary culture's current fascination with reality TV)? Moreover, what happens when all the images (*imagos*, external objects) being consumed, introjected, are harmful to the psyche? As Jimmy remarks, "he didn't want to tell Crake" that the images they were viewing were causing him "severe nightmares" (Atwood, p. 80).

Mourning and Melancholia

Mourning is the feeling of loss and depression. According to Klein, each time an individual experiences the loss of a real loved person or pain caused by an unhappy experience the infantile depressive position is re-activated (Sanchez-Pardo, p. 131). This means that the subject attempts to restore the lost object of love as well as reinstate his or her original good objects (the parents) which are felt to be lost. In normal cases of mourning, the subject is able to grieve the lost object and feels that life can go on (this is the stage in mourning at which suffering can be reparative and productive). However, in the case of melancholia, the mourner fails to reinstate the good internal objects in the ego. Melancholia is the result of "excessive introjection" and "defective or blocked projection." When introjection is in full force, the mechanism of projection remains blocked (p. 63):

The violence of sadistic impulses and paranoid anxieties does not leave room for establishing good (whole internal objects. The individual is overwhelmed by the sense that there is nothing 'good' to hold onto, nothing good inside, and therefore nothing to recuperate. The feeling of emptiness and nothingness that the melancholic exhibits is due to a failure in introjection and to the infinite doubts and uncertainties that assail the subject who was unable to firmly establish his or her good internal objects. (Sanchez-Pardo, p. 131)

Melancholia is characterized by anxiety, insecurity and transformation. Jimmy, like Woolf's Lily, exhibits classic melancholic symptoms of insecurity, self-doubt, unworthiness, self-absorption and fixation on the past. In *To the Lighthouse*, for instance, Lily is overcome by strong paranoid anxieties when faced with her blank canvas: "it was when she took her brush in hand that the whole thing changed. It was in that moments flight between the picture and her canvas that the demons set on her who often brought her to the verge of tears and made this passage from conception to work as dreadful as any down a dark passage for a child" (Woolf, p. 28). Sanchez-Pardo describes Lily's anxieties about creation as a "violent combat with the bad internal objects that want to deprive her of a sense of sight" (p. 266). Thus, "she often felt herself—struggling against terrific odds to maintain her courage; to say: 'But this is what I see; this is what I see,' and so to clasp some miserable remnant of her vision to her breast, which a thousand forces did their best to pluck from her. And it was too, in that chill and windy way,

as she began to paint, that there forced themselves upon her other things, her own inadequacy, her insignificance" (Woolf, p. 28). Like Lily, Jimmy believes that he can never "measure up"—that "Nothing he could achieve would ever be the right idea, or enough" (Atwood, p. 50). Instead he lies awake at night "berating himself, bemoaning his fate" (p. 312).

Melancholia or depressive states arise throughout life as "an acute response to the dangers and lethal traps with which external reality threatens our objects of love, admiration, and idealization. In a desperate attempt to safeguard the object at risk, its incorporation and preservation inside the psyche seems to be the most effective maneuver" (Sanchez-Pardo, p. 69). But this comes at a high cost—in the consuming and storing up of objects, an individual may become consumed by his or her own objects, which takes the form of a retreat from reality and, as Klein says, increases the feeling that the individual is left alone 'with his misery' (Sanchez-Pardo, p. 148). This of course is taken to a rather extreme case in Atwood's novel. Jimmy is left alone in the world with only his memories and inner desires, culture is portrayed as xenophobic (encased within the compounds) guarded from the outside (the pleeblands). Melancholia opens up "a troubled interior space that poses a traumatic relationship with exteriority—and a battle is staged between inside and outside, interiority and exteriority, introjection and projection, mind and body, memory and desire" (p. 12).

This war is staged beautifully in *Oryx and Crake*, which takes as its major theme the protection, transgression and total destruction of barriers and boundaries. This is best illustrated by the pigeons, trans-genetic pig hosts for growing foolproof human tissue organs that are able to "fend off attacks by opportunistic microbes and viruses" (Atwood, p. 22). As Jimmy explains, reflecting on his mother's work at OrganInc Farms, "the bad microbes and viruses want to get through the cell doors and eat the pigeons from inside. Mummy's job was to make locks for the doors" (p. 29). When Pigeon pie and pigeon pancakes get served up for lunch at the OrganInc Farms cafeteria, Jimmy becomes "confused about who should be allowed to eat what...because he thought of the pigeons as creatures very much like himself" (Atwood, p. 24). It is quite fitting and ironic that after all human life has been destroyed the pigeons take over and become Snowman's most dangerous predator. The references to viruses invading cells are too numerous to mention (e.g., a bulletin listed on the CorpSecorp website is devoted to this topic in the chapter entitled "Extinctathon"), and fear of disease and illness permeate the text "Illness had an element of shame to it; no one wanted to be contaminated by the illness of another ... blamed and shunned" (p. 116). And it goes without saying, the deadly RejoovenEsense virus, manufactured at the hands of Crake, consumes the human race.

Atwood's novel is a testimony to contemporary culture's profound problem with boundaries. At one point Jimmy contemplates how 'he'd grown up in walled spaces, and then had become one.' And then "thinking about the pleeblands—the outside—it made him slightly dizzy, as he imagined the desert might or the sea. Everything in the pleeblands seemed so boundless, so porous, so penetrable so wide-open, so subject to chance ... over there on the other side of the safety barriers. Also dangerous" (Atwood, p. 196). The pleeblands (associated with his mother's disappearance) are 'wild' and 'unruly.' Jimmy finds the idea of them 'mysterious' and 'exciting.' After the deadly epidemic is unleashed, the walls and towers come tumbling down, and nature begins to sprout everywhere, weeds "poking up like whiskers all over the flat surface like wildness under the surface ready to irrupt at any time" (p. 226). "Hang on to the words" Jimmy tells himself. Language itself loses its 'solidity'—'dissolving,' 'disappearing,' as nature reasserts itself. In Atwood's vision, nature and the feminine are represented as always bubbling just beneath the surface—which I equate with Julia Kristeva's theory of the 'semiotic chora,' feminine space which conceals itself, but upon-which the 'symbolic'—language and culture—is possible. This is also suggested in a remark Jimmy makes about his mother: "Women, and what went on under their collars. Hotness and coldness, coming and going in the strange musky flowery variable-weather country inside their clothes—mysterious, important, uncontrollable" (p. 16). The text itself is also fragmented, almost schizophrenic at times, as it switches unconsciously between Snowman and Jimmy's narrative voice and the voices that speak inside Snowman's head. Moreover, the narrative, like Woolf's novel, is written in stream of consciousness technique which, explains Sanchez-Pardo, "is a dramatic way of expressing a divided self in modernist texts" (p. 12).

Melancholia is experienced as an empty and uncertain space which allows the lost loved object to emerge. In *To the Lighthouse* this space is represented by Lily's canvas and Mrs. Ramsay, and in *Oryx and Crake*, the Internet and Oryx. As Sanchez-Pardo explains, "When the absence of the object is recognized, the place the object originally occupied is experienced as space....' If this space is felt to contain the promise of the return of the object, it is felt to be benign.... If in contrast to this benign expectancy it is believed that space itself eliminates good objects ... it is felt to be a malignant space. The belief in benign space depends ultimately on the love for the object surviving its absence, thus a place is kept for the object's second coming'" (p. 215). There is some indication here that the outcome of these two novels may not be the same. For Lily, the canvas, a 'glaring, hideously difficult white space', is ultimately conceived (or hallucinated) as a benign space in which she attempts to rescue the lost-loved object. Whereas in *Oryx and Crake*, the Internet is conceived of as a malignant space,

as illustrated by the 'Blood and Roses' game. Jimmy recalls: "That was the trouble with Blood (bad objects) and Roses (good objects): it was easier to remember the Blood stuff. The other trouble was that the Blood player usually won, but winning meant that you inherited a wasteland" (Atwood, p. 80). The feeling of empty space also translates into something missing in the body and is experienced as extreme anxiety in the individual. Woolf captures this sense of anxiety nicely in a few lines where Lily is looking at the drawing room steps:

For how could one express in words these emotions of the body? Express that emptiness there? ... The physical sensations that went with the bare look of the steps had become suddenly extremely unpleasant. To want and not to have, sent all up her body a hardness, a hollowness, a strain. And then to want and not to have—to want and want—how that wrung the heart, and wrung it again and again! (p. 241)

In both novels the mother figure is represented as uncertain, evasive and ambiguous. In *To the Lighthouse* Lily strives to restore the original good object (Mrs. Ramsay) in her painting, but becomes increasingly frustrated in her repeated failed attempts:

She must try to get hold of something that evaded her. It evaded her when she thought of Mrs. Ramsay; it evaded her now when she thought of her picture. Phrases came, Visions came. Beautiful phrases. But what she wished to get hold of was that very jar on the nerves, the thing itself before it had been made anything. (Woolf, p. 260)

Compare this to Jimmy's description of Oryx:

She was a casketful of secrets. Any moment now she would open herself up, reveal to him the essential things, the hidden things at the core of life, or of her life, or of his life—the thing he was longing to know. The he'd always wanted. What would it be? (Atwood, p. 314)

Oryx is 'pale and shadowy' 'she was never very forthcoming,' 'You can never pin her down'; if Jimmy 'put out his hand he could touch her; but that would make her vanish' (p. 113). As with Mrs. Ramsay, Oryx's 'vagueness' and 'evasiveness' suggest the impossibility of ever restoring the lost loved object (p. 114). Moreover, when Jimmy desperately tries to discover Oryx's origins and true identity, she coyly responds, 'You want me to pretend? You want me to make something up?' suggesting that any attempt to restore the lost loved object is fantasy / phantasy. How then are we to understand Lily's achievement at the end of *To the Lighthouse*? Are Woolf's and Atwood's vision the same? A few lines in the chapter entitled "Twister," where Jimmy talks to himself in the darkness, provide the reader with a clue. "Now he's alone in the dark, 'So what?' he tells himself. 'You were alone in the light. No big difference.' *But there is*" (p. 237, emphasis added).

Metaphors of darkness and light, as well as sinking and rising, are central to understanding the outcome in these two novels—and Atwood’s vision. I would just like to turn now to Sanchez-Pardo’s analysis in her chapter “Framing the Fetish: To the Lighthouse; Ceci n’est pas un roman” in *Cultures of the Death Drive*. For Klein anything that produces goodness, pleasure or satisfaction can take the place of the mother in the unconscious. Sanchez-Pardo argues that in this case, the fetish of light is used to substitute the lost loved object. She suggests that the intense light that shines is also the light that blinds, representing mania (p. 236). We see this, for example, in this much quoted passage where a stroke of light from the Lighthouse brings Mrs. Ramsay close to a deadly jouissance (e.g. a phantasy of fusion):

She looked at the steady light, the pitiless, the remorseless, which was so much her, yet so little her, which had her at its beck and call (she woke in the night and saw it bent across their bed, stroking the floor), but for all that she thought, watching it with fascination, hypnotized, as if it were stroking with its silver fingers some sealed vessel in her brain whose bursting would flood her with delight, exquisite happiness, intense happiness, and it silvered the rough waves a little more brightly, as daylight faded away, and the blue went out of the sea and it rolled in waves of pure lemon which curved and swelled and broke upon the beach and the ecstasy burst in her eyes and waves of pure delight raced over the floor of her mind and she felt, It is enough It is enough! (Woolf, p. 89)

In the absence of light there is a melancholic descent into darkness and the unfathomable depths of self. Thus, “One shrunk with a sense of solemnity, to being oneself, a wedge-shaped core of darkness, something invisible to others.... Beneath it is all dark, it is all spreading, it is unfathomably deep, but now and again we rise to the surface that is what you see us by” (Woolf, p. 85). Here Sanchez-Pardo suggests the impossibility of recognizing or acknowledging the lost mother, “of reaching these depths ... produces a split ego (manic-depression), parts of which rise to the surface while others remain beneath the water” (p. 239). Metaphors of light and darkness also pervade Atwood’s novel. Jimmy is a creature of ‘dimness and dusk,’ hiding in the ‘shade’ from the ‘punishing sun.’ He is ‘stuck in time past, the wet sand is rising. He’s sinking down’ (p. 338). However, unlike Lily’s ‘white fixation’ and Mrs. Ramsay’s rapture with the beam of light off the water, Jimmy takes precautions to protect himself from the ‘sun’s glare’ and the ‘evil rays that bounce off the water.’ Sanchez-Pardo argues that Woolf’s “attempts to replace the lost object of love with the aesthetic object of Lily’s canvas, or with her own writing, ultimately fail since the image of the good mother cannot either restored or retrieved” (p. 253).³ Instead, Sanchez-Pardo suggests that Lily’s ‘vision’ is a kind of ‘hallucination’ or ‘delusion’ mediated by the by the fetish of light: “Lily’s second of clarity, this second of ‘sudden intensity,’ operates in the mode of a hallucination, a screen memory, or a fetish of light

that melancholically covers what is lost and already introjected" (p. 253). Sanchez-Pardo concludes that Lily—and thereby Woolf—does not work through the melancholic position into mourning.

By contrast, in Atwood's vision, Jimmy witnesses his mother's execution over the Internet, Oryx's throat is slit, and at the end of the novel we are offered the image of Jimmy sitting in front of an empty computer screen:

he'd turn it off, sit in front of the empty screen. All the women he'd ever known would pass in front of his eyes in the semi-darkness, His mother too, in her magenta dressing gown, young again. Oryx came last, carrying white flowers. She looked at him, then walked slowly out of his field of vision, into the shadows. (p. 345)

Do these lines suggest that Jimmy has finally come to terms with his past by acknowledging the loss of his mother and the impossibility of ever restoring her? On the final page of the novel, when Snowman approaches the three surviving humans, his fate is uncertain and the future of mankind unknown. Atwood's final vision is ambiguous, avoiding fixity and closure, which significantly, in terms of identity formation, supports a Kleinian psychic system which is always 'in flux and unsettled, always in a precarious, contingent, and transitory unfinished state' (Sanchez-Pardo, p. 131). My question is, then, does Atwood achieve what Woolf does (can)not? If I take Sanchez-Pardo's analysis to be correct, then, yes. However, I am not so certain the outcome of *To the Lighthouse* is quite so unambiguous. It is true Lily is obsessed with having the unity of her painting preserved and a sense of wholeness. Even Woolf herself remarked of the *To the Lighthouse* "one has to have a central line down the middle of the book to hold the design together" (Lee, 1977, p. 478). And in "A Sketch from the Past" Woolf writes: "I suppose I did for myself what psycho-analysts do for their patients. I expressed some very long felt and deeply felt emotion. And in expressing it I explained it and then laid it (her mother) to rest" (Sanchez-Pardo, p. 235). Certainly these comments made by Woolf suggest that when Lily has her 'vision' the matter (of her mother) is laid to rest. However, counter to Sanchez-Pardo's reading of the novel and perhaps Woolf's own read of the text, we must remember that the line that joins and unifies is also the line that divides, splits, cuts, separates, kills—a boundary—between melancholia and mourning. In this sense, I would suggest, the matter of Lily's, indeed Woolf's 'vision,'—the matter over whether or not the lost loved object is restored at the end of the novel—remains open and unresolved. Something I do believe is suggested by Woolf herself in these few lines from *A Room of One's own*:

And the phantom was a woman, and when I came to know her better I called her...the Angel in the House...And when I came to write I encountered her with the very first words.... And she made as if to guide my pen.... I turned upon her and caught her by the throat. I did my best to kill her.... Had I not killed her she would have killed me.... She died hard ... [but] she was always creeping back when I thought I had despatched her. (cited in Lee, 1977, p. 79)

Death Drive Pedagogy

And yet, in these times of dreary crisis, what is the point of emphasizing the horror of being? (Julia Kristeva)

Yet, I shall grieve, for melancholy is mortality remembered. (Djuna Barnes)

In this paper, I have begun to describe how anxiety and guilt resulting from feelings of aggression give rise to the restorative moment and set into motion subject identity formation. The subject is founded on the repeated failed attempts to restore a lost loved object that can never be recovered. Thus, subjectivity is formed on "what is the yet to come." As Sanchez-Pardo puts it, "the depressive position marks a space of instability and vacillation that is located in our process of construction of ourselves. This space 'unveils' the incompleteness and openness of self-construction" (p. 15). As such, within a Kleinian framework it is necessary for the subject to enter in and remain within a depressive position. The process of working through melancholia into mourning is referred to as *death drive pedagogy*. However, as Sanchez-Pardo suggests, death drive pedagogy can hardly be thought of as "revolutionary idea." As one critic, Naomi Schor, puts it "In the market place of ideas there is no room and no time for mourning and melancholia. Mourning is viewed as shameful, not to say retrograde. Furthermore, in the age of postmodernist waning of affect, those who wish to bring back affects such as depression are not viewed as very good company" (cited in Sanchez-Pardo, p. 8). Another critic, Fred Alford, remarks that the Kleinian account is "tragic" because "there is no redemption." Moreover, he holds out "little hope for individual transformation on the basis of the importance granted to the death drive and aggressivity" (cited in Sanchez-Pardo, p. 180).

However, how can we not give heed to Klein's theory of mourning and melancholia when loss, trauma, and aggression, not to mention insecurity and instability, are of such great contemporary concern, especially amongst our youth culture. We live in what Linda Singer calls "The Age of the Epidemic" (cited in Sanchez-Pardo, p. 392). Aids and terrorism, biological and political, have made us aware of contingency and death as a social event. Indeed I hope my Kleinian read of *Oryx and Crake* gives some indication of the importance Kleinian melancholic theory holds for contemporary social analysis. How can we make the leap from melancholia to this question of "What constitutes the condition of responsibility?" Or put another way, Jacqueline Rose asks, "contra Freud, not how mourning can be completed, but what is it that death, or remaining with death, might permit" (2003, p. 80). Sanchez-Pardo views death drive pedagogy as a form of "active resistance to the dispossession that the social as a devouring agent perpetrates upon the subject" (p. 8). In simple terms, she sees the

depressive position as form of critical agency and resistance against a culture that consumes and oppresses (identity). The step from melancholia to mourning, to what Sanchez-Pardo refers to as an “Ethics of Freedom,” is in recognizing and acknowledging what has been lost. How is this to be achieved in curriculum work and our everyday practice as educators?

One answer to the significance of Klein’s thought for education is offered in the psychoanalytical writings and literary criticism of one of her successors, Julia Kristeva. As stated earlier, the appearance of anxiety and guilt, in response to the subject’s own sadistic impulses, gives rise to the restorative moment. Crucial then, to Klein’s formulation, as with Kristeva, is anxiety, which is a defense mechanism against a foreign or ‘strange’ element in the psyche. (e.g., What is lost cannot be restored, which leaves the subject with a feeling of real loss and emptiness which may be experienced as a thanatic threat. Anxiety is a response to this threat). In Kristeva’s formulation, following on Freud and Klein, the moment of ethical and pedagogical possibility is in ‘reaching out’ to the strangeness of an Other through which one is able to reconcile the strangeness *within* (and therefore the loss):

It is through unraveling ... the major dynamics of otherness, of love/hatred for the other, of the foreign component of our psyche—that, on the basis of the other, I become reconciled with my own otherness-foreignness, that I play on it and live by it.... toward an ethics for the irreconcilable. (Kristeva, 1988, p. 182)

This identification with the ‘strangeness’ of an other provides the answer to the question of what education is in Kristeva’s ethics:

On the one hand the sense of the strangeness is a mainspring for identification with the other, by working out its depersonalizing impact by means of astonishment. On the other hand, analysis can throw light on such an affect but, *far from insisting on breaking it down*, it should make way for esthetics (some might add philosophy), with which to saturate its phantasmal progression and insure its cathartic eternal return. (1988, pp. 189–190, emphasis added)

Kristevan scholar Sara Beardsworth elaborates further on this point:

The two components of Kristeva’s ethics have fully emerged. Psychoanalysis throws light on the uncanny and the process of *identification* with the other—working out the deconstruction of the subject—that enables tolerance for the irreconcilable, and so the ethic of respect for the irreducible. On the other hand ... we find psychoanalysis giving way to ‘esthetics (some might add philosophy).’ Aesthetics, and perhaps philosophy, would comprise the education component of Kristeva’s ethics. (Beardsworth, 2004, p.193)

Based on this reasoning, Beardsworth concludes that artworks and literature analyzed [such as in Kristeva’s writings, or in Sanchez-Pardo’s *Cultures of the Death Drive*, or in this present work], and the analyses themselves, “can be seen as that kind of work that fulfills Kristevan [and I would also

add Kleinian] ‘education.’” Thus, in terms of our practice as educators, this would simply mean that we would want to create as many opportunities for critical engagement with artwork and literature which let “what is lost, and so the *loss*, figure and be figured” (Beardsworth, 2004, p. 266).

Indeed, I believe, Atwood provides us with a very important model, and that is ‘working through’ the cultural and emotional losses of our past means taking seriously individual and collective narratives of loss. As Stephen White has remarked, this “must involve not only mourning but also a sort of work on the aggression and resentment entailed by loss” (2000, p. 103). On this note, I give the final words to Sanchez-Pardo and Atwood who have helped me to understand how loss and trauma figure in our lives, and why it is so crucial to record our individual stories of loss, anxiety, guilt—and love:

Ultimately, when this story of loss requires death, the writing must pass through the self of the witness who remains and holds a stubborn attachment to the reference. For if the ultimate commandment of History is not to forget, what can be more proper than the will to record. (Sanchez-Pardo, p. 393)

Zero hour, Snowman thinks. Time to go. (Atwood, p. 374)

Endnotes

1. For Kleinians, symbol formation (as a mode of projection) is a defense against the subject’s own aggressive internal objects and art is an expression of the depressive position. Thus, the death drive accounts for creativity. As Hanna Segal has argued “the death drive (understood as aggression, rage, and hatred) is denied less in great art than in any other human activity” (Sanchez-Pardo, p. 179).
2. Excessive introjection may also cause an individual to feel encumbered by his or her internal ‘good’ objects, which can result in outpourings of affection and emotion as witnessed in Lily’s intimate feelings for Mrs. Ramsay (Woolf, pp. 28, 70) or “inexplicable ... joy” and “irrational happiness” as witnessed in Jimmy’s feelings for a green caterpillar (Atwood, p. 41).
3. Kristeva takes up the Kleinian notion that the lost object of love cannot be replaced in her critique of women’s writing (*écriture féminine*). In this view, a special form of women’s writing is simply a kind of screen memory. For Kristeva, the feminine (semiotic) is already inscribed in language (symbolic). Interestingly, she is particularly hostile in her critique of Virginia Woolf’s writing:

In women’s writing, language seems to be seen from a foreign land; it is seen from the point of view of an asymbolic, spastic body. Virginia Woolf describes suspended states, subtle sensations and above all, colours—green, blue—but she does not dissect language as Joyce does. Estranged from language, women are visionaries, dancers who suffer as they speak. (quoted in Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions*, 1989, p. 64)

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