

Transforming Narratives: Subjectivity and Metamorphosis in Franz
Kafka, Vladimir Nabokov, Alejo Carpentier, Vassilis Vassilikos,
Virginia Woolf, and Marie Darrieussecq

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Abstract

This doctoral project explores the narrative representations of transforming subjectivity in modernist and post-modernist texts that deploy the trope of metamorphosis. Subjectivity is explored within a psychoanalytic framework and from a comparative lens, through the juxtaposition of selected short stories and novels of metamorphosis from different literatures, produced in different languages and under different geocultural and historico-political conditions, from 1915 to 1996. Chapter One explores subjectivity as sacrificial and in conflict with a symbolic father-authority, through a close reading of insect metamorphosis in Franz Kafka's "The Metamorphosis" (1915) and Vladimir Nabokov's "The Aurelian" (1931). Chapter Two addresses the postcolonial dimension of subjectivity and its collective construction in terms of the loss of home in Alejo Carpentier's *The Kingdom of This World* (1949) and Vassilis Vassilikos's *...and dreams are dreams* (1988). Chapter Three pairs two feminist writers and their stories of metamorphoses, Virginia Woolf's *Orlando: A Biography* (1928) and Darrieussecq's *Pig Tales: A Novel of Lust and Transformation* (1996), to explore subjectivity as hybrid: androgynous and human-animal like. Metamorphosis, as this project suggests, allows us to explore an array of subjectivities, both individual and collective: it points to the issues of death, rebirth, sacrifice, the subject's position within a nation and the processes of nation-formation, and creative writing as negotiating loss, while it also challenges the established boundaries of gender and animal representation. This thesis argues that the twentieth century stories of metamorphosis which are being examined here articulate a certain metamorphosis in our very conception of subjectivity, namely, the reconceptualization of subjectivity as hybrid, metamorphic, and bound to individual and collective transformations.

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Introduction

“My two hands were planted in the soil. They had only three fingers now. I shifted all my weight to the left hand and was able to free the right one. I shook the dirt off it, then I shook my whole body. My hand had five fingers again.”¹ This is how contemporary novelist Marie Darrieussecq imagined a human-animal metamorphosis towards the end of the twentieth century. In her first novel, *Pig Tales (Truismes, 1996)*, the heroine has been transformed into a pig, but shapeshifts back to a human at this point in the narrative.² While a connection could be drawn between this metamorphosis and the transformation of Odysseus’ men into pigs by Circe in Book 10 of Homer’s *The Odyssey*, Darrieussecq’s depiction is comparatively more graphic and, significantly, semantically different.³ For lengthy portions of the narrative, and with many naturalistic details, the subject struggles with the fact that she is accumulating porcine features in her daily life. In the same passage where she manages to “shake off” her pig nature temporarily, we also read: “I remembered what I hadn’t wanted to see in the marabout’s mirror: the little corkscrew tail on my rear end.”⁴ This first-person account, set in contemporary Paris, treats one’s metamorphosis into a pig not as a witch’s whim, but as the social inscription on the subject, who is female, employed as a masseuse and a sex worker in an increasingly ostracizing, right-wing society: to become a pig, in Darrieussecq’s literary world, means to exteriorise how society treats women and how power distribution becomes visible in this act. This recent fictional metamorphosis also favours fluidity: the heroine goes back and forth between species in what she eventually

¹ Marie Darrieussecq, *Pig Tales: A Novel of Lust and Transformation*, trans. Linda Coverdale (London: Faber and Faber, 1997), 69.

² Marie Darrieussecq, *Truismes* (Paris: P.O.L., 1996).

³ Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Robert Fagles (London: Penguin, 1997).

⁴ Darrieussecq, *Pig Tales*, 69.

realizes to be a beneficial interspecies existence. In Darrieussecq's narrative, the metamorphosis of a woman into a sow challenges the perception of women's bodies and the representation of animals in a contemporary society while also actively engaging with the emergence of women's writing as a form of agency. This use of metamorphosis indicates a long path that the thinking on transformation and subjectivity has passed since Homer and raises the question of how the theme of metamorphosis has itself been reshaped in more recent times. This question is a starting point for my present inquiry.

This thesis explores the narrative representations of transforming subjectivity in modernist and post-modernist texts that deploy the trope of metamorphosis.⁵ The focus of the thesis is on the twentieth century because of some paradigmatic changes that transpired in our thinking and representing in that period, namely, significant modifications in our conception of subjecthood, and, at the level of representation, in the way myth is used in general, and metamorphosis, as a mythical literary motif, in particular. It is my ambition to examine the connection between the different treatments of the theme/trope of metamorphosis and the changes in our perceptions of subjectivity and social agency in the twentieth century. With these concerns in mind, the project encompasses selected short stories and novels from different literatures, produced in different languages and under different geocultural and historico-political conditions, from 1915 to 1996. Through close readings of Franz Kafka's "The Metamorphosis" (1915),⁶ Virginia Woolf's *Orlando: A Biography*

⁵ For an overview of theories and definitions of literary metamorphosis see Kai Mikkonen's article "Theories of Metamorphosis: From Metatrobe to Textual Revision," *Style* 30, no.2 (1996): 309-340. Kai suggests a notion of metamorphosis as a "trope for transformative intertextuality," 329-330.

⁶ Franz Kafka, "Die Verwandlung" (Leipzig: Kurt Wolff, 1915). Franz Kafka, "The Metamorphosis," trans. Susan Bernofsky, intro. David Cronenberg (New York: W. W. Norton, 2014).

(1928),⁷ Vladimir Nabokov's "The Aurelian" (1931),⁸ Alejo Carpentier's *The Kingdom of This World* (1949),⁹ Vassilis Vassilikos's ... *and dreams are dreams* (1988),¹⁰ and Darrieussecq's *Pig Tales*, this project attempts to answer some pressing questions about subjectivity raised by the literary engagements with metamorphoses under discussion. Metamorphosis, I suggest, allows us to explore an array of subjectivities, both individual and collective: it points to the issues of death, rebirth, sacrifice, the subject's position within a nation and the processes of nation-formation, while it also challenges the established boundaries of gender and animal representation. The aforementioned texts all deploy the trope of metamorphosis to address such substantial issues which are integral to our understanding of subjectivity.

The engagement with such diverse texts present us, I argue, with an opportunity to trace a shift in the perception of subjectivity across the twentieth century. This shift, narrated in these texts through the pattern of metamorphosis, is in line with wide-ranging transitions that happened in the twentieth century such as changes in working conditions and economic circumstances and changes in our conceptualizations of gender, bio-sphere, and interaction between species, just to name a few. A historical overview of all the changes that transpired in the twentieth century would be beyond

⁷ Virginia Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography* (London: Hogarth Press, 1928).

⁸ Vladimir Nabokov, "Pil-gram," *Sovremennye Zapiski*, Paris, 1931. Vladimir Nabokov, "The Aurelian," in *The Stories of Vladimir Nabokov*, trans. and ed. Dmitri Nabokov (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1996).

⁹ Alejo Carpentier, *El Reino de Este Mundo* (Mexico: E.D.I.A.P.S.A., 1949). Alejo Carpentier, *The Kingdom of This World*, trans. Harriet de Onis (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006).

¹⁰ Vassilis Vassilikos, ... *and dreams are dreams*, trans. Mary Kitroeff (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1996). Vassilikos's collection ... *and dreams are dreams* was published in French under the title *Rêves Diurnes et Autres Nouvelles*, trans. Gisèle Jeanperin, (Paris: Gallimard, 1988). It was translated from Greek into French, yet the Greek version, *Υπάρχουν Όνειρα*, was not published in Greece until 1995 (Athens: Nea Synora, Livani, 1995).

the scope of this thesis. Yet, I have paid close attention to the social and political contexts of each of the texts under discussion and indicated how they connect to wider concerns. I treat these texts as both oriented by some site-specific concerns and symptomatic of some paradigmatic shifts in the last hundred years, and thus worthy of being placed in a dialogue with each other. In this context, the purpose of this project is threefold: firstly, to argue that these varied texts deploy the trope of metamorphosis strategically as either a minor but pointed index, or an overall framework, to gesture the changing social attitudes towards subjectivity; secondly, that they evidence, across the cultural spectrum, a comparable move from an interest in the individual subjectivity to that in collective subjectivity; and, thirdly, that they all foreground that the transformation is a necessary condition for humans.

Unexpected Comparisons, Close Readings

For this comparative discussion of metamorphic subjectivity, I have selected a hybrid methodology, strongly reliant on innovative juxtapositions and comparisons of texts and contexts, Freudian psychoanalytic criticism, myth criticism, and, above all, the practice of engaged close reading. Two hermeneutic practices inform the discussion: that of comparison and, more widely, the discipline of Comparative Literature, and that of historically alert close reading. The starting point of my choice was the scholarly attention given to comparative studies in the 2009 issue of *New Literary History*. In it, the editors Rita Felski and Susan Stanford Friedman write as follows:

Comparison is a mode of thinking, an analogical form of human cognition, that is indispensable to understanding and creativity and that depends upon principles of relation and differentiation. Not just a cornerstone of analytic

thought, comparison pervades everyday life as one of the fundamental ways in which we organize and make sense of the world around us. Forms of comparison are built into the deep structures of language and constitute the basis for ubiquitous figures of speech such as metaphor, simile, and analogy.¹¹

This approach expands the ways in which we conceive of the hermeneutic possibilities of the comparison itself. Contemporary Comparative Literature studies are not, therefore, limited to comparing writers who belong to contiguous cultural spaces or have experienced direct literary influence; rather, they tend to focus on discursive networks, interactions and interventions, that sometimes bring together disparate texts and contexts, while still being mindful of the power politics that often shape these interactions.

My juxtaposition of strikingly different texts in the present thesis is indebted to this strand of thought. In her *Death of a Discipline* (2003) Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak reminds us that “Comparative Literature must always cross borders,”¹² a mandate that can be interpreted as capitalizing on the discipline’s ability to bring together texts in various languages and from countries across the globe. The pieces of fiction discussed in this thesis have been written in English, German, French, Greek, Spanish, and Russian, and it is in their interaction that one can see the quintessential heteroglossia of our world. Belonging to different cultures and linguistic spheres, they are also different in terms of genres and modes of narration. Although the texts under examination all gesture in different ways towards the unreal, the fantastic, the marvellous, and the magical, they belong to different traditions of, or trends in, writing:

¹¹ Rita Felski and Susan Stanford Friedman, “Introduction,” *New Literary History* 40, no. 3 (2009): v-ix vi.

¹² Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 19.

Kafka, Nabokov, and Woolf are modernists (although Nabokov has sometimes been classified as a postmodernist, too); Darrieussecq and Vassilikos could more closely be allied with the postmodernist spectrum of literature, while Carpentier's novel is the precursor of magical realist writing. In his article "Why Compare?," R. Radhakrishnan makes a bold statement about comparison. He states that "comparisons are never neutral: they are inevitably tendentious, didactic, competitive, and prescriptive. Behind the seeming generosity of comparison, there always lurks the aggression of a thesis."¹³ With this statement in mind, I have placed into dialogue disparate texts not to override them with my pre-conceived interpretation, but to examine the ways in which they provide an answer to the main question of the thesis by honouring their differences and the different contexts in which they were written. Aware of the dangers of comparing such disparate texts, but also the merits of pursuing such unlikely comparisons, I find Radhakrishnan's line of thought valuable. Against his own doubts, he further asserts: "if comparative studies are to result in the production of new and destabilizing knowledges, then apples and oranges do need to be compared, audaciously and precariously."¹⁴

This approach is generally in line with a recent reconceptualization of Comparative Literature studies as an inquiry in planetarity: the comparison of texts irrespectively of their location, context or chronology of production. While I acknowledge some lines of influence, I also keep them in the background, as opposed to relying on them to interpret the texts. For example, my comparison of Kafka—a writer who wrote in German but belonged to a cultural minority living in a cultural "periphery" of Europe—

¹³ R. Radhakrishnan, "Why Compare?" *New Literary History* 40, no. 3 (2009): 453-471, 454, accessed June 14, 2018, doi: [10.1353/nlh.0.0100](https://doi.org/10.1353/nlh.0.0100).

¹⁴ Radhakrishnan, 454.

and Nabokov gestures to their similarities in terms of an insect transformation and explores the possibility of Nabokov's influence by Kafka. Yet, the core of my comparison lies in the shared semantic structure of their figurative strategies: their portrayal of subjectivity as sacrificial and dream-like. Similarly, while in my reading of Woolf and Darrieussecq I acknowledge Darrieussecq's interest in Woolf's fiction and feminist vision, the joint analysis I pursue relies on the comparison of their approaches to the woman writer as a subject in a continuous transformation. Susan Stanford Friedman's discussion of planetary modernisms is often invoked as a successful literary studies application of such orientation: Friedman considers planetarity as a fluid method of comparison which would allow us to pursue any comparison between two works of literature, no matter how unlikely this comparison would seem. Friedman's conception also expands temporally: "I use the term *planetary*," she argues, "to invoke this greater sense of time and space."¹⁵ Yet, her method also presents us with a significant difficulty: Friedman suggests that, in order to pursue a planetary epistemology, we need to abolish the categories of marginal and dominant discourses.¹⁶ Friedman writes: "I regard the boundaries between multiple modernisms as porous and permeable, fostering self/other confrontations and minglings as mutually constitutive, both between different societies and within them."¹⁷ In Chapter Two, on Carpentier and Vassilikos, I also consider the modernist boundaries as porous. However, my approach to the constitution of a metamorphic

¹⁵ Susan Stanford Friedman, "Planetarity: Musing Modernist Studies," *Modernism/modernity* 17, no. 3 (2010): 471-499, 474, accessed June 14, 2018, doi: [10.1353/mod.2010.0003](https://doi.org/10.1353/mod.2010.0003).

¹⁶ Susan Stanford Friedman, *Planetary Modernisms: Provocations on Modernity Across Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

¹⁷ Susan Stanford Friedman, "Periodizing Modernism: Postcolonial Modernities and the Time/Space of Modernist Studies," *Modernism/modernity* 13, no. 3 (2006): 425-443, 428, accessed June 14, 2018, doi: [10.1353/mod.2006.0059](https://doi.org/10.1353/mod.2006.0059).

subjectivity in these two writers postulates that subjectivity is entangled with the loss of the homeland in the context of colonial and neo-colonial inscriptions, and is thus placed firmly within the struggle between hegemonic and marginalized discourses as they have been played out within the specific historico-political circumstances of Haiti and Greece. Roderick Beaton's comment that "the dilemma of Greek modernism was the dilemma of how to be modern *and* Greek at the same time,"¹⁸ encapsulates a concern which still echoes in the work of contemporary Greek writers, including Vassilikos.

Contrary to Friedman's take on planetarity, in "Rethinking Comparativism" (2009), Spivak advocates the necessity to pay attention to the cultural and linguistic specificities of the compared texts.¹⁹ Similarly, Jan M. Ziolkowski emphasizes that comparing texts beyond boundaries and disciplines allows us to cross cultural and linguistic limitations while taking into account the uniqueness of a culture or language.²⁰ Significantly, Spivak alerts us, such comparisons need to stop being Eurocentric, especially because the movement, in terms of language and translation, from the European metropolises to the culture of ex-colonies might be easy, but the opposite is not.²¹ I am inspired by Spivak's point that "peripheral literature may stage more surprising and unexpected manoeuvres toward collectivity," besides the concerns

¹⁸ Roderick Beaton, "Greece," *The Cambridge Companion to European Modernism*, ed. Pericles Lewis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 234-246, 235 (my emphasis).

¹⁹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Rethinking Comparativism," *New Literary History* 40, no. 3 (2009): 609-626, 611, accessed June 14, 2018, doi: [10.1353/nlh.0.0095](https://doi.org/10.1353/nlh.0.0095).

²⁰ Jan M. Ziolkowski, "Incomparable: The Destiny of Comparative Literature, Globalization or Not," *The Global South* 1, no. 2 (2007):16-44, 39, accessed June 14, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40339271>.

²¹ Spivak, 25.

of nationalism and race inscribed to it.²² At the same time, as Sanja Bahun-Radunović and Marinos Pourgouris argue, “intercultural fermentation seems to be more vigorous precisely in the “small culture” settings”: a comparison needs to be inclusive of marginal literatures precisely because these can bring fresh, culturally informed perspectives in the comparative discourse.²³ Amongst the representations of metamorphosis studied in this project, I find that Carpentier’s fiction problematises precisely this concern of complex, both power-driven and power-defying, interaction and “peripheral” literature’s response to it particularly powerfully. Carpentier’s novel is organised by one key site-specific question: how has the influence of Europe, both France and Spain in the case of Haiti, shaped the (colonised and then independent) subject in Central America? Yet, once Carpentier’s text has been put into a comparative dialogue with a writer from the margins of Europe, Vassilikos, this concern emerges as one of wider relevance, as Greece has itself undergone a particular type of colonisation. In turn, our understanding of modern Greek negotiations of cultural and ethnic identity and literature’s response to it is augmented.

Scholars such as Sandra Bermann and Emily Apter have argued that comparing texts from different cultures is inextricably linked to the issues of translation.²⁴ The issue of translation of modernist works has also preoccupied Rebecca Walkowitz. She observes that, while some Anglophone modernist works are “nearly untranslatable” due to their attention to language, other writers “purposefully accommodate translation

²² Spivak, 42.

²³ Sanja Bahun-Radunović and Marinos Pourgouris, eds., *The Avant-Garde and the Margin: New Territories of Modernism* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006), xv.

²⁴ See, for instance, Sandra Bermann, “Working in the And Zone: Comparative Literature and Translation,” *Comparative Literature* 61, no. 4 (2009): 432-446, accessed June 14, 2018, doi: [10.1215/00104124-2009-025](https://doi.org/10.1215/00104124-2009-025). Emily Apter, *The Translation Zone: A New Comparative Literature* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), xviii.

by encouraging multiple editions of their novels and by designing comparative texts that emphasize networks of collectivity.”²⁵ Vassilikos, perhaps more than any other writer from the ones examined in this project, has embraced this aspect of translation and comparativity through the multilingual editions of his *...and dreams are dreams*. The texts under discussion in this thesis have all been translated in multiple languages, and I myself have benefited from their translations into English from German, French, Greek, Spanish, and Russian.²⁶ Committed to site-specific inquiries, I am aware that my reading and potentially some of my interpretations may have been influenced, perhaps distorted, perhaps “transformed” (in the way Walter Benjamin used that term) by the act of translation. To limit the effect of this apparent difficulty, I have tried to look at the original language in cases when this could illuminate any obscure aspects of the text. Such an example is my scrutiny of Kafka’s use of the word “*Ungeziefer*” in “The Metamorphosis.” Here and elsewhere my guarantee of honouring the specificity of a text and a context has been the method of close reading.

In “The Ethics of Reading” (2000), Jane Gallop explains how and why we benefit from close reading. She asserts that, when a reader looks at what *is* in fact written on the page, attentive to the vocabulary, language choices, or minor details of a text, then he or she can appreciate a writer and the literary work for what it *is*, without forcing an interpretation and pre-constructed ideas on them.²⁷ Close reading enables me, on the one hand, to pursue a comparison that is both engaged and neutral, and, on the other

²⁵ Rebecca L. Walkowitz, “Comparison Literature,” *New Literary History* 40, no. 3 (2009): 567-582, 576, accessed June 14, 2018, doi: [10.1215/00104124-2009-025](https://doi.org/10.1215/00104124-2009-025). For Walkowitz, J. M. Coetzee’s work is paradigmatic of this category of comparison literature.

²⁶ Nabokov translated “The Aurelian” into English himself.

²⁷ Jane Gallop, “The Ethics of Reading: Close Encounters,” *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing* (2000): 7-17, 10.

hand, to read the selected texts for what they are, considerate of their specific linguistic, structural, and creative choices. “By concentrating on the details,” Gallop underlines, “we disrupt our projection”—and limit the tendency to impose one pre-conceived interpretation.²⁸ Here it is worth clarifying that I have naturally taken into account, sometimes relied on, widespread interpretations of and responses to the texts I am examining. Yet, fluid literary texts, like Kafka’s “The Metamorphosis,” have had and will continue to be recipients of diverse interpretations. This fact, in combination with Gallop’s observation on the ethical dimension of close reading, shows us how stimulating a work of literature may be. To keep this stimulation alive, I have tried not to impose the comparisons and interpretations upon the texts, but rather to “listen” to them—as Gallop suggests—using the method of close reading.

Placing a research project within the parameters of a discipline like comparative literature also leads one to reflect on the necessity of adopting an inter-disciplinary approach to the scholarly inquiry. This is even more so palpable in the context of an inquiry dealing with subjectivity. My interpretation and understanding of subjectivity are informed by Sigmund Freud’s works and by theorists who carried his ideas further such as Melanie Klein, Julia Kristeva, Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok. Giorgio Agamben’s ideas have assisted my discussion of subjectivity and animality. It is worth explaining here, then, what subjectivity means in the context of my enquiry.

²⁸ Gallop, 11.

Subjectivity and Modernity

In the twentieth century, metamorphosis, as an expression of change, becomes the representational site where individual and social change emphatically intertwine: the self is affected by social, political, and historical changes, bloodshed conflicts, wars and revolutions. These changes have had a huge impact on the European literature in the period of two world wars. Modernist literature is marked by a turn to individual anxieties, as Kafka and Nabokov show to us, but these can often be interpreted as reflections of social circumstances, as my discussion of Kafka will suggest. Such an inward turn occasioned a search for new modes of expression, including those whose express purpose is to describe the inner and outer life of a subject, as Woolf proves in her fictional biography of *Orlando*. This spirit of experimentation in writing and the need to address what is perceived as an age of ambiguity also extend to postmodern literature of the second half of the twentieth century, when new anxieties emerged out of social and political developments such as uncontrolled global capitalism, the rise of feminism, decolonialization, a vast spread of visual culture and global traffic and communication. Darrieussecq, Carpentier, and Vassilikos all address some of these anxieties in their stories of metamorphoses.

In *Sources of the Self*, Charles Taylor argues that modernist thought is not just concerned with subjectivity but in fact rejoices the emphasis on the interiority.²⁹ The historical condition and change of values at the turn of the century impacted the perception of the self: the fragmentation of the period resulted in a dissolved notion of the self, without a defined center.³⁰ The development of psychoanalysis, as a disciple

²⁹ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 456.

³⁰ Identity is crucial to my understanding of subjectivity, but it is not identical to it, although the concept of the subject is closely linked with the concept of identity. An individual may acquire

of the mind, is paradigmatic of all these shifts, and, as such, psychoanalysis continues to provide a comprehensive framework for discussing the artistic use of metamorphosis to articulate new visions of subjectivity. Freudian, and later Lacanian, psychoanalysis both originates from, and is defined by this discourse.³¹ Freud's movement from the topographical to the structural and economic models of the mind expresses this inward turn precisely: the emphasis shifts from consciousness to the unconscious and its components, the id, the ego, and the superego. Yet, these components are everything but fixed, and they do not point to a single centre of the subject—rather, they are effects of flows and fluxes of drives themselves. Subjectivity is indeed a fluctuating concept in psychoanalytic discourse; and in literature, we find, this fluidity can be expressed through a metamorphosis.

Psychoanalysis furthermore describes the subject as formed not only by internal, intro-psychic processes, such as those unfolding in an individual body and mind, but also inter-psychically, in communication with others, as we can see in Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917)³² and his later work *The Ego and the Id* (1923).³³ The subject is thus not constituted only through one individual body but also

multiple identities, such as a sexual identity or a political one. In Freudian psychoanalytic terms, a person's identity is created by the process of *identification*, that is the emotional attachment to an object. Sigmund Freud, "Notes Upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 vols., trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1953-74) (hereafter referred to as *S. E.*), vol. X (1909): 151-318.

³¹ Fredric Jameson states that the subject of the postmodern age is fragmented. He particularly favours Lacan's decentered subject because it favours not repression, like Freud's subject, but desire. Fredric Jameson, "Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan: Marxism, Psychoanalytic Criticism, and the Problem of the Subject," *Yale French Studies* 55/56, (1977): 338-395, 395, accessed June 14, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2930443>.

³² Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917), *S. E.* vol. XIV (1914-1916): 237-258.

³³ Freud, *The Ego and the Id* (1923), *S. E.* vol. XIX (1923-1925): 1-66.

through that body's inscriptions by other bodies and, as Lacan would have it, by the clash with, success or failure of identification with the Symbolic Order. The partial or complete failure of such identification and the possibility of a radically new creative subjectivity to emerge out of this clash subtends the stories of metamorphosis in both Woolf's and Darrieussecq's narratives. The last insight, I should add here, has found its ultimate expression in a theory that moves beyond and sometimes rejects psychoanalysis, that of Michel Foucault, which describes the subject as constructed by power relations. It is in this sense that the self is not a fixed entity but it is "historically located."³⁴ All these revisionings of what subjectivity is confirm Taylor's assertion that twentieth-century modernity is the "age of decentring subjectivity."³⁵

But there are further details that need to be added to this picture. In my discussion of subjectivity in the chapter on Kafka and Nabokov, for example, I turn to René Girard's theory of the sacrificial scapegoat.³⁶ Girard acknowledges the Oedipus complex, explained to us by Freud, but explores its function in the context of the individual's beneficial function within a community. Thus, a new representation of subjectivity emerges in the short stories of Kafka and Nabokov: that of a metamorphic and sacrificial self. In the second chapter, which compares the metamorphoses in the fiction of Carpentier and Vassilikos, the self is clearly articulated in terms of an

³⁴ Lisa Downing, *The Cambridge Introduction to Michel Foucault* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 68. Jean-Michel Rabaté, a preeminent literary scholar engaged with psychoanalysis, also alerts us to the dangers of applying literature to psychoanalysis and vice versa. He proposes that one could learn more from Freud as a writer than a theoretician-clinician. Jean-Michel Rabaté, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and Psychoanalysis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 17.

³⁵ Taylor, 465.

³⁶ René Girard, *The Scapegoat*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

unconscious group loss, that of home and nation. My understanding of this type of loss is informed by Freud's essay "Mourning and Melancholia" and is enhanced by postcolonial critiques of such loss, namely Ranjana Khanna's *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism* (2003).³⁷ Khanna's work has also been influenced by the Hungarian-French psychoanalysts, Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, and specifically their essays on mourning and transgenerational loss in *The Shell and the Kernel* (1994).³⁸ In the third chapter wherein I compare Woolf's novel *Orlando* to Darrieussecq's *Pig Tales*, subjectivity is addressed by a close reading of unconscious fantasies, as theorised by Freud and Klein, in order to place these two texts in a productive dialogue with psychoanalytic accounts of female sexuality and creativity—including those that link the emergence of literary fantasies to the experience of loss, like Julia Kristeva's work *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (1989).³⁹ Finally, I am interested in an aspect which further "decentres" the self and is quintessential to the narratives of metamorphosis: our affinity, or interaction, with the animal. Although the philosophical questions of our interaction with other species are not amongst the main aims of this project, I occasionally turn to animal studies in order to fully comprehend how the writers I have selected use the trope of metamorphosis. Influenced by Foucault's bio-politics, Giorgio Agamben's work on *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power*

³⁷ Ranjana Khanna, *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

³⁸ Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis* Volume 1, ed. and trans. Nicholas T. Rand (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994). In a similar context, Stephen Frosh has also written on the concept of transgenerational haunting and trauma, yet his approach is not directly informative of my reading of Carpentier and Vassilikos. Stephen Frosh, *Hauntings: Psychoanalysis and Ghostly Transmissions* (London: Palgrave, 2013).

³⁹ Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).

and Bare Life (1995)⁴⁰ contributes to my understanding of subjectivity at the end of the twentieth century, as Agamben bridges the political existence with that of the exiled animal.⁴¹ Agamben's concept of the *homo sacer* and animal philosophy illuminate particularly well those instances in which the representation of metamorphosis is deployed to suggest the individual's place in society and the relationships, including those of power, that define him/her. It is used as such in my analysis of Kafka's, Nabokov's, and Darrieussecq's work.

Myth, Metamorphosis, and the Subject

The theme of metamorphosis initially came to be known to us through myths.⁴² Robert Segal suggests that a firm starting point for the examination of myth is to concentrate on three main questions: the origin of myth, the subject matter, and the function.⁴³ Yet, the present study, focused as it is on the problem of subjectivity in the fictional representation of metamorphosis, aspires neither to offer a new theory of myth nor even to trace the genealogy of particular myths which feature a metamorphosis. Rather, my intention is to interpret a shift within the conceptual and representational scopes of the mythical device of metamorphosis and take it as suggestive of the ways in which the very use of myth has transformed in modern times—to such an extent that we can talk

⁴⁰ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (California: Stanford University Press, 1995).

⁴¹ Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell (California: Stanford University Press, 2004).

⁴² For an overview of literary metamorphoses see Ingo Gildenhard and Andrew Zissos, eds. *Transformative Change in Western Thought: A History of Metamorphosis from Homer to Hollywood* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

⁴³ Robert Segal, *Myth: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 2.

about the “new mythification” or de-mythification. I relate literary texts to myth as two types of “symbolic expression”⁴⁴ by acknowledging that their relationship is interactive: as Laurence Coupe described it, “mythology is an important element of literature; [and] literature is a means of extending mythology.”⁴⁵

Nevertheless, a brief survey of key approaches to myth would be beneficial here to help situate the mythic trope of metamorphosis and some assumptions about its operation that scholars have made. Traditional anthropological approaches to myth focused on the relationship between myth and science, suggesting that myth belongs to a ‘primitive’ and ‘ritualistic’ stage of humanity, with the most prominent example being James Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* (1890).⁴⁶ Accordingly, Mircea Eliade in *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (1954) sees the role of myth as connecting the individual with ‘sacred’ mythical time: in one such interpretation, the event of metamorphosis would be the key moment in which one meets with the divine.⁴⁷ This approach may be applicable for a great number of traditional representations of the myth but it is put into

⁴⁴ Ernst Cassirer, *Symbol, Myth, and Culture: Essays and Lectures of Ernst Cassirer, 1935-1945*, ed. Donald Phillip Verene (London: Yale University Press, 1981).

⁴⁵ Laurence Coupe, *Myth* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), 4. Cf. Ernst Cassirer, *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1923–29), vols.1-4 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). The details of the debate about the relationship between literature and myth are beyond the scope of my present project. Suffice it here to mention two main approaches: developmental and based on coincidence, or overlap, between the two symbolic forms. Thus, John Vickery argues that “myth forms the matrix out of which literature emerges both historically and psychologically,” in John Vickery, ed., *Myth and Literature* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), ix. Richard Chase, following Northrop Frye’s discussion in “The Archetypes of Literature” (1957) argues that literature and myth are one and the same form. Richard Chase, “Notes on the Study of Myth,” in *Myth and Literature*, ed. J. Vickery (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 68.

⁴⁶ James Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, ed. Robert Frazer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

⁴⁷ Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

question by the twentieth-century texts under discussion here, not the least because some of them feature multiple metamorphoses or continuous shapeshifting of the subject. Yet, anthropologists like Bronislaw Malinowski, argue that the main function of myth is to preserve traditions. Therefore, as Meletinsky develops, myth also “codifies thought, reinforces mores, defines precise rules of behavior, sanctions rituals, and rationalizes and justifies the social order.”⁴⁸ We will see that some aspects of this definition still obtain in the narrative representation of myth in the twentieth century under discussion here, in particular as it relates to group psychology. Both Ernst Cassirer and Emile Durkheim furthermore elaborate on the social function of myth to create a feeling of unity among the society members.⁴⁹

Such insights reveal an important continuity between the products of culture and politics, a continuity which informs contemporary views on artistic expression. They also draw our attention to the recurrent appearance of classical, traditional myths like the motif of metamorphosis in human culture and to those historical moments in which such myths become prominent.⁵⁰ Structuralist theorists, like Claude Lévi-Strauss, have identified the globally recurring patterns and variations in myths and paved the way for an understanding of the diverse uses of the same or similar mythic pattern across centuries.⁵¹ The awareness of this repetition led to the insight that literature and creativity make use of myth to generate new myths.

⁴⁸ Bronislaw Malinowski, *Myth in Primitive Psychology* (London: Kegan Paul, 1926); Eleazar M. Meletinsky, *The Poetics of Myth* (London: Routledge, 2000), 25.

⁴⁹ Ernst Cassirer, *The Myth of the State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946). See, also, William G. Doty, *Mythography: The Study of Myths and Rituals* (Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 2000). 132.

⁵⁰ On the recurrence of mythic motifs and “mythopoetic” narratives, see Doty, 249.

⁵¹ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning* (New York: Schocken Books, 1978).

For instance, Coupe considers Kafka and Freud to be modern myth-makers, and argues that they were both “conscious that myth-making is inseparable from myth-reading.”⁵² Coupe places Freud and Kafka in the same category of writers who “rewrite the legacy of father-centred religion,” and while this is only one aspect of the modernist approaches to myth, it indicates how “mythopoeic” works may operate.⁵³ Literature is “mythopoeic” according to Coupe, when it tends “to create or re-create certain narratives which human beings take to be crucial to their understanding of their world.”⁵⁴ From Michael Bell’s point of view, “mythopoeia is the underlying metaphysic of much modernist literature, and a way of approaching vital problems that constantly present themselves reductively”; it provides the modernists –to borrow T. S. Eliot’s words from his essay on James Joyce– with “self-grounding” and “order” in a world in disorder.⁵⁵ Modern and contemporary literary texts tend to fuse the mythic motifs and themes with elements from the modern world to suggest that an “imaginative experience” may be “primordial” and, for that reason, valuable.⁵⁶ Bell explicitly links the modernists’ engagement with the question of subjectivity to their interest in myth, arguing that it is only natural that a “mythopoeic conception of the self” would emerge in modernism.⁵⁷ In his reading, this process is deconstructive but not quite destructive for the self: the modernists understood that an individual could have more than one identity, none of which are stable, and they found in mythic

⁵² Coupe, 127.

⁵³ Coupe, 126.

⁵⁴ Coupe, 4.

⁵⁵ Michael Bell, *Literature, Modernism and Myth: Belief and Responsibility in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 2, 21. T.S. Eliot, “Ulysses, Order and Myth,” in *Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), 175. The essay was first published in *The Dial*, November 1923.

⁵⁶ Bell, 228.

⁵⁷ Bell, 36.

figures, like Odysseus, representative examples or “objective correlatives” for this insight.⁵⁸

No discipline that emerged in modernism has given these concerns a better form than psychoanalysis. Almost all psychoanalysts have engaged with myth to describe subjectivity in one form or another, and some of them, like C.G. Jung, have dedicated their lives to it. Understanding mythic narratives as collective “dreams of youthful humanity,” as Freud puts it in “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming” (1908),⁵⁹ they insist on the psychological continuity between childhood and adulthood in the use of myth, but take vastly different routes to grounding this continuity.⁶⁰ With the *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) and the use of the Oedipus myth to describe the foundational psychological complex, Freud transforms mythology into “metapsychology,” observes Dan Merkur.⁶¹ The statement that “[Oedipus’s] destiny moves us only because it might have been ours” shows that myth in Freud functions as a kind of guide in order to reveal the contents of the unconscious mind, individual and collective.⁶² In particular, Freud seems to detect in myth its service as a guide to social

⁵⁸ T. S. Eliot, “Ulysses, Order and Myth,” 176; Bell, 36-37.

⁵⁹ Freud, “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming,” (1908), *S.E.* vol. IX (1906-1908): 141-154, 144.

⁶⁰ Bruno Bettelheim, for example, gives to fairy tales a social function; they help children to face everyday problems and grow up. Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (London: Penguin, 1979). Carl Jung insists on the articulatory significance of myth in forging archetypes and archetypal images. His approach to myths assumes the existence of the “collective unconscious.” C. G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (New York: Princeton University Press, 1959). Jung mentions metamorphosis as transformation, in the context of the spiritual transformation of the soul, which is part of the individuation process. Cf., Robert Segal, *Theorizing about Myth* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1999), 4-10.

⁶¹ Dan Merkur, *Psychoanalytic Approaches to Myth: Freud and the Freudians* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 2.

⁶² Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, (1900), *S.E.* vol. IV (1900): ix-627, 261.

dynamics, wishes, and fantasies, as myths may function as “secular,” “distorted vestiges of the wishful fantasies of whole nations.”⁶³ It is as such that myths invade literature. In “The Theme of Three Caskets” (1913) Freud applies his psychoanalytic technique to unravel the symbolic meaning of the recurrent theme of three (three Fates, three women, three caskets), as it appears in Shakespeare’s work, myths, dreams and fairytales.⁶⁴ With an eye to structure of the fairytale, Freud pays close attention to the transformation of the theme, and based on this, offers the psychological explanation behind the “wishful reversal of the myth”: a very common wish-fulfillment, that is, the reversal of death, as the third woman becomes a manifestation of beauty, instead of death. In this essay, Freud treats mythic patterns in literature both symbolically and structurally, and finally uses them to explain the meaning of the symbols and processes that often occur in society.⁶⁵ Thereby he syncretizes the three main approaches to myth I have outlined above, while focusing on the inherent value of literary representation as such; it is in this way that the recurrence of the trope of metamorphosis will also be treated in this thesis.

It seems to me that the mythical representation of metamorphosis has a distinct role in this modernist revamping of the view of subjectivity. There are good reasons for it. The idea of metamorphosis in Western literature is haunted by Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (8 A.D.), an extensive collection of poetic narratives about mortals and gods that transform into animals, plants, water, or alternative natural forms.⁶⁶ These

⁶³ Freud, “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming,” 152.

⁶⁴ Freud, “The Theme of the Three Caskets,” (1913), *S.E.* vol. XII (1911-1913): 289-302.

⁶⁵Merkur, 15. The same could be said about Freud’s own mythmaking, and, in particular his preoccupation with the taboo of incest and parricide which are linked with the idea of morality within a social group (Coupe, 121).

⁶⁶ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. A. D. Melville (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

transformations are often sent by the gods, as a punishment, or as gifts to help a mortal in danger. Some of the Ovidian metamorphic stories contain behavioural hints regarding the new form the protagonist is going to acquire; how one has behaved is likely to influence, if not always determine, what form he will take in metamorphosis. This is a narrative strategy which we also find inaugurally in *The Odyssey*, as the gluttony of Odysseus' men is associated with their subsequent transformation into pigs. Yet, while the metamorphosis in Homer is more or less a fantastic prop, Ovid links the metamorphoses in his work to another crucial existential question: that of the soul's immortality, despite the change in form, as he follows the teachings of Pythagoras. This idea preoccupied Ovid, and many subsequent writers dealing with the subject, and thus the potential transformation of the "soul" and by extension subjectivity, became an important aspect of metamorphic stories. Metamorphosis then challenges the subjectivity, and social identity, of the one who is transformed and questions the stability of the subject/self in a story.

It is this enquiry into who we actually are that makes metamorphic stories so attractive to the reader. The trope of metamorphosis allows us to approach the question of subjectivity in a unique way; either by challenging our thinking on the differences between animal and human or by breaking the rules by which societies operate. In *Forms of Astonishment* (2009) Richard Buxton argues that "fundamental to most tales of metamorphoses are two antitheses: that between continuity and change, and that between body and mind/spirit/soul."⁶⁷ These antitheses demonstrate that metamorphic stories simultaneously address metaphysical and social concerns, both of which are integral to subjectivity. Although it persists in literature as a theme, the trope of

⁶⁷ Richard Buxton, *Forms of Astonishment: Greek Myths of Metamorphosis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 9.

metamorphosis is not stable in its expressions. The common viewpoint about metamorphosis broadly associates the trope to change, usually external, affecting the body. However, studies of literary metamorphoses show that the change often extends to questioning the identity of the individual and sometimes the very composition of a human subject, that is, subjectivity.⁶⁸ This questioning is linked to the issues of longing for or fear of change. Marina Warner remarks that metamorphic writing pleases the reader as it communicates a promise of change.⁶⁹ This change can be individual, as in the change of a man into an insect, or it can have a collective significance, as in the transformations of the plantation slave, Macandal, into an animal, which Carpentier narrates. In this sense, tales of metamorphosis can function as warnings for the future of the individual or a society, a role which Darrieussecq's story addresses in detail. Moreover, as Warner confirms, the fact that this literary trope of changing body continues to appear in art and literature indicates its continued relevance as the epitome of our "search for personal identity."⁷⁰

While the theme seems to be eternally relevant, the representational engagement with metamorphosis has its amplitudes, though: there are historical periods in which the representations of metamorphosis agglomerate or become particularly prominent. As Warner admits, metamorphic stories tend to be created in the "moments of historical and cultural metamorphosis."⁷¹ As a paradigmatic era of changes, the twentieth century became an especially fertile ground for the development of stories of

⁶⁸ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity* (New York: Zone Books, 2001), 19.

⁶⁹ Marina Warner, *Fantastic Metamorphoses, Other Worlds, Ways of Telling the Self* (London: Oxford University Press, 2004), 18.

⁷⁰ Warner, 28.

⁷¹ Warner, 212.

metamorphosis in various types of cultural expression.⁷² The perceived significance of this continuity between the individual and the collective, between the imagined instance and the wider social transformation, implicit also in psychoanalytic frameworks I have invoked, is the reason why my study of metamorphosis will focus on the questions of both individual and collective subjectivity.

I have started this discussion by suggesting that my thesis is less about the myth itself than about the transformations of the role of the particular mythic trope in relation to the twentieth-century reworking of the notion of subjectivity. My approach is informed by what has been identified as an important shift in the role of myth during the twentieth century. In this period, as Bell observes, myth started being used politically, both through the extrapolation and use of mythic symbolism (e.g., the associations with fascist mythmaking) and through the disclosures of myth's particular productivity in ideologically charged contexts. This association made myth suspect in the second half of the twentieth century and myth-making is now often perceived less favourably than before.⁷³ Bell's remarks on the shift of attitude towards myth take into account the socio-political developments and consequently invite us to rethink how metamorphosis might have changed respectively across the century to correspond to this change. The first noticeable transformation is that the theme of metamorphosis at the beginning of the century reflects primarily the change in individual identity whereas, towards the end of the century, the changes in a society are given more attention than the changes in the individual. Another approach to the same phenomenon would be to describe this development as de-mythification, that is, the abrogation of the privileges, functions and principles of traditional myth-making.

⁷² See Theodore Ziolkowski, *Ovid and the Moderns* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 77.

⁷³ Bell, 148, 226.

The latter process takes various forms in the twentieth-century fiction. Sometimes, the very function of myth changes from its traditional format, moving away from metaphors and symbols, as it is the case with Kafka's story; sometimes the "sacredness" of the mythic event is put into question by representing it as a mundane event; sometimes the mythic components of metamorphic change could be barely visible in the narrative economy of the text. It appears in the margins of a text, like in Nabokov's imaginary transformation; at times the represented event of metamorphosis also breaks through generations and just repeats itself, as in *Vassilikos*. Myth, and the motif of metamorphosis, in particular, may also be recast to have direct political use of challenging certain norms, as I explain in Darrieussecq and Carpentier. The literary texts I am analysing in the following chapters display all this variety. We witness different moments of metamorphosis in every chapter, and different functions of myth as such: In Kafka, for instance, we meet the subject after the metamorphosis while Nabokov envisions an insect transformation for his protagonist which is impossible. The function of myth in Kafka and Nabokov is subversive: it premises a sacrifice, hence hints at a transcendental function, yet this function is left incomplete, and up to the reader to decide. In Carpentier, metamorphosis is used on two occasions and inscribes the difference between Europe and Haiti: the transformations of the slave Macandal, narrated in a magical realist fashion, are part of the Haitian community's oral tradition. In Europe, on the other hand, metamorphosis gestures to the classical tradition, namely to Galatea's transformation into a real woman. Myth has thus two functions for Carpentier: it has a didactic function as it shows the difference between Europe and its margins, and it is also part of Haiti's cosmos—hinting at Eliade's use of myth as a medium to communicate with the sacred. In the magical realist world of *Vassilikos*, a tiger is transformed into a woman, only to become a wild animal again. Furthermore,

addressing the scientific changes which profoundly affect one's body, Vassilikos narrates a heart-transplant metamorphosis that fuses the male patient's internal world with the female donor. In these stories, the device of metamorphosis is not only used to describe a bodily change but also a transformation of the creative process itself, through genre, translation, and editing. For Vassilikos metamorphosis can be applied on a text's own transformation, from the genre of magical realism to a fictional historical short story and also into an autobiography. In Woolf's *Orlando* metamorphosis occurs as a result of the subject's internal change of disposition and, as also happens in Darrieussecq, as a result of the changes in society. We witness Orlando's transformation of sex and while myth seems absent, metamorphosis serves a political, feminist discourse around a subject who does not age. In Darrieussecq, the pig protagonist keeps changing thus the metamorphosis is used as an indication of the metamorphic society and the process of creative production on one hand, and on the other, through the reference to myths about changes, to satirise the effects of an abominable change.

What is crucial to my discussion of subjectivity and metamorphosis is that each of the texts I examine attempts to communicate the change from the point of view of the transformed subject. It also means that they are meta-textual writings, and that the use of metamorphosis is highly self-conscious in them. The last characteristic was an important criterion for my selection. My purpose in this thesis is not to provide an exhaustive account of metamorphoses in literature in twentieth-century, but to analyse the representative examples that foreground the link between the trope and the understanding of (individual and collective) subjectivity. Due to their orientation towards the inner and outer experience of the subject and their self-reflexivity, Kafka's, Nabokov's, Carpentier's, Vassilikos's, Woolf's and Darrieussecq's texts serve this objective well. I suggest that the narrative treatments of metamorphosis fundamentally

changed from the beginning of the twentieth century onwards: rather than being easily readable as a metaphorical outcome of human flaws and accomplishments, metamorphosis in the twentieth century literature appears as a metonymical index, or textual trace, that is either ultimately unreadable or obscenely clear. As such, it is more integrally linked to both the interiority of human subject, their desires and drives, and the social processes that shape the subject. Finally, in the texts I discuss the deployment of metamorphosis also becomes a strongly self-reflexive narrative feature, signalling the author's own effort to navigate the complex interior and exterior impulses in creative writing. I argue that this multitude of roles both reflected and contributed to the transformations of prose genres throughout the twentieth century.

Chapter One: Dreaming the Subject

Insect Sacrifice in Franz Kafka's "The Metamorphosis" (1915) and Vladimir Nabokov's "The Aurelian" (1931)

“Curiously enough, Gregor the beetle never found out that he had wings under the hard covering of his back. (This is a very nice observation on my part to be treasured all your lives. Some Gregors, some Joes and Janes, do not know that they have wings).” Vladimir Nabokov (1899-1977) shared this observation in his university lecture on Franz Kafka’s unfortunate hero, Gregor Samsa, published as part of his *Lectures on Literature*.⁷⁴ The collection is comprised of a series of lectures on a wide range of European literary works which Nabokov himself chose for the purposes of his literature course at Cornell University while working as an Associate Professor of Slavic Literature from 1948-1958. The syllabus included Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* (1856), Marcel Proust’s *Swann’s Way* (1913, from *In Search of Lost Time*) and James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922); the most notable of these lectures, however, is his discussion of Kafka’s “The Metamorphosis” (1915).⁷⁵ Nabokov’s observation about the hidden wings of which Kafka’s protagonist, Gregor, is presumably unaware is informative of

⁷⁴ Vladimir Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, ed. Fredson Bowers, intro. John Updike (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), 250-83.

⁷⁵ Nabokov taught, among others, this Literature module (Literature 311-312), but, he had already written most of these lectures in the 1940s. Fredson Bowers writes that the first lecture of this module at Cornell University took place in 1953 and, specifically, that the Kafka lecture had been handwritten by Nabokov. For a detailed account of Nabokov’s teaching and preparation of the lectures see the Editor’s Foreword by Fredson Bowers, in *Lectures on Literature*, 1980, viii-ix.

both writers and their imaginative response to the trope of metamorphosis. Implicit in Nabokov's analysis is the conclusion that Kafka (1883-1924) did not allow his protagonist to find some solace in his unusual insect change, not even to be able to survive in his transformed body. Kafka is neither a writer of consolation nor a fantast: Gregor's metamorphosis into an appalling insect is indeed only the beginning of his suffering. In one of his letters to his fiancée at the time, Felice Bauer, in 1912, Kafka reveals a degree of affinity between his own inner world and the fate of the protagonist of "The Metamorphosis," which he was then composing: "today the hero of my little story also had a very bad time, and yet this is only the latest rung of his misfortune, which is now becoming permanent."⁷⁶ At the time Kafka was not content with the progress of his writing which was interrupted by business trips. In the same letter, he tells Felice about the disorientating effects of the trip: "[o]ne should never travel: better be insubordinate at the office." Kafka's words suggest that what is replicated in the grim atmosphere of "The Metamorphosis" is, amongst other concerns, not only the writer's dissatisfaction with his own work but also an aversion to travelling.⁷⁷

While this is not the only, or perhaps the most important, way to interpret the tenor of Kafka's story, it is certainly the interpretative point of entry that attracted Nabokov. The world of insects and their behaviour, and the literary use of this world in representational tropes, one of which is the trope of metamorphosis, as well as the more overarching issue of the inter-species interaction—that between humans and insects—hold an eminent place in Nabokov's own fiction. Nabokov had developed an

⁷⁶ Franz Kafka, *Letters to Felice*, trans. James Stern and Elizabeth Duckworth (New York: Schocken, 1973), 116. Kafka wrote "The Metamorphosis" from November until December 1912; the story was published in 1915.

⁷⁷ In the same letter, Kafka writes: "I have to put aside my story [...] and on account of the damned Kratzau trip shelve it for a day or two." Kafka, *Letters to Felice*, 116.

interest in insects, and specifically butterflies, from an early age, and endeavoured to use the factual details of this world in his fiction.⁷⁸ Kafka's stories, however, demonstrate a different approach to the animal world; his tales are populated with peculiar creatures which survive in uncanny states of existence, like Gregor in "The Metamorphosis." The detailed commentary provided by Nabokov in his lecture notes prompts the readers of "The Metamorphosis" to look closer at Kafka's story and recognise it, together with Nabokov, as "more than an entomological fantasy," and even to dispel the idea that Kafka was a writer of fantastic literature. If "The Metamorphosis" is a "fantasy," comments Nabokov, it is so in the sense that it convincingly narrates a subjective reality.⁷⁹ It is precisely Kafka's ability to present fantastic, or impossible, events as natural occurrences, and to use naturalistic, almost scientific language to communicate them to the reader, that connects the two writers' creative efforts. In this context, Nabokov's lecture on Gregor's metamorphosis and his consistent placing of Kafka's "greatest short story" among the masterpieces of European fiction sheds light on his own work, where metamorphoses and insects abound.⁸⁰ At the same time, Nabokov's own entomological expertise imposes itself on his reading of Kafka's text and invites the reader to think about correlations between the two writers' personal and creative trajectories.

A professional lepidopterist and a passionate butterfly collector, Vladimir Nabokov had already published studies on butterflies before he emigrated to the US and started working at the American Museum of Natural History, becoming a Research Fellow at the Harvard Museum of Comparative Zoology in 1942. Born in Russia, he

⁷⁸ See *Nabokov's Butterflies: Unpublished and Uncollected Writings*, eds. Brian Boyd, Robert Michael Pyle, and Dmitri Nabokov (London: Penguin, 2000).

⁷⁹ Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, 252.

⁸⁰ Nabokov, 255.

and his family emigrated to London in 1919 and later to Berlin where Nabokov lived until 1930. In his fiction Nabokov often recalls his childhood in Russia, a country which he was forced to abandon during the revolution because his father was a liberal minister in the Tsar's parliament.⁸¹ He published his short stories initially in Russian and then from 1939 he started writing in English, a language which he claimed he knew equally well.⁸² His double nationality as a Russian-American émigré, then his career as a professor, writer, and entomologist found their way into his poems, short stories, and novels. His travels in different European countries and his later life in America allowed Nabokov to formulate what John Foster calls an "international vision of 'modernist fiction.'" ⁸³ In 1930-31, Nabokov lived in Berlin, and it is there that he wrote his own "entomological fantasy," a story about the unfortunate life of a butterfly collector. "The Aurelian," (1931), was originally written in Russian under the title "Pil-gram," after had returned to Berlin from a butterfly hunting trip in the Pyrenees, on which he and his wife Vera netted more than a hundred species.⁸⁴ Nabokov's multicultural identity is well matched to the equally heteroglotic identity of his much-loved forerunner, Franz Kafka, and Nabokov must have felt a connection to Kafka that extends beyond the

⁸¹ Nabokov often refers to the revolution, in his autobiography, as "the Soviet dictatorship" but stresses that he is nostalgic for his childhood and not for the economic security he lost. In Vladimir Nabokov, *Speak, Memory* (London: Penguin, 1998), 49.

⁸² Nabokov, *Speak, Memory*, 53. Nabokov had an English-speaking nanny as a child and he later studied in Cambridge.

⁸³ John Burt Foster, Jr, "Nabokov and Modernism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Nabokov*, ed. Julian W. Connolly (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 85-100, 86.

⁸⁴ Vladimir Nabokov, "Pil-gram," *Sovremennye Zapiski*, Paris, 1931. Nabokov himself translated "The Aurelian" from Russian into English and the story was published in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1941. This is the same translation which is used in Nabokov's short stories collection. Vladimir Nabokov, "The Aurelian," *The Atlantic Monthly*, November 1941, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1941/11/the-aurelian/306224/>. Vladimir, Nabokov, "The Aurelian," in *The Stories of Vladimir Nabokov*, trans. and ed. Dmitri Nabokov (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1996).

aesthetic affiliation. Nabokov's widowed mother moved permanently from Berlin to Prague in 1923 to retire, and he was a frequent visitor to the city. In his autobiography *Speak, Memory*, Nabokov intriguingly writes that his mother frequented Prague's literary circles, where she met, probably in 1923, "Franz Kafka's friend, —, the talented Czech translator of Dostoevsky and Rozanov."⁸⁵

Kafka was born in Prague when the city was still part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. His family were Jewish, lower middle-class, and while he could speak Czech fluently and his father used this language in their house, Kafka's education was exclusively in German, the language of his mother's education. After he had obtained a doctorate in law, his career was divided between working for an insurance company and writing. He often complained how his work and the business commitments interrupted and affected his writing: a necessary trip during the composing of "The Metamorphosis," for instance.⁸⁶ Kafka's works were all written in German, but the language he employs in his writing is the dialect of Prague Jews' German, inflected by everyday Czech. All of this polyphony made a unique context for Kafka's development as a writer and informed his specific use of language, which, as noted earlier, did not escape Nabokov's attention.

In this chapter, I would like to juxtapose Franz Kafka's "The Metamorphosis" (1915) with Vladimir Nabokov's short story "The Aurelian" (1931).⁸⁷ By comparing

⁸⁵ Nabokov, *Speak, Memory*, 241. Nabokov does not specify the name of the translator-friend.

⁸⁶ Kafka wrote to Felice in 1912: "I still have now, the everlasting fear that the trip will harm my little story, that I won't be able to write any more, etc." Kafka, *Letters to Felice*, 130.

⁸⁷ Franz Kafka, "Die Verwandlung" (Leipzig: Kurt Wolff, 1915). The story was first published in the monthly literary journal *Die weißen Blätter* (Leipzig) in October 1915. The translation of "The Metamorphosis" I use in this study is the 2014 version by Susan Bernofsky. Compared to older translations, like Stanley Corngold's (1972) and, in particular, Willa and Edwin Muir's 1933, Bernofsky's language choices better capture Kafka's specific use of language and his unpolished

these texts, I intend to show how each represents the interrelation between insect and human and responds to the question of what is new in the literary use of metamorphosis at the beginning of the twentieth century. This juxtaposition allows me to suggest that metamorphosis is used as a trope in these texts to relay an imaginative image of subjectivity as metamorphic and sacrificial; the trope of metamorphosis is also transformed into a metamorphic language which recreates and transforms reality. Within this use, I am moving beyond the typical understanding of metamorphic language as metaphoric, into highlighting other modes of metamorphosis in language such as irony, metonymy, dream narration, and the blend of fantasy with material—even scientific—reality.⁸⁸ These modes of metamorphoses are premised on a changed understanding of the function of myth in modern society as such. A consideration of subjectivity as metamorphic and sacrificial and the changed understanding of myth, then, are also part of the wider conversation the thesis aims to develop: unlike the idea of subjectivity which is explored in the next chapters, the in-depth reading of these two pieces of short fiction will afford me the opportunity to introduce and examine the ways in which the traditional representations of the function of metamorphosis were challenged in early twentieth-century literature. Both Nabokov's comments on Kafka and then both writers' formulations of the metamorphic, fragmented self, invite the comparison.

While a number of studies have drawn attention to the similarities between Nabokov and Kafka, most notably, Marina Warner's study of the metamorphic process of hatching and Leland De La Durantaye's study of Nabokov's perception of Kafka as

German. Franz Kafka, "The Metamorphosis," trans. Susan Bernofsky, intro. David Cronenberg (New York: W. W. Norton, 2014).

⁸⁸ These are also some of the features that writers of magical realism imbue their metamorphic stories with, as I discuss in the next chapter.

seen in his lectures, an extensive comparison between the two writers and their representation of subjectivity through the insect imagery has not been pursued.⁸⁹ Kafka's story "The Metamorphosis" itself has been treated extensively by critics, though. The title of Stanley Corngold's book *The Commentator's Despair: The Interpretation of Kafka's "Metamorphosis"* aptly illustrates both the immense interest the story attracted and the "despair" Kafka scholars face when trying to offer a definite interpretation of Gregor's insect metamorphosis.⁹⁰ As Nina Allan's account of critical assessments of Nabokov's writings confirms, his story "The Aurelian" has received a markedly smaller number of interpretations than its "metamorphic" predecessor, and has been critically discussed less often than some longer fiction by Nabokov.⁹¹ Both stories would benefit from a juxtaposition. My reading of these texts is informed by a scrutiny of the writers' approach towards subjectivity, as seen in their use of the trope of metamorphosis; this subject-matter, I argue, invites a psychoanalytic exploration. Both fictional metamorphoses rely on, or engage memories, dreams, daydreams, and fantasies—which, according to Sigmund Freud, are manifestations of the contents of our unconscious—while they expose the subjects' suffering, both mental and physical.

⁸⁹ Warner explores Kafka's influence in Nabokov's well-known novel *Lolita* (1955) and his short story "Christmas" (1949). Marina Warner, *Fantastic Metamorphoses, Other Worlds: Ways of Telling the Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 90. The two writers' literary relationship has been further explored by John Burt Foster, in John Burt Foster, Jr, "Nabokov and Kafka," in *The Garland Companion to Vladimir Nabokov*, ed. Vladimir E. Alexandrov (London: Garland Publishing, 1995), 444-451, and, in Leland De La Durantaye, "Kafka's Reality and Nabokov's Fantasy: on Dwarves, Saints, Beetles, Symbolism, and Genius," *Comparative Literature* 59, no. 4 (2007): 315-331, accessed June 14, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40279383>.

⁹⁰ Stanley Corngold, *The Commentator's Despair: The Interpretation of Kafka's "Metamorphosis"* (New York: Kennikat Press, 1973).

⁹¹ Nina Allan, *Madness, Death, and Disease in the Fiction of Vladimir Nabokov* (Birmingham: Dept. of Russian Language and Literature, University of Birmingham, 1994).

Metamorphosing Texts

Kafka's hero is a travelling salesman, working hard to pay off his father's business debts and to provide for the whole household. The narrator is privy to Gregor's thoughts, in which he reveals that the only reason he works is to support his parents and sister who seem unable to work. Gregor's daily life is, thus, delimited by morning trains, tight timetables, no friends and quiet evenings in his family flat. On one of these mornings, he finds himself transformed into an animal that Kafka imagined as a "monstrous insect," which is by definition dirty and therefore unwelcome. I will return to the question of Gregor's identity and the importance of Kafka's specific choice of the word "*Ungeziefer*" later in this chapter. What is peculiar about this metamorphosis is Gregor's reaction to his change; he briefly contemplates that something has changed in him but he then thinks: "[w]hat if I just go back to sleep for a little while and forget all this foolishness."⁹² It is difficult for him to move around his bed with his numerous legs, even more so to get up, unlock his door and catch his train to work. His body becomes unbearable and, notably, dysfunctional for his professional obligations; other than that, Gregor does not feel repulsed by his new form. His insect transformation gets in the way only because he had to go to work that morning. After his family and employers react in complete terror to his huge insect body, Gregor is forced to stay in his room for the rest of his short life. The problems arise mainly because his new body

⁹² Kafka, "The Metamorphosis," 22.

is repulsive to his social surroundings and the discomfort increases after Gregor gradually loses the ability of human speech. This is the excuse Grete, Gregor's sister, uses to convince both parents that it is time to get rid of "it": human speech seems to have guaranteed humanity, or human subjectivity, to the protagonist in the same way in which the writer's speech, or writing, guarantees his identity.⁹³ Some months after his metamorphosis, Gregor dies exhausted, starved and infected by an apple stuck in his back for a long time. As the story ends, Gregor dies as a hideous entity: a dead animal the species of which Kafka did not wish to make specific.⁹⁴

Only sixteen years separate this treatment of insect change from Nabokov's short story "The Aurelian" wherein he narrates a dream-like metamorphosis of his hero Paul Pilgram through the imagery of an insect's transformation. Pilgram, whose name is homonymous with "pilgrim" in Russian, is a lepidopterist, shop owner in Berlin, obsessed with the fulfilment of his secret dream: travelling away to discover and collect some rare species of butterfly. Nabokov explains the importance of the word "Aurelian": it means a lepidopterist, someone who collects butterflies.⁹⁵ He is old, living with his wife without any children, "because Pilgram had always thought that children would be merely a hindrance to the realization of what had been in his youth a delightfully exciting plan."⁹⁶ Pilgram leads a lonely, quiet life hardly speaking to anyone, including his own wife, the shop's customers, and his few acquaintances. He has suffered a stroke, condemning him to a silent existence, thus the words he utters

⁹³ Kafka, 105.

⁹⁴ "The insect itself cannot be drawn. It cannot even be shown at a distance," Franz Kafka, *Briefe, 1902-1924*, ed. Max Brod (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1958), 135-136. The fragment is translated by Stanley Corngold, in Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis: Translation, Backgrounds and Contexts, Criticism* ed. trans. Stanley Corngold (Princeton: Princeton University, 1996), 70.

⁹⁵ Etymologically, the word derives from the Latin "aurum" which means "golden." Also, the word "aurelia" is used for *chrysalis*, which is the pupal stage of the butterfly, because of its golden-like colour.

⁹⁶ Nabokov, "The Aurelian," 250.

are limited. His daydreams about hunting and collecting butterflies are the only interests he maintains, yet he indulges in these secretly, as they would seem “unintelligible to his wife or his neighbours.”⁹⁷ The realisation of his constant yet unrealistic fantasies of “pilgrimage” to distant places has long been postponed, however, due to simply being unlucky, as the narrator of the story implies. Despite his efforts to gather a sufficient amount of money that would allow him to travel away from Berlin, a series of events including the death of his father-in-law, travel restrictions during the First World War, and the subsequent inflation period, do not allow him to realise his dream. Pilgram’s slow, dysfunctional, sickly body is expressive of his inability to escape into the vivid, delicate world of butterflies and rare moths. Constantly haunted by his desire to travel to Europe and to exotic destinations, Pilgram refuses to abandon his unprofitable shop which accommodates a mixture of school supplies and insects inside glass cases. His only chance to find the funds for his travels is to sell a precious collection of butterflies, which has been left in his store by an unsuspecting widow. One spring day, “a certain first of April, of all dates,” a collector steps into Pilgram’s shop and promises to buy this rare collection of butterflies.⁹⁸ So, Pilgram decides to leave everything, including his wife, and use the profit from the collection he sold in pursuit of his dream as he felt that “the good fortune that now beckoned would never again repeat its invitation.”⁹⁹ His death, which is caused by a second stroke and also by “the richness of the huge happiness that was leaning towards him like a hugemountain” occurs when Pilgram returns to the shop at the night before his journey.¹⁰⁰ He is only able to imagine his pilgrimage to all the

⁹⁷ Nabokov, 249.

⁹⁸ Nabokov, 253.

⁹⁹ Nabokov, 255.

¹⁰⁰ Nabokov, 257.

distant paradise places where he is observing butterflies, incapable of breaking from his “old crinkly cocoon.”¹⁰¹

While their narrative lines may appear to be substantially different, both stories revolve around an isolated protagonist who experiences an unexpected and eventually failed transformation. The nature of this “failure” deserves explanation. Kafka’s story foregrounds failure insofar as the protagonist is not able to survive the complete bodily change; Nabokov’s tale is organised by the hero’s inability to metamorphose like his cherished subject of study—butterflies—and thus being doomed to only imagine a metamorphosis. In both cases, immobility, or claustrophobic enclosure, is highlighted. For both Gregor Samsa and Paul Pilgram, the cause of isolation can be found in their own selves, without making it completely clear if the whole matter of metamorphosis, failed or failing, was their choice or because they are society’s marginalised members.

The two stories share a common narrative structure: both are divided into parts, as episodes of the life of their protagonists.¹⁰² Structurally, Kafka’s narrative adheres to a dream-like sequence of the most important moments in Gregor’s life after his metamorphosis. Time in Kafka is relative and abstract, almost exclusively conveyed through the insect’s perception of time. Until Gregor’s death, the narrative is focalized solely through the protagonist and the reader follows Gregor’s perception. Nabokov’s story is organized into four parts which roughly capture various “scenes” of Pilgram’s life, encompassing his exterior engagement with the world and his interior thoughts. Time is less arbitrarily perceived in Nabokov but is nevertheless focalized through the experience of the central character. Analogous to Kafka’s narrative method, and loyal

¹⁰¹ Nabokov, 255.

¹⁰² Because of the episodic narration of “The Metamorphosis” and “The Aurelian,” we read, in a way, fragments from the protagonists’ lives.

to the modernist mode, the narrator in Nabokov does have access to the inner world; primarily, it is Pilgram's thoughts that are being exposed. While the inner worlds of Gregor and Pilgram are beautifully stretched across the stories, both Kafka and Nabokov leave little outer space to their protagonists, a choice that mirrored in Nabokov's observations of Kafka's treatment of his protagonist. Gregor's existence is limited to his flat and meaningless train journeys, but after his metamorphosis, the space wherein he is allowed to exist becomes even smaller and is eventually limited to his own room. Similarly, the contrast between the imagined places in Pilgram's dreams and his actual moving space is striking. Pilgram's real life happens in his flat and the conveniently located tiny shop right in front of it. This handling of the setting contributes to the feeling of claustrophobia that permeates both stories.

As the above summaries suggest, both stories inhabit a space between reality and fantasy. Coincidentally, in his lectures, Nabokov mentions that all the novels included in his course are fairy tales, including Kafka's. While still revising his "Metamorphosis" in 1913, before its publication, Kafka writes in his diary that he "would gladly write fairy tales."¹⁰³ The end of Nabokov's own story confirms that "The Aurelian," too, is a kind of a self-reflexive "fairy tale" in Nabokov's sense: "Yes, Pilgram had gone far, very far. Most probably he visited Granada and Murcia and Albarracin, and then travelled farther still, to Surinam or Taprobane; and one can hardly doubt that he saw all the glorious bugs he had longed to see."¹⁰⁴ In his autobiography, *Speak, Memory*, Nabokov records his intense curiosity for butterflies, dating from 1907, and specifically his interest in continental lepidopterology that flourished in Germany. Besides reading various studies on butterflies, such as Maria Sibylla

¹⁰³ Franz Kafka, *The Diaries 1910-1923*, ed. Max Brod (New York: Schocken Books, 1948), 235.

¹⁰⁴ Nabokov, 258.

Merian's (1647-1717) books on the metamorphosis of insects found in Surinam,¹⁰⁵ Nabokov emphasises his childhood dream to describe a new species, a dream that would come true: as a scientist, Nabokov both named species and had species named after him, including the butterfly genus *Nabokovia*.¹⁰⁶ This desire is also voiced in his protagonist's dream in "The Aurelian" and Pilgram's childhood memories of his father's shop of exotic creatures wherein butterflies had dominated over the other animals.¹⁰⁷

Nabokov's entomological interests extend into a more fascinating aspect of the behaviour of butterflies: the art of mimicry practiced by insects as a defence mechanism or a mode of survival. "The mysteries of mimicry [...] showed an artistic perfection" for Nabokov, and, in *Speak, Memory*, he equates this "imitative behaviour" of insects to the "mimetic subtlety" he often sought in literature.¹⁰⁸ There are two ways in which Nabokov's idea of artistic mimicry could be understood: one, as highlighting the means by which the content of the material world is both mimetically mirrored and acquires a new, transformed shape in literary text (literature as metamorphosis), and two, as evoking Nabokov's approach to his literary influences, and in extension his approach to another writer who focused on animals and transformations through mimicry. Besides "The Metamorphosis," Kafka's story "A Report to an Academy" (1917) narrates the gradual transformation of an ape into a human, by way of imitating human behaviour.¹⁰⁹ Nabokov's subsequent observation that both the mimicry found in nature

¹⁰⁵ Maria Sibylla Merian, *Transformation of the Surinamese Insects* (Amsterdam: Lannoo, 2000).

¹⁰⁶ Nabokov, *Speak, Memory*, 89.

¹⁰⁷ Nabokov, "The Aurelian," 252.

¹⁰⁸ Nabokov, *Speak, Memory*, 90.

¹⁰⁹ Franz Kafka, "A Report to an Academy," in *Kafka's Selected Stories*, ed. and trans. Stanley Corngold (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), 76-84.

and art are “a form of magic, [...] a game of intricate enchantment and deception”¹¹⁰ is crucial for my reading of the trope of metamorphosis utilised in both Nabokov and Kafka: the metamorphoses of Gregor Samsa and Paul Pilgram elicit a deceptive, part-magical and part-real, aspect of literature as such. This is the realm of myth.

The Problem of Myth in Kafka and Nabokov

In “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming” (1908) Freud stresses that “the material is already at hand” for creative writers, and that “it is derived from the popular treasure-house of myths, legends and fairy tales.”¹¹¹ But what is Nabokov and Kafka’s relationship with myth itself? Neither narrative draws, deliberately, on any known specific story of metamorphosis, such as the ones from the classical tradition. The pattern of metamorphosis can be easily identified in Gregor’s magical change into an insect and in Pilgram’s mental journey through the butterfly imagery. However, Kafka’s protagonist is transformed into a human-sized insect which then has to survive within a realistic environment and Pilgram in fact dies without ever travelling. Having said that, I argue that the very absence of a specific myth in both narratives makes myth — or the knowledge of a mythic pattern—a prerequisite for understanding subjectivity in these stories. For this purpose, and of relevance for my thesis as a whole, it is important to pose the question: can metamorphosis exist outside myth? And if a subject’s transformation is uprooted from any allegorical or symbolic meaning, what

¹¹⁰ Nabokov, *Speak, Memory*, 91.

¹¹¹ Freud, “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming,” 152.

repercussions has this aesthetic choice for our reading of the subject in these stories? In the following section I briefly discuss the existing interpretations of Gregor's metamorphosis in terms of its metaphorical and allegorical meaning as well as its mythical allusions. This allows me to explore Kafka's approach to myth and then to compare it with Nabokov's butterfly change.

Little attention has been paid to the absence, or, the alternative treatment, of myth in Kafka's story. A considerable number of scholars have been preoccupied with the role of metaphor as a device for decoding "The Metamorphosis"; is the change meant to be read literally or metaphorically, for instance? This question is relevant to my existing query regarding the relationship of myth and metamorphosis in modernist narratives, such as these two stories by Kafka and Nabokov.

Iris Bruce (1996) considers the metamorphosis as a metaphor for Gregor's alienation and exile, and Nina Pelikan Straus (1996) writes that Gregor's metamorphosis is a parable of Kafka's own struggle with masculinity.¹¹² In his extensive work on Kafka, Walter Sokel underlines the fact that interpreting Kafka's story as "an extended metaphor" does little justice to Kafka's complex narrative.¹¹³ For Sokel, Gregor's change into a verminous creature is a metaphor which became reality, "because of his spineless and abject behaviour and parasitic wishes."¹¹⁴ This interpretation understands metamorphosis as Gregor's fulfilment of an unconscious

¹¹² Iris Bruce, "Elements of Jewish Folklore in Kafka's *Metamorphosis*," 107-125, 125, and, Nina Pelikan Straus, "Transforming Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis*," 126-140, 133, in Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis: Translation, Backgrounds and Contexts, Criticism*, ed. and trans. Stanley Corngold (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996).

¹¹³ Walter Sokel, *Franz Kafka* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), Walter Sokel, "Kafka's 'Metamorphosis': Rebellion and Punishment," *Monatshefte* 48, no.4 (1956): 203-214, accessed June 14, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30166165>.

¹¹⁴ Sokel, *Franz Kafka*, 5.

wish. Sokel's scholarly approach to Kafka's work is psychoanalytically oriented. In "Kafka's 'Metamorphosis': Rebellion and Punishment" (1956), he identifies two causes of Gregor's metamorphosis: his contradictory wishes of rebellion against the company manager, and self-punishment, because of the guilt the wish for rebellion causes.¹¹⁵ Sokel's Freudian approach to Kafka is further explored in this chapter; it is worth mentioning here, though, as Sokel's reading is allegorical: he considers Gregor as a symbol of alienation and social exclusion, a slave to his own work and life, thus he views Gregor's change as an expression of his inner conflict.¹¹⁶

Both punishment and rebellion are associated with metamorphoses in myths and folklore. Metamorphoses occur in Ovid's work, for instance, as a punishment for not obeying a higher authority. In the case of Arachne, a mortal who wishes to compete with a goddess in the art of tapestry, the punishment of transformation into an insect is a result of the mortal's defiance as shown through her weaving.¹¹⁷ In her essay on the impact of Jewish folklore on "The Metamorphosis," Iris Bruce underlines that, besides Kafka's knowledge of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the trope of transformation must have been known to him from Jewish folklore too.¹¹⁸ Taking further Maurice Blanchot's comments, in *The Space of Literature* (1955), on the associations of Gregor's death with the Kabbalistic belief to the transmigration of the soul¹¹⁹ Bruce draws on the similarities between the concept of metempsychosis in Jewish literature and culture, and the Pythagorean teachings on the immortality of the soul in Ovid's work.¹²⁰ As it

¹¹⁵ Sokel, "Kafka's 'Metamorphosis,'" 128.

¹¹⁶ Sokel, 128-129.

¹¹⁷ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 121-125.

¹¹⁸ Bruce, 107.

¹¹⁹ Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, intro. and trans. Ann Smock (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 71.

¹²⁰ Bruce, 109.

is the case for many of Ovid's bodily metamorphoses, the idea of transformation in Judaism is coupled with ideas of punishment, redemption, sexual violations, and exile, all of which are present in religious folk parables of the previous centuries.¹²¹ Even though Gregor has been indeed isolated from the rest of his family to the point of living as an exiled entity in his room, and he is subsequently punished by his father, there is no indication that he, as the subject of metamorphosis, will be redeemed or reborn after his death. Kafka's Jewish identity may point at the religious implications of Gregor's fate¹²², but, as Harold Bloom states, there is a "refusal" on behalf of Kafka to frame any of his stories as Jewish.¹²³ As Bloom puts it, "[t]he story then cannot be interpreted coherently as a fantasy of death and resurrection, or as an allegory on the less-is-more fate of being a writer. It is another Kafkan negation that refuses to negate the given, which is the world of Freud's reality principle."¹²⁴

As I already hinted, both Kafka and Nabokov chose to engage with the idea of metamorphosis, yet without explicit references to the metamorphoses known to readers from the classical tradition, such as Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Apuleius's *The Golden Ass*. Nevertheless, scholars have drawn parallels between Kafka's tale and Ovid, as Theodore Ziolkowski does in his study of the reception of Ovid in the twentieth century. He considers Actaeon's tragic transformation into a deer and his subsequent death by his own hounds as the classical paradigm of Gregor's unexplained change and

¹²¹ Bruce, 109-110.

¹²² In a 1922 diary entry, Kafka writes: "If there is a transmigration of souls then I am not yet on the bottom rung. My life is a hesitation before birth." In Kafka, *The Diaries 1910-1923*, 405.

¹²³ Harold Bloom, ed. *Franz Kafka's The Metamorphosis* (New York: Chelsea House, 2007), 22.

¹²⁴ Bloom, 27. Bloom argues that Kafka's "negation" that is his "self-conscious Jewishness," escapes interpretation and classification under a Jewish or non-Jewish tradition, 21. Bloom suggests that Kafka's works allow for "a mode of negation neither conscious or unconscious, neither Hegelian nor Freudian," 24.

death.¹²⁵ Ziolkowski, like Iris Bruce, also relies on the fact that Kafka must have studied Latin in school, and would, therefore, be able to read Ovid's works. A Nabokov scholar, David Larmour, identifies translation, exile, the crossing of boundaries, and the loss of speech as the aspects which link Nabokov's treatment of metamorphosis in "The Aurelian" to Ovid.¹²⁶ Larmour's suggestion that the metamorphosis causes the isolation of the hero from the outer world in Nabokov's works demonstrates a strong, but not intended, biographical connection to *Metamorphoses*: like Ovid, Nabokov wrote "The Aurelian" while being away from his native country.¹²⁷

These aspects of metamorphosis demonstrate an affinity between Kafka and Nabokov in terms of their relationship to Ovid, and, in extension, to the treatment of metamorphosis, which is not grounded necessarily on myth itself. There is no evidence, for instance, that Gregor's or Pilgram's souls survive the change. Yet both writers focus on the themes which appear at the margins of Ovid's text, and on the dynamics that accompany the metamorphoses that Ovid narrates: namely, the fact that the subjects who experience profound changes are isolated, under pressure, and unable to communicate their inner world. The crossing of bodily boundaries, the entrance of the subjects into the insect world, and the detailed depiction of a metamorphosed yet exiled subjectivity attest to Kafka's influence on Nabokov as well. The feeling of exile, as Larmour identifies it, of being trapped in a state between the old and the new, is manifested in Kafka's hero, Gregor, and the conflict in which he finds himself with regards human and insect instincts. The matter of language and the loss of speech, as

¹²⁵ Ziolkowski, *Ovid and the Moderns*, 78-79.

¹²⁶ David H. J. Larmour, "Pythagoras and the Butterfly: Nabokov's Ovidian Metamorphoses," in *Metamorphoses in Russian Modernism*, ed. Peter I. Barta (New York: Central European University Press, 2000), 61-87, 61.

¹²⁷ Larmour, 66-67.

means of communication with the outside world, is important to Kafka too. Nabokov's protagonist has already suffered a stroke, which has probably affected his speech, while Gregor's bodily metamorphosis results in the loss of human speech which signals the loss of communication with his family. In both cases, the gradual loss of speech intensifies the protagonists' alienation from their families.

Bruce Clarke interprets "The Metamorphosis" on the basis of "an allegory of writing"; by placing Kafka in a category of modernist metamorphic narratives which retell classical allegories, including Ovid's tales, Clarke's study of metamorphic stories explores the metamorphoses of these texts, through the allegory of change.¹²⁸ Clarke believes that Gregor is a cockroach, not a beetle; he nevertheless reminds us that "insects—moths, scarabs, bees—have long been powerful spiritual symbols."¹²⁹ He considers Gregor part of the monster culture in literature, suggesting that he belongs in the realm of the "daemonic" along with other winged creatures, like butterflies and flies.¹³⁰ Pilgram belongs, or rather he aspires to be, in the same realm of winged creatures, as he captures and collects butterflies. Butterflies carry strong mythic associations: they are symbols of the soul, a reference which would not be unknown to neither Kafka nor Nabokov. In a short fragment called "The Hunter Graachus," published posthumously in 1931, Kafka narrates an enigmatic tale. The hunter Graachus, a dead man, is eternally travelling by boat but is trapped in a state between death and life.¹³¹ When questioned about his peculiar existence, the hunter replies that he is unable to access the afterlife world:

¹²⁸ Bruce Clarke, *Allegories of Writing: The Subject of Metamorphosis* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 19.

¹²⁹ Clarke, 84.

¹³⁰ Clarke, 86.

¹³¹ Franz Kafka, "The Hunter Graachus," in Corngold, *Kafka's Selected Stories*, 109-113.

I am always on the immense staircase leading up to it. I roam around on this infinitely wide flight of steps, sometimes up, sometimes down, sometimes to the right, sometimes to the left, always in motion. From being a hunter I've become a butterfly. Don't laugh.¹³²

From this fragment two issues deserve our attention: the association of the butterfly, a creature of continuous motion, to one's soul; and the approach to metamorphosis through irony. The hunter's fate is tragic, yet comical, an approach which is familiar to us from Gregor's metamorphosis. Kafka's take on the belief in immortality in this tale seems mocking, and this has a counterpart in Nabokov's approach to Pilgram's death: his associations with butterflies that would grant him the entrance to the afterlife are present in the narrative, yet this access is not guaranteed. In "The Aurelian" the huge butterflies in Pilgram's window were also recognised by the customers as "symbols of fair weather,"¹³³ which suggests that Nabokov was aware of some, if not all, symbolic meanings of the winged creatures in literature. Clarke's observation, that "[t]he metamorphic body is virtually ironic [...] cryptic, never transparent"¹³⁴ may well apply to both texts under discussion here.

According to Marina Warner, insects, and butterflies in particular, were frequently associated with metamorphic processes in classical myths, Apuleius's tale of "Cupid and Psyche"¹³⁵ being the most common example.¹³⁶ Warner reminds us that the Greek word "psyche," as found in a number of ancient sources, means "butterfly and moth," and has "given us the English Freudian term, *the psyche*."¹³⁷ The butterfly,

¹³² Kafka, 111.

¹³³ Nabokov, "The Aurelian," 248.

¹³⁴ Clarke, 18.

¹³⁵ Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*, trans. P. G. Walsh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹³⁶ Warner, 84.

¹³⁷ Warner traces this parallel in Aristotle's *Historia Animalium* and Plato's *Phaedrus*, Warner, 90.

then, is a commonly used symbol for the soul in mythology—besides its modern, Freudian use—while carrying promises of immortality and rebirth; these qualities extends to scarab beetles as well. But scholars have identified other mythic references in the tales of Kafka and Nabokov, not necessarily originating from the classical literary tradition. For instance, Dean Swinford (2010) argues that Gregor’s species evokes references from Egyptian mythology and religion. “Such a classification (scarab beetle, by extension), Swinford comments, connects the insect of “The Metamorphosis” to a species that has a particular mythic significance,” such as the beetle’s symbolic association with ideas of death and rebirth.¹³⁸

The difficulty with the metamorphic tradition in Kafka and Nabokov lies in their more general rejection of the use of mythic motifs in literature. In his famous lecture on Kafka, Nabokov appears sceptical of the mythical associations in “The Metamorphosis” and he is clearly less appreciative of modernist works which directly draw on myth, such as Thomas Mann’s *Death in Venice* (1912). Nabokov is also critical of mythic-related and psychoanalytic interpretations of Kafka because they draw upon abstract symbols which “may be stupid and trite” for the appreciation of the story.¹³⁹ Nabokov’s rejection of myth is summarised by Foster: “for Nabokov the mythical approach was detestable” and his approach to Kafka is rather “demythified.”¹⁴⁰ Yet, when read together, both Nabokov’s and Kafka’s texts seem to be part of a continuous conversation on subjectivity: a subjectivity which is metamorphic, yet simultaneously demythified. Nabokov’s observation on myth differs, I think, from the wider use of

¹³⁸ Dean Swinford, “The Portrait of an Armor-Plated Sign: Reimagining Samsa’s Exoskeleton,” in *Kafka’s Creatures: Animals, Hybrids, and Other Fantastic Beings*, eds. Marc Lucht and Donna Yarri (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2010), 211-236, 211.

¹³⁹ Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, 255, 283.

¹⁴⁰ Foster, “Kafka and Nabokov,” 447.

myth found in modernist fiction. As Michael Bell argues, in modernist narratives “[m]yth could be many things, including [...] a literary structure, but its most important meaning was as an emblem of the human world as self-created.”¹⁴¹ Kafka’s fiction, continues Bell, encourages a search for meaning in this world, in contrast with other modernist writers who used myth as a structural tool, as Eliot has argued in his essay on James Joyce’s *Ulysses*.¹⁴² If, as Bell claims, “the truest meaning of the modernist use of myth is the self-grounding character of the human world,”¹⁴³ then Nabokov’s approach to Kafka, and to the presence of myth in literature in general, can be read within this context; for both metamorphoses unsettle the self’s “grounding” by all means.

Such an approach to Kafka’s work also informs the influential reading of Kafka’s fiction by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. “Kafka’s animals,” they observe, “never refer to mythology or to archetypes but correspond solely to new levels, zones of liberated intensities where contents free themselves from their forms.”¹⁴⁴ What they suggest is that we need, first and foremost, to perceive Gregor the insect as independent of any mythical archetypes. According to Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka created a whole new idea of metamorphosis, free of mythical references. They, therefore, reject the allegorical or metaphorical interpretations of this change; they write “there is nothing metaphoric about the becoming-animal. No symbolism, no allegory.”¹⁴⁵ Kafka’s metamorphosis is better understood literally. They address Gregor’s transformation

¹⁴¹ Michael Bell, “The Metaphysics of Modernism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, ed. Michael Levenson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 17-18.

¹⁴² T.S. Eliot, “Ulysses, Order and Myth,” 174.

¹⁴³ Bell, 19.

¹⁴⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 13.

¹⁴⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 35.

through the concept of ‘becoming animal/insect.’ In their thinking, “to become animal is to participate in movement, to stake out the path of escape in all its positivity, to cross a threshold.”¹⁴⁶ With these words, Deleuze and Guattari signal three important elements in metamorphic stories and animals. First, metamorphosis is a movement: it is a process and it is not fixed. Second, metamorphosis provides an escape for the self; in the case of Gregor, according to Deleuze and Guattari, it helps him escape from his family and the “bureaucratic and commercial triangle” in which he has been trapped.¹⁴⁷ Thirdly, to change into an animal is to cross the ontological boundary between animal and human, and to embrace a polyphonic subjectivity.¹⁴⁸

In their reading of Kafka, Deleuze and Guattari also put forward the idea of “minor literature.” Kafka’s literature can be called minor, they argue, because it is the kind of writing which is created by a minority, Prague Jewish people for example, but it is written in a major language, like German.¹⁴⁹ Minor literature has three characteristics which make it “revolutionary” they insist. These three elements are the “deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy” and everything in it taking on “a collective value.”¹⁵⁰ While Deleuze and Guattari’s interpretation has often been criticised by Kafka scholars, the functions of

¹⁴⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, 13.

¹⁴⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, 14.

¹⁴⁸ The becoming-animal allows us to think human subjectivity not in its opposition with the animal. Subjectivity for Guattari, is “heterogenous.” In Félix Guattari “Subjectivities: For Better and For Worse,” trans. Sophie Thomas *Chimères* 8 (1990): 23-37. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari write “we do not become animal without a fascination for multiplicity. Or is the multiplicity that fascinates us already related to a multiplicity dwelling within us?” in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. and foreword Brian Massumi (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 262.

¹⁴⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 16.

¹⁵⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, 16-17.

the minor literature they highlight rightly introduce the idea that Kafka's hermetic writing may challenge the established social and political order. In the case of his "Metamorphosis," the process of becoming animal communicates a non-fixed identity, hybrid as it accommodates both the human and the insect, and collective, since Kafka represents a minority.¹⁵¹ To understand this argument better and to recognize how the choices of Kafka, and after him Nabokov, in their ostensibly demythified metamorphoses, articulate a subjectivity in becoming, it is necessary to be aware of the myths and tales around metamorphosis.

Kafka, deliberately, does not make evident the mythic allusions in his "Metamorphosis." He uses some easily recognised religious-mythic references but then proceeds to question them or strip them of their initial meaning by placing them within a displaced context. For example, one could recognise the role of the apple in Gregor's metamorphosis and subsequent death, as an allusion to the biblical-Christian symbol of the apple as the cause of Man's Fall. Gregor dies because his father attacks him by throwing apples at him; one of them sinks in his back, where, eventually, the wound is infected by the rotten fruit.¹⁵² On the one hand, the apple is charged with the religious symbolism of Adam and Eve's fall and the knowledge of good and evil. On the other hand, the apple kills Gregor for good in an act of his father's cruelty.

Nabokov's story pursues an equally paradoxical approach towards traditional metamorphic tales. The dichotomy is encapsulated by the mythically-loaded imagery of metamorphic processes which stems from the natural metamorphoses of the

¹⁵¹ Kafka's use of Czech German dialect signals the text's association with a collective, minority culture. See also Stanley Corngold, "Kafka and the Dialect of Minor Literature," *College Literature* 21, no. 1 (1994): 89-101, accessed June 14, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/i25112076>.

¹⁵² Kafka, "The Metamorphosis," 85.

butterflies and moths. Starting from the image of a caterpillar, then the cocoon, and finally the butterfly, Nabokov implies that his protagonist is currently in a cocoon, almost ready to emerge out of it like a butterfly. When Pilgram is promised a certain amount of money that will allow him to travel outside Berlin, he decides “that the dream of his life was about to break at last from its old crinkly cocoon.”¹⁵³ This promise of rebirth is never fulfilled, as Pilgram falls dead, after a second stroke.

In both Kafka and Nabokov, a new attention to materiality, of both subjects (humans and other species) and objects, is what replaces old mythic templates. It is thus necessary to examine the role of the material insect and its implications in both narratives. Rosi Braidotti has written extensively on the issue of literary metamorphoses which present us with a “nomadic figuration” of subjectivity, following Deleuze’s theories.¹⁵⁴ Becoming insect, she argues, causes “a sense of alienation” and “arouses the same spasmodic reactions to humans as the monstrous, the sacred, the alien.”¹⁵⁵ The word that Kafka used is “*Ungeziefer*” which in German means “vermin.” Because Kafka never clarified the species of vermin, the interpretations of Kafka’s scholars differ as to whether Gregor is a cockroach or a beetle. Here, the species of insect is of lesser importance than the alternative connotation of *Ungeziefer*, emphasised by translator Susan Bernofsky, and other scholars of Kafka before her, as an “unclean animal not suited for sacrifice.”¹⁵⁶ In “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Vermin,” Stanley Corngold highlights that “the etymological background” of the word

¹⁵³ Nabokov, “The Aurelian,” 256.

¹⁵⁴ Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002).

¹⁵⁵ Braidotti, 149.

¹⁵⁶ Susan Bernofsky (2014), in Kafka, “The Metamorphosis,” 121. Stanley Corngold (2011) and Bruce Clarke (1995) have also stressed that Gregor is unclean for sacrifice.

contributes to “the uncanny, mysterious, unfortunate identity of this non-thing.”¹⁵⁷ Gregor’s new form is therefore associated with dirt, disease, and pestilence. It is also culturally situated in Kafka’s time; beetles or insects, even more so cockroaches, are not welcome in houses and carry diseases. Gregor’s mother believes her son is sick, and the taking away of his furniture would mean that they “are giving up all hope of a cure.”¹⁵⁸ The insect Gregor enjoys being unclean, he likes dirt and rotten food. His unsuitability for sacrifice is crucial in the whole figuration, a point which I will return to later. Here, I would like to turn to the event of Gregor’s death as being devoid of symbolic or metaphoric references.

Soon after Gregor dies, the cleaning woman exclaims that “it’s gone and croaked –just lying there, dead as a doornail!”¹⁵⁹ The insect, that is, Gregor, is dead. Progressively being emptied out of his human subjectivity, Gregor ends up being treated as a monstrous other, as Braidotti argued about insects, undeserving of a proper burial. It is as if the human Gregor never existed, because the death of his insect body overshadows his prior existence. Melissa De Bruyker observes that, at Gregor’s death, “all that is left [...] is a dry shell reminiscent of a cocoon rather than of a human being.”¹⁶⁰ The insect-metamorphosis may open a possibility for Gregor to escape his intolerable existence, as Deleuze and Guattari have argued. Nabokov also supports this

¹⁵⁷ Stanley Corngold and Benno Wagner, “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Vermin (The Metamorphosis),” in *Franz Kafka: The Ghosts in the Machine* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2011), 58.

¹⁵⁸ Kafka, “The Metamorphosis,” 73.

¹⁵⁹ Kafka, 111.

¹⁶⁰ Melissa De Bruyker, “Who Identified the Animal? Hybridity and Body Politics in Kafka’s ‘The Metamorphosis’ and *Amerika (The Man Who Disappeared)*,” in Marc Lucht and Donna Yarri, 191-210, 195.

notion as he hypothesizes on Gregor's hidden wings, and stresses how Kafka's hero attempted to "cast off the mask, to transcend the cloak or the carapace."¹⁶¹

The use of insects in "The Aurelian" serves a similar function, as Pilgram is alienated, fragile, and silent; these features imply that his subtle existence imitates an insect's fragile life, even before his death. Pilgram, whose name is given to a butterfly, also has a short life span. The butterfly imagery is carefully spread throughout the story, from Pilgram's glass case of rare butterflies to his secret dreams, and to his state of mind which is full of butterfly trips, away from Berlin.¹⁶² As in Kafka, metamorphosis in Nabokov is also situated in the insect kingdom, but not among the monstrous insects. Butterflies, of different kinds and with delightful open wings, promise a metamorphosis to their collector, Pilgram, as impressive as their own. The story is set among butterflies, inspiring the hope that Pilgram can mimic their metamorphosis. The butterflies accompany the lepidopterist from the very beginning till the end of the story; seemingly watching his movements with "eyed-wings wide open in wonder, shimmering blue satin, black magic." The narrator describes the creatures as "eyed wings star[ing] at him from all sides."¹⁶³ Nabokov achieves a metamorphic effect by giving the winged insects anthropomorphic details. This effect has been noticed by Maxim D. Shrayer, especially in the original Russian sentences.¹⁶⁴ The anthropomorphic details are effective, he argues, in establishing Pilgram's

¹⁶¹ Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, 280.

¹⁶² Nabokov, "The Aurelian," 254, 259.

¹⁶³ Nabokov, 248, 257.

¹⁶⁴ For instance, in the English version we read about "the squat and dusky Corsican swallowtail"; in the Russian version the Corsican butterfly is described as "*smuglyj*," which according to Shrayer, refers to dark skin or face. Maxim D. Shrayer, "Pilgrimage, Memory and Death in Vladimir Nabokov's Short Story 'The Aurelian'," *The Slavic and East European Journal* 40, no. 4 (1996): 700-725, 707, accessed June 14, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/310108>.

“communication with the lepidopterological otherworld.”¹⁶⁵ The breaking out of the cocoon is suggestive of Pilgram’s upcoming rebirth; he thinks he is going to be transformed through the fulfilment of his dream. Nabokov’s metamorphosis is, as Braidotti states, one of “the sensory and cognitive apparatus.”¹⁶⁶

The insect imagery brings together Kafka and Nabokov in unexpected ways. For example, David Larmour writes about the use of butterflies in Nabokov that “the development of the hungry caterpillar into the butterfly serves as a metaphor for the relationship between Nabokov and all those other texts which he incorporates, through pastiche, allusion and parody, into his own complex creations.”¹⁶⁷ Simply put, Kafka’s influence on Nabokov’s writing goes deeper than the mere use of the insect metamorphosis in their stories, and the following section will shed light on, among other things, the parameters of this intertextual admiration.

Metamorphoses and Language

In both texts under discussion here the trope of metamorphosis is used in twofold ways: to articulate a new vision of what constitutes subjectivity; and to propose a distinct understanding of the workings of literature as such: how mimicry operates and what strategies it uses to transform life into art, and, potentially, transform its readership, too. The fusion of the two uses is informed by a fundamental modernist belief in the

¹⁶⁵ Shroyer, 708.

¹⁶⁶ Braidotti, 149.

¹⁶⁷ Larmour, 62.

continuities between art and life, one that Nabokov and Kafka shared. To approach the interrelation of these strands, then, I undertake an inquiry into the metamorphic literary idiom through which both writers describe subjectivity and its transformation. To facilitate it, I shall detour through Nabokov's own reading of Kafka.

John Foster has argued that Nabokov's first reading of Kafka's "The Metamorphosis" cannot be accurately calculated chronologically,¹⁶⁸ but John Updike supports Nabokov's own claims that, due to his inadequate knowledge of German, he could not read Kafka before 1930.¹⁶⁹ While the debate remains inconclusive, Nabokov's interest in Kafka certainly goes beyond simple admiration. "The Aurelian" "signals the possibility of greater openness to Kafka," writes Foster, and provides "a possible basis for long-term impact, even if first contact came after 1930."¹⁷⁰ Nabokov placed Kafka among the greatest writers of his time, and he frequently mentioned Kafka and his works in his interviews and public appearances.¹⁷¹ Nabokov thought so highly of Kafka and his stories, however, not because the content of Kafka's fiction was attractive—even when the story featured an insect and a metamorphosis—but primarily because of his distinctive style, narrative method, and language.

In terms of style, the French writer Gustave Flaubert's influence brings Nabokov and Kafka even closer. Nabokov himself observes during his lecture on Kafka

¹⁶⁸ Foster, "Nabokov and Kafka," 449.

¹⁶⁹ John Updike writes that Nabokov said in a BBC interview in 1969: "I do not know German and so could not read Kafka before the nineteen thirties, when his *La Metamorphose* appeared in *La nouvelle Revue Française*." In his lecture on Kafka, Nabokov claims he uses the 1933 English translation of "The Metamorphosis" by Willa and Edwin Muir, but, judging by his remarks on the case he probably first consulted the English translation by Eugene Jolas [1936-1937-1938] which appeared in a French journal. In *Lectures on Literature*, xx-xxi.

¹⁷⁰ Foster, 449.

¹⁷¹ When compared to Rainer Maria Rilke or Thomas Mann, Franz Kafka was superior, according to Nabokov. Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, 255.

that “Flaubert who loathed pretty-pretty prose would have applauded Kafka’s attitude towards his tool.”¹⁷² Nabokov proceeds to note that the use of language and narrative mode in “The Metamorphosis” fully corresponds to Flaubert’s method.¹⁷³ In another one of his lectures, Nabokov argued that Flaubert uses his style in such way that his novel *Madame Bovary* (1856) “is also a prose poem but one that is composed better, with a closer, finer texture,” and finds a similar approach to language in Kafka.¹⁷⁴ What makes “The Metamorphosis,” in particular, such a successful narrative, Nabokov suggests, is the “ironic precision” of Kafka’s words, a feature he shares with Flaubert.¹⁷⁵ It is this “ironic precision” in Kafka’s use of scientific language in the story of Gregor, which Nabokov finds admirable.¹⁷⁶ Indeed, Kafka’s consistent use of irony results in making Gregor’s transformation tragic, and in certain scenes almost comic. Hours after his sudden metamorphosis Gregor has yet not understood how intimidating or revolting his own body has become, because the prospect of “losing his position” and “abandoning his family” makes him forget about his new form.¹⁷⁷ In a desperate attempt to convince his company manager that he can fulfil his work duties in the same morning of his change, he shouts at him from his bed: “I am feeling very much refreshed. Here, I’m getting up. Just a moment’s patience!”¹⁷⁸ Gregor’s attempt at lifting his uncooperative body from the bed results in him falling on the floor. Gregor thinks “the resulting sound was muffled and not so obvious,” yet, from the manager’s

¹⁷² Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, 256.

¹⁷³ Nabokov, 171, 256.

¹⁷⁴ “Stylistically it is prose doing what poetry is supposed to do” Nabokov writes, in *Lectures on Literature*, 123.

¹⁷⁵ Nabokov, 256.

¹⁷⁶ Nabokov, 256.

¹⁷⁷ Kafka, “The Metamorphosis,” 35.

¹⁷⁸ Kafka, 37.

point of view, this sound is suspicious: “*something* just fell” in Gregor’s room, he says.¹⁷⁹

This economic irony fuses the concerns of work, employability, survival, and alienation in work with the protagonist’s bodily metamorphosis. No matter how nightmarish Gregor’s situation seems to the reader, it was not totally unrealistic. Ruth Gross has remarked that, “in the world of late nineteenth-century bourgeois Europe, work was more than an economic necessity—it became a way of defining individuals in modern society.”¹⁸⁰ Gregor becomes “something” when he is unable to communicate with his manager through the closed door of his room. His miserable existence has its roots in the job he has to keep; otherwise, he is told, he and his family will not survive. Kafka, by all accounts, was a hard-working employee who navigated the work system with skill, but his own attitude towards work was ambivalent, and—as it emerges from his private testimonies—inimical and sarcastic. In a letter to his friend and editor Max Brod in 1912, Kafka complains that he has to replace his brother-in-law as a manager in the family’s factory for two weeks after submitting to tremendous pressure from his family, including his younger sister. Kafka is terrified of the idea that his writing will be interrupted because of this work-related obligation; he tells Brod that he would rather jump out of the window during the night, thus abandoning both his responsibility towards the factory and finishing his novel.¹⁸¹

The incompatibility of work and pursuing one’s dreams and creative tendencies concerns Nabokov’s story as well. Pilgram and his wife have debts since their shop

¹⁷⁹ Kafka, 33, (My emphasis).

¹⁸⁰ Ruth V. Gross, “Kafka’s Short Fiction,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Kafka*, ed. Jullian Preece (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 80-94, 80.

¹⁸¹ Kafka, *Briefe*, 109, in Corngold, *The Metamorphosis: Translation, Backgrounds and Contexts, Criticism*, 61.

does not make enough profit. As in Kafka's story, selling stationery is neither productive for Pilgram nor does it allow him to travel. Ironically, both Kafka and Nabokov seem to imply that the main obstacle preventing their protagonists from fulfilling their dreams is the same thing it ensures their survival; their job. It is not accidental that in the beginning of twentieth century the idea of work is perceived both by Gregor and Pilgram as asphyxiating their dreams.

At the same time, both Gregor and Pilgram are alienated from their families and social surroundings. The alienation becomes more profound as both protagonists experience their transformation. Gregor, marked as a monstrous entity, is forced to stay in his dark room until his death. Pilgram's similarly lonely existence completely vanishes upon his death. In each case, the society's indifference towards its suffering, marginalized, member is frightening, and Kafka uses irony to highlight it. Both Kafka's and Nabokov's stories articulate a non-stable identity, profoundly altered by social and economic factors.

At this point, it is worth mentioning that the precision in narrating, or transforming the material world into an artwork, achieved through the specific attention paid to the subtleties of narrative mode and language, can be also found in Nabokov's own works. The ironic tone can be identified in "The Aurelian." Nabokov describes Pilgram as a "first-class entomologist" but then proceeds to inform us that the rare moth, which is incidentally called "agrotis pilgrami," was named by another famous entomologist, Dr Hans Rebel;¹⁸² the situation is also subtly ironized by the fictional fact that Pilgram had never travelled in any other country, or anywhere outside his native Berlin.¹⁸³ The omniscient narrator of the story stresses Pilgram's identity as an

¹⁸² Hans Rebel (1861-1940) was, in fact, an Austrian entomologist.

¹⁸³ Nabokov, "The Aurelian," 251-252.

“Aurelian” but also qualifies it with an ambivalent introjection: “for Pilgram belonged, *or rather was meant to belong* (something—the place, the time, the man—had been ill-chosen), to a special breed of dreamers, such *dreamers* as used to be called in the old days ‘Aurelians.’”¹⁸⁴ Such introjected clauses that impart ambivalence into what is said around them, are typical of both Nabokov’s and Kafka’s prose, and are expressions of the operation of metamorphosis in the language itself. The narrator leaves the reader to decide which of these factors were responsible for Pilgram’s unsuccessful career as a lepidopterist. Aurelians, according to the narrator, belong to a category of dreamers; we are not informed whether this means they simply like to dream, or, they are privy to their own dreams. The fact that Pilgram is referred to by his professional denomination as ‘Herr Professor,’ is ironically indicative of his unrealised potential. The day that Pilgram’s luck changes, is April Fool’s Day, while the money he acquires to travel comes from deceiving the owner of the species he has sold. In addition, and in line with Nabokov’s observations about mimicry and deception amongst butterflies, the insects Pilgram manages to sell in order to travel are a species of “clear-winged moths that mimic wasps or mosquitoes.”¹⁸⁵ The language Nabokov uses aspires to transform Pilgram’s dreary everyday life to a dreamlike landscape made of different countries and, fittingly, colourful butterflies and moths. At the same time, this use of language veils the text with subtle irony. Pilgram’s dreams could be deceptive, for instance. In both Kafka’s and Nabokov’s texts the very use of irony gestures towards metamorphosis, too: this mode transforms the literal mimicry into a creative act, and changes the very meaning of the words that appear on the page.

¹⁸⁴ Nabokov, 250, (My emphasis).

¹⁸⁵ Nabokov, 255.

The metaphorical aspect of the very language in which a metamorphosis is described has attracted Stanley Corngold's attention, who suggests that, in Kafka, we are in fact reading a "decayed" metaphor for Gregor's real role in his family.¹⁸⁶ In his 1988 essay, "Metamorphosis of the Metaphor," Corngold examines Kafka's language choices to support the claim that Gregor's change is in fact a distorted metaphor of ordinary language, a transformation of a familiar metaphor which attests to Kafka's aesthetic approach to language and metaphors in his own writing.¹⁸⁷ In December 1922 Kafka writes in his diary that "[m]etaphors are one among many things which make me despair of writing."¹⁸⁸ Although written after the publication of "The Metamorphosis," this fragment suggests an enduring struggle with metaphorical writing in Kafka's creative process. Corngold's observations about Kafka's "metamorphosis of the function of language" reveals one of the many issues which are at stake in Kafka's story. Metamorphosis stands both as a literary trope and, as Corngold suggests, an aesthetic intervention which challenges the traditional use of metaphor—an age-old device by which something familiar is metamorphosed into something strange and with new sets of meaning. One should understand this change in the context of Kafka's and Nabokov's compensatory attention to irony.

I shall return to the question of the new use of metamorphosis to challenge metaphors later, but here I would like to emphasise that the irony of the text is carefully organised. Nabokov requires "precision" both at the level of language and that of the structure. "My course," he writes, describing the literature course he taught at Cornell,

¹⁸⁶ Stanley Corngold, *Lambent Traces: Franz Kafka* (Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2004) and *The Ghosts in the Machine* (2011).

¹⁸⁷ Stanley Corngold, "Metamorphosis of the Metaphor," in Stanley Corngold, *Franz Kafka: The Necessity of Form* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1988), 47-80.

¹⁸⁸ Kafka, *The Diaries 1910-1923*, 398.

“among other things, is a kind of detective investigation of the mystery of literary structures.”¹⁸⁹ He is very keen to identify the thematic structures in “The Metamorphosis.” Recognising the dream-like organisation of Kafka’s “The Metamorphosis,” Nabokov suggests that the story is superiorly sequenced: he divides the first part “into seven scenes or segments,” and the second and third part of the story into ten scenes each. These segments correspond to the division of the Samsa flat, with its numerous rooms and doors. Having sketched the Samsa flat himself, Nabokov states: “[t]his apartment, a flat in an apartment house, in Charlotte Street to be exact, is divided into segments *as he will be divided himself*.”¹⁹⁰ A divided existence, ironically resulting from a divided life, fully corresponds to Gregor’s being, but also to Kafka’s own everyday life, one may add. The division of “The Metamorphosis” into three parts, and then into numerous scenes, could also correspond to the segments on Gregor’s brown insect belly. The organisation of Kafka’s story, thus, replicates both the setting and the physical appearance of the transformed protagonist, but also exteriorises his inner division. What Nabokov intimates in Kafka’s fiction is a continuity between the structure, and the outward and the interior represented worlds.

Comparing the structures and the thematic lines between the stories of Kafka and Nabokov, then, one can perceive that “The Aurelian” is also meticulously thematically divided. The story can be seen as having four distinct parts which represent different phases of Pilgram’s life: the description of his life in Berlin, followed by the description of the impossible life he imagines; third is the preparation for this dream to come true, and finally, the outcome. The division of Pilgram’s life into stages could also represent the stages of the caterpillar’s transformation into a

¹⁸⁹ Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, 1.

¹⁹⁰ Nabokov, 256, (My emphasis).

butterfly; a parallel of which Nabokov would be aware given his entomological expertise. In both narratives, then, a correspondence between outer world, inner states, and the language and construction through which these are related, is established.

This continuity becomes even more noticeable if we look closer at each of the diegetic metamorphoses. Such close scrutiny may provide us with an insight into another way in which Kafka's and Nabokov's metamorphic language operates—namely, its oneiric mode—but may also give us a clearer sense of the image of the human that these texts portray, one that envisions the subjecthood as established between dreams and reality. This is indeed how Kafka described Gregor's change for the first time: “[w]hen Gregor Samsa woke one morning from troubled dreams, he found himself transformed right there in his bed into some sort of monstrous insect.”¹⁹¹ The reason for this sudden transformation is unknown, but Gregor contemplates “*it was no dream,*” as if he had dreamed about his change the previous night and only now, after having seen his “curved brown belly,” he remembered the content of his dream.¹⁹² The story begins with Gregor having been metamorphosed at some point during the night. Gregor raises his head only to discover that he has numerous legs, feelers, no teeth and a segmented body that is hard to control. Kafka does not illuminate us as to whom or what might have caused this monstrous change.

Kafka himself often recorded his dreams, as well as his thoughts on their meaning, in his diaries. One such example is a 1911 diary entry wherein he describes one of his many sleepless nights in detail:

I have not slept at all or only under a thin skin [...] and feel myself rejected by sleep. I sleep alongside myself, so to speak, while I myself must struggle with

¹⁹¹ Kafka, “The Metamorphosis,” 21, (My emphasis).

¹⁹² Kafka, 21, (My emphasis).

these dreams. [...] When I awaken, all the dreams are gathered about me, but I am careful not to reflect on them.¹⁹³

Reading Gregor's awakening in "The Metamorphosis" in light of Kafka's own thoughts about his own dreams, Kafka's hero seems to have committed a mistake: he does not reflect upon the content of his dream. In another diary entry from the same year, Kafka acknowledges the "powerful" presence of dreams which persists from the evening until the next morning, especially as he sits down to write. "Again it was the power of my dreams, shining forth into wakefulness," writes Kafka, describing a power that seems to follow him after he is awoken and which affects the writing process.¹⁹⁴

Dreams of Metamorphosis

Numerous scholars have interpreted the Gregor's change as originating from his unconscious, based on his dream the night before, and his metamorphosis as a result of his troubled relationship with his father.¹⁹⁵ At this point, it is worth introducing two of Freud's principal theories: that of the content, function, and interpretation of dreams, and that of the Oedipus Complex. This section will consider the first of these theories in relation to the specific instances of metamorphosis in Kafka's and Nabokov's texts.

¹⁹³ Kafka, *The Diaries 1910-1923*, 60.

¹⁹⁴ Kafka, 62.

¹⁹⁵ See for example, Sokel "Kafka's 'Metamorphosis,'" and, Lorna Martens, *Shadow Lines: Austrian Literature from Freud to Kafka* (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1996).

In *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), Freud introduced his theories about various types of dreams; their interpretation, their source and content, as well as their relation to memory, and their relation to the unconscious mind. To be able to examine a dream's structure, writes Freud, we need to be aware of its distinguishing features. For instance, dreams are mainly made from visual images and sometimes "with impressions received from other senses."¹⁹⁶ To interpret a dream, Freud follows very specific methods: the dream could be read symbolically, or it can be "decoded."¹⁹⁷ However, Freud argues that dreams in literature should be only read symbolically.¹⁹⁷ Freud interpreted a substantial amount of his patients' dreams as repressed or unrealised wishes which are revealed only after the details of the dream have been interpreted. The fulfilment of wishes is therefore vital to our understanding of the content of most dreams.¹⁹⁸ Our unconscious conceals these wishes, or fears, hence the content of a dream may appear as distorted to the dreamer.¹⁹⁹ Because of this distortion, the dream is differentiated by its latent and manifest content. The manifest content of a dream is the one that is easily identified, in our memory. The latent content, which is more important, is the hidden content which becomes apparent only after the manifest content has been interpreted. After examining a range of different dreams of his own and of his patients, Freud came to the conclusion that a dream's manifest content is compressed.²⁰⁰ Another feature of the function of dreams is what Freud called secondary revision. This takes place when the dream is filtered or interpreted during

¹⁹⁶ Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 61.

¹⁹⁷ Freud, 111.

¹⁹⁸ "When the task of interpretation is complete, a dream can be seen to constitute wish-fulfilment."
Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 132.

¹⁹⁹ Freud, 149.

²⁰⁰ Dream-condensation and dream displacement contribute to the discovery of the latent content of dreams. Freud, 324.

sleep before the actual analysis or discussion of it. The revision of the dream content gives the dream its coherent meaning when it is retold. Freud stresses that when this process is absent, the dreams are presented as fragments.²⁰¹ Memory is, thus, crucial in our reconsideration and narration of a dream. Essentially, secondary revision is responsible for making a dream akin to a narrative, which then can be told to the analyst.

Following the above theoretical grounding, we can assume that the manifest content of Gregor's night dream was perhaps a nightmarish change into a verminous insect; but the latent one could be different. The latent content could represent an unfulfilled wish; a form that would allow Gregor to be free from any responsibility towards his family. The content of the dream is a distorted, repressed wish coming from Gregor's unconscious. In addition, Gregor's first thought about his dream leads us to Freud's words about secondary revision: "when the thought 'it is only a dream' occurs during a dream, [...] it is aimed at reducing the importance of what has just been experienced and at making it possible to tolerate what is to follow."²⁰² Gregor's dream, assuming it took place the night before, should have been a dream in which he, himself, was not human anymore. Gregor would like to believe it was only a nightmare but upon awakening, he realises the dream came true after he remembers its manifest content.

A frequently debated issue in the scholarship on "The Metamorphosis" is whether Kafka's story is entirely a dream.²⁰³ In the light of Freud's discussion of

²⁰¹ Freud, 488.

²⁰² Freud, 488.

²⁰³ David Gallagher, for instance, considers Kafka's text to be subverting the Freudian concept of a dream, as it seems that Gregor's dream of him being an insect continues after he is awake. David Gallagher, *Metamorphosis: Transformations of the Body and the Influence of Ovid's Metamorphoses on Germanic Literature of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Netherlands: Brill, 2009), 70.

dreams, Kafka's story is close to a dream structure. "The Metamorphosis" resembles a dream in the sense that it is constituted by sensory and visual images, not necessarily arranged chronologically, with some time gaps experienced by the subject. Indeed, after his change, Gregor, and with him, the reader, has a very loose sense of the time passing. Gregor does not know what month or day it is: "Christmas had passed now, hadn't it?"²⁰⁴ Therefore, some of the events in the story resemble the fragmented scenes of a dream. On the other hand, the story is still coherent, which gives reason to Freud's concept of secondary revision by the dreamer. Therefore, if Kafka's story were a dream, it would have been the product of revision. However, the insect's death in the end of the story and the reassurance that Gregor's family thrived after they got rid of him, shows to the reader that the metamorphosis was not a dream, but a disturbing, fictional reality. Although there is some indication to the contrary, the overall story is too coherent to be a dream. Through close reading of Kafka's story, the difference between a dream and dream-like narration becomes more distinct. Kafka's story-telling "template" does indeed mimic the structure of dreams or nightmares: this very template allows Kafka to narrate his metamorphosis from the insect's perspective. I, therefore, suggest that the story cannot be considered as a dream per se; instead, the dream-like narration is used as a device to record Gregor's subjective metamorphic experience accurately.

How is metamorphosis experienced subjectively? Pilgram's weakened self is temporarily renewed by the hope of butterfly-collecting, and the narrator provides the confirmation that "[t]he much more expensive visit to the travel agency already referred

Walter H. Sokel, on the other hand, considers Kafka's story can be better understood in light of Freud's writings on dreams and the unconscious. Walter H. Sokel, *The Myth of Power and the Self: Essays on Franz Kafka* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002), 17.

²⁰⁴ Kafka, "The Metamorphosis," 101.

to his new existence, where only butterflies mattered.”²⁰⁵ Foreshadowing his terrible fate in the third part of the story, we read that, while Pilgram is planning the greatly-anticipated journey and the discovery of a rare species, “suddenly something black and blinding welled before his eyes.”²⁰⁶ This is an ambivalent image which certainly suggests that his health will deteriorate but also implies that a winged creature obstructed his view only momentarily. Indeed, in Pilgram’s final moments, only the butterflies watch him when the second stroke kills him “in the twilight of the strangely still shop.”²⁰⁷ Nabokov prepares the ground for his protagonist’s upcoming change by describing his secret ambition. The “phantom of the perfect happiness” was to travel, at least in Europe, in the worlds he had already shaped in his mind with the utmost detail. This world, created from Pilgram’s daydreams, is half real and half imaginary: “there were no casinos, no old churches” but plenty of rare butterflies to capture.²⁰⁸ Freud described such a fantasy in “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming”: “the motive forces of fantasies are unsatisfied wishes, and every single fantasy is the fulfilment of a wish, a correction of unsatisfying reality.”²⁰⁹ Correspondingly, Pilgram’s daydreams of travelling function as an improvement of his present life which fails to make him happy. Having described the Islands of the Blessed, Corsica, Madrid, and Andalusia where Pilgram would go, had his economic situation allowed it, the narrator proceeds to the final stage of the protagonist’s day-dreamt metamorphosis. Pilgram is preparing to emerge from his old life into a new one, and he does so, except that he is not actually alive. Nabokov depicts more magnificent places where Pilgram travelled to, and even

²⁰⁵ Nabokov, “The Aurelian,” 257.

²⁰⁶ Nabokov, 258.

²⁰⁷ Nabokov, 257.

²⁰⁸ Nabokov, 252-53.

²⁰⁹ Freud, “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming,” 145.

the kind of insects he saw: “velvety black butterflies soaring over the jungles.”²¹⁰ But this is Pilgram’s after-life world because his body is left in the shop: “Eleanor saw the checkered suitcase, and then her husband, sprawling on the floor with his back to the counter, among scattered coins, his livid face knocked out of shape by death.”²¹¹ So Pilgram is eventually transformed, but, in an ironic twist, his metamorphosis is spiritual since he dies suddenly. What lingers at the end of the story is the protagonist’s oneiric journey.

In his autobiography, Nabokov offers his readers the opportunity to access his own dreams related to his passion for collecting butterflies and observing the intricate details of the insect body. “It was all there, brilliantly reproduced in my dream,” he recalls, as a childhood memory of the discovery of an Emperor moth is incorporated in his dream: “the subsiding spasms of its [the insect’s] body; the satisfying crackle produced by the pin penetrating the hard crust of its thorax; the symmetrical adjustment of the thick, strong-veined wings.”²¹² Nabokov’s admiration for the insect body contrasts with Kafka’s use of the insect imagery in a fragment of his novella *Wedding Preparations in the Country* (1907) which is also related to dreaming and fantasising: “[a]s I lie in bed I assume the shape of a big beetle, a stag beetle or a June beetle. [...] Then I would pretend it were a matter of hibernating, and I would press my little legs against my bulging body.”²¹³ Kafka’s protagonist wishes he were a beetle and is mentally transformed into one as he lies in bed, in a scene which could well be a

²¹⁰ Nabokov, 254.

²¹¹ Nabokov, 258.

²¹² Nabokov, *Speak, Memory*, 89.

²¹³ Franz Kafka, *Wedding Preparations in the Country*, trans. Stanley Corngold, in *The Metamorphosis: Translation, Backgrounds and Contexts, Criticism*, ed. Corngold, 61. Kafka never finished this story.

precursor of Gregor's transformation. Kafka thus establishes an intimate relationship with the body of an insect, one which implies the adopting of the creature's own body and ability to lie down—features which Gregor adopts too. Nabokov's thoughts about the Emperor moth, on the other hand, show that he remains an enchanted observer of the intricately constructed body of an insect. Yet, in "The Aurelian," Pilgram ceases to be a mere observer of insects but attempts to participate in their transformations. Both Nabokov's and Kafka's wording of the insect body is rooted in a daydream or a fantasy: the beetle is a fine replacement for the human body in Kafka's story, as in Kafka's unfinished novel the human body is separated from the big beetle. In Nabokov's dream, as in his real life, the human interacts with the insect through the act of literally pinning down the butterfly body in order to study it and eventually possess it. Gennady Barabtarlo's recent study on Nabokov's dream experiments reveals that, besides the frequent butterfly-related dreams, Nabokov paid great attention to dreams related to his father.²¹⁴ These dreams, Barabtarlo argues, have been transformed and incorporated within Nabokov's fiction, and he notes that "seeing one's dead father is a particularly poignant theme" in Nabokov's novels and short stories.²¹⁵

²¹⁴ Vladimir Nabokov, *Insomniac Dreams: Experiments with Time*, ed. Gennady Barabtarlo (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2018). Barabtarlo compiled and annotated Nabokov's dreams, which Nabokov himself had recorded from 1964 until 1965.

²¹⁵ Barabtarlo, 153.

Fathers, Sons, and Metamorphosis

Interpretations of “The Metamorphosis” frequently rely on Freud’s theory of the Oedipus Complex. With reference to the plot of Sophocles’ tragedy, *Oedipus Rex*, Freud considered that his patients’ dreams of sexual nature were the proof that “primeval wishes of childhood” directed infants towards the rejection of the father and the claiming of the mother’s love. Freud hypothesizes, in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, that the narrative of Oedipus provides an adequate explanation of infantile sexuality and, more generally, children’s psychological development:

This discovery is confirmed by a legend that has come down to us from classical antiquity: a legend whose profound and universal power to move can only be understood if the hypothesis I have put forward in regard to the psychology of children has an equally universal validity. What I have in mind is the legend of King Oedipus and Sophocles’ drama which bears his name.²¹⁶

Freud’s discovery is worth examining, though, not only because it suggests the existence of unconscious wishes in infants and hence in adults, but also because of his assumption that the taboo he recognises in Sophocles’ tragedy may express a common wish of ours. “There must be something which makes a voice within us ready to recognize the compelling force of destiny in the Oedipus” comments Freud on the effect of the tragedy.²¹⁷ Yet, we need to remember that Freud is here reading a literary work. Shoshana Felman emphasises that the theory of the Oedipus Complex is a quintessential psychoanalytic theory, “a reference narrative—the specimen story of psychoanalysis,” which allows “the psychoanalytic story-telling [to turn] and [return] back upon itself, in the unprecedented, Freudian narrative-discursive space in which

²¹⁶ Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 260.

²¹⁷ Freud, 262.

narration becomes theory.”²¹⁸ Indeed, Freud’s interpretation of Oedipus’ tragic actions—the murder of his father Laius and his subsequently marriage with his mother, Jocasta—compels us to also consider another aspect of psychoanalysis, one that helps us read works of literature under a different light. Freud writes about *Oedipus Rex*:

His destiny moves us only because it might have been ours—because the oracle laid the same curse upon us before our birth as upon him. It is the fate of all of us, perhaps, to direct our first sexual impulse towards our mother and our first hatred and our first murderous wish against our father. Our dreams convince us that that is so. King Oedipus, who slew his father Laïus and married his mother Jocasta, merely shows us the fulfilment of our own childhood wishes.²¹⁹

Yet, these unconscious childhood wishes cannot be fulfilled, according to Freud, as they would constitute an unthinkable and repulsive situation. This is the reason why Oedipus is blind in the end of the tragedy; the taboo of incest has been broken so there has to be a punishment. “These dreams, when dreamt by adults, are accompanied by feelings of repulsion,” notes Freud, “so too the legend must include horror and self-punishment.”²²⁰ In the same text, Freud moves on to apply the theory of the Oedipus Complex to Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* in order to make an important distinction, or addition to the theory: while in Sophocles’ tragedy, Freud argues, the unconscious wish becomes true in front of the audience and is presented in its close proximity with dreams, in *Hamlet* “it remains repressed; and—just as in the case of a neurosis—we only learn of its existence from its inhibiting consequences.”²²¹ Freud’s brief

²¹⁸ Shoshana Felman, “Beyond Oedipus: The Specimen Story of Psychoanalysis,” *Comparative Literature* 98, no. 5 (1983): 1021-1053, 1022, accessed June 14, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2906059>.

²¹⁹ Freud, 262.

²²⁰ Freud, 263.

²²¹ Freud, 263.

mentioning of *Hamlet* in terms of his unresolved Oedipus Complex and the existence of repressed wishes is also significant here as Freud investigates Hamlet and his relationship to his family in light of Shakespeare's relationship to his father and the death of his son.²²²

Freud's reading of *Oedipus Rex* and *Hamlet* is a seminal text for the dialogue between psychoanalytic discourse and literature. Consequently, it is crucial for my reading of subjectivity in Kafka and Nabokov. Jemma Deer's thoughts on Freud's legacy and how this changed the way we read literature are illuminating in this respect:

Oedipus had an Oedipus complex—but he was not the first. Freud recognises thus that there has not been a (progressive or otherwise) development of the psyche, as the impulses of 'our own inner minds' have not changed from 'the past' that is being unravelled. What has changed, however, are the social conditions that that mind operates within, and, thus, as Freud goes on to recognise, it is Hamlet who better represents modern Oedipal desires.²²³

Deer reminds us of Freud's own reservations about analysing the unconscious of a fictional character, like Hamlet.²²⁴ Aware of the limitations of his own interpretation of Hamlet's repressed wishes, Freud turns to the biographical information related to Shakespeare. In a similar way, biographical information on Kafka and Nabokov available to us might facilitate the interpretation of the use of metamorphosis in their work, although, as the following paragraphs will show, it cannot and should not be our sole guide.

²²² Freud, 264.

²²³ Jemma Deer, "More Strange Return: What Freud Owes Literature," *The Oxford Literary Review* 38, no.2 (2016): 221–239, 226, accessed April 10, 2018, doi: 10.3366/olr.2016.0193.

²²⁴ Deer, 230.

Thematically, Gregor's plight is underwritten by the Oedipal narrative wherein the son contests his father's (sexual) power over his mother. Gregor—who has just risen to the rank of the family provider, suddenly lapses back into the state of dependence while seeing his father's figure rising in power, and, specifically, having increasing control over the mother's feelings as the story progresses. Contrary to the conventional principles of the Oedipus Complex, which revolves around the subject's incestuous wishes aimed at the mother, in Kafka's story, the son's fantasy of incest relates to his sister. Gregor fantasises about "kissing her throat" and entertains the idea that he should "pluck her skirt and in this way indicate to her that she should come to his room," thinking that he would make her stay with him as long as his repulsive body was able to hold her.²²⁵ The dynamic of this displacement was contemporaneously noted by Kafka himself, who, in September 1912, commented upon his sister's engagement as follows: "love between brother and sister [is] the repeating of love between mother and father."²²⁶ These self-analysing insights notwithstanding, Kafka's own reception of Freudian ideas was ambivalent; he pronounced vocal doubts of the application of psychoanalysis and its therapeutic benefits.²²⁷ However, Kafka had read Freud, and was very much aware of the psychoanalytic significance of the father-son relationship from 1912.²²⁸ Meg Harris Williams's article on Kafka's "oedipal wound"

²²⁵ Kafka, "The Metamorphosis," 101-102.

²²⁶ Kafka, *The Diaries 1910-1922*, 210.

²²⁷ In a letter to Milena Jesenská in 1920, Kafka writes "I consider the therapeutic part of psychoanalysis to be a hopeless error." Franz Kafka, *Letters to Milena*, ed. Willy Haas, trans. Tania and James Stern (London: Penguin Books, 1983), 175.

²²⁸ Leena Eilittä, "Kafka's Ambivalence Towards Psychoanalysis," *Psychoanalysis and History* 3, no. 1 (2001): 201-210, accessed June 14, 2018, doi: [10.3366/pah.2001.3.2.205](https://doi.org/10.3366/pah.2001.3.2.205).

in “The Metamorphosis” explains this ambivalence clearly.²²⁹ Kafka’s disbelief of Freud did not mean he was indifferent to Freud’s theories but he simply did not trust that psychoanalysis could provide a solution to one’s internal conflict.²³⁰

In one of his letters to his oldest sister, written in January 1921, Kafka evokes the myth of Kronos who devoured his own children in order to keep his power, but offers an interesting reinterpretation of this mythological image of a father killing his sons, referring to Kronos as “the most honest of fathers.”²³¹ Kafka considers the act of physical devouring one’s own children an act of pity when compared to the psychological, metaphorical, devouring of children by their parents.²³² As Marianne DeKoven argues in her discussion of Kafka’s “The Metamorphosis,” Freud and Kafka were almost contemporaries, both part of the same cultural period, and both modernist writers, and thus it is not strange that their works would express similar anxieties.²³³

Whatever Kafka’s attitude towards Freudian ideas may have been, his interpreters have placed the story “The Metamorphosis” within a psychoanalytic framework from the very beginning. The very first influential interpretation of Kafka’s work utilizes Freud’s theory of the Oedipal Complex to argue its case. Hellmuth Kaiser (1931) argues that Gregor’s Oedipal relationship with his father is the cause for

²²⁹ Meg Harris Williams, “The Oedipal Wound in Two Stories by Kafka: The Metamorphosis and A Country Doctor,” *Psychodynamic Practice* 23, no. 2 (2017): 120-132, accessed June 14, 2018, doi:[10.1080/14753634.2017.1304828](https://doi.org/10.1080/14753634.2017.1304828).

²³⁰ Williams, 120.

²³¹ Kafka, *Briefe*, 344-345, in Corngold, *The Metamorphosis: Translation, Backgrounds and Contexts, Criticism*, 71.

²³² Kafka, *Briefe*, 344-345, in Corngold, 72.

²³³ Marianne DeKoven, “Kafka’s Animal Stories: Modernist Form and Interspecies Narrative,” in *Creatural Fictions: Human-Animal Relationships in Twentieth-and Twenty-First Century Literature*, ed. David Herman (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 19- 40, 36.

Gregor's punishment-metamorphosis.²³⁴ Following Keiser, Peter Dow Webster (1959) considers Kafka himself, not Gregor, when discussing Gregor's change in the context of Oedipus Complex. Webster interprets the entire text as a death fantasy generated by the guilt emerging from the unresolved Oedipal conflict.²³⁵ The relationship between fathers and sons and the power dynamics attending to the Oedipus Complex are prevalent themes in Kafka's opus. The father and son relationship in "The Judgement" (1912), a story written immediately before "The Metamorphosis," is indicative of a father's tyrannical hold over a son's freedom, independence, sexual development, and eventually his right to exist. Georg's despair and eventual suicide in "The Judgement" is a submissive action to his father's order: "I now sentence you to death by drowning!"²³⁶ Similarly, Gregor dies after his own father attempts to get rid of "it," the insect-Gregor himself, by throwing apples at him. Kafka's famous letter to his father, written in 1919, has furthermore invited numerous interpretations related to the Oedipus Complex.²³⁷ In this letter, which was published by Max Brod, Kafka compares himself to his father and on every occasion, finds himself the weaker of the two. Kafka's father is persistently a menacing presence to him, and throughout the letter, issues of guilt and sacrifice stand out. In the letter, Kafka explains why this feeling of inferiority towards his father may have developed—this shows a certain amount of awareness on behalf of Kafka that there is an underlying conflict between

²³⁴ Hellmuth Kaiser, "Kafka's Fantasy of Punishment," in "The Metamorphosis" by Franz Kafka, trans. and ed. Stanley Corngold (New York: Bantam, 1972), 147–56.

²³⁵ Peter Dow Webster, "Franz Kafka's 'Metamorphosis' As Death and Resurrection Fantasy," *American Imago* 16, no. 4 (1959): 349-365, accessed June 14, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26301687>.

²³⁶ Franz Kafka, "The Judgement: A Story," in Corngold, *Kafka's Selected Stories*, 3-12, 12.

²³⁷ Franz Kafka, *Brief an den Vater* (1919), *Letter to the Father*, in *Wedding Preparations in the Country: and Other Posthumous Prose Writings*, notes by Max Brod, trans. Ernst Kaiser and Eithne Wilkins (New York: Schocken Books, 1954).

father and son. He recalls a memory from his childhood wherein Kafka asks for his father's affection in the form of a trivial request for water at night. Kafka writes that he kept asking for water from his father despite the "threats."²³⁸ Instead of granting his son's wish, Hermann Kafka takes him out of his bedroom and leaves him out in the courtyard in the middle of the night, with the door of the house being closed.²³⁹ Kafka, almost like an analyst, one could argue, focuses on his father's attitude towards him during this incident: "[a]fter that I was pretty docile, no doubt, but it left me damaged inwardly," writes Kafka.²⁴⁰ Besides the complex issues of the father and son relationship that this letter reveals, it also suggests Kafka's openness to psychoanalytic interpretation and his extraordinary ability to reflect upon critical moments of his own childhood that have shaped his turbulent relationship with his father. From a contemporary psychoanalytic perspective, Kafka's text "presupposes the existence of a symbolic Father [...] and at the same time the presence of a real father, who refuses to leave the role of Father-God, an omnipotent father."²⁴¹ I will elaborate on the significance of the symbolic father as he is manifested in Kafka's story later in this section.

The approaches outlined above emphasise the interpretive relevance of Freud's work and the biographical details of Kafka's relationship with his father. Others have explicitly rejected such associations with Kafka's text. In their work on Kafka, Deleuze and Guattari interpret the presence of the Oedipus Complex subtext in the story in the

²³⁸ Kafka, *Letter to the Father*, 9.

²³⁹ Kafka, 10.

²⁴⁰ Kafka, 10.

²⁴¹ José Durval Cavalcanti De Albuquerque, "On Franz Kafka's 'Letter to my father,'" *International Forum of Psychoanalysis* 20, (2011): 229-232, 230, accessed June 14, 2018, doi:

[10.1080/0803706X.2011.595427](https://doi.org/10.1080/0803706X.2011.595427).

light of the writer's ironic use of motifs. They identify two aspects of the Oedipus legend and the psychological theorizing of it in Kafka's writing, and specifically in "The Metamorphosis": a bureaucratic triangle and the becoming-animal of Gregor. In *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972) Deleuze and Guattari offer a critique of Freud's approach to the oedipal structure by stating that "from the moment that we are placed within the framework of Oedipus—from the moment that we are measured in terms of Oedipus—the cards are stacked against us, and the only real relationship, that of production, has been done away with."²⁴² They advocate that the production of desire, hence a "productive unconscious," is more substantial than "an unconscious that knows only how to express itself—express itself in myth, in tragedy, in dream." Thereby they question Freud's insights that literature, myths, and dreams are expressions of our unconscious in distorted form.²⁴³ While Deleuze and Guattari essentially revise Freud's theories, their *Anti-Oedipus* should be understood as "a psychoanalytic text, not just an attack on psychoanalysis."²⁴⁴ Their approach to psychoanalysis revolves around the concept of desiring machines. "A book itself is a little machine" they state in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980). "When one writes, the only question is which other machine the literary machine can be plugged into, must be

²⁴² Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane, preface by Michel Foucault (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 24.

²⁴³ Deleuze and Guattari, 54.

²⁴⁴ Dagmar Herzog, "Desire's Politics: Félix Guattari and the Renewal of the Psychoanalytic Left," *Psychoanalysis and History* 18, no. 1 (2016): 7–37, 10, accessed June 14, 2018, doi: [10.3366/pah.2016.0176](https://doi.org/10.3366/pah.2016.0176).

plugged into in order to work.”²⁴⁵ In the case of Kafka’s “The Metamorphosis,” the story has been plugged in the bureaucratic machine.²⁴⁶

Other interpreters of Kafka, like Walter Benjamin, argued for a more general commensurability of Freud’s theory and the figures of the father and the son in Kafka’s fiction, and link both to the theological-philosophical narrative of original sin. “Kafka’s strange families batten on their sons, lying on top of them like giant parasites,” Benjamin writes.²⁴⁷ “They not only prey upon their strength, but gnaw away at the sons’ right to exist. The fathers punish, but they are at the same time the accusers. The sin of which they accuse their sons seems to be a kind of original sin.”²⁴⁸ At the same time, Benjamin correctly observes that “the world of offices and registries, of musty, shabby, dark rooms, is Kafka’s world,” and that the figure of the father must be situated in the bureaucratic nightmare of the early twentieth-century Europe, an observation which is in the same context as Deleuze and Guattari’s bureaucratic machine.²⁴⁹ Benjamin points out that, in a number of Kafka’s stories, the father is associated with a being who is always in power, and eventually punishes the son. But this authority is not without its issues in Kafka; in Kafka’s fiction the authority, as Benjamin confirms, is associated with “dullness, decay, and dirt.”²⁵⁰

Following Benjamin’s suggestions above, the paternal authority is manifested in “The Metamorphosis” in two ways: in Gregor’s boss and in Gregor’s father. The

²⁴⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, 24.

²⁴⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, 25.

²⁴⁷ Walter Benjamin, “Franz Kafka: On the Tenth Anniversary of His Death,” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 111.

²⁴⁸ Benjamin, “Franz Kafka,” 114.

²⁴⁹ Benjamin, 112.

²⁵⁰ Benjamin, 113.

father is less present in the first pages of the story, while the fear of Gregor's boss permeates Gregor's thoughts as soon as he wakes up. Gregor fantasises that, given his current immobilized condition, he could quit his job.²⁵¹ He in fact imagines a situation where he marches triumphantly into his office and declares his resignation; "[h]e'd have fallen right off his desk!" thinks Gregor.²⁵² The boss would thus lose his authoritarian position as Gregor knows that his boss usually sits on an elevated desk and "from this considerable height addressing one's employee down below."²⁵³ This is only one of Gregor's fantasies that sustain him, it seems, alongside his self-assurance that when he pays back to his boss the money his family owes, the nightmare of working for him will be over. Gregor's boss is stronger than Gregor, as he would never tolerate Gregor's present state: "his boss [...] would reproach Gregor's parents for their son's laziness, [...] in [his boss's] opinion there existed only healthy individuals unwilling to work."²⁵⁴ Gregor's struggle with authority worsens with the presence of the company's general manager in the Samsa house, who comes to enquire about Gregor's disappearance. Gregor's voice changes into an animal's while he is trying to justify himself to the manager, an early indication that the subject's communication with authority is impossible.²⁵⁵ In another of his fantasies of disobedience and rebellion, Gregor even imagines the possibility of his manager being transformed: "Gregor tried to imagine whether anything like what he was now experiencing could ever befall the general manager; the possibility must certainly be admitted."²⁵⁶ Gregor's fantasy of overthrowing a representative of authority becomes true when

²⁵¹ Kafka, "The Metamorphosis," 24.

²⁵² Kafka, 24.

²⁵³ Kafka, 24.

²⁵⁴ Kafka, 25.

²⁵⁵ Kafka, 39.

²⁵⁶ Kafka, 33.

the manager sees the human sized insect. Gregor observes the manager “slowly retreating” and putting his hand on his mouth upon facing Gregor, thus achieving his goal of terrorising his former oppressor.²⁵⁷

A month after his metamorphosis, Gregor attempts to get out of the room, an act which causes his father’s rage. Upon facing him, Gregor wonders: “was this still his father?”²⁵⁸ Before Gregor’s change, his father used to be sick and unable to work. In line with Benjamin’s observations about the dullness and dirt in Kafka’s world, Gregor’s father used to be “entombed in his bed [...] sitting in an armchair in his nightshirt [...] incapable of rising, while now he did not even need a cane to stand and wore a clean uniform.”²⁵⁹ And yet it is not the father per se who threatens Gregor, but rather, his figure dressed in a shiny uniform, a feature which validates Benjamin’s remark about the fusion of the father and the official in Kafka’s fiction. In the third part of the story, decay returns in the house of Samsas: in line with Gregor’s infected wound and dirt around him, the father’s uniform becomes stained while his father is now unable to stand.²⁶⁰

Nabokov rejected the Freudian interpretations of Kafka’s “The Metamorphosis,” in particular, those related to the Oedipus Complex which consider the insect as a worthless impersonation of Kafka himself opposed to an oppressive father.²⁶¹ “The Metamorphosis” cannot be reduced to the analysis of Kafka’s relationship to his father, as Nabokov correctly points out; yet Gregor’s metamorphosis addresses, amongst other issues, the unconscious struggle between fathers and sons—

²⁵⁷ Kafka, 42.

²⁵⁸ Kafka, 81.

²⁵⁹ Kafka, 82.

²⁶⁰ Kafka, 88.

²⁶¹ Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, 256.

but not exclusively Kafka's own relationship to his father. This struggle, as we know from Freud, is universal, and it can also include a different kind of father, as identified by Benjamin in the guise of authoritarian officials. In this sense, the subject may well be responding to the oppressive power of the father with the "becoming animal" movement. The father-son relationship is closer to an interaction between an official and a helpless citizen.

Despite his reservations about psychoanalysis, in his own autobiography, *Speak, Memory*, Nabokov often recalls his father's presence in numerous scenes from his idyllic childhood in Russia.²⁶² The first paragraph of a section wherein Nabokov relays his memories of his father opens with the following statement on the general tenor of the era: "[t]he old and the new, the liberal touch and the patriarchal one, fatal poverty and fatalistic wealth got fantastically interwoven in that strange first decade of our century."²⁶³ This observation situates the authority of one's father into a wider moment in time, that of early twentieth century, and links it to the contexts delineated by Benjamin. For Nabokov, the figure of his own father was certainly identified with the idea of authority and power, a figure which, for the writer, exercised an excess of admiration to the point of an illuminating magical-realist vision. Nabokov recalls watching his "invisible" father through a window in what he calls "a marvellous case of levitation" as his father resembled a "paradisiac personage" that could be found in a church ceiling while "gloriously sprawling in mid-air, his limbs in a curiously casual attitude, his handsome, imperturbable features turned to the sky."²⁶⁴ For Nabokov, in this memory recollection the father symbolises a God-like being, yet also a magical

²⁶² Nabokov claims that "the vulgar, shabby, fundamentally medieval world of Freud" is insufficient to explain his own exploration of identity. Nabokov, *Speak, Memory*, 4.

²⁶³ Nabokov, *Speak, Memory*, 14.

²⁶⁴ Nabokov, 15.

one. For Kafka, the father also has a God-like power, as Laurence Coupe has observed, but Kafka reimagines this father-god as an official.²⁶⁵

Nabokov's works repeatedly draw on his childhood memories, dreams, and fantasies. "In probing my childhood," confesses Nabokov, "I see the awakening of consciousness as a series of spaced flashes, [...] affording memory a slippery hold."²⁶⁶ Despite Nabokov's distrust of Freud's theories, parallels can be drawn between the symbolic presence of the father in his story "The Aurelian" and the threatening father figures of "The Metamorphosis." A Lacanian re-interpretation of Freud's key dynamic may be a useful informative tool here. Jacques Lacan reinterprets the presence of the father in Freud's tale of the primal horde and in the Oedipus Complex by theorising on the dead father, a symbolic father.²⁶⁷ The Oedipal law of prohibition against killing the father or sleeping with the mother is always founded by the father, Lacan observes.²⁶⁸ Lacan terms the Name-of-the-Father as "an essential signifier in the Other," a constructed, metaphorical structure of what the father may mean for the subject. The subject needs to incorporate this structure in order to enter the symbolic order. The Name-of-the-Father denotes an absence as, according to Lacan, "an Oedipus Complex could be very well formed even when the father was not there."²⁶⁹ Lacan's notion of the symbolic, yet not necessarily present, father is particularly

²⁶⁵ Coupe, *Myth*, 126.

²⁶⁶ Nabokov, *Speak, Memory*, 6.

²⁶⁷ Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, (1913), *S.E.* vol. XIII (1913-1914): vii-162.

²⁶⁸ Jacques Lacan, *Formations of the Unconscious, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book V*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Russel Grigg (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017), 132.

²⁶⁹ Lacan, 151.

useful in signifying the place of the subject here, against the Father's authority in Kafka and Nabokov.

I wish to return here to Benjamin's remark that "the world of the officials and the world of the fathers are the same to Kafka."²⁷⁰ In Benjamin's interpretation, the image of the father is consistently associated with power; Lacan would confirm just such operation of the father-function a few decades later. We find this use of the father-function in Kafka's and Nabokov's stories. In Kafka, power is found in the working environment and the father-like officials, while for Nabokov the power is found in the omnipotence of the subject's escape from the economic instability of the early-twentieth century Berlin, as well as, in the power exercised by religion and the presence of an invisible God. In this case, the metamorphosis of the subject gestures to an attempt to engage with, and eventually escape, the symbolic father, the authority, which has assumed the control of the subject.

Read in this context, the metamorphoses in the two stories emerge as gestures of rebellion against the existing order, and distinct expressions of what Freud called, in 1930, the discontents of civilisation. Civilization and its indexes—authority or family for instance—limit the individual's freedom by regulating one's instincts. "What we call our civilization is largely responsible for our misery, and we should be much happier if we gave it up and returned to primitive conditions," argues Freud.²⁷¹ Our

²⁷⁰ Benjamin, "Franz Kafka," 113.

²⁷¹ Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, (1930), *S.E.* vol. XXI (1927-1931): 57-146, 88.

participation in civilised communities presupposes that our instincts, such as sexuality and aggression, need to be repressed or sublimated.²⁷²

I have already glossed Gregor's incestuous desires towards his sister, which cannot be properly expressed since they are forbidden. In addition to his sexual instincts, Gregor's relationship with authority is troubled. Gregor's metamorphosis occurs partly, therefore, because his ego refuses in a way to conform to the civilised values of his surroundings. As Freud reminds us "dirtiness of any kind seems to us incompatible with civilization,"²⁷³ and Gregor's change into an unclean animal is perhaps the first sign that he wishes to rebel against the established order. Sokel suggests that the metamorphosis reveals in fact Gregor's "secret hostility" towards his work, and that this "accidental" change is a kind of self-punishment against these hostile wishes.²⁷⁴ Sokel does not place Gregor's change in the context of an individual's place in a civilised society. However, Freud is clear when arguing that there are "two origins of the sense of guilt: one arising from fear of an authority, and the other, later on, arising from fear of the super-ego."²⁷⁵ The authority and the super-ego's tendencies are not that different in Kafka. Gregor's aggression is introjected because it cannot be externalised; because the aggression is directed to his own ego, the super-ego reacts, and also attempts to regulate the ego's destructive tendencies. This conflict between

²⁷² "Sublimation of instinct is an especially conspicuous feature of cultural development" writes Freud, and it allows us to direct our energy towards creative outlets. Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 97.

²⁷³ Freud, 93.

²⁷⁴ Sokel "Kafka's 'Metamorphosis,'" 124-125.

²⁷⁵ Freud, 130.

ego and super-ego, argues Freud, “is called by us the sense of guilt; it expresses itself as a need for punishment.”²⁷⁶

Following Lacan rather than Freud, Deleuze and Guattari argue that “The Metamorphosis” is the exemplary story of a re-Oedipalization, that is to say, the re-inscription of the subject within the Oedipus Complex narrative after it has already been liberated from it.²⁷⁷ The “deterritorialization” of Gregor has already taken place; not because of his oppressive father but because of his sister, who is the first person in the family to admit that Gregor must die. “The process of Gregor’s deterritorialization through his becoming-animal finds itself blocked for a moment” they argue, stressing that the sister cannot tolerate Gregor’s attachment to the portrait of the lady dressed in furs.²⁷⁸ It is then, Deleuze and Guattari state, that “Gregor’s deterritorialization through the becoming-animal fails; he re-Oedipalizes himself through the apple that is thrown at him and has nothing to do but die.”²⁷⁹

Pilgram’s failed transformation and imminent death suggest a similar process at work when compared to Kafka’s subject. The father in “The Aurelian” is manifested both in its real and symbolic manifestation: as an invisible, symbolic authority, with God-like features, against whom Pilgram is completely powerless, and as the legacy of the dead father, that is Pilgram’s own father. The symbolic father, one may argue, is, in “The Aurelian,” the state itself: the economic circumstances which, due to the recession and then World War I, keep him in Berlin.²⁸⁰ He was “clumsy, sickly, not very young” and is thus excluded from serving the army or any other activity that would

²⁷⁶ Freud, 123.

²⁷⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 14.

²⁷⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, 15.

²⁷⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, 15.

²⁸⁰ Nabokov, “The Aurelian,” 254.

permit him to travel and subvert his immobile existence. Pilgram is haunted by the accomplishments of his dead father: “his father—a sailor, a rover, a bit of a rogue—married late in life [...] and opened a shop of exotic curios.”²⁸¹ Wishing, thus, to follow his father’s steps, which also include abandoning his wife for an exotic destination, Pilgram’s own rebellion against the symbolic father kills him. While Gregor’s aggression turns against him as self-punishment, Pilgram identifies himself with his love object, the butterflies, in a desperate attempt for his ego to survive the impossible demands of civilisation. Pilgram has long refused to be an active participant in his small community: he purposefully avoids any interaction at the town’s bar wherein he sits silently, he barely interacts with his wife, Eleanor, apart from Sundays when they go out “on a slow, silent walk.”²⁸² Ironically, it seems that Pilgram could have successfully sublimated his instincts and desires through hunting butterflies; yet, this is rendered impossible as Pilgram’s transformation is never accomplished, at least in physical terms.

The Oedipus Complex subtext and the whole issue of the fathers and sons must be understood in relation to the narrative trope of metamorphosis in Kafka’s story. Gregor is undergoing a personal transformation—a metamorphosis, not unlike the one undergone by Pilgram’s butterfly change in Nabokov’s text. But Gregor’s personal transformation, as we have seen, fails, just as Pilgram’s own is prevented. In this context, one can understand that the new use of metamorphosis is linked to the thinking about subjectivity as not fixed but transforming or being prevented from transformation. Insofar as this is true, the fact that Kafka’s use of the Oedipal narrative has been repeatedly linked to the world of authorities acquires a new significance.

²⁸¹ Nabokov, 253.

²⁸² Nabokov, 252.

Behind the story of a personal transformation, its accomplishments or its failures, one may discover a wider social story—even with writers as apolitical as Kafka and Nabokov avowed to be.

Modernist Memory and Being Human

Another of Nabokov's lectures, on the characteristics of a good reader, provides a lens through which I read the themes of memory of creativity in the two stories. Nabokov writes that "the good reader is one who has imagination, memory, a dictionary, and some artistic sense."²⁸³ Applying these characteristics to Nabokov's own reading of "The Metamorphosis," it is evident that imagination and artistic sense can provide some valuable tools for in-depth reading. For example, Nabokov described the insect from Kafka's story in detail and even drew it, using his imagination. He also sketched the purported layout of the Samsa flat—perhaps drawing on the memories of his own visit to Prague and the street where Kafka lived, as well as the memory of all the flats that he himself had lived in.²⁸⁴ Beyond the issue of imagination, then, it is the interrelated question of memory that is fundamental to our understanding of the metamorphic stories by Kafka and Nabokov.

Marianne DeKoven has observed that "[m]odernism in fiction can be said to have memory, 'la recherche du temps perdu' as one of its raisons d'être and central tropes."²⁸⁵ Indeed, memory has been a point of reference for many modernist writers. Moreover, the prominent role of memory in the modernist treatments of the myth and

²⁸³ Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, 3.

²⁸⁴ It is known that Nabokov visited Prague in 1930, the same year "The Aurelian" was written. Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, 256.

²⁸⁵ Marianne DeKoven, "Why James Joyce Was Accepted and I Was Not: Modernist Fiction and Gertrude Stein's Narrative," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 25, no. 2 (1992): 23-30, 24.

stories of metamorphosis, when compared to the function of memory in classical tales, suggests that subjectivity has been transcribed in the twentieth century in strikingly different terms. For instance, in Ovid's tales the retaining of human memory is not a privilege shared by common mortals; instead, it is usually the gods who can change shapes constantly without their memory-preservation being affected.²⁸⁶ For mortals in Ovid's stories, when they transform into water, plants or animals, their consciousness does not vanish, but it is rather limited by the possibilities of their new body; these would not include memory. The situation is different with modernist writers, though. As questions of the nature of subjectivity and the formation of identity gained more attention, memory became understood as a quintessential component of the subject, one that determines the selection and construction of identities. Indeed, for psychoanalysis, memory became the central and integrative part of who we are, our dreams and fantasies. This altered epistemological and existential landscape naturally affected the stories about metamorphosis. Thus, in modernist transformation tales, memory is often a decisive factor in the creation, composition, and development of the protagonist's subjectivity and identity during, or, after a metamorphosis. This process is most frequently explored through the uncovering of our human memories.

The most prominent modernist exploration of how memories shape our present self is Marcel Proust's masterpiece *In Search of Lost Time* (1913-1927), which also includes a number of memorable metamorphoses and metamorphic objects and

²⁸⁶ An exception is worth noting here. It is because he/she is a prophet that Tiresias could remember his experiences between his gender transformations—he had been transformed into a woman for seven years. Conversely, he *becomes* a prophet because he/she can remember both experiences. See my discussion in Chapter Three.

beings.²⁸⁷ The exploration of memory is the key thread binding together Proust, Kafka, and Nabokov. Nabokov's admiration of Proust and his work was noteworthy. In his lectures on Proust, Nabokov stresses that the reader should be attentive to Proust's own words in the *Time Regained* volume of his novel:

what we call reality is a certain relationship between sensations and memories which surround us at the same time, the only true relationship, which the writer must recapture so that he may forever link together in his phrase its two distinct elements.²⁸⁸

For Proust, memory and sensations shape reality, especially the kind of reality that modernist creative writers sought to depict. In the case of “The Metamorphosis” and “The Aurelian” memory is important to the representation of the subjects' own reality and the dynamic changes in their perception. Gregor often recalls memories from his human past and he clings to them as evidence of his still-humanness, while Pilgram looks back, into his happy childhood, or he day-dreams in the present and for the future. As in Proust's work, the protagonists' voluntary and involuntary memories resurrect the past. Voluntary memories refer to a conscious process of remembering the past by choice. Involuntary ones, on the other hand, are uncontrolled and appear unintentionally when the writer's mind is triggered by a certain sense, for example, the taste of a madeleine cake dipped in tea, as famously described by Proust.²⁸⁹ Thus, a revival of the past is made possible in fiction with the help of emotions and sensations. Modernists often favoured involuntary memory over the voluntary one because it allegedly “brings back past moments with a completeness and vividness which the

²⁸⁷ Among other uses of the trope of metamorphosis, Proust describes the cohort of young girls through the image of a metamorphing Medusa/medusa (both a mythic figure and a biological entity).

²⁸⁸ Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, 211.

²⁸⁹ Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, Vol.1 *Swans' Way*, trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin (New York: Modern Library, 1992), 59.

snapshots of voluntary memory cannot match.”²⁹⁰ The representation of the activation of memory in Kafka and Nabokov takes two distinct forms: one, the direct depiction of voluntary or involuntary remembering of the past, and the other, daydreaming in the present and of the future interlaced with, or informed by memories. The latter in itself, if we follow Freud in “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming,” consists not only of future hopes but also residues of the past, and, in the case of myths, “the distorted vestiges of wishful fantasies of whole nations.”²⁹¹ Freud perceives memory as integral to the creative writer’s ability to mould his childhood memories and fantasies into artistic creations, as exemplified best in his case-study of Leonardo Da Vinci’s childhood memory.²⁹² This strong belief in the productive interaction of memory and creativity is paradigmatically modernist and it sheds a new light on how both Kafka and Nabokov describe and utilise the events of metamorphoses in their texts.

The activities of remembering and forgetting appear as closely interlinked in modernist fiction as they do in their contemporary assessments. It is useful to remember Benjamin’s insight that the involuntary memories that come to the narrator’s mind in Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time* are “much closer to forgetting than what is usually called memory.”²⁹³ In Benjamin’s reading of Proust, the involuntary memories are more useful since they can open the door to forgotten events or feelings. In this way, Benjamin relates memory, the way it was perceived by Proust, to the contents of what Freud termed as “the unconscious.” It is in our unconscious where all the memories we wish to forget are placed. The foregrounding of the ambivalent and dynamic relationship between forgetting and remembering the past memories can be identified

²⁹⁰ Paul Poplawski, ed. *Encyclopedia of Literary Modernism* (London: Greenwood Press, 2003), 326.

²⁹¹ Freud, “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming,” 151.

²⁹² Freud, “Leonardo Da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood,” *S. E.* vol. XI (1910): 57-138.

²⁹³ Walter Benjamin, “The Image of Proust,” in *Illuminations*, 202.

in both stories under discussion here. Paradoxically, forgetting is equally vital as remembering in the metamorphoses enacted in these texts.

In “The Metamorphosis” one of Gregor’s severe struggles after his change is with forgetting. Locked in his dark room, he starts forgetting his human past while his insect instincts and tastes become stronger as the months go by. At this point, Benjamin’s remark about forgetting and the involuntary emerging of memories can help us understand why Gregor appears to still remember details from his human past but in a disconnected fashion. Ironically, the memories, even though assisting the insect on clinging on to his past, are not always joyful. His family, Gregor recalls, “gratefully accepted the money, and he was happy to provide it, but the exchange no longer felt particularly warm.”²⁹⁴ It is the persistence of the human memories that prove Gregor’s traces of humanity and communicate the continued split of the insect and the human in Gregor as painful. The memories that Gregor recalls after his change reveal his active human mind inside the insect body and become particularly vivid when he remembers his plans about his sister, Grete; “it was his secret plan to send her off to study at the Conservatory next year.”²⁹⁵ Memory is for Gregor a sole mode of communication with the outside world since he can no longer communicate with his family through speech. He is able only to listen behind closed doors: “thoughts like these, utterly futile in his current state, passed through his head as he stood pressed against the door, eavesdropping.”²⁹⁶ After some months as an insect, Gregor’s memory starts fading away no matter how hard he tries to anchor his human thoughts on his bedroom furniture and on the portrait of the fur lady. As Kafka knew well, insects have no

²⁹⁴ Kafka, “The Metamorphosis,” 63.

²⁹⁵ Kafka, 63.

²⁹⁶ Kafka, 64.

memory. Gregor's change has had an effect that it is irreversible as he "was already on the verge of forgetting, and only his mother's voice, which he had gone so long now without hearing, had shaken him awake."²⁹⁷ Gregor realises his humanity will be gradually lost if his sister and his mother move his furniture out of his room. At first, he is confused but he quickly associates the "good influence this furniture had on his condition" with his former human appearance.²⁹⁸ Gregor decides that he does not want his humanity to fade away: "[d]id he really want to have this warm room, comfortably furnished with family heirlooms, transformed into a cave or den [...] but at the price of simultaneously swiftly and completely forgetting his human past?"²⁹⁹ It is important to note that Gregor's humanity is dependent on his human surroundings, and that the only way for him to maintain his inner human world is by remembering the past, including the objects of his former existence.

Involuntary memories are also present in Kafka's story, but with an even more ambivalent character. These memories show Gregor's unstable and undefined inner state; a combination of insect and human elements. While Gregor's sister is playing the violin in the living room, the insect is enchanted by the music and starts moving out of his room, ignoring all dangers. Gregor's memory of his sister is aroused by a strong and sudden sensation: the sound of her violin. This sound makes Gregor wonder: "was he a beast, that music so moved him?"³⁰⁰ While this question may be read in a Romanticist fashion, wherein the ability to create and appreciate fine arts is the sole prerogative of human beings, indeed their proof of being at the highest evolutionary level in nature, Kafka's perspective is material and subtly ironic. As Charlotte Sleight

²⁹⁷ Kafka, 74.

²⁹⁸ Kafka, 74.

²⁹⁹ Kafka, 76.

³⁰⁰ Kafka, 101.

relates, the property of some insects of the roach species to actually enjoy music was much debated among early twentieth-century entomologists, and the similarities between human and insect modes of living were almost obsessively discussed at the time when Kafka was writing his story.³⁰¹ Kafka's protagonist may be Romantic, but the writer of his metamorphosis is a Modernist with a scientific passion. With his query, Gregor *thinks* he asserts his humanity but he actually recognises a trace of an animal's nature in his transformed self. The music, while symptomatic of the advancement of his insecthood, creates in fact more memories for Gregor and even the sense of lost time; he fantasises that "if the disaster had not disrupted his plans" he would have been able to send Grete to the Music school.³⁰² In a 1911 diary entry, Kafka admits that, personally, he is "entirely shut off from music."³⁰³ It is not surprising, therefore, that, in "The Metamorphosis" Gregor's emotional response to music—a field within which Kafka feels estranged himself—is a decisive trait of his non-humanity.

As discussed above, Nabokov had been critical of the application of Freud's psychoanalytic theories to literature.³⁰⁴ Nabokov's critique of Freud is not focused on Kafka only: it is a general rejection of psychoanalysis. As Jenefer Shute has observed about Nabokov, he dismisses psychoanalysis "both as a theory of the human subject

³⁰¹ Charlotte Sleight, *Six Legs Better: A Cultural History of Myrmecology* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2007), 7.

³⁰² Kafka, 101-102.

³⁰³ Kafka, *The Diaries 1910-1922*, 141.

³⁰⁴ Nabokov derides the existing Freudian responses to "The Metamorphosis," which focus on the use of symbols in the story, as a "fashionable mixture of sex and myth that is so appealing to mediocre minds." Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, 283.

and as a hermeneutic system.”³⁰⁵ Yet, Shute concludes that, despite Nabokov’s constant denial of the usefulness of psychoanalysis, his work and Freud’s work meet not so inconsistently in their explorations of memory. She stresses that “the realm of imagination, of memory and desire—is precisely that of psychoanalytic discourse.”³⁰⁶ Reading “The Aurelian” we cannot be persuaded that the unconscious is unimportant for Nabokov. A large part of Pilgram’s presence in the text is situated in the mind, inhabited by thoughts and memories. Moreover, Pilgram’s spiritual travel at the end of the story, and its contrast to his bodily death, demonstrates not only Nabokov’s awareness of another level beyond consciousness, but his intention of parodying it. In “The Aurelian” memory is primarily interpreted as remembering and it ensures the spiritual survival of Pilgram, since physical survival is impossible. On the one hand, there are made-up memories about the places he would visit and on the other hand, there are some realistic childhood memories. In his thoughts he has visited many countries whose butterflies are almost visible to him: “he knew the high Alpine pastures, with those flat stones lying here and there among the slippery matted grass; for there is no greater delight than to lift such a stone and find beneath it a plump sleepy moth of a still undescribed species.”³⁰⁷ These “fake” memories are beyond time, they are involuntary, continuously feeding Pilgram’s daily fantasies. “These impossible dreams” of Pilgram, are prompted by the permanent visual stimuli in his shop: the butterflies.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁵ Jenefer Shute, “Nabokov and Freud,” in *The Garland Companion to Vladimir Nabokov*, ed. Vladimir E. Alexandrov (London: Routledge, 2014), 412-420, 413.

³⁰⁶ Shute, 415.

³⁰⁷ Nabokov, “The Aurelian,” 254.

³⁰⁸ Nabokov, 254.

Not all these memories are about the past, though, some of them are directed towards the future. The role of involuntary memories in “The Aurelian” becomes central with the death of the protagonist. His consciousness is dead but his unconscious mind travels, following the imaginary routes he has been making for years in his mind. Correspondingly, Pilgram’s voluntary memories are of lesser significance; they are rather disappointing past memories of the things he did not see: “all he had ever seen of it was the dull sand-and-pine scenery of an occasional Sunday trip.”³⁰⁹ The self-absorbed, daydreaming nature of Pilgram in “The Aurelian” demonstrates that memory is a necessary ingredient for an unusual metamorphosis to take place. Memory in Nabokov serves to connect Pilgram to the unattainable butterfly world, which could potentially extend into the future. In addition, Nabokov uses Pilgram’s memory as a means of articulating a series of daydreams, and eventually a bodiless metamorphosis. In contrast to Nabokov, memory in Kafka’s writing is painful for the protagonist and without suggesting any future prospects for the insect. In both narratives, however, there is a dynamic between memory and metamorphosis.

Kafka’s story suggests that subjectivity within metamorphosis is made possible through the inner world of the subject, accessible only by the exploration of memories and dreams. Insofar as this is true, there is an intrinsic link between dreams, daydreaming, memories (based on real or imagined events) and creativity, as explored by Freud in “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming.” The dreamer and the writer are working in similar ways to create their fantasy worlds, Freud argues.³¹⁰ Fantasies, like dreams, are in fact unsatisfied wishes, which find their way out of the unconscious through fantasizing. Childhood memories are important, according to Freud, since the

³⁰⁹ Nabokov, 252.

³¹⁰ Freud, “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming,” 147.

unfulfilled wish returns “to a memory of an earlier experience in which this wish was fulfilled and now it creates a situation related to the future which represents a fulfilment of a wish.”³¹¹ The creating of imaginary worlds, either by a dreamer or a writer, is largely determined by memory. And for Nabokov, under the influence of Proust, memory was frequently used as a tool for creating literary realities.³¹² The relationship between day-dreams, or disguised wishes, and creative writing in Nabokov’s story is intricate, as both dreams and writing disguise the latent content of wishes and have memory as their point of reference. In his story, Nabokov articulates this link: in “The Aurelian” the story-telling is closely linked to dreams. As already stated, for Pilgram, the day-dreams and past memories reveal his unfulfilled wishes, but for Nabokov, the story of a lepidopterist willing to transform into his favourite species constitutes an exemplary instance of a writer’s creative mind in association with day-dreaming. Memories, dreams and daydreams, are thus brought together through the trope of metamorphosis to provide a key to what ultimately mattered for both Kafka and Nabokov: the art of writing itself. I further elaborate on the relationship between the metamorphic subject and creative writing in Chapter Three.

Yet, the issue of memory and its representation also serve a purpose to ask some pointed anthropological and psychological questions. Shrayer has suggested that while Nabokov’s story ends with Pilgram’s death, the “text of Pilgram’s otherworldly travels continues in the reader’s memory.”³¹³ In *The Open: Man and Animal*, Giorgio Agamben quotes from Heymann Steinthal: “the animal has memory, but no

³¹¹ Freud, 146.

³¹² Apart from the role of memory in his fiction, Nabokov’s biography, *Speak, Memory* (1951), is a celebration of the writer’s own exploration of memory.

³¹³ Shrayer, 714.

memories.”³¹⁴ Memories are then a human privilege, distinguishing us from animals. In Kafka, animals, and insects specifically, have no distinct memories; Gregor’s memory does not fade immediately after his change, but gradually, because of the absence of human interaction. In “The Aurelian” human memory defines the relationship between insect-animal and human in a different way. Nabokov’s metamorphosis is dependent on Pilgram’s childhood memories and imagination. This memory is exclusively constituted by butterflies. His insect-like identity, thinks Pilgram, has nothing to do with humans since he repeatedly imagines himself among winged beings. But his new existence is actually based on a continuous interaction with—or exploitation of—the insect world. His life dream “was himself to net the rarest butterflies of distant countries [...] and feel the follow-through of the swishing net and then the furious throbbing of wings through a clutched fold of the gauze.”³¹⁵

Animality

The identification with the animal world in both stories leads to the question of where the subjects’ identities lie. Is identity located in the animal or in the human realm? This question on subjectivity, as we shall see, permeates the use of metamorphosis in the entire twentieth century, and I shall return to it in Chapter Three. Here, however, I would like to indicate its relevance in Kafka’s and Nabokov’s stories. I have already discussed the distinction between humans and animals in terms of the capacity for memory. Alongside memory, Agamben identifies another element that distinguishes human nature from the animal one: language. “If this element is taken away, the difference between man and animal vanishes,” he writes.³¹⁶ Indeed Gregor’s human

³¹⁴ Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, 45.

³¹⁵ Nabokov, “The Aurelian,” 254.

³¹⁶ Agamben, 36.

ability of language is taken away from him from the very beginning of his metamorphosis. Language, or its lack, identifies him as animal: “[t]hat was an animal’s voice” observes the manager when he hears his voice.³¹⁷ Yet, in Gregor’s mind, the speech made perfect sense as he ironically tries to convince the clerk that he can go to work. In Pilgram’s case, the presence of language is subtle. Pilgram barely talks in the story, since he has already suffered a stroke. Language, of course, is a social construct and a means of communication.

Thus, the boundary-crossing between the human and the animal in the two tales of metamorphosis is also signalled through the reaction of others. In Kafka, where the insect and human instincts are eventually merged into one, the identity of Gregor is constantly defined by other beings. Just minutes before he is seen, the insect Gregor thinks of what his family would say upon his new state: “if they recoiled in horror, Gregor would surrender all responsibility and rest easy. But if they accepted it all calmly, [...] he could still make it to the station by eight.”³¹⁸ Corngold has observed that the vermin is “a shifting social construction” that simply cannot be accepted in a society, likening this construction, somewhat contentiously, to the image of the “Jews in the Third Reich.”³¹⁹ He further observes that Gregor’s new form is constantly defined by his family’s opinion, since he has to hide his insect body from everyone. Still, Gregor’s metamorphosed identity is a combination of human and animal qualities. His body, instincts, and appetite have given in to the monstrous-like nature but his consciousness still lingers between human and animal. Leland De La Durantaye’s remark that “Gregor does not think he is some other person—he thinks he is Gregor

³¹⁷ Kafka, “The Metamorphosis,” 39.

³¹⁸ Kafka, 38.

³¹⁹ Corngold and Wagner, 57.

and an insect” accurately expresses the divided self in Gregor.³²⁰ On the other hand, while Pilgram is getting ready to leave everything behind, including his unsuspecting wife, he feels as if the store butterflies are watching him: “[t]rying to avoid the knowing looks of those numberless eyes.”³²¹ The knowing look of the butterfly eyes could also be interpreted, not only as Pilgram’s guilt for leaving in secret, but as an indication of his ongoing interaction with the insect world. Ironically, after that look, Pilgram bends down and that is when the second, fatal stroke comes. In both stories, the protagonists fail to survive alone, outside of family, especially because they were marginalised beings before their metamorphoses.

Sacrifice and Pilgrimage

The subject’s liminal animal-human existence in these metamorphic tales comes into focus through the concept of sacrifice. For the purpose of my analysis of sacrifice in the stories of Kafka and Nabokov, I will now turn to René Girard’s theory. The idea of sacrifice in Girard’s thinking comes from the hypothesis that a sacrifice has a restorative function to society; it ensures the society’s peaceful course, protecting it from incidents of violence.³²² Violence is, according to Girard, present in all human societies. The members of the society need to transfer their violent desires towards someone else for the society to stay intact, an observation that Freud had made in his “Civilisation and Its Discontents.” This is how Girard introduces the concept of the scapegoat: communities need to sacrifice a human or an animal in order to redirect their violent instincts thereby ensuring their collective wellbeing. Girard stresses that the

³²⁰ De La Durantaye, 324.

³²¹ Nabokov, “The Aurelian,” 256.

³²² René Girard, *Sacrifice*, trans. Matthew Pattillo and David Dawson (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2011), ix.

victim chosen to be sacrificed cannot be just anyone: “the victim’s death will not cause any violence because no one will avenge him.”³²³ For Girard, sacrifice is the necessary death of a scapegoat upon whom society transfers their aggressiveness. In a study of sacrifice among a number of scholars like Julia Kristeva, Jacques Derrida, and Maurice Blanchot, Dennis King Keenan defines sacrifice as “a necessary passage through suffering and/or death (of *either* oneself *or* someone else) on the way to a supreme moment of transcended truth.”³²⁴ While Keenan’s definition focuses on the individual and his exchange of death for a higher purpose, Girard’s theory emphasises the function of sacrifice in the society.

Sacrifice is a frequent presence in myths, where it is usually attached to a ritual, and to metamorphosis. In Euripides’ ancient tragedy *Iphigeneia at Aulis* (405 B.C.), the daughter of king Agamemnon must be sacrificed to goddess Artemis for the Greeks to sail against Troy. After Iphigeneia offers herself willingly, according to Euripides’ version, Artemis substitutes her on the altar for a deer to be sacrificed instead. Kafka himself was familiar with Euripides’ *Iphigeneia*, according to a 1910 diary entry, in which he expresses his admiration for the German translation.³²⁵ Girard has correctly remarked that in sacrifices there is “the gradual disappearance of the borderline between animal and man in those who are marked as victims.”³²⁶ However, the role of sacrifice in myths is not explicitly to divert communal violence, but to serve as an offering to a god, either as part of an exchange or as a punishment.

³²³ Girard, *Sacrifice*, x.

³²⁴ Dennis King Keene, *The Question of Sacrifice* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005), 10.

³²⁵ Kafka, *The Diaries 1910-1923*, 28.

³²⁶ Girard, *The Scapegoat*, 48.

Girard's discussion of the notion of the scapegoat is not without mythical references. He examines the myth of Oedipus in order to prove that the stereotype of *persecution* exists in myths, thus to prove his theory is universal.³²⁷ The stereotypes he recognises in the story of Oedipus are the plague in Thebes, the two forbidden acts of incest and parricide committed by Oedipus, and signs that Oedipus is an outsider. What Girard offers, here, are the criteria by which the victim-scapegoat is chosen by the society. Oedipus has committed two crimes that "pollute" his city and, therefore, bring disease upon the whole population. His isolation, the fact that he is a stranger, and that he has difficulty in walking—a visible sign of differentiation—make him the perfect scapegoat. Girard observes that the Oedipus story is clearly a "persecution text."³²⁸ One of the interesting aspects of the scapegoat, which Girard coins, is the belief that the victim is responsible for the disease of a large group. Therefore, "there is only one person responsible for everything, one who is absolutely responsible, and he will be responsible for the cure because he is already responsible for the sickness" it is argued.³²⁹

Despite becoming an *Ungeziefer*—an animal unfit for sacrifice—Kafka hints that Gregor's metamorphosis represents a sacrifice so that his parents, but primarily his younger sister, Grete, cannot only survive, but prosper. The rebirth of Grete takes place triumphantly, giving her parents "the confirmation of their new dreams" when she stands up and stretches "her young body."³³⁰ In line with Girard's notion of the scapegoat, when Gregor dies, the family is indeed reborn. So, is the sacrifice successful? The sacrifice is successful as far as the family-community is concerned.

³²⁷ Girard, 24-25.

³²⁸ Girard, 27.

³²⁹ Girard, 43.

³³⁰ Kafka, "The Metamorphosis," 118.

Besides, Gregor symbolises all the necessary signs for his persecution: he is isolated and his metamorphosis makes him even more a stranger to his family, as an insect he has stopped bringing money into the family, so he is responsible for their potential decay, and his slow-moving insect body cannot be tolerated. Gregor's animal identity also contributes to his sacrifice, or put differently, to the collective murder for the good of the family. In *Violence and the Sacred* (1977), Girard states that "strictly speaking, there is no essential difference between animal sacrifice and human sacrifice, and in many cases one is substituted by another."³³¹ The boundaries between animal and human are crossed even in sacrificial rites. This is the case with Gregor since, in his sacrificial death, he is both an animal and a human.

Contrary to the idea of sacrifice for the protection of society from its own violence, the idea of sacrifice in Nabokov is for personal benefit. Sacrifice and death are associated with pilgrimage and an unfinished quest in "The Aurelian." Pilgram's death is bodily, but in dying for the sake of his quest, his demise invites the idea of sacrifice, though not for a community. Shroyer suggests that Pilgram "feels that the otherworld—the haven of perfect happiness—communicates with him, calls him, summons him to undertake an expedition."³³² Pilgram's very name, as mentioned earlier, is a direct reference to the word *pilgrim*, and thus his imagined voyages seem to indicate the protagonist's deeper spiritual goal. The pilgrimage imagery is completed by a butterfly that Pilgram owns in his store coming from East Tibet, possibly collected by monks.³³³ Tibet is an eminent site for pilgrims; it is clear that Pilgram's plans to

³³¹ René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (London: Continuum, 2005), 9.

³³² Shroyer, 707.

³³³ Nabokov, "The Aurelian," 253.

visit all the distant butterfly paths are very similar to spiritual quests for knowledge and self-discovery.

Yet, neither Kafka nor Nabokov rely on the traditional sacrificial narratives in their stories. Their writing of metamorphosis, death, and sacrifice is modernist; neither Gregor's sacrifice, nor Pilgram's pilgrimage quest carries any religious connotations. Benjamin observes that myth in Kafka could signify a promise of redemption; however, he states that "Kafka did not succumb to its temptation."³³⁴ The mythical or religious temptations are present in both stories: one can draw associations with Jesus Christ in both deaths as they take place in April, possibly near Easter, but definitely in the beginning of spring-time. This timing might suggest that the metamorphosis in these stories also have a deep, spiritual meaning, so both Gregor and Pilgram are alive until spring. It is evident, though, that their metamorphoses lead to their premature death. Death does not seem too premature, though, if we think that both protagonists were insects, hence their life should be short and fragile. Gregor is symbolically sacrificed, causing a symbolic rebirth for his family, and Pilgram experiences a spiritual rebirth. Still, Kafka and Nabokov employ the ideas of sacrifice and rebirth, yet, in each case, the success of the sacrificial process is open to question.

It can be inferred that metamorphosis assists both Pilgram and Gregor to escape the burden of their identity, by becoming animals, which undoubtedly leads them to their death. The concept of subjectivity as it emerges in Kafka's and Nabokov's stories is of a being not only affected but also conditioned by its coming death. In one of his letters to his friend and editor, Max Brod, Kafka writes about his refusal to go on a trip: "it is not fear of the trip itself [...] it is the fear of change."³³⁵ It is not unusual that

³³⁴ Benjamin, "Franz Kafka," 114.

³³⁵ Kafka, *Briefe*, 383-86, in Corngold, 73.

change and metamorphosis should be perceived as close to death, since death itself is an ultimate metamorphosis which each human being undergoes. It is indicative that, in Nabokov's tale, Pilgram's changed existence is only accomplished through his death: the narrative event of his death is followed by an extensive description of his (possible) travels outside Europe, to butterfly paths. Foster has argued that the death of Pilgram "encourages readers to share in a marvellous transformation."³³⁶ This detailed description is not written merely for the participation of the reader, though. Irony shades the paradox that Pilgram's dreams and goals come true only through death. The story closes not with a collective transformation, as Foster argued, but rather with a feeling of an ambiguous transformation. The end of Kafka's story is structurally similar: Gregor meets the same troublesome ending as Pilgram—with the steady putrefaction of the wound which resulted from his father's action, and initiating his own death by starvation—but the story does not end there. On the last page of "Metamorphosis," as Gregor's dead body is thrown to the bin, the Samsas observe "their daughter, who was growing ever more vivacious [...] had recently blossomed into a beautiful, voluptuous girl."³³⁷ This rejuvenating image of blossoming, like that of Pilgram's never fulfilled walks through the fields of butterflies, feels both logical, even optimistic, and thoroughly unjust.

Neither Kafka nor Nabokov offer comforting solutions; the death of the subject is so realistic and inevitable that ideas like rebirth or redemption seem ironic. This is perhaps how the trope of metamorphosis enters the twentieth century: with the discomfiting death of the human-animal subject, a gross sacrifice whose ultimate value and purpose are open to question. In the next chapter I explore how the metamorphosis is manifested in group subjectivity, for instance in the subject's interaction with the nation and community.

³³⁶ Foster, 447.

³³⁷ Kafka, "The Metamorphosis," 118.

Chapter Two: Metamorphosing The (Post) Modern Colonised

Subject

Alejo Carpentier's The Kingdom of This World (1949), and

Vassilis Vassilikos's ... And Dreams Are Dreams (1988)

“the marvelous is everywhere. Its form is the result of transformations which have been going on since the world began.”

Pierre Mabilie, *The Mirror of the Marvelous* ³³⁸

“our style is reaffirmed throughout our history.”

Alejo Carpentier, “On the Marvelous Real in America”³³⁹

In an imagined voyage around the globe, Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier stops by Franz Kafka's Prague. Inspired by an entry in the author's diary, in which he peeks at the city through a window, Carpentier pauses to admire the baroque architecture of the city. Upon his fantastic return to America, Carpentier emphasises that works of literature

³³⁸ Pierre Mabilie, *The Mirror of the Marvelous: the Classic Surrealist Work on Myth*, trans. Jody Gladding (Rochester: Inner Traditions, 1998), 14.

³³⁹ Alejo Carpentier, “On the Marvelous Real in America,” trans. Tanya Huntington and Lois Parkinson Zamora, in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, eds. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 75-88, 83.

influence each other, citing the example of Hesiod's *Works and Days* and its echoes in Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, and thereby making an oblique reference to Latin America's Spanish past, which also stretches to the classical period. The contact with other languages, cultures, and geographies, but also the South American continent's historical past and its representation—enriched as it were by extraordinary mysteries, lunar landscapes—shape the production of art, Carpentier argues. Such inter-imblications and formations are particularly visible in literature and architecture, he suggests. On the one hand, America's literary past—despite deriving from colonialism, and being affected by its present and future—is in fact rooted in its ancient landscape and architecture. On the other, it moulds traces of other landscapes and architectures, sometimes geographically or ideologically disconnected from its own.³⁴⁰ Carpentier revives, among others, José Martí's influential category of the “Mediterranean Caribbean.” The latter presupposes a common, if sometimes contested, comparison between the Mediterranean and the Caribbean, two geocultural locations that lack obvious sea-related parallels but appear to share a dynamic structure of history—a circumstance which yields comparable cultural products. For Édouard Glissant the Caribbean archipelago is a location in which “the poetics of Relation” are most explicitly manifested: an exchange between cultures in modernity, being facilitated by works of literature which allows us to grasp the Other.³⁴¹ J. Michael Dash considers that Carpentier's thinking of identity and subjectivity in his novels has led him to perceive a distinct affiliation with Mediterranean culture:

The Mediterranean then, provides in Carpentier's literary universe a matrix of values on which the identity of American otherness could be based. This

³⁴⁰ Carpentier, “On the Marvelous Real in America,” 83.

³⁴¹ Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2010), 23-35.

view on the autonomous American identity was not prelapsarian but included the realities of a historical contact and the ideal of racial and cultural hybridity.³⁴²

The Caribbean and the Mediterranean accommodate different versions of “otherness” because of their specific historical circumstances. As Dash points out in his analysis of Carpentier’s construction of American identity, there is an encounter with “the ideal of racial and cultural hybridity,” a concept that, according to Peter Burke, is often applied in Latin America to account for the coexistence of indigenous populations and African slaves under the presence of Europeans.³⁴³ Historian Gordon Lewis has offered an informative comparative analysis between the Mediterranean and the Caribbean on the basis of geographical location, social structure, the formation of hybrid cultures and polyglot identities, and historical evolution. This supports the idea that the two have a common historical and social course from antiquity to modernity.³⁴⁴ These assumed historical, and cultural affinities, or continuities between these fringe locations, may suggest that there is a greater continuity in the ways in which imagination works in these two sites than meets the eye. In the context of my enquiry into stories of metamorphoses and subjectivities, I explore whether these geographically marginal locations gave rise to tales of metamorphosis strikingly different to those of Kafka and Nabokov. Might we not encounter tales that gesture to different kinds of subjectivities, and individual and group identities? In addition, I look at the identities constructed within these landscapes and the affinity of such identities with myth. Moreover, I

³⁴² J. Michael Dash, *The Other America: Caribbean Literature in a New World Context* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998), 90.

³⁴³ Peter Burke, *Cultural Hybridity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 4.

³⁴⁴ Gordon K. Lewis, *Main Currents in Caribbean Thought: The Historical Evolution of Caribbean Society in its Ideological Aspects, 1492-1900* (London: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 16-17.

examine the political and socio-historical context, within which these stories emerged, and consider whether these stories may have been influenced by dominant geopolitical discourses in their framing of their subjects; this framework will assist me in comparing stories of transformation that are preoccupied with the relationship of the individual to the idea of nation-home.

In this chapter I have chosen to focus on stories of metamorphosis embedded in fictional texts from two sides of the globe: Alejo Carpentier's novel *The Kingdom of this World* (*El Reino de Este Mundo*, 1949),³⁴⁵ from the Caribbean, and Vassilis Vassilikos's short story collection *...and dreams are dreams* (*Rêves Diurnes et Autres Nouvelles, Υπάρχουν Όνειρα*, 1988, 1995, 1996), from the Mediterranean.³⁴⁶ As the writers of these stories, no less than their protagonists, face violent social changes, we see how the trope of metamorphosis in the second half of the twentieth century is revalued and expanded. In such contexts the circumstance of metamorphosing ceases to be centre-stage and to be attached to individual subjectivity. At the same time, it acquires a new position—what we can call a strategic narrative peripherality—and a new function—namely, to indicate, metonymically or directly, social transformations. Kafka, whom Carpentier and other Latin American writers, such as Jorge Luis Borges,

³⁴⁵ Alejo Carpentier, *El Reino de Este Mundo*, (Mexico: E.D.I.A.P.S.A., 1949). Alejo Carpentier, *The Kingdom of This World*, trans. Harriet de Onis (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006).

³⁴⁶ As the writer informs us, through his personal website, the collection *Υπάρχουν όνειρα* is the final version of two previously published books of short stories: *The White Bear* (*Η Άσπρη Αρκούδα*), Athens: Gnosi, 1988, and *The Comet Halley, There are dreams* (*Ο Κομήτης του Χάλεϋ, Υπάρχουν όνειρα*), Athens: Kaktos, 1986, (My translation). Hence, the stories which compose the collection have previously been published in two separate collections in Greek. The English version I am using in this chapter was translated from Greek into English in 1996. Vassilis Vassilikos, *...and dreams are dreams*, trans. Mary Kitroeff (New York: Seven Stories Press, 1996).

admired for his original expression of the fantastic and the dream-like qualities of everyday experience, did not engage directly with the effects of historical changes on the subject in his *Metamorphosis*.³⁴⁷ His male protagonist was constructed amidst the bureaucracy and middle-class anxieties of early twentieth-century Europe. In this regard, the insect-related, magical transformations—which I have argued in the previous chapter is also a marker of literary transformation of the text—are attempts to negotiate the subject’s relationship to bourgeois society, or to expose its impossibilities. A more directly political view of the subject is to be found in stories of metamorphosis inspired by revolutions, the creation of independent nations, and tales of exile, on the one hand, and by local myths, religion and folklore, on the other. Such stories are representative of the way in which the narrative tool of transformation has been utilized in the second half of the twentieth century.

A comparative discussion of the ways in which the two writers treat metamorphic change can contribute to a new understanding of subjectivity in postcolonial, magical realist literatures. Thus, it will elucidate some of the ways the metamorphic subject is constructed in the second half of the twentieth century. Yet, the main purpose of this chapter is to go beyond the individual and examine the idea of transformation at the level of group subjectivity and identity. The stories that use the narrative mode commonly known as “magical realism” often include re-constructions of identity within wider categories of the self in order to engage with the issues of collectivity and nation. In this regard, Anne Hegerfeldt has argued that “the idea of

³⁴⁷ Kafka’s impact on writers of magical realism and stories where magic is very much a part of reality has been often acknowledged by scholars such as Angel Flores, and some of the writers themselves, including Carpentier. For Flores, Jorge Luis Borges’s translation of Kafka’s stories in Spanish in 1938 marks the literary beginning of magical realism. Angel Flores, “Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction,” *Hispania* 38, (1955): 187-192, in Zamora and Faris, *Magical Realism*, 112.

constituting identity through narration is found not only on the individual level, but it is broadened to include community and even national identity.”³⁴⁸ This observation is applicable to both Carpentier and Vassilikos as their stories of metamorphosis are part of transformed communities. Their stories of identity are inspired by and written in postcolonial geographical locations. Moreover, both focus their tales through specific historical locations, events and their effects: those of nineteenth century Haiti and Greece, respectively. In this way, both address the issue of colonialism as affecting the subject formation. For this reason, my discussion of subjectivity will take into account what Ranjana Khanna has called the “unconscious dimensions of national subjecthood.” Khanna suggests that the “spectre of colonialism [...] hangs over the postcolonial independent nation-state” and I am keen to investigate how this spectre functions in the two texts in light of their writers’ experiences of general and local history in specific locales at the margins of the capitalist Western world.³⁴⁹

My inquiry has two lines of argumentation: one follows the texts as they negotiate the categories of nationhood, and the loss of self and home; the other follows the ways these novels refashion the traditional boundaries of stories of transformation: the themes of the human and the animal, and of death and immortality. The themes often intertwine: in Carpentier’s story, for instance, the animal metamorphoses of two slaves, Macandal and Ti Noël, during the Haitian Revolution are juxtaposed with that of Napoleon’s sister, Pauline Borghese, into a statue. Such an example allows us to consider two aspects of subjectivity as presented through metamorphosis: on the one hand, the colonised subject finds a place in Haiti’s landscape and religious practices;

³⁴⁸ Anne C. Hegerfeldt, *Lies that Tell the Truth: Magic Realism Seen through Contemporary Fiction from Britain* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 64.

³⁴⁹ Khanna, *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism*, 25.

on the other, the colonial subject “returns” to her own territory, that of a museum of a European capital. Both are, therefore, stories of engagement with subjectivity on a larger scale, namely that of the nation. What this engagement testifies to is a creative response to a traumatic loss—a social recalibration of loss that is often transgenerational. Here, loss is to be understood in Freudian terms: that is, the loss of an abstract construct, such as nation or culture, which affects the self and is manifested in mourning and melancholia.³⁵⁰ The literary marvellous, I suggest, is used in these texts to address situated experiences of this kind, and, specifically, to negotiate the affect of historical loss. Psychoanalytically informed scholars, such as Khanna, increasingly discuss post-colonialism, and particularly the relationship between the subjects that populate post-colonial spaces, in terms of the working through of deep historical loss.³⁵¹ Vassilikos’s story of the tiger woman in a German zoo allows us to explore the idea of national identity as constructed inside and outside Greek borders. Further, it presents marginalised subjectivities in modern Athens—themselves marked by loss or the inheritance of past structures of loss. By scrutinizing the instances of metamorphic change and transformation in the two texts, this chapter also explores the ways in which Carpentier’s and Vassilikos’s texts engage the condition of colonial and postcolonial melancholia. Such an inquiry sheds further light on a wider variety of ways in which subjectivity is reconceived in these locales, including the re-charting of the temporal boundaries of subjectivity. The immortal protagonists of Vassilikos’s short story collection, *Rosa and Pacifico*, attest to the various and novel metamorphoses

³⁵⁰ Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” 242.

³⁵¹ Besides Khanna, other scholars have engaged with the issue of melancholia in relation to group loss. See for example David Eng and David Kazanjian, *Loss: The Politics of Mourning* (Berkeley: California University Press, 2003); Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Nouri Gana, *Signifying Loss: Toward a Poetics of Narrative Mourning* (Bucknell: Bucknell University Press, 2011).

of subjectivity, including medical transformations facilitated by a heart transplant. They also highlight the ways in which writing metamorphosis has itself changed, evidencing how metaphors, including those relating to the heart, have been literalized and semantically reworked.

A Postcolonial Perspective on Subjectivity

Published in 1949, Carpentier's novel is dominated by the events of the Haitian Revolution in the French colony of San Domingo (1791-1804). Nine years later, the Cuban revolution would radically change the way in which national identity was conceptualised in Latin America. Carpentier's interest in the Haitian population and the Afro-Cuban movement is not accidental. Nor is a similar concern, detectable in Vassilikos's collection, in the narrator's preoccupation with the aftermath of the 1821 Greek revolution. What these two historical events have in common is the influence of the French Revolution (1789) and the proliferation of Enlightenment values. These, in turn, defined the emergent freedom of the two independent post-colonial nations, and marked specific paths, and even literary modes, through which the subjects inhabiting these places would identify with their homelands. "In 1789 the French West Indian colony of San Domingo supplied two thirds of the overseas trade of France and was the greatest individual market for the European slave-trade" reports C. L. R. James in *The Black Jacobins*.³⁵² Written in 1932 and published in England in 1938, this historical account of the Haitian struggles for independence is an influential study on slavery and the operative forces of colonialism. As historian James Walvin observes, C. L. R. James

³⁵² C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins*, trans. James Walvin (London: Penguin, 2001), xviii.

advocated the importance of the Haitian revolution in *The Black Jacobins*, an account which, for the first time, conveyed the experiences of African slaves across America.³⁵³ In the book's final chapter, James sketches a portrait of Toussaint L'Ouverture, who led the revolution against the French colonisers. Adopting the French revolutionary values of liberty, equality and fraternity, L'Ouverture idealised revolutionary France as "the highest stage of social existence that he could imagine. It was not only the framework of his mind. No one else was so conscious of its practical necessity in the social backwardness and primitive conditions of life around him."³⁵⁴ James' account shows that the idea that Haiti had to be modernised by following the civilised path set out by Enlightenment values was shared by both the colonisers and the colonised. In hindsight, one can recognise that this effective anti-colonial struggle led imperceptibly into neo-colonialism. The issue of the modernization of colonial and postcolonial nations preoccupies Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (1994). Therein, he mentions the Haitian revolution numerous times, but specifically in order to address the problem of what he calls "the postcolonial translation of modernity."³⁵⁵ Bhabha specifically draws on the example of the narrative of modernity as progress adopted both by the French rulers and the natives of Haiti, and especially pioneers of the revolution, like Toussaint, and those who recorded the events, like C. L. R. James. Bhabha asserts that this shared narrative amounts to a case of "split consciousness."³⁵⁶

The significance of the Haitian revolution has also drawn the attention of modern Greek Studies scholar, Stathis Gourgouris. He stresses that the Greek

³⁵³ James, viii.

³⁵⁴ James, 235.

³⁵⁵ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 350.

³⁵⁶ Bhabha, 350.

revolution and the emergence of the neo-Hellenic Enlightenment have a lot in common with the national struggles in Haiti. On the one hand, this is because they were both inspired by the values of the French revolution; on the other, and here he agrees with Bhabha, the Enlightenment was an “emancipatory project” which was imposed as a signifier onto both sites of revolution.³⁵⁷ The signifiers of these events, as Gourgouris correctly highlights, should have been Hellenism and Haitian autonomy, respectively.³⁵⁸ Instead, the European models had such an impact on the formation of these nations as independent that they repeated what Bhabha terms “the archaic aristocratic racism of the *ancien regime*.”³⁵⁹ Indeed, Vassilikos devotes considerable space to a fictional, but historically founded, account of Otto, the first king of Greece,³⁶⁰ while Carpentier’s novel reiterates the European-like reign of Haiti’s first monarch.³⁶¹ What a comparison of two such literary accounts offers, then, is a response to Bhabha’s aporia regarding what happens to sites in which “progress is only heard (of) and not ‘seen.’” Bhabha identifies these spaces as sites of “postcolonial contramodernity,” where modernity is suffused with questions of identity and belonging, expressing an antithesis between self and society.³⁶² The stories of metamorphoses in these contra-modern spaces assume a great importance precisely because they directly address the complex issues of subjectivity within a nation.

³⁵⁷ Stathis Gourgouris, *Dream Nation: Enlightenment, Colonization, and the Institution of Modern Greece* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 74-75.

³⁵⁸ Gourgouris, 74.

³⁵⁹ Bhabha, 350.

³⁶⁰ Vassilikos, *...and dreams are dreams*, 67.

³⁶¹ Carpentier, *The Kingdom*, 107.

³⁶² Bhabha, 351.

The “repeated desire to modernize,” to progress from a primitive, unorganised group to a modern nation, has not only preoccupied scholars of postcolonial discourse, but also modern Greek studies academics as well.³⁶³ These latter have sought to address the issue of Greece in modernity. Neni Panourgia has situated the relationship of European Enlightenment with nineteenth-century Athens within the logic of colonisation, thus recognising that Europe saw Greece with a hegemonic gaze.³⁶⁴ Greece may not have been under direct European colonial rule, like Haiti, but the modern Greek state, once freed from Ottoman rule, adapted the models of thinking offered by European colonial powers to such an extent that it unwittingly slipped into the condition of neo-colonialism. Yannis Hamilakis further expands on Greece’s colonial relationship to Europe, drawing attention to the process of nation-making and the emergence of nationalism, and arguing that “the nationalization of society is a form of colonization.”³⁶⁵ As others before him have also shown, he detects that Greece’s condition following modernity, its consequent structuring as a modern nation-state, is a case of colonisation precisely because the process of making a nation was structured by European models, just as in the case of Haiti.³⁶⁶

In the ‘history’ section of *...and dreams are dreams*, a grandfather explains to his grandson the economic impact of the relationship between the newly founded Greek state and Europe, which soon brought the country into a state of debt: “they wanted Greece to be a slave; ever since then she has been one, my boy: but not a Turkish slave,

³⁶³ Bhabba, 350.

³⁶⁴ Neni Panourgia, “Colonizing the Ideal: Neoclassical Articulations and European Modernities,” *Angelaki* 9, no. 2 (2004): 165-180, 166, accessed June 14, 2018, doi: 10.1080/0969725042000272816.

³⁶⁵ Yannis Hamilakis, *The Nation and its Ruins: Antiquity, Archaeology, and National Imagination in Greece* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 19-20.

³⁶⁶ Hamilakis, 20.

a Christian one.”³⁶⁷ For Vassilikos, the history of modern Greece begins when Greece declares its independence as a nation-state after a four-hundred year occupation by the Ottoman Empire. Anthropologist Michael Herzfeld has used the term “crypto-colonialism” to describe the case of Greece, whose nation structure has been modelled on the hegemonic European example since independence. Herzfeld’s definition of the circumstances of crypto-colonialism describes precisely what Vassilikos himself writes about Greece:

[A]lthough the German philologists and art historians who generated the neoclassical model of Greek (and more generally European) culture were not themselves military colonizers, they were doing the ideological work of the project of European world hegemony. [...] the curious alchemy whereby certain countries, buffer zones between the colonized lands and those as yet untamed, were compelled to acquire their political independence at the expense of massive economic dependence, this relationship being articulated in the iconic guise of aggressively national culture fashioned to suit foreign models. Such countries were and are living paradoxes: they are nominally independent, but that independence comes at the price of a sometimes humiliating form of effective dependence.³⁶⁸

Gourgouris moves one step further and argues that, as a result of fervent adoption of the foreign model of modernizing, the Greek nation has also incorporated the feeling of the “failure of modernization,” a failure to develop on equal terms with Europe.³⁶⁹ As Vassilikos implies at numerous points in his collection of stories, Greece is yet to dispel the awkward feeling of not being modern enough, or not civilised enough, in order to be closer to Europe. These effects have, naturally, deeper roots in the previous long-lasting colonial situation: as Greece was Ottoman for such a long time, the

³⁶⁷ Vassilikos, 73.

³⁶⁸ Michael Herzfeld, “The Absent Presence: Discourses of Crypto-Colonialism,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. 4 (2002): 899-926, 900-90, accessed June 14, 2018, doi:10.1215/00382876-101-4-899.

³⁶⁹ Gourgouris, 71.

condition necessitated painful identity questions. These accretions of colonial history are likely made the newly founded Greek nation particularly vulnerable to the replication of the affects of the colonised even once independent. This affective relationship between Europe and the “belated” modernity of Greece is, according to Gourgouris, “the postcolonial condition par excellence.”³⁷⁰

It is important, I think, not to equate the experience of the Haitian population under European rule, as described by Carpentier, to that of Greece. Nevertheless, considering Greece as a site of postcolonial subjectivities allows me not only to shed a new light on Vassilikos’s stories, but also to compare two different experiences of postcolonialism. Thus, I am able to explore how these metamorphosing subjectivities identify as members of a modern nation, and how the trope of metamorphosis could be used in the context of the discourse of neo-colonial resistance. Incidentally, in the writings of both Carpentier and Vassilikos, Paris holds an ambivalent but significant place.

Siting the Marvellous and the Magical

Using fantastic tropes such as metamorphosis, the mode of writing that has most compellingly engaged the issues of postcolonial subjectivity since the mid-twentieth century is magical realism. In his seminal 1955 essay “Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction” literary critic Angel Flores emphasises that it was the 1935 publication of Jorge Luis Borges’s first short stories that marked the rise of magical realism. “Latin America is no longer in search of its expression,” proclaims Flores: it

³⁷⁰ Gourgouris, 72.

has found an “authentic expression” in the magical realism of Latin American writers.³⁷¹ True, magical realism is the genre most often associated with Latin America, but even Flores’s mention of predecessors like Kafka immediately suggests an international scope and transformations of the genre *en route*.³⁷² Carpentier himself wrote extensively on this type of writing. In his 1975 essay “The Baroque and the Marvellous Real,” he acknowledges the root of Latin American aesthetic practice in the term/category “*magic realism*” (“Magischer Realismus”).³⁷³ This term had earlier been employed by German art critic and painter Franz Roh, who used it in 1925 to describe a very specific turn in the arts, a movement called New Objectivity (*Neue Sachlichkeit*). The latter addressed the oneiric dimension of objects but was decidedly not surrealist. If anything, ‘New objectivity’ artworks accentuated reality and derived a sense of the uncanny precisely from that over-emphasis.³⁷⁴ By using the phrase “marvellous real” instead, which he believed fully expressed Latin American culture, Carpentier wished to show how magical realist expression differs from European Surrealism and its influences. Moreover, he wanted to point out the vital link between an expression of reality, including political reality, and magic realist expression.

³⁷¹ Flores, “Magical Realism in Spanish American Fiction,” in Zamora and Faris, *Magical Realism*, 187.

³⁷² On the contradictory nature of Flores’s argument, see Luis Leal, “Magical Realism in Spanish American Literature,” trans. Wendy B. Faris, in Zamora and Faris, *Magical Realism*, 119-124.

³⁷³ Alejo Carpentier, “The Baroque and the Marvellous Real,” trans. Tanya Huntington and Lois Parkinson Zamora, in Zamora and Faris, *Magical Realism*, 89-108, 107.

³⁷⁴ For Franz Roh’s essay on New Objectivity as the heart of “magic realism”/post-expressionism, see Roh, “Magic Realism: Post Expression,” in Zamora and Faris, *Magical Realism*, 15-31. Alejo Carpentier’s essay on the Baroque explicitly addresses the difference between literary magical realism and Roh’s magic realism, yet acknowledges Roh’s influential ideas.

Carpentier did acknowledge the influence of European literature in this new mode of expression, but he pointed out one of the originalities of the genre in its Latin American context: its affinity to a nation's history and aptitude to address contemporary political events in the guise of the magic and the fantastic. Amaryll Chanady has criticised Carpentier's point of view on the geographical origin of magical realism, stating that magical realist texts were not developed because a specific location happened to be marvellous. Among other reasons, including Carpentier's own observations in his 1949 essay on the "marvellous real," Chanady points out that magical realist writers critically responded to the European canon and traditional narratives by developing a discourse "in the context of neocolonial resistance."³⁷⁵ So, while magical realist fiction has appeared on all sides of the globe, and in both developed and developing societies, magical realist texts have particularly flourished in locations where historical, cultural and political transformations were violent and traumatic. Writers in such locations still tend to convey the events from their colonial past and their deep effects on personal and collective histories as well as struggles over political and cultural identity.³⁷⁶ Such a view is, in fact, implicit in Carpentier's own 1949 text on the link between the Caribbean and Mediterranean cultural identities glossed above. Modern magical realism was born in the throes of colonialism and political turmoil in Latin American countries such as Colombia and Cuba. Yet this did not prevent its adoption by other literatures, and by Greece in particular. That the genre

³⁷⁵ Amaryll Chanady, "The Territorialisation of the Imaginary in Latin America: Self-Affirmation and Resistance to Metropolitan Paradigms," in Zamora and Faris, *Magical Realism*, 125-144, 141.

³⁷⁶ Not all magical realist works are political in terms of responding to colonialism, however; Laura Esquivel's 1989 novel *Like Water for Chocolate*, features a series of fantastic events and establishes a connection between food and subjectivity which has little to do with Spanish colonialism in Mexico. Laura Esquivel, *Like Water for Chocolate*, trans. Carol and Thomas Christensen (London: Swan, 1989).

thrived outside of its native context testifies to similar socio-political transformations and comparable efforts to show the effects of colonialism and neo-colonialism on the shaping of collective identities.

In what follows, I juxtapose Carpentier and Vassilikos contextually to address their specific uses of magical realism, and to chisel out some characteristics of writing in fringe geopolitical locations, including compulsive inter-textuality. In the same essay in which he describes his imagined journeys outside America, Carpentier acknowledges an actual trip to Haiti in 1943, which inspired him to coin the term *lo real maravilloso*, that is, the marvellous real which “arises from an unexpected alteration of reality.”³⁷⁷ Thus, what later came to be termed “magical realism” started as a reaction to realism and, as we will see, surrealism. Significantly, Carpentier’s essay also constitutes the prologue to his novel *The Kingdom of This World*, which is historically grounded in the revolution of the enslaved African population of French-ruled Saint-Domingue, led by Henri Christophe during Haiti’s war of independence in 1804. While this revolution was successful, in 1809, during Christophe’s rule, the Spanish returned to the island and many slaves returned to the plantations. As a result, eleven years later, Christophe was overthrown by another slave mutiny. Inspired by his visit to Christophe’s palace and other key historical locations, and by his contact with voodoo rituals, songs and tales about the slaves’ uprisings, Carpentier came to argue that the marvellous can be found in everyday occurrences, both in the belief that people can metamorphose into animals and in historical events which the writer can present as marvellous in the work of art. “I saw the possibility of establishing certain synchronisms, American, recurrent, timeless, relating this to that, yesterday to today,”

³⁷⁷ Carpentier, “On the Marvelous Real in America,” 84.

writes Carpentier, thus showing that the marvellous, at least as he envisioned it, is also a comparative expression that can explore both the links between past and present and those between myths and reality.³⁷⁸

All of this negotiation of cultural identity and the ways in which it fuelled Carpentier's aesthetic practice may well have been informed by his own life trajectory. Carpentier was born in Switzerland in 1904, two years after Cuba's independence from US military rule, and his family returned to Havana after his birth. There, he belonged to Havana's avant-garde and actively participated in Grupo Minorista (1923-1929), a group of writers, artists, and journalists who sought experimental modernist expression in their work.³⁷⁹ It was Carpentier's contribution to one of the Grupo Minorista's manifestos against the Gerardo Machado regime that led to his imprisonment in Cuba. Carpentier escaped to Paris with the help of the writer Robert Desnos, who then introduced him to the Parisian surrealist circle. There, Carpentier befriended George Bataille and André Breton in the 1930s, and contributed to the Second Surrealist Manifesto (1930).³⁸⁰ Doubtless, all these migrations and meetings influenced Carpentier's thinking about the marvellous in Europe and America, and his work as a journalist, composer, essayist, and novelist. The Surrealist emphasis on dreams, the unconscious and freedom from traditional modes of expression, but also on social critique, influenced Carpentier's writing in Paris and later, in Venezuela and Cuba. When he finally returned to Cuba, after the revolution which brought Fidel Castro to

³⁷⁸ Carpentier, "On the Marvelous Real in America," 84.

³⁷⁹ Vick Unruh, "Modernity's Labors in Latin America: the Cultural Work of Cuba's Avant-Gardes," in *The Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms*, eds. Mark Wollaeger and Matt Eatough (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 345.

³⁸⁰ André Breton, "Second Manifesto of Surrealism 1930," in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969).

power, Carpentier had already published *The Kingdom of This World* and *The Lost Steps* (1953), two novels in which the Haitian landscape and Afro-Cuban movement—about which Carpentier had written extensively prior to his exile in Paris—have a prominent presence.³⁸¹ Carpentier actively supported Castro and served as a diplomat for Cuba in Paris from 1966 until his death in 1980.

Carpentier's journey to Haiti was a transformative experience, and inspired his use of the “*lo real maravilloso*” in *The Kingdom*, and another influence should be mentioned besides surrealism, the Baroque. Although he did not write as a native of Haiti, I consider Carpentier's experience of twentieth century Cuba and his overall preoccupation with identity in postcolonial sites as worth examining. Carpentier's idea of the marvellous is likely to have been influenced, as critics have noted, by Pierre Mabilie's surrealist study *The Mirror of the Marvelous (Le Miroir du Merveilleux, 1940)*, an exploration of the element of the surrealist marvellous in different cultures, religions, and literatures.³⁸² When he visited the island of Haiti in 1943, Carpentier was, in fact, accompanied by Mabilie. Thus, even if Carpentier endeavoured to detach the “marvellous real” from surrealist and, more generally, European artistic expression, the most significant element in Mabilie's study, that is, the assertion that the marvellous originates in site-specific cultural, religious, or folklore beliefs, had a profound impact on Carpentier's own vision of the category.³⁸³ Revisiting Carpentier's surrealist and

³⁸¹ Alejo Carpentier, *The Lost Steps*, trans. Harriet de Onís (London: Gollancz, 1956). For other examples of Carpentier's interest in Afro-Cuban culture see his 1933 novel *¡Écue-Yamba-Ó!* (Madrid: Alfaguara, 1982).

³⁸² Elsa Linguanti, Francesco Casotti, Carmen Concilio eds., *Coterminous Worlds: Magical Realism and Contemporary Post-colonial Literature in English* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994), 16.

³⁸³ Raphael Dalleo, *American Imperialism's Undead: The Occupation of Haiti and the Rise of Caribbean Anticolonialism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016), 90.

avant-garde concerns, Vivienne Brough-Evans has suggested that “the combination of Carpentier’s *vanguardista* concerns regarding issues of cultural authenticity,” as shown in his definition of the marvellous real, and his experience of European modernism³⁸⁴ and ethnographic surrealism, “gave rise to a specific type of narrative, one that qualifies as an emergent ethnographic Marxist text.”³⁸⁵ This assessment reinstates and further emphasizes that magic realism originated as a form of anticolonial resistant discourse. As the marvellous and the surreal in Carpentier’s novel are only understood and witnessed by the African population of the island, it appears invisible and incomprehensible to Europeans in the diegetic world of the text. For scholars, such as Antonio Benítez-Rojo, Carpentier fails to represent indigenous Haiti on its own terms, and unwittingly exoticises it.³⁸⁶ Carpentier’s portrayal of the marvellous aspects of the Haitian cultural landscape has itself been criticised as privileging the colonisers’ point of view, especially in juxtaposing the Enlightenment values of reason and progress with indigenous African rituals, which Carpentier re-reads as “magic” and thence a proof of the marvellous in Latin America and a point of differentiation with Europe. At the same time, this failure is also his achievement: specifically, his complex depiction of black subjectivity in *The Kingdom* allows me to explore subjectivity within the circumstance of what W. E. B. Du Bois calls “double consciousness” in *The Souls of Black Folk*

³⁸⁴ Neil Larsen considers the theory of *lo real maravilloso* as Carpentier’s attempt to move away from European models, a theory which can be considered as both realist and modernist. Neil Larsen, “El Siglo de las Luces: Modernism and Epic,” in *Modernism and iMargins: Reinscribing Cultural Modernity from Spain and Latin America*, eds. Anthony Geist and José B. Monleón (New York: Garland, 1999), 260-276, 264.

³⁸⁵ Vivienne Brough-Evans, *Sacred Surrealism, Dissidence and International Avant-Garde Prose* (Oxon: Routledge, 2016), 65.

³⁸⁶ Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective* [1989], trans. James E. Maraniss (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 183.

(1903), that is, within the circumstances of a black subject caught between two conflicting states of identity.³⁸⁷

The seventeenth century Spanish Baroque aesthetic also permeates Carpentier's formulation of the marvellous real, and the artistic practice in *The Kingdom*. Like a covert address to the European avant-gardes, the intertextual engagement with the Spanish Baroque in the novel serves to underscore the ambivalence of black subjectivity caught between emerging nationhood and colonial values. Although the baroque culture of colonial Spain represented the dominant ideology of the metropolitan centre, the baroque heritage of Cervantes and Lope de Vega of the Spanish Golden Age found its way into the anti-colonial aesthetic practices of the Hispanic Caribbean at the beginning of the twentieth century. Carpentier read Eugenio D'Ors's writings on the Baroque (*Du Baroque*, 1936)³⁸⁸ with interest and passion, while the Spanish "Golden Age" playwright Lope de Vega so attracted him that his words preface the first part of *The Kingdom*.³⁸⁹ Specifically, Carpentier uses an extract from Lope de Vega's comedy *The New World Discovered by Christopher Columbus* (1614), wherein the Devil seeks permission to enter Providence, as "the King of the West" and Providence accepts him:

THE DEVIL

Oh, blessed court,

Eternal Providence!

³⁸⁷ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Dover Thrift, 2016), 122.

³⁸⁸ Eugenio D'Ors, *Du baroque*, trans. Agathe Rouart-Valéry and Frédéric Dassas. (Paris: Gallimard, 1968).

³⁸⁹ Lope de Vega, *El Nuevo Mundo Descubierta por Cristóbal Colón*, trans. Robert M. Shannon (Peter Lang, 2001).

Where are you sending Columbus
 To renew my evil deeds?
 Know you not that long since I rule here? ³⁹⁰

Addressing the colonialism of the New World that started with Columbus, Carpentier chooses the above dialogue to open his first chapter on Haiti's history at the beginning of the eighteenth century.³⁹¹ This appropriation of the Spanish Baroque utterance is played out in a specific historical-diegetic context. The protagonist of Carpentier's novel is an ordinary slave named Ti Noël who witnesses and participates in the slave uprisings against the French led by another slave and historical leader of slave uprisings, Macandal. Tales and folk songs about Macandal and his human-animal transformations, inspire other slaves, including Ti Noël. In the second part of the novel, Ti Noël hears about the French Revolution and the rumours that slavery will be abolished. United under Voodoo rituals and Macandal's teachings, the African population revolts against the French plantation owners with the help of the Spanish rulers on the other side of the island, Santo Domingo. After the French return to power, Ti Noël accompanies his master to Santiago de Cuba, where he encounters the Baroque inside a church:

[T]he Negro found in the Spanish churches a Voodoo warmth he had never encountered in the Sulpician churches of the Cap. The baroque golds, [...] had an attraction, a power of seduction in presence, symbols, attributes, and signs similar to those of the altars of the *houmforts* consecrated to Damballah, the Snake god.³⁹²

³⁹⁰ Alejo Carpentier, *The Kingdom of This World*, trans. Harriet de Onis (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), 2.

³⁹¹ Carpentier, 2.

³⁹² Carpentier, 80. Houmforts are Haitian Voodoo temples.

The Latin American Baroque aesthetic, which Carpentier presents as different from its European precursors, leaves an impression on Ti Noël. The voodoo rituals and the Catholic Church share an affinity in this passage, which poses complex questions about Carpentier's re-discovery of the Baroque. Critic Steve Wakefield argues that Carpentier reconstructed the Baroque in his works as an expression of postcolonialism, stating that Carpentier's "adoption of the baroque style as meta-language" gives the reader a different perspective on the characters' experience of the Baroque.³⁹³ John Waldron considers neo-baroque and magical realism as "two types of representation" that act "as responses to colonialism, neo-colonialism, and its latest iteration, neoliberal globalization."³⁹⁴ Furthermore, Waldron argues that Carpentier has adopted the "bifocal baroque way of seeing" in *The Kingdom*, an evaluation also put forward by Lois Parkinson Zamora in *The Inordinate Eye* (2006).³⁹⁵ Waldron explains that the phenomenon of 'bifocalism' arises when a writer "encounters an ideological fantasy entirely different from his or her own and, rather than asserting mastery or control, attempts to represent both visions of the same time event at once."³⁹⁶ Carpentier's use of the Baroque, I would add, aspires to address the relationship between two religious practices and the relationship between the enslaved Africans and the Spanish Catholic rulers on the island. For the purpose of my argument

³⁹³ Steve Wakefield, *Carpentier's Baroque Fiction: Returning Medusa's Gaze* (Woodbridge: Tamesis Books, 2004), 50.

³⁹⁴ John V. Waldron, *The Fantasy of Globalism: the Latin American Neo-Baroque* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2014), 1.

³⁹⁵ Lois Parkinson Zamora, *The Inordinate Eye: New World Baroque and Latin American Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

³⁹⁶ Waldron, 22. Waldron relies on Slavoj Žižek's discussion of ideology and fantasy in his book *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 1997).

here, I examine the depiction of baroque and voodoo in Carpentier in their representation of the human's relationship to and with animals. I will return to this point later in my discussion of metamorphosis. Here, however, I would like to note that similar genre-fusions in service of the narrative of transformation are visible in the story of the depiction of Pauline Bonaparte. Carpentier mentions this historical figure in his prologue to the novel: "my encounter with Pauline Bonaparte there [the north coast of Haiti, Cap Français], so far from Corsica, was a revelation to me."³⁹⁷ Pauline's relationship to her slave, Soliman, a parallel narrative to Ti Noël's story, features another metamorphosis which I discuss later.

Carpentier includes references to Baroque aesthetics and broadly adheres to its principles in his magical realist narrative in order to "bridge historical and cultural rupture, to assemble disparate cultural fragments – past and present, European and non-European," Vassilis Vassilikos's use of the Baroque, on the other hand, is subservient to the wider project of inter-textual meandering in his book, a project that foregrounds the permeable boundaries between reality and fiction.³⁹⁸ The Baroque playwright Pedro Calderón de la Barca is an important presence in Vassilikos's 1988 magical realist collection *...and dreams are dreams*. Both the Greek and the English title of his volume of interconnected short stories are a reference to Pedro Calderón de la Barca's play *Life is a Dream* (1635).³⁹⁹ Specifically, they paraphrase the words of its protagonist, prince Segismundo, incarcerated by his own father to avert an

³⁹⁷ Carpentier, "On the Marvelous Real in America," 84.

³⁹⁸ Lois Parkinson Zamora and Monika Kaup, "Baroque, New World Baroque, Neobaroque: Categories and Concepts," in *Baroque New Worlds: Representation, Transculturation, Counterconquest*, eds. Zamora and Kaup (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 1-40, 9.

³⁹⁹ Pedro Calderón de la Barca, *Life is a Dream* (La Vida es Sueño) trans. Gregory J Racz (London: Penguin, 2007).

unfavourable prophecy about Poland's national destiny. In a famous monologue, Segismundo states that "life is a dream at best,/ And even dreams themselves are a dream;"⁴⁰⁰ these words present the formal and thematic underpinning of Vassilikos's collection. Unlike Carpentier, Vassilikos is not interested in incorporating the Spanish Baroque into the text for its historical meaning and legacy, but rather in using Calderón de la Barca's vision of life as a dream in his own exploration of dreams and the nature of reality. Inter-textually, the baroque aesthetic is only one of different literary or aesthetic movements that Vassilikos references or uses in his text. But Calderón de la Barca's profound vision of politics and power and the questions of a nation's political future profoundly inform Vassilikos. Thus, we identify a dual effort to create a fragmented vision of a nation's dreams and to introduce the reader to an unreliable universe of stories in which even the narrators are unsure about the distinction between the real and fantastic.

Unlike Carpentier, who first entered the limelight with *The Kingdom of This World*, Vassilikos was already an internationally established writer when *...and dreams are dreams* was published in 1988. Vassilikos came to literary fame with his Dantesque *Trilogy: The Plant, The Well, The Angel* (1961),⁴⁰¹ three fantastical, magical realist stories, which Italo Calvino called "the most mythic, symbolic metamorphoses of contemporary life."⁴⁰² Vassilikos's innovative treatment of myth allows me to compare it with the uses of myth in Carpentier's novel. Like Carpentier's, Vassilikos's life was

⁴⁰⁰ "That all life is a dream to all, and that dreams themselves are a dream," Calderón de la Barca, *Life is a Dream*, 98.

⁴⁰¹ Vassilis Vassilikos, *To φύλλο. Το πηγάδι. Τ' αγγέλιασμα* (Athens: Nea Synora, 2007). *The Plant, The Well, The Angel*, trans. Edmund and Mary Keeley (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964).

⁴⁰² Italo Calvino, Preface to Vassilis Vassilikos, *Fuori le mura*, trans. Fabrizio Grillenzoni (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1972).

marked by migration and a period of exile in Paris. He studied directing in New York where he had the chance to meet poets of the Beat Generation, and befriended Allen Ginsberg, in particular. In one of his numerous interviews he recalls that Lawrence Ferlinghetti gave him one of his poems called “One thousand fearful words for Fidel Castro,” thereby gesturing a continuity of social concerns that bind, unexpectedly, Cuba, the US Beat generation, and Greece.⁴⁰³ Vassilikos returned from Paris to Greece in 1960 and remained there until 1967, when, being a leftist artist, he had to flee because of a policy of persecution by the military junta that lasted from 1967 to 1974. In 1966-7, Vassilikos published his bestselling political novel *Z*, which focuses on the 1963 assassination of Greek MP Grigoris Lambrakis. In 1974 he wrote what critics claim was a foundation for the development of contemporary Greek literature: *A Few Things I Know About Glafkos Thrassakis*, a work that irreverently straddles the genres of novel and autobiography.⁴⁰⁴ What Vassilikos says about *Thrassakis* could also be applied to *...and dreams are dreams*: “I’d call it a biogranovel, an autonovegraphy, a novistory.”⁴⁰⁵ The stories I will be discussing in my comparison of Carpentier and Vassilikos, all engage the discourses of quasi-biography (“biogranovel”), fictionalized autobiography (autonovegraphy), and, most importantly, that of rewriting history (novistory). But they also all bear the key characteristics of magical realism, or the marvellous, and gesture towards a representation of reality in which belief, which

⁴⁰³ Vassilis Vassilikos, interview by Costas Katsoularis, *Book Press*, December 12, 2009.

<https://www.bookpress.gr/sinenteuxeis/ellines-ii/vasilis-vasilikos>. All quotations from this source are my translation.

⁴⁰⁴ Vassilis Vassilikos, *Γλαύκος Θρασάκης* (Athens: Ellinika Grammata, 2008).

⁴⁰⁵ Vassilis Vassilikos, *A Few Things I Know About Glafkos Thrassakis*, trans. Karen Emmerich (London: Seven Stories Press, 2002), vii.

Carpentier considered so important for the marvellous real, is necessary for the understanding of subjectivity.

...and dreams are dreams is comprised of seven short stories which relate to each other in different ways, eventually forming a loose narrative. Although the book has most often been labelled a collection of stories, it is equally possible to read it as a postmodern novel in seven parts. Most conspicuously, these seven parts/stories all seem to revolve around dreams, their relationship to life, their varied manifestations and their categorisations. The first story introduces one such attempt at an (im)possible classification: “there are dreams that are sold in the market, packaged or fresh, at sale price, dreams that are imported or indigenous, tax free, made locally; dreams that come out according to the seasons, like fruit; others, frozen, you can find all year round.”⁴⁰⁶ The ‘dream’ segments/fragments of the first part also appear in the other chapters. The first chapter tells the story of four men who establish a successful newspaper called the *Almanac of Dreams*, which features, not real facts or news, but dreams. The second chapter, entitled “history,” looks at two parallel stories taking place on a yacht, an episode featuring the passengers and a longer narrative that in the form of a discussion between the captain and his grandson, both being members of the crew. The grandfather narrates different episodes from the history of Greece from the 1830s onwards, beginning with King Otto’s arrival, as the first king of the independent nation; throughout, he is fixated on the economic and political dependence of the country due to loans and fraudulent officials. The passengers and the crew end up discussing the same idea: the country’s debts and multiple loans from foreign banks.⁴⁰⁷ In between

⁴⁰⁶ Vassilikos, *...and dreams are dreams*, 3.

⁴⁰⁷ The devaluation of the drachma and the economic situation of the country are matters of concern throughout the work.

these parallel stories, and the captain's imaginary dialogues with dead ancestors and figures from the country's historical past, Vassilikos introduces the love story of Don Pacifico and his wife Dona Rosita. The third part of the collection is preoccupied with a special category of dreamers: migrant taxi drivers, or "Gastarbeiters" who returned to Greece. Two of these stories are of interest for my enquiry into metamorphosis and subjectivity: "The Story of the Immigrant who worked at the Dusseldorf Zoo before coming back to Athens and buying his own taxi" and "the transplant." The fourth short story entitled "Dona Rosa and Don Pacifico" and the sixth one "three miraculous moments lived by Dona Rosita" are preoccupied with the relationship between the couple, told in the form of an interior monologue. The story of "the white bear" intervenes between these two chapters. It is in the last chapter, "the transplant," that the reader may connect all the above narratives: the protagonists of this chapter are Irineos, a writer-narrator, and Rosa; both of whom are now located in contemporary Greece, at the end of the twentieth century. The transplant in the final story—a medical miracle—could be considered as a contemporary-cast metamorphosis, since after a heart transplant operation, the behaviour and consciousness of a man, called Pacifico, become "effeminate" because he receives a woman's heart.

As its very title suggests, *and dreams are dreams* is strikingly intertextual. Vassilikos was born in 1934, so, by the time he started writing, modern Greek literature had witnessed the emergence of significant modernist poets such as Odysseas Elytis and George Seferis. Yet, there are few writers who implored the fantastic to narrate contemporary political concerns or aspects of the modern self; a notable exception being the writer Yannis Scarimbas. The appreciation for Elytis and his long poem *The Axion Esti* (1959) can be seen throughout *...and dreams are dreams*, with numerous references to the poem and its allusions to dreams. Of particular significance is the

repetition of a well-known phrase from the poem: “and dreams will take their revenge, and they will sow generations for ever and ever!”⁴⁰⁸ My reading of Vassilikos’s works suggests that one must include European, including Greek, Surrealism, among his influences.⁴⁰⁹ Vassilikos has embraced these cultural and literary cross-fertilisations: “every book I have written is the result of my reading of another book,” he emphasizes, “[t]he books I have written without the influence of another (non-Greek) writer were terrible.”⁴¹⁰ ...and dreams are dreams must be read, then, in the context of a great literary dialogue. Three interlocutors emerge as particularly significant for my discussion of the text. First, there is the Italian writer Italo Calvino, whose passion for repetition and weaving of lengthy, convoluted sentences in works like *Invisible Cities* (1972) is often mimicked in Vassilikos’s prose. But the use of dreams in a magical realist setting within a political context also preoccupied Albanian writer Ismail Kadare, admired by Vassilikos, in his work *The Palace of Dreams* (1981), a novel in which the dreams of citizens are scrutinised under an authoritarian state. Such connections across the fringe areas of entangled or comparable histories, are evocative and lead me to the third interlocutor. In one of his interviews, Vassilikos specifically confirmed his affinity with the artistic discourse of Latin America. He reflects: “what my writing aspired to do was to depict the second half of the twentieth century in the same way Mexican artists did in their wall paintings.”⁴¹¹ Establishing a close rapport with Diego Rivera’s colossal murals, which capture the historico-political struggles of

⁴⁰⁸ Odysseus Elytis, *The Axion Esti*, trans. Edmund Keeley (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014), 54. The phrase is repeated throughout Vassilikos’s collection.

⁴⁰⁹ Vassilikos strategically uses planetary literary heritage of varied expression: Kafka, Albert Camus, Eugene Ionesco, Gustave Flaubert, André Gide, Jean Paul Sartre, and many others find their way to the pages of his books.

⁴¹⁰ Vassilikos, *Book Press*.

⁴¹¹ Vassilikos, *Book Press*.

the working class in Mexico, as well as the traumatic experience of colonial rule through an aesthetics of repetition-with-revision, Vassilikos has indeed achieved a depiction of the distressing effects of European influence on Greek identity in a bold way while blending the real and the fantastic.

Magical Realism: History and Text

Individual matters of style and the issues of appropriation of global literatures aside, both Carpentier's and Vassilikos's texts under discussion here could be interpreted within the wide generic category of magical realism. More especially, I argue, it may be interpreted in the context of this genre's special relationship to the conditions of postcoloniality and globalisation. While there is a relative scholarly consensus on the site wherefrom magical realism came to global prominence, the distinct features of the genre are still subject to debate. It is therefore worthwhile outlining these scholarly discussions here, indicating en route some of the semantic aspirations and stylistic choices that our two writers made, and in particular as they relate to the treatment of history.⁴¹² While Flores has argued that the originality of magical realism can be found in the "amalgamation of reality and fantasy," in a way similar to the legacy of European surrealism, critics such as Luis Leal and Chanady observe that magical realist writers do not escape reality but challenge it, revealing its mysterious aspects.⁴¹³ Wendy B. Faris furthermore identifies five typical features of magical realist novels which all reflect the intrinsic ambivalences surrounding the genre. Drawing upon established and diverse magical realist writers, such as Gabriel García Márquez and Salman Rushdie,

⁴¹² Even though Latin American writers are often associated with magical realism, the genre is in fact geographically diverse. Some contemporary representative examples are Haruki Murakami, Salman Rushdie, Günter Grass, and Toni Morrison.

⁴¹³ Leal, 122-123, and Chanady, 130.

she places the genre under the wider category of world literature. The primary feature of a magical realist work is undoubtedly the presence of magic in the text, which is to be taken literally, not metaphorically. Secondly, Faris argues, magical realist texts describe the external world in a realistic manner, but these faithful representations include magical details or objects which point the reader in the opposite direction. In addition to this strategy, history is manipulated or retold so that these magical details are placed within a historical context. Thirdly, magical events often produce doubt in readers and unsettle the ontology of the text; Faris suggests that the confusion lies in whether the event should be perceived as the character's hallucination or as a "miracle." Furthermore, magical realist novels concern themselves with boundaries—physical and metaphorical—as well as the unstable boundaries separating fact from fiction. The final distinct feature of magical realist writing, that Faris identifies, is its employment of altered and distorted conceptions of time, space, and identity. The rules that govern time and space are broken in magical realist fiction, with time being unnaturally extended, shrunk and very often repeated while spaces such as houses are assigned a sacred importance. Similarly, identity is "contested" even though the characters seem realistic or placed in historical contexts.⁴¹⁴

Greek literature, however, never developed a magical realist tradition similar to the Latin American "boom" of the 1960s. Roderick Beaton's detailed study of modern Greek Literature, from the late nineteenth century till the 1990s, mentions magical realism's influence in Greek literature, but it does not identify any vibrant preoccupation with the fantastic and the real as such, except for some examples, such

⁴¹⁴ Wendy B. Faris, "Scheherazade's Children: Magical Realism and Postmodern Fiction," in Zamora and Faris, *Magical Realism*, 163-167.

as Eugenia Fakinou's *The Seventh Garment* (1983) and Rea Galanaki's *The Life of Ismail Ferik Pasha* (1989), two novels Beaton, significantly, considers as representative examples of the establishment of "a new relationship to foreign writing."⁴¹⁵ According to Beaton,

the new Greek novel of the 1980s is grounded in the fictional techniques of allusion, parody, the rapprochement between realism and the fantastic, and between realistic story-telling and Modernist experiments – techniques which by the end of the 1980s had established a world-wide, but not especially western-European currency, in the work of such writers as Thomas Pynchon, Milan Kundera, Salman Rushdie, and the South American successors to Jorge Luis Borges.⁴¹⁶

The 1980s were not the first time the relationship between the real and the non-real were explored in Greek writing, though, and not all of it took the form of interaction with foreign literary interlocutors. What Beaton calls the "folkloric realism" of literary texts written from the 1880s to 1910, depicting events from an idyllic version of Greek country life, challenged the conventions of mainstream realism through stories grounded in community beliefs and local customs. One can see these as precursor narratives for any tendency to magical realist expression one may find in later Modern Greek literature. The legacy of nineteenth century folklore realism was, as Beaton observes, satirised in the 1960s by the writers who explored the limits of the real and the fantastic.⁴¹⁷ Vassilikos is, of course, among these, but one could argue that his relationship with previous literature—like that of many other writers—is more complex

⁴¹⁵ Roderick Beaton, *An Introduction to Modern Greek Literature* (Oxford: Calendon Press, 1994), 286.

⁴¹⁶ Beaton, 288.

⁴¹⁷ Beaton, 254-255.

than what the binary of satiric rejection or non-satiric espousal might suggest. As Rebecca Walkowitz states about the “Comparison novel,” such works

are part of an emergent genre of transnational fiction whose preoccupation with comparison is stimulated in part by the historical conditions of the global literary marketplace, and in part by several related developments such as the flourishing of migrant communities, and especially migrant writers, within metropolitan centers throughout the world.⁴¹⁸

Vassilikos is part of this particular type of literature; Walkowitz adds that a comparison novel effectively addresses one more aspect of globalisation: statelessness. This aspect is explored in relation to the subject’s transformation.

As I have touched upon the issues of literary periodization and the complex routes of the development of national or global literatures, it is worth pointing out that, at the surface at least, Carpentier’s novel and Vassilikos’s collection may be seen as inhabiting literary spaces on two opposite sides of the mid-twentieth century divide, which some scholars have identified as a move from modernism to postmodernism. Carpentier’s novel is often seen to belong to the avant-garde canon of modernist literature while Vassilikos’s is, in many respects, a postmodern piece, or at least the type of writing representative of the late twentieth century. So, at this point, it would be useful to acknowledge the specific position of the narrative mode of magical realism and the two texts under consideration within the shifts in representation and perception that characterized the twentieth century. This inquiry will also be of relevance for my next chapter, where I likewise juxtapose an early twentieth century text with a late twentieth century piece.

⁴¹⁸ Walkowitz, “Comparison Literature,” 568.

In his essay “Defining the Postmodern” (1986) Jean-François Lyotard compared how the postmodern artist negotiates the past and tradition to the way Freud showed that the past and unconscious material emerge during the process of interpreting a dream in therapy, and during dreaming itself, thus the past repeats itself.⁴¹⁹ It is the postmodernist artist’s task, Lyotard suggests, to actively engage with the past and to establish a different relationship with it, not following the modernist inclination to forget or repress it. Regardless of whether this is an absolutely accurate description of modernism, the links between the way in which the past is handled in magical realist fiction and the postmodern condition are obvious. Both writers under discussion in this chapter engage with the historical and cultural past in the way Lyotard describes; yet this is also a collective past in both narratives. Both the chronologically distant seventeenth century past and the events of the two previous centuries are present, as if coinciding, in Carpentier’s descriptions of Cuba and Haiti, and Vassilikos’s short stories of Greek population inside and outside Greece freely moves through time to access some specific moments in modern Greek history. Carpentier’s and Vassilikos’s writings display some further recognisable elements of postmodernist fiction, although critics often consider Carpentier’s 1949 novel an example of modernist expression.⁴²⁰ While there are some contextual reasons why Carpentier’s fiction could be understood as postmodernist as well as modernist, it is less dubitable that Vassilikos’s expression in his post-1980 fiction belongs to the postmodernist landscape. According to critic Fredric Jameson, postmodernism emerges in a consumer

⁴¹⁹ Jean- François Lyotard, “Defining the Postmodern,” in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, 2nd ed., eds., Vincent B. Leitch, William E. Cain, Laurie Finke, Barbara Johnson (London: Norton W. W. & Company, 2001), 1612-1615, 1612.

⁴²⁰ See for example *Modernism and Its Margins: Reinscribing Cultural Modernity from Spain and Latin America* (1999), eds. Anthony L. Geist, Jose B. Monleon, and Roberto González Echevarría’s extensive study *Alejo Carpentier: The Pilgrim at Home* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977).

capitalist society which witnessed the expansion of technology and mass production of goods and of art, and the dominating presence of images and media among other cultural, economic and social changes. Jameson, who situates the beginning of the transition from the modernist expression/aesthetic to the postmodernist between 1950 and 1960, identifies pastiche, fragmentation, a nostalgic mode of expression, a loss of historical sense and the disappearance of individuality as postmodern features of art.⁴²¹ Not all postmodernist works of art display all of the above, but these points are indicative of the changes in literature, and specifically in the production of the postmodern novel and short fiction which interests me in this chapter. In Vassilikos's 1995 work, for instance, the technique of pastiche is used extensively alongside a fragmented view of time. The past and the present interact in the stories, yet at the end of the collection, time becomes entirely fluid, even unimportant, as the reader understands the cyclical movement of the social events described. In addition, an extensive part of the collection is focused on the mass production of dreams as products; commodities which can be sold, bought and be created on demand, and even printed in a newspaper to produce profit. This reframing of dreams as commodities marks the shift from the modernist view of dreams as the key to our unconscious and Freud's theories, to a postmodernist era where dreams are placed as being outside but economically and ideologically interpellative of the subject.

J. Michael Dash sees Carpentier's theorisation of the marvellous as an attempt to create a unique, non-European identity. He states that "after negritude and indigenism, the theory of the marvellous realism can be seen as one of the most valiant

⁴²¹ Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, 2nd ed., eds., Vincent B. Leitch, William E. Cain, Laurie Finke, Barbara Johnson (London: Norton W. W. & Company, 2001), 1960-1974.

attempts to ground otherness in New World space.”⁴²² The idea of “otherness” is both explored and extended in Carpentier’s fiction, but it is also put into question, as subjectivity itself—let alone an “other” subjectivity—is represented as somewhat unstable in *The Kingdom*. The so-called “death of the individual subject,” which Jameson observed within postmodernist culture, is, however, but one of the possible representations of subjectivity in magical realist texts. Even in Vassilikos’s text, there are some specific characters, like Pacifico and Dona Rosita, who communicate a ‘traditional’ internal narrative focused on the relay of their thoughts. At the same time, both characters metamorphose into new characters across the collection, taking on different personae, a technique which does not privilege a firmly shaped individuality. Likewise, while Carpentier’s novel suggests a shattered notion of the enslaved and colonised self, which places him within the modernist spectrum of writers, the multiple narratives of *The Kingdom* also allow for a further investigation of Caribbean subjectivities. Crucial to the exploratory presentation of subjectivity in these texts is the strategically deployed device of metamorphosis. The metamorphoses in both Carpentier and Vassilikos, which focus on the transition from human into animal, but are not limited to this type of change only, point to the fragmentation of the colonised other/self in historically informed narratives, and further gesture to a political underpinning of subjectivity from the second half of the twentieth century. These metamorphoses are neither symbolic nor allegorical of the transition of subjectivity towards a traditional, socially informed form, but are rather magically real; this is a narrative choice shared by Carpentier and Vassilikos which I will discuss shortly.

⁴²² Dash, 88.

Although the debate on whether magical realist texts are modernist or postmodernist continues, the engagement of magical realism with history also displays an affiliation with specifically postmodern strategies of representing history in fiction. Late twentieth century novels combine history and fiction to challenge established concepts of identity, space, and time, while they concern themselves with retellings of historical events. In her study of postmodern fiction, which includes examples of magical realist novels, Linda Hutcheon has named such an engagement “historiographic metafiction.” Her definition of historiographic metafiction can thus be helpful in understanding the relationships between fact and fiction, and history and fiction in magical realist expression:

Historiographic metafiction refutes the natural or common-sense methods of distinguishing between historical fact and fiction. It refuses the view that only history has a truth claim, both by questioning the ground of that claim in historiography and by asserting that both history and fiction are discourses, human constructs, signifying systems, and both derive their major claim to truth from that identity.⁴²³

Apart from Hutcheon, historian Hayden White has argued that historical narratives are foremost verbal artefacts which the historian, as a writer, needs to present in a fictitious manner using his or her imagination, and that the opposite is true, too: literature always gestures to a historical narrative. White’s argument is interesting for any consideration of the representation of history in literature, since it traces a similarity between literature and history, that is, “the fictive element” in both types of narratives.⁴²⁴ Both Carpentier and Vassilikos exploit this property of literature to offer an alternative or

⁴²³ Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: Theory, History, Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1988), 93.

⁴²⁴ Hayden White, “The Historical Text as a Narrative Artefact,” in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

complementary version of history. Instances of the treatment of history as relayed in textbooks, not as an absolute truth but as an ideologically veiled construct against which a subjective, magical experience should be posed, can be found in both texts under discussion here.

In Carpentier's *The Kingdom*, the historical engagement turns on Haiti's colonial past, both in the hands of French and Spanish rulers and during the reign of King Henri Christophe. J. Michael Dash highlights the importance of Carpentier's reading of Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* (1918). A German historian and philosopher, Spengler believed that Western culture could not accommodate an accurate expression of the fantastic, or the marvellous due to its historical evolution. Several historical events, on different planes, are re-told by Carpentier but from the slaves' perspective. This obliquing of vision foregrounds the fantastic component of historical events: the historical poisoning campaign of 1750s is re-focalised through the slaves' perspective into a narrative about the magic poisoning of the cows and subsequent deaths of the masters. Carpentier writes that the slaves believed the poisoning was due to Macandal's supernatural powers: "Macandal, [...] had proclaimed the crusade of extermination, chosen as he was to wipe out the whites and create a great empire of free Negroes in Santo Domingo."⁴²⁵ Macandal's execution also has a historical aspect, according to Christopher Warnes, as it resembles the account of Moreau de Saint-Méry in which Macandal is burnt to death.⁴²⁶ While Carpentier strove to include as many factual details in his ethnographic magical realist narrative as he could, Warnes, and other scholars, have repeatedly highlighted the inaccuracies of his

⁴²⁵ Carpentier, *The Kingdom*, 30.

⁴²⁶ Christopher Warnes, *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel: Between Faith and Irreverence* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 62.

historical account of the Haitian revolution, which “ignored the most important events and leaders of the revolution.”⁴²⁷ Warnes notes that some Latin American writers, including Carpentier, were “positioned both inside and outside metropolitan culture, [such that] they could neither accept the terms of the Western cultural hegemony nor reject them entirely.”⁴²⁸ But such accusations seem to miss the point about the magical realists’ treatment of history. These texts do not aspire to offer an accurate account of general political history, for the simple reason that their writers do not believe that there is one such single accurate account, or even that history progresses teleologically. To follow one potentially truthful account would mean to bracket all other possible versions, including, most likely, the versions of the subjugated, which is what Carpentier’s accretion of ethnographic details aims to give voice to. For that reason, in these narratives, the historical events float across time, alternatively accented and often temporally displaced. Furthermore, these texts insist on the cyclical nature of history. As Warnes confirms, in *The Kingdom* the Haitian history of the revolution is presented as repetitive and revolving ⁴²⁹ as the novel ends with Ti Noël protesting against “the new masters” of the plantation.⁴³⁰

Sharing a similar vision of history as repetitive, cyclical and yielding destructive effects for the future of a nation, Vassilikos goes back in time. Retelling episodes from the history of the newly founded independent Greek state after the country’s long occupation by the Ottoman Empire, he emphasises the foreign influences of France, England and Russia in the country’s affairs. Vassilikos does not

⁴²⁷ Warnes, 62.

⁴²⁸ Warnes, 41.

⁴²⁹ Warnes, 62.

⁴³⁰ Carpentier, 179.

accentuate the four-hundred-year Ottoman occupation as the country's paradigmatic experience of colonialism, as one might have expected, but stresses instead the country's weakness to resist the foreign influence of stronger nations during the first years of its independence. History occupies a lengthy part of Vassilikos's collection: literally entitled "history," the history of modern Greece and its peculiar circumstances of colonisation are told by multiple narrators, fantastic or realistic, alive or dead. In the first chapter, "Plasterboard and Fiberglass," the reader witnesses the conversations taking place on a yacht via the omniscient narration of a doctor amongst the passengers. The entire section takes place on a yacht that is "an original out of the Hydra shipyards," which thus carries a historical importance for the conversations that take place on it. This ship seems to have acquired an eternal presence across the centuries of Greek history:

the very same ship had taken part in the Greek War of Independence. Later the ship had been used by sponge divers; during the Asia Minor disaster, it had carried refugees from Smyrna. During World War II, it had sailed to the Middle East.⁴³¹

The ship is thus an object of memory and history, having been involved in some major events of Greek history and being the site of the Captain's storytelling as he travels literally back to history while on board. The theme of history as eternal and repetitive continues in the second chapter, "Captain," when the captain of the ship is suddenly "transformed into the old sailor Kanaris who, on a different night, a moonless night, had set fire to the flagship of the pasha."⁴³² Continuously drawing parallels between modern Greece and its colonial past throughout this part of the collection, Vassilikos

⁴³¹ Vassilikos, ...*and dreams are dreams*, 52.

⁴³² Vassilikos, 65. Constantine Kanaris fought in the Greek War of Independence from the Ottoman Empire and is famous for his victorious fight against the Turkish navy on the island of Chios in 1822.

remembers history both through storytelling and the techniques of magical realism. Addressing his young grandson in a fairy tale mode, the captain retells some of the events that led Greece to become economically indebted to England, the linear order of the narrative disrupted throughout by his own thoughts. Here, the captain is transformed again “into a ghost, into an evil spirit, every time he thinks, because he is a captain of the mind.”⁴³³

Vassilikos’s historical pursuit is inextricably linked to the trope of metamorphosis and with his exploration of Greek subjectivity. The captain is conflicted as he feels “like a stranger in his own country” due to the latter’s severe economic state, but he also remembers his Greek ancestors in every occasion in which Turkey is involved.⁴³⁴ Strangely, Vassilikos does not juxtapose the country’s ancient past with late twentieth-century Greece. Indeed, one may say that he purposefully omits references to the classical tradition celebrated in European thought in the years of the Greek War of Independence. This significant historical omission proves justified when read in terms of Vassilikos’s vision of modern Greek identity, which is not grounded in the classical tradition but constituted within the premises of neo-colonialism.

While in Carpentier’s text the historical setting of nineteenth-century Haiti accommodates metamorphoses, in Vassilikos’s collection of stories, Greece’s colonial history is treated in only one section. Moreover, the metamorphoses that we read of are located in different periods in the country’s history, while the setting itself is also ever-changing. Both novels use the marvellous to address the trauma of a colonisation, and particularly to discuss the weakness of smaller nations to resist the foreign influence of

⁴³³ Vassilikos, 75.

⁴³⁴ Vassilikos, 76.

dominant or culturally and politically hegemonic nations while undergoing social transformations. Vassilikos zooms in on the political affairs of the newly founded modern Greek state, which was a “Greek colony” at the time, but in the dreams of its citizens it can be “an independent, strong, autonomous state, free of foreign guardianship, where those who fought in the revolution would become the leaders of the liberated nation.”⁴³⁵ The same vision is articulated in *The Kingdom*, in line with historical events, when Henri Christophe becomes the king of Haiti.

This interaction between a textbook version of history and unrecorded history is a more general characteristic of magical realism. When interacting with history and individual memories though, in many cases, magical realist writers index a postcolonial reality. This is attributable to the fact that magical realist stories first appeared in the second half of the twentieth century in newly independent countries facing the substantial challenges of post-colonial existence, namely neo-colonialism, civil strife, and corruption. Stephen Slemon argues that the benefit of examining magical realist literature in a postcolonial context inheres in the genre of magical realism itself. This genre allows us “to recognize continuities within literary cultures” before, during, and after colonial existence. This particularly so when treating postcolonial texts comparatively.⁴³⁶ Indeed, it is only by comparing two authors of diverse yet structurally similar historical backgrounds on the basis of a shared mode of expression—postcolonial magical realism—that we are able to trace similarities between two vastly different representations of subjectivity. Besides his insistence on comparative practice, Slemon critically responds to Hutcheon’s argument concerning postmodern

⁴³⁵ Vassilikos, 80.

⁴³⁶ Stephen Slemon, “Magic Realism as Postcolonial Discourse,” in Zamora and Faris, *Magical Realism*, 407-26, 409.

fiction and history. He lists three features of magical realist expression which problematise its easy inclusion in the postmodern fiction canon: first, the location of a magical realist narrative becomes “metonymic for the postcolonial as a whole”; second, history is manipulated in such a way that fictional time can at once refer to the historical colonial past and to a society’s future; and third, such texts engage with border crossing, especially when they aim to communicate the experiences of silenced voices “produced by the colonial encounter and reflected in the text’s language of narration.”⁴³⁷ The marvellous real here describes the “strange” events of contemporary Latin American—and, in this case, Greek—history, like a new language, “appropriate to the expression of our realities,” with the writers being the “witnesses, historians, and interpreters” of these events.⁴³⁸ As I have already mentioned, a common feature of magical realist texts is the articulation of alienated or disenfranchised voices in a meaningful context. As Slemon argues, as far as a postcolonial discourse is involved, magical realist accounts engage with history in order to heal traumas or rethink painful historical events constructively rather than painfully.⁴³⁹ Both Carpentier and Vassilikos address this trauma, which haunts the subjects of these narratives, by offering an encounter with marginalised subjectivities—slaves, immigrants, or migrant-workers—who all transform and unite in groups in the wake of historical changes: circumstances signalled by some actual metamorphoses in the text. In the sections that follow, I explore the implications of this inner trauma by looking at the notion of hybrid subjectivity within the postcolonial context and considering the links between individual and society in psychoanalytic terms. I then offer a psychoanalytic

⁴³⁷ Slemon, 411.

⁴³⁸ Alejo Carpentier, “The Baroque and the Marvellous Real,” 107.

⁴³⁹ Slemon, 422.

exploration of trauma and loss in light of the above. In doing so, I specifically try to map the ways in which the subjects in both texts explored here identify with their nation.

Hybrid Subjectivity

The encounter, in *The Kingdom*, between the African slaves and the Europeans—both Spanish and the French colonisers—is at the heart of Carpentier’s enquiry into the marvellous real and Latin American identity. In this regard, the notion of hybridity is crucial to his portrayal of his literary subjects. Bhabha’s seminal work on hybridity in postcolonial settings elucidates this type of encounter, foregrounding a “transnational and translational sense of the hybridity of imagined communities.”⁴⁴⁰ He argues that, instead of considering the unheard voices of marginalised cultures as their “currency” in an exchange with other nations and cultures, it is more productive to consider them an in-between space in which the hybridity of a cultural identity is accepted. Hence, he explains, Benedict Anderson’s definition of the nation as a homogenous imagined community is no longer adequate to describe the processes by which modern nations interact with each other.⁴⁴¹ As already mentioned, hybridity is a concept which is often ascribed to Latin American identity in light of its colonial past and the impact of this past on the construction of a modern identity. It is in this particular context that the subjectivity in Carpentier’s text is created. In this regard, the transformations of the African slaves, Macandal and his follower Ti Noël, within the Haitian natural landscape and voodoo rituals are vastly different from those of the European subject, Pauline, who becomes a marble statue of the Enlightenment. Such formations of subjectivity,

⁴⁴⁰ Bhabha, 7.

⁴⁴¹ Bhabha, 8.

which in *The Kingdom* are both narrated from the perspective of the enslaved, document the unequal cultural exchange between Europe and Haiti but also point to the fact that Carpentier's attempt to ground the marvellous real exclusively in Latin American culture often exoticises the African population of the island. While *The Kingdom* offers an opportunity for what Bhabha describes as cultural and racial hybridity, the fact that the Europeans are oblivious to the occurrence of marvellous events, shows that, for Carpentier, this aspect of American identity cannot yet be understood by the metropolis.

Despite Carpentier's own understanding of the vernacular manifestations of the marvellous, his novel raises the issue of colonial influence in all aspects of culture in Haiti, ranging from religion to clothing, and architecture, and therefore translates the European modern, both French and Spanish, into an American context. Ti Noël adopts, for instance, the colonisers' fashion as a free man by wearing the coat which used to belong to the former King, Henri Christophe: "the pride of the old man's heart was a dress coat [...] with cuffs of salmon-colored lace, which he wore all the time."⁴⁴² This a sign of what Du Bois calls "the double consciousness." However, this positionality is also evocative of the colonised subject's psychological negotiation of the event of colonisation and the colonisers' culture, as described by Martinican psychoanalyst and philosopher Franz Fanon. In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) Fanon posits that the black subject navigates the local and the global world by wearing the "masks of whiteness," i.e., performing whiteness, and this is exactly what the character of Ti Noël does in Carpentier's novel.⁴⁴³ The baroque, as discussed earlier, is another of

⁴⁴² Carpentier, *The Kingdom*, 164.

⁴⁴³ Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967).

Carpentier's strategies for 'translating' metropolitan imagery, and for both engaging and carefully distancing the coloniser's vision of the world. Ti Noël observes pigs, dragons, and dogs inside the Santiago Cathedral in Cuba, symbols which he understands because of Macandal's transformation tales and the presence of nature, including the serpent, in these rituals.⁴⁴⁴ The influence is not one-sided, however, as Pauline Bonaparte asks for help from her slave, Soliman, during a plague epidemic that kills her husband, and participates in a series of voodoo rituals for protection against the disease.⁴⁴⁵

In her discussion of Carpentier's vision of the marvellous, Maria del Pilar Blanco argues that "Carpentier's *lo real maravilloso* becomes the circumstance through which subjects can themselves begin to recognise their home as a new world."⁴⁴⁶ The colonised subjects in *The Kingdom* have been robbed of the idea of home through slavery and oppression, and it is the occurrence of magical events, such as Macandal's transformations, that establish a connection between the Haitian African population and the components of "home," including religion, rituals and cultural beliefs. These aspects of home and belonging had been wiped out and replaced by European ones or had been demonised and registered as uncivilised aspects of human nature, or as Ti Noël's French master, Lenormand de Mezy, calls voodoo "the savage beliefs of people who worshipped a snake."⁴⁴⁷ When the French plantation owners try to punish the African population of Haiti, and especially those who rebelled, with poisonous snakes,

⁴⁴⁴ Carpentier, 80.

⁴⁴⁵ Carpentier, 92-93.

⁴⁴⁶ María del Pilar Blanco, "Reading the Novum World: The Literary Geography of Science Fiction in Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*," in *Surveying the American Tropics: A Literary Geography From New York to Rio*, eds. Owen Robinson, Leslie Wylie, Maria Cristina Fumagalli, and Peter Hulme (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 49-74, 72.

⁴⁴⁷ Carpentier, 73.

“these snakes, creatures of Damballah, were to die without laying eggs, disappearing together with the last colonists.”⁴⁴⁸ Carpentier’s portrayal of these two different worldviews pose crucial questions as to how literature engages with the “other,” how the European models of subjectivity have been imposed on the reading of another culture’s identity, and how comparative analysis can adequately approach these depictions. Hence, Carpentier’s account is crucial for addressing the above issues as it utilises the process of metamorphosis to open up the possibility of re-engaging with American identity and one of the pressing issues revolving around this identity: the affinity to one’s homeland.

A similar concern can be found in Vassilikos’s *...and dreams are dreams*. The anxiety of European influence in all aspects of Greek culture is clearly spelled out in the “history” section with the loss of a nation’s sovereignty through economic dependence upon other, more powerful and economically stable nations. In the story ‘Captain’, the Greek nation’s relationship to Europe is explained with an evocative parallel:

Greece was a dog that had been tied up for four hundred years and was trying to break its chains. But three masters were lying in wait to see who would take it over. [...] The masters wanted it to be free in order to scare the sultan’s wolfhounds, but not so free that it would become a master itself. And so, the three masters, the Russians, the English, and the French, helped free the Grecian dog, but then they quarrelled among themselves over who would own it.⁴⁴⁹

Vassilikos poses here a frequently expressed concern amongst modern Greek scholars, namely that, after the country’s independence from the Ottoman Empire, the newly

⁴⁴⁸ Carpentier, 97.

⁴⁴⁹ Vassilikos, 65.

founded Greek state was dependent upon Europe. Even the very premise of Greece existing as an independent nation is hereby put into question as it is implied that the country transitioned from enslavement into economic, political, and cultural dependence. The “history” section’s narrative is non-linear, shifting between thoughts on nineteenth and twentieth-century Greece, but the views expressed by the captain and the rest of the yacht passengers are consistent. Greece’s relationship to Europe has always been, and still is, at the end of twentieth century, similar to the economic influence between a metropolis and an ex-colony. “The spectre of bankruptcy has haunted us since the small Greek state was established,” proclaims one of the passengers, thus advancing the idea that modern Greece has always been indebted to Europe, both intellectually and financially, thus confirming Herzfeld’s argument that the financial dependence of nations is a form of crypto-colonialism. As with Carpentier, the other aspect of subjectivity in *Vassilikos* is related to the affinity between the self and homeland. The return to the homeland is a concern expressed in all the stories of the taxi drivers who have returned to Greece, and by one of the protagonists of the short stories. Irineos changes his name into Pacifico when he becomes a suspect for the forest fires in his community: “his homeland had hurt him again. The first time was when it wouldn’t let him leave because he belonged to the left.”⁴⁵⁰ Irineos thus becomes “another” by changing his identity and leaving Greece.

⁴⁵⁰ *Vassilikos*, 139.

The Individual and the Collective

How does an individual, like Irineos, identify with a group? The intimacy and continuity between the individual and society is what Freud calls “group psychology,” that is, the relationship of the individual to a group, irrespective of whether that group is a nation or an institution.⁴⁵¹ In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, Freud first discusses previous descriptions of group mentality, which were mostly indebted to the kind of individualistic Enlightenment progressive thinking that led to the formation of the idea of the nation, in order to offer his own thoughts about how the mind of the individual functions within a group. His theory, I believe, is significant for our understanding of the operation of (neo)colonised subjectivity in Vassilikos’s and Carpentier’s novels, and, as such, merit a detailed exposition.

Freud singles out social psychologist Gustave Le Bon’s hypothesis that the individual’s primeval instincts and desires come to the fore in the context of a crowd, generating the collective unconscious as a platform on which the individual might gratify unconscious wishes which would have otherwise remained repressed.⁴⁵² In such a crowd, Le Bon implies, individual members are paradoxically blind and automatic. Freud remarks that the above is only one manifestation of group psychology, offering the examples of language and folklore to explain that there must be a certain degree of “creativity” in every group. Thus he poses the important question of “how much the individual thinker or writer owes to the stimulation of the group in which he lives, and whether he does more than perfect a mental work in which the others have had a simultaneous share” and adds the insight that the whole group is also affected by each

⁴⁵¹ Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, (1921), *S.E.* vol. XVIII (1920-1922): 65-144, 70.

⁴⁵² Freud, 82.

individual.⁴⁵³ In line with his argumentation in “Creative Writers and Day-dreaming,” which I have discussed previously, Freud analyses how the individual, who carries his own desires, fantasies and neuroses, is able to function, not only as stupefied, but also as a creative member of a larger group. The relationship of a group to its members is governed, according to Freud, by the two instincts, Eros and Thanatos, the urge to create and love and the urge to destroy, as well the energy of these instincts, the libido.⁴⁵⁴ Libido, our ability to love, is directed towards love objects. The ways by which each individual is connected with a love object, or a group, throughout his or her life include narcissism and identification. Identification, which can be either positive or negative, first occurs very early in an individual’s childhood, during the Oedipal stages of development, Freud argues, and it functions in the following way. When the love object is introjected into the ego, and therefore a tie is formed between the individual and the love object, identification functions as a “substitute” for this tie, or it may be created as a “shared” tie with another individual.⁴⁵⁵ It is this shared quality which, for Freud, may explain the individual’s identification within a group, since all the members of a group have a common emotional tie.

Such shared emotional ties are implied in both Carpentier’s and Vassilikos’s texts. On the one hand, they are articulated through a series of shared trope-affects such as resistance, resentment, euphoria, despair, irony, desire for change and the fear of change, all meticulously detected in both texts. On the other, and, more often than not, they take the form of the group psychology practices that Freud highlights, such as the

⁴⁵³ Freud, 83.

⁴⁵⁴ Freud, 90. Freud only mentions Eros in this essay. He elaborates on the death drive in *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930).

⁴⁵⁵ Freud, 108.

establishment of the demarcation between “us” and “them” and attempts to forge a model of political manipulation of the group. In Carpentier’s novel, subjects find themselves in the process of identification with a group: for example, Carpentier depicts the African enslaved community in the process of becoming an independent nation. In *Vassilikos*, the subjects have already identified themselves with a group, that is, “the Greeks,” but they are still conflicted with regards to their relationship with the category of “Greek nation” and the relationship their group establishes with other groups both in and outside of that nation.

The conceptualisation of the idea of a nation, Benedict Anderson argues, can be found very early in the history of creole communities, and even earlier than in the European communities, as evidenced in the liberation movements in Latin America which led to the independence of many colonies from Spain in the 1800s.⁴⁵⁶ Anderson considers that the uprisings against the Europeans in America were national movements, assuming thus that the colonised populations had formed the idea of an imagined community. Contrary to the general view that the idea of nation appeared with particular advances in the Western European thought of the late eighteenth century, Anderson posits the birth of nationalism in circumstances of a forged community of oppressed subjects, both slaves and natives in the case of French and Spanish colonies. He singles out the example of the Haitian revolution leader, Toussaint L’Ouverture, who led the uprising of the enslaved African population in 1791 and achieved the island’s independence from France in 1804. He juxtaposes this with another example of the origin of the “official nationalism”: that of Greece’s war

⁴⁵⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 2016), 195.

of independence from Ottoman rule in 1821. Historically speaking, the idea for an independent Greek nation developed after the French and the American revolutions, which Anderson highlights as the main factors for its creation in the first place. This circumstance both connects and contrasts the South American and the Greek Mediterranean contexts in just the way Carpentier might have wished. While Anderson has identified the need for a nation to exist in both of these occupied sites, he does acknowledge that the European models of nationhood were contemporaneously or subsequently imposed on the shaping of the newly founded nations, either violently in the case of Haiti, or, as Vassilikos implies in his writing, through political and financial control in Greece. Anderson's argument, that the nation is a constructed, imagined institution, since its members are only able to imagine they all belong in the same community, brings together the collective and individual subjectivities at play in the novels of Carpentier and Vassilikos. Crucial to this understanding of the comparative history of nationhood is the notion of the use of imagination to construct a collectivity, which employs the use of fantasy, the manipulation of desire, the drive to narrative, and, if one follows Vassilikos, the deployment of dreams as distinct constructions for giving meaning. Both Carpentier's and Vassilikos's postcolonial narratives engage with what Bhabha describes as the relationship between self and society: "[p]rivate and public, past and present, the psyche and the social develop an interstitial intimacy."⁴⁵⁷ As the above suggests, in both writers, the postcolonial setting is such that subjectivity is essentially constructed as political and in continuous dialogue with the nation. Although, in both cases, we are reading a vision of fragmented subjectivity, as I further demonstrate in the section on metamorphoses, the narratives given by the protagonists in both novels focus on the need to express the traumatic experience of change, both

⁴⁵⁷ Bhabha, 19.

physical and mental. These changes are not incidental; rather they are the result of colonialism, regardless of whether the colonial experience was direct and immediate, as in the case of Haiti and Carpentier's Cuba, occurred in deep-time, or was achieved by other political and economic means, e.g. through imposing a king, or modulating the education system, as in the case of Greece.

The intimations of the violence to which a group was exposed or that it perpetrated permeate both Carpentier's and Vassilikos's texts. In both, we find powerful metaphorical language presenting various scenes depicting the African slaves' suffering rape and beheading at the hands of their masters. In both, violence is more often implied and inferable than directly depicted. What is foregrounded in this way is the necessity to move beyond violence and destruction and the ways in which a community can handle these. Freud's theories on humanity's death drive, which is regulated by civilization, can illuminate one of the ways individuals engage with community. The subject is never completely free to act as he or she pleases, since the destructive, primal drives and wishes would not allow a community to exist, argues Freud.⁴⁵⁸ It is civilisation and the expectations of society which repress the individual's aggressive instincts, but not without any impact inflicted on the unconscious. Freud stresses that the subjects can be part of a group, civilised societies in this case, only when society has imposed guilt on the destructive tendencies of its members. It is then the individual's ability to sublimate, to redirect these instincts to creative outputs, through art, which prevents us from destruction. "What began in relation to the father

⁴⁵⁸ Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 96.

is completed in relation to the group,” argues Freud, invoking the prohibition of the primal father in *Totem and Taboo* (1913).⁴⁵⁹

In his papers “On Transience” (1915) and “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917), Freud examines the situations in which the individual loses the love object, which, as he writes, can be the idea of belonging to a nation, or the nation itself as a group to identify with. In such cases, the libido does not abandon the lost object in order to replace it, but re-directs its energies towards the ego instead, incorporating the lost object in its own structure and splitting the ego into the lost object and an increasingly punitive entity called the “ego-ideal” (or, later, the super ego).⁴⁶⁰ While in “healthy” mourning the ego gradually leaves behind the lost object and replace it, in melancholia the lost object perseveres in what Abraham and Torok have called an “inner crypt.” The continuous secret operation of this crypt ego disables the subject for “normal” relationships with other individual or group entities (e.g., the notion of collective). I shall return to this topic in Chapter Three, but here I would just like to note that this split in the ego is crucial for a Freudian understanding of how group psychology works.⁴⁶¹

Ranjana Khanna has applied the Freudian reflection on melancholia to the context of postcolonialism. Exploring the “unconscious dimensions of national subjecthood,” Khanna has argued that the experience of colonialism operated as the traumatic moment of loss.⁴⁶² The loss in question, according to Khanna, is the loss of

⁴⁵⁹ Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 133.

⁴⁶⁰ Freud, *On Transience*, (1916), *S. E.* vol. XIV (1914-1916): 303-307, 307, and Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” 243.

⁴⁶¹ Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, 110.

⁴⁶² Khanna, 12.

a specific ideal: the ideal of the right of subjecthood and the right not to be exploited. The remnants of this loss, she argues, are melancholically preserved in former colonies/modern nation-states, eventuating in a haunting aftermath. This is so because the group experience of loss is inextricable from the very formation of these newly independent nations. The form of this aftermath, more often than not, is “political revolutionary violence,” Khanna writes, explaining such group reaction as “a form of melancholia in unconscious response” to the loss of the ideal.⁴⁶³ Thus, vivid depiction of violence in Carpentier’s novel can be interpreted as serving as indices to the loss the slaves have suffered. This loss can mean the loss of the homeland, the loss of freedom, or the impossibility of finding a viable replacement love object for this loss even after Haiti’s independence. Besides violence, Carpentier’s black protagonists exhibit other signs of melancholia, such as an identification with the perpetrator of loss. The African population in *The Kingdom* is actively involved in the process of decolonization and its aftermath, assuming various roles in the newly established order. Ti Noël is set free as his master dies, while Henri Christophe chooses to ignore his community’s religion and imitates the colonisers’ practices when he becomes king. In Vassilikos’s *...and dreams are dreams* the specter of colonialism has taken the form of debt dependency and financial control. Yet, since the protagonists of the short stories fail to identify themselves as valuable members of the Greek nation state on many occasions, the question arises as to what these individuals have lost and whether this hostile identification is due to the form the Greek nation took when it was established.

Dimitris Tziouvas has offered an informed account of individual and collective identity as seen through Greek novels relying on psychoanalytical perspectives such as

⁴⁶³ Khanna, 23.

those of Freud, Lacan, and Kristeva. He remarks that, in the case of Greece, “individualism has remained atrophic due to the fact that national identity has been defined defensively in relation to a hostile ‘other.’”⁴⁶⁴ Vassilikos explores in depth the relationship of the individual to Greek society and state, often highlighting that the self exists against an ‘other’, ranging from immigrant taxi drivers, the foreign influence, to the Greek state itself. By paying closer attention to the metamorphoses though, Vassilikos’s engagement with Greek identity reveals its more complex aspects as the central characters of the stories—Rosa, the taxi drivers—find themselves to be others in modern Greece. As the captain of the yacht finds himself between two states, that of being a stranger himself and feeling hostile towards others while in Greece, the subjects of Vassilikos’s stories face a similar ambivalence.⁴⁶⁵ Applying Julia Kristeva’s approach to the emergence of national identity, Tziovas points out that as “Greek collective identity was based on establishing a distance between ‘us’ and ‘them,’” it was thus constructed upon the German Romantic model of nationhood, rather than the model ‘inherited’ from the Enlightenment which would be more inclusive of the ‘other.’⁴⁶⁶ What needs to be highlighted here, is that both concepts of a homogenous nation and national identity in modern Greece were imported from Europe, and this tension is also evident in literature, especially in the interaction between self and nation. Gourgouris also comments on the issue of the homogeneity of the nation state during

⁴⁶⁴ Dimitris Tziovas, *The Other Self: Selfhood and Society in Modern Greek Fiction* (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2003), 27.

⁴⁶⁵ Vassilikos was exiled in Paris during the Colonels’ Junta in Greece (1967-1974), so he is familiar with the experience of exile.

⁴⁶⁶ Tziovas, 27. Tziovas relies upon Julia Kristeva’s *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. Leon Roudiez (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), and her distinction between the French *esprit general* and the German notion of *Volksgeist* in her work *Nations without Nationalism*, trans. Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

the nineteenth century, arguing that the Greek population which formed the modern Greek nation state was in fact heterogeneous. The “polyphony” of the Greek identity was thus ignored, he suggests, since Greece had to conform to the European standards of nationhood.⁴⁶⁷ A common symptom in formerly colonised states is the establishment of the nation-state itself which lies in the paradoxical fact that the native administration or leadership which governs the independent state repeats the forms of organisation imposed by the coloniser. One of these inherited structures is the idea that a nation must be homogenous.⁴⁶⁸ Consequently, the subjectivities of such nations have to conform to a presupposed idea of identity defined by specific features such as language or religion.

The idea of a homogenous postcolonial homeland also preoccupies Khanna in her discussion of time in relation to the idea of the nation. Revising both Anderson and Bhabha’s ideas, Khanna argues that her own understanding of time is neither empty, *pace* Anderson, nor linear, *pace* Bhabha. Both Khanna and Bhabha recognise that Freud’s concept of *Nachträglichkeit* (‘afterwardsness’ or ‘deferred action’) is valuable in discussing the traumatic experience of colonialism and its long-term effects on the individual and the nation.⁴⁶⁹ Khanna’s argument concerning the remnants of colonialism focuses on haunting and the idea that time in a nation is non-linear because of the presence of spectres. “The remainders,” she writes, “are not driven by a conscious desire for nationhood or community. They do not build a sense of belonging. [...] On the contrary, they manifest an inability to remember, an interruption, or a haunting encryption that critiques national-colonial representation.”⁴⁷⁰ Khanna uses the idea of haunting to describe the psychic processes that affect the continuity of a nation.

⁴⁶⁷ Gourgouris, 120.

⁴⁶⁸ Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2016), 59.

⁴⁶⁹ Khanna, 15.

⁴⁷⁰ Khanna, 21.

In doing so, she is indebted to the work of the Hungarian-French school of psychoanalysis. The reference here is, specifically, to the work of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok who, following Sándor Ferenczi's formulations on the introjection of objects, wrote a series of essays on traumatic experiences, mourning and individuals' functioning in the circumstances of loss—what they name “the illness of mourning.”

In her essay on “The Illness of Mourning and the Fantasy of the Exquisite Corpse,” Torok examines Ferenczi's concept of introjection and the ways in which it differs from Freud's theory of introjection of lost objects. Introjection, she clarifies, is “the process of including the Unconscious in the ego through objectal contacts. The loss of the object will halt this process. Introjection does not tend toward compensation, but growth.”⁴⁷¹ It is precisely Torok's emphasis on this function of introjection as a process in which the ego can expand that moves her away from Freud's thinking on the process of introjection. In Freud the lost object becomes a part of the ego ideal and it refers to an unattainable object. Incorporation, according to Torok, on the other hand, is less productive for the ego. After a loss has occurred, the object is attached to the ego but only in an attempt to counteract the loss, as the object still carries with it the desire of ownership. “The loss acts as a prohibition,” Torok stresses, because, whereas the ego would normally cut any ties with the lost object, as in the case of introjection, here it ends up supporting these ties with the object in the hope that it might be restored. The purpose of incorporation is “to recover, in secret and through magic” the lost object, thereby ignoring the painful reality of loss.⁴⁷² It is when introjection fails, when the individual cannot assimilate the loss and stays fixated on the lost object, that the illness

⁴⁷¹ Maria Torok, “The Illness of Mourning and the Fantasy of the Exquisite Corpse,” in Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis* Volume 1, ed. and trans. Nicholas T. Rand (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 107-124, 113.

⁴⁷² Torok, 114.

of mourning (or melancholia) takes place.⁴⁷³ The desire for this object has to be buried “like a corpse,” since it denotes a certain momentary satisfaction of the ego.⁴⁷⁴ In their essay “Mourning *or* Melancholia: Introjection versus Incorporation” Torok and Abraham elaborate on the differences between introjection and incorporation, clarifying that “incorporation denotes a fantasy” since it refers to a secret location in the ego and seeks to gratify a desire, that is to keep a love object.⁴⁷⁵ Incorporation involves two processes, demetaphorization and objectivation, which both show that the individual may refuse to mourn, to accept the loss of an object or a part of himself that was lost in the process. In some cases, the loss is not even acknowledged. This inability to mourn and the refusal of loss “[erects] a secret tomb inside the subject” a process akin to burying something alive. What is buried in this case is the trauma of loss and the loss itself, placed inside an inner crypt, creating an “intrapsychic secret.”⁴⁷⁶ The contents of the crypt and its very existence are what melancholic individuals try to hide and conceal when they turn against themselves, and while, for Freud, this behaviour was interpreted as revenge against the love-object which had been subsequently transferred onto the ego, Abraham and Torok consider it as manifestation of a phantom object that the individual has identified with.⁴⁷⁷ Abraham and Torok’s concept of the phantom adopts imagery associated with ghosts in order to describe the process in detail: the phantom makes the individual suffer as its burial location is, by definition, inappropriate to accommodate it.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷³ Torok, 116.

⁴⁷⁴ Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, “Mourning *or* Melancholia: Introjection versus Incorporation,” in Abraham and Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel*, 124.

⁴⁷⁵ Abraham and Torok, 125.

⁴⁷⁶ Abraham and Torok, 130.

⁴⁷⁷ Abraham and Torok, 137.

⁴⁷⁸ Abraham and Torok, 141.

How does the phantom relate to group psychology though, and, by extension, postcolonial studies? In “Thoughts for the Times on War and Death” (1915) Freud remarks that “the human being is subject not only to the pressure of his immediate cultural environment, but also to the influence of the cultural history of his ancestors.”⁴⁷⁹ Freud’s idea that the individual’s psychic life may be influenced by events he has not himself experienced is related to what Abraham and Torok theorise on the phantom’s haunting. Borrowing vocabulary and imagery from folklore and literature, Abraham makes a parallel between the spirits of the dead that haunt the living, and the phantom which has arisen to torture the individual.⁴⁸⁰ The phantom can arise not only in an individual psychological experience but also in the psychic life of a group, through the transmission of a secret, or a traumatic experience which was not directly experienced by the individual, but by his ancestors, parents or a group he has identified himself with, such as a nation. The idea that a shared phantom returns to haunt us functions, Abraham argues, as an exorcism which seeks to push the phantom from the private to the collective.⁴⁸¹ The concept of transgenerational haunting may point to a particular traumatic experience (for example, that of being colonized, exploited, denigrated) which haunts multiple individuals for generations and is, as such, visible in the situations of postcolonialism and neo-colonialism. Abraham’s suggestion, in resolving the encounter with the phantom, is to “make the phantom appear in the light of day” or to give voice to the silence to which the experience of loss has been condemned.⁴⁸² As the editor and translator of Abraham and Torok, Nicholas Rand,

⁴⁷⁹ Freud, *Thoughts for the Times on War and Death*, (1915), *S. E.* vol. XIV (1914-1916): 273-300, 282-283.

⁴⁸⁰ Nicolas Abraham, “Notes of the Phantom: A Complement to Freud’s Metapsychology,” in Abraham and Torok, 171-172.

⁴⁸¹ Abraham, 176.

⁴⁸² Abraham, 190.

explains, their work on haunting “enables us to understand how the falsification, ignorance or disregard of the past [...] is the breeding ground of the phantomic return of shameful secrets on the level of individuals, families, the community, and possibly even entire nations.”⁴⁸³

To better comprehend how the loss of an abstract ideal, such as the nation, can provoke the feeling of “haunting” which Abraham and Torok have described, it is necessary to see how the individual identifies with the nation in the first place. Freud had already described this relationship between self and group psychology through object relations, as I have discussed earlier. Drawing upon the idea of a nation’s function as a social fantasy, Gourgouris reinterprets both Anderson and Freud. Like Anderson, he considers the nation as an imaginary institution which is shaped by historical circumstances, but he also addresses the formation of a national identity through national fantasies. He argues that nations are not themselves fantasies but, instead, the object of a collective, social fantasy.⁴⁸⁴ In this sense, the nation operates in a similar way to colonialism, through the use of power to occupy its subjects, hence the purpose of this fantasy is “to make the Nation a subject.”⁴⁸⁵ Gourgouris asserts that it is “the fantasy of nationality” and the “fantasy of belonging to a community” that shape the modern national subject from the nineteenth century onwards.⁴⁸⁶ Although the social fantasy Gourgouris identifies can be better understood through the example of Greece, since the modern Greek state had always been sustained by the desire to be identified as a predecessor of European civilisation, it is crucial for my reading of

⁴⁸³ Nicholas T. Rand, “Secrets and Posterity: The Theory of the Transgenerational Phantom,” in Abraham and Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel*, 165-169, 165.

⁴⁸⁴ Gourgouris, 14.

⁴⁸⁵ Gourgouris, 43.

⁴⁸⁶ Gourgouris, 4.

nation in Carpentier too. While Haitian subjects are not haunted by their historical past in the way that Greek subjects are, the identification of Carpentier's black subjects with the idea of a nation points at what Gourgouris calls the nation's "mythhistorical form."⁴⁸⁷ While in the case of Greek literature the phantom of European influence affects the individual's engagement with the category of nation because of the unsaid condition of crypto-colonialism, in Carpentier's novel the European influence is so pervasive that the subjects' desire to identify with a father-nation are condemned into an ambivalence between the African and the European. Eventually, in both Carpentier and Vassilikos, the nation becomes a traumatic object for the fictional subjectivities portrayed, but also for the writers themselves, as they both sublimate, to use Freud's term, their desire for the nation into their work of art. It is the loss of the nation-ideal and the social fantasy of national belonging that the metamorphoses in Carpentier and Vassilikos sustain. This loss has to be uttered and not condemned into silence, a creative strategy that Freud had identified in his work on loss and melancholia: "it is an inevitable result of all this that we should seek in the world of fiction, in literature and in the theatre compensation for what has been lost in life."⁴⁸⁸

Metamorphoses in Carpentier: the European and the Native Subject

The trope of metamorphosis, as I have already suggested, functions in *The Kingdom* as an oral storytelling technique which reconnects the slaves to their past. In this regard, the tales about Macandal's magical transformations succeed in uniting the enslaved African community against the colonists. For the slave Ti Noël, who is gradually introduced to the world of legendary Macandal and the oral tales about his

⁴⁸⁷ Gourgouris, 15.

⁴⁸⁸ Freud, *Thoughts for the Times on War and Death*, 291.

extraordinary powers, these tales of metamorphosis transform the occupied island from a place of powerlessness and humiliation into a place where the possibility of another, non-enslaved identity arises. This latter identity may connect him further with his African homeland through rituals and religion. In such tales, the animal species blend with the human and the slaves learn about “extraordinary animals that had had human offspring. And of men whom certain spells turned into animals.”⁴⁸⁹ However, the tales cease to be told while Macandal is hiding from his oppressors. Ti Noël observes that with Macandal’s absence the world around him becomes emptier, specifically because “with him had gone Kankan Muza, Adonhueso, the royal kings, and the Rainbow of Whidah,” that is, the African kings that have a prominent position in Macandal’s tales.⁴⁹⁰ The references to Africa’s past are always mythological, the snake gods are evoked to protect the slaves and punish the French, while Macandal’s subsequent appearances at the plantation have a religious importance. Macandal’s arm had been crushed by the French masters but his metamorphoses continued to inspire the slaves to rebel against their masters. “They all knew that the green lizard, the night moth, the strange dog, the incredible gannet, were nothing but disguises,” while Ti Noël reassured them that their Loas would eventually avenge them.⁴⁹¹ Establishing the links between the white wax heads of a barber shop and animals which are being slaughtered from the very first chapter, *The Kingdom* sets out to narrate the identity of the colonised in Haiti in a way in which metamorphosis acquires a mythical status, with epic-like aspects, but does not oversee the violence of the revolution: “It amused Ti Noël to think that alongside the pale calves’ heads, heads of white men were served on the same

⁴⁸⁹ Carpentier, *The Kingdom*, 19.

⁴⁹⁰ Carpentier, 23.

⁴⁹¹ Carpentier, 35-36. The Loas are African spirits of Vodou which are invoked during rituals.

tablecloth.”⁴⁹² In Carpentier’s novel, metamorphosis is attached to myths and legends of the African natives of Haiti, especially those concerning Voodoo rituals and animal sacrifices, which are described in detail yet are never fully understood by the Europeans. Besides the apparent cruelty of killing animals though, a rapport between men and animals is inherited in the community’s stories which were told to each other in the form of oral tales. Macandal “spoke of the great migrations of tribes, of age-long wars, of epic battles in which the animals had been allies of men.”⁴⁹³ Gradually, the power of Macandal’s storytelling about their African past “exercised a strange fascination” over the slaves, especially Ti Noël.⁴⁹⁴ The same fascination is shared by Carpentier when he mentions Macandal in the prologue of *The Kingdom*:

during my stay in Haiti, where I found myself in daily contact with something we could call the marvelous real. I was treading earth where thousands of men, eager for liberty, believed in Macandal's lycanthropic powers, to the point that their collective faith produced a miracle on the day of his execution.⁴⁹⁵

The marvellous in this case is part of the legends and myths about the transformational powers of Macandal, and specifically the transformation into a werewolf.⁴⁹⁶ The miracle Carpentier refers to is also attached to the concept of metamorphosis; after Macandal is captured by the French owners of the plantations, it is decided that he is going to be burned alive in front of all the slaves. Indeed, the guards witness the slave’s death but the African population witness a different version, according to which Macandal is saved: “the bonds fell off and the body of the Negro rose in the air, flying

⁴⁹² Carpentier, 5.

⁴⁹³ Carpentier, 7.

⁴⁹⁴ Carpentier, 13.

⁴⁹⁵ Carpentier, “On the Marvelous Real in America,” 77.

⁴⁹⁶ Giorgio Agamben’s work on *homo sacer* specifically refers to a werewolf; in addition, Darrieussecq’s story *Pig Tales*, which is discussed in the next chapter, also features a werewolf.

overhead, until it plunged into the black waves of the sea of slaves.”⁴⁹⁷ The slaves knew, the narrator claims, that Macandal’s link with the animal world and numerous appearances through animals meant that he could escape his fate and achieve a state of immortality in his flight from death. The European rulers fail to recognise the existence of the marvellous once again, and it is only through the slaves’ eyes that the reader is able to comprehend the revolutionary acts of defiance against the colonisers. Jerome C. Branche has argued that, the discourse of myth serves strategically here as “the prism through which the black revolution might become acceptable.”⁴⁹⁸ Its specific use of the myth of metamorphosis as one of perpetual renewal and its semantic investment in the figure of werewolf assure that the message is not lost or cast off as a mythic embellishment.

Mabille’s study of the marvellous includes a description of afterlife beliefs in Haiti, specifically the concept of the ‘zombie,’ which originated from the local beliefs that voodoo rites could bring a dead slave back to life.⁴⁹⁹ Mabille cites W. B. Seabrook’s *The Magic Island* (1929) and his account of Haiti’s dead slaves, who, after being dead, returned to life as automatons, thus demonstrating a less appealing aspect of what he calls “the marvellous.” As both Michael Dash and Dalleo point out, William Seabrook’s portrayal of the voodoo practices and songs in the Haitian jungle were well known to Carpentier himself and it informed his depiction of Haiti.⁵⁰⁰ Mabille explains that, while Seabrook’s account tells us about the expressionless, empty eyes of the plantation workers, which were “in truth the eyes of a dead man,” the reality is different

⁴⁹⁷ Carpentier, 46.

⁴⁹⁸ Jerome C. Branche, *Colonialism and Race in Luso-Hispanic Literature* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 242.

⁴⁹⁹ Mabille, 80-81.

⁵⁰⁰ Dash, 91. and Dalleo, 150.

as the workers were not living dead entities but were in fact under “the spell” of European oppression. “These mysterious beings were living humans under a cruel spell that transformed them into slave laborers, less expensive than animals, and lost in animal-like mindlessness.”⁵⁰¹ Mabile points out that slavery does not make the fantastic element of transformation inappropriate in this case, even if the reality behind the tale is unpleasant, but is instead an indication of a way of thinking that wishes to “turn a portion of humanity into complete automatons, deprived of independence, personal needs and psychological fears.”⁵⁰² Mabile’s critique of the figure of the zombie, that is, that the colonizers’ appropriation of the myth of transformation related to enslaved populations, is stimulating but fails to explore the reality behind the inspiration for such stories and further implications of such representation. First, the stories of slaves who come back to life like Macandal in *The Kingdom*, are rooted in local customs and religious beliefs about the communication between the living and the dead, and the emergence of the zombie legends could be plausibly linked to the community’s need for the hundreds of slaves who died on their way to or in Haiti. Second, politically speaking, while the repetition of such legends in a literary text written by an orientalizing Western writer could be essentializing, to bring them forward in a literary context means also to foreground the critique of the condition that degrades and reifies human beings into automatons. Carpentier seems to be aware of all these possibilities. He omits the figure of the zombie from his account of voodoo rituals, but underscores the transformation of Macandal as both a link between the

⁵⁰¹ Mabile, 81.

⁵⁰² Mabile, 81.

living and the dead and the site of subversive power, which empowers the native population; significantly, the slave's transformation is invisible to European eyes.

In recreating another historical event, that of poisoning the colonising masters, Carpentier gives us a detailed picture of indigenous myths and rituals, as Ti Noël and Macandal visit a voodoo priestess to help them make the deadly potion. Maman Loi's tales of "extraordinary animals that had had human offspring" and "of men whom certain spells turned into animals" further enhance the affinities between human and animal amongst the enslaved population.⁵⁰³ When the poison causes a great unrest in the plantations and Macandal has to disappear as his life is in danger, the slaves are convinced of his supernatural abilities and believe in the rumours that he is "chosen to wipe out the whites and create a great empire of free Negroes in Santo Domingo."⁵⁰⁴ The marvellous metamorphosis of a slave into an animal is a tale that Haitian people believed for a reason, Carpentier suggests that it enabled them to channel their struggle for freedom: "in the Americas, [...] there did exist a Macandal who possessed the same powers because of the faith of his contemporaries and who used that magic to inspire one of the most dramatic and strange uprisings in History."⁵⁰⁵ As Carpentier shows, the importance of belief in the story of metamorphosis in this case becomes crucial for establishing, or, rather, liberating, the colonised subject's point of view, which has been overshadowed by European oppression. The final metamorphoses of Ti-Noël into different types of animals aim to help him be part of a community; however they do not hold the same weight as Macandal's legendary transformations into animals. Faced

⁵⁰³ Carpentier, *The Kingdom*, 19.

⁵⁰⁴ Carpentier, 30.

⁵⁰⁵ Alejo Carpentier, "Prologue to *The Kingdom of This World* (1949)," in *Review: Literature and Arts of the Americas* 26, no.47 (1993): 28-32, 28.

with the terrifying prospect of becoming a slave again, Ti Noël decides that the human form is not useful in this respect.⁵⁰⁶ His animal transformations assist him in hiding or surviving the oppression, but do not allow him to live harmoniously in a community of other creatures, until he realises that, unlike himself, “Macandal had disguised himself as an animal for years to serve men, not to abjure the world of men.”⁵⁰⁷ Metamorphosis then is meant to serve the revolution and inspire the oppressed, and not simply to provide a means of escape from their terrible fate; Ti Noël’s attitude towards himself, including his abilities to metamorphose, changes in this respect. The transformations may reconnect the human to nature and the homeland, which has been exploited and destroyed due to colonial expansion, but they also point at a greater significance.

What these transformations testify to is a need for the subject to negotiate the colonised traumatic experience of slavery and colonialism, and, specifically in the situation of the slaves and their descendants in Haiti, the absence of the homeland. The Haitian nation does not yet exist at the beginning of *The Kingdom*, and Africa is very much seen as homeland, like a symbolic mother, with which the subjects identify and to which they try to symbolically return through their participation in voodoo rituals and metamorphoses. After the rebellion against the French and the establishment of an independent state, and during Henri Christophe’s monarchy and continuation of slavery, Ti Noël discovers the unbearable reality of Christophe’s “indigenous” oppressive actions: “the howls, the senseless screams, continued at the corner of the Archbishop’s Palace until the throat, choked on blood, lacerated itself in curses, dark threats, prophecies and imprecations.”⁵⁰⁸ Since the Haitian nation-state has been

⁵⁰⁶ Carpentier, *The Kingdom*, 172.

⁵⁰⁷ Carpentier, 178.

⁵⁰⁸ Carpentier, 124.

constructed as a mimicry of the colonisers' idea of statehood, it repeats the practices of the French monarchy and perpetuates the stereotypical ideas of division between the pagan, "uncivilised" African and the "enlightened" Christian population. The subject faces the ambivalence of belonging to and identifying with the nation-state as a social fantasy because the nation is hostile to the subject's identity. This is the condition of double consciousness which, as Paul Gilroy explains in *The Black Atlantic*, describes the identification of the black subject to the nation-state.⁵⁰⁹ The idea of nation becomes both a love and hate object for the subject, since there is no nation that Ti Noël can identify with, and because, at the same time, the existing nation seeks to imprison him. This double loss is manifested in the pessimistic, ambivalent ending of *The Kingdom*. Ti Noël begins to accept the futility of revolting after he witnesses the disappointing results of the revolution on the island. At this point his ability to metamorphose into different animals, which was taught to him by Macandal, becomes significant. Strangely, despite his ability to transform into various animals, Ti Noël does not feel that he belongs to any of the animal species.⁵¹⁰ The reader realizes that the need of the nationalised subject to engage with a larger, collective group drives these metamorphoses. The quest for a new love object fails, however, as the newly founded Haitian state is neither independent nor inclusive of its African members. When Ti Noël attempts to be part of an "orderly" species, such as geese, he is rejected as he is immediately identified as an "other." although his transformed appearance would testify the opposite. Carpentier evokes a metaphor to describe this rejection: "[t]he clan now seemed a community of aristocrats, tightly closed against anyone of a different

⁵⁰⁹ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993), 161.

⁵¹⁰ Carpentier, 173.

caste.”⁵¹¹ Establishing a parallel between the goose community and aristocracy to describe the dynamics of failed assimilation/acceptance of the subaltern into a community, Carpentier inserts a political commentary: the parallel suggests that race and class hierarchies are quickly re-established in the independent state and that discriminations continue to be visible in Haiti.

The episode focusing on former slave Soliman continues this dialogue on identity, race, and the cross-continental representations of subjectivity. Soliman escapes from Haiti, where he has been deported from France, and finds himself in Rome. The stories Soliman narrates in Rome in front of an amazed audience have magic embellishments but present a self-orientalising narrative construction: “he was asked to tell his story, which he did with gusto, embellishing it with the greatest lies, passing himself off as a nephew of Henri Christophe who had miraculously escaped the slaughter of the Cap.”⁵¹² Soliman lies incessantly in his attempt to impress the Italians who are even ignorant of Haiti’s geographical location, let alone its history, as they cannot tell the difference between Madagascar and Persia. These circumstances are of importance because they assist us in identifying Carpentier’s thoughts on the translation of the marvellous in Europe and link it directly to his reading of subjectivity through a (would be) metamorphosis. One day Soliman wanders in the Borghese Palace in Rome and suddenly encounters a statue whose resemblance to his former mistress Pauline Bonaparte is uncanny.⁵¹³ In his prologue to *The Kingdom*, Carpentier links his own memory of Antonio Canova’s sculpture of Venus (1804-1808), the model for which was Napoleon’s sister, Pauline Bonaparte, and it is likely that the episode is

⁵¹¹ Carpentier, 177.

⁵¹² Carpentier, 155.

⁵¹³ Carpentier, 159.

constructed around this sculpture. In the diegetic world, Pauline did not torture her slave in the ways the male masters used to; instead, she “took a perverse pleasure” in torturing him with desire for her naked body.⁵¹⁴ As Soliman used to massage his mistress, he possesses an intimate knowledge of her body and the similarity of the marble statue to the real Pauline becomes unbearable to him. “Yellow in the light of the lantern,” he imagines he sees “the corpse of Pauline Bonaparte, a corpse newly stiffened, recently stripped of breath and sight which perhaps there was still time to bring back to life.”⁵¹⁵ What Soliman experiences seems like a manifestation of the marvellous in which the immediate object of his desire, Pauline, is merged with a work of art. Yet as Carpentier emphasised in his prologue to the novel, this transformation is a self-deception, as it does not interrupt reality in any way and can only be witnessed by a single individual: it appears as a metamorphosis but its nature is that of a chimera.

Pauline’s “metamorphosis” is thus written in the context of Carpentier’s engagement with the multidirectional routes of translating subjecthood and expression between Europe, America and Africa. It presents the writer with an opportunity to explore the trope of metamorphosis from the inanimate work of art into the animate (if dead) body in terms of the subject’s identification with a nation, and simultaneously to foreground a multicultural vision of fragmented subjecthood. Carpentier carefully foreshadows the encounter with the marble statue and highlights the importance of the other statues in the palace: first Soliman discovers statues of naked women which are veiled; then his gaze turns towards statues of animals and women which depict mythological encounters of women with the divine through metamorphoses, such as

⁵¹⁴ Carpentier, 89.

⁵¹⁵ Carpentier, 160.

the story of Leda and the swan and Europe's abduction from bull-like Zeus. The mythological figures seem alive in Soliman's imagination, as he thinks that "paintings seem to step from the wall: a smiling youth who raised a curtain, a boy, crowned with grape leaves, who held a mute panpipe to his lips or laid a finger to his mouth for silence."⁵¹⁶ Thus preparing the reader for a metamorphosis or for a manifestation of the divine inside the statue room, it is perhaps not surprising that Soliman's hallucinatory vision is a retelling of the Pygmalion and Galatea myth, or that a Dionysian scene will take place, given that Soliman is drunk. Ovid's version of Pygmalion carving the ideal woman out of marble is echoed in Carpentier's metamorphosis of Pauline. Pauline's beauty is in fact compared to Galatea much earlier in *The Kingdom*, when one of the crew members of the ship she is travelling in, imagines her as Galatea.⁵¹⁷ Ovid's Galatea is made of "snow-white ivory," very much like Canova's statue; Soliman's momentary thought of the possibility of the statue being alive is conveyed in Ovid through Pygmalion's thought that the statue "seemed to be alive, / Its face to be a real girl's, a girl / Who wished to move."⁵¹⁸ It is not impossible that Carpentier drew a mental parallel between Ovid's Galatea on the couch and Antonio Canova's neoclassical "Venus Victorious" who appears to recline on a roman couch as well. The intertextual routes are complex here. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Goddess Venus intervenes and transforms the soulless marble Galatea into a real woman, while Pauline's body posture impersonates the goddess herself in Canova's creation, thus establishing a connection between the divine and the human in Soliman and Pauline's relationship. Pauline's statue holds the golden apple awarded to Venus by Paris, a prize

⁵¹⁶ Carpentier, 158.

⁵¹⁷ Carpentier, 87.

⁵¹⁸ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 232.

which, in the myth of “The Judgement of Paris,” becomes the starting point of an unacceptable love affair and the Trojan War. Pauline’s body attains mythical and unattainable qualities in both its human and marble form; it is the body of a goddess which exercises a power over Soliman.

Galatea’s story is a narrative in which the female exists through the male gaze and via the male erotic desire. Pauline’s body is also described as an object of desire in Carpentier. Her transformation is premised on an individual male fantasy. Soliman touches the statue “with eager hands” especially because touching the body “aroused a memory” and images from his past as Pauline’s masseur.⁵¹⁹ The “chill of the marble,” however, contaminates his hands and moves to his wrists and it is only then that Soliman makes a terrifying association between death and the coldness of the statue, causing him to abandon it, shouting “in the vast silence of the Borghese Palace.”⁵²⁰

Freud has interpreted the male fascination and confrontation with the female in his essay “Medusa’s Head” (1922), in which he uses the symbol of Medusa’s decapitated head to explain the expression of the castration complex in men. The encounter with the female body and genitals is terrifying, he writes, because it is a visual warning of the possibility of male castration, given that the male subject perceives the female body as monstrous. This terror is intrinsically linked to the anxiety of powerlessness and the ultimate state of powerlessness: death.⁵²¹ Soliman’s wild reaction in front of the stone copy of Pauline is an expression of the terrifying encounter with the possibility of death, the fear of castration and powerlessness. However, as

⁵¹⁹ Carpentier, 159.

⁵²⁰ Carpentier, 160.

⁵²¹ Freud, “Medusa’s Head,” (1922), *S. E.* vol. XVIII (1920-1922): 273-274.

Carpentier stages an unusual encounter between a former slave of African descent and a neoclassical statue of his white colonizing mistress, I interpret this episode in terms of the influence of colonialism on the subjugated. It is not accidental that this powerful and enchanting female body is European, and not American. The object of desire is a marble-like, white, European woman of royal descent, an idealised version of female beauty and perfection that embodies Europe's influence upon a colonised subject. Soliman attempts to possess the marble body by touching the statue with his fingers, but the experience drives him insane in a direct commentary on the status of colonised subjectivity. The merging of the Galatea myth with the narrative of colonisation also suggests further layers of meaning. Peter Brooks has commented that the narrative can be read psychoanalytically, in terms of the negotiation of the lost love object, which

magnificently represents a crucial wish-fulfillment: the bodily animation of the object of desire. It may suggest that in essence all desire is ultimately desire for a body, one that may substitute for the body, the mother's, the lost object of infantile bliss—the body that the child grown up always seeks to recreate.⁵²²

In *The Kingdom*, Soliman's relationship to Pauline is premised on the impossibility of fulfilling a forbidden wish for his mistress's body and thus the inability to possess his love object—an inability that is inscribed politically by class and race. Pauline's/Galatea's body is the love object, but as Brooks highlights, this body can function as a substitute for another body which has been lost. Because of Soliman's encounter in the Borghese Palace, I argue that the love object is in fact the homeland, which, for Soliman, has been replaced by France through his life with Pauline. Ultimately, Pauline represents the civilised, and seemingly harmless aspect of colonialism in an evocative scene in which she allows Soliman to “kneel before her

⁵²² Peter Brooks, *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative* (London: Harvard University Press, 1993), 24.

and kiss her feet,” an attitude which Carpentier describes as “the noble gratitude of a simple soul brought into contact with the generous teachings of the Enlightenment.”⁵²³ For Soliman, Pauline represents the possibility of new homeland—a mother-land in replacement of Haiti, or Africa— wherein the primitive subjects need to be civilised and to show their gratitude towards the superiority of France.⁵²⁴ We are faced, then, with a series of homelands: Africa, Haiti, and France. The subject, Soliman, cannot find his place in any of these homelands; he has already been separated from Africa.

The deceptive metamorphosis of Pauline in the Borghese Palace into a corpse, and Soliman’s fear of himself turning into a marble corpse, is in fact a manifestation of the destructive power of colonialism. The metamorphosis allows us to read the colonised subjectivity in Carpentier as fragmented and split: the subject created under colonial rule is torn between the desire of a love object, which can take the form of a nation, and the knowledge that the love object will not reciprocate the feeling of love, if the latter is directed towards the coloniser’s nation. This split inside the subject is an expression of the double consciousness that Du Bois described: an ambivalent, torn subject-position of the formerly enslaved and/or colonised population, straddling their native heritage, layers of colonial exploitation and displacement, and the European influence. Both metamorphoses in Carpentier’s novel focus on the impossibility of identifying a new love object and the emptiness of the ego; thus, the condition of colonial melancholia.

⁵²³ Carpentier, 89.

⁵²⁴ Carpentier’s portrayal of Soliman’s “primitive” cry inside the Italian palace repeats Freud’s division between primeval, archaic instincts and civilised ones, the distinction between the ego and the id.

Migrating Metamorphoses in Vassilikos

In Vassilikos, the trope of metamorphosis can be identified in various stories, but it appears in its most undiluted form in one of the “stories of taxi drivers,” that of a tiger named Rosa who becomes a woman after she enters into a relationship with her tamer. The involved narrator announces the genre of his story early on: it “will seem like a fairy tale,” we are told.⁵²⁵ The setting may be that of an adult fairy tale, but it is simultaneously realistic and socio-economically well delineated. The narrator is a taxi driver who used to work as Gastarbeiter (foreign/guest worker) in Germany and has now returned to Greece. The parallel between migrant workers, taxi drivers, and storytellers in 1980s Athens opens up a dialogue between the stationary and migrating citizens of a country, and between the existential experiences of stasis and mobility as such. This is in keeping with the organisation of the narrative bodies in the collection as a whole. Vassilikos’s characters constantly move in and outside Greece, always contemplating their choices. This movement of population is more evident in the stories of the taxi-drivers who left Greece and went to Germany but then returned, bringing with them marvellous stories of their experiences abroad and maintaining the stereotype of a magical, and rich, world outside the Greek borders. The Greek nation operates in the case of modern Greece as “a traumatic object” upon which “the stories of the taxi-drivers” focus. The narrators of the magic realist stories about fantastic women are therefore negotiating the loss of this object—nation—by retelling their stories of love and betrayal to the creator of the dream newspaper.⁵²⁶

⁵²⁵ Vassilikos, 128.

⁵²⁶ Gourgouris, 32.

Similar to the circumstances of the female metamorphosis into an animal in Marie Darrieussecq dystopic novel, which will concern us in the next chapter, Vassilikos' story of Rose the tigress focuses on an inter-species love, here between tamer and animal. Such inter-species love emerges in another story in the collection, which merits a brief discussion: "the white bear." There the unnamed, unreliable narrator exacts a species transfer/transformation. Rather than depicting or implying a direct metamorphosis, this story targets the psychological content of the dynamics of identification, desire, and inter-species metamorphosis. The unnamed narrator of this story owns a white bear which he is trying to hide in contemporary Athens. He treats the female white bear as if she were his love-partner, only for the reader to discover that the bear ironically has the same name as the narrator's human partner, Aliki. The ownership of the animal allows the narrator to find a part of himself associated with the capacity to love someone else, as he states that "I wanted to have an animal of my own, since I didn't have a person of my own, or rather since I didn't want to have one."⁵²⁷ The white bear is significant for another reason: it allows Vassilikos to reflect on the process of writing a novel with numerous unreliable narrators, and to acknowledge at the same time an important literary influence, Yannis Scarimbass (1893-1984). In *Figaro's Solo* (*To Σόλο του Φίγκαρω*) (1938), Scarimbass portrays an unreliable, potentially mentally unstable, narrator-writer who changes multiple identities.⁵²⁸ At one point in the novel, the narrator of Scarimbass's novel explains: "the idea of a novel cut me like a knife ... Mentally, I was killing a bear."⁵²⁹ Vassilikos

⁵²⁷ Vassilikos, 184.

⁵²⁸ Yannis Scarimbass, *Figaro's Solo* (Athens: Nefeli, 1992), (my translation).

⁵²⁹ Vassilikos, 169.

takes up this statement and introduces it as a motto for his own story of the white bear, in turn transforming, or metamorphosing the literary predecessor's text itself.

But in the story about Rosa, love is provoked not by displaced identification but by inter-species empathy. The tiger, according to the narrator/taxi driver who had met her in a zoo, was tortured by the memories of freedom in the jungle although she was born in captivity. While in captivity the tigress fell into a state of continuous sadness—a kind of transgenerational melancholia—which is not uncommon in wild animals in zoos, but is uncommonly depicted in fiction. The narrator emphasises Rosa's fantasies of freedom and situates them in a place “where her ancestors had lived happily in the wild” highlighting that she was melancholic because she inherited the idea of freedom “in her blood.” The narrator underscores the transgenerational aspect of the tigress's conceptualisation of freedom and her very experience of the loss of freedom.⁵³⁰

It is worth considering this short story in light of a central theme of this collection, which I have already explored in this chapter; that is, Vassilikos's concern with the relationship between freedom and control, the power exercised over disenfranchised members of a society, especially in the context of Greece and Europe, and across generations. In all the stories in the collection the female protagonists seem to be one and the same person, perpetually transforming, at the level of distinct stories as well as at the level of the collection as a whole: Dona Rosita, the woman who was magically producing dollars in one of the stories, Rosa-the tiger, who is transformed into a woman and then back into a tiger, and finally the woman who dies and has her heart transplanted into a man, therefore their subjectivities are confused. Similar to

⁵³⁰ Vassilikos, 129.

Carpentier, Vassilikos portrays his subjects as intrinsically and transgenerationally melancholic: in this version of Rosa, the animal-like protagonist grows despondent because she fails to function as herself due to her being displaced from her natural environment. Interestingly, Rosa seems to struggle with a loss of a love object in all the other ‘versions’ of her ‘self’ in *...and dreams are dreams*, and this loss is always directly associated with the loss of freedom.

In “The Lost Woman and the Bed Full of Dollars,” which directly precedes the story of Rosa the tiger, we follow a woman called Dona Rosita who possesses a supernatural ability to produce dollars and has a history of abuse at the hands of the Mafia because of this special ‘talent,’ including being forcefully held captive. When the woman falls in love with the taxi-driver (and narrator), she still suffers from the traumas of her previous incarceration, an experience which leaves her with a constant fear of abandonment by her lover. Ironically, the narrator—and lover—becomes possessive of her and decides he “would hide her” by moving from Greece to Germany, and Rosita’s life is once again limited to seeing the world “only through closed shutters.”⁵³¹ As a result, she becomes unhappy and ceases to produce dollars. Rosita is called the Lost Woman as she disappears one day and is never found by her lover, who is now a taxi-driver—except that she reappears metamorphosed as Rosa, the animal protagonist in a zoo in Germany. The story of the tigress Rosa is thus the culmination of a string of stories on captivity, in which each metamorphosis is seen as an escape route by which subjectivity tries to ensure the continuation of the self. In each of these transformations there is a symbolic loss at play, namely, the loss of the place of birth, and it is precisely this loss that enables metamorphic escape. In the context of

⁵³¹ Vassilikos, 126.

Vassilikos' writing on nationless subjects in this collection, the stories of displaced female subjects and their subsequent transformations suggest, first, that subjectivity in modern Greece is constructed upon stories of migration and loss of the homeland and, second, that in these cyclical developments the ultimate transgenerational burden is carried by marginalised subjectivities.

Such marginalised subjectivities are concentrated in the figure of Rosa. Rosa's fantasies of escaping from captivity stop when she is transferred from a zoo to a circus. There she meets the new tamer who is not afraid of her wild nature and follows a method reminiscent of the method of hypnosis applied in hospital practices in the early twentieth century: "he would always start by looking her deep in the eye, which would make the tigress restless and troubled."⁵³² After she falls in love with her tamer, thus finding a new love object, Rosa starts gradually changing into a woman. The transformation upsets the circus staff because "of her changing shape," as the change "was a change of species."⁵³³ I investigate the implications of a female subject changing species further in the next chapter. Loyal to the structure of the fairy tale, with its swift happy-end resolutions, the narrator explains that since her transformation was complete in a week, and Rosa was subsequently taught how to master human speech, she married the tamer and had two children. Although Rosa's energy is directed towards her partner, who seems to be the reason for her change, the trauma of leaving the jungle and living incarcerated is not entirely healed. We are told that Rosa avoided visiting the zoo as the memories of captivity were not forgotten, while there remained a "flame in her eyes that reflected her jungle origins."⁵³⁴ The tiger's change into a woman can be read as

⁵³² Vassilikos, 129.

⁵³³ Vassilikos, 130.

⁵³⁴ Vassilikos, 130.

Rosa's repression of her wild and primitive instincts in order to become human. But this transformation is not entirely liberating or happy. As Freud reminds us in *Civilisation and its Discontents*, one needs to abandon a crucial part of one's identity in order to be able to participate in an interaction with another species, or simply to live in a community.⁵³⁵ When the tamer died, the narrator recalls, Rosa turned into a tigress on the day of his funeral, completely forgetting that she had once been a woman. The grief and mourning over the death of her love object causes Rosa to reconnect with her repressed instincts, the part of herself which she had to reject to be part of civilised human society. Vassilikos thus portrays a powerful female protagonist whose self is fragmented due to a number of traumatic events. This animal transformation could be compared with that found in Angela Carter's story "The Tiger's Bride" (1979), where an encounter with a violent male occasions a similar metamorphosis of a woman into tiger; yet Rosa's story has a greater political significance: it brings to the fore questions of assimilation and loss, or perceived loss, of a homeland, that form a thematic undercurrent to the collection.⁵³⁶

Strategically positioned and presented as unfolding across the working migrants' routes in Europe, this story of metamorphoses points, then, to a wider concern of Vassilikos's book. That is, it points to the anxiety of national affiliation and self-definition when faced with the paradox of actual heterogeneity and imposed homogeneity of a nation that Tziovas has invoked, and the conundrum of the subject's metamorphosis through migration. This concern, skilfully linked to the issues of authorship, is introduced in the first story of the collection, where the unreliable

⁵³⁵ Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, 133.

⁵³⁶ Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (New York: Penguin, 1980).

narrator, Irineos, tells us that one of the founders of the dream journal was a Greek who had just come back from Australia and, alongside the other founders, had failed to understand how business worked in modern Greece, “He was ignorant of Greek bureaucracy,” we are told, “and unaware of Mama Greece’s longing to draw to the very last drop the blood of any immigrant who made the faux pas of being repatriated and bringing back, like seamen do, all his foreign currency.”⁵³⁷ Such migrant personalities abound in “the stories of taxi drivers,” which instates the highly evocative collective character of “taxi drivers.” In one of the stories the narrator meets Stelios, who emigrated to Belgium and then returned to Athens to work as a taxi driver. In the story “Where for Different Reasons, Another Immigrant Taxi Driver Regrets Returning to Greece,” the taxi driver—and narrator—again called Irineos, who came from Canada, is questioned about his potential involvement in a wildfire which destroyed a big part of a forest. Even though the story implies that the character had good reasons to set the fire himself, he feels betrayed by the fact that his neighbours think he might be a suspect: “he started thinking of emigrating for a second time, in his old age. His homeland had hurt him again.”⁵³⁸

At the end of this story, and right before the next chapter of the collection, which is dedicated to Dona Rosita and Don Pacifico’s love story, this Irineos decides to change a part of his Greek identity: he changes his name into Pacifico. Literalising a verse taken from the Greek poet, Costas Varnalis, on becoming “another,” Vassilikos

⁵³⁷ Vassilikos, 132.

⁵³⁸ Vassilikos, 139. Numerous times in the collection, the word “mother” is used in reference to Greece. Upon leaving his country, Irineos thinks that “Greece was a heartless mother, always chasing you away.”

suggests that the homeland is responsible for this change of identity, and the loss which comes with it.⁵³⁹

What torments the collective character of taxi-drivers is the incorporation of the dictates of an ethnically homogenous homeland to which they want to belong—or into which they want to re-assimilate—coupled with an anxiety that the homeland is not independent or even genuine enough (that is, it is still colonised) or that they themselves are not good enough for it. The idea of homeland here functions paradoxically as what Abraham and Torok have called the shared phantom, established trans-generationally and seeking expression.⁵⁴⁰ The roots of this anxiety, and the transformation of the idea of nation into a phantom, can be traced to what Khanna has described as the loss melancholically underpinning the contemporary operation of many post-colonial (and neo-colonial) nations: the ideal of the right of (group) subjecthood and the right not to be exploited.⁵⁴¹ The remnants of this loss, she argues, are melancholically preserved in former colonies and modern nation-states, eventuating in a haunting aftermath. Following Khanna and Abraham and Torok's interpretation of the group operation of the "illness of mourning," the retelling of the magical realist stories by former immigrant Greeks serves as a narrative crypt in which the characters bury some historical incidents, stretching widely through time and, as we have seen, glossed at various points in the collection: for example, the "Asia Minor disaster" (the 1922 exchange and displacement of the Orthodox Greek and the Muslim populations between Asia Minor and mainland Greece); or the Second World War displacements; or the exilic migration and the disappearance of prominent intellectuals and the left-

⁵³⁹ Vassilikos, 140.

⁵⁴⁰ Abraham and Torok, 176.

⁵⁴¹ Khanna, 23.

oriented population under the right-wing dictatorship (which Vassilikos himself experienced); or the shifting parameters of the Greek nation themselves, which successive governments introduced (in which the writer, also a politician, himself participated). These seem to result from the group experience of loss that, Khanna writes, is linked to the very formation of newly independent nations, and they eventuate in the traumas of national affiliation and self-definition, and the (im)possibility of assimilation; all these are gestured in the section “stories of the taxi drivers.” They create unsettled, split, constantly morphing group and individual-subjectivities, whose condition is exteriorised through metamorphosis, but who nonetheless benefit (and can benefit others) from their experience of migration.

Narrating/morphing the Subject

It is in the closing story of the collection, “the transplant,” that the reader may fully understand the significance for the book of the relationship between Pacifico and Rosita, a relationship explored in different narratives throughout the collection, as well as the significance of migration (of bodies and souls). In this final story Vassilikos invents a new narrator who is a writer and has travelled to Rome in order to write a novel about the life of a man who has received a transplant: the heart of another person. This medical “miracle” is worth-mentioning not only because of its scientific significance, the narrator explains, but also because the operation will take place in Italy, since the Pope has just allowed organ transplant operations to be performed in the country. The narrator of “the transplant” is called Irineos and, as he confesses to his readers, he has been writing a story about “Don Pacifico, a man with heart trouble, who has received the transplanted heart of Dona Rosita, a woman who was killed in a car accident”—perhaps, the very story which, through a series of textual metamorphoses, we have been reading so far. At this point, the narrator places the inquiry on a higher

existential level, targeting the issue of sexually hybrid subjectivities, while discreetly invoking the myth of Tiresias. He wonders: “how does this man feel with the heart of this woman?”⁵⁴² The fictional writer provides us with some insight—for example, that Pacifico felt Rosita’s presence—while simultaneously expressing doubts that a writer is able to describe such a hybrid positionality in the first place: “how am I supposed to know how a man feels with the transplanted heart of a woman?”⁵⁴³

Yet, as readers we have already read a big part of the answer to this question in the previous story about Pacifico and Rosita. The practicalities of the transplant and its medical repercussions do not feature clearly in the narrative, but there is enough indication that Pacifico realises a part of him is in fact feminine. The narrator states that the reason he and Rosita are not so different after all lies in the fact that “things become more complicated from the moment that man realises he is half woman, since at the base of his penis lies the cancelled female sex.”⁵⁴⁴ Readers understand that they are reading a very modern, mechanically and medically assisted metamorphosis, one which nevertheless gestures towards a long history of reflecting on and expressing the idea of inter-sex metamorphosis. The interaction of the feminine and the masculine in the same body and the same subjectivity is an issue Virginia Woolf explored in her 1928 novel *Orlando*, a text which I discuss in detail in the next chapter, and I shall return to this topic soon. But it is another type of transformation that occurs in the “transplant” that interest me here, in conclusion.

⁵⁴² Vassilikos, 212.

⁵⁴³ Vassilikos, 214.

⁵⁴⁴ Vassilikos, 153.

The entity of the narrator/fictional writer starts losing himself in his own story: “my creative self finally got going. I have two strings to my bow, you see: when the man is hurt, the writer comes alive. [...] I became Don Pacifico who had received her heart in a transplant and is now living with it.”⁵⁴⁵ As the narrator/writer, Irineos, tries to recover from a broken heart—the cause of which is, unsurprisingly, a woman called Rosa—he finds that the story of “the transplant” can be written with greater ease, since his heart-broken self allows him to narrate a borrowed heart of a (dead) woman who now inhabits the body of a man. The “transplant” allows us to read subjectivity and its creation through a fictional narrative in terms of immortality. The narrator-writer, now metamorphically fused or identified with Don Pacifico, wonders how much time he has left before his own death since, his life is likely to be short with the artificial organ.⁵⁴⁶ But the very instance of writing/narration prolongs this lifespan, possibly indefinitely. Conclusively, immortality emerges as one of the key themes and concerns in the book, spreading across historical and fictional planes, and the narrative event of metamorphosis is disclosed as serving this wider purpose. The act of narration is the operating aspect of metamorphosis, as it records the constant changes of identity over time: the appearance of Pacifico/Irineos and Rosa/Rosita in different stories, eras, and settings from 1850 to the narrator’s present in 1980s.

At the end of “the transplant,” the narrator reflects on the death of the author, the death of his hero, and on the “failure of narration” altogether, while also claiming that none of the characters have anything to do with him as a writer. Yet, even after the narrator dies, the act of narration endures in Vassilikos: “[n]owadays, we all want to

⁵⁴⁵ Vassilikos, 231.

⁵⁴⁶ Vassilikos, 232.

express something that is more collective,”⁵⁴⁷ the undisclosed narrative voice says, assuming the plural. The final narrator in Vassilikos’s book is the creative individual Freud talks about in “Creative Writers and Daydreaming,” one who emerges out of the group in order to give shape to a community’s dreams and fantasies, and thus both a collective and an individual. In Vassilikos, Freud’s interpretation of writers and their fictional worlds is taken further, to the point where the subject nearly vanishes but the story remains alive within the group: “you have to stop existing as *I*, as a separate individual, and become the intermediary of others.”⁵⁴⁸ The stories are offered in the community, much like Moses relaying the commandments to the group and Michelangelo sculpting the moment in his famous statue. Writing about his long-term fascination with the figure of Moses and its artistic rendition in “The Moses of Michelangelo” (1914), Freud reinstates the importance of thinking within a psychoanalytic framework when it comes to interpreting those works of art which may express an entire group’s psychic life:

what grips us so powerfully can only be the artist's intention, in so far as he has succeeded in expressing it in his work and in getting us to understand it. I realize that this cannot be merely a matter of intellectual comprehension; what he aims at is to awaken in us the same emotional attitude, the same mental constellation as that which in him produced the impetus to create. But why should the artist’s intention not be capable of being communicated and comprehended in words, like any other fact of mental life? Perhaps where great works of art are concerned this would never be possible without the application of psycho-analysis.⁵⁴⁹

In agreement with Freud, what the two texts explored in this chapter present is the affective narration of subjects within and for their respective communities, an act of connecting different members of a community together. While seemingly peripheral to

⁵⁴⁷ Vassilikos, 260.

⁵⁴⁸ Vassilikos, 259.

⁵⁴⁹ Sigmund Freud, “The Moses of Michelangelo,” (1914), *S. E.* vol. XIII (1913-1914): 209-238, 212.

the main narrative, the trope of metamorphosis not only assists but is also vital for this effect in both *The Kingdom* and *...and dreams are dreams*. The final narrator in Vassilikos, one who has metamorphically fused with his character who had received the heart transplant from yet another character of the opposite sex, confesses at the end of the short stories collection: “I have told my story, fictitious like all stories, since the act of writing is the manifestation of the imaginary [...] I have managed to express the difficulty of expression in a world that keeps changing.”⁵⁵⁰ It is the world itself that transforms or may transform in Vassilikos’s and Carpentier’s books and narrating the different types of metamorphoses, both bodily and metaphorical ones, is an index to this condition in the two texts: it explores the relationship between belief and reality.

This common concern is reflected in the attempts by the texts’ narrators to convince the readers that the metamorphoses did indeed happen, but that only a certain group of people witnessed it. In Carpentier’s novel the belief in the possibility of transformation is tied to community rituals and oral storytelling, which are also tools of resistance to colonialism and ways of conveying the supernatural away from the sight of Europe. In Vassilikos, on the other hand, this belief is directed towards an appreciation of expression (or an effort at expression) as such, and is thus aimed at the community of readers and story-tellers. It is for this reason that, in both texts, metamorphoses are portrayed as a kind of miracle, but not one of a divine origin; one could say that the metamorphic changes in both cases are caused by the very act of storytelling. The transformations of bodily forms are narrated as oral stories passing from gifted storytellers, like Macandal and the taxi drivers, to a community, and they have a significant impact on the community as they all address the condition of the loss

⁵⁵⁰ Vassilikos, 261.

and the fragmented, split subjectivities underpinning modern, apparently independent nations. Postcolonial magical realist texts give the disenfranchised members of a society the opportunity to be heard, and they do so by using or endorsing oral storytelling as a source of alternative perspectives on history.⁵⁵¹ Both texts under discussion here advocate this alternate vision of history that emerges through storytelling. Maggie Ann Bowers considers oral storytelling to be a cross-cultural variant of magical realism. She writes:

[T]his interactive storytelling is thought to promote communities by binding people together in a creative act. Moreover, because each time the story is told it is altered, it is understood that there is no one correct version of the story and that in fact, there are many.⁵⁵²

The above observations are true for both Carpentier and Vassilikos and, specifically, for the way in which they present the historical events of the revolutions and their aftermath. Significantly, both Carpentier and Vassilikos seem to follow Freud in intimating that the narratives of a community also contain the dreams and phantasies of its subjects. In his discussion of Jensen's *Gradiva*, Freud highlights the value of creative writers and their ability to dream before everyone else in their community. "Creative writers [...] are apt to know a whole host of things between heaven and earth of which our philosophy has not yet let us dream," stresses Freud.⁵⁵³ In expressing their own communities' dreams of changes, both Carpentier and Vassilikos have succeeded in dreaming those dreams which Freud calls "the class of dreams that have never been dreamt at all—dreams created by imaginative writers and ascribed to invented

⁵⁵¹ Maggie Ann Bowers, *Magic(al) Realism* (Oxon: Routledge, 2004), 94.

⁵⁵² Bowers, 85.

⁵⁵³ Freud, *Delusions and Dreams in Jensen's Gradiva*, (1907), *S. E.* vol IX (1906-1908): 1-96, 6.

characters in the course of a story.”⁵⁵⁴ In the following chapter I explore the dreams of writers that have used the trope of metamorphosis and the act of creative writing to address the concerns of a specific community, namely that of women, at the beginning of the twentieth century, in Virginia Woolf’s *Orlando*, and at the end of this century, in Marie Darrieussecq’s *Pig Tales*.

⁵⁵⁴ Freud, 7.

Chapter Three: The Writing (of the) Female Subject

Fantasies of hybridity in Virginia Woolf's Orlando (1928) and Marie Darrieussecq's Pig Tales (1996)

Many critics and readers have suggested that Franz Kafka's stories, his "Metamorphosis" in particular, inspired Marie Darrieussecq in writing her first, best-selling novel, *Pig Tales* (1996),⁵⁵⁵ a nightmarish tale about the transformations of a woman into a sow. However, the writer herself has contested the comparison. In one of her interviews, Darrieussecq addressed this issue explicitly, while explaining what lies at the heart of her interest in metamorphosis: "everyone talked about Kafka, which is daft. It's completely different from Kafka. There's a gulf between Kafka and women, and Kafka and women's bodies."⁵⁵⁶ Indeed, Darrieussecq's feminist treatment of metamorphosis focuses on women and the representations of the feminine body. Kafka's literary treatment of women, especially his treatment of women's bodies, marks a decisive separation from Darrieussecq's work.⁵⁵⁷ His story of metamorphosis ends with Grete, the insect's sister, in vigorous health, and proudly taking Gregor's place in the family after his long-awaited death. The monstrous body of Gregor is disposed, while Grete will be soon metamorphosed from a girl into a woman, rather than a filthy animal, thus ensuring her family's future. Darrieussecq's story, on the other hand, focuses on an aspect of metamorphosis which is absent in Kafka: with her

⁵⁵⁵ Marie Darrieussecq, *Pig Tales: A Novel of Lust and Transformation*, trans. Linda Coverdale (London: Faber and Faber, 1997). It was originally published in France, as *Truismes*, in 1996.

⁵⁵⁶ Marie Darrieussecq, interview by Fiona Cox, *Practitioners' Voices in Classical Reception Studies*, Special Issue 2013: *Contemporary Women Writers*, trans. Fiona Cox, June 8th, 2012, <http://www.open.ac.uk/arts/research/pvcrs/2013/darrieussecq>.

⁵⁵⁷ For further discussion of Kafka and women see Elizabeth Boa's *Kafka: Gender, Class, and Race in the Letters and Fictions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

porcine writer-narrator, she chooses to reconcile a despised animal with the human, so her narrative is comparably more daring and explicit than Kafka's. The writing of a subjective experience of transformation in *Pig Tales* is, at times, Kafkaesque, though. As in "The Metamorphosis," the depiction of the changed body is naturalistic, almost graphic; the represented world is hostile; and the transformation of the protagonist into an animal remains unexplained. Eventually, both these fictional metamorphoses narrate socially constructed changes, as the subjects metamorphose into creatures which correspond to society's projections on them. Darrieussecq's choice of animal, one of exceptionally pink flesh, is based on the author's views of society's treatment of women, just as Kafka's choice of a harmless but unwelcome insect for Gregor is evocative of his "vermin-like" existence as an insignificant part of the early twentieth-century capitalist machinery.⁵⁵⁸

Ten years after the publication of *Pig Tales*, Darrieussecq said that she was still interrogated on her choice of animal in the novel. In the introduction to her 2006 novel, *Zoo*, she reiterates the reasons for this selection: "we treat women as sow, more often than mare, cow, monkey, viper, tigress; more often than still as giraffe, leech, slug, octopus, or tarantula; and far more often than as a centipede, female rhino, or koala. It's simple."⁵⁵⁹ Here Darrieussecq specifies her own post-modern enquiry in *Pig Tales*: society's projections on women affect their appearance and their actions, but also, perhaps primarily, their very identity. If there is a writer whose work can be compared

⁵⁵⁸ In Darrieussecq's birthplace, Bayonne, there is a Ham Fair (the Foire au Jambon) held annually during the Easter weekend. Bayonne Ham (jambon de Bayonne) is famous worldwide. The choice of pig may have been partly inspired by this festival.

⁵⁵⁹ The passage is from the introduction of Marie Darrieussecq's *Zoo* (Paris: P.O. L., 2006). In Anat Pick, *Creaturely Poetics: Animality and Vulnerability in Literature and Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 81.

to Darrieussecq's feminist explorations of with female identity and the potential of a metamorphosis to give a visible expression to it, that is Virginia Woolf.

In her mock-biographical tale *Orlando: A Biography* (1928), Virginia Woolf narrates the fantastical life of the young aristocrat Orlando whose lifespan starts from the Elizabethan period and miraculously extends to centuries after this, until the beginning of the twentieth century.⁵⁶⁰ The narration of Orlando's life stops in 1928, the year when women in England were given equal voting rights to men under the Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act, and when the novel itself was published. Days after its publication, Woolf gave a series of lectures at the two women's colleges at Cambridge, which later formed her 1929 essay on women and creativity, *A Room of One's Own*.⁵⁶¹ But it is Orlando's sudden transformation from a man to a woman that allows the protagonist to draw a unique comparison between the two sexes and two modes of being. By extension, the transformation invites the reader's comparison to Darrieussecq's *Pig Tales*. *Orlando* is now considered to be an "exemplary text for feminism and post-modernism" because it challenged and playfully dismantled the division-walls between genders.⁵⁶² Equally playing with division-walls between humans and animals, but also with women and society, *Pig Tales* was published at the end of twentieth century, a year after strikes opposing to the Jacques Chirac's conservative policies had paralysed France's public affairs. This post-modern tale is set in contemporary France and follows the transformations of a salesgirl

⁵⁶⁰ Virginia Woolf, *Orlando: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁵⁶¹ Woolf spoke openly about the rights and freedoms of women and, in particular, their right to education and their financial and intellectual independence. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Hogarth Press, 1929).

⁵⁶² Laura Marcus, "Woolf's feminism and Feminism's Woolf," in *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*, ed. Susan Sellers (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 156-76, 171.

into a pig, thus literalising the metaphorical treatment of women. The transformation causes some of the culturally distorted images of female body to become too real to read or to accept.⁵⁶³

The juxtaposition of these two feminist metamorphic tales offers a reading of female subjectivity as metamorphic and hybrid which also promises to have a collective impact, in regards to women as creative writers. As discussed in Chapter One, metamorphosis in the stories of Kafka and Nabokov gives rise to an interrogation of interiority, and subjectivity is imagined as sacrificial. In Chapter Two, I argued that, through the metamorphoses of which Carpentier and Vassilikos write, subjectivity has a collective significance and addresses the subjects' loss of nation in colonial and postcolonial settings. For Woolf and Darrieussecq, metamorphosis both reflects and encourages social change through the change of the protagonist into a woman and into an animal respectively. Both texts are aimed at alerting the reader to a number of contemporary issues, such as women's rights, animal exploitation and animal killing, totalitarianism, and, most critically, the restraints on women's freedom. By comparing *Orlando* to *Pig Tales*, two seemingly unrelated tales of female transformation, a new understanding of the significance of the metamorphic self, as seen through the exposition of unconscious fantasies, can be achieved. By manipulating the trope of metamorphosis, an entirely unrealistic process, both stories communicate empowering fantasies of hybrid selves, either androgynous or animal-like, which, when read, challenge the traditional concepts of the self and engage with formulations of female identity which are progressive, even for some twenty-first century audiences. These

⁵⁶³ This is a feature we also find in Kafka's "The Metamorphosis" (1915).

fantasies of alternative identities revisit existing, yet still relevant, debates on female creativity and identity.

My enquiry into Darrieussecq and Woolf focuses on the complex connections between creativity, grief and the trope of metamorphosis of the female subject. In *Pig Tales*, I particularly focus on the emerging writer in combination with the emerging animal of the text exploring the *écriture de cochon*, mastered by the pig after her nightmarish experiences and the death of her wolf mate.⁵⁶⁴ In conversation with Woolf's writings on women and writing, I examine Orlando's transformation as the expression of an unconscious fantasy. The schema of loss and mourning as triggering the act of writing, which has been theorised by Julia Kristeva in her work on depression and melancholia, assists my reading of the two metamorphoses. Starting from a reading of Kristeva's *Black Sun*, I wish to suggest that it is possible to read the animal-human subject as melancholic and abject by considering that Pig's ability to write is prompted by a loss.⁵⁶⁵ In *Orlando*, the emerging, immortal writer responds to a symbolic loss. Once these links have been established, I suggest—taking my cue from Hélène Cixous—that a literary space can be created for hybrid identities, but not exclusively female ones. My approach in the discussion of a marginalised animal-human subjectivity in *Pig Tales* is also informed by Giorgio Agamben's concept of *homo sacer*.

The time gap between Virginia Woolf and Marie Darrieussecq is nearly a century; it thus allows, through comparison, to survey subjectivities across a century and how the pressing issue of our existence and our co-existence with others, such as

⁵⁶⁴ Darrieussecq, *Truismes*, 10.

⁵⁶⁵ The narrator-protagonist of *Pig Tales* does not have a name. For clarity purposes, I opted to refer to her as Pig.

the opposite sex, has re-emerged to address our co-existence with animals. To do so, both writers subvert the limitations of traditional forms of writing and self-expression, each in a different but equally groundbreaking way.

Woolf's Modern Biographies

Virginia Woolf was the daughter of the editor, biographer, and historian Leslie Stephen, creator of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, and consequently, her education, including in the genre of biography, was well provided at home with the use of her father's vast Victorian library. Despite the existence of two women's colleges at Cambridge, Virginia and her sister Vanessa were denied university studies, unlike their brothers who were given the privilege of attending Cambridge.⁵⁶⁶ This lack of a formal academic education is often expressed in her essays, both as a personal deprivation but it is also put in a broader context, when advocating access to Higher Education for women. Despite her recurrent nervous breakdowns and her mental illness, Woolf produced a formidable body of creative work, including short fiction, novels, a play, and a huge amount of criticism and lively correspondence. Being a socially and politically active modernist, Virginia, alongside with her sister Vanessa Bell, brought together a circle of radical thinkers and artists of their time, today known as the Bloomsbury group. The members of this group addressed repeatedly the issues that form the core of Woolf's 1928 novel: social and personal identity, written and

⁵⁶⁶ Women could attend lectures and exams at university from the late nineteenth century but the right to graduate was only granted to them in the 1920s. In "Three Guineas" (1938), Woolf stresses the fact that most of the daughters of educated men, like herself, were not allowed to attend Cambridge, in Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas*, ed. Anna Snaith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 115.

unwritten histories, sexuality, the relationship between facts and fiction, and creativity. Since 1917 Virginia Woolf and her husband, Leonard Woolf, had operated their own publishing house, The Hogarth Press, which published some of the most challenging literature and thought of the time, such as poems by T. S. Eliot and W. H. Auden, short stories by Katherine Mansfield, the poems and works of Vita Sackville-West, and many psychoanalytic titles, eventually leading to the publication of *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (1956-1974). Woolf's last novel, *Between the Acts*, was published after her death; Woolf, unable to handle another mental breakdown, drowned herself in the River Ouse in 1941.⁵⁶⁷

Orlando: A Biography was not Woolf's sole attempt to engage with the genre of biography. Later, in *Flush: A Biography* (1933), Woolf experimented with fictional autobiography; therein she narrates the story of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's dog from the animal's point of view. She also wrote an expansive biography of the critic and painter Roger Fry after his death.⁵⁶⁸ But it is in her essay "The New Biography" (1927), that Woolf's interest in modernist biography comes to light as she endorses the turn of biographies towards fiction from the nineteenth century to the twentieth. She points out that Victorian biographers were too preoccupied with communicating truth in lengthy volumes, hence their works were not artistic at all; filled with endless facts and details they lacked "personality."⁵⁶⁹ But, in the twentieth century, "the biographer's imagination is always being stimulated to use the novelist's art of arrangement, suggestion, dramatic effect to expound the private life" of the subject, she writes, thus gesturing towards fictional biographies but also to a new relationship between the

⁵⁶⁷ Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1996), 262.

⁵⁶⁸ Virginia Woolf, *Roger Fry: A Biography*, (London: Hogarth Press, 1940).

⁵⁶⁹ Virginia Woolf, "The New Biography," in *Virginia Woolf: Selected Essays*, ed. David Bradshaw (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 95.

biographer and the subject, founded upon equality and independence.⁵⁷⁰ Her remark upon the link between fiction and reality is worth emphasising, since it was also applied in her own writing of *Orlando*, where an imaginary biographer-narrator follows the adventures of the ageless protagonist, Orlando, and describes, maintaining a critical eye throughout, key events of an unusually lengthy life. The book is written “half in a mock style very clear and plain” wherein the unreliable narrator presents the reader with both fantastic and true events, carefully maintaining “the balance between truth and fantasy” as Woolf intended.⁵⁷¹ For Max Saunders, Woolf’s *Orlando* is an exemplary text probing her modernist concerns with the genre, as depicted in “The New Biography,” and, at the same time, serves as a successful parody of the Victorian biography of the previous century.⁵⁷²

“It struck me, vaguely that I might write a Defoe narrative for fun,” writes Woolf in her diary in 1927, contemplating the text that would be her “escapade,” destined to be *Orlando*.⁵⁷³ In another diary entry of the same year, after finishing an article, Woolf feels relieved from work obligations; then “instantly,” she writes, “the usual exciting devices enter my mind: a biography beginning in the year 1500 and continuing to the present day, called Orlando.”⁵⁷⁴ Both the impulse to revise the genre of biography and Defoe’s influence are easily recognisable in the form of the text. *Orlando* is written as if it were a fictionalised biography, and could be therefore compared to Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), especially in the marked

⁵⁷⁰ Woolf, “The New Biography,” 97-100.

⁵⁷¹ *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, volume III: 1925-1930, eds. Anne Olivier Bell and Andrew McNeillie (London: Hogarth Press, 1980), 162.

⁵⁷² Max Saunders, *Self Impression: Life-writing, Autobiografiction, and The Forms of Modern Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 16.

⁵⁷³ *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, 131.

⁵⁷⁴ *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, 161.

presence of its narrator-biographer to guide the reader. The word “biography” added in *Orlando*’s subtitle is explanatory, since it indicates the genre that the reader will encounter and sets the appropriate tone for the narrator. But *Orlando* is more experimental; apart from the rules of writing a Victorian biography, those unwritten contracts of trust between the narrator and the reader that govern fictionalised biographies, such as Defoe’s narratives, are also ridiculed in Woolf’s text. Not only does Woolf renegotiate the relationship between the writer and the reader, but she also redefines the relationship between the biographer and the subject, as she had emphasised in “The New Biography.” The biographer’s objectivity towards the protagonist is debatable. At times, he or she justifies Orlando’s actions by reminding the reader of the cultural differences between the sixteenth and twentieth century: “yet, after all, are we to blame Orlando? The age was the Elizabethan; their morals were not ours.”⁵⁷⁵ But elsewhere, the biographer disapproves of Orlando’s choices: “[i]f only subjects, we might complain (for our patience is wearing thin), had more consideration for their biographers!”⁵⁷⁶ As the narration begins in Elizabethan England, the biographer’s reassuring statement of Orlando’s sex in the very first line of the text, “[f]or there could be no doubt of his sex,” marks also the beginning of Woolf’s ludic approach to biography.⁵⁷⁷ The foregrounding of this sentence is pointed and, in retrospect, ironic. Soon, everything will become open to doubt, starting with one of the givens no biographer of real or fictionalised persons would doubt: their subjects’ sex.

But there are “a great many incidents to record” first.⁵⁷⁸ Orlando’s noble descent and male gender affords him with several freedoms and career opportunities during the

⁵⁷⁵ Woolf, *Orlando*, 18.

⁵⁷⁶ Woolf, 155.

⁵⁷⁷ Woolf, 11.

⁵⁷⁸ *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, 162.

sixteenth century. Favoured by Queen Elizabeth, he is granted the ownership of a house. He has affairs and engagements with women of different cultures and social classes, until he is betrayed and abandoned by a Russian royal princess, Sasha, whom he meets at King James's court. As time goes by, Orlando struggles to understand literature, mostly poetry, establishing a friendship with the poet Nick Greene while working on the composition of his lengthy work "The Oak Tree, A Poem." After his efforts to establish a reputation for himself as a writer fail completely, and, being heavily disappointed by both sexes, –women as romantic partners and men as poets– Orlando leaves the English court to live in Turkey. While serving as the Ambassador of King Charles in Constantinople, Orlando's sex suddenly becomes female. The transformation, which comes to Orlando while in a state of deep sleep, takes place during a revolution against the country's sultan. Orlando, a woman now, spends some time with a group of gypsies in Turkey, but then feels nostalgic about her country. Without being entirely aware of the implications of being a female person in Europe yet, Orlando returns to England, only to find that her sex, hence the right to own property, are a matter of legal dispute. Upon her return, Orlando realises how differently she is expected to behave both in her private and public affairs; she is then in position to compare her restricted freedoms and rights to the previous privileges she had as a male. The centuries pass and Orlando does not age; instead she tries to comply with the role of women in English middle-class circles. In the end of nineteenth century Orlando meets another androgynous being called Marmaduke Shelmerdine, gets married and has a son. Since the times have changed, she is able to take back her house, legally establish herself as female, and publish her poem "The Oak Tree" with great success. Orlando's life is described until 1928, which coincides with the year Virginia Woolf published *Orlando*, and with the fictional biographer's present.

Just a year before the publication of the book, Woolf was inspired to write a book for which “satire and wildness” would lay at its heart.⁵⁷⁹ Mark Hussey observes that Woolf’s intention was not to satirise the genre of biography itself but the “masculine point of view which [...] keeps art and life rigidly separate,”⁵⁸⁰ a feature of Victorian biographies that Woolf focused upon in “The New Biography.” Apart from mocking traditional biographies, the novel satirises various political and social circumstances through Orlando’s everyday life experiences, especially the customs and habits of the aristocracy in England; but all these are enveloped by the consideration of the differences between the two sexes. Woolf’s satire is therefore mostly aimed to condemn society’s imposed rules on both sexes, primarily those on women.⁵⁸¹ As Orlando’s biographer insists that “[t]he change of sex, though it altered their future, did nothing whatever to alter their identity,” the reader is reassured that the only type of change which could affect Orlando’s thinking and writing were the changes in the outside world that inevitably took place in London and its suburbs during the three centuries of Orlando’s lifespan.⁵⁸²

Orlando continuously works on his poem and improves his writing while the biographer notes the environment’s influence on the creative process: “that the streets were better drained and the houses better lit had its effect upon the style.”⁵⁸³ While still working on the draft of the book, Woolf considered it to be not only satiric, in its spirit, but also wild in terms of structure, perhaps alluding to her experiments with time in the

⁵⁷⁹ *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, 131.

⁵⁸⁰ Mark Hussey, “Woolf: After Lives,” in *Virginia Woolf in Context*, eds. Bryony Randall and Jane Goldman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 13-27, 18.

⁵⁸¹ In line with the satiric spirit of the book was the mocking of the writer’s “own lyric vein” as well, as Woolf states in her diary in March 1927. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, 131.

⁵⁸² Woolf, 83.

⁵⁸³ Woolf, *Orlando*, 67.

novel, for instance the use of a clock to mark the changes of centuries.⁵⁸⁴ As Orlando grows up slowly from adolescence to adulthood, in three centuries, England inevitably changes without following the protagonist's own rhythm of growth. While he is in Turkey, London is transformed; Orlando observes that, after the plague and the Great Fire, new buildings and monuments have been built. Towards the end of the century she observes how London is not a chaotic city anymore.⁵⁸⁵ Despite the architectural order, darkness makes its appearance in London in order to prepare the ground for the grimmer, Victorian London. In each of these diegetic periods, the scope of changes is described thoroughly. For instance, the description of "the first day of the nineteenth century" announces the beginning of a series of changes in weather, diet and behaviours. The Victorian era is a transitional period, with "a great cloud which hung" everywhere, and, perhaps not accidentally, Orlando's sex has yet to be legally decided.⁵⁸⁶

Woolf critically engages with the historical aspect of Victorian biography by having her narrator quote external, though fictional, sources, such as the views of historians and newspapers. The novel allows for a journey into England's cultural history which strikes one as accurate: the English way of life and customs are faithfully depicted, the historical recreation of scenes of London and its suburbs across the years in a three-century time-span as well as the details of English nutrition, clothing and furniture accompany Orlando's life adventures. Thus, the impression of the historical accuracy of the narrator's account of Orlando's biography is strengthened. Even when Orlando is away from English soil, the descriptions of Constantinople and Turkish

⁵⁸⁴ *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, 168.

⁵⁸⁵ Woolf, 130.

⁵⁸⁶ Woolf, 112.

customs do not seem fictional but the result of an accurate testimony to the biographer/narrator who attempts to report the events objectively:

[a]nd sometimes, it is said, he would pass out of his own gates late at night so disguised that the sentries did not know him. Then he would mingle with the crowd on Galata Bridge; or stroll through the bazaars; or throw aside his shoes and join the worshippers in the Mosque.⁵⁸⁷

This type of narration continues throughout the novel, but Orlando's time in Constantinople is coloured by fantasy since it is the place of the protagonist's unexplained transformation. The narration is made as believable as possible, carefully maintaining the illusion of biography. "It is with fragments such as these that we must do our best to make up for Orlando's life and character at this time" reports the biographer on the lack of information about Orlando's life in Turkey. The reader is also informed by newspapers: "[f]rom the Gazette of the time, we gather that 'as the clock struck twelve, the Ambassador appeared on the centre Balcony which was hung with priceless rugs.'"⁵⁸⁸

Orlando's family history and a number of his life adventures are brought to life by the vivid personality of the writer Vita Sackville-West, her own family history and Knole house in Kent, all of which fascinated Woolf. Her diary entries in 1927, written after Woolf had stayed at Knole, betray some of the aspects which inspired *Orlando* the same year, such as "Vita stalking in her Turkish dress" and the rich history of the house itself in which "all the centuries seemed lit up, the past expressive, articulate [...]" so we reached the days of Elizabeth quite easily."⁵⁸⁹ The book is indeed dedicated to Sackville-West, and Woolf's passionate relationship with her has been explored by

⁵⁸⁷ Woolf, 74.

⁵⁸⁸ Woolf, 74 - 78.

⁵⁸⁹ *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, 125.

many scholars, particularly in relation to *Orlando*, since Vita's many roles, as mother, traveller and writer, were highly regarded by Woolf.⁵⁹⁰ "It is based on Vita, Violet Trefusis, Lord Lascelles, Knole etc."⁵⁹¹ wrote Woolf in her diary, explicitly stating that Vita, her ancestors' fascinating history, and Vita's own travels and love affairs with both men and women, fueled the writer's imagination when creating *Orlando*. Hermione Lee, in her acclaimed biography of Virginia Woolf, interprets Woolf's experimentalism in *Orlando* in relation to the significance of her love affair with Vita. She suggests that, for Woolf, "a revolution in biography is also a sexual revolution," a statement which highlights Woolf's progressive treatment of sexuality and writing in her novel.⁵⁹² To underscore the interplay between reality and fiction, Woolf accompanied the transformations of Orlando with photographs and portraits in the book at various stages of his/her life. These, however, were entirely real: for the late portraits Vita herself was photographed, while for the earlier ones Woolf borrowed some family portraits from the house of Sackvilles. The strong influence of Vita upon *Orlando* is only one aspect of Woolf's extraordinary portrayal of an immortal, sex-changing character, continuously engaged in a semi-comic interaction with the transforming outer world. Beyond that, it is clear that the events narrated in the novel are almost entirely fantastical.

⁵⁹⁰ For further studies exploring the relationship of the two women see Karyn Z. Sproles' *Desiring Women: The Partnership of Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West* (London: University of Toronto Press, 2006). Susan McNamara's "Seduction and Revenge in Virginia's Woolf *Orlando*," *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 80, (2011) :619-641, argues that the writing of the novel was an act of revenge by Woolf for Vita's abandonment of her.

⁵⁹¹ *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, 162.

⁵⁹² Lee, 13.

Darrieussecq's Postmodern Autobiography

It is in the form of an autobiography that Marie Darrieussecq's novel *Pig Tales* is written, although, in this case, the biographer/narrator is an animal. Sharply satirical, the novel also straddles and unsettles the binary between fantastic fiction writing and the documentation of the real world and historical change. The novel was published in 1996 in France, but the contemporary Paris described by Darrieussecq is dystopic: work conditions are terrible, especially for women, the totalitarian government is hostile to foreigners, mentally ill people, stray animals and women, all personal information is monitored or projected in mass media, while books are banned alongside critical thinking, freedom and animal rights. Darrieussecq's Parisian society and natural landscapes are transformed alongside the woman's change into a sow; the transformation, of both political and personal life, is rather a descent into degradation for a large part of the story. The radical changes in the environment and in city life take place in the background, while the protagonist tries to come to terms with her conflicting identity and her new body. Darrieussecq does not mock this world though: it is a critique, through a harsh exposition, of a flawed society. The metamorphosis of the female protagonist into a sow perhaps follows the satiric spirit that Woolf achieved in *Orlando*, but it does not stop there. In this world, everything is horrifying for large parts of the population: women, children, animals, foreigners, patients; this is also a cautionary tale. In an interview at the University of Arizona in 2012, Darrieussecq underscores that the depiction of Paris in *Pig Tales* is precisely what the world should not be like.⁵⁹³ The text is therefore a writing-out of anxieties and fearful projections about contemporary world's future.

⁵⁹³ Marie Darrieussecq, "Dialogue with Marie Darrieussecq" (lecture, UA Poetry Center, University of Arizona, April 3rd, 2012), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7M0fZ9hqqi8>, accessed June 15, 2018.

The immediate success of Darrieussecq's novel in France, and then worldwide, through translations, led the author to quit her academic post at the University of Lille and pursue an accomplished writing career with twenty books published to date.⁵⁹⁴ Her interest in the genre of autobiography is not pursued in this novel only. Darrieussecq's own doctoral thesis on the relationship of irony and autobiography, as well as her academic writings on the "less serious" uses of the genre, testify to the ironic tone of the autobiography of a pig in *Pig Tales*. While this porcine metamorphosis is the overt dominant theme of *Pig Tales*, Darrieussecq's preoccupation with women and their psychological inner worlds, as well as their engagement with contemporary society, are recurring thematic concerns in her novels. One of Darrieussecq's recent literary connections with women and writing is her 2016 translation of Woolf's celebrated text *A Room of One's Own* into French.⁵⁹⁵ Although there is no evidence that Darrieussecq's first novel was influenced by *Orlando*, Woolf is certainly among the writers with whom she is well acquainted, and by whose prose she may have been inspired, even unconsciously. Her profound interest in feminist thought, and consequently in Woolf's argumentation in *A Room of One's Own*, would have contributed to the shaping of her own writing. Darrieussecq's literary dialogue with Woolf's writings is discussed in the next part of the chapter. For Darrieussecq, literature should aspire to "to put words where there are *no* words, to put words where we don't know what to say and even less

⁵⁹⁴ Her latest book is a dystopian novel. Marie Darrieussecq, *Notre vie dans les forêts*, (Paris: Éditions P.O.L, 2017). She has recently written the biography of the German expressionist artist Modersohn-Becker. Marie Darrieussecq, *Être ici est une splendeur: Vie de Paula M. Becker* (Paris: Éditions P.O.L, 2016), Marie Darrieussecq, *Being Here: The Life of Paula Modersohn-Becker*, trans. Penny Hueston (Melbourne: Semiotext(e), 2017).

⁵⁹⁵ Virginia Woolf, *Un lieu à soi*, trans. Marie Darrieussecq (Paris: Editions Denoel, 2016).

what to write,” she says.⁵⁹⁶ Indeed, as a third-wave feminist writer, ever since *Pig Tales* she has repeatedly addressed current affairs in French society through her writing, fictional or not, including sexual and political scandals, far-right political leaders, particularly Jean-Marie Le Pen, and, most recently, attacks on creativity, satire and freedom of speech.⁵⁹⁷ Thus she fills a blank space in women’s representations in post-modern literature.⁵⁹⁸

Portraying a bleak future for Paris where hybrid beings need to hide from the authorities, Darrieussecq weaves the fictional, first-person narrative of a hybrid woman-sow creature that looks back to the events that brought her to her present condition, in the form of a quick-paced autobiographical narrative written in a state of urgency. The illusion of the urgent and hasty aspect of this confession is enhanced by the lack of chapters in the novel: it is written, instead, in the form of a long continuous text. The reader is warned from the very first line that the story will bring “distress and confusion” and that “any publisher who agrees to take on this manuscript will be heading for trouble.”⁵⁹⁹ The ongoing changes between human and animal aside, the confessional monologue of the pig-woman is realistic. Before her transformation into a pig, the anonymous woman discovers she is pregnant. Her thoughts on the matter are

⁵⁹⁶ Marie Darrieussecq, interview by Samira Ahmed, *Front Row*, BBC Radio 4, March 3rd, 2014, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b03wpy8>, accessed June 15, 2018. (My emphasis).

⁵⁹⁷ Darrieussecq, *Front Row*. She discusses her latest novel *All the Way* (2014) and offers her opinion on the Dominique Strauss-Khan scandal that preoccupied public opinion in 2011.

⁵⁹⁸ Rosemary Neill, “Charlie Hebdo Terror Attack Galvanised Marie Darrieussecq Into Action,” *The Australian*, April 13, 2016, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/review/charlie-hebdo-terror-attack-galvanised-marie-darrieussecq-into-action/news-story/94b78b5391a4cb6e84bd6c01aee6d2dd>, accessed 15 June 2018. Following the deadly shooting at the offices of satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in 2015, Darrieussecq offered to work and write for the magazine, supporting the freedom of speech and the “feminist” character of the magazine, as well as its critical stance against racism.

⁵⁹⁹ Darrieussecq, *Pig Tales*, 1.

indicative of her options if she is to keep her job in the beauty industry: “if they’d known I was pregnant I’d have been fired. How could I tell the director of Perfumes Plus? It was unthinkable. He’d have accused me of being careless.”⁶⁰⁰ Thinking of another woman’s actions in a similar case, which serves as an example for the protagonist, she reveals that “my own mother had waited until the fifth month before tearfully getting an abortion, as we couldn’t do without her salary at home,” stressing the unprivileged position of lower-class women, which had not improved since her mother’s time.⁶⁰¹ As Darrieussecq’s fictional tale unravels, the reader may observe that certain aspects of contemporary society described by the woman, especially the negative ones, are not fictional but real. “What is doubtless best for the girls of today,” warns the narrator, “is to find a good husband, a teetotaler, because life is hard and a woman doesn’t work like a man, and you can’t expect men to look after the children.”⁶⁰² Darrieussecq has repeatedly addressed the issue of female dependence from men which, in the twenty-first century, is primarily an emotional matter, whereas in the twentieth century it was rather an economic issue. In her 2016 interview to *The Australian* she draws from her personal experience as a mother when stating that,

in spite of our feminist efforts to raise our daughters as powerfully as our sons—and I have a son and two daughters—the daughters still grow up with *Sleeping Beauty* in their mind. In spite of our efforts ... they still wait for a man. They wait for the prince, and their life will begin. It’s a pity. Even me, I have to fight against that. I think that boys and men are a bit more autonomous because it’s a long history, women have been dominated for—what?—thousands of years.⁶⁰³

⁶⁰⁰ Darrieussecq, *Pig Tales*, 17.

⁶⁰¹ Darrieussecq, 18-19.

⁶⁰² Darrieussecq, 52.

⁶⁰³ Neill, “The Australian.”

Darrieussecq's last phrase echoes Virginia Woolf's lectures at Cambridge's women's colleges, especially when stressing how much the female sex has been oppressed by patriarchy, both physically and intellectually: "women have sat indoors all these millions of years," says Woolf, "so by this time the very walls are permeated by their creative force."⁶⁰⁴ Such concerns also preoccupy the narrator of *Pig Tales* who often voices humorous or naïve remarks on women, independence, and their expected roles as mothers and wives: "there aren't enough children, every government says so," thinks Pig, while pointing to numerous stereotypes and political statements which have been perhaps perpetuated in Parisian society for years. However, since the confession attempts to achieve a degree of truthfulness and credibility, it soon becomes clear that societies where women are treated like animals and have no power over their life decisions, soon become nightmarish and heavily oppressive, not only for women but for any being who dares to differ.

One aspect of Darrieussecq's play with the rules of autobiography, and specifically with the identity of an autobiographer, is the need, as expressed by the fictional narrator, to tell, and eventually write, stories like this one, with the hope they will be heard, even believed.⁶⁰⁵ The events that lead the anonymous narrator into a peculiar state of writing "piggle-squiggles" unfold when, desperate for a job, she starts working as a salesgirl in a cosmetics chain in Paris. It is during this period that she starts gradually transmogrifying into a sow. Speaking as if retrospectively, the narrator now understands that her change should not have been entirely surprising to her, had she been more observant of the "symptoms": her human flesh, also tested by the chain

⁶⁰⁴ Woolf, "A Room of One's Own," in Anna Snaith, ed., *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas*, 66.

⁶⁰⁵ Darrieussecq, 1.

director before she hires her, was already “marvelously elastic” while her thighs “had grown pink and firm, curvaceous, yet muscular.”⁶⁰⁶ Being promoted into a sex worker for the company came naturally, confesses the narrator, but because of certain freedom of thought she allowed herself, her transformation into a sow did not stop. “You might say that I had an opinion on everything,” she says, while suspecting that something is wrong with her body.⁶⁰⁷ Apart from the rolls of fat she acquires on the way, her appetite naturally changes, even her clients’ tastes change. In a relentless narration of squealing, blood-letting dreaming, abortions, flower eating, abusive relationships, and futile attempts to conceal the emerging pig with makeup products, the narrator discovers another self in her. She has become more animal-like—not only on the outside—and vulgar: something which is not acceptable in contemporary Parisian society. While a far-right regime emerges, the woman makes several attempts to reconcile with her pig body and instincts. After the regime changes again, into a seemingly freer one, the pig-woman meets another being who can also transform occasionally, like her: Yvan, the former owner of the cosmetics company Moonlight Madness, who is a werewolf. For a short period of time they live happy together, both in their human and animal forms, until the SPA, the Society for the Protection of Animals, which operates in Paris, kills the wolf. The encounter with Yvan is a transformative experience for the woman-pig, and his tragic death leads her to write her adventures in the first place.

⁶⁰⁶ Darrieussecq, 2-3.

⁶⁰⁷ Darrieussecq, 16.

Crossing Genre Boundaries

In both *Orlando* and *Pig Tales*, the genres of biography and autobiography are ludically employed. The biographical devices give each narrator a degree of credibility, a strategy that in turn activates a certain logic that recasts a fantastic process, metamorphosis, as a natural event that the reader should simply accept. Before exploring the subjects' transformations in detail, I shall discuss both stories in terms of their crossing the conventional genre boundaries, and whether this strategy affects our perception of subjectivity.

Perhaps *Orlando*'s enduring literary influence has something to do with the book's ability to move freely across different trajectories. The gender boundaries, as already mentioned, collapse in Orlando's experience of both sexes, but that theme did not satisfy Woolf's playful intentions with this book, as her diary entries attest. The genre of the text is also metamorphic: the publication of *Orlando* in 1928 confounded booksellers because of the ambiguity of its genre. Woolf's best-selling work moved between biography and fiction, with Woolf supporting its fictional and imaginative spirit, even though it included some real facts relating to a real person and her family. The booksellers got additionally confused over the subtitle "A Biography."⁶⁰⁸ But Woolf's biographical experiments point to more complex generic transfers in *Orlando*, all of which interlace the issues of subject-formation, subjectivity, and projections of identity.

From its very inception, Woolf considered *Orlando* as a work of experimental fiction that would "be great fun to write."⁶⁰⁹ One of the most repeated words in her

⁶⁰⁸ *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, 198.

⁶⁰⁹ *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, 131.

diary entries during the composition of the book in 1927 and 1928 is “fantasy.” The writing of *Orlando* meant for Woolf something more than transforming an existing genre—that of biography—it also affected her attitude towards writing and her own mind: “I shall let myself dash this in for a week,” she wrote, stressing how this book was “a treat” to her after tea.⁶¹⁰ So while “fantasy” may allude to the fictional part of *Orlando*, the word signified for Woolf a mental satisfaction since the creative process was described with unusual vocabulary when compared to the composition of her other works.⁶¹¹

Following Woolf’s description of the novel, scholars have interpreted the fantasy in *Orlando* simply as a reference to the fantastic elements of the story, such as the protagonist’s agelessness. Another approach, one which provides a fertile ground for exploring the combination of realist and fantastic events in *Orlando*, is to view the text through the lens of magical realism.⁶¹² The “marvelous real,” as it is defined by Alejo Carpentier in his essay “On the Marvelous Real in America” (1949), primarily concerns literature produced in Latin America. Here, the miracles which interrupt reality are not merely literary devices but, because of their close proximity to the culture, geography and history of the place, they are perceived to be true.⁶¹³ If we move beyond the spatial limitations of Carpentier in his theorising of what later became

⁶¹⁰ *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, 161.

⁶¹¹ Rachel Bowlby, *Feminist Destinations and Further Essays on Virginia Woolf* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 150.

⁶¹² Even though the term was introduced after *Orlando*, some studies argue that there are elements of magical realism in the novel. See for example Jill Channing’s essay on “Magical Realism and Gender Variability in Orlando,” *Virginia Woolf Miscellany* 67, (2005):11-13, 11, and Suzanne Jill Levine’s “A second Glance at The Spoken Mirror: Gabriel García Márquez and Virginia Woolf,” *Inti: Revista de Literatura Hispánica* 16-17 (1982): 53-60, accessed June 10, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23285317>.

⁶¹³ Carpentier, “On the Marvelous Real in America,” in *Magical Realism*, Zamora and Faris, 86.

magical realism, and focus on the relationship between the setting and the protagonist, which is crucial to such narratives, we can find correspondences in Woolf's fantasy. Orlando's prolonged life and change of sex is tied to the history of England over three centuries, and the novel witnesses the interplay of fantastic and historical facts, such as The Great Frost in London (1683-1684).

It is in Constantinople, however, and not in England, where history, biography, and fantasy are employed to describe Orlando's transformation. Susan Bazargan comments on Woolf's association of magic with and the East, stating that "the Orient as constructed by the Western imagination" was where "binary notions of gender identity can become blurred." It is "the magic of the orient" which, for Bazargan, makes this metamorphosis feasible.⁶¹⁴ The exact moment of Orlando's change remains unknown: Orlando wakes up as a woman and the biographer states that this is a fact we, as readers, cannot doubt. The narrator has to "confess" that "he was a woman" after a long sleep, and while the change itself can be disputed, the narrator proceeds to declare to the reader that "it is enough for us to state the simple fact; Orlando was a man until the age of thirty, when he became a woman and has remained so ever since."⁶¹⁵ The narrator attempts to convince the reader that the impossible change of Orlando's sex is completely natural. This blend of deceptive accuracy and a supremely fantastic event suggests a narrative procedure similar to that found in magical realist texts. Yet, Woolf's text is not a typical magical realist one; David Mikics observes that while both modernism and magical realism explore the reality-fantasy dynamics,

⁶¹⁴ Susan Bazargan, "The Uses of the Land: Vita Sackville-West's Pastoral Writings and Virginia Woolf's Orlando," in *Woolf Studies Annual* 5 (1999): 25–55, 49. For the importance of Constantinople in *Orlando*, also see Krystyna Colburn, "Spires of London: Domes of Istanbul," in *Virginia Woolf: Texts and Contexts- Selected Papers from the Fifth Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf*, eds. Beth Rigel Daugherty and Eileen Barrett (New York: Pace University Press, 1996), 250-254.

⁶¹⁵ Woolf, *Orlando*, 84.

modernist writers were preoccupied with means of expression and not with the “transformation of the writer’s object.”⁶¹⁶ Woolf does not aim to recount a magical event for her readers: she seems to imply that the change of sex is absolutely possible. The transformation is accepted by other characters in the novel, and the narrator seems similarly less interested in the “marvelous” aspect of the metamorphosis than the realistic side of it and its consequences.⁶¹⁷ The narration moves, in fact, away from Orlando’s change in order to focus on the practical aspects of Orlando’s life as a woman, first in Turkey, and later in England.

Orlando’s immortality, which is casually inserted in the text and not blatant—though the reader cannot ignore it—also gestures to magic. The repetition of personages from the Renaissance to the Victorian period anticipate the paradigms of magical realism, such as Gabriel García Márquez’s *A Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967).⁶¹⁸ Woolf’s diary from March 1927 reveals that writing a “fantasy” was a spontaneous thought but the unrealistic character of the text was intentional:

Suddenly between twelve and one I conceived a whole fantasy to be called “The Jessamy Brides”—why, I wonder? I have rayed round it several scenes. Two women, poor, solitary at the top of the house. One can see anything (for this is all fantasy) the Tower Bridge, clouds, aeroplanes. [...] No attempt is to be made to realise the character. ⁶¹⁹

⁶¹⁶ David Mikics, “Derek Walcott and Alejo Carpentier: Nature, History, and The Caribbean Writer,” in Zamora and Faris, *Magical Realism*, 371-404, 372.

⁶¹⁷ According to Carpentier’s theory on magical realism, the “miracle” must be believed in the story and also accepted by the reader. Carpentier, “On the Marvelous Real in America.” 86.

⁶¹⁸ Gabriel García Márquez, *A Hundred Years of Solitude*, trans. Gregory Rabassa (London: Penguin, 2014).

⁶¹⁹ *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, 131.

“The Jessamy Brides” is the very first inspiration for *Orlando*. Again, Woolf’s thoughts on fantasy are not entirely clear at this point besides the work’s sharp contrast to reality. The word “fantasy” is later repeated in her diary a few months after the novel has been published: “Orlando was the outcome of a perfectly definite, indeed overmastering impulse. I want fun. I want fantasy.”⁶²⁰ Writing *Orlando*, says Woolf, helped her “to keep realities at bay,” besides discovering new rules of structure and narration.⁶²¹ Writing “a fantasy” that would help her to escape the rules of writing meant that she could also freely express her thoughts on women and their treatment in patriarchal societies, on artistic creativity, and on gender inequality through satire and jokes. Eventually, what was originally intended as “a writer’s holiday” by Woolf, and not a serious work,⁶²² led her to conceive a being who experienced the way of life of both sexes, and to create a novel which has had a lasting impact on discourses of feminism, gender, and queer theory. Primarily then, the novel can be read as an expression of the author’s private fantasies, but given the strong feminist context of *Orlando* it can be considered as a political fantasy.

As with *Orlando*, Darrieussecq’s postmodern tale presents the reader with a stimulating combination of genres, combining autobiography and fiction, dystopian fantasy and realism, and elements of magical realism too. The novel could also be part of “autofiction,” a term which refers to both the genre of autobiography and fictional events.⁶²³ The dystopian atmosphere of *Pig Tales* and its critique of contemporary

⁶²⁰ *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, 203.

⁶²¹ *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, 203.

⁶²² *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, 177.

⁶²³ Adelheid Eubanks, “The Pleasure of Being a Pig: Marie Darrieussecq’s *Pig Tales*,” *The South Carolina Modern Language Review* 1, no.1 (2002): 44-56. Raylene Ramsay, “Autobiographical Fictions” in *The Contemporary Novel in France*, ed. William Thompson (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1995), 37.

society, namely French politics and the treatment of women and animals, have naturally invited comparisons with George Orwell's *Animal Farm: A Fairy Story* (1945). Sallie Muirden has hinted that Orwell's allegorical story could be the "literary precursor" to Darrieussecq's political tale.⁶²⁴ *Pig Tales* is, indeed, satirical: oppressive government policies, both right and left wing, are gradually implemented as Paris becomes increasingly hostile for both women and animals. Conversely, politicians, perceived through Pig's naïve, uneducated mind, are themselves compared to animals. One of these politicians is Edgar. Edgar's political campaign slogan "for a healthier world" is ironically juxtaposed with the protagonist's transformation, and Edgar's nuclear project, "Goliath."⁶²⁵ The adventures of Pig are often humorously presented, although she often recognises her condition is nightmarish. When, for instance, she discovers a sudden appetite for the flowers she received, as gifts, from her customers, Pig confesses to the reader: "I realise now that it was one of the symptoms—is that, well, I used to eat these flowers."⁶²⁶ The novel could be seen as an allegory of capitalist contemporary societies and a critique of animal killing.

An intrinsic part of Darrieussecq's play with allegorical tales is in the protagonist's inability to recognise them as such. During Edgar's oppressive government, while books are forbidden, Pig comes across Knut Hamsun's novel *Hunger* (1890).⁶²⁷ She reads the following passage, on animal killing:

⁶²⁴ Sallie Muirden, "Magical Allegory in Marie Darrieussecq's novel *Pig Tales* (1996): Piggy Debauchery in Postcolonial France," *Colloquy: Text Theory Critic* 16 (2008): 229-44, 230.

⁶²⁵ Darrieussecq, *Pig Tales*, 90.

⁶²⁶ Darrieussecq, 25.

⁶²⁷ Paradoxically, the quote is not from Hamsun's novel, *Hunger*, but from his 1908 novel *Benoni*, as Anat Pick has observed (2011). In this part of the novel, Pig tells us she is reading Hamsun's *Hunger*. Darrieussecq quotes the same passage as an epigraph for *Pig Tales*, not mentioning which of Hamsun's novels it belongs to, so the use of the title *Hunger* seems ironic.

Then the knife plunges in. The farmhand gives it two little shoves to push it through the thick skin, after which the long blade seems to melt through the neck fat as it sinks in up to the hilt. At first the boar doesn't understand a thing, he remains stretched out for a few seconds, thinking about it. Aha! Then he realises he is being killed and utters strangled cries until he can scream no more.⁶²⁸

She is unable to understand the allegorical meaning of it, though; even more difficult is it for her to understand the implications of the passage for animals. "I wondered what a *boar* was; my back began to feel all clammy. I decided to laugh it off, because otherwise I was going to throw up" she writes, trying to dispose any unpleasant thoughts.⁶²⁹ Darrieussecq approaches allegorical tales with irony, since allegories do not appeal to animals or hybrid beings, even if they are understood by readers. In fact, a postmodern take on allegories and metaphors is attempted; they are stripped bare in the novel—to the basics of meaning. Commenting on the same passage, Sanja Bahun emphasises that "[f]or all the jovial tone, Darrieussecq's novel is a somber tale of the slaughter that has happened or threatens to happen to multitudes of creatures."⁶³⁰ Bahun also argues that the novel is part of the magical realist canon, inviting a closer comparison between the elements of "political allegory" in Darrieussecq's text and the arguably non-political slant of traditional magical realist narratives.⁶³¹

Killing is not only practiced by humans, though. Yvan, being a werewolf, kills someone every full moon, and the description could not be more explicit and comic: "You couldn't tell the blood from the tomato sauce [...] I ate the pizza, Yvan ate the

⁶²⁸ Darrieussecq, 87.

⁶²⁹ Darrieussecq, 87.

⁶³⁰ Sanja Bahun-Radunovic, "The Ethics of Animal-Human Existence: Marie Darrieussecq's *Truismes*," in *Myth and Violence in the Contemporary Female Text: New Cassandras*, eds. Sanja Bahun-Radunovic and Julie Rajan (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), 55-74, 71.

⁶³¹ Bahun-Radunovic, 56, 58.

pizza man.”⁶³² The grotesque scenes of blood, killing, and violence are paralleled with independent, quasi-realistic sources, such as magazines and TV shows that confirm the protagonist’s claims. Yvan’s murders are documented through a series of newspapers titles while the narrator admits she even has visual proof: “[i]n the clippings I kept, you can see the heads of the corpses, all neatly decapitated the way Yvan liked to do it.”⁶³³ But, for all their horror, these killings—unlike those perpetrated by humans—are not gratuitous, nor motivated by greed; rather, they are presented as being necessary for the survival of the animals whose instincts cannot be ignored.

The anonymous writer of *Pig Tales* attempts, like the narrator of *Orlando*, to convince the reader that these events took place no matter how unbelievable they may seem. In both tales, the narrators try to establish a relationship with the reader, perhaps one of trust, a technique which can make all the fantastical events, especially the existence of hybrid beings, awfully literal in *Pig Tales* and amusingly possible in *Orlando*. By communicating their own fantasies through ostensibly reliable narrators, Woolf and Darrieussecq establish an interaction between reader and their marginalised hybrid subjects. The question of how the writing of fantasies foregrounds the issue of identity cannot be answered, though, if fantasy is not explained in its psychoanalytic as well as literary context. In the following sections, I briefly explain the context of unconscious phantasies, taking my cue from Sigmund Freud. I then turn to Melanie Klein and Hanna Segal in order to explore the relationship between unconscious fantasies and creative writing in *Orlando*. The above writers and analysts are associated with the interests, discussions and publications of the Bloomsbury Group, so *Orlando* is also discussed within context of the author’s social milieu. As the twentieth century

⁶³² Darrieussecq, 116.

⁶³³ Darrieussecq, 113.

progressed, naturally ideas about female creativity developed in new directions, and *Pig Tales* is the product of a distinct cultural climate. Therefore, fantasies of metamorphosis should also be read in the light of these new directions, and I consequently explore two key thinkers which may have informed Darrieussecq's idea of female subjectivity and creative writing: Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous. The aforementioned critical thinkers inform a reading of *Orlando* and *Pig Tales* that does not isolate them, but treats them comparatively.

From Phantasy to Fantasy (and Back)

In psychoanalytic discourse, the word phantasy is often opposed to reality.⁶³⁴ Sigmund Freud considered phantasies to be a crucial part of the psychic life of every individual, whether healthy or not, and he associated phantasies with the release of pleasure and an individual's libidinal development. In "Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning" (1911) Freud explains how unconscious phantasies arise from the ego's wish to feel pleasure, and he identifies the two principles of mental functioning, or thought-processes: the pleasure principle and the reality principle. Freud considered unconscious phantasies to be related to desire, thus holding the potential to be satisfied, which would then lead to pleasure. However, the ability to phantasise is tied with reality:

with the introduction of the reality principle one species of thought-activity was split off; it was kept free from reality-testing and remained subordinated to the pleasure principle alone. This activity is *phantasying*, which begins already in

⁶³⁴ In this section, I use "phantasy" when referring to unconscious phantasies in psychoanalytic terminology and "fantasy" when referring to the literary genre of fantastic literature.

children's play, and later, continued as *day-dreaming*, abandons dependence on real objects.⁶³⁵

Thus understood, "phantasying" and, later, "day-dreaming," are seen as gradually attenuating the link with reality, until the dependence on real objects has been abandoned, even though the phantasy may have been initially reliant on them for its own formation. Carl Jung agreed with Freud that phantasy is part of the individual's mental world.⁶³⁶ Freud considers that children's phantasies and, later, the daydreaming of adults are both part of the individual's healthy psychic development, and it is for this reason that they are integral to children's play, as it is in the pleasure-principle in which sexual instincts are developed and, along with phantasies, are protected by the reality principle. Daydreaming is not, however, identical to phantasies. In her 1948 essay, "The Nature and Function of Phantasy," Susan Isaacs differentiates her spelling from phantasy to fantasy, since the latter refers to conscious processes such as daydreaming and fiction.⁶³⁷ Phantasies are foremost unconscious and they often originate from urges or feelings, similar to the content of dreams and daydreams.⁶³⁸ The distinction between fantasies as daydreaming, and unconscious phantasies in Freudian thinking is worth noting here; and these are different from literary fantasies found in fiction and fantasy literature. What interests me in this section is the unconscious phantasy, and its manifestations in works of literature which, in turn,

⁶³⁵ Freud, "Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning," (1911), *S. E.* vol. XII (1911-1913): 213-226.

⁶³⁶ Jung writes, "there are two kinds of thinking, the directed-thinking which is conscious and relates to reality and the fantasy-thinking, which is akin to dreaming and is unconscious." Carl Gustav Jung, (1911) *Symbols of Transformation*, vol. 5, trans. R.F.C. Hull, in *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung* (London: Routledge, 1956), 17.

⁶³⁷ The analyst Susan Isaacs was working, at the time, with Melanie Klein and other practitioners. Susan Isaacs, "The nature and function of phantasy," *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 29, (1948): 73-97, 80.

⁶³⁸ Susan Isaacs, 82.

expose these phantasies.⁶³⁹ In re-reading Freud's ideas on unconscious phantasies in his early writings and observations, Sander M. Abend notes that by 1905, the year when "Three Essays on the theory of Sexuality" was published, Freud "had established unconscious fantasy life in an essential position in his theory of both normal and pathological development, as well as having assigned it an important place in the technique of psychoanalytic treatment of the pathological conditions."⁶⁴⁰

As discussed in the previous chapters, creative works, as seen in Freud's essay "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" (1908), often communicate the writers' phantasies to their readers, simultaneously satisfying their private, unconscious phantasies. When disguised as fictional events, these phantasies can be read without causing feelings of shame to the reader. Sophocles' tragedy, *Oedipus Rex*, is perhaps the best example of a literary work which portrays unconscious phantasies, common to all men and manifested in childhood, according to Freud: those of castration and incest.⁶⁴¹ It is the writer though, states Freud, who has the ability to communicate these phantasies with the use of a myth and "brings to light the guilt of Oedipus" thus "compelling us to recognise our own inner minds, in which those same impulses, though suppressed, are still to be found."⁶⁴² Freud notes that this would not be the case with personal, private phantasies of non-writers; our own phantasies are meant to

⁶³⁹ Freud's theories on castration phantasies which are of crucial importance to the resolution of the Oedipus complex, are perhaps, the most well-known childhood phantasies, but are not within my scope of enquiry in this chapter.

⁶⁴⁰ Sander M. Abend, "Unconscious Fantasy and Modern Conflict Theory," *Psychoanalytic Inquiry* 28, no.2 (2008): 117-130, 118, accessed June 16, 2018, doi: [10.1080/07351690701856831](https://doi.org/10.1080/07351690701856831).

⁶⁴¹ Freud writes on the tragedy of Oedipus: "His destiny moves us only because it might have been ours." Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 261.

⁶⁴² Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 262.

remain secret since they belong to the unconscious and they would be considered unacceptable if made public in the same way a story becomes available to read.⁶⁴³

For my enquiry into literary phantasies two points are of particular interest here: firstly, Freud's claim that creative writers can "reconcile" the two principles of the mental life in a unique way.⁶⁴⁴ Secondly, the importance of mythical narratives in the expression of unconscious phantasies: by accessing these narratives we can enquire into our own inner world. The story upon which Freud developed his thinking of phantasies was about a male protagonist; this does not exclude female or even animal phantasies however.⁶⁴⁵ The process of reconciling reality with phantasizing is complex: if the artist's wishes or instincts are overwhelming, they carry them away from reality. Through the creation of fantastic worlds, which emerge out of the traces of external reality, however, the writer is able to connect with reality precisely by creating a new one. The artist can "mould his phantasies into truths of a new kind, which are valued by men as precious reflections of reality," notes Freud.⁶⁴⁶ Thus, we may infer that the creative writer, in this case, may be able to follow a similar method to that which the analyst pursues in therapy; that is, remembering, reconstructing his/her private, phantasies into a narrative form. The problem herein lies in the fact that these phantasies are largely based on unconscious desires and so, just like in the dream-work, their exteriorisation is different from the latent content. In fact, they seem to be subject to a process: daydreaming phantasies themselves are already some form of a narrative, which both gives expression to and occludes the latent content, but their

⁶⁴³ Freud, "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming," 150.

⁶⁴⁴ Freud, "Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning," 224.

⁶⁴⁵ For a study on female phantasies, see Marianne Leuzinger-Bohleber, "The 'Medea Fantasy,'" *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 82, (2002): 323-345.

⁶⁴⁶ Freud, "Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning," 224.

reconfiguring into a final, shareable, narrative is usually subject to another layer of revision and, as such, it may have to involve fantasy fiction.⁶⁴⁷

In his analysis of Dostoevsky's character and work, Freud recognises the oedipal impulse of murdering the father but remarks that "it is a dangerous thing if reality fulfils such repressed wishes"⁶⁴⁸ highlighting that unconscious phantasies are not fulfilled as such, but they are distorted and manifested in one's dreams, speech, and artistic creations.⁶⁴⁹ Freud's observations on texts which treat parricide, such as *Oedipus Rex* and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880), demonstrate that the content of these texts cannot be found in consciousness exclusively, but also in the unconscious.⁶⁵⁰ However, as Freud demonstrates in his essay, phantasies can be projected in non-fantastic worlds. The question which, thus, emerges is how do realistic narratives differ from fantasy narratives in their use of phantasies? In other words, why did both Virginia Woolf and Marie Darrieussecq narrate their phantasies in a metamorphic, thus non-realist, context? Before I discuss these phantasies in detail, it is important to acknowledge the place of these phantasies within the fantasy genre, and in a tradition of literary scholarship that is concerned with the complex dynamic of the interaction between the pleasure principle and reality principle, and its articulation in phantasy-formation.

⁶⁴⁷ Freud parallels the process of interpreting dreams to a narrative, thus associating the process of remembering and reconstructing a dream during therapy/analysis to the process of creating a story. This is also a transformation/interpretation process since the content of the phantasy would not be the same when made public/spoken out. Both dreams and unconscious phantasies are interpreted as wish-fulfillments by Freud.

⁶⁴⁸ Freud, "Dostoevsky and Parricide," (1928), *S. E.* vol. XXI (1927-1931): 173-194, 186.

⁶⁴⁹ A good example of this dynamic, Freud believes, is provided by Dostoevsky's fiction. Freud's essay on Dostoevsky and parricide offers important insight on castration phantasies, as expressed in Dostoevsky's realist fiction, without foregrounding the use of fantastical and impossible events.

⁶⁵⁰ Freud, *Dostoevsky and Parricide*, 184.

The twentieth century witnessed the publication of some of the most acclaimed books representing the fantasy genre, with works ranging from J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* (1911) and H. P. Lovecraft's horror stories, to J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* (1937), *The Lord of Rings* trilogy (1937-1949) and J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter book series (1997-2007). Both *Orlando* and *Pig Tales* may not fall under the type of fantasy literature which introduces the reader to a new, magical world inhabited by magical beasts and elves; instead, they belong to the kind of fantasy literature which "can effectively draw attention to the cultural politics of daily life" without resorting to a straightforward critique of a particular political system.⁶⁵¹ This type of fantasy writing can be read as political: the writer addresses contemporary issues using some fantastic events which alert the reader to the writer's intentions. At the same time, the fantasy captures the reader's interest through the projection of unconscious phantasies. Fantasy writing is, thus, premised on the ability to daydream, to consciously fantasise about impossible events, and to express the deepest wishes found in the unconscious.

I delve further into the nature of phantasies in what follows, and in my specific reading of the texts, but here I would like to point out that both Woolf and Darrieusecq foreground a specific phantasy in their works, fully aware of the complex relationship between real and fictional worlds. Thus, their stories of metamorphoses can be seen as consciously reinforcing the "phantasizing" activity, articulated through the use of some fantastic elements that may stretch from setting to specific motifs. Woolf and Darrieusecq use, I argue, their understanding of phantasy's operational premise of "creating worlds" not only to negotiate certain private desires but also to communicate some messages about imagined, but possible, worlds—either ideal or nightmarish—

⁶⁵¹ Mark Bould and Sherryl Vint, "Political Readings," in *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*, eds. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 102-112, 104.

which can accommodate these desires. In *Orlando*, the protagonist is constantly reflecting upon and, often, daydreaming of the differences and similarities between the sexes. As the narrator repeats throughout the novel, moving from one sex to another does not alter this person's identity, who thus obtains the phantasy of a hybrid (male-female) subjectivity by means of metamorphosis. Woolf's intimate phantasy, of humans belonging to either sex, either by cross-dressing or metamorphosing, can be also read as a disguised group phantasy of female empowerment in *Orlando*, whose protagonist is an independent and, by all means, female writer but who also has an androgynous mind.⁶⁵² In *Pig Tales*, the reader is faced with an overwhelming stream of private phantasies, which are often both fascinating and disturbing. Darrieussecq's literary phantasies also concern society, or at least an important part of it, and focus on the event of metamorphosis into a hybrid, animal-human subjectivity. Both writers have "activated" socially engaged, thus enabling, phantasies, which, one can argue, have political functions. While both texts come from the sphere of private phantasies, by establishing "new truths," one of them being the hybridity of the self, they move to the sphere of collective phantasizing wherein the reader witnesses a new version of reality.

Such fantasy texts are the subject of Rosemary Jackson's study, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (1981). Jackson surveys texts of the nineteenth and twentieth century, such as Kafka's "The Metamorphosis," which can be interpreted in the light of psychoanalytic criticism, and subsequently as premising unconscious phantasies in the acceptable form of a narrative. Jackson does not include Virginia Woolf in her enquiry but, nonetheless, her observations on fantasy literature are important in

⁶⁵² Woolf's phantasy of an androgynous writer, independent and equipped with "a room of one's own" is very much present in *Orlando*.

elucidating the question of why fantasy texts engage closely with unconscious phantasies. Jackson argues that this type of fantasy literature “characteristically attempts to compensate for a lack resulting from cultural constraints: it is a literature of desire, which seeks that which is experienced as absence and loss.”⁶⁵³ These texts subvert the dominant social order, not by inventing new and impossible realities, as typical fantasy stories and science-fiction texts do; instead, the fantastic elements coexist and occur side by side with ‘real’ ones.⁶⁵⁴ By challenging existing realities, fantasy literature allows the expression of repressed phantasies, even though these are disguised in the story. Jackson does not only explore the function of fantastic narratives as articulating desire but also their healing value to the self, as counteracting the unsatisfied desires and phantasies of the writer and the readers. In this view, the role of literature, as a creative medium wherein desires are exposed without society’s censorship, validates Freud’s speculations on the relationship of unconscious phantasies to literature, and also on the necessity of expressing these fantasies through accessible and appropriate means like reading, writing and story-telling. Another aspect of the fantastic, which, argues Margaret-Anne Hutton, has been observed in contemporary French literature, is the portrayal of loss, trauma and grief; experiences that could not have been contained within realist modes of expression.⁶⁵⁵

Considering Jackson’s remarks on the function of fantasy literary works, and considering that both *Orlando* and *Pig Tales* challenge existing traditional subjectivities, then, both texts may be said to belong to this type of “desire” literature. Such literature allows for phantasies of androgynous beings, like Orlando, and of

⁶⁵³ Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Methuen, 1981), 3.

⁶⁵⁴ Jackson’s analysis is based on both Freudian and Lacanian theories of fantasy and subjectivity.

⁶⁵⁵ Margaret-Anne Hutton, ed. *Redefining the Real: The Fantastic in Contemporary French and Francophone Women’s Writing* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009), 10.

animal-humans, like Pig, to be articulated in a meaningful context. To examine whether these texts respond to a loss, and what kind of loss, I turn to thinkers who have addressed the function of phantasies in terms of loss and creativity. In the following section, I discuss the role of phantasy in Melanie Klein's work,⁶⁵⁶ and then turn to Hanna Segal, who, following Klein, has eloquently explored the relationship of creativity and literary works to phantasies, as acts of reparation. Finally, Kristeva's work on depression, melancholia, and writing informs my reading of metamorphic subjectivity in *Orlando* and *Pig Tales*.

That both Woolf and Darrieussecq rely on psychoanalysis to forge their image of the human subject is not incidental. In her influential study, *Virginia Woolf and the Fictions of Psychoanalysis*, Elizabeth Abel explores Woolf's creative affiliations with British psychoanalysis and specifically her encounters with the works of Sigmund Freud and Melanie Klein.⁶⁵⁷ Abel points out Woolf's scepticism and reservations when reading Freud's papers, in order to support the thesis that Woolf's subject matter in her novels is closer to Klein's theories since they focus more on aesthetics and mother-infant dynamics, as opposed to Freud's focus on male psychology and sexuality. In "Woolf and Psychoanalytic Theory," Sanja Bahun has complemented this account by arguing that Woolf's relationship with Freudian psychoanalysis and Freud himself was indeed ambivalent.⁶⁵⁸ Furthermore, instead of adopting a Kleinian-only approach when reading Woolf's texts, Bahun argues, it is more productive to read them "as a

⁶⁵⁶ Melanie Klein, *Love, Guilt and Reparation, and Other works (1921-1945)*, *The Writings of Melanie Klein Volume I* (New York: The Free Press, 1975).

⁶⁵⁷ Elizabeth Abel, *Virginia Woolf and The Fictions of Psychoanalysis* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989).

⁶⁵⁸ Sanja Bahun, "Woolf and Psychoanalytic Theory," in Randall and Goodman, *Woolf in Context*, 92-1-9, 97.

negotiation of both psychoanalytic frameworks,” and not to overlook Freud’s influence.⁶⁵⁹ Indeed, although Woolf only met Freud and Klein in 1939, Freud’s *Collected Papers* had been edited and published by Hogarth Press in 1922.⁶⁶⁰

Woolf was aware of Freud’s early works, and his suggestion of the “split ego” finds its way to *Orlando*. The “conscious self” of Orlando expresses her wishes while the “Captain self, the Key self” is in control of the drives.⁶⁶¹ Freud’s words on the “psychological novel” refer to creative writers and how they give a part of their self to their works and heroes. In the case of *Orlando*, Woolf’s inspiration was driven by a number of roles women—including Woolf and Vita Sackville-West—could undertake. We can, then, assume that Woolf takes Freud’s theorising on the organisation of the self much further, by identifying multiples layers in Orlando:

[t]he psychological novel in general no doubt owes its special nature to the inclination of the modern writer to split up his ego, by self-observation, into many part-egos, and, in consequence, to personify the conflicting currents of his own mental life in several heroes.⁶⁶²

Indeed, on the final pages of *Orlando*, the selves she possesses change in every turn of her car. Orlando needs to “call upon” a specific self, the biographer claims, but this self was at that moment “kept aloof.”⁶⁶³ Hence we know that Orlando is able to change selves, all of which are part of his past both as a woman and man, directed by her desire, “commanded and locked up by the Captain Self.”⁶⁶⁴

⁶⁵⁹ Bahun, 102.

⁶⁶⁰ Bahun, 95.

⁶⁶¹ Woolf, *Orlando*, 179

⁶⁶² Freud, “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming,” 149.

⁶⁶³ Woolf, *Orlando*, 179.

⁶⁶⁴ Woolf, 179.

Virginia Woolf resisted engaging in psychotherapy based on psychoanalysis, for various reasons. By contrast, Marie Darrieussecq has embraced it. She has even emphasized how undergoing an eight-year psychoanalytic therapy helped her to be able to write after leaving her “neuroses” behind.⁶⁶⁵ She specifically acknowledges that reading and “practicing” Freud had an effect on her writing career, and she admits that “I could not have written *Pig Tales* without analysis. I could not have invented a persona, to separate my voice from the voice of the persona.” She adds that, after her own analysis ended, she continued reading Freud’s cases, alongside Lacan, and became an analyst herself.⁶⁶⁶ Darrieussecq considers Freud to be “a great writer and a great researcher,” whose work can be read over and over.⁶⁶⁷ Having read Freud with such a commitment, Darrieussecq would have encountered the significance of unconscious phantasies as well as the post-Freudian approach to mourning, such as that pursued by Julia Kristeva.

Melanie Klein follows Freud’s views on phantasies, but expands his observations and theory through her clinical work on the phantasies of infants and symbol formation.⁶⁶⁸ Klein uses phantasies and their relation to external reality as the determining factor between healthy children and psychotic ones. Drawing from her

⁶⁶⁵ Marie Darrieussecq, “Je suis devenue psychanalyste,” *L’express*, November 2006.

http://www.lexpress.fr/culture/livre/je-suis-devenue-psychanalyste-par-marie-darrieussecq_811700.html (my translation). “Freud, j’ai lu un peu et pratiqué beaucoup, c’est-à-dire que j’ai fait une analyse, huit ans, qui m’a permis entre autres de séparer (autant que faire se peut) ma névrose de mon écriture.”

⁶⁶⁶ “Je n’aurais pas pu écrire *Truismes* sans analyse. Je n’aurais pas réussi à inventer un personnage, à séparer ma voix de la voix du personnage.” Darrieussecq, *L’express*. (My translation).

⁶⁶⁷ “Mais il faut dire que Freud est un écrivain en plus d’être un grand chercheur. J’insiste là-dessus.[...] On peut mettre toute sa vie à la lire et la relire.” Darrieussecq, *L’express*. (My translation).

⁶⁶⁸ Klein’s extensive studies with infants, both healthy and neurotic, led her to establish the existence of phantasies in all infants, thus to every human being, regardless of their mental stability.

case studies with both healthy and schizophrenic young patients, Klein elaborates, firstly, on the role of phantasies in children's play, and, secondly, on the destructive impulses of infants.⁶⁶⁹ In both cases of phantasies, Klein establishes a connection to creativity. What distinguishes a healthy child from a mentally ill one, argues Klein, is the content of their play, namely personification, which in fact is used to express and release the children's phantasies in a creative way. Klein emphasises that "schizophrenic children are not capable of play in the proper sense," explaining that their play does not bring them closer to reality but it disconnects them instead.⁶⁷⁰ In addition, the children who delighted themselves in destroying objects were also fantasizing that they were attacking the mother, or their mother's breast, if, for example, they were being fed. These phantasies were often manifestations of infantile anxiety for the potential loss of the mother or her inadequacy to satisfy their wishes, an observation which further enhances the association between phantasies and the fulfillment of wishes. The reparative phantasies emerge, according to Klein, when the infant's unconscious has to confront the anxiety of the loss of the mother. One of the functions of these phantasies was to correct the ego's destructiveness or other violent drives through creative activities. "Creative work of all kinds symbolises an attempt to restore the breast" which was previously "attacked and damaged by the baby in infancy," argues Klein.⁶⁷¹ Thus, Klein shows that phantasies are necessary to the

⁶⁶⁹ Klein, *Love, Guilt and Reparation*, 199.

⁶⁷⁰ Klein, 199.

⁶⁷¹ Hanna Segal, *Introduction to the Work of Melanie Klein*, (London: Karnac Books, 2012), 44. Julia Segal has noted Klein's difference with Freud in this respect. Klein argues that whenever children feel a sense of guilt, due to their destructive or sexual thoughts towards the parents, this is due to the nature of their phantasies, and not due to their parents' causing them to feel guilty or ashamed of their phantasies, as Freud had theorized, in Julia Segal, *Melanie Klein* (London: Sage, 1992), 30.

development of humans, and that they need to be expressed creatively.⁶⁷² For Hanna Segal, Klein rethinks phantasy not as an escape from reality, but, instead, as a defense mechanism against the one's own "internal reality" which is made from their wishes and phantasies.⁶⁷³

Following Freud and Klein's findings, Segal theorised that phantasies in infants serve a didactic purpose since they assist individuals in testing their external reality, very much like a "scientist" who "learns about the nature of the world" through testing it against various hypotheses.⁶⁷⁴ Segal expanded Klein's theories on the reparation drive, which is the impulse to re-create lost objects, by relating this impulse to the creative drives of writers, specifically drawing upon the example of Marcel Proust. In "A Psychoanalytic Approach to Aesthetics," Segal scrutinizes Proust's own "mourning" for the loss of the past in his work, which eventually gave him the ability to re-make what he had lost through writing. The very recognition of his own grief upon the loss, argues Segal, is what led him to the need to re-create it.⁶⁷⁵ However, Proust's creative works are not phantasies, despite supporting Segal's point on reparation. Segal makes a general claim on creativity and reparation though: "all creation is really a re-creation of a once loved and once whole, but now lost and ruined object, a ruined internal world and self," without making a distinction between fantasy

⁶⁷² Klein asserted that the unconscious wishes of children, which could not have been fulfilled in childhood, for example "to have one's mother or one's father all to oneself," are likely to be fulfilled during a person's adult life, if these wishes are directed towards other people and, thus, to result in the creation of a new family. This new creation will eventually be the healthy fulfillment of an infantile phantasy. Klein, *Love, Guilt and Reparation*, 317.

⁶⁷³ Segal, *Introduction to the Work of Melanie Klein*, 20.

⁶⁷⁴ Hanna Segal, "Phantasy and Reality," in Hanna Segal, *Psychoanalysis, Literature and War: Papers 1972-1995*, ed. John Steiner (London: Routledge, 1997), 22-31, 27.

⁶⁷⁵ Hanna Segal, "A Psychoanalytic Approach to Aesthetics," in Hanna Segal, *The Work of Hanna Segal: A Kleinian Approach to Clinical Practice* (London: Jason Aronson Inc., 1981), 185-206, 190.

and realist texts.⁶⁷⁶ It is worth noting that Segal, as did Klein, considered the work of art as an attempt to repair something that no longer existed as a whole, and that this object could represent an aspect of the self that is equally split or damaged.

Julia Kristeva has added another component to the writing and loss schema: sadness. In *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (1989), Kristeva places melancholia in a linguistic context, as language, but also as an “affect,” a mood manifested in response to traumas.⁶⁷⁷ The body, including the psyche, responds to sadness over a loss, yet when the affect of sadness is exteriorised, in some cases, literary creation can emerge out of this response. “Literary creation is that adventure of the body and signs that bears witness to the affect—to sadness as imprint of separation and beginning of the symbol’s sway,” writes Kristeva.⁶⁷⁸ Signs and symbols emerge with the loss of a loved object, which is often maternal, and with which the subject had identified.⁶⁷⁹ These symbols are not stable though; the “sway” means that the melancholic writer doubts the very symbols she is using, thus, there is a constant questioning of the power of language to convey the experienced sadness. Kristeva warns that the final literary creation, “the testimony” as she calls it, will not be identical to the sadness which created it; although the reader will be able to identify the “semiotic and the symbolic imprints” of the affect.⁶⁸⁰ As Kristeva revisions depression and melancholia as affecting the work of art, both in a productive and a destructive way, it is worth noting that in her theorising of creativity and sadness, she emphasises the

⁶⁷⁶ Segal, “A Psychoanalytic Approach to Aesthetics,” 200.

⁶⁷⁷ Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 22.

⁶⁷⁸ Kristeva, 22.

⁶⁷⁹ Kristeva acknowledges Hanna Segal on the necessary condition of loss for creative activity, such as writing, to emerge. Kristeva, 23.

⁶⁸⁰ Kristeva, 22.

continuous dialogue between melancholia and writing, but also the circumstance after sorrow has been lifted. The text now functions as a “fetish” allowing for associations of writing with pleasure—and, potentially, to phantasies.⁶⁸¹

Kristeva identifies an additional element that she sees as the ultimate trigger of melancholia, more so than love-object identification, which Freud had described in his 1917 essay.⁶⁸² She terms this Ur-element the “Thing.” The “Thing” is not an object, but a pre-oedipal “non-object of desire and loss that escapes signification.”⁶⁸³ It cannot be named, represented or signified, hence it becomes difficult for the melancholic writer to successfully mourn for it.⁶⁸⁴ Kristeva suggests that this non-object resides somewhere in the realm of the maternal. As Klein and Segal have already showed, the loss of the maternal symbolic object leads infants and adults to not only wishing to compensate for its loss, but to respond to this loss in a specific, imaginative way, which Kristeva sees as a representation of a new way of mourning. Writing has often been linked with the writer’s inner psychological state, and, in Kristeva’s thinking and her analysis of literary examples, it may have a healing function against melancholia.

Kristeva’s point that “there is no imagination that is not, overtly or secretly, melancholy”⁶⁸⁵ assists us in identifying the role of writing as a powerful mourning

⁶⁸¹ Kristeva, 9.

⁶⁸² Kristeva’s work is largely indebted to Freud. In “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917), Freud defines both melancholia and mourning in terms of the loss of a love-object. The object loss is “transformed into an ego-loss” thus causing ambivalence to the melancholic person due to the identification with a lost object. Freud adds a third “precondition” to melancholia, besides the loss of the object and ambivalence that is “the regression of libido into the ego.” Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” 258.

⁶⁸³ Tsu-Chung Su “Writing the Melancholic: The Dynamics of Melancholia in Julia Kristeva’s *Black Sun*,” *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies* 31, no.1 (2005): 163-191, 167.

⁶⁸⁴ Kristeva, 13.

⁶⁸⁵ Kristeva, 6.

ritual in the texts of Woolf and Darrieussecq.⁶⁸⁶ The “Thing” in Kristevan theory represents the mother; for male subjects (and writers since we are interested in the production of writing) it is possible to bear this symbolic loss. The case is different for females, argues Kristeva, since, for a woman to discard the maternal object will mean to reject a part of her own self, to commit a symbolic matricide, thus sacrificing the part of her self which had been identified with the mother.⁶⁸⁷ Matricide is necessary for the female artist to emerge out of the melancholy position. If she fails to discard the maternal Thing, the writer finds herself in the state of “asymbolia,” which leads to “the death of the self,” which is thus condemned into silence and invisibility.⁶⁸⁸ Kristeva’s views on matricide and female discourse have been criticised because of the lack of alternatives she offers for feminine discourse.⁶⁸⁹ Still, Kristeva’s views on maternal loss and the emergence of literature can highlight some aspects of female subjectivity in *Orlando* and *Pig Tales*. Writing, for both protagonists, could function as a mourning mechanism for the loss of a maternal loved object. Orlando and Pig are both emerging writers who find their voices after a loss has been incurred, so they could be viewed as melancholic subjects.

⁶⁸⁶ My purpose is not to use psychoanalytic criticism to interpret Virginia Woolf and Marie Darrieussecq in terms of the process of writing their phantasies. I am reading *Orlando* and *Pig Tales* in the light of the above theorists, and I focus on how their protagonists become writers.

⁶⁸⁷ Kristeva, 28.

⁶⁸⁸ Kristeva, 28.

⁶⁸⁹ Chloë Taylor writes that “women, then, according to Kristeva, have most often either over-identified with and desired the mother and lived silently incarnate existences, or have over-identified with and desired the father and become militants, devotees [...] because their sanity and lives have depended upon it,” in Chloë Taylor, “Kristevan Themes in Virginia Woolf’s *The Waves*,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 29, no. 3 (2006): 57-77, 59, accessed June 18, 2018, doi: 10.1353/jml.2006.0036.

Phantasies: Subjectivity and Creative writing

In “Women’s Time” (1979) Kristeva argues that in women’s writing, repressed, unconscious desires can be exposed within “a space of fantasy and pleasure” which is created “out of the abstract and frustrating order of social signs.”⁶⁹⁰ However, women writers tend to identify themselves with male power and patriarchal privileges, notes Kristeva, but this itself is evidence of their desire to create “a more flexible and free discourse, one able to name what has thus far never been an object of circulation in the community: the enigmas of the body, the dreams, secret joys, shames, hatreds of the second sex.”⁶⁹¹ Feminine discourse poses a problem for female subjectivity: on the one hand, it communicates unspoken worlds to society, giving women writers the opportunity to stand as equals next to their male counterparts, and, thus, satisfying the need for equality with men. On the other hand, this very nature of equality eventually transforms women, according to Kristeva, into supporters of male domination, which then perpetuates the oppression of women.⁶⁹² As stated above, certain aspects of Kristeva’s views on women’s writing are problematic, especially if compared to her analysis of male writers. In her reading of Woolf’s texts in light of Kristeva’s theories, Miglena Nikolchina considers Woolf—due to her suicide—as a melancholic writer who “is estranged from language, separated from the Symbolic; a dancer and a visionary, she is bounded by a spastic, asymbolic body.”⁶⁹³ Nikolchina suggests that,

⁶⁹⁰ Julia Kristeva, “Women’s Time.” trans. Alice Jardine and Harry Blake, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 7, no.1 (1981): 13-35, 31.

⁶⁹¹ Kristeva, “Women’s Time,” 32.

⁶⁹² Kristeva wonders “[a]nd does one not find the pen of many a female writer being devoted to phantasmic attacks against Language and Sign as the ultimate supports of phallogocratic power?” in “Women’s Time,” 31.

⁶⁹³ Miglena Nikolchina, “Born From the Head: Reading Woolf via Kristeva,” *Diacritics* 21, no. 2/3 (1991): 30-42, 32.

despite Kristeva's views on female writing, her theoretical enquiries may reveal that Woolf's writing is revolutionary. This point is helpful for my enquiry, because, seen in this light, Woolf's writing in *Orlando* questions the male-dominated symbolic order.⁶⁹⁴

Woolf's relationship with her mother, and her attempts to address her mother's death through writing, have formed the focal point of studies on Woolf and grief, with particular attention paid to her novels *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *To The Lighthouse* (1927).⁶⁹⁵ The present study of *Orlando* is not concerned with the feeling of grief as it may have affected Woolf in writing her fantasy. Instead, my enquiry is focused on the themes of mourning and female creativity which emerge from my reading of *Orlando* as a text which probes the metamorphosis of subjectivity. Similarly, my interest in Marie Darrieussecq's *Pig Tales* focuses on the complex connections between creativity, grief, and the trope of metamorphosis of the female subject.⁶⁹⁶ Both texts create this space of fantasy and pleasure, which Kristeva talks about in "Women's Time," by making public intimate details and unconscious phantasies of female subjectivity.

⁶⁹⁴ Nikolchina, 75.

⁶⁹⁵ See Susan Bennett Smith, "Reinventing Grief Work: Virginia Woolf's Feminist Representations of Mourning in *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*," *Twentieth Century Literature* 41, no. 4 (1995): 310-327, and, Benita Bornstein, "Virginia Woolf: Grief and the Need for Cohesion in *To The Lighthouse*," *Psychoanalytic Inquiry* 3, (1983): 357-370.

⁶⁹⁶ However, I do take into account both writers' interactions with psychoanalytic circles in my readings.

Loss, Compensation, and the Act of Writing through Metamorphosis

After her transformation, Orlando at times disguises herself as a man, while she remains biologically a woman. The continuous preoccupation of the narrator/biographer with gender, as well as the protagonist's unexplained immortality across the centuries can qualify Woolf's text as fantasy which is developed at length, much more than a realist novel with fantastical elements. If the fantasy of *Orlando* compensates for a symbolic object loss, as —following Jackson and Kristeva—we may argue, it may be for the limited opportunities of women in England from the Renaissance until the beginning of the twentieth century. Woolf had probed this social loss in her "Room of One's Own," emphasising the lack of opportunities for women to write from the Renaissance onwards with her famous—and fictional—personage of Judith Shakespeare.⁶⁹⁷ How does Woolf respond to women's intellectual freedom which for her is comparable to that of "the sons of Athenian slaves"?⁶⁹⁸ In her female form, Orlando is an unusually independent woman with property in her name. Therefore, she is able to make her own decisions without needing financial support through marriage to a male character. She can afford her own private space to write, as Woolf believed all women writers needed, and, most importantly, she is not required to reflect the prescribed behaviours of men or women, but can act according to her own unique tastes and experience.⁶⁹⁹ Ann Ronchetti has observed a private, and also biographical, agenda behind the text. Orlando's unusual freedom was intended not only to extol the exciting life of the bisexual writer, Vita Sackville-West, Ronchetti notes, but is also "an example of wish-fulfillment on Woolf's part as a woman writer aware of the difficulties posed

⁶⁹⁷ Woolf, "A Room of One's Own," 36.

⁶⁹⁸ Woolf, 81.

⁶⁹⁹ "A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction," in Woolf, "A Room of One's Own," 3.

by cultural expectations, marriage, and—through her sister Vanessa’s experience—motherhood to female creativity.”⁷⁰⁰

As well as depicting androgyny and same sex relationships, Woolf’s fantasy is a celebration of female expression which springs from an extraordinary being who has successfully combined writing with motherhood and marriage. The fantasy thus can compensate for the loss of female creativity which Woolf lamented in “A Room of One’s Own.” Hermione Lee has commented on *Orlando* that, “like so much of Virginia Woolf’s feminist writing, this biographical fantasy is at once historical and Utopian, a tragic description of what women’s lives have been like and an empowering fantasy of how they might become different.”⁷⁰¹ Woolf’s fantasies in both *Orlando* and “Room” not only compensate for the loss of women writers because of male oppression, and the lack of financial and creative independence but, as Lee suggests, they are subverting the boundaries between genders and same sex relationships, showing new ways of existing in society. In addition, through Orlando’s easy transitions from man to woman and the vice versa—the latter accomplished not through magic but through clothes—the fantasy aims to revoke society’s gender limitations. There would not be so many differences between the two sexes if society did not impose different behaviours, different rights and specific clothes. Woolf’s fantasy is indeed political in this respect, aiming to correct society’s unfair treatment of women.

Reaffirming the need for women to have their own space for writing, thus for creative independent expression, Darrieussecq’s translation of Woolf’s “A Room of One’s Own” serves as a literary reminder that this space is not yet large enough.

⁷⁰⁰ Ann Ronchetti, *The Artist, Society, and Sexuality in Virginia Woolf’s Novels* (London: Routledge, 2004), 88.

⁷⁰¹ Lee, 69.

Darrieussecq's translation is of interest here because she shares with Woolf similar feminist concerns with women's writing. A brief consideration of her choice of words when translating Woolf highlights her enquiry into the emergence of creativity. Darrieussecq chooses to translate the famous "room" as "lieu" and not, as previous translators into French did, as "chamber," thus, acknowledging that, after all these years, women need, not a bedroom, according to Darrieussecq, but a place on their own.⁷⁰² Darrieussecq stretches the room into a place of female creativity on purpose, so that her translation may offer contemporary women a place to write, which can be larger than the four walls of the room, literally and metaphorically, and perhaps more abstract than before: it could be a site. A place of writing can be anywhere—even in an abandoned farm or a forest—and can still develop and explore a compensating fantasy of female writing.

Indeed, the anonymous female protagonist of *Pig Tales* takes refuge in a farm that belongs to her mother. She arrives in her human form but, after her mother rejects her, she joins the rest of the pigs in the farm's barn. Darrieussecq's protagonist literally kills her mother; ironically, she has paired with Pig's former exploiter, and they are getting ready to sell her meat in the black market until Pig manages to shoot them.⁷⁰³ In a tense episode, Pig regains a human shape for a few moments and manages to murder her mother in order to avoid being slaughtered for her meat. This episode can be interpreted as a symbolic act of separating herself from the maternal space, thus confirming what Kristeva argues in *Black Sun*: "matricide is our vital necessity, the sine-qua-non condition of our individuation."⁷⁰⁴ Darrieussecq's protagonist's killing of

⁷⁰² Darrieussecq, trans. *Un lieu à soi*, 1.

⁷⁰³ Darrieussecq, *Pig Tales*, 133-134.

⁷⁰⁴ Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 36.

her mother is significant for her emerging identity as a female writer who, according to Kristeva, needs to commit a symbolic matricide, thus sacrificing that part of herself which had been identified with the mother. Matricide is necessary for the female artist to emerge out of the melancholic position. Playfully engaging with Kristeva's text and literalising its metaphors, Darrieussecq suggests that by reckoning with the loss of the mother—by a libidinal matricide—one can find a viable alternative to self-destructive tendencies, and can be enabled to act creatively, to utilise signs and symbols, and to write creatively. Significantly, though, it all has to happen at the place of the maternal itself. Hence, Pig's return to her mother's farm.

In Darrieussecq's story, the act of writing—writing about one's self in this case—is vital to the preservation of human memories, as it allows the protagonist to reflect upon her past and present state in relation to her identity. What additionally preserves her human memory and body is her recollection of Yvan. Her memories of him are what make her stand on two legs while still a pig, when she is about to be slaughtered by her own mother and the Perfumes Plus director.⁷⁰⁵ After the murders, it is strongly implied that she can still acquire a human form during a full moon: “when I crane my neck towards the Moon, it's to show, once again, a human face.”⁷⁰⁶ The protagonist's need for self-expression initially stems from the loss of her werewolf-mate, and by the end of the story it becomes imperative for her acceptance of her hybrid nature. Her mourning over the loss of another hybrid being, expressed through writing, allows her human self to come to light. The admission, “[t]hat's why I write; it's because I remain myself through my sorrow over Yvan,” testifies that the ability to find

⁷⁰⁵ Darrieussecq, 133-4.

⁷⁰⁶ Darrieussecq, 135.

yourself in writing (perhaps literally here) is a privilege of humans.⁷⁰⁷ As Darrieussecq's story ends, another transformation is visible on the sow-writer of the story, this time caused by the very act of writing. The woman-sow in the end of the novel is different from the one in the beginning because she is fully aware of her hybrid self and body. The sow-woman combination is now balanced and less confusing for the subject: "I'm a sow most of the time. [...] I watch television. I phoned the director's mother. [...] I'm not unhappy with my lot."⁷⁰⁸ She has now acquired, like Orlando, a room, or a place, of her own, a space wherein her hybrid subjectivity can be written. Darrieussecq seems to be rewriting her own "Room," in its relation to *Orlando*, with *Pig Tales*.

While still human, Pig identified in herself similar behaviours to her mother, such as the abortion, but this identification is forgotten after her transformation and subsequent abandonment by her mother. The protagonist's mother finds her again when Pig and Yvan become rich and are constantly being followed by journalists after the war. The mother shamelessly parades herself on TV with photos from Pig's human childhood in order to gain money and, as Yvan warns Pig, the mother tries "to lure the wolf from the woods," as both Yvan and Pig are hiding from the authorities.⁷⁰⁹ The mother's emotional blackmail through mass media proves to be successful, as Pig eventually contacts her. She recalls that "it killed me to think my mother had recognised me in spite of that. Maternal instinct is wonderful thing, *a gut feeling*, as they say."⁷¹⁰ Hinting at the existence of the maternal as an unconscious or inherited trait, Darrieussecq has her protagonist to commit not only a symbolic matricide, but also a

⁷⁰⁷ Darrieussecq, 128.

⁷⁰⁸ Darrieussecq, 134-135.

⁷⁰⁹ Darrieussecq, 119.

⁷¹⁰ Darrieussecq, 120.

real one, thus, Pig rejects the mother and supposedly accepts the loss of the Thing, as theorised by Kristeva. Pig is not then a melancholic because she denies the death of the mother: she has accepted it. But what she cannot bear is the loss of her lover Yvan, and this loss is what triggers the work of art, her writing.

The fantasy of independence of female creativity and the transformational process of writing that Woolf described in *Orlando* is a fantasy that is shared with *Pig Tales*. With *Pig Tales* Darrieussecq communicates the fantasy of a modern female writer with no education or financial security, of dubious morals and overt sexuality who manages to write her autobiography based on her own transformations, initially bodily ones and, finally, mental. Orlando has advantages which Pig lacks: educated and of superior class, financially independent, even beautiful. Still, the process of writing for these two hybrid beings can be read in light of a loss: a melancholia which leads to creativity, but not in asymbolia or silence.

As stated above, the process of writing for Orlando is associated with his/her melancholic nature, and the relationship between loss and creativity manifests itself in the narration. The very first words Orlando utters are: "I am alone," and the biographer admits that Orlando "loved solitary places, vast views, and to feel himself for ever and ever and ever alone."⁷¹¹ Is Orlando really melancholic in Kristeva's mode, or does his sadness express a different type of melancholy? As Orlando waits for Sasha in the darkness, the signs around him foreground "death and disaster," and when he realises that the Russian heir is not going to come to their meeting, the atmosphere is filled with "huge noises as of the tearing and rending of oak trees [...] wild cries and terrible inhuman groaning."⁷¹² Besides preparing the reader for what will follow, the imagery

⁷¹¹ Woolf, *Orlando*, 13.

⁷¹² Woolf, 38

is that of a melancholic site. Shortly after Sasha's betrayal, which is juxtaposed with images of helpless drowned citizens, trapped in the icy waters, Orlando falls in a deep sleep for a week, a peculiar occurrence which makes even his biographer wonder "had Orlando worn out by the extremity of his suffering, died for a week, and then come to life again?"⁷¹³ The loss of his love-object, Sasha, causes suicidal tendencies to afflict Orlando's ego, which has yet to begin mourning the loss.⁷¹⁴ And yet Woolf chooses to place her emphasis on her protagonist's passion for literature and writing poetry just after the biographer has informed us of Orlando's melancholy, among his other traits. There is no indication, though, that his lost love-object, Sasha, could symbolically represent the maternal. In fact, the loss of the mother is, for Kristeva, a defining loss when it comes to female subjectivity and voice and, most importantly, women's writing. Still, Orlando manages to finish her poem, even without a maternal figure close to her. Orlando, then, has to kill a symbolic mother: the Victorian ideal of a perfect and pure woman, a dutiful wife and mother who has not even dreamt of becoming a writer, and is otherwise called the "angel in the house."⁷¹⁵ Victoria L. Smith has offered a different reading of loss and reparation in *Orlando* as "an enactment of melancholia." For *Orlando*, she argues, "might be a metaphorical recovery of what Woolf and Sackville-West could not, as women and as lovers, have."⁷¹⁶

Returning to Jackson's analysis on the function of fantasy literature, the creative writer—fictional as Orlando and Pig are—can arguably compensate for a loss of an

⁷¹³ Woolf, 42.

⁷¹⁴ "Orlando now took a strange delight in thoughts of death and decay," Woolf, *Orlando*, 44.

⁷¹⁵ Virginia Woolf, "Professions for Women" (1931), in *Selected Essays*, ed. Bradshaw, 235.

⁷¹⁶ Victoria L. Smith, "'Ransacking the Language': Finding the Missing Goods in Virginia Woolf's 'Orlando,'" *Journal of Modern Literature* 29, no. 4 (2006): 57-75, 63, accessed June 14, 2018, doi: [10.1353/jml.2006.0050](https://doi.org/10.1353/jml.2006.0050).

object. Furthermore, instead of providing an escape from a potentially painful reality, the very writing of fantasies re-creates an aesthetically pleasing version of external reality, and is simultaneously thought of as a successful way to accommodate the loss and absence of the object. Creative writing both in *Orlando* and *Pig Tales* is a transformational experience for female subjectivity, and, at the same time, this subjectivity is itself metamorphic and linked with significant body changes.

Hybrid Subjectivity and Feminine Writing

Pig becomes aware of her peculiar complexity only after her encounter with Yvan who teaches her how to coexist between two spaces.⁷¹⁷ This self-awareness of existing in-between, a product of many transformations, is frequently jocularly invoked in *Orlando* and always linked to the act of writing. “Come, come! I’m sick to death of this particular self. I want another,” proclaims Orlando towards the end of the narrative.⁷¹⁸ Finishing “The Oak Tree” causes her to come to terms with the rest of her selves, either male or female, and to become aware of “a single self, a real self.”⁷¹⁹ Orlando is equally loved by men and women irrespective of his sex. Particular attention could be placed upon Orlando’s thoughts on marriage and the spirit of her age, shortly before she completes her poem. Her marriage to a husband, often absent, at Cape Horn, contributes to Orlando’s finding her true self, in accordance with the spirit of the age.⁷²⁰

Thus, the act of writing in *Orlando* both assists the mourning work and engenders a more comprehensive transformation. The fantasy of physical

⁷¹⁷ “Yvan loved me equally well as a woman and as a sow.” Darrieussecq, *Pig Tales*, 108.

⁷¹⁸ Woolf, *Orlando*, 152.

⁷¹⁹ Woolf, 155.

⁷²⁰ Woolf, 153.

metamorphosis is thematically and semantically linked to this inner transformation of the protagonist. For this reason, while there are metamorphic changes, or changes of identities, there is narration; when these changes cease, the narration ends. The urge to write, and thus attempt to establish and communicate a sense of identity, is encouraged by the protagonists' inexplicable metamorphosis. Importantly, this identity is conceived and phantasised as hybrid. Initially through the eyes of a male, then through the position of a woman, Orlando can communicate the different experience of the two sexes across the centuries.

In *Pig Tales*, the pig-natured woman records the experiences of an underprivileged woman but also of a farm animal, and then ends up as a combination of the two. She also needs to be able to empathise with realistically marginalised identities within French society: African people, Muslim women and migrant workers. Becoming a writer is illuminating equally for the protagonists (Orlando, Pig) and the reader. For Woolf the ideal writer is androgynous whereas for Darrieussecq it is the female writer who has to embrace a wider realm of the disenfranchised, those who are also mistreated and disadvantaged by patriarchy. The key here is that the ideal writer, both Woolf and Darrieussecq seem to suggest in their novels, has to incorporate a hybrid identity, for only then s/he is able to write. Like Tiresias, who is only able to prophesise after he has experienced both sexes, Orlando and Pig find their voice within their metamorphic nature. However, both Orlando and Pig are not exemplary anti-patriarchal writers: Orlando submits to the spirit of the age and gets married and becomes a mother, while Pig ends up being involved with a male boar in the forest, to ensure her survival amongst other pigs.

Hélène Cixous has addressed the connections between female discourse and the female body in her essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1971). Her insistence on the

reclaiming a female literary territory undoubtedly accommodates both writers' concerns on the formation of female subjectivity. Cixous vividly suggests that "woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies—for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal."⁷²¹ As women have been repeatedly silenced, embarrassed and excluded from speech by men, the only means for them to enter the phallographic symbolic order is to write of their unconscious desires, wishes and thoughts—the events surrounding the female body—which have also been demonised in male discourse. "Their stream of phantasms is incredible" notes Cixous on the unconscious female mind which needs to be written, besides the body.⁷²² Both Woolf and Darrieussecq write of the female self; they engage with the female body in different ways but they also stress the need, with their writing of fantasies, of a female mode of expression.

The fantasy of transformation in *Orlando* seems to correspond to the kind of writing Cixous has in mind when she argues that women's writing of their unconscious instincts and sexuality will bring radical changes in society.⁷²³ Woolf's description of the female body may not be explicit at the crucial moment of transformation, but the language and imagery in *Orlando* communicate the protagonist's sexuality and relationship to creative writing: "[he] flung himself—there was a passion in his movements which deserves the word—on the earth at the foot of the oak tree. He loved [...] to feel the earth's spine beneath him; for such he took the hard root of the oak tree

⁷²¹ Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa" trans. Keith and Paula Cohen, in *New French Criticisms*, ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), 245-267.

⁷²² Cixous, 245.

⁷²³ Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," 252.

to be; or, for image followed image.”⁷²⁴ Social change is embedded in women’s writing according to Cixous, as female writing can be “the very possibility of change, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures.”⁷²⁵

For Darrieussecq, the writing of the female body is a fearsome endeavour—but one which promises to give access to the secrets of the female body: “I bled a lot, but you couldn’t call it a period,” thinks Pig, adding that then “something curious and absolutely unseemly happened [...] I began really wanting sex.”⁷²⁶ Pig’s transformations are foremost somatic and coexist or alternate with intimate, and often taboo, female processes. Pig’s autobiography is not strictly a product of female writing, but also an *écriture de cochon*, a product of marginalization and exile from civilization.

These written fantasies of hybrid and metamorphic subjectivities can mobilise changes in the established male discourse which is treated ironically in both texts. The trope of metamorphosis, in this equation, helps us to understand how hybridity is created, and why subjectivity matters in these texts which advocate female writing. Incorporating social change in women’s writing may assist us in reading the pig-woman’s writing as such: hybrid-female subjectivities can mobilise changes in the established male discourse.

⁷²⁴ Woolf, *Orlando*, 14.

⁷²⁵ Cixous, 260.

⁷²⁶ Darrieussecq, *Pig Tales*, 27.

Rendering Myths in Orlando and Pig Tales

Myths, or as Freud called them, “the secular dreams of youthful humanity” are a vital support in forging such layered texts as Woolf’s and Darrieussecq’s, and they provide time-honoured articulations of the hybrid subjectivities that interest both writers.⁷²⁷ The relationship between myths and fantasies is also of importance here: “myths fascinate us because they portray unconscious fantasies,” states Marianne Leuzinger-Bohleber.⁷²⁸ Before moving into closer scrutiny of the phantasies of hybrid subjectivity in each of the texts, I would like to briefly survey these mythic subtexts. Both Woolf and Darrieussecq have exteriorized and strategically used not only their intimate but also group fantasies of female empowerment, which, if it were not for the presence of a mythic template such as metamorphosis, could not have been so easily glossed.

Shortly after Orlando’s change of sex, while sailing back to England from Turkey, she exclaims: “Which is the greater ecstasy? The man’s or the woman’s? And are they not perhaps the same?”⁷²⁹ This quote is famously attributed to a mythological figure akin to Orlando, the prophet Tiresias. In Book III of his *Metamorphoses*, Ovid narrates how Tiresias was able to change from male into female for seven years, after encountering two magic snakes. After a second encounter, he transformed back into a man, still retaining the memory of his female form. Ovid hints that after this experience, Tiresias was “wise” since he “knew both sides of love.”⁷³⁰ This is why Hera and Zeus ask him to enlighten them when debating on which sex is privileged to “get more pleasure out of love.”⁷³¹ Tiresias’ pronouncement on the matter favours Zeus, because

⁷²⁷ Freud, “Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming,” 152.

⁷²⁸ Leuzinger-Bohleber, “The ‘Medea Fantasy,’” 323.

⁷²⁹ Woolf, 92.

⁷³⁰ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 60-61.

⁷³¹ Ovid, 61.

he states that women receive more pleasure, so Hera blinds him as a punishment.⁷³² Tiresias is then granted the gift of prophecy by Zeus, in compensation for Hera's punishment, and he gains intuition in knowing the future as well as the past. Outside of her own reading of classical literature, Woolf would have encountered the figure of Tiresias in T.S. Eliot's poetry, which had been published by the Hogarth Press. Eliot placed the prophet at the centre of his celebrated poem "The Waste Land" (1922) as a figure of unity. Tiresias for Eliot is a liminal persona of both sexes, as his "wrinkled female breasts" testify; his prophetic gift is widely used in the poem, from warning Oedipus for his crimes to witnessing the decayed waste land.⁷³³ Eliot also stresses Tiresias' ability to live among the dead and the living, an important element considering Orlando's inclination to death but also his/her agelessness.⁷³⁴

If the story of Tiresias is a modernist device used by Eliot to provide some sense of order in his work, in *Orlando*, Tiresias is used as an expression of Orlando's androgyny. Here, the Tiresias motif does not favour either of the two sexes, but functions to hint at their equality.⁷³⁵ The reference to Tiresias is relevant to Orlando's timelessness through the centuries and his ability to write poetry, which could be paralleled to the prophet's gift of seeing the future and the past. Woolf's allusion to Ovid and the myth of Tiresias grants her access to a story which would be well-known to an educated readership, and thus provides a persuasive point of reference for her own ruminations on gender. The ongoing dialogue between myth and society is not new;

⁷³² Ovid, 61.

⁷³³ T.S. Eliot, "The Waste Land," *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), 61-62.

⁷³⁴ Eliot, 62.

⁷³⁵ See T.S. Eliot's essay on the function of myth in the twentieth century: "Ulysses, Order, and Myth" (1923).

and the specific rendering of such a metamorphosis to address gender issues, and the questions of belonging to or being exiled from normative society, was visible already in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, a text written in exile.⁷³⁶

Sarah Annes Brown has examined the influence of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* on *Orlando*, by focusing on the tales of Daphne and Apollo and of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus, two tales of female persecution and rape.⁷³⁷ *Orlando*'s tapestry looks almost real: "it looked as if the huntsmen were riding and Daphne was flying," an Ovidian image of persecution and metamorphosis which Woolf does not probe further.⁷³⁸ In a similar image that could have been inspired by Ovid, Pig is violently thrown into a swimming pool by her boyfriend. Honoré forces Pig to wear a new bathing suit, and after she fails to satisfy his image of her—the garment rips—he leaves her half-naked in the water park to be publicly humiliated on account of her appalling external appearance, which at the time resembles a fat sow. Pig is insulted and abused by a company of boys who form "a ball dancing" around her naked body, thus Pig finds it impossible to flee.⁷³⁹ Darrieussecq distorts the classical imagery provided by myths by having a monstrous woman persecuted, instead of a nymph. The postmodern rendering of myth thus aims to deconstruct the image of the beautiful woman who is exploited by a powerful male, often a god. Full of sexist imagery, the scene highlights Pig's ignorance, since she sympathises with her boyfriend's decision of abandoning her in the swimming pool, "dying of shame" for her own body. At the same time, the

⁷³⁶ Darrieussecq's protagonist also writes in a seeming exile, like Ovid.

⁷³⁷ Sarah Annes Brown, *The Metamorphosis of Ovid: from Chaucer to Ted Hughes* (London: Duckworth, 1999), 203.

⁷³⁸ Woolf, *Orlando*, 66.

⁷³⁹ Darrieussecq, *Pig Tales*, 49-50.

scene dramatises the shocking treatment of women who do not embody the image of the young, slim female.⁷⁴⁰

Another story by Ovid is of particular interest in this context: “The Island of Circe.” In Book XIV, Ovid retells the story of Aeneas, focusing on his companions and how they were transformed into pigs by the witch Circe, inspired by the well-known episode of Virgil’s *Aeneid* (29-19 B.C.). As with *Pig*, the experience of painful transformation is recorded from the point of view of one of the unfortunate men: “[b]ristles began to sprout; I could no longer speak.”⁷⁴¹ The swine, then, join the rest of the wild animals in Circe’s palace until Circe changes them back with her wand, under the threat of Aeneas.⁷⁴² Darrieussecq studied Latin, and she has translated Ovid’s *Tristia* and *Epistulae ex Ponto* into French.⁷⁴³ Darrieussecq has directly acknowledged the presence of myth in her story, stating that the Circe episode (like the presumed inspiration she took from Kafka) was not in her mind, consciously at least, when writing *Pig Tales*. Nevertheless, she still considers it relevant to her novel: “in actual fact Ovid and even Homer with the transformation of Ulysses’ men into swine belong to a tradition that I found much more inviting, but it was pretty subconscious.”⁷⁴⁴ Darrieussecq’s account of the pig transformation is narrated in the first person, emphasizing the subjective painful experience. In this interview, Darrieussecq also acknowledges the presence of unconscious processes in the mind of the writer as well as the role of myth in inspiring the creation of a fictional world. In her analysis of *Pig Tales* Bahun has focused her attention on a specific episode which also probes the use

⁷⁴⁰ Darrieussecq, *Pig Tales*, 30.

⁷⁴¹ Ovid, 333.

⁷⁴² Ovid, 334.

⁷⁴³ Marie Darrieussecq, trans. *Tristes Tropiques* (Paris: P. O. L., 2008).

⁷⁴⁴ Darrieussecq, *Practitioners’ Voices*, Fiona Cox.

of myth in the text: “I’d read that the ancient Romans’ favourite—and choicest—dish was stuffed sow’s vulva.”⁷⁴⁵ Since Darrieussecq hints at the sow’s sacrifice in antiquity and repeatedly engages with the deaths of piglets, Bahun argues that the ancient festivals of Thesmoforia and Bona Dea, which both related women to the sacrifice of pigs, place the idea of the pig’s sacrifice into a mythical-ritual context.⁷⁴⁶ Both festivals celebrated female sexuality with the pig being “a specific stand-in for the female sexual organ.”⁷⁴⁷ In metamorphosing myths into postmodern nightmarish tales and allegories of female sexuality and the female body, Darrieussecq uses the trope of metamorphosis in order to communicate these terrifying changes of the protagonist and also to create a semi-mythical, enchanting narrative which contains something of the fascination that Ovid’s disturbing tales still create in readers.

The static scene of the metamorphosis of Orlando and the ongoing changes of Darrieussecq’s protagonist have little in common since the metamorphoses narrated are not of the same kind, just as Ovid’s mythical stories of Tiresias and Aeneas’s men differ. Both stories feature two mythical, subjectively experienced transformations, however, which, in Ovid’s retelling, are didactic for the transformed beings. Tiresias gains insight and knowledge from his change, while Aeneas’s companions learn to hold back their piggish appetites after their punishment. As with most tales of metamorphoses, the stories cross established boundaries: the merging of sexes is not impossible after the experience of Tiresias, and the animal urges are closer to human instincts after Circe’s exposition. After reading these stories, the relationship of myth and society becomes reciprocal, as these impossible events may inspire and even affect

⁷⁴⁵ This scene also protests against animal cruelty, but Pig thinks “I took no sides on the subject, never having had any particular firm opinions on politics.” Darrieussecq, *Pig Tales*, 47.

⁷⁴⁶ Bahun, “The Ethics of Animal-Human Existence,” 64.

⁷⁴⁷ Bahun, 64.

society's thinking about hybrid beings. This is perhaps one of the many reasons that inspired Woolf to write about the fantasy of an androgynous being and Darrieussecq to create a porcine woman, for each exposes the significance of hybrid identities through their writing and metamorphic events. Cixous's argument on the power of feminine discourse to affect society is also—partially—founded on a myth: “they riveted us between two horrifying myths: between the Medusa and the abyss,” she writes.⁷⁴⁸ The myth of Medusa, which is hereby summoned by Cixous to represent the supposed silencing of men's discourse before the image of a monstrous feminine, can be viewed in relation to Darrieussecq's monstrous writer, but also to Orlando's gaze at the darkness, in the past, present and perhaps future in the last scenes of the novel.⁷⁴⁹

The Phantasy of Androgyny and Immortality in Orlando

“The change seemed to have been accomplished painlessly and completely in such a way that Orlando herself showed no surprise at it” reports the narrator.⁷⁵⁰ The text of *Orlando* is offered as a playful narration about an androgynous being who makes a painless transition from manhood to femininity. The protagonist's invisible transformation is reminiscent of the change, “at some point during the night,” of Franz Kafka's protagonist,⁷⁵¹ though causing less trouble to the subject than its Kafkaesque

⁷⁴⁸ Cixous, 256.

⁷⁴⁹ “It was not necessary to faint now in order to look deep in the darkness where things shape themselves and to see in the pool of the mind now Shakespeare, now a girl in Russian trousers, now a toy boat on the Serpentine.” Woolf, *Orlando*, 189-190.

⁷⁵⁰ Woolf, 83.

⁷⁵¹ Franz Kafka, “The Metamorphosis,” 3.

equivalent did. Before he wakes up as a woman, Orlando falls into a long sleep during which there is a revolution, but he is not harmed as he looks dead.⁷⁵² The poetic paragraphs before the narrator reveals to the reader the change of sex, serve almost as a justification of the transformation. The biographer-narrator considers a simpler, less shocking option of informing the reader that “Orlando died and was buried.”⁷⁵³ But this is quickly dismissed in deference to the truth. Woolf imagines, therefore, a scene where three women, the sisters Purity, Chastity and Modesty visit Orlando, while asleep, and try to prevent the truth from being told to the reader. But Orlando’s truth is told in the loudest way possible: “while the trumpets pealed Truth! Truth! Truth! we have no choice left but confess—he was a woman.”⁷⁵⁴ The narrator’s reassurance that the change of sex did not affect Orlando’s personality, and that Orlando’s mind did not belong to either sex, make the fantasy of an androgynous being fit into a consistent narrative.

Orlando’s “vacillation from one sex to the other” is not a new idea for Woolf; she had talked about the possibility of androgyny during her lectures at Cambridge:

It is natural for the sexes to co-operate. [...] I went on amateurishly to sketch a plan of the soul so that in each of us two powers preside, one male, one female. [...] The normal and comfortable state of being is that when the two live in harmony together, spiritually co-operating.⁷⁵⁵

The image of two people getting into a taxi, she has said, inspired Woolf to consider androgyny as necessary for one’s state of mind to be in harmony and to cultivate inspiration. What does androgyny mean for Woolf, then, in *Orlando*? First of all, it was Orlando’s own inner change, “a change in Orlando herself that dictated her choice of a

⁷⁵² Woolf, *Orlando*, 80.

⁷⁵³ Woolf, 81.

⁷⁵⁴ Woolf, 83.

⁷⁵⁵ Woolf, “A Room of One’s Own,” 74.

woman's dress and of a woman's sex."⁷⁵⁶ The narrator implies that Orlando was already androgynous in mind before he changed into a woman: Orlando contained a "mixture in her of man and woman." Thereafter, it is primarily the differences in male and female clothing that make Orlando a man or a woman.⁷⁵⁷ During the first centuries of his life, his male side seemed to preside, and, when the female side led, Orlando followed this by changing the outward appearance of his sex into female.

Beth Schwartz argues that the model of androgyny in *Orlando* can be found in Shakespeare.

Nowhere is Shakespeare's mothering influence more evident than in *Orlando* and *A Room of One's Own*, the companion pieces in which his presence is most pervasive. Shakespeare is the paragon of the sublimely androgynous artist in *A Room*—and also the model for Orlando's androgyny and anonymity.⁷⁵⁸

The majority of Woolf scholars who write on androgyny have looked at *Orlando* in the context of Woolf's essay, among them are Nancy Topping Bazine, Marilyn R. Farwell, and Rachel Bowlby.⁷⁵⁹ Nikolchina interprets androgyny in *Orlando* as a Kristevan mask, "the mask of androgyny" as she calls it, to argue that androgyny in the text functions as a role, a turn that can be taken only momentarily, for the subject to access the barred space of male discourse. Androgyny "is analogous to Kristeva's use of the male mask: speaking via a male artist who speaks via a female double who further splits

⁷⁵⁶ Woolf, 111.

⁷⁵⁷ Woolf, 111.

⁷⁵⁸ Beth C. Schwartz, "Thinking Back Through our Mothers: Virginia Woolf Reads Shakespeare," *ELH* 58, no. 3 (1991): 721-46, 722, accessed June 14, 2018, doi: 10.2307/2873462.

⁷⁵⁹ Nancy Topping Bazine, *Virginia Woolf and the Androgynous Vision* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1973), Marilyn R. Farwell, "Virginia Woolf and Androgyny," *Contemporary Literature* 16, no. 4 (1975): 433-451, and, Rachel Bowlby, *Feminist Destinations and Further Essays on Virginia Woolf* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), 1997.

into a male/female couple.”⁷⁶⁰ This notion of androgyny as role-playing is also supported by Pamela Caughie:

The androgynous self in *Orlando* is a metaphor for the dramatic, the role-playing self. Androgyny is a metaphor for change, for openness, for a self-conscious acting out of intentions. It is not an ideal *type*, but a contextual *response*. Identity is always disguised in *Orlando* not because the “true self” is running around [...] but because identity is a series of roles.⁷⁶¹

In the seemingly light-hearted tone of *Orlando*, and with a reference to Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park* (1814), the biographer refuses discussion of her subject’s sexuality. “But let other pens treat of sex and sexuality; we quit such odious subjects as soon as we can,” the biographer states, showing a reluctance to elaborate on bisexual desire.⁷⁶² Brenda Helt defines bisexuality in *Orlando* “as a challenge to the hetero/homo dichotomy that Woolf believed to be producing another social invention: a culturally widespread homophobia that isolated women from other women emotionally, politically, and professionally.”⁷⁶³

Orlando is not the only androgynous being of the story. Orlando’s first thoughts upon seeing the Russian Princess are indicative, for Sasha has characteristics that may belong to either sex: “he beheld [...] a figure, which, whether boy’s or woman’s, for the loose trousers of the Russian fashion served to disguise the sex, filled him with the highest curiosity.”⁷⁶⁴ During his lifetime he is involved, besides Sasha, with Archduchess Harriet, who Orlando meets again as Archduke Harry. The Archduke

⁷⁶⁰ Nikolchina, “Born from the head: Reading Woolf via Kristeva,” 39.

⁷⁶¹ Pamela Caughie, “Virginia Woolf’s Double Discourse,” in *Discontented Discourses: Feminism/ Textual Intervention/ Psychoanalysis*, eds. Marleen S. Barr and Richard Feldstein (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 41–53, 49.

⁷⁶² Woolf, *Orlando*, 84.

⁷⁶³ Brenda S. Helt, “Passionate Debates on “Odious Subjects”: Bisexuality and Woolf’s Opposition to Theories of Androgyny and Sexual Identity,” *Twentieth Century Literature* 56, no. 2 (2010): 131-167, 132, accessed June 14, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41062468>.

⁷⁶⁴ Woolf, 24.

insists that “he was a man and always had been one” but he had to disguise himself as a woman in order to approach male Orlando.⁷⁶⁵ If the reader has noticed all the hints concerning Orlando’s affairs, then the revelation between Orlando and her husband, Marmaduke Shelmerdine, in the end of the nineteenth century should not be surprising: “an awful suspicion rushed into both their minds simultaneously. ‘You’re a woman, Shel!’ she cried. ‘You’re a man, Orlando!’ he cried.”⁷⁶⁶ According to Nathaniel Brown, Marmaduke is the androgynous incarnation of poet Percy Bysshe Shelley: an interpretation which further confirms Woolf’s play with androgyny and history in the novel due to Shelley’s “effeminate” appearance which Woolf had observed.⁷⁶⁷

Besides androgyny, Orlando has another attribute popular amongst fantasy writers, that of immortality. Immortality is explored in Freud’s earlier work on wish fulfillments, and specifically in interpreting “The Theme of Three Caskets” (1913), where he notes that the greatest wish found in our unconscious is to overcome death.⁷⁶⁸ Segal, following Freud’s ideas, confirms that “all artists aim at immortality; their objects must not only be brought back to life, but that life must also be eternal.”⁷⁶⁹ Immortality allows Orlando to experience England changing through the centuries, thus to compare the significant changes in the way of thinking, the way of life, and most importantly in the rights and freedoms of women. The female side of Orlando is able to understand Sasha’s betrayal, which hurt his male self, two centuries previously, and, as he confesses to herself, to better understand women. Orlando “remembered how, as a young man, she had insisted that women must be obedient, chaste, scented,

⁷⁶⁵ Woolf, *Orlando*, 106.

⁷⁶⁶ Woolf, 146.

⁷⁶⁷ Nathaniel Brown, “The “Double Soul”: Virginia Woolf, Shelley, and Androgyny,” *Keats-Shelley Journal* 33, (1984): 182-204, 190, accessed June 14, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30212934>.

⁷⁶⁸ Freud, “The Theme of the Three Caskets,” 289-302.

⁷⁶⁹ Segal. 203.

and exquisitely apparelled” and bitterly remarks that she will have to conform to these standards as a woman, even that now she recognises they were, and still are, in fact oppressive.⁷⁷⁰ The protagonist’s immortality is sometimes ambiguously presented due to thoughts such as “I am growing up,” which imply that Orlando matures but does not age.⁷⁷¹

Another technique through which Woolf establishes the fantasy of immortality in the novel, apart from her protagonist’s long life, is through the appearance, and equally unexplained long life, of key characters throughout Orlando’s life. Orlando meets the Elizabethan poet Nick Greene centuries later, she also meets again with Archduke Harry, while her encounter with a mysterious figure in the twentieth century hints at Orlando’s affair with Sasha in 1600s. The narrator, who is as immortal as Orlando, has been following his/her biography subject all these years. This technique allows the reader to participate in Woolf’s fantasy of an immortal protagonist, biographer, and reader. Furthermore, immortality can be achieved for Orlando through writing poetry: “he vowed that he would be the first poet of his race and bring immortal luster upon his name.”⁷⁷² Woolf repeats the words in the next sentences. As Orlando compares himself to his dead ancestors he loudly declares his own immortality for the second time and, just a few lines later, the biographer informs us of Orlando’s task: “to win immortality against the English Language.”⁷⁷³ Orlando’s identity does not stay fixed all these centuries; her immortality is indeed a privilege but, as the biographer emphasizes, in the 1900s Orlando’s personality is changeable and multifaceted. Woolf

⁷⁷⁰ Woolf, *Orlando*, 93.

⁷⁷¹ Woolf, 103.

⁷⁷² Woolf, 49.

⁷⁷³ Woolf, 50.

literally splits Orlando's self in pieces: "she had a great variety of selves to call upon, far more than we have been able to find room for."⁷⁷⁴

Darrieussecq's Animal Phantasies

Darrieussecq also creates a split ego, in this case, divided between animal and human nature. The fantasies, as relayed through her novel, are more troubling to read, however, than Woolf's story. For Darrieussecq, the fantasy of a hybrid identity focuses on animal-human coexistence and the acceptance of this hybridity. In *Pig Tales*, the protagonist adopts numerous roles: that of a worker, a partner, daughter, and also mother, like Orlando. Her porcine side, though, is the hardest to assimilate into her identity. Soon, the pig instincts and appetites take over the human ones, causing the protagonist to eat raw potatoes and fresh flowers, to grunt and to roll in mud, to walk on four legs, and to have primitive urges like eating a baby. In the episode where Pig considers snatching the baby, the police arrive to kill her; but due to her horrifying appearance she manages to escape. "It's monstrous!" accurately describes Pig and shows the society's opinion of hybrid creatures living in the city.⁷⁷⁵

Reading the woman-sow as a rejected member of society may highlight an aspect of hybrid subjectivity: abjection. The term, proposed by Kristeva, encompasses the parts of our self that we cannot contain and often disgust us, such as dirty skin.⁷⁷⁶ In Darrieussecq's novel, the pink pig skin, which emerges as part of the transforming

⁷⁷⁴ Woolf, 179.

⁷⁷⁵ Darrieussecq, 73.

⁷⁷⁶ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 53.

body, is unbearable for both the subject and her surroundings. “It was only after I put on a little too much weight that I began to disgust myself,” confesses Pig, while later on she discovers that bathing is efficient for casting off the animal urges and skin changes.⁷⁷⁷ Following Kristeva’s argument on the various aspects of abjection, I suggest that Darrieussecq’s protagonist inhabits the “fragile state” Kristeva describes, where human meets animal. By eventually embracing her abject animalistic and oversexualised side, the pig protagonist can participate in a bearable existence which bridges the distance with the monstrous Other.⁷⁷⁸

To better understand how the human-animal interaction is articulated in *Pig Tales*, a close reading of Giorgio Agamben’s concept of ‘Homo Sacer’ is helpful.⁷⁷⁹ The concept of *Homo Sacer* seems contradictory, admits Agamben. Drawing upon the Roman concept of sacredness which defined the criminal’s life as “sacred” and therefore not suitable for sacrifice, Agamben emphasises that this contradiction epitomises the life of *homo sacer*. This kind of man has broken the law, hence he is a figure which causes disorder in the community, and he is consequently condemned. He cannot be sacrificed for the benefit of the city, since he is not considered pure and clean after his crimes; however, his death can or should be a murder which will remain without any punishment.⁷⁸⁰ Agamben, then, defines his “sacred” man as isolated from political and social life: *homo sacer* is denied the life and the rights of a citizen (*bios*), and he has only “bare life” (*zoe*), that is, a life not governed by human laws, and completely cut off from political existence.⁷⁸¹ The *bios* that *homo sacer* is denied was

⁷⁷⁷ Darrieussecq, 16.

⁷⁷⁸ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 54.

⁷⁷⁹ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

⁷⁸⁰ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 38.

⁷⁸¹ Agamben, 60.

a crucial part of the identity of free citizens in Ancient Greece. Agamben places the *homo sacer* and his killing under a “sovereign sphere,” between murder and sacrifice.

Andrew Asibong argues that in the case of Darrieussecq’s sow protagonist, “bare life is filtered through sex” so “the figure to emerge, is not Agamben’s neutered *homo sacer*, but his obscenely sexualized counterpart *mulier sacra*.”⁷⁸² Pig has indeed all the characteristics of a *homo sacer* or, rather, a *mulier sacra*: her exclusion from society begins when she fails to comply with the standards of the beauty and sex industry she is part of. She reaches the point where it is impossible to conceal the pig with makeup products and creams since her whole body has succumbed to the pig nature. Hence, her friends and colleagues progressively abandon her, as she fails to leave her animal ways behind. After a painful abortion, she thinks that she looks like a human again; she fails to realise though that her animalistic, almost demonic, nature is too evident after all.

Taking into account both Agamben’s and Kristeva’s interpretations of excluded subjectivities, and their application to the fear and suffering experienced by the metamorphic protagonist of *Pig Tales*, I propose that the novel expresses the trauma of our coexistence with other species. Yet, considering Pig’s horror when confronted with the prospect of remaining an animal at the beginning of the novel, and her acceptance of her hybrid nature through the act of writing her autobiography, it is imperative that such carnivalesque narratives of horror and humour are told, for they allow us to negotiate our own identity and its abject components, one of them being the animal.

Both *Orlando* and *Pig Tales* offer us fantasies with a collective appeal, intensely engaging us, as readers, in impossible experiences in order for taboo issues to be

⁷⁸²Andrew Asibong, “Mulier Sacra: Marie Chauvet, Marie Darrieussecq and the Sexual Metamorphoses of ‘Bare Life,’” *French Cultural Studies* 14, no. 2 (2003): 169-177, 171.

properly expressed in society. The Woolfian metamorphosis at the beginning of the twentieth century articulates the fantasy of a man being naturally changed into a woman in order for gender equality to be both experienced and articulated, alongside fulfilling the wish for immortality. At the end of the same century, metamorphic stories demanded the use of comparably more shocking imagery and language for the same concerns to be addressed. Darrieussecq further engages with the pressing issue of how we define the human in opposition to, or coexisting with, the animal. *Pig Tales* suggests that the hierarchical way which society treats women is comparable to the way it treats animals. But it also suggests that both feminine humans and animals have special gifts that can be realised if, rather than opposing, we transcend the prescriptive discourse on women and animals. The vacillating metamorphoses of Pig and Orlando are not, then, escapes from a dystopic or conservative society, but occasions which inspire a creative, even terrifying, opportunity for a dialogue between different subjectivities.

Conclusion

All metamorphoses are stories of telling the self, Marina Warner has argued: “stories of metamorphosis,” she writes, “convey ideas about ourselves and enact processes that move and structure imagination.”⁷⁸³ They give a verbal form to subjectivity, and in my present enquiry, articulate our vision of twentieth-century subjectivity. As a rule, twentieth century stories of metamorphoses offer us a vision of subjectivity as metamorphic. This vision, I would add, is also subject to transformation, and is thus unstable. Not only are we faced with a notion of the subject as metamorphic, but this notion is metamorphosing too, reminding us of the fluidity of precisely those processes that structure the imagination of the self. Metamorphosis becomes then more than a way of telling the self: it becomes the process through which the metamorphosis of a vision of the self is told.

My exploration of the twentieth-century narratives of metamorphosis to articulate the ideas about subjectivity has had three steps. In Chapter One, I have examined the dynamics of metamorphosis as found in two pieces of early twentieth-century modernist short fiction, by Jewish-Czech-German Franz Kafka and Russian-American Vladimir Nabokov, respectively. These narrative engagements focus on individual subjectivity. As it may be expected from “rebellious” modernist narratives, “The Metamorphosis” and “The Aurelian” imagine the subject in conflict with the Symbolic Order, or the realm of the Symbolic father; in both stories, however, this conflict results in the subject’s sacrifice. These narratives posit subjectivity as abject, (either negatively or positively), insect-like, sacrificial, and disobedient. This subjectivity, although not apolitical, draws our attention specifically to the changes

⁷⁸³ Warner, 212.

affecting the subject as an individual, and an individual at odds with the society. In Chapter Two, I have brought together two magical realists who are writing in different time-periods and at different sides of the globe, but with similar concerns: the Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier and a Greek one, Vassilis Vassilikos. Interweaving their narratives with numerous types of metamorphosis, inspired by classical examples, community tales, and technological advancements, both writers conceptualise subjectivity as collective—and collectively transformed. Drawing upon the concept of postcolonial melancholia and the effects of transgenerational trauma, I examined these metamorphoses as an attempt to negotiate the loss of one's nation and home. "Nowadays, we all want to express something that is more collective," writes Vassilikos, in his epilogue of *...and dreams are dreams*, and I take this self-assessment earnestly, using it as the conceptual framework for the understanding of subjectivity in this chapter.⁷⁸⁴ The understanding that the subject is always both individual and deeply implicated in, even inscribed by, the social dynamics and processes also shapes British writer Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* and French writer Marie Darrieussecq's *Pig Tales*, which I analysed in Chapter Three. The two texts express this concern with continuity between the individual subject and the socium in different ways, but both are structured by the idea of the absence or loss of female voice in fiction. En route, Woolf's and Darrieussecq's texts forge new images of metamorphic subjectivity. In both cases, we are presented with a hybrid subjectivity that seems to uphold a dual subject-position in a radical way, as a subject of transforming sex (and immortality), and as an interspecies (human-animal) subjectivity. Woolf's story puts forward a narrative of sex transformation to promote a vision of the coexistence of male and female identities in an immortal subject. Her story, I argue, operates like a literary fantasy compensating

⁷⁸⁴ Vassilikos, *...and dreams are dreams*, 260.

for the precarious place of a woman in England in the beginning of the twentieth century. Writing at the end of the twentieth century, Darrieussecq, on the other hand, explores the societal inscriptions of the collectives of women and animals as abject “others” and their uncomfortable yet eventually triumphant merging.

Contemporary metamorphic stories embrace the idea of transformation and transformability; they all indicate that the self is metamorphic, and not stable, and that it is part of one’s (or one collective’s) integrity to recognise and embrace this condition. In the conclusion of Vassilikos’s story, “the transplant,” the narrator contrasts an insect’s transformation from the caterpillar into the butterfly, to that of humans. Evoking the story of Eros and Psyche, found in Apuleius, as well as the platonic concept of the soul/butterfly, he writes:

while the butterfly, in order to sprout wings, first goes through the chrysalis stage, the human being starts its journey on the earth with wings like a butterfly. As the years go by he turns into a worm, until the moment when he is reunited in the ground with his worm brothers and sisters.⁷⁸⁵

Kafka’s human-insect seems to confirm this story: the protagonist ends up in the ground literally, with little indication of his continued spiritual existence. Nabokov’s narrative, when seen from Vassilikos’s perspective, tells us the opposite is true: Pilgram’s journey starts from the ground and ends in the world of butterflies. Interestingly, the narrator in “the transplant” argues that love, as a transformational force, might change this metamorphic course for humans: “in my case, the exact opposite was happening. I was a butterfly soul. [...] thanks to her, I had changed.”⁷⁸⁶

⁷⁸⁵ Vassilikos, 236.

⁷⁸⁶ Vassilikos, 236.

In all these texts the activity of metamorphosing is intrinsically linked to subjectivity itself. Darrieussecq's eternally changing subject can provide an answer that may well apply to all the visions of subjectivity in this thesis: in order to survive, the subject, individual and collective alike, needs to metamorphose. Vassilikos expresses a similar aporia; what will happen if the subject stops transforming himself, if the traces of others are not incorporated (including through medical implants), or, simply, activated in us? If the contemporary subject stops engaging with the other, as expressed in our incorporation of an animal or a body organ which belongs to another human being, the subject will not survive. Rather than only being a discursive or visual articulation of our vision of subjectivity, metamorphosis is, thus, an essential component of the self/subject itself. It is an insight that is quintessential in the discipline that provides the framework for this thesis: psychoanalysis. This project has mapped out subjectivity through psychoanalytic discourse, and specifically through Freudian thought, in order to locate this metamorphic, hybrid self within twentieth-century accounts of the mind and its operative aspects, such as memory, dreams, fantasies, and creativity.

Towards its end, Darrieussecq's novel, *Pig Tales*, transforms itself from a naturalistic, often uncomfortably sardonic text into a lyric proposal that a female writer will find her voice by accepting her interspecies, metamorphic self. In fact, all the texts under discussion in this thesis scrutinise the position of the writer and the activity of writing as both metamorphic—transmuting the material from the external world into words—and transformative (sometimes with a political capacity to transform the world), in line with Freud's analysis of creative writing as day-dreaming. Unlike classical tales of metamorphosis, twentieth-century narratives use metamorphosis to suggest a more general (individually and socially) transformative power of

imagination. This capacity not only to describe a metamorphosis but also to incite it is vocalised particularly well by Vassilikos's narrator: when feeling an impulse to write, he says, "[he] could hear nothing but the other voice, that of [his] imagination, that wanted to transplant itself onto human flesh."⁷⁸⁷ Carpentier's, Vassilikos's, Woolf's, and Darrieussecq's texts, in particular, also suggest that, across the twentieth century, the metamorphic subject has been conceptualised as not only creative but also political—a writer capable of transforming private fantasies into public ones. In these metamorphic stories, a pig can communicate a politically informed identity, one that is alert to the society's ecological, feminist, and political concerns; a two-sex subject's experiences expose social issues such as imperialism and, women's right to vote and to own property; the metamorphoses occurring in the margins of the tales of both Carpentier and Vassilikos reflect on the fundamental societal changes, from the colonial to the postcolonial and the (new) national, and the ways in which the subject can or cannot navigate them.

Such dual operation of the stories of metamorphosis/featuring a metamorphosis continues throughout the twentieth century. The number of texts featuring metamorphosis in the twentieth century would be impossible to capture in a PhD thesis, though.⁷⁸⁸ Likewise, some aspects of the interaction between the concept of metamorphosis and the operation of literary texts could not have been covered extensively here, due to the thesis's focus on the question of subjectivity. For, it is not only the subject that transforms in these texts: in all the pieces of fiction discussed here metamorphosis affects the genre, the narrative methods, treatment of chronotopes, and

⁷⁸⁷ Vassilikos, 251.

⁷⁸⁸ Some examples are Eugene Ionesco, *Rhinoceros*, trans. Martin Crimp (London: Faber and Faber, 2007); Miguel Angel Asturias, *Men of Maize*, trans. Gerald Martin (London: Verso, 1988); Philip Roth, *The Breast* (London: Cape, 1973).

other aspects of the text. While these observations are relevant to all texts under discussion here and worth pursuing in their own right, for the purpose of the argument in this project, I have drawn upon them only to contextualise the image of subjectivity and demonstrate that the “activity” of metamorphosis “feeds” into other aspects of writing, beyond the representation of subjectivity. Another metamorphic aspect which this thesis has not explored in further detail is the idea of translation as transformation, a position some of the writers in this thesis—Vassilikos, for example—were keenly exploring. All these are points for further research.

In this thesis I have used the time-period of the twentieth century because it provides a fertile ground to explore a paradigmatic change in our understanding of subjectivity and the representation of it with the help of the theme of metamorphosis. But, in closure, it is worth posing the question: what happens to the trope/concept of metamorphosis in the twenty-first century? It seems that the theme of metamorphosis is very much alive in contemporary literature. Stories about metamorphic subjects are being written and widely translated; and they seem to engage the same set of issues as their twentieth century predecessors. Not many years after Vassilikos wrote his story of the tigress, an Indonesian writer named Eka Kurniawan, published a novel about a female white tiger occupying the body of a male villager, Margio. His 2004 novel, *Lelaki Harimau* (translated and published in English as *Man Tiger* in 2015) tells us a story wherein antithetical subjectivities merge into each other: the female mind enters the male one and the animal coexists with the human, all these in the same body.⁷⁸⁹ As Benedict Anderson observes, Kurniawan’s novel draws his inspirations from traditional oral tales found in Indonesia about male tigers as protectors of

⁷⁸⁹ Eka Kurniawan, *Lelaki Harimau*, (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2004). Eka Kurniawan, *Man Tiger*, trans. Labodalih Sembiring, intro. Benedict Anderson (London: Verso Books, 2015).

communities.⁷⁹⁰ Yet, this tale has been transformed in the hands of Kurniawan into a magical realist novel: the tiger enters a human, and, in an interesting twist reminiscent of both Woolf's playfulness with gender and Darrieussecq's graphic descriptions, the tiger is female, and carries all of the murderous instincts of a predatory jungle animal in her new body. Another contemporary writer, who has often been compared to Kafka,⁷⁹¹ provides us with an unusual tale of transformation and creativity: Yoko Tawada's novel *Etüden im Schnee* (*Memoirs of A Polar Bear*, 2014; trans. 2016) relates the story of three generations of anthropomorphic female polar bears.⁷⁹² The grandmother bear is also a writer which decides to record her life's experiences which are, though, familiarly human. Tawada's writer-animal subject ponders on issues like grammar and language, storytelling techniques, and her encounter with her alter-ego, a female circus tamer. The story gestures to an increasing interest in animals and creativity and their shared qualities with human subjectivity, hinting also at environmental changes which threaten not only our literary representations of metamorphosis, but also our metamorphic selves per se. In an imaginary interview, the granddaughter bear, which lives in a zoo in the twenty-first century Germany, states: "I thought we [bears] could survive all the changes in our environment if we'd only change our bodies and our thoughts. But I don't have an environment anymore."⁷⁹³ We never learn if the bear survives in the zoo, but we learn that the subject needs to be metamorphic in order to survive and that the subject is at the same time transforming—

⁷⁹⁰ Anderson, introduction to Eka Kurniawan, *Man Tiger*, xii.

⁷⁹¹ Tawada's story has been clearly influenced by Kafka's animals, such as Peter, the ape, and the mouse Josefina.

⁷⁹² Yoko Tawada, *Etüden im Schnee*, (Tuebingen: Konkursbuch Verlag Claudia Gehrke, 2014). Yoko Tawada, *Memoirs of A Polar Bear*, trans. Susan Bernofsky (New York: New Directions, 2016).

⁷⁹³ Tawada, *Memoirs of A Polar Bear*, 249.

a bear is also a writer, and a writer can temporarily be a historically informed polar bear.

Why does the trope of metamorphosis still appear as a dynamic template for contemporary literature? Perhaps it is because of the property of every story of metamorphosis to articulate (our sense of) the self. More to the point, though, we ourselves live in an era of consistent and continuous metamorphoses. Our sense of subjectivity is more malleable and vulnerable than ever as we are being reshaped through changes around us: changes relating to nation, religion, citizenship, gender, environment. If, metamorphic stories are, as Freud tells us about myths, disguised traces of group fantasies, then they will continue, as the stories of the self, to evoke enjoyment and pleasure and to illuminate who we are, but also to articulate some warnings about our destiny as a species, nascent thoughts that we are well advised to heed.⁷⁹⁴

⁷⁹⁴ Freud, "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming," 152.

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