LEARNING RESPONSIVITY/RESPONSIBILITY:
READING THE LITERATURE OF HISTORICAL WITNESS

by

Claudia Eppert

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the Degree of Doctorate of Philosophy
Graduate Programme in the Philosophy of Education
Department of Theory and Policy Studies in Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the
University of Toronto

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines what might constitute a responsive/responsible practice of reading and teaching contemporary North American literature that bears witness to historical events of trauma, violence, and persecution. This question is specifically posed through a critical study of three witness narratives: Joy Kogawa’s Obasan, Leslie Silko’s Ceremony, and Paule Marshall’s Praisesong for the Widow. The dissertation introduces the assertion that these narratives are constituted within the social form and framework of an ethical address to readers to learn from the protagonists’ remembrances and Bildung. Drawing predominantly upon contemporary psychoanalytic work and the writings of philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, it maintains that this ethical address requires readers to break with conventional epistemological and ontological frameworks for comprehending the testimonial suffering of others. It subsequently examines the implications of such a radical learning ethic for pedagogical reading theory and practice. This examination is further developed through a critique of educational/ethical presumptions underlying various literary and pedagogical readings of the above three witness narratives. The dissertation concludes with the consideration of how teachers might then productively introduce these narratives, as well as other witness literature, into high school, college, or university English or Social Studies/History classes.
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CHAPTER ONE

ETHICAL ADDRESS

To read a text... means bearing some burden of responsibility, believing oneself addressed, and thus answerable -- to the text itself, or to one's reading of it.

Adam Zachary Newton 1995, 45.

INTRODUCTION

In the last several decades in North America, there has been a marked rise in the availability and study of literature -- in the form of poetry, fiction, diary, memoir -- variously centred upon the negotiation of an historical past that has been beset with communal, collective, national acts of symbolic and physical violation, oppression, persecution. This literature can be considered indicative of a more general contemporary Western cultural and social preoccupation with the remembrance of traumatic historical events at the end of the twentieth century. Indeed, this preoccupation has become such that it is itself almost cliché to stress memory as a cultural obsession for Western societies (Huyssen 1994, 3).

Pierre Nora, a leading French historian in the study of collective memory, attributes much of this phenomenon to the rise of democratization and to an increasing global technological and media prowess. According to Nora, this century has seen the passing of societies that assured the conservation and transmission of collective values, and the end of ideologies that posited an unencumbered passage from past to future. Additionally, with the assistance of mass-media, contemporary historical perception has become increasingly fragmented. The consequence of these societal changes is the widespread sense that remembrance has become lost. The call for memory accrues thus from the apprehension of its
collapse. As Nora states, "we speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left" (1989, 7). On such terms, the evocation of memory appears melancholic -- a lament not for the past per se so much as for the traditions of remembrance through which the past was held in continuity with the present.

From within this perspective, however, the return to memory concurrently testifies to its struggle to come out from beneath the service and shadows of history to act against the grain of an objectifying and oppressive historical grammar. In the realization that the project of modernity had gone horribly wrong through the events of facism and the Holocaust, coupled with the violences of imperialism, remembrance has been hailed as a reparative act of vigilance against the methods of history and in honor of those who suffered its consequences. It has been called upon as an investment to be re-established and affirmed by those who have been excluded from dominant official histories or have experienced the disintegration of their communities as a result of modernity. The re-formation of the memories of these social communities has constituted the crucial vehicle by which they reconstructed or re-imagined their connection to their heritage. In this respect, the quest for memory has become the search for individual and collective histories. Nora observes the contemporary intensification of the relationship between biography and history -- in which the resurgence of social memories has instantiated a forceful personal agenda to examine and locate one's place within and among these heritages. As Michael S. Roth (1995) maintains, these individuals and social groups are undertaking the arduous task of writing and rewriting their own past in a manner that challenges dominant narratives about modernization and progress and re-establishes their links with tradition and with a memorial past with which they can live.

Much of the vast emerging genre of what I call, for reasons I will elaborate below, "literature of historical witness" is framed by this revisionary task. Within North America, this genre testifies to such historical moments of discrimination and persecution as the Middle Passage and its subsequent history of slavery, the mass deaths of Chinese-Americans and
Chinese-Canadians in the building of the transnational railroads, the internment and forced dispersal of Japanese-Canadians during and following the Second World War, the persecution of the Indigenous peoples of North America, North American anti-semitism, and symbolic and physical violences against women and refugees. Literature that bears witness to these historical events includes, among a wealth of others, novels such as Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* (1975) and *China Men* (1977), Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony* (1977) and *Almanac of the Dead* (1991), Paule Marshall’s *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983), Sherley Anne Williams’ *Dessa Rose* (1986), Joy Kogawa’s *Obasan* (1981), poetry such as Jeannette Armstrong’s *Breath Tracks* (1991), short story collections such as Terry Watada’s *Daruma Days* (1997), and children’s/young adult fiction such as Margaret Craven’s *I Heard the Owl Call My Name* (1973), Marlene Nourbese Philip’s *Harriet’s Daughter* (1988), Kogawa’s *Naomi’s Road* (1995) and Beatrice Culleton’s *April Raintree* (1985).

Within the terms of this literature, “bearing witness” encompasses not merely the evidentiary recounting of historical events but the more active revisionary accounting of and for them. While recounting denotes narration in detail, accounting is not mere description and recall but emphasizes a reckoning and reclamation. This accounting is undertaken through the intricate possibilities in provisions of (counter) memory. Palumbo-Liu asserts that “all notion of ethnic writing as revision of history point to this term [memory], for it is through memory alone, as the repository of things left out of history, that the ethnic subject can challenge history” (1996, 212). The scope of accountability in witness literature through memorial resources includes but is by no means limited to the following: 1) the narration of factual and counter-factual complexities of socio-historical moments of violation and violence instituted by events of colonialism, genocide, nationalism; 2) the provision of testimony set against the exclusionary dominant grammar and methods of official History as framed by the project of modernity; 3) the detailing of such legacies wrought by these historical events as the
disintegration of communities, family, friendships and the destruction of personal and social identities; 4) the detailing of the depth and extent of the physical and psychological infliction and effects of personal and social suffering undergone not only by those who lived this oppressive past but also by subsequent generations; 5) the undertaking of the arduous task of working through the remnants of the past and of setting/settling the grounds for an affirmative re-definition of individual, familial, communal, and collective identities; and 6) the ongoing challenging not only of antiquated but also contemporary hegemonic framings of what might designate a North American national or multicultural historical consciousness. Individual texts of historical witness might thus attempt any one or more of these tasks of memorial accountability.

Within recent years, works of this genre have become a staple of English literature and Cultural Studies curricula in North American schools, colleges, and universities. Yet, while literary criticism on these texts has become increasingly vast, material that concentratedly examines the pedagogical issues inherent to reading, studying, and teaching these texts is only beginning to emerge. A more extensive need exists, consequently, for scholarly attention to be given to concerns of pedagogy. This is so because of the myriad and complex problems that attend the reading and teaching of this particular genre of literature, and because of the multiple pedagogical claims that are nevertheless continually asserted for its reading and teaching.

With respect to the former, because the literature of witness references historical moments of suffering, oppression, and persecution, reading and learning from it is by no means straightforward. David B. Morris is not off the mark when, in response to the question,

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2 See, for example, Graham, Pinealt-Burke, and White Davis' edited collection Teaching African American Literature: Theory and Practice (1998); McKay's and Earle's Approaches to Teaching the Novels of Toni Morrison (1997); Matino and Peck's Teaching American Ethnic Literatures (1996); Carey-Webb's and Stephen Benz' Teaching and Testimony (1996).
"What can the study of literature tell us or teach us about suffering?" he pronounces that this is an "impossible question, a sinkhole, a yawning chasm that dissertation directors warn against" (1997, 25). The question opens up fundamental concerns about knowledge, about the very (im)possibility of the communicability and comprehensibility of historical pain and violation through the limiting cultural and linguistic resources of different discourse communities (Spelman 1997). Moreover, literature that bears witness to instances of extreme suffering proves to be difficult reading in another sense as well. It often provokes an unpredictable complex of emotional dynamics in individuals who engage it -- combinations and variations of abjection, anger, guilt, shame, denial, fear, worry, sympathy, empathy, and voyeuristic pleasure. These responses, furthermore, are themselves set within and against prevailing cultural discourses of emotion. Finally, because the literature of witness is often situated within the minutiae of historical events and draws upon the cultural traditions, myths, legends, and narrative structures of different ethnic heritages, reading it not only demands familiarity with these events and traditions but also threatens to become reduced to the exoticization or appropriation of its "otherness." Matino and Peck thus assert that reading American ethnic literature becomes akin to processes of translation in which readers are faced with the challenge of making the experiences to which it refers comprehensible without erasing differences (13).

Although the challenges posed in the engagement with the literature of historical witness are significant and have as yet received little scholarly attention, the claims made within literary and educational circles for its reading are nevertheless extensive and, at times, grandiose. It is not simply that this literature can make history "come alive" but that, in doing so, it has transformative possibilities. Most fundamentally, I would argue, this literature has been attributed with being able to forge and sustain a pedagogical commitment in and from its readers. Broadly conceived, commitment points to a participation that is not partial but is implicated in a sense of being deeply impelled to a particular performative over a sustained period of time. It emphasizes depth and duration in the form of intellectual, emotional,
physical, and spiritual involvement; and it gestures toward the possibility of a continued working through of the complexities of an engagement. The pedagogical promise of such commitment has been phrased within the terms not only of producing better reading practices but also better modes of social interaction (LaCapra 1994, 222). Reading the literature of historical witness promises to lead to the combatting of racism, anti-semitism, sexism, and to the more encompassing overturing of socio-historical grammars of violence. Carey-Webb more comprehensively maintains that, in making available the suffering of others, the reading of the “testimonial literature of the oppressed,” can lead to “the aspiration of human continuity, the establishment of justice, and the making of the future” (7).

How precisely these pedagogical commitments can become fulfilled in the reading of the literature of historical witness, however, remains an open question, particularly in the face of the difficulties reading this literature incurs. What the substantive content of this literature and the complex of difficult emotions it elicits demands is not more acclaim but rather pointed questions as to not only the intricate specificities of reading practice but also the fuller character of a “just” practice of reading: a reading, in other words, that reads the story of another in a manner that is respectfully mindful of the singularity and difference of both that story and that place of alterity from which it issues. It is against the background of these questions, then, that I locate the problematics and objectives of this dissertation. Indeed, I maintain that only from the detailing of such a practice, and from the examination of how the actualities of reading practice might meet and fail this ethics, can one begin to ascertain the larger pedagogical commitment and promise in reading the literature of historical witness.

THE CLAIMS OF ADDRESS

Rather than begin this dissertation in response to the question of what reading the literature of historical witness can accomplish, I want to begin to address the above concerns by turning to the question of what, if anything, this literature asks of readers. In other words,
in calling this literature one of “historical witness,” I want more specifically to put forth what I believe to be a text-reader relationship claimed by this genre that distinguishes it from more non-realist literature or from more objective historical documentation. In its detailed and intimate witnessing and accounting of and for concrete counter-historical moments of real and imagined suffering, violation, violence, and death, I argue that this literature constitutes itself within the social form and framework of a radical pedagogical and ethical address to readers.3

Address, as noun and transitive verb, signals both site and direction. It directs its addressees to attend to its call and invokes a personal and social site of attendance and answerability. The “claim” of address both staked and wielded by the literature of historical witness, I believe, calls upon readers to constitute their reading practices in and through the moment of being addressed. I argue that what this means, more specifically, is that this literature’s call dictates that reading become a formative pedagogical practice engaged in a learning of what it means to attend/be answerable to this literature and the alterity from which it issues. On such terms, the express purpose of this literature is not the idle captivation of its audience. Nor is it simply the learning about the historical referents this literature indexes. Rather, the address of this genre binds author, text, and readers in a learning relation that has each implicated in a learning of the terms of an ethical address. The over-riding question becomes one of: “what encompasses (my) (our) answerability to the (remembrance of the) past

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3 What I am calling the “literature of historical witness” has variously been called “ethnic literature,” “testimonial literature,” and “trauma literature.” I deploy the term of witness literature for several reasons. First, I want to specifically emphasize those texts that engage the subject of traumatic history and the working through of the past through the exigencies of memory. Secondly, I also want, among other things, to distinguish it from what is more commonly called “testimonial literature” that emphasizes first-person accounts. I want to broaden the notion of witness to include that literature by those, such as Toni Morrison, who write about historical trauma, such as slavery, while not necessarily having personally experienced it. Third, I want to distinguish witness literature from what is increasingly being called “trauma literature” (see Tal 1996 and Granofsky 1995). I do this because I want to emphasize the relationship between text and reader as a relationship of address which involves the reader in acts of bearing witness to the text and to its historical referents. Moreover, as Chapter Five will do, I want to trouble the notion of any correspondential relationship of trauma between the text and its reader.
and to historical and contemporary others?” In this respect, to the extent that this literature is accountable to and for the performativity of its own historical witness, it concurrently addresses readers to learn of and from the dynamics of their own transactional witnessing practice.

LEARNING ETHICS

This dissertation proposes to trace and elaborate the particular character of this address in order to learn the terms of readerly attendance and answerability as manifested explicitly and implicitly within different literary texts of historical witness. At the same time, however, by referencing the philosophical writings of Emmanuel Levinas and various contemporary psychoanalytic work, I frame this examination within a broader designation of what might encompass an ethics of reading or, what I prefer to call -- for the purposes of this dissertation - - a radical learning ethic.

I maintain that this radical learning ethic issues from an interventionist critique of the exclusionary premises and dictates of conventional epistemology and ontology. It argues that the logocentric paradigm that has defined learning as maieutics -- as the transmission of ready-made information through processes of recollection, memorization, and repetition is insufficient from both a pedagogical and ethical standpoint. This is so because, within this learning paradigm, what counts as knowledge is always decided upon beforehand: knowledge must always pass through an authorizing evidence-checkpoint that thematizes and, in so doing, legitimates it (Felman 1987, Levinas 1969). On such epistemological grounds, learning can never encompass more than simply reproduction and exclusion. Yet, the condition of the real structure of learning, as Shoshana Felman and Emmanuel Levinas differently emphasize, is not ready-made knowledge but rather ignorance.4 Both maintain that learning issues from a radical

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4 In psychoanalytic inquiry, ignorance constitutes the product of processes of repression. Felman asserts that a radical psychoanalytically-inflected pedagogy recognizes “ignorance” as the radical condition of the very structure of knowledge; much as the unconscious -- a knowledge that escapes intentionality, meaning, and recognition -- conditions consciousness. Ignorance,
exteriority (an alterity) that subjects the learner to an interminable excess of knowledge. This excess makes learning encumbrant upon an encounter of "surprise." Learning constitutes the learning of what is not yet known and has not already been thematized or authorized. According to Felman, the "true Other is the other who gives the answer one does not expect. Coming from the Other, knowledge is, by definition, that which comes as a surprise, that which is constitutively the return of a difference" (1987, 82-3). Levinas perceives radical learning as the "traumatism of astonishment... the experience of something absolutely foreign" (1969, 73). While, as this dissertation will elaborate, Felman and Levinas significantly differ in their conceptualization of what this radical "Other" learning and its (readerly/pedagogical) consequences constitute, they draw two similar conclusions. Their perspectives not only substantively reconfigure the learner-teacher relation insofar as the teacher becomes the "Other" who disrupts the (conventional) knowing subject, but, more significantly, they re-define teaching as itself not more than a practice of learning, as the teaching of how the learner learns (Handelman 1996, 227). Learning thus is by no means idle transmission but rather fundamentally "the creation of a new condition of knowledge, the creation of an original learning disposition" (Felman 1987, 80-1). The interminable end of learning is the very condition that makes learning possible.

For Levinas, this learning is ethics: learning disrupts the entire project of epistemology with the more dire condition of ethics; that is, the condition of sociality (Cohen 1986, 5). The learning grasped in the learning relation -- the learning condition that makes learning possible -- is the learning subject's relation to the Other (Handelman 1996, 227). This relation to the Other is always a relation with the irreducible alterity of another person, an alterity that surpasses understanding and that renders the subject interminably answerable (Cohen 1987, 15). The other person (always as ethical other) calls/commands the learner to this inalienable

therefore, is not simply a lack -- a passive state of absence -- but the active exclusion of knowledge from consciousness. The subject of this knowledge that is not in possession of itself thus refuses to acknowledge his or her own implication in this knowledge (79).
answerability. The command is *a priori*. It comes from the other person before the exigencies of language, thought, respect, receptivity, tradition and without the other person "doing anything." The traumatism of astonishment is the awakening to this command, an awakening that happens in what Levinas calls the "face-to-face" encounter with the Other.

The answerability demanded from the learner in the face-to-face encounter is one of an inexhaustible responsibility/responsivity not *to* but *for* the other. Part of what this means, by way of introduction, is that the learning of the learner’s interminable answerability to the Other shatters the narcissistic ontological foundations of the subject. Exposure to the face of the Other disturbs, pierces, ruptures, interrupts, and shames the learner from the abilities which make the knowing and being of the separate and narcissistic subject continuous and ultimately complacent (Cohen 1986, 7). As Handelman asserts, “facing thus disrupts the free, autonomous knowing self that through its reasoning and consciousness thinks it can construct the world out *of* itself, or know the world *from* itself” (1996, 226). A radical learning ethic on these terms, therefore, is one which encompasses the abdication of the learner’s position of centrality in servile responsibility/responsivity for others. The challenge that proceeds from this Levinasian ethics, and which orients this dissertation, is the learning of what more specifically it means to become an answerable, a responsible/responsive (reading/learning) subject, and how reading the literature of historical witness particularly contributes toward the working through and aspiration toward the realization of such an ethics.

**LITERARY KNOWLEDGE**

While Levinas presents his learning ethics primarily against the background of the reading of Rabbinic texts, Susan Handelman questions what it might mean specifically to perceive *literary* texts as teachings in the Levinasian sense: "What does it mean to say a text ‘teaches us something’? Can the idea of the ‘literary’ incorporate the notion of ‘teaching’? Does
a text 'teach' us how to teach it?" (1996, 222). Handelman deploys Felman's psychoanalytic notion of “literary knowledge” to illustrate the inherent instructive potential of literary texts.

According to Felman, literature can surprise and challenge rather than simply “inform” because, unlike philosophical or historical discourse, it does not presume mastery over its own meaning. Like dreams, literature is not authoritative but rather a knowledge not-in-possession of itself (1986, 92). Moreover, Handelman points out how, in Jewish mystical tradition of Kabbalah, learning requires that the teacher contract or condense what is being learned so that the student is not overwhelmed and confused by its complexity but rather through intense study can come to grasp its original depth and detail. Only by virtue of the condensation, in other words, can the idea be transmitted to and eventually unfolded by the student. The deepest knowledge therefore, she asserts, can only be conveyed indirectly -- through condensation, story, parable. Handelman thus suggests that literature embodies this kind of instructive, poetic mode of self-contraction.

Through indirection -- through contraction, condensation, concealment -- literature teaches what it itself does not know the meaning of. Handelman also asserts, however, that in the Kabbalistic model the purpose of this self-contraction is to give birth to the other" (233). In other words, literature more fundamentally opens up a creative space for radical learning; that is, the creation of an original learning disposition which issues from and is the consequence of a generative relation with an unthematizable and infinitely instructive Other. On such ethical terms, as Handelman notes, literary knowledge constitutes not a paralytic aporia but a positive pedagogy (1996, 234).

**BILDUNGSROMAN**

My dissertation, therefore, seeks to examine how the literature of historical witness opens up possibilities for radical learning. Michael Fischer maintains that within contemporary North American ethnic writing “the figure of the ethnic (often called marginal, stranger, or
insider-outsider) is not a figure of partial assimilation (child-learner), but a figure of learning, of access to further realms of meaning” (1994, 88). How might the ethnic figure in the literature of historical witness specifically instruct learners? How might this literature implicate learners in a practice of reading that might reflect, in Levinasian terms, an openness to the other) rather than an egoistic act of self-expansion and claim to mastery? My argument, then, turns on the assertion that this literature addresses readers to learn from it in the aspiration to the interminable ethical ends I have introduced. My development of this argument proceeds in the context of an explicit examination of particular texts of witness, literary-critical and pedagogical approaches to reading and teaching of these texts, and a brief discussion of the ways in which students in a college English class have taken up certain of these texts.

Beyond limiting my examination to those texts that are most commonly taught in English and Cultural Studies classrooms but that as yet have not received much pedagogical theorizing, I lodge my discussion in what might be called a dominant subset of the genre the literature of historical witness; namely, the contemporary North American Bildungsroman of historical witness. This narrative subset, I observe, embeds itself explicitly within the terms of an address to the reader, not simply to learn what is consciously and unconsciously being conveyed but to do so through the enactment of a performative learning relation. In other words, this generic subset proceeds precisely through a pedagogical structure that teaches, exercises, or “stages” a learning.

Handelman stresses the importance of the vocabulary of “staging” in the development of a learning ethic. The word denotes not only a dramatization but also a period, step, or passing through in a progress, activity, or development. Against this resonance, staging stresses the performative as opposed to mimetic dimensions of learning: “when something is staged it is put in motion, re-created, transformed” (1996, 231). Handelman points to psychoanalytic practice as the staging of the patient’s unconscious for purposes of the performative playing out of and working through of conflict. On these psychoanalytic terms,
healing is accomplished through the transferential projection of the patient's unconscious conflicts onto the analyst. The re-enactment or staging of these conflicts in the therapeutic scene enables them to be brought to light, interpreted, and perhaps resolved. Handelman maintains that within this framework not only is what is learned “staged” but also learning between teacher and student itself is that which can be staged (1996, 231).

Before specifying how this generic subset of witness literature thus stages a learning, I want to introduce and supplement Handelman’s idiomatic pedagogy with what anthropologist Unnu Wikan (1991) describes, following philosophers Donald Davidson and Richard Rorty, as the practice of “passing theories.” She deploys this concept in the context of asking the question “[I]magine that our task was to meet a person from a different culture. How could we proceed?” (468). Specifically, she examines this concept in her efforts to meet and understand Bhutanese people and culture. Broadly presented, “passing theories” describes a person’s continual process of “guesswork” with respect to assessing and interpreting the meanings of another’s gestures, behaviours, actions. These hypotheses and interpretations are “passing” because they are constantly re-evaluated, shed or revised not simply as one acquires knowledge and insight but more pointedly to accommodate differences, registered as slippages in the form of “mumbles, stumbles, malapropisms, metaphors” (468). This practice thus similarly “stages” a learning in the sense of a transformational moving through. What is particularly interesting about this concept is that passing theories are intended to anticipate and foreclose the surprising return of a difference. Wikan reveals how, as a languageless person in Bhutan faced with the task of communicating with villagers, she formed “a passing theory about what kinds of humans they were so as not to be taken by surprise, and so as to get them to accept, and preferably to like, me” (468). Wikan creates a passing theory in order to prevent surprise and, as she later stresses, in order to establish the grounds for commonality and continuity, but the returning interruptions of difference consistently reveal the failures of this theory and the need for an alternate or revised one. As will be subsequently elaborated, the pedagogy implicit in this
concept significantly differs from Levinas’ notion of learning to the extent that it remains ethnographically invested in practices of thematization and aspirations of mastery in effect unopen to surprise. For present purposes, however, I refer to Wikan to underscore in ways only implicit in Handelman the notion of staged learning as an inexhaustible process of interruption: of learning, unlearning, re-learning.

Britzman maintains that traditional equations of education with progressive assertions of Bildung have often elided the centrality of processes of unlearning to learning. She maintains that if education is a Bildungsroman, “a building of selves and culture, a bringing up of education and life, and a battling between public personae and singular desires, it is not necessarily the heroic story of progress” (51). In its positivist dreams of mastery, progress demands the forgetting of the conflict it requires and must not allow itself to be interrupted or haunted by the past and its failures. She suggests that contemporary education needs a radical understanding of Bildung as “risky business.” For Britzman, the risk of Bildung is the opening up of itself to stories and interferences of the anxieties of the inconsolable. This dissertation follows Britzman in her revision rather than dismissal of the concept of Bildung. As Misgeld and Nicholson affirm, “we still need a form of education -- Bildung -- which does not separate learning from its application to oneself... but encourages a person’s development through knowledge, learning as a form of self-encounter and encounter with what is other and different” (1992, xi).

The generic subset of the literature of historical witness stage learnings within their own literary worlds that are accommodated more by Britzman’s vigorous reconfigurations of Bildungsroman than by this word’s traditional denotations. The protagonists of neo-narratives such as Joy Kogawa’s Obasan, Leslie Silko’s Ceremony, and Paule Marshall’s Praisesong for the Widow (to cite only those texts I will be discussing) find themselves variously addressed by an inconsolable past that demands a just recollection. Each protagonist is taken on an educative journey not only to learn about this past but to learn how she or he is deeply
implicated in what is learned as well as in the processes and failures through which this learning proceeds. The three narratives I examine stage the protagonist as figure of learning by indeed (to gesture back to Fischer here) introducing him or her metaphorically as child, naive in her or his conscious or unconscious severance with an historical past of oppression and persecution that is too difficult to bear. Each narrative follows the protagonist as he or she learns and matures through a series of events, recollections, and story-tellings.

What principally distinguishes this contemporary Bildungsroman from its classical predecessors is that the formative road travelled by the learning protagonist is headed back in time toward a series of experiential confrontations with a traumatic past that she or he did or did not personally live. The vehicle of difficult learning thus is remembrance, or what Toni Morrison more accurately calls in her novel Beloved, "re-memory," an unforgettable yet uninterpretable memory that is always "there for you, waiting for you" (36). That the protagonist's "education" proceeds pivotally through a narrative (re-)staging of traumatic remembrance reverses the traditional Bildungsroman format in which self-consciousness is constituted through the Erfahrung (experience) of an unanticipated series of adventures. In those narratives of historical witness in which the protagonist participates in a "re-living" of his or her traumatic memories, the path travelled is known in advance, if repressed. What remains unanticipated by these characters, however, is the series of events or experiences that initiate them into a resolute working through of these memories, as well as whether and how their remembrance will initiate a marked transformation in their complex lives.

Frequently, this remembrance-learning proceeds through a teaching relation in which the protagonist confronts his or her relationship with the past through the help of an unorthodox mentor -- be that teacher a demonic ghost as in Beloved, two aunts, one a "word-warrior," the other all but mute, as in Obasan, or "medicine men" such as in Ceremony or Praisesong. It is these mentors who call the protagonists to a practice of recollection and reclamation. Their teaching in all cases proceeds through the indirection of "literary
knowledge.” Moreover, the manner of learning by the learner similarly challenges notions of education extrapolated within the conservative epistemological paradigms of Bildung. It often proceeds less through cognitive language or learning than through processes equivalent to the dreaming and transferential relations of psychoanalytic encounters. Indeed, it is these poetic processes that enable the slow and painful stagings of past traumas.

In this respect, this generic subset follows much the same pattern laid out by the genre Ronald Gronofsky examines in his work The Trauma Novel (1995). He illustrates how many of the characters in his imaginative novels similarly come to terms with their traumas: “in the trauma novel, we see a portrayal of the quest for identity in the face of a brutal assault on the sense of self. The novelist often depicts the quest by what I call the structure of ‘trauma response,’ which may be broken down into three interdependent ‘stages’: ‘fragmentation’, ‘regression,’ and ‘reunification’” (18). For Gronofsky, these stages of trauma response are not literal but symbolic enactments -- a symbolic re-living of the trauma itself is often a necessary precursor to the successful response to it. After a painful period of psychic fragmentation, the individual may begin to see a new pattern in things which “adumbrates a transformation -- the absorption of the agony of the trauma into an integrated personhood” (Granofsky, 19).

The narratives of historical witness I examine, insofar as they work through traumatic memories of a repressed past as a means of re-claiming and assigning significance, have often been called narratives that conjoin remembrance and learning with healing, hope, and the return of voice. Indeed, the memorial telling/learning of the story, as Maxine Hong Kingston’s “talk-story” or Silko’s ceremonial “thought-woman” becomes the mark of hope. In this respect, these Bildungsromanen also work in and against the tradition of the Künstlerroman (“artist-novel”), which details the growth of the teller/artist into a stage of maturity that signals the recognition of the protagonist’s artistic destiny. Hence, for example, by the end of Praisesong, Marshall’s protagonist, Avey Johnson, chooses to become a dancer and teacher. Where these novels diverge from the more traditional Künstlerroman is that the creative learning most often
happens through, as will be elaborated upon in a moment, a radical practice of "witness," a learning and telling of that which is impossible to tell.

As Fischer observes, the contemporary re-invention of the inter-relation of remembrance, learning, and redemption is not new. The Pythagorean notion of recollection that fascinated Plato also held that "only through memory, honed by constant exercise and effort, could one purge the sins of past lives, purify the soul, ascend and escape from oblivious repetitions" (1986, 197). American ethnic autobiography, he argues, is similarly fueled not merely with the anxieties of industrial homogenization and of the loss of a generative ethical vision. He asserts that this literature reflects and beckons "a (re-)invention and discovery of vision, both ethical and future oriented. Whereas the search for coherence is grounded in a connection to the past, the meaning abstracted from the past, an important criterion of coherence, is an ethic workable for the future" (1986, 196).

Fischer's claim, however, still leaves us not simply with the problems of the specificities of this ethical vision as it is imagined, played out, complicated, and realized in particular narrative of historical witness but also what these stagings might teach readers about their own reading practices and modes of social interaction. In this dissertation, I argue that, in each of the three narratives, the protagonist's remembrance-learning becomes the vehicle for a more radical practice of "witness-learning" for both the protagonist and the reader. The concept of witness-learning issues from the realization that, as David Carroll maintains, "[s]imply remembering the past... is not itself a guarantee that the worst forms of injustice and devastation of the past will not be repeated in some form or others.... Memory in itself guarantees nothing; it all depends on what kind of memory and how, within memory, one goes about combating... injustice (1990, ix). Witness-learning is a memorial practice that I conceptualize as emanating from and directed toward a radical learning ethic that, as already stated, breaks with traditions of epistemology and ontology. In illustrating how each character participates in a practice of "witness-learning" I read these narratives against the grain of
several contemporary readings (and perhaps, in some respects, against the authors’ own view) that argue for the protagonists maturation into an “intergrated personhood.” I do not contest this claim: rather, I re-conceptualize how this claim might be understood from a Levinasian and a psychoanalytically informed learning ethics. These readings then become the ground for the consideration of the question of how readers are answerable to this witness-learning. How might the “facing” of this literature challenge readers/learners in examining the sources of their own incomprehension and their own implications in exclusionary practices? How might it disturb their being at “home” with themselves? How might it beckon learners’ transformation and re-orientation in the newness of learning? By way of introduction into the theoretical substance of this dissertation, what this learning ethic points toward is the learning of how to “read for alterity” (Britzman 1998, 92); that is, how to read without reproducing and reinscribing the other within forms of violence, without reading the pain and suffering of the other as entertainment or as titillation, without reducing the other to versions of the self, and without turning away from the future-oriented commitments witnessing this literature demands from its readers.

**SCHEMATIC STRUCTURE OF THIS THESIS**

The predominant foci now outlined, the next chapter examines the learning ethic manifest in Joy Kogawa’s novel *Obasan* as read through and against a Levinasian lens, and with reference to psychoanalysis. The writings of Levinas, broadly in the vein of postmodern and postcolonial thought, critique a tradition of Western philosophy and socio-political practice that emphasizes the primacy of ontology. At the same time, his works are increasingly referenced to fill the gap left by postmodernism with respect to the question of ethics (Bauman 1993, 84; Nealon 1997, 131). And, while they are further specifically deployed in the context of the consideration of what it might mean to bear ethical witness to the paradigmatically traumatic events of the Holocaust (as they themselves attempt an answerability to these events),
the possibilities Levinas’ work affords for the reading and teaching of “multicultural” literature of historical witness is as yet untapped. This reading of Obasan sets the stage for a more considered view (in subsequent chapters) of what is entailed in reading within a radical learning perspective informed by Levinas’ ethical approach. Furthermore, in this chapter, I discuss certain of the questions raised by a college class regarding certain events in Obasan. The concern I introduce here is whether and to what extent these questions complicate a pedagogy of radical reading/learning.

Chapter Three examines the complexities of reader identification with the remembrance-learning staged in the Bildungsroman genre, specifically Leslie Silko’s Ceremony. The format of the Bildungsroman in which the protagonist undergoes a journey of learning and maturation often invites a pedagogical perception of the relationship between character and reader as one that is predicated upon a joint learning, in which the character’s learning is also that of the reader’s (indeed, this relationship is one I claim for Obasan in my reading of this text). The structure of Ceremony, even more so than Obasan, encourages a “participatory” learning on the part of the reader. Yet, the ethical implications of this participatory process, as already suggested above, are problematic. A relationality of joint-learning not only might presume a homogeneous reading audience but also might threaten the foreclosure of the alterity of (and within) the text, the protagonist, and the historical events narrative indexes. This is so particularly to the extent that participation is defined on terms of readerly “identification” with the main character. To elaborate upon this criticism, I refer to Robert Eaglestone’s critique of Martha Nussbaum’s liberal humanist ethics of reading. Eaglestone maintains that Nussbaum’s ethic of straightforward cognitive and emotional identification contradicts the idea that moral learning takes place through “surprise” (49). Against the background of a Levinasian understanding, Eaglestone stresses that the principle of surprise inherently requires the return of a difference not made possible through the exigencies of identification (50). My chapter
closes with an introductory discussion of an alternate notion of participation that issues from a “reading for alterity.”

Chapter Four extends this discussion by detailing more extensively the limits of a joint-learning. More specifically, I redeploy the concept of identification in the context of the question of what it means to be “home.” To this extent, my predominant concern is with a pervasive notion of Bildung as one that binds learning with an Odyssean “homecoming.” I critique this view in the specific context of Paule Marshall’s Praisesong for the Widow. This chapter seeks to introduce a rift between the remembrance-learning staged by the character and the learning of the reader. This difference becomes most apparent in the healing resolutions this novel enacts. My chapter will examine Eaglestone’s criticisms in greater detail, specifically by drawing upon his Levinasian inflected notion of “interruptive interpretation” in discussion of the possibilities it affords for contrapuntal readings of these narratives of historical witness as reflexively interrupting their own learning and their reading for the stagings of differential returns.

The final two chapters shift somewhat to a more explicit discussion of problems that attend the teaching of these narratives. Fundamental to the fifth chapter is the realization that the learning ethic in the world of the Bildungsroman is symbolically staged. From this basis, I examine the increasingly common pedagogical presumption that learning takes place through a crisis. Felman asserts that “testimonial teaching fosters the capacity to witness something that may be surprising, cognitively dissonant. The surprise cannot be authentic without that crisis, which has to break and to transvaluate previous categories frames of reference” (1992, 53). Following Kali Tal, my concern is when the crisis that surprise elicits in learners is reconfigured in academic literature (according to Kal, by Felman herself in her 1992 Testimony book) as one that is “traumatic” for readers, in the sense that they symbolically and physically “re-live” the traumatic memories undergone by the story-teller. After elaborating, I address the stakes this “existential re-living” poses for pedagogical practice. I then juxtapose
Felman's notion of crisis with Levinas' view of "traumatism of astonishment," examining how each learning ethic is variably responsive to the claims of answerability with respect to witness literature. Against this background, I trace a crisis of learning that happened to me in my "personal" reading of Obasan and draw certain pedagogical conclusions based upon the insights I obtained from this learning moment.

Finally, the concluding chapter studies how particular teaching guides do or do not reflect aspects of the learning ethic I lay out in this dissertation. I focus predominantly on two guides that offer specific questions teachers might ask students of Obasan. In this context, I consider not only the substance of these questions but, more theoretically, the orientation of the question in general and its "interruptive" potential. I define what I mean by "orientation" by drawing upon Levinas' concept of proximity. The thesis concludes with a brief introductory discussion of what I call "ap/proximal questions" with respect to Obasan and the literature of historical witness more generally. I consider these pedagogical questions to be ones directed toward the instantiation of radical learning ethic without, at the same time, claiming ownership of such an ethic.
CHAPTER TWO

LEARNING IN AND FROM JOY KOGAWA’S OBASAN

Perhaps the most important thing that literature has to tell us about suffering concerns the need for respect in the face of an experience that always holds back part of its truth, inaccessible and alien.

Morris 1997, 42.

INTRODUCTION

In the first chapter to this dissertation, I introduced my claim that the literature of historical witness constitutes itself within the social form and framework of an address to its readers. This address calls readers to participate in a radical learning that implicates them in a practice of accountability and answerability to this literature and to their own reading practices. I maintained that the Bildungsroman generic subset of this literature “stages” a particular (though also variable) learning ethic of just recollection with the intent of teaching its readers. In this second chapter, I consider the character of this learning ethic more fully as I find it performed within Joy Kogawa’s Obasan (1981), a novel dealing with the internment, forced relocation and dispersal of Japanese-Canadians during and immediately after the Second World War. I begin this examination by distinguishing between two interrelated dynamics of learning -- the learning about and learning from an experience, event, or text. In her elaboration of these two psychodynamics, Britzman maintains that “whereas learning about an event or experience focuses upon the acquisition of qualities, attributes, and facts, so that it presupposes

1 The distinction between learning about and learning from originates with Sigmund Freud. See his “On the Teaching of Psycho-Analysis in Universities” (1919).
a distance (or, one might even say, a detachment) between the learner and what is to be learned, learning from an event or experience is of a different order, that of insight" (1998, 117). She asserts that because the insight concerns “the acknowledgment of discontinuity from the persistence of the status quo,” it requires the learner’s “attachment to, and implication in, knowledge” (117). I seek to elaborate upon this distinction by asking: what is the learning about and learning from that Obasan stages? To address this question, first through a considered reading of the novel and then through a discussion of how the text more specifically addresses and implicates its readers. I continue to draw upon the philosophical thought of Levinas, as well as make reference to aspects of psychoanalysis.

More specifically, what I attempt to show in my reading of Obasan is that while the learning about that it stages devolves upon an informational teaching of the physical and symbolic historical violences directed against Japanese-Canadians, its learning from requires the learning of the specificities of a radical ethics of respect and responsibility for the suffering of historical and present others. I maintain that a critical dimension of this learning ethics is the commitment to attend to the suffering of the other through an interminable attention to the alterity of the Levinasian “saying,” as this alterity breathes in and through the “said” of pedagogical, socio-historical, and political discourse.2

LEVINAS’ “SAID” AND “SAYING”

The concepts of the “said” and the “saying” are introduced in Levinas’ text Otherwise than Being (1991), a text which, in many ways, constitutes a re-writing of his earlier work Totality and Infinity (1969) and is the result of his reading of Jacques Derrida’s essay

2 By referencing the thought of Levinas, I am somewhat moving away from solely psychoanalytic determinations of “learning from.” Little has been written on the implications of Levinas’ writings for psychoanalysis. For some initial discussion along these lines, see Robert Bernasconi’s and David Wood’s edited book The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other (1988), and Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley’s edited collection Re-Reading Levinas (1991).
"Writing and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas" (1978). This 1991 text attempts an understanding of ethics in terms of language. It seeks to determine language's ontological structures and the possibilities for escaping and/or subverting these. Levinas departs from his previous position in which he held that the ethical is able "to bypass language as representation" to maintain that language is the condition for ethics, is the site of its manifestation and enactment (Eaglestone, 142).

For Levinas, language is made up of the le dire (the "saying") and le dit (the "said"). It is the "saying" that operates as the condition or mode of the ethical. The "saying" is the ethical context of our social world prior to our defining entry into it: it is the "originary" moment/site where the ethical occurs. What this "saying" constitutes and communicates is a publicness or openness to the alterity of others: it is "the commitment of an approach, the one for the other. the very signifyingness of signification" (Levinas 1991, 5). For Levinas, the "saying" is not a language but is rather the "non-thematizable ethical residue of language that escapes comprehension within the conceptual framing of thought" (Critchley 1992, 24). It cannot, therefore, be defined, described, delimited, and does not communicate information or knowledge per se. Yet, it commands attention; it is "understanding and listening.... It is an obedience in the midst of will" (Levinas 1991, 36). The "saying" shows its subjects to be inextricably and inexhaustibly bound up with others and unable to do otherwise than be answerable and accountable to others on terms that fracture the essences of things. What the "saying" thus accomplishes is the subversion of ontological understanding and any essentializing self-composition. Eaglestone asserts that "[t]he saying breaks up identity and opens to the other because it is in the saying that the finite and limiting strictures of being, of essence, or identity standing alone, are overcome. The saying overcomes the closure of identity because it comes before identity" (143). Because the "saying" is prior to ontology and self-formation, the obligations of answerability it incurs are not able to be chosen freely by the
subject. On these terms, the subject’s choice not to respond to someone else itself comes to encompass a form of response, a “performative saying” (Eaglestone, 143).

In contrast to the “saying,” the “said” is the “saying” translated into the concrete presences of meaning, discourse, culture, and history. The “said” is that of language which thematizes, designates, names, informs: “[it] communicates ‘facts’ or things and is that material part of language that can be written or spoken. The act of ‘naming’ identifies, controls, delimits, and imposes meaning within a fixed totalizing system.... the said creates the identity of an entity by ‘thematising it’ (Eaglestone, 145). Because of its ontologizing orientation, the “said” contains and immobilizes the “saying” over diachronic time, transforming it into doxa. The “said” therefore, in its orientative function, does not betray the existence of an ontologically defined universe but rather constructs one: it establishes a logocentric and totalizing world of concretized themes and identities.

For Levinas, the “said” and the “saying” are thoroughly interwoven and in conflict with each other. While the “said” encompasses the translative immobilization of the “saying” into ontological language, the “saying” concurrently can never be fully contained or effaced by the “said.” Rather than be fully absorbed by the “said,” the “saying” imprints its trace on the “said’s” thematizations: “it lets itself be reduced [but] without effacing... the ambiguity or the enigma of the transcendent, in which the breathless spirit retains a fading echo” (Levinas 1991, 44). It is the traceable (non)presence in the “said” that constitutes the subversive potential of the “saying.” Levinas accuses Western philosophy of having “forgotten” the “saying” (1991, 37). He maintains that its contemporary task, therefore, is one of a committed attendance to it. More specifically, this dire philosophical task is one of ethically interrupting the “said” by exposing it to the “saying.” Levinas writes, “it is... necessary that the saying call for philosophy in order that the light that occurs not congeal into essence what is beyond essence” (1991, 44).
OBASAN’S PEDAGOGICAL STRUCTURE

While Levinas ascribes this endeavor to philosophy, I suggest that it seems equally a literary and educational practice. Indeed, the deep pedagogical structure of Kogawa’s novel can be read as a performative staging of an interruption of the “said” and as a learning from the “saying.” Obasan reads in the tradition of the classic Bildungsroman as it devolves upon the maturation and education of its central character, thirty-six year old Japanese-Canadian Naomi Megumi Nakane. Naomi is challenged to learn about and from the historical past of her childhood and the psychological legacy of suffering this past inflicted upon her and generations of her family. For Naomi, this was a time when she was, as her Aunt Emily says, “too young to know was going on” (184). But it is not simply Naomi who is called upon to learn. Much of postcolonial writing has variously stressed a teaching/learning relationship between text/author/character and reader. As Renate Eigenbrod maintains, “[g]iven the failure of formal education in colonized societies (past and present) to teach ‘the truth’, writers of colonized peoples often consider it their ‘task’ to ‘dispel’ lies... resorting to traditional ways of teaching through storytelling” (1998, 16). In several respects, one may assert that Naomi’s learning is also the learning of the reader.3 This is so, as I will illustrate, in the measure that readers are continually addressed by Naomi’s own learning: through her ignorances and resistances, through her questionings, through her ambivalence, and, finally, through what I argue are the Levinasian ethical insights she develops.

That Kogawa offers her novel as a radical practice of learning for her readers in which the pedagogical challenge is the aspiration of an ethical relationship with an Other is already clear from the prologue. The ambiguous “I” of the prologue conjoins author, narrator, reader and operates both as an address and a pledge or contract of attendance and accountability. Kogawa writes,

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3 While I draw this parallel for the purposes of this chapter, the following chapter will consider more fully the dimensions and consequences of such a claim.
There is a silence that cannot speak.
There is a silence that will not speak.
Beneath the grass the speaking dreams and beneath the dreams is a sensate sea. The speech that frees comes forth from the amniotic deep. To attend its voice, I can hear it say, is to embrace its absence. But I fail the task. The word is stone.
I admit it.
I hate the stillness. I hate the stone. I hate the sealed vault with its cold icon. I hate the staring into the night. The questions thinning into space. The sky swallowing the echoes.
Unless the stone bursts with telling, unless the seed flowers with speech, there is in my life no living word. The sound I hear is only sound. White sound. Words, when they fall, are pock marks on the earth. They are hailstones seeking an underground stream.
If I could follow the stream down and down to the hidden voice, would I come at last to the freeing word? I ask the night sky but the silence is steadfast. There is no reply.

Narrator-author-reader are called from subterranean depths to attend to the voice of a silent Other and embrace its absence. Yet, the present terrain of hearing and learning is inadequate to the task, producing only resistance and resentment of the inpenetrability and enormity of what needs to be confronted. The stone does not yield its secrets but hails to an underground stream. Perhaps to meet the task, to have truth disclosed, requires that the learner “follow” this stream, apprentice himself or herself to the voice the emanates from its depths. The framing of this process of learning as a question without reply suggests that no certainty is attached to this learning: its outcome cannot be predicted in advance. The prologue thus reads simultaneously as preparation and warning. We must be prepared to submerge ourselves in the depths of the novel without assurance.

The novel begins, then, with an address to learn; not simply to learn what we already know -- indeed, the ground of contemporary knowledge unearths nothing, obstructing our relationship with a voiceless other -- but to learn what is unfamiliar to us. The prologue suggests that Kogawa’s novel will stage a radical practice of teaching/learning for both the narrator and the reader; a learning that is produced out of the relationship between text (narrator/protagonist) and reader, and that brings to the student (both narrator/protagonist and reader) “surprising” knowledge. The risks of this radical pedagogy, though, are considerable.
Britzman points out that radical reading (and learning) is always “risky business” because it is “always about risking the self, about confronting one’s own theory of reading, and about engaging one’s own alterity and desire” (94). Yet, as Kowaga suggests, at the same time, these risks are unrefusable: without taking them there is no communication, no living: “Unless the stone bursts with telling, unless the seed flowers with speech, there is in my life no living word.” What follows, then, is a discussion of Naomi’s (and our) risky learning and of how character and reader become implicated in the insight(s) the narrative offers. This more extended interpretation of Obasan constitutes the foundation for a considered view in subsequent chapters of what it might mean to learn from this Bildungsroman and from other literature of historical witness.

THE DIFFICULT LEARNING OF NAOMI NAKANE

Obasan opens on the night of August 9, 1972, the same night twenty-seven years after the nuclear bombing of Nagasaki. Kogawa presents Naomi as a primary school teacher “bored to death with teaching” (7) and “scurrying for significance... unwilling to live with randomness”(5). While Naomi lived the events of the Second World War as a child in Vancouver, B.C. and is haunted by repressed memories of the hardships she had to endure, she has yet to work them through and consider them within their socio-historical context. Despite her age, in this sense, Naomi is still naive and uneducated. The opening scene, which has her and her Uncle standing in the field in Southern Alberta to which they have been coming once a year for eighteen years, introduces Naomi as still a young learner from whom the past is kept. The field hearkens to the landscape of the prologue, symbolically representing a site of learning. The grasses are tall and, when beckoned by the wind, they wave like a “sensate sea.” She and her Uncle wade through the “dry surf,” challenged by the flecks of grass that hit them like ocean spray. Naomi remembers her first time coming to this place at the age of eighteen, and how she feared the rattlesnakes it might hold and wanted to leave. In asking her Uncle
whether it was dangerous, she betrayed her unpreparedness to risk learning “difficult knowledge.” knowledge that destabilizes one’s complacency and sense of coherence in the world (Britzman 1998). After asking her age in response to this question, her Uncle exclaims, “Too young. Still too young” (3). Naomi reflects in 1972 that “[w]hatever he was intending to tell me “some day” has not yet been told. I sometimes wonder if he realizes my age at all. At thirty-six, I’m hardly a child” (3). While Naomi no longer recognizes herself as a child, it is only by the end of the novel, when she has learned what it is her Uncle has been keeping from her all these years -- information about the disappearance of her mother following her mother’s and grandmother’s visit to relatives in Japan -- that this denial becomes deeply realized.

As I will argue, it is the absent-presence of Naomi’s mother at the novel’s conclusion that introduces Naomi to the possibility of learning from the past. However, what prepares her for this learning is the prior teaching she receives. A month following her trip to the field with her Uncle, “a too much old man,” her Uncle dies of unknown causes. Naomi returns home to Granton, Alberta, from the town of Cecil located about one hundred and fifty miles northeast of Granton to be with her, around eighty-year-old Obasan (meaning aunt in Japanese), where she will call her brother Stephen in Montreal and her Aunt Emily in Toronto to notify them to come to the funeral. The four weeks of mourning following her Uncle’s death during which she stays with Obasan becomes the occasion for Naomi’s education. The school year thus commences not with Naomi teaching her schoolchildren, but rather with her teaching us, by showing us how she learns.

Naomi learns the details and dimensions of her history from Obasan and Aunt Emily. She apprentices herself to each of their teachings, teachings that are different in ways suggestive of the Levinasian distinction between the “saying” and the “said.” Naomi comments on the contrariness of both aunts: “How different my two aunts are. One lives in sound, the other in stone. Obasan’s language remains deeply underground but Aunt Emily, BA, MA, is a word warrior. She’s a crusader, a little old grey-haired Mighty Mouse, a Bachelor of Advanced
Activists and General Practitioner of Just Causes" (32). The identification of Obasan’s language and habitat with “stone” and the subterranean both hearkens back to the prologue and foreshadows the ethical address of the absent-presence of Naomi’s mother at the novel’s end. In her eighties, bone-weary, increasingly silent, unable to release her grief by crying because of clogged tear ducts and increasingly hard of hearing, Obasan embodies and instructs Naomi of the non-thematizable “saying” of “traumatic memory” and its concomitant legacy of suffering and grief.

As Cathy Caruth details, traumatic memory -- that is, memory of events or experiences of an extreme and overwhelming nature -- is memory that cannot be readily tolerated and accommodated, either emotionally or cognitively. This memory resists conscious awareness and control, and instead becomes encrypted within the unconscious. Psychic defenses are in place that enable the registration of the trauma but secure it against conscious recollection. Within the unconscious, trauma preserves its literal (real) form. In other words, it stores the traumatic experience in its actuality, and it remains there inexorably fixed, unforgettable. This memory, however, does not reside only in the unconscious. It is re-enacted indirectly and symbolically in nightmares, images, physical sensations, and behaviours, sometimes long after the event(s) that initiated the past trauma. In this respect, rather than subjects being in possession of their memories, these memories compel the inverse. They are not free to be consciously witnessed or lived, either at the moment that they originate or subsequently. Traumatized subjects become “locked” into remembrance. They can neither consciously recollect their experience, nor can they unconsciously forget it (Caruth 1995, 4-5).

Naomi shares this traumatic memory with Obasan: “But we’re trapped, Obasan and I, by our memories of the dead -- all our dead -- those who refuse to bury themselves. Like threads of old spider webs, still sticking and hovering, the past waits for us to submit, or depart” (26). Obasan’s aging process suggests submission: a graduated possession of her body.

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4 See also Caruth’s Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History (1996); Richard Terdiman’s, Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis (1993).
by her traumatic memory to the point where, when she dies, she will count among those traumatized dead “who refuse to bury themselves” (26). The fact that Obasan never discards anything, that she collects balls of twine, string, wool and thread, further illustrates her tie to the past. Moreover, since the death of her husband, Naomi’s uncle, Obasan wanders in a “different dimension of time” where “[e]verything is forgetfulness. The time of forgetting is now come” (44, 30). Obasan’s forgetting foreshadows her increasing entrapment in the time of her traumatic memory.

Naomi’s learning of the linguistic symptoms of traumatic memory is evident throughout the novel. In one instance, she asserts, “[f]rom both Obasan and Uncle I have learned that speech often hides like an animal in a storm” (3). While the discourse of trauma is elliptical, burrowing in danger and threat, as Naomi observes, it nevertheless possesses its own syntactical and semantic grammar: “the language of her grief is silence. She has learned it well, its idioms, its nuances” (14). The important pedagogical lesson here is the recognition that traumatic memory is not innate, but learned and expansive, necessitated and fed by acts of violence and inattentiveness: “Over the years, silence within her body has grown large and powerful” (14). While Obasan introduces Naomi and we as readers to the “saying” of traumatic memory in its singularity, at the same time, Kogawa suggestively presents Obasan as archetypal widow and teacher: “She is every old woman in every hamlet in the world.... Everywhere the old woman stands as the true and rightful owner of the earth. She is the bearer of keys to unknown doorways and to a network of astonishing tunnels. She is the possessor of life’s personal details” (16). The old woman that is Obasan is therefore also Aunt Emily and Naomi’s mother; all three are the bearers of keys to unknown sites of learning.

In marked contrast to Obasan, however, Aunt Emily, single-minded and determined academic, activist, and pedagogue enraged by any injustice (34) has devoted her life to mastering the political, judicial, public discourse of the “said” so that she might “tell of the lives of the Nisei in Canada in effort to make familiar, to make knowable, the treacherous yellow
peril that lived in the minds of the racially prejudiced” (40). Making “known” here encompasses a blaze of attending conferences, writing letters of protest, lecturing (though Naomi revealingly calls it “bulldozing” and “marathon talking”) producing pamphlets, and generally “rushing from trouble spot to trouble spot with her medication pouring into wounds seen and not seen” (34). At the same time, making “known,” for Aunt Emily, becomes the crucial means for an uncompromising confrontation with and coming to terms with one’s contentious relationship with the past. Her motivation to make past injustices a “live issue” is therefore rooted not only in the belief in the need for public -- communal and national -- acknowledgement and reparation but also echoes psychoanalysts Nicholas Abraham’s and Maria Torok’s (1994, 1986) notion of the “transgenerational phantom”: that traumas not voiced and worked through are incorporatively passed down to subsequent generations. Aunt Emily insists: “We have to deal with all of this while we remember it. If we don’t we’ll pass our anger down in our genes. It’s the children who’ll suffer... The past is the future” (36, 42).

For this reason, Aunt Emily takes on the young Naomi by sending her via Obasan a parcel “for [her] education” (188) so that she might “know everything” (43). Loosely wrapped in twine that Obasan significantly collects, the parcel becomes Naomi’s primary text, a text that contains its own teaching-in-the-text, signifying for Naomi “symbols of communion, the materials of communication. white paper bread for the mind’s meal” (182). It contains a series of material traces of the past as well as more current documents, displacing conventional “textbook” teaching: an old scrapbook full of newspaper clippings, Aunt Emily’s diary dated 1941 composed in the form of letters to Naomi’s mother, conference papers, government and family letters from her grandmother Kato, copies of telegrams and memorandums. Naomi finds herself addressed by the package. Besides an injunction by her Aunt in the form of a note that falls to the floor addressed either to Naomi or to Aunt Emily herself to “[w]rite the vision and make it plain. Habakkuk 2:2,” the contents of the package themselves ignite Naomi’s attention: “...on my lap, her papers are wind and fuel, nudging my early morning thoughts to flame”
The citation refers to God's message to the prophet Habakkuk that the Israelites need to be heard and remembered. On such terms, the address given in this injunction is not simply to read, but to witness and learn the obligations of doing so. As Brinkley and Youra suggest, "[t]o receive the words of a witness is to find that one has also become a witness, that one’s responses are there for others to witness as well. Once the transmission begins, one cannot stand outside its address" (1996, 123). As a communicative act, witnessing carries obligations of acknowledgement, remembrance, and commitment. One must bear (support and endure) the psychic burden of a traumatic history, and acknowledge that memories of violence and injustice press down on one's sense of humanity and moral equilibrium. As well, one must bear (carry) and thus transport and translate stories of past injustices beyond their moment of telling by taking these stories to another time and space where they become available to be heard and seen. Finally, through words, images, or actions, one must indicate to others not only why what one has seen is worthy of remembrance but also how such remembrance may inform one's contemporary perceptions and actions (Simon and Eppert 1997, 178).

The address to witness is not only for Naomi to listen, and to pass on what she has learned by re-telling -- both the substance of her learning and its means, but also for her to become accountable to the materials of witness and to her own practices of reading and narration. And, as this slip of paper addresses Naomi, one might contend that so too does it call out to us as readers. It is an address meant not simply to be read but also to be heard or witnessed by us. At one remove from the novel, our assignment is to attend to the contents of the package, and to Naomi's own processes of learning about and from it. Naomi's reading, witnessing, and learning thus draws attention to our own, and to our own obligations of accountability and answerability.
The documents in the parcel, as well as family photographs in Obasan’s home, spawn for Naomi a memorial narrative of recovery, beginning with her recollections of her childhood: the loss of her house and property in Vancouver, the dispersal of her family, her move with her brother, Obasan, and Uncle to the ghost town of Slocan in the interior of British Columbia, the move to a small hut on a beet farm in Granton, Alberta, the whereabouts of her Mother and Grandma Kato in Japan. What the documents permit is the contextualization of these childhood memories. In learning about the complex socio-historical realities surrounding these memories and the origins of the magnitude of suffering undergone by her family, Naomi is alerted to the terrible innocence of aspects of her young memory. Reading Aunt Emily’s journal entries, dated December 25, 1941 to May 21, 1942, she remarks that “Aunt Emily’s Christmas 1941 is not the Christmas I remember.... Sick Bay, I learned eventually, was not a beach at all. And the place they called the Pool was not a pool of water, but a prison at the exhibition grounds called Hastings Park in Vancouver” (79, 77). The journal recounts progressive events of discrimination and persecution following the bombing of Pearl Harbour: the confiscation of property -- radios, businesses, fishing boats, furniture, homes -- by the Canadian government, increased censorship and segregation, the internment of Japanese-Canadians to work camps and concentration camps, and the forced relocation of others to ghost towns. It further provides Naomi with insight as to the reasons behind certain familial decisions, such as the injunction by her mother that Naomi not be told what happened to her at the close of the war: “The orders, given to Uncle and Father in 1945, reach me via Aunt Emily’s package in 1972, twenty-seven years later. The delivery service is slow these days. Understanding is even slower” (173). Naomi’s difficulty in understanding introduces and underscores the key challenge faced in pedagogical attempts to make events of historical trauma “knowable” not only to those who underwent them but even more so to those who witness them later in time. How and under what conditions can pedagogy deliver -- that is, deliver on its conventional imperative as well
as its goals of social justice -- when its subject matter at every turn points to what Claude Lanzmann articulates as "the obscenity of the very project of understanding"? (205).

Naomi’s learning therefore must issue from a pedagogical site beyond the confines of traditional epistemological teaching. Yet, in this respect, Naomi is by no means a model student, insofar as this ideal is conservatively framed by an unquestioning, passive and distanciated reception of knowledge. Nor does her reading readily translate into a straightforwardly definitive project. Naomi observes the difference between herself and her Aunt Emily:

Write the vision and make it plain? For her, the vision is the truth as she lives it. When she is called like Habakkuk to the witness stand, her testimony is to the light that shines in the lives of the Nisei, in their desperation to prove themselves Canadian, in their tough and gentle spirit. The truth for me is more murky, shadowy and grey (32).

While she feels compelled by the contents of the parcel, most of her early reading practice and learning is repetitively characterized by instances of ambivalence, resistance, and denial. Early on she confesses, “[t]he very last thing in the world I was interested in talking about was our own experiences during and after World War II” (32). For Naomi, initially it is the present that preoccupies her, remembrance of the past serving only to detract from attention to contemporary injustices and burden the present with unnecessary emotion:

Crimes of history. I thought to myself, can stay in history. What we need is to concern ourselves with the injustices of today. Expedience still demands decisions which one day will be unjust. Outlaid I said, Why not leave the dead to bury the dead?... Life is so short...the past so long. Shouldn’t we turn the page and move on?... All this belongs to yesterday and there are so many other things to attend to today. All the details of death that are left in the laps of the living.... Some memories, too, might better be forgotten. Didn’t Obasan once say, "It is better to forget"? What purpose is served by hauling forth the jar of inedible food? If it is not seen, it does not horrify. What is past recall is past pain. Questions from all these papers, questions referring to turbulence in the past, are an unnecessary upheaval in the delicate ecology of this numb day (41-5).
Naomi voices a key pedagogical question and, in so doing, draws attention to the very reading and taking up of the novel: namely, why read, and why remember? The questions come out of the force of the burden of witness; the burden of carrying and living with, remembering and re-telling the suffering of the past. At a further point in the novel, when character and reader alike have been more definitively subjected to the details of the senseless atrocities against Japanese-Canadians. Naomi asks herself, “do I really want to read all these?... I am tired, I suppose, because I want to get away from all this. From the past and all these papers, from the present, from the memories, from the deaths, from Aunt Emily and her heap of words... (182-3). The constancy of racism and suffering fatigues Naomi to the point where she wishes to escape this evidence and the obligations of its witnessing. In testifying to her resistance to learning, Naomi confronts readers with their own: simply put, “Why read this novel? It’s depressing.” The challenge of learning posed here is less the answer to this question than its working through -- the working through of what this question means and why it is asked, and the working through of affective dynamics of denial and repression. “Working through” thus encompasses healing as well as confrontation and challenge. Dominick LaCapra emphasizes a practice of working through that is not narrowly therapeutic but rather “implies the possibility of judgment[s] that [are] not apodictic or ad hominem but argumentative, self-questioning and related in mediated ways to action” (1994, 210).

“Working through” indeed constitutes a central dimension of Naomi’s learning. Learning about her past becomes the means for what Aunt Emily insists is the need for Naomi to recall the deeply buried sufferings of her childhood. It is a difficult labour of witness that asks of Naomi not confession but testimony. The learning and teaching task for Naomi is to struggle to voice the unsayable and to speak her own vulnerability and exposure, not only for her own working through but additionally (and centrally) for those others who suffered, and for her learning readers. It is Aunt Emily thus who prods Naomi on. Aunt Emily’s instructive role is set, therefore, within the terms not simply of a more conventional maieutics for her
text-package but also of a simultaneously therapeutic and critical project. In the midst of nostalgically beginning to recall the Vancouver house she lived in as a child prior to the war, and the closeness of her family, Naomi protests: "It does not bear remembering. None of this bears remembering" (49). Aunt Emily counters:

You have to remember.... You are your history. If you cut any of it off you’re an amputee. Don’t deny the past. Remember everything. If you’re bitter, be bitter. Cry it out! Scream! Denial is gangrene. Look at you Nomi...unable either to go or to stay in the world with even a semblance of grace or ease (50).

Aunt Emily refuses Naomi’s escapist desires, echoing Drucilla Cornell’s claim that the forging of an uncompromising relationship with the past in which one learns who one has been is implicated in the delineation of who one wants to become (1992, 64). In response to Aunt Emily’s protest, Naomi takes tentative steps: “All right, Aunt Emily, all right! The house then - - the house. if I must remember it today, was large and beautiful. It’s still there on West 64th Avenue in Vancouver.... These are the bits of the house I remember. If I linger in the longing, I am drawn into a whirlpool. I can only skirt the edges after all..."(50-3). Naomi thus skirts the edges of her memory, only gradually to enter its deeper recesses: she comes to recall the more painful details of her life in her house: her sexual abuse by her neighbour, Old Man Gower, the departure of her mother and Grandma Kato to Japan in September 1941, the breakup of her family, and her time in Slocan.

For Aunt Emily, moreover, contending with the raw and indelible memories inflicted by the past constitutes a matter-of-fact pedagogy implicated in the intervention and subversion of dominant history. Not only is Naomi’s re-membering necessary, but the content of her remembering is “fact” -- possessive of a fundamental truth status and of the capabilities of correcting the record of “said” history. She exclaims: “It matters to get the facts straight.... Reconciliation can’t begin without mutual recognition of the facts.... Health starts somewhere” (182). Naomi thus responds, “The fact is that, in 1945, the gardens in Slocan were
spectacular.... The fact is that families already fractured and separated were permanently destroyed" (183).

Naomi’s most painfully factual counter-memories are of her post-war life in southern Alberta. In the substance of Aunt Emily’s parcel, she comes across a newspaper clipping with photograph that communicates a story of happy and productive Japanese-Canadians as beet workers in Alberta following the war. The newspaper clipping is accompanied with an index card from Aunt Emily on which is written “facts about evacuees in Alberta”(197). Naomi notes the violent contradiction of this historical documentation and the traumatic realities of her life as a child beet worker:

‘Grinning and happy’ and all smiles standing around a pile of beets? That is one telling. It’s not how it was.... Facts about evacuees in Alberta? The fact is I never got used to it and cannot. I cannot bear the memory. There are some nightmares from which there is no waking, only deeper and deeper sleep.... Aunt Emily, are you a surgeon cutting at my scalp with your folders and your filing cards and your insistence on knowing all? The memory drains down the sides of my face, but it isn’t enough, is it? It’s your hands in my abdomen, pulling the growth from the lining of my walls, but bring back the anaesthetist turn on the ether clamp down the gas mask bring on the chloroform when will this operation be over Aunt Em? (197, 194)

Naomi’s testimony of this period of her history in which the reader is given to “know all” is not simply a chronicling of past events but the re-memorizing of trauma. The elicitation of her traumatic testimony warrants a “pedagogical mindfulness” on the part of readers; that is, it introduces readers to the question of how to listen to personal narration of extreme suffering:

Is it so bad? Yes. Do I really mind? Yes, I mind everything. Even the flies.... It’s the chicken coop ‘house’ we live in that I mind.... It’s the bedbugs and my having to sleep on the table to escape the nightly attack, and the welps over our bodies.... It’s walking in winter to the reservoir.... It’s everybody taking a bath around the galvanized tub.... Or it’s standing in the beet field under the maddening sun.... It’s hard, Aunt Emily, with my hoe, the blade getting dull.... Its so hard and so hot that my tear glands burn out.... I mind growing ugly.... I mind the harvest time and the hands and wrists bound in rags to keep the wrists from breaking open.... I cannot tell this time, Aunt Emily. The body will not tell (194-6).
The "mindfulness" needed by readers in response to Naomi’s accounting for her painful re/mind/ers rehearses the dilemma Naomi herself faces particularly when she reads the personal letters from her grandmother in Japan (to be discussed shortly). How do we read or "hear" testimonies that describe experiences that are too difficult to bear, that cannot ever be adequately spoken and communicated? Naomi does come to acknowledge the need to educate herself about her past: “As for me, I suppose I do need to be educated. I’ve never understood how these things happen” (188). The “orders-in-council” given to and against Japanese-Canadians was, for Naomi, an unidentifiable dark shadow that sailed “like a giant hawk across a chicken yard” (188). However, what continues to fill her with despair is the question of the difference this education can make:

All of Aunt Emily’s words, all her papers, the telegrams and petitions... but what good they do I do not know.... In time the wounds will close and the scabs drop off the healing skin. Till then, I can read these newspaper clippings, I can tell myself the facts. I can remember since Aunt Emily insists that I must and release the flood gates one by one.... But what then? Uncle does not rise up and return to his boats. Dead bones do not take on flesh. What is done, Aunt Emily, is done, is it not? And no doubt it will all happen again, over and over with different faces and names, variations on the same theme.... Greed, selfishness, and hatred remain as constant as the human condition, do they not? Or are you thinking that through lobbying and legislation, speech-making and story-telling, we can extricate ourselves from our foolish ways? Is there evidence for optimism? (189, 199).

Naomi thus centrally asks here whether it is at all possible to learn from the past. It is a concern that returns readers not simply to the question of why remember (a question that can be simply answered within epistemological frameworks) but, more specifically, to the character of the relationship of remembrance, learning, and hope. As Naomi points out, remembrance cannot reverse the past, nor does it guarantee the non-reproduction of violence. Where, then, in our pedagogy of remembrance do we locate hope, recognizing the centrality of optimism to processes of testimony and working through?

As with all Naomi’s questions, they are not simply idle reflections, but ethico-pedagogical questions intended to give readers pause, pause not only for more conceptual
considerations such as those above but also for specific foregroundings of our individual processes of reading. In her asking, Naomi focuses our attention on our process of attending to her, and on the question of whether and how our learning and reading is making a difference, is extricating us from our foolish ways. It is this pointed question of how we transformatively learn from testimony that introduces the novel’s conclusion. It opens Naomi to her final and most profound learning, a learning that represents a marked departure from all conventional pedagogy, and that moves Naomi finally out of a place of despair. Unlike Obasan who submits to her traumatic memory, Naomi comes to be able to depart from it and, in this process, receives her true teaching. As Franz Rosenzweig asserts, “[t]eaching begins where the subject matter ceases to be subject matter and changes to inner power” (quoted in Handelman, 225).

LEARNING EROS AND ATTENTION

Obasan and Aunt Emily’s teachings and Naomi’s apprentice work of memory have set the way for Naomi to learn the final secret of what happened to her Mother and Grandmother. Without this prior learning both Naomi and the reader would not have been able to realize the full implications of this encounter. Her final teaching is the teaching of her dead Mother. Obasan’s sister: it is the learning not simply of the voiceless language of suffering but, I argue, more profoundly that of an ethical encounter with the other, of a Levinasian face-to-face relation. At this crucial turning point of the narrative, Naomi comes to experience fully the measure of her answerability for the past and for Japanese and Japanese-Canadians subjected to the atrocities of the Second World War. This experience not only results in Naomi’s ability to read/hear testimonies of the past (past others) other-wise but also prompts her to decisive action in which she takes on the responsibilities of witness.

This radical teaching comes to Naomi primarily through dream. Psychoanalysis has extensively demonstrated the centrality of dreams to processes of learning. Dreams present us with knowledge that is not in possession of itself; knowledge of the not yet known. According
to Steven Gans in “Levinas and Pontalis: Meeting the Other as in a Dream” (an essay insightful in its conjoining of psychoanalysis with Levinasian ethics in the context of a meditation on healing), Pontalis asserts that dreams constitute a transitional space where they have the potential to open an instructive possibilities for analyst and patient. Gans maintains that, on such terms, the act of “awakening” out of this dream, of learning, requires that the patient recognize the Other and be recognized (87). In other words, as Gans states, “the client must enter the ethical relationship” (87).

Naomi’s dream, one of a dance ceremony of the dead in a courtyard alias graveyard, foreshadows this process of entry. It is a ceremony of both initiation and teaching: the dance, a radical “dance of learning.” Her grandparents, parents, and Obasan are all in attendance as well as soldiers that provide an ever present reminder of murderous intentions and possibilities. Her mother is in the center of the courtyard, the teacher of the dream-learning. She holds in her heart-shaped mouth the knotted string stem of a red rose akin to the twine of Obasan’s ball of string. Her fingers deftly moving along the string from knot to knot, drawing the flower closer to her lips (228). As Naomi attempts to draw close to her mother, the atmosphere changes and Naomi feels a dark ominous cloud ascending from up a valley in the shape of a great cape and descending over them, trying to pry open Naomi’s mother’s mouth, and Naomi’s eyes. She identifies the overshadowing and threatening presence as “The Grand Inquisitor”: “Was it then that the nightmare began? The skin of the air became close and dense, a formless hair vest. Up from a valley there rose a dark cloud -- a great cape. It was the Grand Inquisitor descending over us, the top of his head a shiny skin cap. With his large hands he was prying open my mother’s lips, prying open my eyes” (228).

Naomi, at this point, literally and symbolically “awakens” from her nightmare, falling and crying out, called by her Mother to attend to what the dream communicates (228). Gans says that, for Levinas, “I am called by the face of the Other to awaken as if from a dream. I must drop my cover story, my defenses, my masks... and... respond to the address of the face
which touches my heart and asks me to tell the truth” (88). Naomi thus is addressed by her mother -- awakened into an ethical learning relationship with her. In this awakening, the truth she experiences is that of the violent and violative character of the Grand Inquisitor, and her own implication in his oppressive “interrogative” practices: “[t]he Grand Inquisitor was carnivorous and full of murder. His demand to know was both a judgement and a refusal to hear. The more he questioned her, the more he was her accuser and murderer. The more he killed her, the deeper her silence became” (228).

The Grand Inquisitor is not simply representative of an oppressive Canadian government. Naomi’s nightmare, I would contend, more broadly constitutes a critical comment on the progressive grand narratives and expansionist practices of Western modernity, ones that resulted in the assimilative, exclusionary, and annihilative impulses and events of the Holocaust, the Second World War, imperialism and colonialism. Furthermore, it is concurrently a comment on the pedagogy which bore these grand narratives and practices, a pedagogy itself “carnivorous and full of murder” (228). Rooted in suffocating inquisitions of Naomi’s mother, this pedagogy served only to silence her, thereby betraying its inability to receive knowledge, to attend to the other as other.

In her moment of ethical awakening, Naomi sees her former self -- as child, learner, and teacher -- as the Grand Inquisitor. She acknowledges how her questions concerning the disappearance of her mother, questions that began at the childhood age of questioning, were false and violent. In the need to know about her mother’s absence, she wonders whether she has wrongfully been her mother’s accuser: “How the Grand Inquisitor gnaws at my bones. At the age of questioning my mother disappeared. Why, I have asked ever since, did she not write? Why, I ask now, must I know? Did I doubt her love? Am I her accuser?” (228). She observes that such interrogation cannot enable the learning her mother has in mind for her: “My mother hid her love, but hidden in life does she speak through dream. Her tale is a rose with a tangled stem. All this questioning, this clawing at her grave, is an unseemly thing. Let the
inquisition rest tonight. In the week of my Uncle's departure, let there be peace” (229). It is the resting of the inquisition that enables the hearing of her mother’s tale and teaching on different terms. As Levinas contends, the other's alterity is “manifested in a mastery that does not conquer, but teaches. Teaching is not a species of a genus called domination, a hegemony at work within a totality but is the presence of infinity breaking the closed circle of totality” (1969, 171). Naomi’s mother thus introduces/awakens her and (potentially) readers to a radical dream of learning.

The lesson given to her in her dream is that to hear her mother’s ethical teaching, Naomi must in every way “abandon” herself to it: “What the Grand Inquisitor has never learned is that the avenues of speech are the avenues of silence. To hear my mother, to attend her speech, to attend the sound of stone, he must first become silent. Only when he enters her abandonment will he be released from his own” (228). According to Gans, “to meet the Other face to face means I must leave my egocentricity behind and enter a... space of welcome, discourse, and intercourse. To allow the Other to be means to let someone speak independently, apart from any other aim we have in regard to that person. We cannot place the Other in our own light, and incorporate the Other into our own story, without destroying the possibility of meeting in the genuine sense” (86). In this respect, then, what the dream-lesson has made possible is a genuine meeting of Naomi and her mother.

Moreover, the self-abandonment in which one leaves one's egocentricity behind opens the way for an ethical relationship of love with the other. As Gans points out, love is the culmination of Levinas' discourse with the other, as well as the culmination of the psychoanalytic process (88). Gans maintains that, for Levinas, in loving, “there is no attainment, no possession of the hidden secret at the depth or height of expression and disclosure, rather the reverse... the voluptuous breaks with the orders of discourse; yet in its silent saying beyond the meaningful gives access to the source of meaning itself, namely, to the
lightning birth of ecstasy that is both the precondition of and the fruit of the entry into the world" (89).

Naomi interprets her Mother’s dance ceremony of the dead as a ceremony of love -- as a teaching of ethical love. In recalling the dream, she remembers two ideographs for the word “love” that she once came across: “The first contained the root words ‘heart’ and ‘hand’ and ‘action’ -- love as hands and heart in action together. The other ideograph for ‘passionate love’ was formed of ‘heart’, ‘to tell’, and ‘a long thread’ (228). Naomi recognizes that the dance ceremony combined the meaning of these two ideographs to represent a teaching of three women: Obasan, Aunt Emily, and Naomi’s mother. She observes: the ceremony is a “slow and courtly telling, the heart declaring a long knotted thread knotted to Obasan’s twine, knotted to Aunt Emily’s package” (228).

Levinas’ recurring metaphor for the intricate relationship between the “saying” and the “said” is that of piece of thread with knots along its length (1991, 165-71). The “said” represents the thread (the weave of continuity and commonality). The knots represent the traces and interruption of the “saying.” While made up of the thread, these knots are not the thread but rather a disruption of it. Naomi’s mother calls her daughter’s attention to this knotting, teaching her to attend to the “saying,” teaching us as readers to attend to moments in the text that betray its “saying.” This learning of and as interruption, Levinas holds, is “the wisdom of love at the service of love” (1991, 162). The attentiveness to the “saying” -- this introductory dream-lesson of the pedagogical conditions for the realization of ethical love -- enables Naomi to learn about and from the fate of her mother. This learning is given to her through two tellings, one of the “said” that tells the “facts” of her mother’s disappearance and the other of the “saying” of Mother-Naomi, received through another dreaming.

The first telling proceeds through blue-lined rice paper letters from Grandma Kato addressed to Grandpa Kato dated 1949 and a letter from a Canadian missionary that are in Aunt Emily’s parcel. The reading of the letters takes place not in privacy but in the company of
Obasan, Aunt Emily, Stephen, and the Anglican Minister Nakayama-sensei who have all come to Obasan’s house for Uncle’s funeral. It is Nakayama-sensei who reads them aloud following prayer. He calls for an attendance: “Naomi,” he says softly, ‘Stephen, your mother is speaking. Listen carefully to her voice” (233). The sensei (which means “teacher” in Japanese) calls Naomi and her brother to attend to their mother’s voice -- a voice that is absent from the discourse of the “said,” in that the letters are not written by the mother, yet is everywhere present in the suffering these letters communicate.

What Naomi and Stephen learn is that their mother and grandmother were denied return to Canada by the government. Through their grandmother’s letters they realize that Grandma Kato and Naomi’s mother’s extended family had been killed by American B-29 bombings in Tokyo. While the two had escaped the bombings by having gone to Nagasaki the day before to take care of Grandma Kato’s niece’s new baby, Cheiko, they suffered the experience of the A-bomb on Nagasaki. Naomi’s mother survived the bombing, although she was permanently disfigured. Naomi maintains that Grandma Kato had not wanted to tell of these events, hoping that the horror “would surely die sooner... if they refused to speak. But the silence and the constancy of the nightmare had become unbearable for Grandma and she hoped that by sharing them with her husband, she could be helped to extricate herself from the grip of the past... ‘If these matters are sent away in this letter, perhaps they will depart a little from our souls,’ she writes. ‘For the burden of these words, forgive me’” (236). Naomi’s mother, however, gave strict orders that her children remain protected and do not learn of these events. The letter from the Canadian missionary tells that she found Naomi’s mother’s name on a plaque of the dead, where now a Canadian maple tree grows.

For Naomi, the news is met not singularly with rage and despair but also with love. Nakayami-sensei says quietly in response to the letters: “There is a brokenness. That this world is brokenness. But within brokenness is the unbreakable name. How the whole earth groans till Love returns” (240). Amidst his voice and prayers, Naomi withdraws into daydream and
attends to the second telling; an attendance that has her listening to the voices of the dead, particularly the voice of her mother: “Gradually the room grows still and it is as if I am back with Uncle again, listening and listening to the silent earth and the silent sky as I have done all my life. I close my eyes. Mother. I am listening. Assist me to hear you” (240).

Naomi then addresses her mother directly, asking how she can attend to her wordless words in the exile of the Grand Inquistor: How can she respond to the trace of her mother? It is a question for readers as well:

I close my eyes. Mother. I am listening. Assist me to hear you (240) .... Silent Mother, you do not speak or write. You do not reach through the night to enter morning, but remain in the voicelessness. From the extremity of much dying, the only sound that reaches me now is the sigh of your remembered breath, a wordless word. How shall I attend that speech, Mother, how shall I trace that wave? (241).

Naomi’s question of “how shall I attend that speech?” is one that proceeds from a learning orientation radically different from that which prompted her inquisitorial questions. Rather than being situated within oppressive terms of mastery, this question comes from the “extremity of much dying” (241) and attempts to be responsible/responsive to this devastation.

Hearing her mother’s response to her call: “Martyr mother, you pilot your powerful voicelessness over the ocean and across the mountain, straight as a missile to our hut on the edge of a sugar-beet field.” Naomi metaphorically invokes her as a receding tide that takes her daughter away from the safety of the shore, drawing her “to the white distance, skyward” (242, 241). In her figurative departure, Naomi learns to attend to the cries hidden by her silence and joins her mother in her nuclear suffering:

Beneath the hiding I am there with you. Silent Mother, lost in the abandoning, you do not share the horror. At first, stumbling and unaware of pain, you open your eyes in the red mist and sheltering a dead child, you flee through the flames. Young Mother at Nagasaki, am I not also there? In the dark Slocan night, the bright light flares in my dreaming. I hear the screams and feel the mountain breaking. Your long black hair falls and falls into the chasm. My legs are sawn in half. The skin on your face bubbles like lava and melts in your bones. Mother, I see your face. Do not turn aside” (242, emphasis mine).
No longer a child, through her dreaming, Naomi is now imaginatively able to recollect - to "face" her disfigured mother -- in the aftermath of Nagasaki. Naomi thus learns/enacts a face-to-face relationship with her mother in which her mother is Other-Master-Teacher, the "voice [that] comes from the other shore" (Levinas 1991, 183) and exposes her to the saying, to an "infinity" of knowledge not yet learned. Levinas maintains that "[t]eaching is a discourse... that bring[s] to the student what the student does not yet know. It does not operate as maieutics, but continues placing in me the idea of infinity. The idea of infinity implies a soul capable of containing more than it can draw from itself" (1969, 180). The "knowledge" of infinity comes to Naomi concretely (and figuratively) in her mature recognition that "I am thinking that for a child there is no presence without flesh. But perhaps it is because I am no longer a child I can know your presence though you are not here. The letters tonight are skeletons. Bones only. But the earth still stirs with dormant blooms. Love flows through the roots of the trees by our graves" (243).

Naomi's learning from then is first and foremost an interiorized attendance to the non-thematizable "saying" of grief and suffering: "In all our life of preparation we are unprepared for this new hour filled with emptiness. How thick the darkness behind which hides the animal cry. I know what is there, hidden from my stare. Grief's weeping. Deeper emptiness. Grief wails like a scarecrow in the wild night, beckoning the wind to clothe its gaunt shell" (245). Morris points to how the wail or scream of grief serves as a "potent image for the metaphorical silence at the heart of suffering" (27). Naomi is now intimate with this silence -- a grief, she observes, that disguises itself in the eyes of her uncle, mother: "I had not known that Grief had such gentle eyes... the familiar lost eyes of Love that are not his and that he dons as a mask and a mockery" (246).

This learning, in part, prompts an elegiac 5:30 am, pre-dawn conjournment of the people of Naomi's past and the call for a move beyond mourning: "This body of grief is not fit
for human habitation. Let there be flesh. The song of mourning is not a lifelong song. Father, Mother, my relatives, my ancestors... my loved ones, rest in your world of stone. Around you flows the underground stream. How bright in the darkness the brooding light. How gentle the colours of rain” (246). We are thus returned to the prologue of the novel, only now, the hailstones have warmed to rain, the underground stream flows with life and continuity, and the light of dawn beckons. Naomi decides to greet the dawn by driving out to the coulee where she was last month with her Uncle. Now she dons Aunt Emily’s coat, warmed and protected by Aunt Emily’s teachings, and assuming the responsibilities of witnessing. She observes the creative scene before her: “Above the trees, the moon is pure white stone. The reflection is rippling in the river -- water and stone dancing. It’s a quiet ballet, soundless as breath” (247). This observation is a direct counterpoint and refutation of her remark to her Uncle in the novel’s opening that “Nothing changes.”

What has changed for Naomi -- what has been given birth to through her practice of witnessing -- is not only her learning about and from the voicelessness of Grief. In the face-to-face encounter with her Mother, she has also learned something more fundamental, a learning that enables her finally to “depart” from her mourning into a creative space of contemplation, “a quiet ballet” (Britzman 1998). What she has learned in Levinasian fashion is that she can learn. Mark Clamen writes that, within a Levinasian framework, “[w]hat I ‘learn’ is... that I can be addressed by [the past], that it calls to me, from outside. That is, I learn that I can learn. That I don’t contain it all.... I find myself, as an ‘I’, open, vulnerable, exposed, responsible’” (50). Clamen’s “I” returns us to the “I” of the novel’s opening prologue, marking both our collective and singular implication in the obligations of address and learning.

Otrasan does not poetically end here. It concludes with an excerpt from a memorandum sent by the co-operative committee on Japanese Canadians to the House and Senate of Canada, April 1946, protesting the treatment of the Japanese Canadians. It details ten ways in which the Canadian government has violated human and civil rights in its treatment of Japanese-
 Canadians. Like the prologue, this memorandum is presented outside the frame of the body of this story and, in this manner, constitutes a direct address particularly to readers. It stands as a test of how, whether, and what we as readers have learned and the character of our commitments. To past readers, it stood more directly as an imperative to ethico-political action. Published in 1981, Kogawa’s is one of the first testimonials to the trials experienced by Japanese-Canadians. At the time of its publication, Japanese-Canadians were protesting but had as yet not received retribution from the Canadian government for the violations of human rights committed against them. An official apology and reparation payments were given only in 1988. Kogawa’s Obusan thus marks an intervention in Canadian history; itself an attempt “to write the vision” and make a difference: to commit Canadians to learning ethics, remembrance, and justice.

**TASKS OF LEARNING**

As already indicated, Levinas describes the work of philosophy as one of attending to the ethical knots in discourse; the “saying” entwined with the “said.” Within this philosophical framework, the pedagogical task is not simply to follow the thread but rather to expose those moments/sites where the knots interrupt the thread. Robert Eaglestone maintains that this performative endeavour involves

> the unveiling of the saying from the said, the unsaying of the said, the putting of the same into question by the other, and tracing of the other not back to the same but to the other and to obligation to the other.... [This task] is closer to the idea...of ‘witness’. It draws attention to the saying in every said, to the outside, the transcendent alive but buried, encrypted in every utterance (148).

The meeting of these challenges of witness, then, is encumbant upon an incessant questioning that interrupts the ontological and epistemological logic of dominant discourse. Whether through writing or reading, witnessing (as will be much elaborated upon in subsequent
chapters) consequently encompasses a practice of opening oneself up the "saying" of others, and so, to one's ethical responsibilities for others.

Through her narrative, Kogawa seeks to bear witness by interrupting contemporary discourses of politics, of history, of education, and of literary genre. Though I will complicate this claim further on in this dissertation, her novel constitutes a knot within the exigencies of Canadian and North American remembrance and discourse. Insofar as she has assigned herself the radical task of philosophy through the medium of literature, so too is her protagonist, in several respects, a philosophical questioner. Unlike her activist Aunt Emily, Naomi finds the challenge of writing the vision "plainly" -- that is, in the discourse of the "said" -- daunting, as for her the "truth... is more murky, shadowy and grey" (32). Yet, the positivity/productivity of her questioning is acquired. Initially, while reading about the crimes of history, her learning is characterized by an affective resistance to questioning that which only unearths pain, rather than by its embrace: "What is past recall is past pain. Questions from all these papers, questions referring to turbulence in the past, are an unnecessary upheaval in the delicate ecology of this numb day" (41-5). The questions Naomi dreads to ask are not conclusive. They do not readily admit to any certainties or reductive responses. Rather, they are more open-ended counter-questions that call into question the promise of remembrance and learning itself.

The more pointed questions she does ask and which have consumed her since she grew into the "age of questioning" are those that concern the disappearance of her mother. What she learns through her dreaming is that those questions are ones informed by the masterful and egoistic agenda of the Grand Inquistor. Rather than open her to the saying of her mother, they accuse and judge. It is only after awakening to this realization that Naomi begins to question differently and in a way that allows her to receive the words of her mother -- words that are not given to her directly but are the "saying" in the "said" of Emily Kato's letters: "Silent Mother.... From the extremity of much dying, the only sound that reaches me now is the sigh
of your remembered breath, a wordless word. How shall I attend that speech, Mother, how shall I trace that wave" (241)?

LEARNING QUESTIONS

As my reading of Obasan suggests, then (and as will be more extensively discussed in the concluding chapter), questions are themselves learned. A considerable pedagogical concern that accrues from this realization is the question of what marks the differences between grand inquisition questions and those that yield the “saying,” that open up possibilities of the voices of others to be heard responsibly. While I address this concern in Chapter Six in the context of a critique of contemporary teaching guides on Obasan, I conclude this second chapter with a brief consideration of what it means to (learn to) question by introducing questions about Obasan that were raised by students in a highly culturally diverse college English class I taught in the summer of ‘98.5

While students posed many significant questions, there were four that particularly generated intense reflection, discussion, and debate. The first was the question of why Naomi as a schoolteacher was not in possession of historical knowledge of what happened to Japanese-Canadians during and immediately following the Second World War. Surely, students asked, she would have had to have taught this material. The second question was why Aunt Emily made the decision to leave for Toronto when this meant leaving Obasan, Uncle, Steven, Naomi and other relatives behind. Granted Aunt Emily was the only one who received official permission to go. and granted she felt, from the vantage point of Toronto, she might be more effective in liberating her family, she nevertheless chose to depart from her family not to return for twelve years. The third “obsessive” question asked by students was to what extent Kogawa’s novel was historically accurate. And the fourth was about the “Canadian” status of

5 Specifically, an “Approaches to Literature” class at Centennial College in Toronto. By way of background, many of the students are recent immigrants to Canada, and come from a broad spectrum of different countries and cultures.
Japanese-Canadians during the War; namely, a questioning of the justifiability of Canadian-Japanese opposition in light of the cruelties committed by the Japanese against the Chinese and against prisoners of war.

In all four cases, students’ questions seemed directed against the novel: against Naomi, against Aunt Emily, and against Kogawa. Each of these figures, in certain respects, was put on trial. In the first case, students seemed invested in Naomi as a “subject presumed to know” -- because she was a teacher, a thirty-six year old adult, and a child-survivor. Both her historical naivety and her repression, as well as what one student described as her constant “complaining,” led several students/readers to feel that Naomi failed their expectations of her as the novel’s heroic protagonist. It also led to an impatience with Naomi’s learning. This impatience came despite (and because of) the fact that several students in the class, as refugees and immigrants, had themselves endured several hardships. In the second case, Aunt Emily was rigorously accused and defended for having “abandoned” her family, particularly her young niece and nephew. Students’ criticisms emanated from their own reflections on what they and their families might have done and, for some, did indeed do in similar situations. Others maintained that Aunt Emily’s “sacrifice” was in the valuable service of her advocacy and leadership, of her charge to “write the vision.”

In the third case, Kogawa’s novelistic act of witness -- her counter-memorial recounting and accounting for the suffering of Japanese-Canadians -- was interrogated. Two students were particularly dubious. One said that an older acquaintance of hers who “knew all about history” had said that what was described in the novel was not “true.” Another maintained that in conversation with a thirty-something Japanese-Canadian friend, the friend had similarly asserted that what Kogawa was claiming was an “exaggeration.” In the final case, criticism came primarily from Chinese students in the class who were fully aware and generationally still fearful of the atrocities committed by the Japanese against them and of Japanese fascist pronouncements during the war about conquering the Eastern hemisphere.
Several of these students felt that, despite their Canadian citizenship, Japanese-Canadians were nevertheless responsible for suffering instigated by Japan. One student more extremely perceived Aunt Emily's continual crossing out of affiliation of "Japanese" on government documents with "Canadian" to be not so much an expression of Canadian loyalty, but rather an indication of Japanese shame and guilt. Other students, particularly those from countries without Human Rights legislation, were more sympathetic to war measures taken by the Canadian government. Within and against this discussion, students further debated and questioned their own "immigrant" status and what/where their "home" might be.

A question that arose for me upon hearing students' "charges" against the characters in the novel and against Kogawa's "fiction" writing was whether and to what extent they might hearken back to "grand inquisition" questions. These questions did not intervene in social discourses of the "said." For instance, what was not questioned in the judgement of Naomi were the broader educational and historical institutions in which this character was working during the 1970s. As a schoolteacher, Naomi would most likely not have taught this history from such a perspective, as it would not have been "on the curriculum." Naomi's own "alienation" from these discourses gestures toward this, as she stresses that "it is one month after my last visit to Granton and I am standing in front of my grades five and six class at Cecil Consolidated, defending myself" (5). Naomi is frequently required to explain herself against the inquisitorial questions of her students. Her first lesson is to teach the pronunciation of her Japanese name, which one of the girls exclaims is a "pain" to pronounce, and to defend her non-marital status. This prompts a remembrance of a date with one of her student's widowed father who asked her about her national status and "was so full of questions that I half expected him to ask for an identity card" (7).

Nor were students (with several exceptions; hence, all the debate) inclined to re-direct their judgment of Aunt Emily's choice and scruples to a broader discussion and critique of those discriminatory national policies that required that she make this decision in the first place.
And students, but for a couple, distrusted the genre of “fiction,” stressing Kogawa’s own preface that “although this novel is based on historical events, and many persons named are real, most of the characters are fictional” over evidence of her research in public archives and the inclusion in her narrative of official documents. Discussion among students then centred upon “history” versus “fiction” and the interpretative nature of truth claims. Finally, the charge against Japanese nationalist policies and actions deflected all criticism away from what Canadian democratic responsibilities should be. In other words, the dangerous illogic being developed here was that the criminal actions of other countries excuse those of Canada.

This questioning by students seems contrary to the philosophical task set out by Levinas. Rather than hear Obasan as a “saying” in the “said,” it might be argued that students questions imposed themselves upon the text. What, I wondered, did it mean then when several students toward the end of the class commented that they had “learned a lot”? As already stated, in the concluding chapter of this dissertation, I return to this question and to this class discussion in the context of an examination of teacher’s guides on Obasan and other literatures of historical witness. I re-examine these questions based upon the arguments developed in the following two chapters.
CHAPTER THREE

CEREMONIAL LEARNING AND THE IDENTIFICATION WITH SUFFERING

I speak and
powerfully become actions
becomes memory in someone
I become different memories to different people
different stories in the retelling of my place


INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, I examined the character of ethical address in Joy Kogawa’s Obasan and the learning ethic it stages. Furthermore, I introduced a distinction between a questioning practice framed by the terms of a “grand inquisition” and one that aspires to an ethical engagement with and responsibility for others that is attentive to the “saying” in the “said.” In this third chapter, I complicate and “interrupt” certain of the suppositions in my previous reading of Obasan: namely, my claim that Naomi’s learning is also the learning of the reader. Claims made for such similitude between reader and protagonist abound in literary criticism. Speaking of Silko’s Ceremony, Susan Scarberry, for instance, maintains that the form of the novel requires that the reader’s memory function like that of the principal character -- Tayo. G. Thomas Couser holds that the same is true of Paule Marshall’s Praisesong for the Widow (1996, 119). Often such assertions are embedded in the pedagogical presumption that memorial “identification” with the protagonist is the pedagogical means for the instantiation of ethico-political commitment.¹ Kogawa herself points to the promise of such identification with

¹ In Holocaust criticism, the relationship between reader and testifier is often phrased within the terms of a pedagogical instantiation of a “chain of witnessing/testimony.” See Felman and Laub
the trials of another. In an article addressed to the Canadian Caucus of Human Rights in 1983, she contends,

Our wholeness comes from joining and from sharing our brokenness.... Rather than abandoning the way of brokenness, I believe we need to remember the paradoxical power in mutual vulnerability.... Beyond our doubt and confusion lies our capacity to recognize what suffering is and where health lies and to identify with both. I believe that it is the identification of and with suffering at every level, in every condition and in every person that magnetizes the compass of justice and points us to home (qtd. in Grewal 1996, 140-1, emphasis mine).

What remains unclear in such assertions, however, is the specific qualities of an "equivalency" between character and reader, and how this relationality precisely leads to social justice. In this chapter, through a study of the "ceremonial learning" that takes place in Leslie Silko's Ceremony, and a critique of Martha Nussbaum's reading/learning ethics, I seek to begin to counter terms of relationality between the (reading) self and (textual) other that emphasize empathetic "identification of and with suffering at every level" as an ethico-pedagogical orientation that directs our commitments. In this chapter and in following chapters, my critique centres particularly upon "identification" conceptualized as the projective ability to imaginatively "participate" in and "know" the experiences of others. I maintain that "identification" here is structured on ontological terms of the "self-same." Britzman points to what is at stake in such a reading practice:

[wh]ile initially the learner attaches to the experience of the other by way of wondering what she or he would have done had such an event occurred in his or her own life, this is not yet an implication. For this experiment in empathy actually may provoke defenses and resistances to insight. This is so because what tends to be projected is the learner's undisturbed present and not the way the learner's life has become her present. But just as significantly, the learner's strategy of projection impedes an understanding of the differences between the learner's knowledge and the knowledge of the other (1998, 118).

(1992), Horowitz (1997). In her discussion of Ida Fink's Holocaust short story "A Scrap of Time," Horowitz, for instance, asserts that "[a]nd what of the reader in this chain of testimony?... Like Fink's narrator, we garner fragments of memories and bits of stories... which cohere through empathic imagination and willingness to bear witness. The act of reading places us in equivalency to the narrator" (224).
Britzman importantly emphasizes how identificatory processes foreclose engagements with others that respect the singularity and differences of others’ experiences. I argue that “identification” consequently is inimical to a responsive/responsible “learning from.” In the following chapter, I extend this critique by showing how “identification” is strongly embedded in ontological notions of “home,” as Kogawa illustrates above. Within this frame, learning or Bildung is commonly presented as departure and arrival “home.” Yet, this dissertation contends that Bildung presented on these grounds cannot meet the requirements of an ethical answerability to and for others.

CEREMONIES OF REMEMBRANCE-LEARNING

Obasan, Marshall’s Praisesong for the Widow, and Leslie Marmon Silko’s Ceremony all significantly stage the main character’s participation in a radical learning ceremony. In Obasan, Naomi’s final dream lesson involves her observation of the courtly dance ceremony of the dead through which her mother instructs her to attend to the knots in her formative education -- to the “saying” in the “said.” As I will detail in the next chapter, in Paule Marshall’s Praisesong, Avey Johnson learns the lessons of her past -- her ancestry and her inheritance -- through her participation in the yearly creolized dance ceremony of the natives of the island of Carriacou in the Caribbean. While Naomi’s ceremonial learning leads her to a productive space that enables her to assume the responsibilities and commitments of remembrance (as metaphorically revealed in her wearing of Aunt Emily’s coat), Avey similarly returns to North America from her Caribbean excursion with the intention of becoming a teacher. Finally, the protagonist in Silko’s Ceremony undergoes a rite of remembrance-learning that leads him to an understanding of and reconciliation with his Native heritage.

All three Bildungsromanen, then, initiate their characters into a ceremonial remembrance-learning, the outcome of which is psychic, physical, and spirtual regeneration.
The ceremonies are ceremonies of communion that proceed through the interruption of the learning of and legacies wrought by dominant white discourses and the performative exercising of abandoned or repressed ancestral memories. The radicality of the ceremonies is that they do not simply encompass a ceremonial mimesis -- they are not simply interventions into hegemonic discourses accomplished by a rote/rite learning of traditional practices (thus, an identification with ancestral learning) -- but rather teach learning as a dynamic process that principally involves the return of a difference.

In what follows, I more specifically examine the counter-ceremonial role of learning as it is staged in Leslie Silko’s Ceremony. I chose this Bildungsroman not only because it exemplifies this radical learning but also because of its unique formal structure. More so than Ohasan (or Praisesong for the Widow), it is structured in a way that strategically invites readers’ experiential involvement in the protagonist’s Bildung. In this respect, it importantly foregrounds problems of reader-identification with the ceremonial learning it stages. James Ruppert, in his study of this novel, asserts that its educative importance lies not simply in its presentation of a philosophical and cultural viewpoint but in its “teaching us how to read it and how to understand its special narrative structures” (78). What, I ask, does this novel teach us about how readers are to “participate” in Tayo’s ceremonial learning? I address this question first through a discussion of Tayo’s Bildung and the novel’s ceremonial structure, and then through a consideration of the different modes of reading/learning the narrative gestures toward and implicitly critiques.

**LESLIE SILKO’S CEREMONY**

*Ceremony* tells the story of Tayo Couser’s loss and recovery of his personhood. Tayo is a young Native American of half-Mexican, half-Laguna ancestry who has just spent six years serving in the Second World War. He suffers from a deep debilitating traumatization that is initially attributed to “battle fatigue” -- to such jungle war experiences as witnessing “the
skin of the corpses again and again, in ditches" (7), being a prisoner of war in Japan, being a bystander to the murder of his cousin Rocky by Japanese soldiers, and not being able to prevent the death of his Uncle Josiah because of his absence from home. Although, subsequent to the war, Tayo stays at a Post Traumatic Stress treatment facility at a Los Angeles hospital, the attention he receives there serves only to sedate and alienate him further from the healing he requires.

The narrative’s present tense is Tayo’s return to his Laguna Pueblo reservation where he lives with his Aunt Thelma, her husband Uncle Robert, and Old Grandma; his cousin (whom he calls brother) Rocky and his Uncle Josiah having directly and indirectly become war victims. The other loss in his life is his mother who had abandoned him when he was four. Much of Tayo’s time on the reservation is spent with three other Native war veterans, Leroy, Harley, and Erno. These three “friends” spend most of their post-war days bar-hopping. During most of their bar-hopping, they nostalgically dwell on the “status” issued by the American public at large during the war, and struggle to repress the painful memories of their subsequent abandonment and discrimination by Americans following their war service.

_Ceremony_ begins with a window into Tayo’s traumatized state. He awakens from a nightmare of drowning in a cacophany of incoherent Spanish, Japanese, Laguna voices and loud music. The nightmare prompts an immediate memory of a moment from his childhood, and, in so doing, metaphorically paints the adult Tayo as still a child, an image that is drawn repeatedly throughout the narrative:

He could get no rest as long as the memories were tangled with the present, tangled up like coloured threads from old Grandma’s wicker sewing basket when he was a child, and he had carried them outside to play and they had spilled out of his arms into the summer weeds and rolled away in all directions, and then he had hurried to pick them up before Auntie found them. He could feel it inside his skull--the tension of little threads being pulled and how it was with tangled things, things tied together, and as he tried to pull them apart and rewind them into their places, they snagged and tangled even more (7).
Silko deploys the image of "tangled memories" similarly used by Kogawa in her description of Naomi's and Obasan's disoriented state of mind, and also (as will be shown) by Paule Marshall. Tayo's physical, psychical, spiritual entanglement manifests itself in an overwhelming "great swollen grief" that is expressed through uncontrollable bouts of crying, an inability to speak, feverish and hallucinogenic moments, a general disorientation and loss of direction, constant nausea and vomiting. His grief-stricken state resists any sense-making attempts within the traditional dictates of epistemology: "He examined the facts and logic again and again... the facts made what he had seen an impossibility.... He shivered because all the facts, all the reasons made no difference anymore" (9). Attending his manifest despair is a pervasive sense of invisibility and homelessness. All he has witnessed and his failures of comprehension leave him feeling overwhelmingly distrustful, despondant, and suicidal:

he lay there with the feeling that there was no place left for him; he would find no peace in that house where the silence and the emptiness echoed the loss.... he knew what his eyes had seen, and what his ears had heard.... But he wasn't sure anymore what to believe or whom he could trust. He wasn't sure.... He was tired of fighting. If there was not one left to trust, then he had no more reason to live (32, 63, 122).

Yet, readers soon learn that to attribute Tayo's turmoil and despair entirely to the war would be reductive. To do so would be to follow in the steps of scientific researchers who, as Tayo hears, maintain that the effect of increased violence and drinking among Indian war veterans is an inevitable war consequence. Tayo dismisses this report upon hearing it read to him by his hospital doctor: "It's more than that. I can feel it. It's been going around for a long time... I don't know what it is, but I can feel it all around me" (53). The challenge for Tayo is to learn the character of this unspecified "it." This difficult learning task is steeped in what will become a ceremonial practice of recollection: "Tayo felt the old nausea rising up in his stomach, along with a vague feeling that he knew something which he could not remember" (117).
Silko presents the repression and disorientation Tayo experiences as a direct consequence of a positivist white education that has pervasively denounced the legends and dreams of Laguna traditions as idle superstitions:

If a person wanted to get to the moon, there was a way; it all depended on whether you knew the directions -- exactly which way to go and what to do to get there; it depended on whether you knew the story of how others before you had gone. He had believed in the stories for a long time, until the teachers at Indian school taught him not to believe in that kind of "nonsense" (19).

Tayo’s dissociative split between his public book learning and the learning of his culture’s traditions and myths is continual. It leads him to become like the Grand Inquisitor of Kogawa’s Ohasan, “carnivorous and full of murder.” Tayo reflects on a childhood memory in which he went on a rampage swatting flies in the kitchen. When confronted by his Uncle Josiah, he protests: “But our teacher said so. She said they are bad and carry sickness” (101). Josiah then tells him a Native myth about the greenbottle fly who asks Mother Earth for forgiveness for the way people were behaving. Mother Earth receives it and the people are returned their crops and water. Josiah then forgives Tayo and concludes with the injunction, “Next time, just remember the story” (102).

The destructive effects of positivist education on Laguna culture, myths, and traditions is repeatedly invoked by Silko. As Josiah and Robert embark on the business of raising cattle, they peruse “how to” books loaned to them by the extension agent, but “the problem was the books were written by white people who did not think about drought or winter blizzards or dry thistles, which the cattle had to live with” (75). The scientific books implant doubt and defeat in Tayo’s family, as well as contribute to the rejection of their own cultural beliefs and practices.

It is Tayo’s cousin Rocky who most embodies the consequences of Westernized education. Like Naomi’s brother Stephen who becomes a first-class classical musician and completely estranged from his Japanese heritage, Rocky embraces Western values and knowledge at the expense of his traditional upbringing. He becomes an A student and all-state
in football and track. Eager for success, he strives to be a model student: "He said he was always going to win. So he listened to his teachers, and he listened to the coach. They were proud of him. They told him, 'Nothing can stop you now except one thing: don't let the people at home hold you back'" (51). Supported by his mother (Tayo’s Aunt Thelma), who wanted him to be successful in the Western world, Rocky takes the advice given to him and comes to reject the traditions of his people. He retorts against Tayo’s doubt: “Those books are written by scientists. They know everything there is to know about beef cattle. That’s the trouble with the way the people around here have done things -- they never knew what they were doing” (76). Because of his investment in Western education, his desire to succeed and be recognized by mainstream society, Rocky jumps at the opportunity to show his allegiance to America by enlisting in the army. Tayo joins him out of support for the cousin he calls his brother. Rocky’s desire to belong, however, tragically leads to his death.

Tayo’s own chances of survival thus hinge upon a learning radically different from that of Rocky. It is Old Grandma who comes to this recognition, much to the chagrin of Tayo’s aunt who fears what people will say and wants to heed the warning of the army doctor that there should be no Indian medicine. Old Grandma decisively announces: “That boy needs a medicine man” (33). Healing comes to Tayo in the radical teachings of two medicine men and a spirit-mountain woman named Ts’eh. Ku’uosh, his first instructor, introduces him to the challenges and responsibilities he faces. He beckons Tayo to become cognizant of the fragility of the world and the power of a single individual to destroy the whole. But this teaching is all that is within Ku’uosh’s power. Ku’uosh is unable fully to help Tayo as his ceremonial practice does not fulfill the requirements of the scope of contemporary destruction. The witchery that has been unleashed upon the world by whites and natives alike -- one exemplified by modern warfare and nuclear destruction -- exceeds the theoretical scope and methodology of Ku’uosh’s pedagogical framework. Ku’uosh’s teachings are traditionally mimetic rather than innovative: “as if nothing the old man said were his own but all had been said before and he
was only there to repeat it" (34). Ku’uosh thus refers him to another medicine man, Old Betonie (and Betonie’s young bear helper Shush).

Old Betonie can help while Ku’uosh cannot because of his radical learning ethic. Tayo observes that Old Betonie (himself of mixed ancestry) “didn’t talk the way Tayo expected a medicine man to talk. He didn’t act like a medicine man at all” (118). Like Obasan, Old Betonie collects everything, but his is not merely the collection of traditional medicinal products but also telephone books and calendars, to keep “track of things,” he exclaims (120). Old Betonie performs a Scalp ceremony on Tayo. While this traditional ceremony contributes to his healing, it is not enough: “One night or nine nights won’t do it anymore... the ceremony isn’t finished yet” (152). So Betonie sends Tayo off with a prediction that embarks him upon a quest north into the mountains to reclaim cattle that has been stolen from Uncle Josiah, Uncle Robert and himself: “Remember these stars... I’ve seen them and I’ve seen the spotted cattle; I’ve seen a mountain and I’ve seen a woman” (152). Betonie extends and develops Ku’uosh’s teachings. He stresses to Tayo that his malady is not simply individual but an integral part of something much larger and that he (Tayo) has a central role in repairing the harm that has been done: “We all have been waiting for help a long time. But it never has been easy. The people must do it. You must do it.... This has been going on for a long time now. It’s up to you. Don’t let them stop you. Don’t let them finish off this world” (152). While searching for his cattle, Tayo meets the spirit-woman Ts’eh, with whom he lives and falls in love. She gives him the spiritual, psychic, emotional, and cognitive resources to complete the ceremony.

Like with Naomi, Tayo’s learning is characterized by constant ambivalence. On the one hand, he feels a deep and resilient connection with the oral traditions and tellings of the Laguna people:

He knew what white people thought about the stories. In school the science teacher had explained what superstition was, and then held the science textbook up for the class to see the true sources of explanations. He had studied those books, and he had no reasons to believe the stories anymore. The science books explained the causes and effects. But old Grandma always used to say, ‘Back in time immemorial, things were different, the animals could talk to human beings
and many magical things still happened.' He never lost the feeling he had in his chest when she spoke those words, as she did each time she told them stories; and he still felt it was true, despite all they had taught him in school (95).

On the other hand, he is plagued by doubts ingrained in him through white teachings: "All the rest -- old Betoni and his stargazing, the woman in her storm-pattern blanket -- all that was crazy, the kind of old-time superstition the teachers at Indian school used to warn him and Rocky about" (194). As with Naomi's, Tayo's learning is by no means straightforward, but often regressive. At one point, in the middle of the ceremony and full of doubt, he indulges in his friends' drinking companionship and succumbs to the familiar ease of denial: "He didn't have to remember anything, he didn't have to feel anything but this" (159). And finally, also like Naomi, he questions what his ceremonial remembrance-learning can possibly accomplish: "I wonder what good Indian ceremonies can do against the sickness which comes from their wars, their bombs, their lies" (132).

Despite his resistance, however, Tayo does learn. The principal orientation of his learning ceremony is toward a responsible/responsive healing achieved through memorial untanglement and clarity of vision:

But now the feelings were twisted, tangled roots, and all the names for the source of this growth were buried under English words, out of reach. And there would be no peace and the people would have no rest until the entanglement had been unwound to the source (69).

To accomplish this, Tayo first must heed Uncle Josiah's injunction to listen and remember. Ts'eh message to him to "remember everything" reinforces his Uncle's childhood lesson (235). She asserts, "As long as you remember what you have seen, then nothing is gone. As long as you remember, it is part of this story, we have together" (231). Yet, recollection on its own terms is insufficient. Tayo's remembrance must be accompanied by an integral faith in and commitment to the Laguna past and its traditions. He must believe in their medicinal properties if he is to be able to help himself and repair the world.
Second, Tayo must learn to critique dominant discourse -- to identify its ideology and the deception it disguises. In the process, he must unlearn what he has memorized. This interruptive practice begins for Tayo when he learns that his Uncle's cattle had been stolen by none other than white rancher Floyd Lee. He recognizes the extent to which he has been indoctrinated by this discourse when he observes his own reluctance to accuse Lee of thievery:

He knew then he had learned the lie by heart -- the lie which they had wanted him to learn: only brown-skinned people were thieves.... The lie. He cut into the wire as if cutting away at the lie inside himself. The liars had fooled everyone, white people and Indians alike; as long as people believed the lies they would never be able to see what had been done to them or what they were doing to each other.... Their lies would destroy this world (191).

The moment of recognition strikingly accuses and exposes the violence behind the words of two patrolling ranchers who discover Tayo on Lee's property. Believing that Tayo is attempting to steal deer or cattle, their first intention is to take him back to ranch headquarters and then to the jail in Grants. However, they end up letting him go so that they might acquire the mightier prize of a mountain lion whose tracks they have just found. The Texan rancher explains: "'greasers and Indians -- we can run down anytime. But it's been a couple of years since anybody up here got a mountain lion'" (202). He justifies his release of Tayo with the exclamation: "Yeah, we taught him a lesson... These goddamn Indians got to learn whose property this is" (202)!

But if Tayo's tasks are defined by the reconstruction of his ancestral discourse and the deconstruction of white discourse, his learning ultimately, however, is not merely the substitution of one with the other. Rather, he must radically re-configure both to meet his contemporary needs. Indeed, this radical re-configuration constitutes the central feature of Old Betonie's learning ethic. Betonie points out to him that Indian people are being misled in their fear-ridden investments that ceremonies must be performed as exact replicas of past ceremonies so as to prevent future destruction. Betonie conversely insists that ceremonies have always been in transition, and require change in order to meet contemporary demands:
'There are some things I have to tell you,' Betonie began softly.... I have made changes in the rituals. The people mistrust this greatly, but only this growth keeps the ceremonies strong.

'She [Betonie's grandmother] taught me this above all else: things which don't shift and grow are dead things. They are things the witchery people want. Witchery works to scare people, to make them fear growth. But it has always been necessary, and more than ever now, it is. Otherwise we won't make it. We won't survive. That's what the witchery is counting on: that we will cling to the ceremonies the way they were, and then their power will triumph and the people will be no more' (126).

Michael Hobbs, in drawing upon the work of Bahktin, makes the insightful argument that Tayo must account for both traditions of learning by writing his own "internally persuasive discourse" (306). As Betonie's grandmother stresses when Tayo does not want to go to school 

"[the ceremony] is carried on in all languages now, so you have to know English too" (122).

In this respect, then, Tayo cannot simply passively participate in Betonie's ceremony. Rather, he must be active and innovative. This means authoring the conclusion to his own ceremonial story. Ts'eh's teaches this lesson also. In a moment of foretelling, she sees what Betonie already knows, that Tayo will be prevented from completing the ceremony. Those stopping him will be the white men who learn that Tayo has taken re-possession of his cattle, and his friends who believe he has become crazy because he lives isolated in the mountains and who therefore want to return him to the hospital:

The end of the story. They want to change it. They want it to end here, the way all their stories end, encircling slowly to choke the life way. The violence of the struggle excites them, and the killing soothes them. They have their stories about us -- Indian people who are only marking time and waiting for the end. And they would end this story right here, with you fighting to your death alone in these hills.... Because this is the only ending they understand (232).

Ts'eh reveals that his veteran friends are too much the subjects of the witchery of white discourse ever to be able to release themselves from its destruction. Inadvertently, they will consequently seek his demise. If this ending is successfully accomplished, Tayo's death will
simply reinforce what has been thought all along. He will be written off as simply "another victim, a drunk Indian war veteran" (253).

In efforts to outrun this destructive conclusion, Tayo stumbles onto the uranium mine shaft of the Cebolleta Land Grant. In this moment, everything epiphanically comes together. Tayo recognizes that what he calls his "home" is also the place used to create the first atomic bomb (Trinity Site, White Sands, the Jemez Mountains, Los Alamos). This insight enables him to interpret his wartime nightmares of incoherent Japanese, Spanish, Laguna voices. He learns that these intermingled voices were a cry against nuclear devastation and "the fate the destroyers had planned for all of them, for all living things" (246). Tayo finally sees the pattern:

He cried the relief he felt at finally seeing the pattern, the way all the stories fit together -- the old stories, the war stories, their stories -- to become the story that was still being told. He was not crazy: he had never been crazy. He had only seen and heard the world as it always was: no boundaries, only transitions through all distances and time (246).

This vision provides Tayo with the resources finally to compose the conclusion to his story. This conclusion attempts to intervene in witchery's violent designs. Tayo observes Leroy's and Emo's murdering of Harley in efforts to bait Tayo out of hiding. However, instead of following his first impulses to seek immediate revenge for the murder of his friend, he stops himself and turns his back. He significantly counters his own instincts for violence -- his compulsion to take the pliers he has from cutting Lee's fence and drive them into Emo's skull.

What ultimately prevents him from this revengeful act of violence are the remembrances he has learned, particularly Ts'eh's memory to him that he and his people "had always been loved" (255). Tayo's conclusion, then, encompasses a radical writing against the dominant and expected grain of violence. This radical resolution concludes peacefully with Tayo returning home to his reservation to pass on his story and its affirmative message to Ku'uosh and others.
As the final verse maintains, the spell has been broken and the witchery “is dead for now” (261).

THE CEREMONIAL STRUCTURE OF SILKO’S CEREMONY

What is particularly compelling about Silko’s novel is that it does not simply narrate Tayo’s ceremony but also structurally stages it in a manner that beckons reader participation. The first half of the novel formally mirrors Tayo’s postwar distress and disorientation by resisting any conventional structural thematizations. There are no obvious chapter breaks or headings, and few chronological or thematic orienting marks. It is written predominantly in a stream-of-consciousness hallucinegetic and fragmentary fashion, abruptly moving between present and past in apparently unrelated scenes, sometimes in mid-section, mid-paragraph, or mid-sentence. The prose is repeatedly broken up with verse, with mythic Laguna stories that initially make little sense and appear to have little direct bearing on the plot.

However, as Tayo undergoes Old Betonie’s ceremony and his vision begins to clear, so too does the structure of the narrative become more conventionally readable, following a more linear and episodic pattern. Interestingly, whereas in Obasan, Aunt Emily commands Naomi to “write the vision,” in Ceremony, Betonie’s ceremonial vision is dramatically enacted. Tayo observes that “Betonie’s vision was a story he could feel happening -- from the stars and the woman, the mountain and the cattle would come” (186). The gradual formalization of the narrative similarly induces the reader vicariously to perceive this slow unravelling of the ceremonial pattern. The Laguna verses of drought and survival become more uniform and their larger meaning within the context of the narrative becomes identifiable. As the narrative draws to its close, we are able to follow Tayo through to his concluding composition.

Moreover, as with Kogawa’s Obasan, Silko’s narrative is framed with a poetic prologue and epilogue that similarly and simultaneously foreshadows the novel’s pedagogical intent and structure, and that specifically addresses the reader. In the opening proem (or sets of
proems), the narrative voice commands the reader to attention. The voice will re-tell the Laguna story of the spider "Thought-Woman." Thought-woman is the co-creator of the universe (with her two sisters), diviner of names, and the spinner of tales. The proem stresses the importance of stories for the survival of Native culture: "[they] aren't just entertainment... They are all we have, you see/all we have to fight off/ illness and death" (2). The injunction to readers/listeners is direct: they demand from their audience not a voyeuristic or spectatorial response, but a serious and attentive hearing that does not dismiss, distort, nor forget these stories, particularly in the violent face of modernist discourse: "Their evil is mighty/but it can’t stand up to our stories./So they try to destroy the stories/let the stories be confused or forgotten" (2). The proem also directs readers to the narrative’s remedial purpose: "The only cure/I know/is a good ceremony/that’s what she said." The narrative, therefore, constitutes a performative "re-telling" of a reclaimative ceremonial story, a story-telling whose properties are to be curative.

Moreover, the proem ends with a single word on a solitary page: "Sunrise." The word signals both a literal beginning and an awakening; the beginning of the narrative and of Tayo’s waking up from his nightmares. It also, however, gestures toward Tayo’s and readers’ initiation into a "good ceremony." Midway through the novel, as Tayo is in the midst of his ceremonial learning, we learn the deeper meaning behind this opening reference. Tayo arises after a night with Ts’eh, and ventures outside. In the crisp morning air, he recalls the ritual of the Dawn people, who would sound bells and turtle-shell rattles and chant a song-prayer to greet the sunrise:

Sunrise!
We come at sunrise
to greet you.
We call you
at sunrise.
Father of the clouds
you are beautiful
at sunrise.
Sunrise!
Tayo stands up to repeat the song in memory of its significance:

He repeated the words as he remembered them, not sure if they were the right ones, but feeling they were right, feeling the instant of the dawn was an event which in a single moment gathered all things together -- the last stars, the mountaintops, the clouds, and the winds -- celebrating this coming. The power of each day spilled over the hills in great silence. Sunrise. He ended the prayer with 'sunrise' because he knew the Dawn people began and ended all their words with 'sunrise' (182).

Tayo’s reading of and participation in the Dawn people’s ceremony -- and his sense of communion with the words and their meaning -- marks his reconnection with the traditions of his ancestry and his own memorial-healing. The ceremony that Thought-Woman has begun is thus taking effect. Now cognizant of the full background to “sunrise,” we realize that Silko’s use of the word in the prologue is itself an invocation to the Dawn people, and to the coming of dawn as a single harmonious moment in which all things are gathered together. The novel not only begins with this invocation but also purposefully ends, again on a separate page, with a final gesture: “Sunrise/accept this offering/Sunrise.” Silko’s narrative and ceremonial re-telling of Tayo’s ceremony thus constitutes an offering, a gift, to the dawn. But, as a prayer, it also signifies a hope -- that of harmony and the destruction of the witchery. In this respect, I would argue that the song-prayer also addresses the reader to become accountable and answerable to what it says and promises.

Silko’s dramatic staging of a ceremonial learning through her novelistic structure thus strategically implicates readers in what is being performed. Structurally enforced is a binding relationship between Tayo’s ceremonial remembrance-learning and readers’ own reading and learning. It is not just, therefore, that we receive the text but that through our reading we participate in the ceremony. In this way, not only are we addressed directly but also indirectly. The instructions given to Tayo to remember everything and that “[w]e all have been waiting for help a long time. But it never has been easy. The people must do it. You must do it” (152) applies equally urgently to readers.
James Ruppert draws explicit attention to the ceremonial structure of the novel and the obligations conjoined with reading it:

He (the reader) must understand the story and see the work of the destroyers in the world around him. Night Swan, Betonie, Ts'eh or Tayo could also say to each of us, 'you are part of it now.' So the reader too must act. Great responsibility is placed on the shoulders of those who understand. They must see to it that the story ends properly. Consequently the readers are also given an identity in the mythic story. They are members of a group of people who must tell the story correctly, who must defeat the destroyers. They are part of the story now. Others will speak of them when they learn the story (84).

While Ruppen rather hyperbolically extends his insight to claim unproblematically that by the conclusion of the novel, readers themselves have been given meaning, identity, and harmony, he perceptively observes Silko’s strategy to make readers’ responsible for what she recounts. In this sense, Silko’s aims are in accord with Native oral traditions that hold the listener/reader responsible for participating in the story. Silko maintains that in these traditions “a great deal of the story is believed to be inside the listener, and the storyteller’s role is to draw the story out of the listeners” (qtd. in Hobbs, fn 1.). Michael Fischer observes the prevalence of this participatory strategy in American ethnic literature more generally. He maintains that “the characteristic of contemporary writing of encouraging participation of the reader in the production of meaning... is an ethical device attempting to activate in the reader a desire for communitas with others while preserving rather than effacing differences” (1986, 232-3).

Yet these observations, alongside the comment made by Scarberry in the beginning of this chapter that the structure of Ceremony requires the reader's memory to function like that of Tayo's, invite a series of pedagogical questions: Insofar as readers are being addressed and implicated in this re-telling, what is the precise character of their “participation”? More specifically, to what and how are they answerable in their performative reading? What is the teaching-in-the-text in this regard? And, finally, how, if at all, does Silko’s novel establish communitas while nevertheless preserving difference?
READING AS CEREMONIAL LEARNING

Consideration of these questions is crucial in the measure that, as a heterogenous community of readers, we are indeed being called to attention, responsibility/responsivity, and action by *Ceremony*. To be commanded to read/listen/participate and to end the witchery unleashed upon the world requires learning the precise requirements of this answerability, both within and outside of the context of our reading of this novel. What consequently needs to be delineated at the outset is a more precise accounting of what “ceremonial participation” might encompass. In what follows, I thus attempt such a delineation by considering different modes and possibilities of participation. Each of these modes, I argue, are embedded in different pedagogies of learning (about/from others). In detailing these various modes of participatory-learning (as the last chapter to this dissertation will elaborate), I am by no means seeking to lay out a prescriptive taxonomy of reader-response. Rather, my focus is on the consideration of what is at stake in different learning encounters with respect to how these modes of learning are responsive to the claim of answerability exerted by Silko’s narrative and to the pedagogical learning ethic introduced in the opening chapter to this dissertation. Of predominant concern, in this regard, is the question of how different learning pedagogies/practices enable learning on terms that do not repress or refuse the alterity of another’s learning-experience. In other words, I am exploring the possibilities for a learning that does not proceed on ontological grounds.

To this end, therefore, I identify five different modes of ceremonial-learning participation possible in the reading of/engagement with Silko’s *Ceremony*:

1) As “tourist learner.” This mode references the reader/learner’s observation of ceremonial practices as a passing-through and passing-by.

2) As “identificatory learner.” Invoked here is a learning relationship in which readers imaginatively identify with and substitute themselves for Tayo and his *Bildung*.

3) As “communitas-learner.” This means being at and participating in the ceremony not as identical to Tayo but alongside him, as another party.

4) As “ethnographic learner.” This also involves being present as another party in the ceremony but as ‘outsider’ and ‘researcher’.
5) As "witness-learner." This final mode of participation emphasizes a particular vigilant relation of "proximity" to Tayo's remembrance-learning and *Ceremony*’s historical referents.

I begin, then, with a critical elaboration of each mode of participation. As is probably already evident, this elaboration moves toward a prioritization and outlining of an alternative practice of reading as "witness-learning." What I intend to show is that these other four modes variously ascribe to an ontological understanding of learning and, so, are insufficiently responsive to the ethical address of *Ceremony*, or, for that matter, each of the three *Bildungsromanen* under discussion in this dissertation. To the extent this is so, I nevertheless want to retain the rhetoric of “learning” in each case. As the conclusion to this dissertation emphasizes, “learning” is by no means singularly practised.² Yet concurrently, however, I hold onto this word in the belief that much of its significance lies in the promise of its dimensions of answerability -- not in any positivist sense of progression but rather in terms of a deepening consciousness of one’s responsibilities and commitments not to but for others and for one’s past and present world (this distinguishing point I develop more extensively in subsequent chapters, particularly in the final chapter on “Re-Learning Questions”).

Beginning with “tourist-learning,” I would argue that this participatory practice presents learning at its most superficial and its least answerable. I characterize it as a variously voyeuristic, spectatorial, or consumer engagement with what is being read/heard/seen. Learning, on these terms, issues principally from an idle, distanced, and largely uninformed curiosity or fascination with the object of interest. It is characterized more by a passing and entertained attentiveness than by any deeper principled commitment. Ceremonial participation on these terms -- speaking symbolically with respect to reading practice -- might involve

² I also wonder if retaining the notion of learner in these cases might not also issue an important tension between good (however, misplaced) and bad intention. In other words, learning might encompass an act of good faith while not learning would reject any "genuine interest" in another, such that "indifference" in these practices of learning is foreclosed. On such terms, one would assume that an "indifferent tourist" or an "indifferent ethnographer" is oxymoronic.
browsing, posing, picture-taking, trying on, buying. Because tourist-learning primarily references such a passing-through and passing-by, it would rarely challenge or unseat learners from what they already know. Learning here would be “acquired” mostly incorporatively, perhaps on trophy terms that enable learners simplistically to assert, “been there, read that, know that.” Certainly, this mode of learning would be violative of the integrity and complexities of its object. What learning directs itself to, within these touristic parameters, cannot be more than indexed, abbreviated, sensationalized, shelved.

Silko herself illustrates and warns against this brand of learning within the context of her novel. Not only does she point out in her poetic prologue (“stories... aren’t just entertainment”) how hearing/reading on such terms undermines the very generative foundation and purpose of ceremonial learning, but she also reinforces this point and emphasizes its violative character by juxtaposing Tayo’s Scalp Ceremony with the public ceremony held in the town of Gallup, the town on the borders of the reservation with its dismal Indian ghettos which Old Betonie’s home overlooks. Organized by three white men and the town’s mayor, the Gallup ceremony is held annually precisely to draw tourists and business for natives and non-natives:

The Gallup Ceremony had been an annual event for a long time. It was good for the tourist business coming through the summertime on Highway 66. They liked to see Indians and Indian dances; they wanted a chance to buy Indian jewelry and Navajo rugs.... The tourists got to see what they wanted: from the grandstand at the Ceremonial grounds they watched the dancers perform, and they watched Indian cowboys ride bucking horses and Brahma bulls (116).

The Gallup ceremony is mere spectacle and, as Old Betonie emphasizes, a hypocritical ritual: “People ask me why I live here,” he said in good English, “I tell them that I want to keep track of the people. ‘Why over here?’ they ask me. ‘Because this is where Gallup keeps Indians until Ceremonial time. Then they want to show us off to the tourists” (117). Within this epistemological framework, Natives are rendered as exotic other, showcased and stereotyped for tourists’ vagrant and window-shopping sensibilities. Reading Tayo’s ceremonial
remembrance-learning from within a “participatory” tourist-learning mode would reduce it and its significance to a version of the Gallup ceremony.

Paula Allen Gunn’s article, “Special Problems in Teaching Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony,*” draws explicit attention to how student-readers in her university classrooms frequently approach this narrative with just such a sensibility:

> My students, usually ‘wanna be’s’ to at least some degree, are vicariously interested in the exotic aspects of Indian ways -- and they usually mean by that traditional spiritual practices, understandings and beliefs. Drawing their attention from the object of their longing to more mundane literary concerns and practices is troublesome. At every least opportunity, they vigorously wrest the discussion from theme, symbol, structure and plot to questions of ‘medicine,’ sacred language, rituals, and spiritual customs (382).

While the final chapter of this dissertation critically takes up Gunn’s investment in teaching the “more mundane literary concerns,” her observation well-illustrates how students’ reading is characterized by a voyeuristic learning about the other that reduces an attendance to difference to fascination or longing and knowledge to curiosity and appropriative acquisition.

In contrast, participation as “identificatory learner” would not involve holding Tayo’s ceremonial remembrance-learning up for display (for “show and tell”) but rather would proceed imaginatively through readers’ dramatic alignment with Tayo’s suffering and his working through of his relationship to his past and its inheritance. Readers might empathetically project themselves into Tayo’s experiences -- drawing upon resonating events in their own lives that they have either personally undergone or with which they claim a vicarious relationship. Alternatively, this projection may involve an *ecstasis* in which readers imaginatively transport themselves into Tayo’s shoes in ways marked by efforts of self-forgetfulness. Such imaginative projections would accomplish the “re-living” of Tayo’s remembrance-learning and become the means for the assertion of a comprehensive understanding of Tayo’s character, background and formative *Bildung* on readers’ own relational, substitutive terms. On these terms, readers would viscerally experience Tayo’s nausea, would look at the black and white
image of the stars Silko has included and see the patterns Tayo does, would mimic Tayo's remembrance-echoing of the Dawn people's sunrise prayer and similarly "feel right" about it. Finally, such consequent ownership of Tayo's life would also readily lead to the assumption of the ethico-political injunctions directed at Tayo. Readers thus experience Betonie's instruction to repair the world and stop the witchery unleashed on civilization as implicating them. Furthermore, within this identificatory logic, by the novel's ceremonial resolution, not only have readers themselves become healed, but they have also been incited to ethic-political action in ways that exceed the boundaries of their reading. It is precisely such a pedagogical presumption that leads Ruppert to the troubling conclusion:

The title *Ceremony* refers not only to the ceremony that Tayo experiences, but also to the harmony, healing, and increased awareness that the reader acquires through the reading and understanding of the novel itself. It has produced meaning, identity, and understanding in the reader. It has brought the reader into the story, brought him in touch with the unity of all that is, placed him at the center of the swirling sand painting of the world. It has brought him into harmony (85).

Within an identificatory framework, participation produces an heroic learning that has readers understanding and successfully completing Tayo's ceremony; authoring its conclusions as does Tayo. However, I would argue that this "authoring," this "centering," ultimately comes at the expense of Tayo's learning. The readers of Silko's narrative complete the ceremony, but they do so in Tayo's stead.

**NUSSBAUM AND THE ETHICS OF IDENTIFICATION**

To critique this second mode of participation more fully, I briefly refer to the Neo-Aristotelean learning ethics of Martha Nussbaum. Doing so, I believe, not only serves to shed light on the ethical problems this kind of reading poses and to more fully historicize this mode of reading practice, but it also prepares the way for the substance of the next chapter. Guided by the question of how literature can inform readers of how they should live, literary reading,
for Nussbaum, is in large measure a learning enterprise. She principally argues that literary works not only stage real-life ethical difficulties in their complex minutiae but that, in so doing, they challenge readers to develop a heuristics for the responsible working through of those dilemmas. Since, for Nussbaum, moral experience amounts to a clarity of attention, apprehension, and attentiveness, not only does reading “someone else’s complex position” in literature become the same as the reading of one’s own life but the skills acquired in reading become applicable to one’s capability to apprehend, be alert to, and act in response to moral complexities found in the everyday real world (Nussbaum 1986, 11).

Within this framework, reading provides readers with what Kenneth Burke defines as “equipment for living” (qtd. in DesPres, xiii), involving them in a Socratic enterprise in which they negotiate and seek to resolve the complexities of ethical dilemmas faced by the characters, by testing historical and contemporary moral precepts against these dilemmas and through the creative revaluation of these precepts. Nussbaum states that “the conception of moral philosophy with which I am working makes philosophy’s specification of the good an outgrowth of an educational, Socratic interchange between text and reader, who actively judges how well the text accounts for his or her ethical experience, I shall speak as though the activity of the reader is pertinent to moral philosophy” (Nussbaum 1990, fn. 143). Learning, she maintains, is thus principally achieved through the element of surprise and through inspiration: the outcome of inquiry is not a “mere repetition of his or her view that the reader would have given at the start” (Nussbaum 1986, 10). Rather, the literary work opens readers to the partiality of their assertions, enlightening them as to “what they really think” and produces “a harmonious adjustment of their beliefs, both singly and in community with one another” (Nussbaum 1986, 11). Because of literature’s interrogative possibilities, because it brings “certain themes and questions to each reader’s attention, [it] can therefore advance the conversation among readers” (Nussbaum 1986, 14). Literary engagement thus alters readers’ communally-based moral precepts for the better, through ongoing dialogue. Nussbaum
maintains that the literary work (specifically the tragic poem) will be distant enough from the reader’s bias and so “can count as a shared extension of all reader’s experience” (1986, 15).

As Nussbaum affirms in her discussion of Henry James’s *The Golden Bowl*, ethical practice issues from a “Socratic working-through of the interlocutor’s or reader’s own moral intuitions that will leave this person clearer about his or her own moral aims” (143). In reading this, what she perceives as an exemplary novel, readers participate in a formative learning experience equivalent to that of its principal characters: “the adventure of the reader of this novel, like the adventure of the intelligent characters inside it... calls upon and develops our ability to confront mystery [and] develop our moral assessment process” (1990, 143). This inclusivity of reader into text, Nussbaum argues, is particularly highlighted by James’s use of “we”. What this novel centrally teaches readers, she asserts, is their inattentiveness and the need for the consideration of life’s complexities.

According to Nussbaum, readers are thus instructed through their identification with the novel’s protagonist, Maggie Verver. In her interpretation, the novel’s beginning has Maggie aspiring toward moral perfection and toward being an ideal daughter to her father. Her subsequent marriage, however, places particular stresses on her moral world view. Yet, she refuses to broaden and refine her principles to accommodate the complexities her new situation poses. thereby showing readers Maggie’s moral blindness and fallibility in what is her paradoxical naive desire to be virtuous. It is only much later that Maggie comes to acknowledge the realities of conflict and its inherency in everyday life, although she nevertheless sets out in the novel’s resolution to restore harmony and balance. She does so despite the fact that this more noble goal has her morally compromising herself and engaging in cruelty and dishonesty. The novel concludes, according to Nussbaum, with an incorporative moral vision that shows Americans the ideal of American values and how Americans necessarily fail in endeavors to achieve this ideal as a result of their moral fragility. According to Nussbaum, what Maggie comes to learn is to be “a reader of nuance and complexity” (134). The lesson
"for us and Maggie... [is to] see clearly and with high intelligence. Respond with the vibrant sympathy of a vividly active imagination. If there are conflicts, face them squarely and with keen perception. Choose as well as you can for overt action, but at every moment remember the more comprehensive duties of the imagination and emotions. If love of your husband requires hurting and lying to Charlotte, then do these cruel things making the better choice" (135). As readers, we gain insight into our own inadequate moral characters "as we carefully follow and respond to Maggie.... Seeing this world through her intelligent eyes, we hardly notice that we ourselves are rapidly becoming as distant from Charlotte, and as blind to the inner life of her pain, as Maggie herself (145-5). Finally, Nussbaum maintains that James’s text not only reveals the limits and possibilities of moral perception but also calls us to responsible moral action through our improvisational capacities. As Maggie’s view of herself as an actress enabled her to innovatively work through what was required by her for her responsible conduct and learning, so too are we able necessarily to achieve the same, as differing historical and contemporary contexts require the incessant creative revaluation of moral codes of behaviour.

Robert Eaglestone takes up a pointed critique of Nussbaum’s philosophy. Like Eaglestone, what I find problematic in Nussbaum’s work is the suggestion implicit in her writing that literature becomes ethically significant through personal identification. In readers’ enactment of the Bildung in/of the story principally through an emotional identification with the main character -- an identification that has readers living in the text as the protagonist -- what gets over-ridden, among other relationships, is a relation with the text that acknowledges its radical difference; hence, precisely its potential to elicit surprise from which we might learn. Eaglestone writes:

Nussbaum’s demand is that the reader make a straightforward imaginative identification with the characters to ‘re-enact’ the particular ethical situation of the novel. Once the reader has identified with a character, the novel becomes ‘mine’, that is, it becomes a role-play enactment of the reader’s moral dilemmas. However, the whole thrust of Nussbaum’s argument relies on the novel as offering an other approach to understanding the world, a surprising
new and challenging perspective, that cannot be identified as one's own but with which one enacts a dialogue. 'To enact' in itself implies that one is enacting something different from oneself, and thus reaffirms the otherness of the text. To identify with a character means that the text can no longer offer a surprise or a challenge to one's normative set of rules, in exactly the way that Nussbaum's argument crucially demands that it does (50).

Against the background of a Levinasian understanding, Eaglestone stresses that the principle of surprise inherently requires the return of a difference not made possible through the exigencies of identification (50). Identification is based on recognition rather than surprise. What gets lost in the reading process, therefore, is precisely that concept of performativity, or innovation that her main characters embody: reading becomes a more or less mimetic rather than actively hermeneutic practice. Moreover, that the ethically minded reader must be open to surprise means that the appreciation of the moral significance of a literary work requires that the reader is ideally able to put aside preconceived political, social, and personal ideas. Eaglestone emphasizes the impossibility of this. He stresses that this is impossible if the task is both to identify with a character by bracketing off one's own location and yet use that character for reflection on one's own experience. If the reader becomes the character, then the amount of reflection the reader has is limited.

With respect to Silko's Ceremony, imagining ourselves as Tayo not only denies the singularity and difference of Tayo's past and experience but also makes reading practice such that our interests over-ride the address made in the text to “hear” the story; not as mirror to our own, nor for our own purposes, but rather principally as the return of the unfamiliar. As subsequent chapters elaborate, the Socratic pedagogy in which Nussbaum's learning ethic is situated retains the narrative and the events to which it bears witness within our own epistemological and ontological frames of understanding.

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3 Eaglestone extends this criticism of Nussbaum to include her collapse of narrative voice with the author who then takes over as guiding ethical present, as well as to include her account of reading as continual surprise as foreclosing the possibilities of other ethically motivated readings based on, for example, ideas of gender or social justice (52).
READING AS CEREMONIAL LEARNING, CONTINUED

The third and fourth modes of participation I have identified reference readers'/learners' involvement in the ceremony not as substitutes for Tayo but as if they themselves were separately present. Participation as "communitas-learner," I contend, commonly involves identification, not as replacement but as a process of belonging or coming-to-belong. It issues from a spirit of conjoinment, familiarity, and solidarity; in an investment not articulated as an "I am/know Tayo" but rather as "Tayo is my brother... and I am with him and of him." Reading within this framework proceeds not on the presumptive identificatory terms of having gone through the particularities of Tayo's circumstances but rather on more general multiple terms of affiliation and possession: with his geographical background, his ancestry, his cultural and ethnic traditions, his education, his oppression, his ceremonies, his learning and so on. Readers, on these pedagogical terms, would participate in ways that already manifest a legacy of continuity and connection with the past or that would be desirous of assuming this legacy as their own. Expressed concretely, readers might mimic with Tayo the sunrise prayer of the Dawn people and Tayo's ceremonial remembrance-learning from within the orientation either of a past or future-oriented affinity with these. Indeed, within this participatory framework, the predominant terms of ceremonial engagement might be that of mimesis. In the spirit of communitas, what would be required would be an embodied acceptance and openness, a practicing of Shelley's reading ethic of a "willing suspension of disbelief." Finally, ceremonial participation here would necessarily involve reader's own ceremonial working through; again, not as Tayo but as themselves. Rather than imaginatively insert themselves into and occupy Tayo's writing of his own conclusion as would an identificatory-learner, readers within this characterization might work through and rewrite their own narrative ending to the learning ceremony but in ways that would similarly lead them "home," and to a home that neighbours Tayo's own.
In contrast to the above, reading as "ethnographic learning" proceeds predominantly from an outsider rather than insider relationship. While readers here may mimic Tayo's ceremonial prayer, doing so is done less in the spirit of communal affiliation than in an empirical grammar of research and information. Rather than mimic the sunrise prayer to see what it would feel like as might a passing tourist learner, or rather than mimic it because it "feels right" to Tayo as might an identificatory learner, or, lastly, mimic it because it feels right or wants to feel right on its own terms as would a communitas-learner, the ethnographic learner might mime this prayer on similarly though more extended exploratory tourist terms but also on more questioning, comparative, and judgmental terms -- in consideration of what this prayer involves, where it comes from, whether and to what extent it is (is not) right. The ethnographic learner, from this position of researcher and questioner, might participate in Tayo's ceremonial remembrance-learning with commentary notebook in hand.

While I critically examine these two modes of learning more substantively in the next chapter, suffice it at this point to more generally and briefly indicate certain of their ethical consequences. Reading from within a position of communitas-learner clearly draws attention to the realization that reading occurs within a heterogenous community as well as to the problem of (readerly) identity. The ethical implications of this learning practice differ depending on relations of ethnic, cultural, national, geographical, ancestral, linguistic, communal, gendered, educational, historical etc. affiliations. Toward the end of Silko's *Ceremony*, Tayo experiences a sense of binding harmony with people of Laguna, of Japanese, and of Mexican ancestry who have all suffered under the devastation of nuclear destruction. But what would it mean for someone of Japanese background to sing the solemn sunrise prayer along with Tayo, or to adopt a Laguna-inscribed ceremonial remembrance-learning as their own in a spirit of belonging? Moreover, to what extent does learning as a suspension of disbelief allow for a questioning engagement of both the ceremony and the terms of one's participation? This last question is similarly signalled by Silko in her implicit criticisms of the
traditional and unchanging/unquestionable ways/practices of the old medicine men. What remains unproblematised in her narrative, however, are the complex nuances of departure and return in transformative learning. From the other side, questioning from within an ethnographic learning perspective threatens to reproduce the manner, orientation, and consequences of Kogawa's Grand Inquisitor. Central questions that emanate from this perspective are: “what would/should I have done in that situation,” “what knowledge do I already have that enables me to comprehend this experience,” “how is what I see useful to me,” “how does it confirm what I know about myself”? Learning here is inscribed with value-laden terms of tolerance, usefulness, appropriation, dismissal. Participation might entail a “passing through” (invoking Wikan) as an interpretative, “surprising” endeavour that projects onto the scene of learning an audience's own empirical, hermeneutic and phantasmically based skepticisms, suspicions, suppositions. Moreover, this learning “about” the other threatens to be implicated, as Kogawa maintains, in ‘carnivorous, and murderous intent’. In its appropriative extreme, it threatens to exclude or annihilate difference. Silko herself asserts within the context of her narrative, referring to white discourse: “The effects [of witchery] were hidden, evident only in the sterility of their art, which continued to feed off the vitality of other cultures” (204).

Gunn importantly explores certain of the difficult issues of reading introduced here in the context of a discussion of the tensions she experiences when she teaches Silko’s Ceremony. Herself of Laguna ancestry, she questions classroom use of “sacred materials”: that is, “any material that is drawn from ritual and myth” (379). She maintains that, as a university professor, she has what she deems is an “ethical” responsibility to “provide students with the most complete, coherent information available, and in teaching Native American literature providing the best information includes drawing from ritual and mythic sources that have bearing on the text under consideration” (379). At the same time, she finds that this responsibility directly conflicts with her native ethical upbringing, under which terms “using the tradition while contravening it is to do violence to it” (379). She maintains that,
contrary to the orientation of white dominant informational discourse that requires “learning all and telling all in the interests of knowledge, objectivity, and freedom” (382), Pueblo practice is characterized by persons’ refusals to inquire about matters that are not “necessary, sufficient, and congruent with their spiritual and social place” (379). She stresses the extent to which the Laguna people are devoutly protective of the privacy of their stories, myths, and cultural traditions, and notes how this view is pervasive throughout other Indian communities. Navajo belief, for instance, similarly holds that the re-telling of oral stories to those outside of its community, and particularly in print form may lead to that community’s immanent destruction. While stories thus have the power to heal, they also can injure and become part of the witchery of/in the world.4 In this context, Gunn tells of her hearing of a particular Laguna historical moment that testifies to this belief. She explains that an anthropologist by the name of Elsie Clews Parsons had gone to Laguna to collect material on Pueblo culture and religion. Parson’s ethnographic observations, when published, horrified the Laguna community. According to Gunn, “in accordance with her academic training, she [Parson’s] objectified, explained, detailed and analysed their lives as though they were simply old artifacts, fetishes, and discussed the supernaturals as though they were objects of interest and patronization” (383). She asserts that Parson’s publication coincided with the deepening of the drought in Pueblo, the increase of non-Native visitors to the community, and several ensuing personal and social horrors, such as the discovery of uranium on Laguna land, the development of nuclear weapons close to Jemez, the Second World War, water and land poisoned by nuclear waste etc. (384). As a consequence of this destruction, Gunn maintains that “all entry by non-traditionalists to dances and stories was cut off. They [the Lagunas] had witnessed first-hand the appalling consequences of telling what was private for reasons that far exceed simple cultural purism” (384).

4 Gunn, therefore, questions why Silko herself chose to include the long mythic poem text of Laguna’s salvation from drought that runs throughout the narrative when that story is not to be told outside the community.
Gunn notes that while, like Rocky, her educational background should make it easy for her to dismiss these "coincidences," her body cannot forget its remembrance-learning. When teaching or writing in ways that over-ride her native beliefs, she finds herself physically ill, her body rebelling against her own conscious violations (385). Unable to resolve this conflict, she finds herself in many ways "non-teaching" the novel; that is, avoiding discussions of the particularities of native spiritual systems (and, in the context of Ceremony, of the significance of Tayo's prayers, rituals, and spiritual activities) and predominantly focusing her attention on literary properties of fiction such as plot and action. In this difficult compromise, she asserts that she feels that she has failed both her academic responsibilities and her Laguna ones (385).

READING AS WITNESS-LEARNING

In an effort to respond to Gunn's ethical dilemma, and having now examined the limitations of the four modes of participatory-learning previously outlined, I begin an introductory sketch of an alternative reading practice; that of "witness-learning." The term "witness" has a long history in judicial and theological literature, and is increasingly being deployed in literary and pedagogical discussions that wrestle with the ethical character of contemporary engagements with historical events that have left a traumatic legacy on those who survived them. My reasons for invoking it here are three-fold. First, as suggested in the introductory chapter, the word used in the context of reading practice foregrounds the fact that the events being "fictionalized" in the literature of historical witness index actual historical moments. Second, as also suggested in the introductory chapter, the literature of historical witness itself bears witness/testifies to these events and their legacy of suffering through

5 With specific respect to its literary and pedagogical currency, see Henry Louis Gates (1991), Felman and Laub (1992), Simon (1994), Aarons (1996), Brinkley-Youra (1996), diPaolantonio (forthcoming), Salverson (forthcoming). Rather than pedagogical practice being underscored with agendas of indoctrination, colonization, utilization, what is significantly being struggled with here through the deployment of the language of witness are the possible radical terms for the aspiration of a non-violative/violent relationship with suffering others. To this extent, this dissertation seeks to contribute to this vigilant working through within the context of its specification in the reading/teaching of particular literary works.
practices of remembrance-learning. Third, I use the word because it centrally emphasizes a responsible/responsive commitment of attention to what is being witnessed. It calls upon a commitment of answerability. In what follows in this dissertation, then, I develop what I consider the particularities of this witness-learning to encompass within the specific terms of literary reading and the broader terms of a radical learning ethic. By way of conclusion to this chapter, I briefly gesture toward certain practices of witness-learning that take into account a relation of respect to what is being witnessed and that particularly bear upon Silko’s ceremonial narrative.6

a) Being observant of those moments that would be acceptable to mimic (and in consideration of under what terms) and withdrawal from those that would constitute a violation of the “sacredness” of the practices of others. Readers might thus not sing the sunrise prayer but look at the image of the night sky Silko has included for her readers on the basis of their hearing of the ceremonial story.

b) Refusing to identify with Tayo or imagine his suffering as something identifiable. But rather hearing Tayo’s traumatic testimony in ways that are responsive to what Tayo (as third person character and narrative voice) says and does not and cannot say. This applies equally to the narrative’s other characters, and to Silko’s own writerly absent-presence.

c) Learning the discourses of witchery taught in the novel. Learning, beyond the scope of this narrative, more about these discourses and the ways in which North American consciousness is implicated in them. Learning, for instance, more about the Pueblo uranium mines, Pueblo exploitation, and the discourses of secrecy surrounding them.

d) Attending to the fragments of traditional Laguna myths and poems inserted in the narrative in ways that are mindful of their historical “sacredness.” And, in tandem with this, supplementing one’s reading by learning more about Laguna practices to have a more informed/just sense of what is involved in a responsible witnessing and re-telling.

e) Authoring not the conclusion to Tayo’s story but writing an ending that reflectively examines readers’ differential learning of what it means to witness his past and that, in this way, is accountable to its ethical address and intervenes in the discourses of witchery. And, concurrently, passing-on the story to others not in the same way that Tayo does to Ku’uosh and other members of his community, but in ways that are marked by readers responsible reading of it

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6 This is also written in the recognition that the particularities of every text need to be taken into account in the detailing of any practice of witness-learning.
and on terms (as will be more fully discussed in Chapters Five and Six) that implicate readers.\(^7\)

f) Hearing the ceremonial sunrise prayer and the ceremonial remembrance-learning that is the sub-text and structure of the novel and becoming answerable to and committed to its ethico-political address in ways that do not involve a taking-on of the ceremony as one’s own. Particularly, as the next chapter will examine in detail, refusing to take on Tayo’s healing or settle readers’ learning in the novel’s ceremonial reconciliation, that is refusing to make any reading claims for the restorative location of a ceremonial home, meaning, and identity.

I maintain that these witnessing practices, in conclusion, themselves exercise a transition (as Old Betonie calls for), a transition that has one, in Levinasian terms, writing/reading/learning otherwise, in ways that gesture toward one’s being for the other. In the next chapter, I develop my consideration of certain of these learning practices further, with a more specifically Levinasian inflection. Particularly I elaborate in the context of a reading of the remembrance-learning staged in Paule Marshall’s *Praisesong for the Widow*, the claim made by Eaglestone that what he describes an “ethical criticism” is “a ‘witness’ to the saying in the language of literature: this witnessing is its responsibility and duty” (170).

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\(^7\) This is precisely what troubles me about the substance of Gunn’s teaching practice; namely, that by focussing class discussion on the elements of fiction -- theme, plot, setting, etc. -- she emphasizes literary technique at the expense of enabling students to examine their own implication in the teaching-in-the-text.
CHAPTER FOUR

(UN) LEARNING HOME

The responsibility with which I am charged is not mine, and because of it I am no longer myself.... The responsibility with which I am charged is not mine and causes me not to be I.

Maurice Blanchot 1995, 13, 18.

INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, I considered what might count as a responsible/responsive reading of Silko’s Ceremony (and, by implication, other narratives within the Bildungsroman sub-genre of North American literature of historical witness). Specifically, I examined the question of the reader’s learning role in the witnessing of another’s suffering and ceremonial working through of an oppressed past. In this chapter, I extend this consideration by way of reflection on the latter half of Kogawa’s Human Right’s statement; namely, that the identification with suffering “points us to home.” My guiding concern is the question of the pedagogical relationship between “home” and “remembrance-learning” as staged within these Bildungsromanen and within the possible terms of the witnessing practice of a radical reading-learning ethic. “Home” here denotes not simply a geographical base and orientation, but resonates also with implications of national, communal, ethnic, familial identity, and with the (un)conscious ideality of a “safe haven.” Home encompasses an (un)conscious and envisioned site precisely of communitas, of affiliation and acceptance.

The Bildungsroman genre in general represents the protagonist’s formative learning with the terms of a physical or symbolic departure from a childhood home to a site of mature
reconciliation and self-identity. Home thus is figured as point of departure and as direction and object of learning. North American ethnic Bildungsromanen such as Kogawa’s Obasan and Silko’s Ceremony stage a remembrance-learning of “home” in the face of historical and contemporary (inter)national abjection and alienation: home becomes what precisely must be variably remembered, learned, worked through, and rewritten.¹ In this chapter, however, I examine the relationship between home and learning more fully. I do so through a discussion of this thematic not as it is staged within these two narratives but rather as it is performed in Paule Marshall’s Praisesong for the Widow. I follow this analysis with a complication of this learning-home relationship in the context of the consideration of its consequences for a pedagogical practice of witness-learning.

REMEMBRANCE-LEARNING IN PAULE MARSHALL’S PRAISESONG FOR THE WIDOW

Praisesong is instrumental to these thematic considerations as it structurally charts the remembrance-learning of its protagonist Avey Johnson -- a wealthy black middle-aged widowed New Yorker -- through a physical and symbolic geographical mapping of a series of radical departures and arrivals. Indeed, the narrative begins and ends in medias res -- opening in the midst of Avey’s journey in the Caribbean and closing with her flight back to America. Rather than, however, elaborate on this theme at this point, I begin my discussion with a more general examination of Avey’s singular remembrance-learning.

The narrative’s opening finds Avey in a half-possessed panic to disembark from a Caribbean cruise she has taken with her two long-time friends, Thomisina and Clarice. A late spring cruise was an annual ritual for the threesome since a little over a year following the death of Avey’s husband, Jerome (Jay) Johnson. Committing to the first cruise three years prior to

¹ Much of the canonical American Bildungsromanen depict the protagonist’s learning within the paradox of reconciliation and alienation -- in which maturity comes in the tragic recognition of the impossibility of a return to a nativist home.
the novel’s 1977 present met with much opposition from the youngest of Avey’s three daughters, Marion, a twenty-eight year old divorced Brooklyn activist and schoolteacher of black inner-city students, most of whom the public school system had rejected as “impossible to teach” (16). Having begged her mother to tour Brazil and Ghana in prior years, Marion dismisses Avey’s vacation plans as a “meaningless cruise with a bunch of white folks” (13). Indeed, Marion is the first within the narrative to address Avey: “Why can’t you be a little imaginative, for God’s sake, a little independent, and go off on your own somewhere. Learn something!” (14-5).

This initial injunction sets the background against which Avey’s remembrance-learning is staged. As a learner, Avey is manifestly in denial of her ancestral African-American heritage. Her modern upscale Manhattan life is constituted in her assimilation of the superficialities and discriminatory ideologies of dominant white capitalist culture. Significantly residing in the exclusive neighborhood of North White Plains, her temperament is characterized by quietude, rationalism, excessive organization (she travels on the seventeen day cruise with six suitcases), and a preoccupation with superficialities of dress, social manner, and status. Nothing in Avey’s present day character hints at possibilities for an independent, contestory, or inspirational learning. Her much anticipated cruise aboard the ocean liner, *The Bianca Pride*, a “huge, sleek, imperial... [vessel of] dazzling white steel” (15-16), replete with elegant Versailles dining room initially only re-inforces her unwillingness to venture from the blanket security of her familiar Manhattan home with its special crystal and silver-plated china. Dinner in the Versailles room when Marion draws attention to its imperialist significance only prompts the admission: “There were some things in this life... she simply refused to let bother her” (47). The “excursion” in the Caribbean thus shows Avey as initially an unchallenged, uncommitted “tourist learner,” as she herself readily accedes at a later point in the narrative: “I’m a visitor, a tourist, just someone here for the day” (167).
But what starts out as an idle excursion becomes a confrontation with what Toni Morrison in her novel Beloved calls "the disremembered and unaccounted for" (274). The cruise ship's docking at the many ports that marked her ancestors tortuous arrival and landing in the Americas uncompromisingly calls Avey to a deeper ceremonial learning. Her desperation at the narrative's outset to abandon ship at the earliest possible moment and fly back home to New York after only five days is a direct consequence of an inescapable and inexplicable haunting. She becomes pursued and possessed by the spirit of her great Aunt Cluney who appears to her in a nightmare, the first remembered nightmare Avey has had since the mid-60s when "she had found herself taking all the nightmare images [of civil rights protests, sit-ins, and bombings] from the evening news into her sleep with her" (31).

In the echo of Marion's injunction, her dead Aunt Cluney forcefully demands that Avey become committed to attending to her repressed ancestral past. In her childhood, Avey's parents had sent her every August to visit Aunt Cluney on Tatem Island, South Carolina, at her aunt's insistence. There, Avey not only observed the entrancing "Ring Shout" spiritual dances of the community, from which her aunt had been expelled for committing the unforgivable sin of having lifted her feet off the ground in the midst of one of these dances, but also was ritualistically required to hear her aunt's retelling of the mythic story of the Ibo landing at Tatem. Anchoring at this landing in the time of the Middle Passage, the Ibo slaves studied their surroundings with the insight "you and me don't have the power to see" (37). Perceiving present and future enslavement and oppression, the parable has it that they chose then and there to return home to Africa, "walking on water with iron shackles" (38). Avey's name, short for Avatara, (meaning re-incarnation) comes from Aunt Cluney's grandmother who is said to have been witness to this event.

Now, Aunt Cluney recalls Avey in her present dreaming back to this story, motioning for her to come on the walk that had been a ritual with them (32). What first involves a patient summoning, however, soon becomes a forced dragging and all out bruising fist-fight. Avey's
stubborn resistance to her aunt's commands evidences the measure of her repression of the painful past and its inheritance: "In instilling the story of the Ibos in her child's mind, the old woman had entrusted her with a mission she couldn't even name yet felt duty bound to fulfill. It had taken years to rid herself of that notion" (42). The consequence of her Aunt's possession manifests itself bodily upon Avey as an incessant "mysterious clogged and swollen feeling which differed in intensity and came and went at will" (52) and which induces an ongoing nausea, as well as a series of claustrophobic hallucinations that transform onboard entertainment activities into violent scenes of oppression and victimage. As with Tayo, Avey's possessed acting-out defies the educative terms of conventional rational understanding and mastery: "it was just that something -- she couldn't say what -- had come over her the past couple of days. She couldn't explain it. She could make no sense of it" (28). Anxious of accusations of being pathological by trying to articulate what sounds simply "too illogical and absurd" (30), her chosen alternative is a hasty, unexplained departure. It is only her friend Thomisina who, in hearing of Avey's decision to leave, accurately voices that "somethin' deep's behind this mess" (28).

Rather than a direct return to her New York home, however, Avey's disembarkment in the mid-voyage port of Grenada leads to her unanticipated participation in another excursion, one which initiates her transformative remembrance-learning. During her taxi wait on the wharf for a ride to a hotel and then to the airport the following day, she observes herself in the midst of an extraordinary scene. Rather than be surrounded by the usual crowd of tourist-mongers, she observes a solemn procession of a couple of hundred well-dressed families carrying overnight bags and gifts heading in the direction of small local beat-up old schooners and sloops tied to the wharf (66). The patois-speaking congregation reinvokes for her a lost aural memory of Tatem's oldtimers speaking Gullah and engages her with a strange nativist sense of familiarity and belonging, to the point where she hallucinates that this congregation is cohorting with her Aunt in claiming Avey's attendance to where they are headed. From the taxi driver
who finally arrives, Avey learns that these people are “out-islanders” from the island of the historically unmapped Carriacou -- a place “nobody ever heard of. That they don’t even bother putting on the map, it’s so small” (77). Annually they return home for three days as part of what they call the “The Carriacou Excursion.”

Avey’s overnight stay at the Grenada seaside hotel “The Miramer Royale” is in keeping with the empty grandioseness of her Manhattan home and choice of ocean liners. Yet, this hotel, the best of a huge ominous line of skyscrapers populated mostly by whites constitutes the backdrop for a disconcerted reflection upon Avey’s struggles in her last thirty years. Sitting on the hotel’s balcony, she “felt like someone in a bad dream who discovers that the street along which they are fleeing is not straight as they had believed, but circular, and that it had been leading them all the while back to the place they were seeking to escape” (83). Avey recollects her and her husband Jay’s sacrifices to escape from the dire of poverty and oppression of Hasley Street in Brooklyn. While their twelve-year-long painstaking, blinding pursuit of the American dream led to economic progress and security, as with Rocky in Silko’s *Ceremony*, it came at the cost of a steely disassociation with their African American identities and heritage. In her husband’s learning that “when you come this colour, it’s uphill all the way” (134), Jay (become Jerome) not only comes to disparage other blacks -- “that’s the trouble with these Negroes out here” (140) but in Avey’s impression also gradually assumes a whitened pallor, confirmed to her at his funeral, his death the result of a final stroke. Avey recollects her own equivalent measure of disassociation. She remembers her refusal to participate in the political riots of the 60s and 70s, and her lack of support in Marion’s involvement in Washington’s Poor People’s March (140).

Avey’s remembrance prompts for the first time a grief-stricken nostalgia for her and her husband’s early Hasley years and their small intimate rituals of listening to jazz or blues, recitations of African American poetry, or sustaining travels to Tatem. She maintains that “something in those small rites, an ethos they held in common, had reached back beyond her
life and beyond Jay's to join them to the vast unknown lineage that had made their being possible. And this link, these connections, heard in the music and in the praisesongs of a Sunday: 'I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young...,' had both protected them and put them in possession of a kind of power"(137). Avey's nostalgia floods her with questions as to whether there might not have been an alternative, a way of rescuing their children from poverty while "preserving, safeguarding, treasuring those things that had come down to them over the generations, which had defined them in a particular way. The most vivid, the most valuable part of themselves!" (139). Instead, she observes, "they had behaved, she and Jay, as if there had been nothing about themselves worth honouring!" (139). In addition to strength and distance, she considers that what would have been required from her and her husband was a vigilance: "It would have called for an awareness of the worth of what they possessed. Vigilance. The vigilance needed to safeguard it. To hold it like a jewel high out of the envious reach of those who would either destroy it or claim it as their own" (139).

Awakening to the recognition of an incomplete life opens Avey up to a re-learning of her ancestral past. Moreover, her remembrance-learning is inscribed with a healing from her affliction. The next morning finds her walking along the deserted north end of the beach -- a "magnificent shoreline which called to mind a huge stage stood intact" (153). The stage becomes the site for both a conventional and radical pedagogical scene. Seeking rescue from the heat, she enters an island rum shop that has been closed for the Carriacou expedition and meets its proprietor Lebert Joseph, a short, lame, and initially fierce-seeming close to ninety-year old whose "lines etched on his face [were] like the scarification marks of a thousand tribes" and who gave "the impression of having undergone a lifetime of trial by fire" (161). Initially suspicious of him and his senile assertions about his past and his interrogations of hers, she feels "as if she were a schoolgirl again and he a teacher she disliked" (163). These dynamics seem to echo of not only a failed pedagogical encounter but also one set within the terms of a conventional maieutics. However, as Avey finds herself inadvertently confessing
the trials of her previous days, she soon comes to recognize the radical difference of this pedagogical scene. Like Old Betonie, Lebert possesses sage-like insight and medicinal powers. His ability to discern the origins of her hallucinatory state “marked him as someone who possessed ways of seeing that went beyond mere sight and ways of knowing that outstripped ordinary intelligence (Li gain connaissance) and thus had no need for words” (172).

A native from Ti Mourne, Carriacou, Lebert Joseph tells Avey about the significance of the annual expedition there. The ritual has its origin in the call to honour their ancestry:

Each year this time they [The Long-time People] does look for us to come and give them their remembrance... I tell you, you best remember them.... If not they'll get vex and cause you nothing but trouble. They can turn your life around in a minute, you know. All of a sudden everything start gon' wrong and you don' know the reason. Oh, they can be disagreeable.... Is their age, oui, and the lot of suffering they had to put up with in their day. We has to try to understand and try our best to please them...(165).

The Carriacou commemoration of the Long-time people takes place through a Big Drum ceremony in which they sing and dance the "Beg Pardon" as well as various nation (tribal) and creole dances. Pronouncing himself of the Chamba nation, and realizing from his failed interrogation of Avey as to her tribal ancestry, he urges her (almost hypnotically so) to postpone her trip and join him on the excursion and ceremony despite her initially vehement, childish reluctance.

Avey relents and the passage across the channel to Carriacou constitutes for her the beginnings of a spiritual and communal re-birth. The beat up old schooner that takes them there is called the Emmanuel C. (Emmanuel meaning to walk among angels) and boasts “the crudely carved figurehead of a saint on the bow” (193). The communal spirit on the schooner, created especially by the maternal solicitude of the old women whom she sits beside and who bear a striking resemblance to Tatem churchgoers, reminds Avey of childhood excursions from the Hudson River to Bear Mountain, filling her with the same ceremonial promise as did her and her Aunt Cluney’s watching of the church folk perform the Ring Shout. Like Kogawa,
Marshall deploys the imagery of thread to communicate the pervasive binding sense of lineage, connection, and affirmation provided by these communal rituals. Though the threads are thin to the point of invisibility, Avey observes “they felt as strong entering her as the lifelines of woven hemp that trailed out into the water at Coney Island. If she cared to she could dog-paddle (she couldn’t swim) out to where the Hudson was deepest and not worry. The moment she began to founder, those on shore would simply pull on the silken threads and haul her in” (191). Past becomes present here as she notes the Caribbean sea is “as smooth as silk” and the sea air able to “cure anything” (196).

As Thomas Couser observes, however, Avey’s own healing can only occur through a remembrance-learning marked also by a necessary forgetting of much of what and how she remembers: “in order to regain her ‘soul’ she must lose the ‘world’, at least temporarily” (110). When Avey awakens in her Grenada hotel following her reflection of her life with Jay, “[h]er mind... had been emptied of the contents of the past thirty years during the night, so that she awakened with it like a slate that had been wiped clean, a tabula rasa upon which a whole new history could be written” (151). In the midst of her passage through the channel and her memorial meditation on a childhood Easter service in which her Reverend Morrissey sermoned on Christ’s resurrection, the “giant stones” that bear the weight of the sins of humanity, and the possibilities of removing these boulders from the great temple of life by calling upon God (201), Avey is suddenly overcome with a relentless nausea.

No longer a scenic (or touristic) voyage, the Emmanuel C. encounters some turbulent waters, and Avey succumbs to an incessant vomiting, not to mention the humiliation of uncontrollable diarrhea. The act symbolizes Avey’s bodily purging of the social ills that have plagued her. The cleansing of body and mind prepare Avey for an empathetic remembrance of the historical significance of her transformative passage. Lying on the boat bunk following collapse from wretching, her head momentarily clears to give her the impression of “other bodies lying crowded in with her in the hot, airless dark. A multitude it felt like lay packed
around her in the filth and stench of themselves, just as she was. Their moans, rising and falling, with each rise and plunge of the schooner, enlarged upon the one filling her head” (209). What Avey is imaginatively reminded of is the horrendous experience of the Middle Passage. This deep remembrance of historical trauma paves the way for a reconciliative reckoning with or “reading” of her ancestry.

Once on the island, Avey is brought back to life under the healing, ministrative hands of Lebert’s forty-something daughter, Rosalie Parvey. Rosalie bathes and massages Avey, arousing in her pleasurable sensations long forgotten and childhood memories of being bathed and scrubbed by her Aunt Cluney. The cleansing ritual prepares Avey for her participation in the Big Drum ceremony. However, rather than be a grandiose fest as Avey had anticipated, the night ceremony proves initially to be no more than a small elderly gathering in a dirt backyard behind a dilapidated house. Nevertheless, feeling welcomed by the islanders who regard her “with those eyes that refuse to see any differences” (235), she is captivated by the scene before her. Observing the “Beg Pardon” ritual, followed by Nation Dances, Avey becomes attentive to the wealth in these activities. During this commemorative ceremony, she perceives an integrity in the old people’s vision and commitment to the honouring of a past that has been all too readily “disremembered and unaccounted for.” And this new learning begins to inscribe itself upon her, filling what she articulates has been the volcanic crater-size hole of her last thirty years.

But Avey’s emerging realizations must not simply be viscerally heard but also enacted bodily. While each Nation dance is performed only by those who have some affiliation with the tribal nation from which it originates, the Creole Dances that follow are more inclusive, drawing a larger and younger and somewhat more jubilant crowd to the ceremony. In this respect, referencing the last chapter, Avey as well as the community honour the difference of the nation dances, observing but not identifying with them. Avey is encouraged by others in the Creole Dances to participate: “what seemed an arm made up of many arms reached out from
the circle to draw her in” (247). At first, she joins cautiously, moving at their pace but not attempting to imitate their dancing of the rhythmic “Carriacou Tramp.” Unconsciously gripped by the movement, however, she soon finds herself blindly dancing, not the “Tramp” as Lebert and Rosalie proudly perceive but rather the Ring Shout dances she had observed in her Tatem childhood but could not participate in because of Aunt Cluney’s unforgivable faux pas. Now transported back into a past -- one merged with the present and the Carriacou Tramp, and careful not to lift her feet off the ground as did her Aunt, Avey symbolically “finally after all these decades made it across” (248) to join the elderly Shouters who had become one with the out-islanders in the shuffle “designed to stay the course of history” (250). Avey observes that

for the first time since she was a girl, she felt the threads, that myriad of shiny, silken, brightly colored threads (like the kind used in embroidery) which were thin to the point of invisibility yet as strong as the ropes at Coney Island... she felt the threads streaming out from the old people around her in Lebert Joseph’s yard. From their seared eyes. From their navels and their cast-iron hearts. And their brightness as they entered her spoke of possibilities and becoming even in the face of the bare bones and the burnt-out ends (249).

What evolves for Avey into a passionately committed and liberatory dancing culminates in a respectful acknowledgment by her new-found sense of community. Instigated by Lebert, the dancers solemnly bow before her which results in her vocalization and reclamative naming of her identity. When asked by an elderly woman the ritualistic “who you is,” Avey responds, hearing the admonition of her Great Aunt Cluney: “not to say simply ‘Avey,’ or even ‘Avey Williams.’ But always ‘Avey, short for Avatara” (251).

The novel concludes as it began, with Avey in mid-passage. Rather than stay among the islanders, Avey departs from the island airport to return to New York. As she looks upon the landscape below her, she intuits the island beyond the geographic surface as “more a mirage rather than an actual place. Something conjured up perhaps to satisfy a longing and need. She was leaving Carriacou without having really seen it” (254). In this respect, she leaves Carriacou having learned but not having toured the island within tourist-learning terms
or researched it ethnographically. Avey’s remembrance-learning has centred her, “restored [her] to her proper axis” (254) and, from this empowered vantage point, she returns with a mission: “to speak of the excursion to others elsewhere” (254). She would make her teaching territory North White Plains, shopping malls, train stations, skyscrapers, and her principal pupils would be those who “rushed blindly in and out of the glacier buildings, unaware, unprotected, lacking memory and a necessary distance of the mind (no mojo working for them!)” (255). Finally, she would sell her house in North White Plains and restore the one in Tatem left to her by her aunt. Intending to enlist Marion in her cause as “Marion alone would understand about the excursion and help her spread the word” (255), like Naomi who dons Aunt Emily’s coat, Avey decides to assume Aunt Cluney’s memorial work. Among other things, she will insist that her grandchildren (as well as Marion’s outcast pupils) visit Tatem every summer and hear her narrate the story of the Ibos.

HOME AS RETURN/NOT-RETURNING

Yet, to the extent that Avey’s remembrance-learning is framed within and against the contexts of alienation and return, departure and arrival, Marshall’s narrative concurrently introduces a series of important questions regarding the measure in which it participates in a non-ontological reading/learning practice. I would argue that Praisesong might initially more readily lend itself to a reading which frames Avey’s remembrance-learning as a return-to-roots Bildung. On these terms, Avey’s remembrance-learning encompasses the memorial reclamation of her African-American identity. In what follows, I briefly illustrate such a reading. From the basis of a subsequent consideration of various Levinasian implications of this return-to-roots reading, I subsequently offer a more radical against-the-grain interpretation of Avey’s remembrance-learning (an interpretation which will be expanded upon in subsequent chapters of this dissertation). I maintain that this radical interpretation interrupts the previous one and, in so doing, supports an ethico-pedagogical practice of witness-learning.
In Marshall's *Praisesong*, Avey Johnson embarks upon an educative journey that physically and symbolically returns her "home." Through her formative *Bildung*, she comes to recover both a painful/healing memory of the Middle Passage and an agentic self-identity. This transformative journey home is at once psychologically and geographically enacted in the narrative. As others have variously pointed out, *Praisesong* symbolically re-enacts and reverses the slave routes of the Americas (Couser 1996). Avey's excursion thus encompasses the reversing of an already travelled passage, from North to South, from Manhattan's North White Plains and Brooklyn's Hasley Street to Tatem and the Ibo Landing in South Carolina, to the shores of Grenada, to the island of Carriacou where she is finally and fully called back to her creolized heritage and her ancestral African roots.

What Avey's formative journey thus returns her to is her African ancestors' point of arrival in the Americas. Her return-to-roots remembrance-learning does not entail a re-crossing of the Atlantic back to Africa: she does not take the trip to Ghana that Marion had suggested. Nor is there any indication that, subsequent to the space-time of the novel, she will attempt to locate her tribal roots. Her ancestral origins remain unnamed, with Lebert and Rosalie only speculating by the way she carries herself that she is of the Arada people, an association Avey amusingly ascribes to Lebert's expert imaginings (253). Yet, while characterized by the ambivalences of a creolized heritage, Marshall nevertheless inscribes this arrival as Avey's point of "homecoming." That she is called "home" is evident not only in the repeated summons of her Aunt Cluney but also in the consistent welcoming of the out-islanders. Her "home" is, in fact, focused on two geographical sites: the island of Carriacou and the Ibo Landing in Tatem, South Carolina. The former draws her to her re-familiarization with the latter. She observes of the out-islanders, that "there was a familiarity, almost an intimacy, to their gestures of greeting" (69). Waiting on the wharf, she asserts that "sometimes the least thing seen or heard during the day, or merely thought of in-passing, could trigger a dream of people and events long-forgotten" (67).
Avey's spatio-temporal homecoming concurrently returns her to her personal and collective sense of selfhood. More specifically, what Avey's remembrance-learning disrupts is her self-established illusion that she has already arrived, not only in North White Plains or in *The Bianca Pride* but more so with herself. That Avey is not already at what for many long years has been her desti-national home is something of which she is herself only vaguely and inexplicably aware. At any early point in the narrative, still feeling the grip of her Aunt Cluney while sitting with Thomisina and Clarice in the infamous, pompous Versailles room for dinner, Avey observes herself and her friends in one of the rooms over-seeing mirrors:

Her wandering, abstracted gaze was caught and held by a reflection in one of the huge gilt-framed mirrors which had all been hung so that they leaned forward slightly over the room; a distant reflection of three carefully groomed, older women.... She easily recognized them [Thomisina and Clarice] both in the distant mirror. But for a long confused moment Avey Johnson could not place the woman in beige crepe de Chine and pearls seated with them (48).

Avey observes how this “wasn’t the first time it had happened” (48).

Through her remembrance-learning, Avey thus is returned to the source/scene of her own misrecognition, to what has been her repressed alienation from a traumatic ancestral past. Aunt Cluney summons her with the intention to return her to her “authentic” destiny, one that Avey greets with the instinct to flee: “awakened in the middle of the night...[she] decided she would prefer to spend the rest of her vacation at home” (20). What Avey is addressed to learn in her aunt’s (and others’) repeated call to “come” is that what she thinks is her home is not, and what she aspires to run away from paradoxically is. This inescapable paradox she is traumatized into recognizing through her practice of remembrance-learning.

Yet, while Avey’s homecoming is not defined in terms of a return to Africa, she also ultimately does not choose to stay in the Caribbean. Her symbolic return to Carraicou remains a temporary excursion, drawing her back to her Tatem home. By the novel’s end, in the context of Avey’s performance of the “Carriacou Tramp” the two geographical sites of Carriacou and Tatem merge into one: Carriacou and Tatem are one and the same creolized point of arrival. In
this respect, the alienated and polluted logocentric discourses of white capitalist North America of which Avey's journey cleanses her are substituted not with an Afrocentric discourse but with a creolized North American one. In the canonical tradition of the American Bildungsroman, Avey is under no naive illusion that she can return to a pre-Middle Passage innocence. As she reflects on her life with Jay, she realizes that her re-learning requires both an abiding by North American ideologies and a vigilant honouring of her heritage. The challenge she thus faces is equivalent to that of Tayo's in Silko's Ceremony who also must write his own "internally persuasive discourse." While she intends to sell her North White Plains home, she comes to define her mission and sense of belonging within the boundaries of settling in another area in northern New York and, once she has retired, living part of the year in southern Tatem where she will take her grandchildren and visitors to the Ibo landing. In this respect, she locates her home with her feet firmly planted in the Americas, and in the traditions of the Ring-Shout in which dancers were forbidden to lift their feet off from the ground. Avey's return home to North America and to Tatem is possible because her physical journeying has recalled her to her proper former self. In the dance ceremony, she is "restored to her proper axis." Recalled to that from which she has been estranged, she is able to identify and name herself, as Avatara. In this respect too, Avey is healed from both her self-misrecognition and from the traumatic bodily possession of her Aunt. The reconciliation enacted in the novel, therefore, is that of Avey's recovery of her personal and collective self-possession.

(UN)LEARNING HOME IN MARSHALL'S PRAISESONG

Marshall's reconciliatory remembrance-learning ethic would seem to offer much promise to those she intends as her subsequent pupils; for those "young, bright, fiercely articulate token few for whom her generation had worked the two or three jobs" (255). What she seeks to provide her students with is the means for the realization of a therapeutic coming-to-terms with a painful past and the possibility for the instantiation of a self-loving "home"
within and, crucially, against an abject North American legacy and the realities of a spatio-temporal alienation from the maternal homeland of Africa. At the same time, however, I suggest that, to the extent that Avey’s formative education is read as a narrative of personal and collective recovery, her learning (and subsequent teaching practice) may not, in fact, be radical, promissory, and responsive/responsible. Indeed, one might argue that Avey’s Bildung threatens ultimately to reproduce rather than subvert logocentric paradigms.

In his insightful analysis of Alice Walker’s short story, “Elethia” and Kogawa’s Obasan, David Palumbo-Liu points to what is centrally at issue here. He maintains that ethnic writers are often caught in a double dilemma. First, in order for them to contest dominant historiographic discourses through the writing of counter-memorial witness narratives, they must deconstruct these discourses while concurrently legitimating the authority of their own. In this process of legitimation, they cannot expose counter-memories as themselves discursive, ideologically-saturated revisionary acts. Furthermore, he suggests that the exigencies of narrative structure/emplotment present a similar problem:

the formal properties of literary narrative engage ethnic writers in the ideologically problematic nature of closure. The narrative’s ending may be predicated upon a stabilization of history in which the ongoing dialectical relationship between micro and dominant discourses is suppressed. What starts off as a contestive counterhistory may thus be objectified and stabilized as merely a smaller instance within the greater metanarrative of history (212).

Marshall’s Praisesong is subject precisely to these dilemmas. As a counter-commemorative narrative, it is faced with the task of laying claim to the radical personal and collective possibilities of Avey’s insurgent remembrance-learning. Moreover, the dictates of narrative structure call for a reconciliatory conclusion, for an affirmative tying up of loose ends. Marshall responds to these requirements by presenting remembrance-learning within the thematizing parameters of “home-coming.” What Avey’s remembrance-learning promises, therefore, is a recovery able, as Avey remarks “to stay the course of history.” Indeed, insofar as Avey has recovered her self-possession, then her remembrance-learning has been
successfully accomplished. And, insofar as we are told in the novel, Avey’s restoration to her proper axis leads not to further learning but rather to her teaching, a responsibility she is able to take on, one might argue, because her learning, as healing and as the recovery of identity, has been successful. Avey has crucially recovered her “voice.” Thus, while most of Avey’s learning finds her out-of-sorts, this becomes substituted with self-realization. Through her learning (her “participatory-learning”) Avey comes to be able to identify herself, to name herself as “Avey, short for Avatara.”

It might consequently be argued that Praisesong, through its emphasis on “homecoming,” reinforces rather than subverts ontological discourse. In this respect, the narrative might be seen as ultimately not offering/staging a radical learning ethic. For Levinas, a radical responsible/responsive Bildung does not issue from the striving for and reclamation of a memorial self-identity. Drawing on Levinas to point to the (reading/learning) subject’s ethical requirement to bear witness to the “saying,” Eaglestone maintains:

the ‘saying’ in literature is precisely that uncanny moment when we are made to feel not at home with the text or in ourselves. We are neither transported to a nether world of virtual life, nor do we simply mouth our misinterpretation of the text. It is in these moments when our sense of our selves and our relation to the logos is interrupted and put into question that the ethics of literature are at their clearest. These moments of fragmentation are a testimony to the irreducible otherness of the other and to our responsibility (175-6).

As I shall elaborate more fully in the following chapter, the ethical address from the other thus calls for a witnessing that works against any narcissistic impulses or investments. Witnessing attempts to put into question any logocentric practice of learning embedded in the belief that consciousness “can construct the world out of itself, or know the world from itself” (Handelman 1996, 226). As Mark Clamen stresses, “[t]o be part of a tradition of reading is not to find one’s identity -- national, cultural, politically or otherwise. No identity, no rest, no home, can be found in the past [instead of ‘the past’, read ‘learning’]. It stands before you as
accusation, not as mirror” (1998, 49). On these seemingly “homeless” terms, however, neither does reading encompass a converse practice of self-alienation. Handelman contends that:

Of course, the themes of exile, homelessness, emptiness are quite familiar in the modern literature of alienation. But alienation can be thought only in terms of ‘identity’, and Levinas’s point is precisely not to let us rest in identity, even in ‘identity betrayed’, which would be only another form of gazing narcissistically at our own wounds rather than being opened to and for another in which the I is unique and irreplaceable (1991, 273).

From this Levinasian ethical perspective, a responsible/responsive practice of witness-learning with respect to Praisesong is one that would question its ontologico-pedagogical resolution, and would seek to interrupt any of its “identificatory” claims. In the measure that such questioning would seek to displace readings of the narrative invested in the memorial reclamation of “identity” so too would it challenge any notion of readerly participation in the learning of the protagonist that proceeds on the terms of “identification.” Both senses of “identificatory” point reading back to the narcissistic affirmation of the (reading) subject rather than toward a radical responsivity to the non-reducible alterity of another person’s experience. And, as argued in the previous chapter, these “self-same” terms ultimately foreclose the possibility of learning to be a surprising, unfamiliar encounter. And, as I argue in more detail in Chapter Five, these terms are fundamentally incommensurable with the answerability to which the reader is obligated by the address of/in the text.

MARSHALL’S NARRATIVE AS “SAID”

By virtue of the predominant exigencies of narrative closure, Avey’s remembrance-learning is thus readily perceptible as thematized: Praisesong’s final resting-place is that of a reconciled self and consolidated collective identity. Insofar as witness-learning is constituted as an intervention into the ontological “saids” of discourse, it therefore requires from the reader a critical separation from what is being read rather than an “identificatory” participation. This separation comes from the realization that the literary work does not escape thematization; it is
itself a “said” by virtue of representational narrative requirements. Recognition of a literary work’s textuality -- its formal implication in logocentricity -- is precisely what Nussbaum’s learning ethic fails to acknowledge (see Eaglestone 1997; Horton 1996). In this awareness, it is not simply that as Marshall’s novel comes to an end it fossilizes into discourse -- but rather that as narrative it is ontological.

This claim is consistent with a Levinasian position insofar as he maintains that it is impossible ever fully and finally to transcend the “said.” For Levinas, one always remains inescapably mired in ontology. As such, witnessing extends the task of learning beyond that of a “narrative ethics,” which might attempt to locate the ethical “saying” within the world of the text (as did my reading of Obasan), and beyond an ethics centred upon defining the responsible terms of a participatory relationship between reader and literary world (as did my Ceremony chapter). Both of these reading practices are supplemented and displaced by what Eaglestone articulates as “ethical criticism”; that is, a restless practice of “interrogative interruption” that I alternatively define as “witness-learning.” Drawing upon Levinas, Eaglestone maintains that an ethical criticism is “a ‘witness’ to the saying in the language of literature: this witnessing is its responsibility and duty” (170). In the following chapter, I reveal my preference for the term of “witness-learning” over that of “ethical criticism” because I believe the former more readily calls attention to the reader’s implication in what is learned, an attention that is missing from Eaglestone’s criticism.

Where I follow Eaglestone is in his insight that “interruption” might issue from the challenge Terence Hawkes describes for literary criticism; namely that it “be anxious -- that it not only raise the spectre of the unheimlich but also promote it within the material it examines” (1994, 177). In Levinasian terms, this would mean attempting to interrupt the “said” in order momentarily to expose an “otherwise” in language; namely, the “saying.” In other words, for

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2 To a certain extent, what I have been attempting to accomplish in this dissertation is the enactment of such an ethical criticism. In other words, each chapter has sought to “interrupt” and complexify the claims for an ethico-pedagogical reading practice made in the previous one.
Levinas, the “saying” is constituted as a property not of narrative but rather of language, inhering as spectre within the “said.” Eagleton suggests that “fiction” is the quality of the “saying”: “fiction appeals to ethics not because it is in narrative but because it is in language” (169). Fiction, or, referring back to the introductory chapter of this dissertation “literary knowledge,” thus becomes identified with language rather than with generic text. Handelman consequently locates within “the ‘said’ or book... an ‘other voice, a second sonority’ (285). From this perspective, witness-learning thus entails a responsivity to and exposure of the text’s “second sonority.” As the chapter on Kogawa’s Obasan indicated, this “second sonority” or “saying” is the voice and ethical address of the other. According to Handelman, it is this “second sonority” -- the “saying” in the language of the text -- that calls for critical attention: the “second sonority” is the “modality which opens and ‘exposes itself to exegesis and solicits it, and where meaning, immobilized in the characters, already tears the texture which conceals and encloses it” (285-6). The (readerly) witness to “saying” thus disrupts the ontological drive toward the reproduction of certainties, identities, and representations of the (textual) “said.”

INTERRUPTING CLOSURE IN PRAISESONG

I contend, then, that witness-learning with respect to Marshall’s novel, among other witness literature, would mean not closing the book on the interminability of Avey’s learning, or that of readers. Rather than follow the path of her remembrance-learning and rest in the narrative’s ceremonial home/learning, readers would attempt to displace the “homecoming” it gestures toward and incessantly ask after the question of whether and how the narrative betrays a witness-learning, the trace of a “second sonority.” It is such an against-the-grain reading of Praisesong that I now briefly offer (and detail more fully in subsequent chapters). I suggest that Praisesong, in fact, implicitly illustrates an unresolvable tension between Avey’s remembrance-learning and her witness-learning.
That Avey does learn to witness comes most to the fore with respect to the ghostly address of her Aunt and the witness-teachings she receives from others. As I sought to illustrate in my reading of Kogawa’s *Obasan*, Naomi’s formative ceremonial remembrance-learning culminates in a learning of the need for an attentiveness to the “saying,” to the non-thematizable trace of the other that is the voice of her mother coming from the “other shore” calling out to her to be answerable to the past. Avey is similarly addressed. She is called to attention by the “spectre of the unheimlich” in the spirited form of her “familial” Great Aunt Cluney. Indeed, as Derek Attridge observes, the apparition in much of literature is the figure that summons readers and characters alike to an obligation: “Responsibility comes from a ghost, or the ghost: the revenant which is also an *arrivant*. The ghost lays me under an obligation to recognize my responsibility.... The peculiar institution we know as ‘literature’ is haunted by many ghosts, which appear to the living to remind them of their responsibility, to test them, to demand justice” (1995, 224). The non-thematizable visage, embattled call, and spirited possession of her Aunt Cluney disturbs her niece’s complacency, demanding that she pay attention to and bear the burdens of a responsible witness.

Avey must not only heed her aunt’s summons if she is ever to overcome the illness of the soul which afflicts her, but part of what this involves is learning to witness the “saying” in the seemingly incomprehensible texts to which she finds herself subject. These radical texts include her nightmare of her Aunt’s visitations, her other dreams, her hallucinations, such recollections as the story of the Ibo landing, Reverend Morrissey’s sermon, the text of the Carriacou excursion and return. What these texts speak of in their memorial traces is the unspeakable and irrepressible suffering of her ancestors, and their actual and mythic survivance. That she comes to witness this “saying” is illustrated in her traumatic recollection of the Middle Passage during her transformative -- ill-ridden -- boat journey to Carriacou. Avey hallucinates that she is witnessing the suffering experienced by those who lived this Passage. In this moment, rather than the remembrance being an abstraction, she experiences the depth
and burden of the trauma of the event: “Their suffering -- the depth of it, the weight of it in the cramped space -- made hers of no consequence” (209). Avey recollects but refuses to approximate the suffering of the Middle Passage to her own. In this respect, she does not simply remember the past but crucially becomes mindful of the singularity and difference of its traumas.

This attentiveness becomes even more explicit in her observations of the “Beg Pardon” ritual and Nation Dances. She realizes that

[j]t was the essence of something rather than the thing itself she was witnessing. Those present -- the old ones -- understood this. All that was left were a few names of what they called nations which they could no longer even pronounce properly, the fragments of a dozen or so songs, the shadowy forms of long-ago dances and rum kegs for drums. The bare bones. The burnt-out ends. And they clung to them with a tenacity she suddenly loved in them and longed for in herself. Thoughts -- new thoughts -- vague and half-formed slowly beginning to fill the emptiness (240).

During this ceremony, Avey perceptively witnesses that trace of the past/suffering other -- the Levinasian “saying” -- within the remnants, the “burnt-out ends” of Carriacou memory. Her “surprising” witnessing encompasses and leads to a radical “learning,” to the formation of “new thoughts.”

Moreover, at a later point in the ceremony -- when the atmosphere seems most festive -- Lebert reminds them of the ritual’s “true and solemn business” (245). Momentarily interrupting the rhythmic pace of the music, he produces a “single, dark, plangent” drum note that

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3 Avey’s experience here poses the compelling question of whether and to what extent someone who has not eye-witnessed an event can possess a “deep memory” of that event. Lawrence Langer (1991) elaborates upon notions of deep and common memory used by writer Charlotte Delbo in her testimony of her experiences during and following Auschwitz. Langer maintains that while common memories are those that belong to the domain of language and thought (akin to a narrativized memory), deep memories are those of a traumatic event. Deep memories (much like Freud’s traumatic memories as discussed in the second chapter of this dissertation) preserve the sensory materiality of the trauma -- its original weight and depth. In her insightful paper, “‘Ah, The Dead Do Not Die’: Pedagogical Memory and Second Generation Witness” (forthcoming), Rachel Baum considers just this question in the context of a discussion of Second Generation Holocaust literature.
sounded like the distillation of a thousand sorrow songs.... The theme of separation and loss the note embodied, the unacknowledged longing it conveyed summed up feelings that were beyond words, feelings and a host of subliminal memories that over the years had proven more durable and trustworthy than the history with its trauma and pain out of which they had come. After centuries of forgetfulness and even denial they refused to go away. The note was a lamentation that could hardly have come from the rum keg of a drum. Its source had to be the heart, the bruised still-bleeding innermost chamber of the collective heart (245).

The drum note testamonially voices an historical legacy of trauma that can neither be spoken nor commonly remembered, and despite generational time/effort is not obviable, cannot bear collective healing. It stands as a solemn interruptive moment in the festive rhythmic "said" of the Big Drum ceremony: "For an instant the power of it brought the singing and dancing to a halt.... For a fraction of a second the note hung in the yard, knifïing through the revelry to speak to everyone there. To remind them of the true and solemn business of the ceremony. Then it was gone" (245). Avey's insight into its significance implicates her own repression in centuries of collective amnesia and denial as well as frees her not from the burden of the still-open wound but from its censorship. What she learns -- is surprised or shocked into recognition by as a result of the resounding note -- is that "freedom" issues neither from forgetfulness nor from the escaping of memorial resonsibility and accountability. Insofar as this and Avey's other differential texts bear witness on these terms, we might assert that Marshall's narrative thus does attempt to interrupt not only dominant educational, historiographic, literary discourse but also its own reconciliative tendencies and narrative fluency.

As will be elaborated further on in this dissertation, the mythologized tale of the Ibo landing may also be read as encompassing an instructive "saying" that intervenes in the historical facticity of the event. In Marshall's conclusion, Avey announces that this tale, in addition to her re-telling of the Carriacou excursion, will become the text that she will pass on to future generations. While geographically she goes as far back in her teaching as the arrival of her ancestors in the Americas, through this re-telling, spiritually she goes much farther. First,
insofar as her teachings are fueled by the pedagogy implicit in the myth, she will attempt to instruct her future disciples into the Ibo's radical practices of witness and study. As the myth has it, when the Ibos arrived, they:

just stopped...and took a look around. A good long look. Not saying a word. Just studying the place real good. Just taking their time and studying on it. And they seen things that day you and me don’t have the power to see. 'Cause those pure-born Africans was peoples my gran’ said could see in more ways than one. The kind can tell you 'bout things happened long before they was born and things to come long after they’s dead (38).

The Ibos, therefore, possessed the ability to witness, to attend to the “things... you and me don’t have the power to see.” In passing their practices of study onto her students, Avey teaches them the possibilities of witness-learning. Furthermore, their landing marks a state of historical consciousness inscribed with possibility. In ways that importantly bear upon the next chapter, what is particularly significant about the myth of the Ibos’ actions in the face of oppression and destruction is that the learning ethics this resurrective act of return by walking on water implicitly proffers is one ultimately defined not by an interminably suspended nauseous anxiety but rather by an (im)possibly venturous, risky, and overcoming faith.

Finally, Avey additionally maintains that she will repeat to her students the proverbial witness-saying of the woman from whom she inherited her name (with its performative resonance of reincarnation); namely, “[h]er body she always usta say might be in Tatem but her mind, her mind was long gone with the Ibos” (254-5). Couser points out that this “saying” suggests that while Avey chooses to return to North America, to be literally in it, she is not entirely of it (111). Avatara’s “saying” emphasizes a productive mind/body disassociation that, in some respects, gestures to an historical consciousness that contrarily refuses to settle, to be “home” while still acknowledging the realities of location. What both this “saying” and the myth of the Ibo landing, as well the Big Drum ceremony, point Avey toward are “possibilities and becoming even in the face of the bare bones and the burnt-out ends” (249). In other words, while physically and emotionally secure, it might be counter-argued that Avey’s
personal and collective sense of self is not firmly consolidated but in a performative state of becoming. While "restored to her proper axis" it is not an essentialist self that emerges but rather a dynamic personhood that is answerable to the past. This answerability is acknowledged in the fact that the name Avey chooses to adopt is that of "Avatara."

**READER RESPONSIBILITY**

By way of conclusion, I thus articulate a responsible/responsive reading practice of witness-learning within this chapter, in continuance with the previous one, as follows:

- **g) perceiving the literary work as embodying/constituted in non-thematizable sayings that intervene in dominant literary, educational, historiographic discourses.**
- **h) attending to the "saying" in literature through an exegitical practice that interrogates the literary work's "said," contrapuntally interrupting any of its reconciliative moments.**
- **i) reading in ways that refuse witness within hopeful terms of reader-textual resting-place, from within promisory redemptive claims. Witnessing, then, as an interminably vigilant practice always in the service of the other.**

In answer to Kogawa, therefore, it is not that the identification with suffering points us to home, but rather that a memorial witness-learning practice implicated in an interminable (un)learning of home brings us to a closer attendance to the suffering of another. This said, the following chapter, rather than centreing upon a discussion of a literary text, examines more elaborately the (reading) subject's Levinasian implicative obligations in encountering (textual) others. It examines the consequences of these obligations with respect to the witnessing of all three *Bildungsromanen* under discussion in this dissertation; namely *Obasan*, *Ceremony*, and *Praisesong*. Finally, the last chapter, in the context of an analysis of three teaching guides, two on *Obasan* and one on *Ceremony* examines the implications of witness-learning as argued throughout this dissertation for the specificities of classroom practice.
CHAPTER FIVE

CRISIS OF LEARNING

In the era of the Holocaust, of Hiroshima, of Vietnam -- the age of testimony -- teaching... must in turn testify, make something happen, and not just transmit a passive knowledge, pass on information that is preconceived, substantified, believed to be known in advance, misguidingly believed, that is, to be (exclusively) a given.

Felman 1992, 53.

Reading is rather risky business whose outcome and full consequences can never be known in advance.... Does not reading involve one risk that precisely, cannot be resisted: that of finding in the text something one does not expect?


INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, I sought to detail further what might encompass an ethical practice of witness-learning. Drawing upon the writings of Levinas, I maintained that it is a memorial witness-learning practice implicated in an interminable (un)learning of home that brings us to a closer attendance to the suffering of another. This said, this chapter seeks to shift direction somewhat. What troubles me about the practice of witness-learning I have outlined thus far, and what troubles me also about texts such as Eaglestone that seek to articulate an ethical practice of literary criticism, is that they seem to focus their witnessing practice solely upon textual exegesis. In other words, not allowing the text to find a home becomes primary in ways that deflect attention from a pedagogical questioning of the ways in which literature
dialogically interrogates readers. In so doing, literary criticism wrests readers from the responsibilities to face (away from) themselves through the address of the other.

This chapter thus concentrates more specifically upon readers' implicative responsivity to/responsibility for the text's ethical address. I examine this responsivity/responsibility by way of critical discussion of the inter-relations among witnessing, learning, and crisis. The central underlying assertion informing these inter-relations is a perception of witnessing as a learning activity that issues fundamentally from the return of a difference. Indeed, it is this unexpected return that realizes learning as "risky business," as Britzman maintains above. The questions that become important to consider with respect to this assertion, however, are the precise character of this return, its cognitive and affective consequences, and the specific ways in which it is implicated in a learning from; that is, in a practice of witness-learning. I address these questions through a critical juxtaposition of Shoshana Felman's psychoanalytic elaboration of the character and pedagogical dimensions of what she references as a "crisis of witnessing" with Levinas' ethical concept of "traumatism of astonishment." This juxtaposition becomes the vehicle for the consideration of the nature of the literary crisis experienced by each of the protagonists' in the Bildungsromanen of historical witness discussed in this dissertation and the nature of the relationship between this literary crisis and that potentially experienced by readers. In this context, I examine my own "traumatism of astonishment" with respect to my reading of Joy Kogawa's Obasan and the limits of this reading for the general pedagogico-literary formulation of a responsive/responsible witness-learning ethic.

CRISSES OF WITNESSING

In the introduction to her and Dori Laub's Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History (1992), Felman maintains that twentieth-century events of unprecedented mass destruction and dehumanization have produced a "crisis of witnessing" within Western societies. That is, she asserts that these events are of such horror
that they cannot be contained and accounted for through the contemporary cultural frames of reference and the preexisting categories of knowledge that delimit and determine our perceptions of reality (xv). She thus defines "witness" as the performative practice of making our failures of apprehension tangible to the imagination through non-habitual and estranged conceptual prisms (xv). Felman's crisis of witnessing thus implies this failure and the difficult reckoning with it. In what follows, I discuss the substance of her opening chapter in which she elaborates how just such a "crisis of witnessing" was enacted in one of her Yale "Literature and Testimony" seminars with a view to determining more specifically what she means by this phrase and how she perceives it to be integrally bound with the activity of learning. The key concern motivating this discussion is the direction of Felman's witness-learning ethic with respect to its implications for encompassing the pedagogical site for a responsive/responsible engagement with and for others. In other words, what concerns me is how Felman articulates an answerability to/accountability for the other and how she perceives her working through of the crisis of witnessing to participate in this answerability/accountability.

The structural framework for Felman's opening chapter is a description of how her students' reading of a sequence of literary, psychoanalytical, and historical texts -- followed by a viewing of videotaped autobiographical testimonies of Holocaust survivors -- instantiated an entirely unexpected crisis of witnessing within the class. What she had originally sought to accomplish in her seminar was two-fold: 1) the students' discovery of the pervasiveness of testimony in most genres of writing, and 2) the students' embodied realization of how testimonial texts do not simply report facts but "in different ways, encounter -- and make us encounter -- strangeness; how the concept of testimony... is in fact quite unfamiliar and estranging" (7). What she had not bargained on was that the subject-matter of the reading material and videotapes would become unwittingly enacted among the majority of her students and that the productive consequence of this unintended enactment would be a significant
"pedagogical lesson learnt in its wake" (xvi); one with crucial implications for teaching/learning practice with respect to texts of historical witness more generally.

Felman suggests early on in her chapter that the character of her students' "crisis of witnessing" bears an equivalency to the testimonial content of her reading/viewing material. This testimonial content is defined by the process of "bearing witness to a crisis or trauma" (1). Each of the literary and visual texts she deploys in her seminar thus not only variably bears witness to a crisis or trauma but also, in so doing, teaches what it means to bear witness. For Felman, the provision of testimony to a crisis or trauma finds its origins in a simultaneously literary and historical event; be that Freudian narrative psychoanalytic inquiry, Mallarmé's discovery of the free verse genre against the backdrop of the French Revolution, or Paul Celan's impossibility and necessity of writing in the face of the Holocaust. In this respect, as I critically elaborate later on in this chapter, Felman binds the trauma or crisis that is the consequence of an historical experience with that which is the result of a novel understanding of representational possibility or limitation. She suggests that the latter is realized precisely through its implication in traumatic historical times.

Moreover, each testimony that bears witness at once to the historical and literary crisis or trauma additionally sheds light on different aspects of the literary and psychological symptoms of this crisis or trauma. Camus' *The Plague* thus points to the necessary clinical therapeutic dimension of crisis or trauma. Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground* contrastingly illustrates that, in the course of its own utterance, the testimonial spites any therapeutic endeavors and thus forecloses its own very *raison d'être*. Freud's Chapter Two of his *The Interpretation of Dreams* crucially locates the difference between the testimonial and the confession in the former's radical powers to displace the latter. That is, Freud's unprecedented psychoanalytic discourse proves that "one does not have to possess or own the truth, in order to effectively bear witness to it" (Felman, 15). The testimonial thus encompasses a spontaneously-realized process and practice that indirectly accesses the truth of
an event or experience. Mallarmé's discovery of the free verse genre reveals that crisis or trauma testifies to the unanticipated literary, psychological, and affective breakage of all previous frames of comprehension (Felman, 20). Crisis testimony thus bears witness to this unexpected breakage and to how this accident of witness consequently possesses and pursues the subject with its radical and unmasterable difference (Felman, 21). Felman asserts that from this accidental awareness, liberation can proceed: "if... it is the witness who pursues the accident, it is perhaps because the witness, on the contrary, has understood that from the accident a liberation can proceed and that accidenting, unexpectedly, is also in some ways a freeing" (23).

Felman thus moves toward a psychoanalytic portrait of the crisis of witnessing, emphasizing that the class readings of Freud's analysis of Irma's dream mark a turning point in her students' understanding of testimony (12). Through the reading of Freud, Felman introduces her students to her second objective; namely the fully estranging quality of crisis testimony. Testimony bears witness to the inescapable traces of an otherness that are beyond the reach of the testifier's consciousness. While this otherness relentlessly alienates the testifier from his or her familiar resources of comprehension, it simultaneously ushers in learning and liberation. It breaks all prior frames of understanding and (dis)possesses its witnesses precisely because it encompasses the surprising, challenging, and instructional return of an ultimately incomprehensible difference. But if this unexpected return in all these testimonial accounts discussed to this point proves crisis to be replete with revolutionary and, with the exception of Dostoevsky, potentially therapeutic possibilities in its instructional character, Felman subsequently presents testimonial crisis more explicitly as existentially traumatic. In its traumatic dimensions, the return of a difference issues from an inconsolable loss and grief that interminably fragments the identity of the testifying subject. The process of bearing witness becomes one of singularly testifying to this traumatic abyss and the dissolution that is the consequence of the return of otherness. As I will subsequently argue, in the manner in which
Felman articulates this explicit shift from crisis to trauma in the performative practice of witness, she undercuts not only the learning potential inherent in this practice but she also neglects the related answerability to and accountability for others that this performative practice makes possible.

The instrument for this shift is the paradigmatically traumatic event(s) of the Holocaust. Against this historical context, she maintains that the "fundamental shift in thinking and being" that has until now been defined within the terms of a crisis is no longer triggered by revolution but by massive cultural and historical breakdown and catastrophic loss (25). The poetic writings of Holocaust survivor/victim Paul Celan insightfully illustrate that testifying to this loss means bearing witness to an incorrigible woundedness, to the state of being stricken by reality, and to the failed struggle to re-emerge from the paralysis of this state (28). According to Felman, Celan's poems testify to a reality and knowledge of which they are not in possession precisely in bearing witness to the poet's own vulnerability; an exposure which manifests itself in his own self-conscious struggle to break down any self-possessed control over the sense and form of his verse (37). Felman asserts that while students emerged from each textual encounter somewhat altered, Celan's poetry particularly addressed them in the namelessness of his traumatic experience (39). She maintains that their reading of his poems found them prepared to follow him to the horrific void from which they originated, a preparation they experienced as profoundly liberating (39).

For Felman, this preparation opened her students up to the "risks" incorporated in the reading of testimony; namely, their own embodied experience of the event of an unexpected return of a difference. Not Celan's poetry but the students' viewing of two testimonial videotapes that bear witness to two personal experiences of the Holocaust initiates this return. Felman asserts that the manner in which the students actively received the address in the video testimonies caused them to break into crisis. The crisis, however, encompasses an existential trauma in the measure that it instantiated among her students a complete cognitive and
emotional breakdown: a fragmentation of identity symptomatically expressed in manifestations of anxiety, silence, inarticulateness, obsession, disorientation. In her subsequent address to the class, an integrative address intended to bring students out of the paralysis of this state and back into significance, Felman vouches that the breakdown they had undergone was not unlike that experienced by Celan. In other words, in this intimate testimonial encounter with incomprehensible death and suffering, they had individually lived an utter 'suspension and loss of the knowledge that had been acquired in the class' (50). The encounter dispossessed students of all their previous consolable and consolidating frames of reference and comprehension because what they had inexorably faced through the secondary witnessing of the Holocaust and what possessed them was the radical answerlessness of loss and death.

In order for students to repossess themselves, Felman maintains that they must themselves testify to this experience in the form of a term paper. Their testimonial task thus is to follow the class readings in bearing performative witness to their own traumatizing failures of apprehension and representation in their attempts to contain the extreme devastation/destruction that characterizes the twentieth century. At the same time, she instructs her students to learn from what they had read/viewed and undergone; to ask themselves the following questions: “What has this experience taught you in the end? What did it change in your perception of those other texts? What difference did it make in your global perception of the class?” (52). On the basis of how the class completed the task, Felman asserts that her students had, in effect, cognitively and affectively worked through their traumatization. The conclusion she draws leads her to the broad pedagogical claim that teaching/learning cannot take place without crisis and that the instructor's role, therefore, is to create in the class “the highest state of crisis it [can] withstand” (53). She elaborates:

if teaching does not hit upon some sort of crisis, if it does not encounter either the vulnerability or the explosiveness of a (explicit or implicit) critical and unpredictable dimension, it has perhaps not truly taught: it has perhaps passed on some facts, passed on some information and some document.... In the age of testimony, and in view of contemporary history, I want my students to be able to receive information that is dissonant, and not just congruent, with everything
that they have learned beforehand. Testimonial teaching fosters the capacity to witness something that may be surprising, cognitively dissonant. The surprise implies the crisis (1992, 53).

Felman thus locates her witnessing pedagogy in the belief that learning issues not simply from the mere acquisition of new information but more fundamentally from the testimonial call that witnesses “transform themselves in the function of the newness of that information” (1992, 53). The newness -- the surprise -- that returns to the witness in the encounter with the testimonial/historical implies an existential crisis: “the encounter with the real leads to the experience of an existential crisis with all those involved” (53). It is existential or traumatic because the breakage of the world/word enacts the breakage of the witnessing subject. As one student in Felman’s class puts it in her testimony of what she has learned, “my autonomy has been rendered precarious, even fragile” (55). And, as another student writes, “Literature has become for me the site of my own stammering.... Literature, for me... has had a performative value: my life has suffered a burden, undergone a transference of pain” (56).

ETHICS OF/IN CRISIS

In ways that are not unproblematic, Felman’s learning ethic has found its way into everyday pedagogical theory and practice. For instance, in the introduction to his and Stephen Benz’ edited collection, *Teaching and Testimony*, Allen Carey-Webb contends that “in teaching testimony at Yale, Shoshana Felman found that the crises her students experienced was productive; the contributors to *Teaching and Testimony* would tend to agree” (11). In his concern with what he perceives among his students as an ever-increasing desensitization and indifference to violence, Carey-Webb holds that Felman’s learning ethic offers an implicative witnessing practice capable of overcoming “empathetic failures” (11). What Carey-Webb in his interpretation of Felman thus beckons to is a relationship of “equivalency” Felman emphasizes between those who lived the Holocaust and those in her class who encounter the devastation of
this event through the reading/viewing of testimonial texts. Their experience was "not unlike Celan's own Holocaust experience" (50) The point of similarity in this relationship is the trauma of inapprehension and representation. Both eye-witnesses and secondary witnesses undergo this traumatizing collapse of the self; the former through having survived the Holocaust and the latter through reading/viewing/hearing testimonial accounts. One difference Felman crucially minimizes in drawing this equivalency is that for Holocaust survivors the traumatization is the consequence of having experienced the Holocaust and not being able to comprehend/represent its devastating loss, and that for secondary witnesses it is the result of a sense experience of a happening beyond the bounds of everyday life that is unavailable to them and which they cannot fathom. Indeed, it would seem that, in her exclusive emphasis on the "not unlike[ness]" of students' experience and that of Celan, Felman seeks to bridge this difference. The orientation of her learning ethic stresses that in the reading/viewing/hearing of testimonial accounts, her students are traumatized by their vicarious experience of what eye-witnesses went through rather than by their inability experientially to access this event. Moreover, I would argue that, for Felman, this experience is more than vicarious: in its traumatizing consequences, "equivalency" tends towards substitution of the other by the reading/viewing subject.

This interpretation of Felman's learning ethic is not original. Kali Tal contends that Felman's concept of witnessing is encumbant upon an over-identification with trauma survivors that has her students 'reliving and reexperiencing the event' (1996, 53). Dominick LaCapra similarly reads a relation of contemporaneity between audience and eye-witness. Specifically with reference to Felman's final chapter on Claude Lanzmann's documentary Holocaust film, Shoah, LaCapra emphasizes that Felman's is an approach "of celebratory participation based on empathy or positive transference... the shock, displacement, and disorientation triggered by testimonial reenactment at times seems tantamount to reliving or acting out of the past through self-rending identification with the victim" (1997, 247).
Fundamentally at issue in these criticisms, thus, is the question of the ethics of Felman's witnessing pedagogy. Her learning ethic presupposes that, insofar as radical knowledge is that which comes from the Other as the surprising return of a difference, the traumatizing knowledge (reading/viewing/listening) subjects do not possess becomes available to them to the extent that they occupy a position of empathetic identification with the experience and impact of what Holocaust witnesses lived; to the extent that they themselves undergo a transference of pain. Tal argues that rather than establish the productive terms for the hearing of another's testimony, witnessing perceived on these grounds is violative, contributing to the disempowerment and depoliticization of trauma survivors by prioritizing the reader's imaginative and empathetic capabilities over the difference of the testifier's (un)conscious knowledge and by predominantly defining survivor experience within the terms of fragmentation and paralysis rather than survivance.¹ LaCapra similarly concludes that Felman's empathetic pedagogy lends itself to the foreclosure rather than the opening up of the possibilities for "working through problems in however limited and differential a manner for victim and secondary witnesses alike" (1997, 248). In sum, what both Tal and LaCapra thus seem to gesture toward might be phrased as a predominantly two-fold criticism of Felman's concept of witnessing. One criticism is that the radical, empathetically-motivated experience of an indefinable excess that shatters the secondary witness's sense of mastery and cohesiveness threatens to become collapsed/confused with the very real horrors of the Holocaust and with the specificities of the trauma of that event upon those who did and did not survive it. And, the other criticism is that, as a consequence of this confusion, the experience of the crisis of secondary witnessing defined above, in several respects, comes at the expense of the other, at the cost of the integrity and complex singularity of eye-witness's experiences and testimony. On some level, it seems that, because of this collapse, the secondary empathetic transferential

confrontation with (mass) death and devastation through Holocaust representation is in paradoxical conflict with an ethical face-to-face relation with the testifier. This is a relation in which the reader/listener attends to those uniquely located unsayable traces in the testimony that cannot be reduced to a version of the unknowability that befalls the secondary witness.2

Questions of working through and learning are central to these criticisms. In her psychoanalytic elaboration of “crisis,” Felman binds witnessing with transformational learning. She stresses that witness-learning needs to be more than an informational exercise. A “learning from” needs to implicate students cognitively and affectively in the testimonial re-tellings of others, and instantiate an alteration of the terms for the reader/viewer/listener’s understanding of self and others. Felman accomplishes this insofar as what this learning concretely encompasses within her class is a witnessing of the horror of the Holocaust through a transferential experience of testimonial accounts. This experience initiates a traumatization of self-identity rooted in the students’ realization of the limits of their familiar conceptual schemas to account for the extent of what happened. This, then, is the pedagogical lesson students learn in the wake of witnessing. Yet, the critical question Felman’s witness-learning begs is what exactly is “worked through.” In other words, learning becomes tantamount to the transferential experience of the scale of the loss, horror, and inexplicability of the Holocaust, and not to the detailed consideration of the character and ethical implications/effects of such an experience. In efforts to help students return to significance, Felman asks them to consider what their experience has taught them and what difference it has made in their perception. Yet, the student testimonies she includes excerpts of in her chapter offer little in the way of insight that extends beyond a largely indeterminate awareness of a transformation that is the consequence of the traumatization of transferential witnessing: the acknowledgment of the existential consequence of a correspondential unknowability and inexplicability for secondary witnesses becomes emphasized over their working through of the specificities of the responsibilities of

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2 In my view, Lanzmann’s film particularly aspires to this collapse in its viewing audience.
(impossible) witnessing. One of her student’s remarks: “Somehow, though, I have managed to survive, whole and a bit fragmented at the same time: the same, but decidedly altered. Perhaps this final paper can only be testimony to that simple fact, that simple event” (55). As such, it seems Felman’s performative learning ethic concludes at the limits of witnessing; where the subject’s self-dispossessing experience of and testimony to answerlessness is the end of answerability.

**LITERARY CRISIS**

In what follows, I return to my criticism of Felman’s concept of witnessing from within a Levinasian framework. Before doing so, however, it is necessary to understand “crisis” more succinctly. As Tal observes, while Felman defines her notion of testimony, the rhetoric of trauma, crisis, pedagogy, and so on remains largely unexamined (54). Indeed, crisis is frequently deployed interchangeably with trauma. In my examination of Felman’s chapter above, I have sought to attempt some distinction between the two by presenting Felman’s “existential crisis” as trauma. As already indicated, where the distinction seems suggested by Felman herself is in the hermeneutic move from Mallarmé to Celan. The move is initiated through the realization of the differential nature of the historical event being testified to (namely the French revolution and the Holocaust) and the responses each elicits. The former emphasizes an accidental, suprising or shocking learning experience that possesses the testifier, challenges and emancipates him but does not irrevocably break him. In contrast, the latter re-conceptualizes learning as an incorrigible wounding (or trauma) and as the testimonial in/expression of negativity. Felman emphasizes that the surprise implies the crisis; that learning cannot take place without a crisis; that, in other words, only the latter truly encompasses a radical learning ethic, as it breaks with conventional epistemological and ontological understanding.
The OED locates the etymological origins of “crisis” in the Greek “decision” and defines it generally as a decisive turning point (whether for better or worse) in an illness, emotional phase, or unstable state of affairs. It also often denotes a paroxysmal attack of pain or anxiety. With respect to literary terminology, crisis is commonly understood as that which not only propels a narrative’s plot but also signals the reversal (the tragic or comedic) turning point in the fortunes of the protagonist. In this second emphasis, crisis is tied to a work’s dénouement (French for “unknotting”), devolving upon the protagonist’s revelatory or epiphatic moment of insight (in Aristotle’s language, *anagnorisis*) of something hitherto unknown. Each of the protagonists in the *Bildungsromanen* under discussion experiences such an epiphatic moment. In the case of Naomi, it is when she learns the answer to her mother’s disappearance. For Tayo, it is in the spontaneous moment he sees the pattern in the world. And, in Avey Johnson’s remembrance-learning, it is in the singular sounding of her teacher’s drum note and her subsequent participation in the Carriacou Tramp dance. Each of these moments of *anagnorisis* fundamentally alters each protagonist’s perception of her or his relationship to the past and to past and present others.

What I seek to illustrate in this discussion of crisis or *anagnorisis* with respect to these three narratives is that the witness-learning that takes place in these transformational moments encompasses a working through of the protagonist’s traumatization; the traumatization that is the consequence of the historical events of persecution and oppression in which each of these narratives is framed and the expression of which is the protagonist’s dispossession of self-identity and her/his experience of the limits of knowing and being. What I argue is that the remembrance-learning that is the process of the testimonial working through of this traumatization initiates a subsequent traumatization of a radically instructive nature. This traumatization is a witness-learning which, in contrast to Felman’s notion of the crisis of witnessing as developed in her first chapter, is not a negativity but a positive turning point, one
which moves out of dispossession and returns agency and personhood to the protagonist through the radical revelation of his or her obligation to past and present others.

"TRAUMATISM OF ASTONISHMENT"

I shall come back to my discussion of Felman’s notion of crisis and crisis/trauma as it operates within these formative Bildungsromanen following a more detailed examination of Levinas’ notion of “traumatism of astonishment” that was introduced in the first chapter of this dissertation. As already indicated, for Levinas, the “traumatism of astonishment” happens through the encounter with the face of the other. This face is not a visual image but a relation -- a manifestation that “exceeds the idea of the other in me” (Handelman 1996, 226). The astonishment encompasses the surprising return of a difference that is the revelation of one’s relationality to another. More specifically, it is the subject’s revelation of its interminable obligation to the other; that it is everywhere and at every turn interminably indebted to the other. As Jeffrey T. Nealon maintains,

My singularity or subjectivity, in other words, is given as a function of the other’s unique and irreducible infinity; I can expect no gain from a confrontation with this otherness, but rather only the serial epiphany of my subjectivity as everywhere beholden to the other. What I find out from experience is the ‘traumatic’ fact that the other is always already there, and hence any act I perform is necessarily conditioned by -- Levinas would say owed to -- the other. It is, then, before the other’s infinity that I am subject(ed), and therefore to the other that I always owe my response (1997, 135).

For Levinas, then, the subject is always already beholden to and responds to the other in language and in action, even though the subject may refuse or dismiss that other (Nealon, 132). Indeed, the “I” is nothing but its response to and responsibility for the other. Levinas writes, “[t]he Me before the Other is infinitely responsible.... To be myself signifies, then, not to be able to get out from under responsibility” (1966, 41). This revelatory moment is traumatizing because, as Handelman maintains, the “relation with the other shatters the narcissistic unity of the subject: the subject is decentered, displaced, traumatized as ego” (1991,
The subject is traumatized because it fundamentally realizes itself both as commanded by
the other before and despite itself, and as having been/being of willful and murderous ego: "it recognizes its powers as violent, [and] its authority as imperial.... it recognizes itself as murderous and the Other as vulnerable or destitute, the object of the subject's actual or potential violence, the object of irresponsibility and injustice" (Cohen 1987, 17). This traumatization is not simply conceptual but interrogates the subject on every level, making the subject ill at ease in its own skin. Levinas asserts that it "strips the ego of its pride and the dominating imperialism characteristic of it. The subject is in the accusative... [n]ot at rest under a form, but tight in its skin, encumbered and as it were stuffed with itself, suffocating under itself, insufficiently open, forced to detach itself from itself, to breathe more deeply, all the way, forced to dispossess itself to the point of losing itself" (1991, 110).

The astonishing return of a difference thus seizes the subject with a non-indifference to
the other. The subject's traumatization results in a profound reorientation that commands a subjectivity-for-the-other that fears murder more than death. In this respect, Levinas situates death in the realm of intersubjectivity; perceiving it in light of annihilation of its victim. The command to be otherwise for the other thus demands from the subject an absolute attendance; an answerability expressed in the "Here I am" -- one which contains within it the obligation that "Thou shall not commit murder." As Cohen maintains, this reorientation is not properly ontological or epistemological but rather encompasses an ethical deformation of being and knowledge (17). The subject's non-in-difference to another insists on an alterity irreducible to the identifications of epistemology and ontology: alterity and obligation for that alterity must be acknowledged in terms of what surpasses cognition and being, and what is prior to any prescriptive ethical grammars.

This profound "unheard-of" (Levinas 1991, 148) reorientation toward the other thus is implicated in two inter-related effects. The shattering of the narcissistic unity of the subject hollows out or contracts the I to make room for the other (Handelman 1996, 233). In other
words, the rupture of self-identity enables the other to reveal itself. It gives birth to the other and opens to the possibility of a creative and inspirational access/attentiveness to a radical exteriory in ways that the other remains other and not reducible to some image of identification or dialogue constructed by the I. Second, the obligation for the other ultimately reinstates the agency of the subject. As Handelman observes, while Levinas deconstructs the subject, he saves the person (289). While the identity of logos and being are shattered, the subject’s dissolution is surmounted precisely through the call of revelation, of the ‘Here I am’ (Handelman 301). The ‘Here I am’ requires the presence/personhood of the subject, but not as the self of substantial identity; not as a free, unified ego. Rather, it issues from the impossibility of escaping responsibility for the other, from the action that is the consequence of the subject’s interminable beholdeness to the other. The “Here I am,” in other words, is the self always at the service of others. Rather than an emptied subject, the breaking open, making vulnerable, and judgment of the ego issues forth a new independence, what Levinas calls “difficult liberty.” This freedom is difficult because it is founded on the prior structure or paradox of responsibility: rather than be free of responsibility, the subject is called to it and commanded by it. Levinas states that “[t]he more I return to myself, the more I divest myself, under the traumatic effect of persecution, of my freedom as a constituted, willful, imperialist subject, the more I discover myself to be responsible” (1991, 112).

Within this Levinasian framework, learning thus encompasses the experience of this traumatism of astonishment and the enactment of the “Here I am.” Levinas asserts that “true learning consists in receiving the lesson so deeply that it becomes a necessity to give oneself to the other. The lesson of truth is not held in one... consciousness. It explodes toward the other” (1994, 80). Bildung, hence, is always oriented toward the other; issuing from a traumatism of astonishment. Learning as the hollowing out of the self and as the reinstatement of a subjectivity for the other, consequently, is in sharp distinction from any existential alienation or the fragmentation of the self in an incomprehensible void. As Handelman thus points out, in
contrast to Felman’s witness-learning ethic, Levinas’ notion of learning does not gesture toward a paralytic aporia but rather encompasses a positive pedagogy (1996, 234). The subject’s reorientation to the other, the birth of that other, and the learning that comes out of this sociality, as Cohen underscores, is “effected by means of a positivity, the surplus of ethics, rather than by a negativity or lack which the subject would then recuperate or attempt to recuperate” (1987, 17).

WITNESSING (FOR) ALTERITY

Because being otherwise issues not from within the terms of a stable and self-conscious identity but rather from doing, from the action of the subject for the other, the question of how one reads and bears witness becomes central. Within a Levinasian schema, as Handelman points out, the “reader is no longer the willful, isolated, heroic pagan self but in turn hollowed out, opened, called by and obligated to the text and author in responsibility and command. The ‘reader’ would not be an arbitrary willful misreader bent on power and domination over the text” (1991, 288). This is a fundamentally different pedagogical relation than that asserted by Harold Bloom, as presented in Michael Hobbs’s discussion of Silko’s Ceremony. Bloom maintains that “[w]hen you read, you confront either yourself, or another, and in either confrontation you seek power. Power over yourself, or another, but power” (qtd. in Hobbs, 301). For Bloom, the strongest readers are misreaders that intentionally misunderstand writers in order to make space for their own creative projects. In his elaboration of this view, and in order to present Tayo as a radical reader, Hobbs draws upon Bakhtin’s assertion that “one’s own discourse, and one’s own voice, although born of another or dynamically stimulated by another will sooner or later begin to liberate themselves from the authority of the other’s discourse”(302). Hobbs’ makes the argument that Tayo survives his war trauma and his confrontation with the authoritative educative discourses of modernity in the radical reading/writing of his own “internally persuasive discourse.”
"liberating" discourse is one of resistance that emanates from Tayo's unique in-between condition as half-white and half-Indian, as reader of white texts and traditional Laguna tales. This location makes him unwilling to privilege one discourse over another. Rather, his testimony involves a deconstruction of the lies of hegemonic white discourses and their emblematic reinscription from his own re-fashioned ceremonial perspective. Following Old Betonie, Tayo's reading/writing thus is also a rewriting of orthodox Native ceremonial traditions that in their refusals to change are no longer strong enough to contend with the force of contemporary witchery. In these rewritings, Tayo thus acquires power over himself, over these authoritative discourses, and over his friends who, at the novel's end, threaten to undo him in their own succumbing to the destructive orientations and outcomes of witchery.

While insightful, it seems Hobbs's Bloomian/Bakhtinian reading ultimately, in fact, presents Tayo's liberation on terms not of a resistance from authoritative discourses but rather of their reproduction. This is so because Tayo's fashioning of an internally persuasive discourse does not break from the logocentric patterns of ontological and epistemological discourse. While Tayo's exegetical practice rightly has him interrogating dominant discourses, on Hobbs's terms, the radical story Tayo constructs from his non-essentialist in-between position continues to be defined within the framework of dominance and mastery: Tayo's liberation by the narrative's end shows him to be hero and author of his own story and his own multiple identity. In this respect, Tayo's anagnoretic encounter with otherness occurs in the service of his own enriched self-fashioning. And, as such, while relational, Tayo's "I" comes at the expense of the other's difference, as the other is appropriated in Tayo's own interests. Within the framework of Hobbs's interpretation (yet counter to the conclusions he draws), Tayo's learning and anagnorisis thus shows itself not to be radical. While I will shortly show that reading Ceremony in this way fundamentally constitutes a misreading that is possible only to the extent that one neglects Tayo's ethical awakening to his sense of responsibility for his past,
before doing so, I want to expand upon the implications of the defining terms of a Levinasian responsive/responsible subjectivity.

In his "The Ethics of Dialogue: Bakhtin and Levinas," Nealon essentially argues that while Bakhtin posits an ethics of answerability, this creative responsivity to the other remains marked by what that encounter affords the self. Nealon states, "the Bakhtinian subject encounters otherness primarily as a reassurance of its own developing, shifting sameness; the self encounters the other as a way of enhancing its own sense of multiplicity" (138). While Nealon directs his criticism specifically toward Bakhtin, he also more broadly aims it toward a current social constructivist ethic defined by "a series of performances" that, in the words of Levinas, have us "resting in avatar" (145; Levinas 1991, 14). In this latter respect, what Nealon eschews is a social constructivist position that claims to respond to the limits of essentialism by positing a subject whose agency is defined through a postmodern strategic essentialism, multiply voiced. He stresses the insufficiency of this counter-position insofar as it ultimately issues from subject in the service of the subject. For Nealon, social constructivism on these terms is in fact not a counter-position at all but merely a diversified echo of the Odyssean Bildung:

At its best social constructionism is deployed in the current theoretical field as an attempt to reopen or save a notion of agency from the stone determinism of essentialist narratives; but... with the return to ethical agency and subjective possibility, we seem to lose the importance of subjection: the subject is constructed to be sure, but that construction can never be simply (or even primarily) in the service of the subject's free, enriching choice (144).

Arguing for a contrasting Levinasian literary approach that takes into account the insights of social constructivism, Nealon asserts that the subject strategically be only insofar as it recognizes that it is so always as one-for-the-other. Such terms make explicit that the fulfillment acquired in the encounter with the face of the other is "only the serial epiphany of my subjectivity as everywhere beholden to the other" (135). As Nealon makes clear, this serial "traumatism of astonishment" which is alerted to responsivity/responsibility as subjectivity
itself requires from us an enabling agency that acts in the world for the other. On such terms, as Nealon asserts, uniqueness and agency are not features of our individual qualities, but rather the qualities of our subjections. Subjection thus references precisely that we are “always a priori subjected and indebted to the infinite alterity of the other,” and that “our ability to think or respond in concrete contexts presupposes a necessary subjection before the infinite alterity of the other” (136). On this basis, as a rejoinder to the essentialism versus social constructionist debate, Nealon contends that “perhaps what we require is not an identity politics of who we are, but an alterity politics of how we’ve come to be who we are -- not the answerability of Bahktinian subjective privilege, but the Levinasian responsibility engendered by the other” (146). Nealon concludes that, on the terms of such an alterity politics, reading constitutes risky business because ethical answerability is located exterior to subjectivity, where it offers no Odyssean return. He writes that “perhaps this is the ‘fine risk’ that Levinas points to... not the risk of subjective Bahktinian adventure, which succeeds in enriching the subject even when it fails, but rather the higher risk of response as unrecoverable exposure to the other” (147). To return to the opening epigraph by Britzman in this chapter, the risk one finds in reading a text, what one does/cannot not expect to find, is a potential ‘traumatism of astonishment,” encompassing one’s interminable responsibility for another.

**ANAGNORISIS AS WITNESS-LEARNING**

Returning, then, to the notion of literary crisis, one might read the anagnoretic moment of revelation in each of the *Bildungsromanen* under discussion in this thesis as encompassing a “traumatism of astonishment” that instantiates a resolution on terms in which the protagonist aspires to meet his or her witnessing obligation to the other. In the case of Kogawa’s *Obasan*, when Naomi learns of the reasons for the disappearance of her mother, she experiences her *anagnorisis*. Through her dream, she recognizes herself (and others) as Grand Inquisitor, as murderous subject and as everywhere beholden to her mother and the past. Naomi’s
traumatism displaces her narcissism; purging her of her egoism and arbitrariness. Her dream relation with her mother initiates Naomi's questioning of her and others' right to appropriate, dominate, encroach, and usurp. She recognizes that her judgment of her mother's abandonment and Naomi's denial of both their histories was rooted in her own immature, selfish concerns. This insight dramatically reconfigures her relationship to her mother within covenental terms. She announces her "Here I am" in the question of "How can I hear you?" Naomi's mother's call to her daughter from the "other shore," from the aftermath of the destruction and death of the Nagasaki bombing, in Naomi's dreams and in the unspoken of Grandma Kato's testimonial letter is an address to Naomi to access the "saying" in the "said" and to accept the obligations of historical witness. In this respect, while Naomi's anagnorisis leads to the death of her as hero in the conventional literary sense, it also "saves" her. It enables her to compose herself on different perspectival terms in which she is one-for-the-other. Revelation coincides with inspiration: she returns to the coulee able now to see the "quiet ballet" in her surroundings.

In Silko's Ceremony, Tayo's anagnorisis happens in the moment when he is at the unranium mine shaft and sees in the ore rock the scale of the monstrous design of destruction the witchery has unleashed upon the world. At this moment, the pattern of the ceremony is completed, and Tayo accesses the wholly other. He sees "the way all the stories fit together -- the old stories, the war stories, their stories -- to become the story that was still being told. He was not crazy; he has never been crazy. He had only seen and heard the world as it always was: no boundaries, only transitions through all distances and time" (246). That Tayo comes to the recognition of his answerability to this vision is evident in his refusal to reproduce the dominant discourses of power/violence by murdering Emo: "The witchery had almost ended the story according to its plan; Tayo had almost jammed the screwdriver into Emo's skull the way the witchery had wanted" (253). What stops Tayo is the realization of his responsibility to finally end the witchery, and to live to serve those in his past, such as the Mountain Woman:
“He would go back there now, where she had shown him the plant. He would gather the seeds for her and plant them with great care in places near sandy hills” (254). What Tayo thus precisely answers to is the injunction, “Thou shall not kill.” It is an injunction that he had also enacted during the war in his inability to act upon the orders of his sergeant to murder a line-up of Japanese soldiers, one of whom he feverishly mistakes for his Uncle Josiah. However, at that time, implanted as he was in this murderous discourse, he was unable to recognize his hallucination as an ethical call from the other (his dead Uncle) to nonviolence, and agrees instead with his doctor’s prognosis of battle fatigue. Contra-Hobbs, therefore, it is not that Tayo writes an internally persuasive discourse which enables the construction of his subjectivity on appropriative self-authorizing terms. Rather, Tayo’s anagnorisis binds him to suffering others, and the story he writes/enacts by not killing Emo is one that is and recognizes that it is accountable to those others. That his subjectivity becomes defined on such terms of responsibility is evidenced also in his pedagogical commitment at the novel’s end to the obligations of witness; to re-tell his testimony to old man Ku’oosh and other members of his community.

Finally, Praisesong might be similarly read on Levinasian terms of a ‘traumatism of astonishment’ and as a rejoinder to interpretations of Marshall’s narrative that frame Avey Johnson’s reincarnation within the terms of a performative self-fulfilling and self-originating subjectivity, however heterogenous or creolized. Avey’s “restoration to her proper axis” may be re-read as the result of her epiphanic realization of her obligation to the Ibos and all those who died during or after the Middle Passage. Avey’s possession by the spirit of her Great Aunt Cluney thus leads ultimately not to Avey’s fragmentation but to a renewed agency that recognizes the self as singularly a construction made possible only through the binding allegiance with another. What Avey comes to realize through her possession by her Aunt (a possession that has always been there, though repressed until Avey’s cruise) is that she cannot escape her responsivity/responsibility for her past, and that the other is always there calling her
to attention. Her capacities for thinking, feeling, being and even repressing are made possible through the relation with infinite others. This anagnorisis comes to her during her participation in the Big Drum ceremony. More specifically, it becomes evident in Lebert Joseph’s dancing of the “Beg Pardon” which, as its singers testify “is not just for me one... Oh, no! Is for ‘tout moun’ [for all the world]” (236), and in Lebert’s sounding of the drum note which reminds Avey and others of the “true and solemn business of the fête” (245). When Avey joins in the “Carriacou Tramp,” she experiences her connections with others and of “possibilities and becoming” on the terms of obligation. Hence, when asked her name by an elderly woman, Avey responds not in the independent terms of “Avey, or even Avey Williams” (251). Rather, she replies “Avey, short for Avatara” (251). It is not that Avey comes to “rest in avatar” but that she is awakened into a personhood defined on the radical grounds of her assumption of responsibility for her ancestry and history. Avey’s reincarnation thus is made possible to the extent that she recognizes the shortened form of her name as borne from a past other, from Avatara. While Avey’s ontological identity is consequently crushed -- an identity established on North American progressive terms of white individualism and the promise of the American dream -- her spirit is renewed. Avey’s assumption of her Great Aunt’s phrase, “my body is in Tatem but my mind is with the Ibos,” emphasizes both Avey’s taking on of her “Here I am” obligation to the Ibos and a renewed subjectivity that issues from that obligation and from her responsivity to the spirited “saying” of Ibos’ experience. Although she remains physically in Tatem, her commitment is to the Ibos and their history. It is through this covenantal relationship between Avey and Avey’s texts of the dreams and memories of Aunt Cluney, including the story of the Ibos that Avey realizes her responsibility to pass on what she has learned to others. In this respect, like Naomi and Tayo, Avey’s traumatism of astonishment demands from her a pedagogical future that has her re-telling her (non-thematizable) story and its readerly obligations to others.
WORKING THROUGH

However, while these three Bildungsromanen can all be read on such Levinasian terms, what each narrative’s conclusion does not account for is the pedagogical character of the “working through” of readers’ and listeners’ subjection to the past. In other words, although each protagonist reveals a pedagogical commitment to the obligations of witness, these terms remain unspecified beyond a witness-learning marked by an attentiveness to the non-thematizable excess in the past and the tracing of students’ responsibility/subjection to past and present others. The question thus becomes: what, more particularly, might this tracing encompass? What might this practice ask of and from readers personally?3 In asking these questions, I re-open up for consideration what reading within the frame of a learning ethic outlined thus far might mean for a performative practice of “working through” discussed in the opening chapter. “Working through” on these terms becomes articulated as a witnessing practice of reflexive interrogation proceeding from the orientation of a covenental relationship. In other words, what is at issue here is the working through of one’s ability precisely to be one-for-the-other, to read for alterity. As a practice of learning, this involves more than simply the acknowledgment of the self in crisis. As the next chapter will elaborate, it devolves upon an interrogative practice of witnessing understood as “work” for the other. In this respect, witness-learning thus markedly differs from the confessional, as it does not encompass a “witness of the self but a testimony for the other” (Handelman 1991, 273).4

Nealon’s insights offer an initial inroad to a witnessing practice of working through insofar as he first points to the “serial epiphanies” that are the consequence of the face-to-face relation and, second, to an alterity politics that attends to the specificities of our subjections.

3 Much of what follows draws on the insights developed in Simon, Eppert, Clamen, Beres. Unpublished manuscript.

4 For other insights on the differences between confession and witness/testimony, see Boler. Referencing Foucault and Felman, she argues that the difference lies precisely in the latter’s embeddedness in obligation.
Elaborating upon Nealon, in the context of a working through that is a “reading for alterity,” the former might develop from a tracing of how our (reading) responses always possess a residual call of the other. It would further encompass a study of our traumatisms of astonishment, insofar as these are potentially incurred in dialogic encounters, whether through texts or through conversational engagements with others. More specifically, such a study might consider not simply the character and consequences of these traumatisms with respect to how they disrupt our complacency but also crucially the particular ways in which they call us to responsibility and action. Moving from this, the latter might attend more elaborately to the ways in which (reading) subjects are socially produced in the subjections of the face-to-face; that is, how we responsibly come into being/action/reading through the always a priori call of the other (Nealon, 136). Additionally, a significant component of such an examination concurrently might consider how as willful (reading) subjects, we have historically and currently failed or refused this address in our egoistic responsivity/reading.

In this context, witnessing would interminably foreground how we as individual or collective readers interpret or ‘solicit’ texts, impose meaning upon them, and how and whether or not these texts demand such aggressive readings (Handelman 1991, 315). Centrally at issue here is an interminable vigilance on levels of both readership and personhood to how each who approaches the text is inquisitorial. This vigilance might involve an interrogation of how readers are implicated in dominating the “saying” of the text through thematizing acts; are complicit and complacent with such acts. Such self-interrogation encompasses asking where, when, how, why questions with respect to the origins and particularities of such thematizations and desire for/investments in them. It also addresses the consequences of these thematizations; the particular and multiple ways in which such practices obstruct one’s abilities to be vulnerable to others, to hear others on complex non-thematizable terms, and to be responsive to/responsible for others. The orientation of this self-accountability might then issue forth consideration of how one might guard against thematizations or, perhaps more precisely,
continually work to interrupt them. Such an interrogative practice applies no less to our emotional responses to texts. In other words, under consideration would be how these responses -- whether implicated in practices of fascination, sympathy, identification, abjection, empathy -- enable or disable the hearing/reading of others’ expressions of suffering in ways that do not reduce the excesses within those testimonies to versions of ourselves. This practice thus recognizes such emotional responses as themselves encompassing thematizations; discursive constructions emanating from the possibilities of mastery or exclusion. As Britzman underscores, “feelings... cannot exist without narrative conventions and their own structures of intelligibility and unintelligibility... structures of intellegibility that depend upon historically specific spheres” (84). Britzman points to the need for contemporary pedagogical theory and practice not to constitute feelings as “the royal road to attitudinal change... [but] as a curious reading practice, as a problem of ethical conduct” (84). The practice of witnessing as reflexive working through, then, would be implicated in an interminable exegesis; the undoing and interrupting of such thematizations in the responsible, contractive orientation to make space for the other’s complexity and integrity. What most differentiates this orientation from Nussbaum, or Bahktin for that matter, is that the subject’s answerability is not for oneself: that is, it is not directed toward’s the self’s realization and fulfillment but rather towards others and towards a responsivity to their ethical address.

How more specifically would such a reading practice take place with respect to a narrative such as Obasan? While this constitutes the predominant substance of the following chapter, suffice it to say at this point that it would mean examining how reading subjects from and within different contexts continually thematize the concepts and emotions of history, memory, identity, suffering, racism, love, silence, empathy, trauma that are variously explored in the narrative in their particularities and generalities; how Naomi’s, Obasan’s or Aunt Emily’s experiences of trauma, hardship, loss, discrimination become transposed as “saids” through writing and through interpretive practice; how characters’ beliefs and investments are similarly
reduced; how Naomi’s remembrance-learning and anagnorisis are thematized; how the narrative’s language and structure also are, and so on. An aspect of this would be struggling to map personal and social genealogies for these thematizations. For example, the ‘theme’ of silent suffering in Obasan has received considerable literary attention; where silent suffering is thematized alternately as positive and negative, and on the basis of culture/race. A consequential concern becomes how such ascriptions obstruct the possibility precisely for hearing and being responsive to the complexities and sayings of silent suffering, and how such ascriptions and investments can be continually disrupted.

READING PERSONALLY

This responsible/responsive working through by no means precludes and, in fact, requires reading personally; that is, in ways that take into account the complex uniqueness of the reading subject’s knowledge, experiences, locations, and investments. These experiences, locations, and investments infuse responsivity and answerability with particular resonant significance, acknowledging that witnessing is the product of a concrete relation and that the other’s unthematizable integrity can only be accessed through such personal answerability. Robert Gibbs maintains that “revelation occurs only when I ‘say’ the text, for myself.... The uniqueness of each person is required for this disruption in learning from another.... The way that revelation signifies is to solicit, to demand and to enhance my uniqueness, my distinctive interpretation of the call” (53-55). Revelation thus is made possible to the extent a reading subject brings to bear upon her/his witnessing all her/his singular references and resources, all her/his personal past and present life experience, thoughts, and feelings. Indeed, for Levinas, ultimate signification can only be accessed through the contributions of each person’s distinct slant. He asserts:

It all happens as though the multiplicity of persons... were the condition for the fullness of ‘absolute truth,’ as though each person, through his uniqueness, ensured the revelation of a unique aspect of the truth, and that certain sides of it
would never reveal themselves if certain people were missing from mankind (qtd. in Aronowicz, xvi).

The full "uniqueness" of each person is thus central to any witness-learning. In Naomi's case, much of what she learns comes out of her historical experience and from her two aunts. At the end of the narrative, she symbolically dons Aunt Emily's coat. Yet, her own unique experience is such that she cannot simply mimic her Aunt Emily. Rather, the difficult freedom she now experiences demands that her reading of the "saying" of her mother's and her own past proceeds from and resonates with the particularities of her own responsible/responsive voice. Similarly, Avey Johnson's pedagogical re-telling of the past is not merely the repetition of the story of the Ibos but is approached from within the specificities of her struggles against Harlem poverty in the repression of her past and of her transformative experiences of the Carriou excursion. And Tayo's re-telling, finally, also is inflected with his war-time experiences, his interpretation of his love for the spirit of the mountain woman and his interpretation of the learning he received from her and from Old Betonie. These narratives exhibit the recognition, therefore, that the text's "second sonority... lives through the lives of who hear it" (Handelman 1991, 290).

At the same time, however, the personal does not displace a devout attention to the (textual) other. Avey's subjective experience, for instance, does not take precedence over the story of the Ibos and the Middle Passage. With respect to reading practice, Aronowicz asserts that such an unparalleled attention averts a potential subjectivism that threatens to out-stage the text. She maintains that the subjectivity of the reader "requires as its corollary that intense attention to the object, not only in what it manifests but also in what, through its manifestations, it hides.... this... helps to make the relation of the interpreter to the text something other than mere whim, for it forces him out of his private universe into a life he shares with others" (Aronowicz, xx). In this respect, working through never becomes
solipsistically performative: the witnessing subject never loses sight of its relationality and servitude to the other. As Aronowicz reinforces:

the subjectivity called into play by the act of interpretation is always an extreme attention to what is outside itself. In fact, for Levinas, the primary connotation of ‘self’ is not an interiority closed in upon itself. When the self is true to itself it is nothing but that which is established by its response to the Other. It is the other person who disrupts our complacency, our sameness, our self-sufficiency, and, in the attention he or she commands, establishes the self that we are in reality, a face without any rear area, an occiput, to conceal itself, a complete exposure.... for him the primary sense of subjectivity is... an unparalleled attention, a response to what is outside, the most outside of which is the other human being. Thus, when Levinas talks of the necessity of the specific person of the interpreter in the act of interpretation, the lines we are accustomed to draw between subjectivity and objectivity blur. His is a redrawing of the lines in which a total subjectivity is at the same time a total attention to the object.... [The text thus is brought very close and yet kept very far.... [The attention to the other] can only be accomplished through an attention to his [her] specificity that requires all of my own and which is the essence of my inalienable responsibility' (xxi-xxii).

In this respect, the experiential is inextricably bound with the social, the cultural, and the historical in terms of both the specific details of the text and (non) thematic issues that concern the world at large.

IDENTIFICATION RE-VISITED: A READER’S ANAGNORISIS

To this point in the dissertation, I have been arguing for a reading practice that refuses any identificatory position with that of the main character, as such a positionality threatens to reduce the other to a version of the same. Imaginatively inhabiting the other’s place, as Nealon emphasizes, manifests a confusion with another that precisely has us resting in an avatar rather than engaged in the work of a responsible/responsive witnessing (145). Yet, my Levinasian readings of Obasan, Ceremony, and Praisesong, are invested in an attention to what might encompass a practice of witness-learning, as in many ways exemplified by the protagonists in each narrative. Might the charge consequently not be made that, in fact, I am arguing for an identificatory witnessing in which the reader’s learning is aligned with or becomes that of the
protagonist? Concurrent with this, it might also seem that I gesture toward a witnessing practice in which the reader’s identificatory participation in the protagonist’s remembrance-learning leads to the former’s experiencing of a “crisis” in the moment of the protagonist’s own anagnorisis, and which culminates in the reader’s working through and recognition of her/his obligation to past and present others on the same terms as that of the protagonist. And, to the extent that this is the case, this “crisis” in the reader would, therefore, not encompass a “crisis of witnessing” but rather a “traumatism of astonishment.”

In what follows, I seek to trouble such possible claims in the context of an examination of my own reading of *Obasan*. In my reading, I did undergo a crisis of learning, and this crisis occurred in the moment of Naomi’s own. On an initial level, my reading of *Obasan* thus may stand to serve rather than contest the above charges. One might argue, too, that the narrative structure of the novel readily lent itself to the timing of this experience, as it is propelled by and performs the unravelling of a mysterious unknown: namely, the cause for the disappearance of Naomi’s mother. This unravelling incurs the impact of this disclosure on Naomi’s understanding, as well as on that of the reader. It is in the context of this disclosure that Naomi dreams the interruption of her mother’s death/love ceremony by the Grand Inquisitor, and implicates herself in his identity. Through her interpretation of this dream, she returns to the path of her previous *Bildung* from the age of questioning, re-examining it on terms that recognize its pedagogy as motivated in ego-centric investments. This radical insight issues the collapse of her former identity and the reinstatement of a responsible subjectivity answerable to her past and the past of other Japanese-Canadians. As we, as readers, are given to learn the horrible events that led to Naomi’s mother’s death, might we not also in this vulnerable moment of shocking disclosure find ourselves suddenly implicated in Naomi’s inquisitorial interpretation?

My personal answer to this question is “yes.” At the same time, however, I preface this affirmative response and the subsequent analysis of my own implication with the pedagogical
qualification that I can by no means predict that another's reading will [or should] be the same as my own. Even to suppose that this might be the case would be to contradict the very unexpected terms on which a "crisis of learning" happens. This qualification briefly made, the subsequent question becomes: what is the character of my crisis of learning; to what extent might it conceived as a "crisis of witnessing" or a "traumatism of astonishment"? To identify my crisis of learning in Felman's terms as a "crisis of witnessing" "not unlike" Naomi's own would be to suggest that I have gained an embodied insight into and empathetic understanding of Naomi's incomprehensible and horrific loss of her mother and the traumatic experiences of Japanese-Canadians during the Second World War. In keeping with the orientation of this dissertation, I shall argue that my crisis was contrastingly that of a "traumatism of astonishment." The subsequent question consequently becomes one of whether this means that the learning relationship between protagonist and reader nevertheless bears an equivalency. As I hope to show, the very terms and requirements of a reader's traumatism of astonishment make moot this final question.

What then was the character of the crisis of learning upon reading of Naomi's dream of the Grand Inquisitor and her subsequent interpretation of this dream? No doubt, my response was in the order of a crisis. Reading this part of the narrative instantaneously and completely threw me off balance, because I suddenly saw my manner of approaching others -- in the questions I chose or chose not to ask -- as in many ways being that of a Grand Inquisitor. My questioning practice was suddenly recognized on terms that potentially violate the integrity of others and the integrity of my relationships with others. Rather than myself as questioner -- as reader, academic, acquaintance, friend etc. -- I found myself accused and interrogated, suddenly cognizant of my own murderous, silencing potential. In this respect, my (narcissistic) investments were entirely displaced. Confounded and placed into question were suppositions of who I was or perceived myself to have become as a subject, moral and otherwise. Also put into question were several of the concrete social terms under which I presently relate to --
converse with, work with, play with, be intimate with -- and engage others. This experience was deeply painful not only because of my sudden awareness that I might be harming others, but also because it beckoned a return of the repressed and a considered examination of a personal history of questioning in other scenes.

Indeed, this shocking insight in certain respects became the engine of this dissertation, which might be read as an effort of responsible working through. Were my questions prior to the dissertation predominantly and uncomplicatedly guided by the contents of my own psychic and moral investments, upon reading Obasan, they became fueled with underlying concerns of what it means to question, and how questioning enables/obstructs responsible engagements with others. More specifically, questions suddenly of interest were: how do I thematize questions I ask about and from another insofar as thematization is understood as the way my questions are informed by my self-serving calculations, projections, expressions, and anticipated responses, whence do these thematizations personally, socially, historically originate, how do they obstruct my ability to hear and participate in a relationship with another in ways that do not compromise the other person’s singularity, complexity, integrity, not to mention my receptivity to another’s possibility of teaching me. For the substance of this dissertation, these concerns largely became channeled into ethical practices of reading and learning, as both these fundamentally encompass an interrogative process.

I identify my crisis of learning as akin to a traumatism of astonishment not only in its unexpectedness, its displacement of my foundations, its effect of making me see my questions as potentially violative, in its calling me to a responsive/responsible attention, but also in its impressing upon me the awareness that my questions can never be fully realized in an answer. In other words, what unexpectedly came to me was the insight that, insofar as my questions constituted the pursuit of a particular conclusive truth, then they would always be insufficient and would always require more questions. The questions themselves would never be able to get at what I wanted, or phrased in re-oriented and less masterful ways, what was out there to
access. In this sense, I learned that the object at which my questions were directed would never be reducible to them; that I would never know.

But crucial to consider were the consequences of this crisis of learning; what it asked of me, not simply with respect to the details of my own life but also in terms of my reading practice. What I realized most starkly was that my questions could not come at the expense of the other's complexity, could not be reductive and violative. What centrally distinguishes my crisis from that described by Felman is that I learned, first and foremost, that I was/am a self (only) in relation to others, and that I have an obligation to honour that relationship. As such, my approach to questioning had to be marked with contraction, had to enable rather than suppress the opening up of the other. With respect to my questioning of Obasan, of Naomi’s and her mother’s traumatic experiences, what I could no longer do was pose them in ways that sought a particular return, that were oriented toward my own self-fulfillment. Nor could they be guided by the attempt to ascertain for myself what their traumatic experiences were like. While I experienced horror, shock, and distress upon learning of the reasons for Naomi’s mother’s disappearance, Naomi’s testimonial dream and my response to it required an answerability that would not come at the expense of the difference of their experience as both told and not told. In this respect, my witnessing obligations required a withdrawal from potentially imagining myself into the particularities of Naomi’s Japanese-Canadian experiences, her traumatic childhood abandonment and subsequent loss of her mother, or her mother’s suffering during and after the nuclear bombing of Nagasaki. Nor for that matter could I project a presumptive equivalency between Naomi’s witness-learning and my own. While Naomi and I both learn what it might mean to witness; to hear/bear the testimony of another’s suffering, the specific context, expression, and relevance of this witness-learning remains markedly separate.

Perhaps rather than on terms of identicality one might more productively conceive of the relation between Naomi’s witness-learning and my own within the climax of the novel as a
“meeting place,” an intimate point of contact. On these terms, non-thematizable complexities, interruptions of thematizations, “traumatisms of astonishment” that have impressed themselves upon the details of my own history and life experience meet with the complexities, interruptions, and “traumatisms of astonishment” that constitute the “literary knowledge” of *Obasan*. Indeed, this meeting enables and informs my exegetical practice. My inconclusive and partial recollection of the excesses of cognition and affect manifest in ambiguities, slippages, contradictions, complexities that inhere in the concrete realities of past and contemporary situations come to my reading. Indeed, this recollective calling up -- the ethical calling from the other, in this case as a “traumatism of astonishment” makes my exegetical attendance to *Obasan* possible.

In sum, what I ask of and from myself in the process of a reflexive working through are the specificities of my implication in the narrative’s witness-learning with respect to the orientation and processes of my reading; that is, the whence and wherefore of my questions and elicitations, the character of my responsivity/responsibility with respect to my investments in empathetic identification and in particular thematizations, my attentiveness to the narrative’s non-thematizable excess. At the same time, my obligations to others return me to the text and the materials of witness. To this end, I interrogate the substance of my implication with respect to the historical events the narrative references. Of central concern here is what it means to be a Canadian and/or landed immigrant, what it means to participate justly in Canadian society, what it means to remember, learn, or teach Canadian history through commemorative practices. Finally, I pose the larger inter-related question of my responsibilities for others in concrete everyday terms in ways that do not foreclose the integrity of each’s singular complexity.

This said, I stress that such a practice of working through by no means disparages or divests me of my responsibilities to acknowledge and locate the immediacies and realities of my responses. If anything, sidestepping, negating, or dismissing my personal responses would encompass an act of bearing false witness, as it would deny the integrity of my relations with
others. What it does potentially accomplish, however, is a reorientation of the study of these responses in ways that beg the question of how they enable or obstruct my abilities to be one-for-the-other. It further ensures that the process of working through remain interminably bound with a devout attention to the other/text so as not to displace its position of priority. That is, working-through constitutes a reflexive interrogative component of witness-learning only insofar as it proceeds in the vigilant service of the radical exteriority of the text/other.

LEARNING OUTSIDE THE NARRATIVE

What I have presented above are the terms for a working through that might encompass a radical witness-learning ethic. In my own case, while many of these questions have been a theoretical concern for a number of years in the context of collaborative study (Simon et. al), they addressed me again personally in their full urgency -- breaking into my everyday world -- during my reading of *Obasan*. I say “again” in the realization that learning never happens once and for all but is ongoing, instantiated not in a resolute singular instant but in and through an interminable series of anagnoretic moments. Yet, as indicated earlier, that my own crisis of learning occurred during the climax of the novel is not to predict the same for another. In other words, one cannot prescriptively locate a pedagogical practice of witness-learning either in the protagonist’s *anagnorisis* or in a text more generally. Doing so not only subtracts from the witnessing process the recognition that learning is an unexpected, accidental event but also displaces the acknowledgment that learning is produced out of unique encounters between texts and individual readers. These texts may be narratives of historical witness and/or they may encompass the world at large. Even while I locate my “traumatism of astonishment” in Naomi’s *anagnorisis*, this moment did not occur in or spring out of a vacuum. Indeed, a prior complex series of other events, experiences, and readings external to my reading of the narrative, in effect, constituted the trigger for this learning moment. This acknowledgment concedes not only to the recognition that reading is embedded within a complex life but also to
the awareness that no matter how ambiguous a text, learning is always more incomplete and messier than what literature models us with.

That reading encompasses the totality of witness-learning thus seems a misplaced presumption. That reading makes possible a series of anagnoretic moments seems at best perhaps a hoped-for encounter; that is, insofar as such an encounter is defined on the terms of this dissertation as the instantiation of a subjectivity-for-the-other that does not involuably negate the agency of the reading/learning subject. Such terms recognize that the risk that Obasan takes is that the specificities of its ethical address are not heard, or heard only abstractly. In this respect, contra Felman, I neither locate crises of learning within the properties of literature nor do I subscribe to a pedagogical practice which portends to predict, provoke, and claim such a traumatism. Rather, I argue for a practice emphasizing and issuing in the working-through of questions of obligation and accountability to and for others, in questions of the ethical address of literature of historical witness and the character of each character’s witness-learning, and in questions of the reader/subject’s implication in this address to learn. In this way, I hold open rather than insist upon the possibilities of an unexpected and challenging pedagogical encounter with radical difference, define the nature of that encounter as a positivity, and emphasize a pedagogical practice that follows not from the instantiation of such a traumatism but from a working through of its character and implications. It is only on these different terms that I am inclined to follow Felman in her claim, rewriting it somewhat, that if learning does not in some way address the ethical consequences of a “traumatism of astonishment” (even though such a traumatism might not have been yet experienced), then it has perhaps not been truly accomplished.

Finally, although this dissertation predominantly emphasizes a reading practice of witness-learning rooted in the question of reading subjects responsivity/responsibility for the other, and the specificities of questions within such a radical learning ethic, it is important to stress that in seeking to address these issues, I am not ultimately arguing for a singular
pedagogical practice. Doing so would be not only to bracket learning to a particular set of ethical concerns and thereby potentially to foreclose other readings, other insights, other surprises understood on different terms. In this respect, like Eaglestone, I believe that a Levinasian hermeneutic would have to allow for multiple readings -- every reading interrupting the other one.

In the next and final chapter of this dissertation, I examine aspects of this and other chapters in light of their implications for the specifics of classroom teaching. I address this concern through a study of different teaching guides on the narratives in this dissertation. I conclude the chapter with some broader comments on what it means to read the literature of historical witness responsively/responsibly.
CHAPTER SIX

TEACHING GUIDES: RE-LEARNING QUESTIONS

A community of the question about the possibility of the question.

Derrida 1978, 80.

We have much to learn about... how one questions oneself by asking a question of another; and how another's questions of me are my questions for myself.

Gibbs 1992, 104.

INTRODUCTION

Having now addressed the possibilities and exigencies of a radical learning ethic with respect to the reading of specific literature of historical witness, the conclusion of this dissertation considers more concretely the pragmatic pedagogical face of such an ethics. Within recent years, increasing attention has been given to various theoretical and practical pedagogical concerns that attend the high school, college, and university teaching of this literature. Also now available are teaching guides that provide specific suggestions for the productive introduction and taking up of this material within educational settings. This chapter examines three such guides. It considers two papers within Maitino's and Peck's edited volume *Teaching American Ethnic Literature: Nineteen Essays* (1996) that focus exclusively upon the *Bildungsromanen* under discussion in this dissertation. The first of these details a particular approach to the classroom teaching of Silko's *Ceremony*, and the second examines possibilities for teaching Kogawa's *Obasan*. The third more extensive guide is Lars Thompson’s and Becci Hayes’ *Companions to Literature: A Teacher's Guide for Obasan* (1991).
These three guides together, and against the backdrop of other pedagogical writings previously discussed in this dissertation (such as those by Hobbs and Gunn), provide a fertile ground for the beginnings of a more extended consideration (one that moves beyond the scope of this dissertation) of curricular discussion and activities that might support an ethico-pedagogical practice of witness-learning. My predominant concern in this dissertation has been with the ways in which learning is situated within the formation of an historical, witness-learning consciousness in which readers might become cognizant of and work through the personal and social responsibilities they bear for others. In this respect, I have sought to bind learning, in theory and practice, to an attentiveness to ethics. I have argued that the Bildungsromanen under discussion in this dissertation, and the literature of historical witness more generally, calls readers to such an attentiveness. Moreover, I have framed this project on the radical terms of a (readerly) answerability (a “commanded” covenantal responsibility/responsivity not to but for others) that is encumbrant upon the refusal of any (learning) relationship between self and others defined on appropriative foundations of the self-same. In other words, I have argued that learning and answerability require the interminable interruption of the primacy of ontological and epistemological discourses. My aim in this chapter is not to embark on an extended critical review of these three guides with respect to how they do/do not reflect such an ethico-pedagogical agenda, as doing so would reductively presume that all pedagogies should be fueled by this agenda. At the same time, however, I do seek to hold these guides accountable to the extent that the curricular activities they offer are underscored with investments in social justice and responsibilities toward others. In this measure, I argue that these guides only go so far. Their limitations in this regard become readily evident when these guides are examined from the perspective of the radical learning ethic pursued in this dissertation,

My intention in this chapter, more specifically, is to show how “responsibility” within these guides remains embedded within an ontological framework that consequently places
parameters upon what can be learned in the reading of these *Bildungsromanen*. In certain respects, learning is not simply restricted but is potentially irresponsible in the sense of foreclosing the alterity of those who are being read/engaged/remembered. I illustrate this through an examination not only of particular activities these guides offer but, more centrally, of the questions Wilson, Yamada, Thompson and Hayes introduce to educators as a means to facilitate classroom discussion/learning. While Thompson and Hayes provide research and writing exercises, they focus their attention predominantly (and Wilson and Yamada do so exclusively) upon the asking of questions. The pedagogical basis for this focus is clear. Questions are commonly held to be endowed with interruptive possibilities, a means for interrogating prior assumptions, statements, and expectations. Eaglestone asserts that "unlike a statement, [to receive] a question is to be interrupted: a question starts a dialogue. An idea phrased as a question resists closure and begs not only an answer but another question, an interruption" (135). Questions thus are initiators -- betraying the promise of subversive openings. Blanchot beautifully writes:

> The question is movement. In the mere grammatical structure of the question we already feel this opening of the questioning word: there is the request for something else; incomplete, the word that questions recognizes that it is only a part. Thus the question is essentially partial; it is the setting where speech offers itself as ever incomplete.... (qtd. in Ouaknin, 86-7).

On these terms of questioning, communities of readers and learners might productively be defined as communities of questioners. In this rigor of questioning, one might also contend that in the process of learning there can be no illegitimate question, that, for learners, every question thinkable of what is being worked through must be asked/askable. Along these lines, Jankelevitch maintains that, as a reader, one must be responsive to "everything that is thinkable in a question, thoroughly, at all costs. You must entangle the inextricable and only ever stop when it becomes impossible to go any further" (qtd. in Ouaknin, 62).
However, it needs to be cautioned here that what Blanchot and Eaglestone are pointing toward is the ethical potential/potency of the question; a potentiality that lives within the infinitude and incompleteness of questioning. My caution is intended to expose the question contrarily as not always and entirely responsible: questioning is by no means a priori, an innocent or self-evidently moral practice, as previous chapters of this dissertation have already indicated. Any community of readers/questioners, thus, must first interrogate the question itself; must offer the question as an open question. Against this context, then, I examine the questions these three teaching guides offer educators. I consider what these questions ask of and from readers in terms of readers’ engagements with these narratives; and, broadly, the responsibilities these questions call for. A central concern in this latter regard is with the question of what is risked in these pedagogical questions. How do these questions educate, in the sense of teaching readers/learners how to live in the world, alone and with others, without ostracism and without levelling (Derrida 1994, xviii; Kristeva 1991, 2)? How, in other words, do they challenge the very ontological and epistemological foundations that are mired in and produce ostracism and levelling? In this context too, I re-consider the questions asked by college students of Ohasan, as introduced in the second chapter of this dissertation.

**TEACHING CEREMONY AND OBASAN**

The first teaching questions I introduce are those offered by Norma C. Wilson. In her essay entitled "Ceremony: From Alienation to Reciprocity" she asserts that these questions are fueled by her principal pedagogical intent to have learners address issues of responsibility with respect to Silko’s narrative. She maintains that the novel itself encourages readers “to think deeply and to act responsibly to fulfill our cultural and human responsibilities” (78). To this end, she maintains that readers, first and foremost, crucially need to acquire historical and geographical background knowledge not only of the practices and beliefs of Laguna culture/mythology (and of Silko’s own biographical history) but also, more generally, of
Native American, American, and World literatures and traditions. This knowledge provides readers with the resources to understand the cultural/mythological references/perspectives within the narrative as well as to perceive them within and against the context of other cultural traditions. With this background knowledge, students can consider such comparisons as “the similarities and differences between European writers calling on the muse for inspiration and Silko telling the story that Ts’its’tsi’nako is thinking. The class might consider to what extent the individual imagination is similar regardless of cultural background, and to what extent the imagination is culturally influenced” (77-8).

Such discussion is supplemented with extensive classroom study of the narrative’s intrinsic literary elements: theme, plot, setting, style, point of view, stream of consciousness, flashback etc. In the body of her paper, beyond asserting their contribution to the comprehension of the novel, Wilson does not elaborate upon what class discussion of these literary elements accomplishes or how the learning of these is explicitly tied to the fulfillment of her objective of getting students to think about their obligations to others. Her subsequent suggested classroom “study questions,” however, reflect a more concentrated emphasis on questions of social and personal responsibility. They include the following out of fifteen:

1. Enumerate the ways in which Native American life and culture have been polluted by American technology or by modern life in general, according to *Ceremony*.

2. Identify the destructive forces in Tayo’s world and the ways in which they affect his life.

3. Consider what Tayo is personally responsible for in the novel (for example, his own behavior) and what he is not responsible for. According to the novel, how important is an individual’s assumption of responsibility to the health of the surrounding community’s culture and environment?

4. Identify the positive steps in Tayo’s healing process in the course of the novel. Describe each step, and indicate whether it occurs as a result of his own actions, outside influences, or both combined.

5. Explore the ways in which *Ceremony* critiques dominant American society. What are the specifically white values and actions in the novel that affect Tayo? (79).
With the exception of another question that asks readers to research the history of life on American Indian reservations, Wilson’s study questions are exclusively directed to Silko’s text and to the text’s commentary on themes of cultural conflict, dominant American witchery, trauma and healing, and interdependence. With consequences which I will elaborate upon following discussion of the subsequent two guides, but for Wilson’s explicit third question, questions of responsibility are predominantly tackled through the identifications and critiques of the violences that circumscribe Tayo’s world.

Mitsuye Yamada’s essay on “Experiential Approaches to Teaching Joy Kogawa’s Obasan” in the same edited volume comes to teaching the literatures of historical witness from a very different perspective. While recognizing the importance of socio-historical and aesthetic or literary pedagogical approaches (such as those of Wilson), she maintains that these approaches insufficiently allow for the establishment of a "relationship" between text and readers. In observations of her own classroom teaching, she notes that many of her white students often speak of the characters in ethnic narratives as "those people"; people in no way related to themselves. For this reason, she introduces an "experiential pedagogy" to the study of these narratives. This pedagogy counters disassociation by “forcing” students "to experience the work by tapping into their own personal encounters" (293). Yamada does not specify the particular ways in which the culling up of students' personal histories works against disassociation. However, the implication seems to be that the drawing of parallels and connections between students’ lives and Naomi’s own takes the “foreignness” out of Naomi’s experiences. Yamada ends her paper by quoting from a sermon delivered by the Reverend Yasutake on American racism:

*Any great literature is culturally/nationally rooted. Whether it be Tolstoy or Camus, they are intensely human stories with which we could or must identify. Otherwise, anything 'foreign' will forever not be human, and to that extent we 'dehumanize' ourselves and we become ethnocentric, which is probably one of the basic problems of white dominant 'America' (307).*
Yamada is vague about what "identification" specifically encompasses. With respect to the reading of *Obasan*, she speaks about students -- through her experiential approach -- "experienc[ing] the psychological awakening of the narrator/author" and "participat[ing] in her personal journey to self-discovery and at the same time recover[ing] some memories of their own pasts" (295). She contends that when students become conscious "of their own buried past, they may come to understand that the recovery of this past can give meaning to their present identity" (295). In this way, then, Yamada's experiential approach seeks to accomplish a relationality between white students/dominant discourse and minority students/minority discourse on terms of familiarity and connection. Her approach also seeks to contribute toward students' own ethnic self-recovery: students thus participate in the same learning process as Naomi; searching the past for "an anchor" for their identities (299).

According to Yamada, certain sections of *Obasan* provide particularly useful points of departure for students' reflection upon their personal histories. For instance, the moment in the narrative when Naomi examines her family photographs can call forth students' exploration and sharing of what they recollect and have forgotten about their own family histories. Aunt Emily's insistence that Naomi not deny any of her past similarly provides a valuable prompt for students to address the relevance of their past to their present lives. Naomi's reflection upon her childhood is an opportunity for students to access their own childhood memories and learn the differences between children's and adult's perception of events (298). Finally, Naomi's encounters of discrimination by people within her community becomes the means for students' recounting of their own experiences of discrimination and/or prejudice.

Five of the fourteen questions that conclude Yamada's essay are:

1. Have you ever had occasion to revisit a place... familiar to you in your childhood? What memories were evoked by your returning to these 'old haunts'?

2. What can we learn by 'recovering' our past?

3. What old memories have been 'resurrected' by the sudden discovery of an old photograph, a letter or an object connected with your past?
4. In the incident where the Barkers visit the Nakanes (Chapter 24), do you identify more with Naomi or Mrs. Barker? Why?

5. What do you think Joy Kogawa meant by the question she appears to be asking herself and the reader: 'Where do any of us come from in this cold country' (307-8)?

Yamada suggests that the personal reflections and discussions these experiential questions generate can create the conditions for white students acceptance of minority people's histories as a legitimate "part of the cultural history of all Americans" (307).

COMPANIONS TO LITERATURE: A TEACHER'S GUIDE FOR OBASAN

The final guide I introduce is Thompson's and Hayes' more extensive teacher's resource on Obasan. In their introductory address to teachers, they describe their pedagogical objectives as two-fold: "First and foremost, we want your students to enjoy the novel. Second, we wish to encourage individual, personal responses to the novel and to provide opportunities for shared responses" (2). Beyond this brief account, their address proceeds only to emphasize the adaptability of their guide. No detail is provided as to what "enjoyment" encompasses and whether and to what extent the attention to personal responses is intended to achieve more than enjoyment. In certain respects, the content of the guide indirectly sheds insight into these concerns.

The guide is composed of two parts. The first devolves upon a section by section study of the novel. Each section contains five structured activities: a basic quiz, a vocabulary study of English and Japanese words, content comprehension questions for each chapter, descriptive and expository writing exercises related to excerpts of the novel, and specific personal response questions. The second part of the guide is geared for advanced readers. It provides a more comprehensive literary study of Obasan as a whole and of socio-historical issues of racism, immigration, trauma, citizenship, nuclear war, etc. raised by the narrative. It includes

1 They assert that their guide is aimed at and adaptable for all age groups, programmes, and class sizes.
student-directed questions as well as research activities, role-playing exercises, and the
dramatization of various scenes in the novel. It also continues the thread of the guide’s aim to
provide a broad spectrum of personal questions. Within this dual structure, a more specific
underlying pedagogical emphasis is apparent. The guide is structured through a concentration
upon socio-historical, literary, and experiential questions and exercises. In this respect, it
significantly combines and reflects the pedagogical approaches of Wilson and Yamada.

Thompson and Hayes’ socio-historical questions are quite extensive. Predominantly,
they consider the events, policies, social and political practices, Japanese practices and
historical figures that populate Obasan’s setting. For example, they address the Canadian War
Measures Act, Canadian Citizenship laws, the roles of Japanese and Japanese-Canadians
during and after the Second World War, Japanese traditions and customs, Canadian politicians,
and systemic Canadian racist practices towards Japanese-Canadians, and so on. An
indiscriminate sample of these questions taken from the chapter-by-chapter analysis and from
writing activities follows:

1. According to Aunt Emily, how were American Japanese and Canadian
Japanese treated by their respective governments (15)?

2. List the injustices against the Japanese-Canadians (16).

3. The War Measures Act was drawn up in response to hysteria during the First
World War (1914-18). Justify the need for this Act now. How is it possible for
this Act to be misused or abused (18)?

4. Who is the ‘Governor in Council’? What is the Privy Council? Are they part
of the Canadian parliamentary system (23)?

5. ‘Crimes of history, I thought to myself, can stay in history. What we need is
to concern ourselves with the injustices of today.’ What do you think? Is it
possible that the ‘injustices of today’ are built upon the crimes of history (63)?

The research activities in the second section address the above concerns in more comprehensive
fashion. They require students, among other activities, to examine racism against particular
ethnic groups in Canada, to research Canadian immigration policies since 1900, to investigate
Japanese-Canadians’ struggles for compensation, to research the Canadian parliamentary
system, and to research such aspects of Japanese culture as tea ceremonies and calligraphy. In general, these questions and activities, while extensively informational, require students not simply to identify and become knowledgable about socio-historical practices and policies but also to evaluate these and to argue their own perspectives.

These socio-historical concerns are integrated with conventional literary ones. Questions and exercises variously direct students to the consideration of Obasan's plot, settings, character development, formal styles, and multiple themes. Questions about theme, for instance, address issues of silence, alienation, racism, grief, childhood, religious faith, and memory. Some of these literary questions include:

1. The community of Japanese Canadians acts as a character in Obasan. Discuss (59).

2. 'I never speak of my thoughts to anyone.' Discuss the theme of isolation in Obasan (53).

3. In Obasan, Kogawa creates a tension between language and 'no language', between words and 'wordlessness', between telling and 'no telling'. Explain (58).

4. What is the role of photographs in Obasan (61)?

5. The poetic qualities of the novel help us to see and feel the setting and situations in which the characters are placed. Explain (62).

Thompson's and Hayes' inclusion of the "experiential" primarily takes three forms. The first encourages students to recollect their own past and present life experiences and investments. Like one of Yamada's suggested activities, one writing/research activity asks students to trace their own family genealogy. Another exercise, designed by a high school student, requires them to write their own autobiography. The autobiographical, in this exercise, is defined as a "quest -- a journey towards discovery of the self through the writing of one's own life" (73). The assignment identifies its aim as follows:

By describing where, what and who we have been, we can begin to understand who we are now and who and what we might become in the future. Before we can journey to strange lands and make new discoveries, before we can truly
know other people, we must make an inner journey 'home', to find and accept ourselves and our own identities" (73).

The specificities of this assignment involves students in writing seven or eight letters to a close friend or relative, each of which is to describe an incident from the student's past that has influenced or shaped that student as she or he is today (73).

The second type of personal question and exercise requires students to draw upon their imaginative resources; to compare and contrast their own lives with those of the characters, to imagine what the past must have been like, to consider hypothetically what they might (not) have felt and done had they been (Naomi or Japanese-Canadians) living during this time. Questions invite students to identify with the characters and their experiences, to contrast their own experiences, and to project themselves into the narrative's traumatic past events, moments and situations. To further introduce students to traumatic experience and its expression, the guide includes a more research-oriented activity entitled "Wounds and Scars." It encompasses the anthologization of a series of written, sung, or recorded poems that express traumatic experience and the recovery from that experience. From another perspective, the guide invites students to consider the rhetorical dimensions of persuasively conveying a traumatic scene. An imaginative writing assignment along these lines is the following:

Imagine a scene too horrible to describe (accident, nightmare, disaster). Think of a way to describe that scene by deliberately understating its horror. Leave as much as you can to the imagination of your reader. Then put it into words. OR write a horror story, using as much exaggeration as your readers can bear (See Edgar Allan Poe and Stephen King for examples) (54).

In this specific assignment, students' imaginations are deployed less as a vehicle for identification and/or empathy and more for the development of descriptive writing skills.

A third dimension of the experiential involves students' working through of their responses to affective experiences and to moral/political issues raised by the thematic substance of Obasan. Many of these questions are "should" or "would" questions that solicit students' opinions with respect to historical and contemporary issues of social justice, normative
relationships between past and present, and contemporary social relationships. Intended to generate moral reflection and debate, these questions combined tend to read like "scruples" questions.

These three forms of experiential questions are reflected in the following:

1. a) Have you ever had to move when you didn’t want to? Describe your feelings and reactions during the move and upon seeking your new home (33).

b) Is your cultural heritage important to you? If yes, what do you do to preserve it (63)?

c) Have you ever defended a cause as strongly as Emily Kato? Why or why not (63)?

2. a) Have you ever felt the same as Naomi (32)?

b) Is your reaction to grief similar to Obasan’s? Do you wish it were different (20)?

c) How would you react if you were told this [hut] is your new home? How would you react if you came upon it after being lost in the woods (55)?

3. a) What is the best way to deal with grief (20)?

b) Should past injustices be buried and forgotten (21)?

c) Should immigration be restricted in order to avoid racial problems (63)?

d) Will the meek inherit the earth (64)?

Together, the forms of the experiential, as well as of the socio-historical and literary seem crucially directed toward the instantiation of relationships between the narrative’s and students’ private and public, past and present worlds. The over-riding issue to consider more fully now is the extent to which these questions fulfill the “responsible” objectives of these guides.

CALLING (ORIENTATION) INTO QUESTION

As already indicated, the questions posed by Wilson, Yamada, Thompson and Hayes, are broadly and variably guided by the pedagogical intent of the aspiration toward a responsible relationality between self and others, readers and text, present and past. To this end, Wilson
asks her students to consider the importance of the assumption of individual responsibility "to the health of the surrounding community's culture and environment" (79). Yamada emphasizes the experiential in efforts to overcome the intellectual and emotional distance between white students/dominant culture and minority peoples/ethnic histories. Thompson and Hayes make no such explicit pedagogical assertions; however, the character of their socio-historical, literary, and personal questions, the considerable attention they give to "crimes of history," readily point to concerns of social justice and responsibility.

On these terms, I would argue, however, that these guides stress continuity over and above disruption/difference; and, although students are clearly invited to challenge what and how they know, to question moral principles and practices, what evades questioning is the primacy of ontology. Little attention is given to the interruption of the (reading) "I" and the "I's" implication in the lives of others. Wilson's question concerning how important the assumption of individual responsibility is invites the simple unreflective answer of "very." The nature of this responsibility, specifically in its connection with the subjectivity the expression of this responsibility requires, remains largely unexamined. Responsibility stays predominantly defined within non-interruptive logocentric parameters. Yamada's emphasis on readers'/students' "recoveries" of their personal identities, I would argue, similarly defines relationality on unproblematic essentializing terms.

That these guides emphasize relationality between self and other on grounds of continuity rather than difference and interruption is more readily apparent in the deployment of the "personal," particularly with respect to the pedagogical questions of Yamada and Thompson and Hayes. Much of the "experiential" unproblematically encompasses practices of imaginative projection and appropriative identification. As stated, Yamada invites students "to experience the psychological awakening of the narrator/author... [and] participate in her personal journey to self-discovery," and to compare themselves with such characters of Oobasan as Naomi and the Barkers. But these appropriative questions are most pronounced in
Thompson's and Hayes' guides in which students are encouraged to consider to what extent they have felt/might feel as Naomi did/does. There are a number of these kinds of questions throughout the guide: "If you were there [on the train to Slocan], what kind of accommodation would you prefer?... If you as a citizen, had been evacuated by your government, how bitter would you be?... The Nakanes learn they must leave Slocan. In their situation, would you prefer to remain in Slocan or face the unknown?... Would you like to live Naomi's adult life?" (33, 33, 43, 65). Such questions assume that students are able to access Naomi's experiences and to project themselves into past events and experiences alien to them. They manifest an underlying pedagogical approach suggestive of the terms of Nora Dewar Allingham's defense of the cultural and ethical value of literature:

as with any study that encourages movement to understanding and an ethical analysis, and the recognition of the interdependence of human history and contemporary experience, the student's personal response to the reading is the starting point. The use of response journals and student identification of the important issues allows for 'ownership' of the experience (36).

This kind of pedagogical agenda of “ownership” ultimately returns reading to a Bakhtinian practice of writing an "internally persuasive discourse" (discussed in previous chapters) within what Jeffrey Nealon contends, in his essay on Bakhtin and Levinas, are the terms of manifest self-fulfillment and identity. Thompson's and Hayes' writing activity makes this ontological agenda particularly explicit: “before we can truly know other people, we must make an inner journey 'home', to find and accept ourselves and our own identities” (73).

I maintain that what seems centrally at issue here is the question of the orientation of these guides. To ask the question of orientation is to emphasize that questions are not a priori but rather themselves encompass the framing consequence of specificities of beliefs, understandings, and approaches to the world and to others. Questioning practice that proceeds from logocentric paradigms of being and knowing are naively and, paradoxically unquestionably, directed toward the confirmation and reinforcement of these paradigms'
founding beliefs, understandings, approaches. Indeed, this is Levinas' central argument. As the chapters in this dissertation have emphasized, Levinas' writings have sought to consider a relational encounter between self and other that is not appropriative. Ewa Ziarek points out that "[t]he originality of Levinasian ethics does not lie in a new categorization of alterity, but rather in its obstinate refusal to think the other. Such refusal to think the other... posits ethics as a critique of ontology -- a calling into question of the will to knowledge" (1993, 64). For Levinas, the invariable orientation of ontological thought -- of inquiry, comprehension, and representation -- is toward home, toward the consolidation and affirmation of self-identity. As such, this orientation follows inevitably upon the collapse of differences between self and other, and the consequent violent and violative subsumption (levelling) or abjection (ostracism) of the other by the self.

Levinas's work is also the effort to write philosophy following the paradigmatically traumatic events of the Holocaust. *Otherwise Than Being* is dedicated in part to "the memory of those who were closest among the six million assassinated by National Socialists, and of the millions on millions of all confessions and all nations, victims of the same hatred of the other man, the same anti-semitism" (1991). For Levinas, the anti-semitism of the Nazi era is equatable with a broad antihumanism whose violent grammar of assimilation and annihilation is traceable within the logic of Western ontological thought. In this respect, Levinas writes from within a decidedly postmodern, post-Holocaust, postcolonial perspective that identifies the outlook and political project of Nazism as well as Eurocentric practices of imperialism and colonialism as the "un/reason/able" progressive extreme of a Western philosophical tradition extending from Socrates through Hegel to Heidegger. Robert Young maintains that "in [all] these cases the other is neutralized as a means of encompassing it: ontology amounts to a philosophy of power, an egotism in which the relation with the other is accomplished through its assimilation into the self" (1990, 13).
"Inquisitorial questions" can be seen as emanating from the orientation of an ontological imperialism. As asserted in previous chapters, inquisitorial questions are ones defined within the traditions and exigencies of the Grand Inquisitor; questions set within investments of power, master, ownership, self-assurance and self-fulfillment. Such questions may function as forms of defense, even of repression. They may deflect and disavow any self-interrogative responsibility for the question itself. These are the "hypocritical" questions of the murderer who sweeps over Naomi’s and her mother’s learning ceremony; who asks questions that place Naomi and her mother on trial; and that do not allow for undesired answers, interruptions, digressions, hesitations, or other questions. Naomi observes, "[h]is demand to know was both a judgement and a refusal to hear. The more he questioned [my mother], the more he was her accuser and murderer" (228). Similarly, these are not questions that permit Tayo’s questioning of dominant white and Native discourses of learning, or of the possibilities his Uncle’s cattle having been stolen by Floyd Lee:

Why did he hesitate to accuse a white man of stealing but not a Mexican or an Indian? ...[Tayo] knew then he had learned the lie by heart -- the lie which they had wanted him to learn: only brown-skinned people were thieves; white people didn’t steal, because they always had the money to buy whatever they wanted... The liars has fooled everyone, white people and Indians alike; as long as people believed the lies, they would never be able to see what had been done to them or what they were doing to each other" (191).

Questions fueled with inquisitorial investments, desires, claims (bracketed within the logic of ontology and epistemology) are oriented toward self-fulfilling interests over and above an accountability to the conflicting interests of others. For Levinas, Socratic questioning (and a Socratic pedagogy) would be an expression of the inquisitorial. He points to the ontological agenda of this Socratic practice:

The silent coming and going from question to response, with which Plato characterizes thought, already refers to a plot in which is tied up the node of subjectivity, by the other commanding the same.... Asking oneself and questioning oneself does not undo the torsion of the same and the other in
subjectivity; it refers to it. There is an intrigue of the other in the same which does not amount to an openness of the other to the same (1991, 25).

I would argue that experiential questions which call upon readers (imaginatively) to comprehend the experiences of others on one’s own contemporary terms of understanding or which seek the recovery of readers’ identities inadvertently also betray an ontological orientation. With these questions, the knowing autonomy of the (reading) “I” remains intact, is never challenged. There would seem to be less at stake in Thompson’s and Hayes’ conditional “should” and “would” questions -- questions such as “should immigration be restricted in order to avoid immigration problems.” Yet, such questions, unless accompanied by or situated within ontological critique, may readily lend themselves to discussion and responses contained within ontological conceptions of “freedom.” For Levinas, freedom defined by ontological thought “is maintained by a self-possession which extends itself to anything that threatens its identity. In this structure European philosophy reduplicates Western foreign policy, where democracy at home is maintained through colonial or neocolonial oppression abroad” (Young, 14). Within this framework, the answer to Thompson’s and Hayes’ question above -- “should immigration be restricted in order to avoid immigration problems” -- might plausibly be, “yes.” Levinas therefore opposes a freedom based on self-interest to a “difficult freedom” that is respectful of the alterity of the other (Young, 14).

In response, indeed, in responsible/responsive answerability to the symbolic and physical violences of the twentieth century, Levinas thus proposes an alternate orientation: the orientation of ethics and sociality. This orientation, as Young emphasizes, substitutes a “respect for the other for a grasping of it.... Against the egoism of the preoccupation of being with itself [Levinas] posits a relation of sociality, whereby the self opens itself to [the other] through a relation with it” (14, 15). On the terms of this “difficult” ethics, it is not an autonomous freedom but a “heteronomous responsibility” (i.e. a responsibility not for multiplicity but for alterity) that is a priori (Young, 16; Caputo, 59). This responsibility
before/for the other is before being, knowledge, and questioning. As Derek Attridge stresses, "the very question 'Where does responsibility come from?' arises out of responsibility; responsibility is prior to subjectivity, to questioning" (225). However, the instructive terms of responsibility, of the encounter with the address/face of the other, centrally names questioning as a "calling into question" of the repressive logic of the same, of the egoistic foundations of knowledge and identity. Levinas contends, "the calling into question of the same... is brought about by the other. We name this calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the other Ethics" (1969, 43). This ethical questioning of the subject's spontaneity ultimately encompasses the questioning of the primacy of freedom itself, understood as the freedom of the ego to exercise its will. Hence, Levinas maintains, "to approach the Other is to put into question my freedom, my spontaneity as a living being, my emprise over the things, this freedom of a 'moving force', this impetuosity of the current to which everything is permitted, even murder" (1969, 303).

AN AP/PROXIMAL APPROACH

Levinas' conceptualization of ethical responsibility points pedagogical theory and practice in a radical direction. As already stated, for Levinas, ethics is prior to knowing and (egoistic) being. The requirement of absolute and infinite responsibility for the other might be considered a "happening" that occurs before the (reading) subject's self-awareness, choice, rationalizations. John Caputo says of Levinasian obligation: "[t]o say that obligation 'happens' is to say that obligation is not anything I have brought about, not anything I have negotiated, but rather something that happens to me" (7, 6). As obligation precedes (self) consciousness, so too is the subject's being "called into question" simply and irrevocably a priori. The (reading) subject thus is always already "called into question," always already "traumatized" (other words Levinas deploys here are "wounded," "persecuted," "hostage"). As Elizabeth Weber emphasizes, for Levinas, "the wound precede(s) the ego." (1996, 74). On these terms,
the subject cannot choose to become traumatized/to be called into question, or, for that matter, negotiate the content or exercise of that call. Nor can the (reading) subject contain the (im/possible) instance of this call's anagnoretic instanciation; that is, that moment of encounter with the alterity of another person when the (reading) subject “awakens to” (learns) the a priority of ethics and the deceits of willful “spontaneous” choice/responsibility. For Levinas, this anagnoretic moment constitutes a secondary traumatization or, rather, a repetition of the originary traumatization. Weber maintains that “the trauma in which the encounter with the other recalls an earlier trauma, is trauma because it is reminiscent of an immemorial trauma” (1996, 74). Weber names the immemorial trauma as the “absolute trauma of persecution” and the secondary trauma as the “trauma of absolute responsibility” (74). Yet, the trauma of absolute responsibility, the “traumatism of astonishment,” does not proceed from within the conservative logic of cognition. As Chapter Five indicated, “traumatisms of astonishment” are not a property or act of consciousness: they “cannot occur within the egoist spontaneity of the same” (Levinas 1969, 43). Levinas maintains that the calling into question results from a radical exteriority, from an encounter with the “face” of another person. It therefore does not encompass “turning around and becoming conscious of the calling to question. The absolutely other is not reflected in consciousness.... We are concerned with questioning a consciousness and not with the consciousness of questioning” (1966, 41).

On these terms (the terms of the other), pedagogical practice may seem a moot and, indeed, violative activity. In the measure that “true learning” comes from an exteriority, pedagogy can never “claim” the ethical instantiation of responsibility. It cannot name, negotiate, explain, predict, guarantee or even really advance a responsible and “traumatic” calling into question. Any attempt to do so, to reconcile or absorb the “true learning” that is taught by the differential other with/into conventionally epistemological parameters of pedagogical thought and practice, would constitute a betrayal. It would mean the reductive thematization and, hence, violent/violative deformation of the radical alterity of the
responsible/responsive learning encounter. As such, it would seem that pedagogy cannot offer any concrete practice of reading presented on dialectic (synthesizing) terms. Indeed, the establishment of such a practice may effect the foreclosure of any radical learning in its inimicality to the unexpected. Eaglestone asserts that "as soon as a way of reading becomes a methodology, an orthodoxy or a totalising system, it loses its ability to interrupt, to fracture the said" (165). These terms would seem to present ethics as that which remains forever outside of and alien to the specificities of pedagogical practice. They would seem to contradict even the very possibility of pedagogy to promise a responsible/responsive learning.

Yet, the stance of this dissertation has been that the exteriority of a radical learning ethics does not leave pedagogical practice idle or irresponsible. Referencing Hamlet and the Danish prince's inability to read his father's spirited call to act, Attridge suggests that when it comes to being summoned to responsibility by the call of the other, there are "no rules... no assured codes of reading" (225). Unsure, Hamlet must nevertheless act; must direct himself to an answerability to his father by risking all and trusting in a future without ground, without the promise of an epiphanic revelation, and without the expectation of justice (Attridge, 225). Attridge's Shakespearian allusion echoes the unanswered question that prefaces Kogawa's narrative: "If I could follow the stream down and down to the hidden voice, would I come at last to the freeing word?" Kogawa's/Naomi's question (a question, I would argue that opens up the question of an "autonomous freedom" and a Levinasian "difficult freedom") keeps learning and its redemptive promise unassured, and yet the "hidden voice" requires a response, requires that it be followed. Similarly, Avey cannot deny the summons of responsibility by her Great Aunt Cluney to bear responsible witness to the events of the Middle Passage. What I am thus emphasizing here is that the Bildungsromanen of this dissertation embody a (teacherly) call for (reading) subjects to be answerable to this call. For pedagogy to ignore this address -- perhaps because it fears the uncertainty of the non-intentionality of the ethical response or because it recognizes its own implication in the orthodoxies of ontology -- I would argue, is
ultimately to refuse this literature's authoritative summons. As has been variously stressed throughout this dissertation, pedagogy must take risks. The address by the (literary) other for readers to be answerable to the materials of witness requires that pedagogy, like Hamlet, act nonetheless; that it nevertheless attempt and orient itself to the ethical terms of a practice of witness-learning. The very a priori quality of another's (literary) address is one that demands educators'/readers' accountability (and hope) despite the fact that pedagogy cannot contain/master/own ethical "traumatisms of astonishment." But how and on what, if any, terms might a pedagogical practice of witness-learning cognizant of its own (un)natural limitations proceed? This is an open question, and what follows is a very preliminary consideration of a potential response.

For Levinas, the limitations of thought by no means demand its refusal. Rather, these limitations in fact make the possibilities of "thought" (and of the reflective/analytical activities of philosophy, of literary criticism, and of pedagogy) more precise and more urgent. As has been emphasized throughout this dissertation, these ethico-pedagogical possibilities are ones of interruption, of attempts to open spaces for a potential awakening to exteriority, to an encounter with the trace of ethical obligation that resides within communication. But to consider the minutiae of this interruptive task would require constituting pedagogy in ways that are not reducible to a formulaic or dialectic methodology or a taxonomy of reader-response. Thus, perhaps a more adequate and open-ended way of theorizing this pedagogy would be to use the language of "approach." By "approach" I intend to signal not simply another methodology or taxonomy but, more radically, an other one, one itself disruptive of the very concept of (ontologically/epistemologically situated) approaches. This approach would be interminably oriented toward shifting the terms of (readerly) answerability from ontology/epistemology to ethics and a radical learning (Bildung). Yet, it would continually attempt to remain dynamic and open -- a movement rather than an entity, an activity rather than a statement. To this end, it would recognize the limitations of the strictly programmatic, manifest most commonly as
guidelines, principles, rules. Additionally, it would not seek to "own" itself as an ethics, would not presuppose itself as author to the pragmatic terms of ethical engagement/learning, as able to outline the path and detail a specific "resting-place" to the activity of learning. Rather, it would be overwhelmingly characterized by an ongoing attempt to "draw near" to ethics, to approach it without ever presuming to master it.

I would more elaborately introduce this ethico-pedagogical approach as an "ap/proximal" one, doing so for two reasons. First, the word points to pedagogy's obligation to withdraw/disavow the claims of ownership over ethics. Ethico-pedagogical practice may at best "approximate" ethics: constitute itself as a *translative* or "performative staging" or "setting the stage" off/for "traumatisms of astonishment." This practice would "call into question" the primacy (and expressions of) ontology. It would operate within the limitations of consciousness while interminably seeking to escape these limitations. In the process of questioning, it would, therefore, also attempt to be interminably vigilant of how thought simultaneously remains inadequate to a "calling into question." Handelman states that "[e]ven in the ultimate self-reflexiveness of the ego looking at itself, the ego still escapes, is not itself put into question" (Handelman 1991, 256). In this respect, an ap/proximal pedagogical approach would consistently seek to foreground its own inadequacies, its own distance from the "real" thing.

Second, the word "ap/proximal" recalls Levinas' writings and keeps pedagogically in mind/memory the ethical orientation of pedagogical practice; that is, it gestures toward that which it seeks to approach. Levinas maintains that ethics is precisely the "proximity of one to the other, the commitment of an approach" (1991, 5). Whereas in *Totality and Infinity* this ethical approach was termed "the face," in his later work, *Otherwise than Being* it is "proximity." Proximity describes an encounter in which the other "draws near" to the subject and the subject becomes vulnerable to the other's touch. It thus emphasizes movement over touch. This proximity is not thematizable. Levinas contends that "the other to whom the
petition of the question is addressed does not belong to the intelligible sphere to be explored. He [she] stands in proximity” (1991, 25). In the proximal relation, the other does not become absorbed by the self but stays distinct. In more concrete terms, Levinas maintains that the other becomes neighbor but maintains his/her differential personhood. Edith Wyschogrod explains that “[t]he ethical relation is a welling up of subjectivity in which the particularity of each term remains intact” (136). Proximity thus is simultaneously a drawing near and remaining infinitely apart and separate. Handelman contends that proximity constitutes a “closeness to the other without all collapse of distance” (1991, 225). An ap/proximal approach, then, would be one oriented toward (one interminably seeking to approach) a relation of proximity between self and other. It would attempt to open a space for an intimacy with the other in which the other is not collapsed into a version of the self. Concurrently, however, it would foreground itself as a missed or belated proximal encounter, because thought comes only after the loss of the proximal relation. As Hugh Miller points out, for Levinas, “consciousness in all its forms -- representational, axiological, practical -- has already lost this close presence [of proximity]” (1995, 54).

Put another way, one might suggest that an ap/proximal approach would seek to inscribe itself with what Levinas calls a particular “attitude”: that is, “an attitude which cannot be converted into a category and in which the movement toward the Other will not reclaim itself by an identification, will not return to its point of departure” (1966, 37). This attitude is thoughtful: “reflection is not an accident in the life of the consciousness. It involves a calling into question of oneself, a critical attitude which is produced in face of the other and under his [her] authority” (Levinas 1969, 81, emphasis mine). Following upon the previous chapter of this dissertation, the “critical attitude” informing the ap/proximal approach would radically reconstitute a practice of "working through" as "work for another." In his early essay entitled “On the Trail of the Other,” Levinas asserts that
we must not think of work as a superficial agitation out of some depth that stays just as it is, as an energy which, after all transformations, remains equal to itself. Neither can we think of it as a technique which by the famous negativity reduces a strange world -- to a world in which otherness is converted into my idea. Each continues to affirm that being is identical with itself... Work radically considered is in effect a movement of the same toward the Other which never returns to the same. To the myth of Ulysses returning to Ithaca we can oppose the story of Abraham leaving his fatherland forever for an unknown land and forbidding his servant to lead even his son to the point of departure.

Work fundamentally considered demands a basic generosity of the Self which in Work goes toward the Other. It therefore demands an ingratitude from the other. Gratitude would be precisely the return of the movement to its origin. But on the other hand, Work differs from a game or from a simple output. It is not a simple loss and it does not suffice to affirm the Self in its identity surrounded by notion. Work is neither a simple acquisition of merit nor a simple nihilism... Work is then a relation with the Other, who has been affected but does not show it.... (1966, 37-8).

The work for the other as the “calling into question” of being and knowing, therefore, would be an activity neither of play nor of (egoistic) gain. Work “radically considered” would proceed in the service of the other without seeking a (self-invested) return.

**interrupting the inquisitorial: ap/proximal ‘why’ questions**

Questioning practice, as well as the reading, re-reading, and exegesis of literature, are instrumental to an ap/proximal approach in the measure that they address themselves to an answerable “calling into question.” Each are productive vehicles for placing into pedagogical consideration the very character, foundation, and objectives of the subject’s (questioning/readerly/learning) freedom. A questioning approach particularly recognizes itself as always oriented to continual and open-ended interruption, toward ruptures of ontological thought, and learners’ ontological and epistemological complacencies. As Handelman observes, for Levinas, “the consciousness of questioning is the questioning of conscience. This means an overturning of the egoism and the narcissisms of consciousness, of its autonomy and self-coincidence, its identity and respose” (1991, 192). The “consciousness of questioning” poses autonomous freedom as a violent and violative construction by the egoistic
subject. Levinas maintains that morality (pedagogy) begins when freedom “instead of being justified by itself, feels itself to be arbitrary and violent... murderous in its very exercise” (1969, 84).

In order to potentially open a productive space for radical learning, questioning practice must continually seek not simply to disrupt the “said” object of inquiry but also its own thematizations. Handelman underscores that “the question, as interruption of thought, opens a space for an ‘exterior’ to thought” (195). In contrast to Jankelevitch’s assertion concerning the legitimacy of all questions, the question oriented toward interruption is not “any question,” insofar as the pedagogical context/orientation of and approach to “any question” is directed to repressive and self-interested ends. What questioning thus must be responsive to and attempt to access is the question’s own ethical potential and orientation. As it is the other that calls the (reading) subject into question and responsibility, proximity is always traceable in the question, inhering in its dynamic qualities. In his essay on Levinas, Derrida maintains that this dynamism is ethics, and that the truly ethical question is one that has not yet been fully phrased:

A community of the question, therefore, within that fragile moment when the question is not yet determined enough for the hypocrisy of an answer to have already initiated itself beneath the mask of the question, and not yet determined enough for its voice to have been already and fraudulently articulated within the very syntax of the question. A community of decision, of initiative, of absolute initiality, but also a threatened community, in which the question has not yet found the language it has decided to seek, is not yet sure of its own possibility within the community. A community of the question about the very possibility of the question. This is very little -- almost nothing -- but within it, today, is sheltered and encapsulated an unbreachable dignity and duty of decision. An unbreachable responsibility (1978, 80).

A community of the question, a community of responsible learners, thus, is one fashioned within the indeterminancy and dynamism of questioning. Responsive and oriented to this indeterminant otherness, it attempts to undo the “hypocrisy... beneath the mask of the question,” calling this hypocrisy to conscience. Levinas maintains that, in the facing of/proximity with the other, the “quis-nity” of the question “excepts” itself from its ontological
orientation and phrasing (1991, 25). A community of questioners would interminably work toward approaching such an "exception."

The pedagogical approach of inconclusive interruption being outlined here is constituted on terms not of infinite regress but rather of an answerability to past and present others. What becomes important to consider is the possibility that certain questions might reflect/promote this approach more readily than others. This is by no means to present such questions prescriptively but rather as themselves opening up possibilities of answerability, of a "drawing near." By way of juxtaposition with the inquisitorial (and the ontologizing questions of the aforementioned guides), such questions might themselves productively be considered as "ap/proximal" ones. Perhaps the most proximal of ap/proximal questions is the question of "why." According to Robert Gibbs, unlike other questions, the question of "why" requires accountability. He asserts:

Any question lays claim to the one asked, soliciting a response, implying the ability to answer or respond, but 'why' disturbs the simple exchange of question and answer. 'Why' challenges the person asked. 'Why' implies that the assumed reasons for things are not right, not quite good enough.... 'Why' asks me to explain myself, to offer a reason to another person. To attend to a 'why' is to feel the authority of the person who questions me. To answer a 'why' question is to become responsible, to become responsive. Such responsibility is the point of orientation for ethics (forthcoming, 1, emphasis mine).

The "why" question thus is particularly interruptive; calling into question what precedes and poses it. It thus constitutes one learners might ask of a text or of themselves and of their reading/learning practices. Such a question challenges a Socratic pedagogy -- requiring that it be accountable; putting this pedagogy's questioning practice and claims for freedom into question. As Gibbs suggests, the question of "why" comes from the authority of the other. With respect to the pedagogical engagement with witness literature, "why" questions should thus be perceived as coming not from the classroom instructor but rather from the specific

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2 As Gibbs points out, this question of why, at its most fundamental, is not that of why (should we) be responsible. Such a question presupposes that responsibility can be questioned; that it is justifiable in principles or consciousness (forthcoming, 3).
ethical address of and within this literature; from the teaching authority of its literary knowledge. In the reading of this material, teachers and students alike are addressed by the question of “why” and called to work through a practice of witness-learning.

Ap/proximal “why” questions in the pedagogical context of the reading of Bildungsromanen such as Obasan, Ceremony, Praisesong would be centrally oriented toward eliciting attention to responsive/responsible (inter)relations between self and other; to interrupting the defining ontological terms of such relations. These would be questions situated in the difficult attempt of enabling the drawing near to the other while respectfully seeking to maintain the other’s infinite separateness. They would be directed toward the unsettlement of the thematized world of the contemporary reader and learner. To this end, questions concerning and arising from the address of witness literature would call learners to examine their own implication in historical events of suffering and injustice, and in the learning from the testimonies of those who lived those events. Implication here does not simply address the individual but also the individual in his/her relation to multiple collectivities and communities. These implicative questions would pose the question of the learning subject’s singular autonomy. What, then, might be the phrasing of some “why” questions that might introduce this concern and open up a questioning/witnessing process?

One such ap/proximal question in this regard might be “why have you learned?” Indeed, this question constitutes the very urgent terms for the writing and reading of the literature of historical witness. It is a key question because it ultimately lends itself to two answers -- “I have learned for me” and/or “I have read/learned for another.” Through the dual responses it elicits, it opens up and puts into consideration not only the character and orientation of learning but also, concurrently, the established priority of the “me.” This question, therefore, reflects a very different orientation from, for example, the question Felman asks her students following their reading/viewing of Holocaust testimony; namely, “what has this experience taught you in the end?” (1992, 51). Felman’s question, as she asserts, draws
attention to the insufficiencies of students' (and testifiers') abilities to comprehend/rationalize the extremities of violence and suffering. While it thus testifies to an "unanswerability," (as the previous chapter of this dissertation indicated), it does not introduce into discussional thought the measure of readers' responsibilities to the materials of witness. Although it addresses the epistemological possibilities and limits of learning, it does not pose the concurrent integral ontological problem of "who is learning?" (that is, the learning "I") and the "what for?" of the learning encounter. In other words, it does not place into question the "return" of learning. I thus offer the ap/proximal question of "why have you read/learned?" as one that more pressingly foregrounds the relational and responsible/responsive dimensions of witness-learning.

In opening up consideration of one's implicative learning obligations for others, the question of "why have you learned?" introduces other attendant "why" questions. It brings to the fore, for example, the requirement that learners take responsibility for their own questions and questioning practices. One might therefore trace within any question a learner might ask of witness literature, a counter-question, a rejoinder that issues from the (textual) other. This question would be that of, "why are you asking?" It is a question that centrally directs itself back to the learner's witnessing relation with the text. It issues forth a recollective response, asking those to whom it is directed to question themselves and the answerable orientation of their question. It asks learners to consider where their question comes from and what it is directed toward.

In this context, I return to the second chapter of this dissertation which concluded with an introductory discussion of questions students in a college English class had in response to reading *Obasan*. By way of a brief reprise, their questions concerned the issues of: why, as a thirty six year old schoolteacher, Naomi was not knowledgeable about the historical details of what happened to Japanese-Canadians during and after the Second World War; why Aunt

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3 This question comes from Simon, Fletcher & al. in their work on hearing and responding to First Nations testimony.
Emily made the difficult decision to leave Naomi and her family behind to relocate to Toronto; whether and to what extent Kogawa's novel was historically accurate; and, finally, whether Canadian opposition to Japanese-Canadians might not be justified in light of the cruelties committed by the Japanese to the Chinese, to Koreans, and to North American prisoners of war. In Chapter Two, I pointed out that, in each case, students' critical questions seemed directed in a linear movement from the reader to and against the actions of the characters, against the genre of the historical fiction, and against Japanese historical practices and policies. On this basis, I wondered whether these questions might be read as reminiscent of the "inquistorial." From the perspective of the conclusion of this dissertation, I resist such a charge on the basis that it denies student's differential dignity in their asking and threatens reductively to reproduce those terms of inquisition which position the educator as one who knows, accuses, and judges (learning) others. I maintain, however, that questioning students' questions does productively open up -- and hold pedagogy accountable to -- the more encompassing question of students' and educators' learning orientation. Addressing this question of orientation is to consider a community of learning as one in which students and educators, as learners, have the opportunity to question ourselves, the learning practices/institutions in which we participate, and the foundational terms of our relationships with others.

To this end, the question of "why are you asking?" might productively and openly be posed in class discussion. Asking this question to the college students prompted responses that directed attention to the very possible ontological orientation and character of questioning. One student who questioned Aunt Emily's decision concerning her departure to Toronto replied to the "why are you asking?" question by stating that "[i]f it had been me, I wouldn't have done that." Another student responded that he had been faced with the "same dilemma" as Aunt Emily and chose a different route. These are two particularly productive responses to the ap/proximal "why are you asking?" question in that they invite consideration of the locus of
one’s engagements with the text and with others. They introduce for further questioning what it might mean to assert that one has had a “same” experience or can “imagine” the experience of another. In calling into question practices of engagement with past and present others, and posed within the larger context of the question of “why have you learned?”, these responses consequently address themselves to the non-incorporative orientation of a proximal relation. To this extent, the “why are you asking?” question might thus productively beckon an alternate engagement with or re-reading of Obasan that acknowledges the singularity and difference of another’s experience. Naomi’s dream of the Grand Inquisitor provides a particularly instructive context for drawing attention to the “origin” and orientation of questions, and their possible redirection. It does so by pointing to the masterful agenda of the inquisitorial and to alternative ap/proximal questions such as Naomi’s own; namely, the question of “Mother, how can I hear you?” Naomi’s question is additionally valuable because it further returns attention from students’ own lives (initiated by the “why are you asking?” question) to the substance of the text; beckoning the question of what it might mean to read Obasan and the traumatic past it references “other-wise,” from within the unnameable site of a responsive/responsible relationality.

Finally, with respect to returning to the materials of witness, ap/proximal "why" questions would be those that intervene in violent and violative socio-historical and cultural discourses of the “said.” As Chapter Five asserted, with respect to Obasan, these would be questions that examined how the concepts and emotions of history, memory, identity, suffering, racism, empathy the narrative brings to the fore are continually thematized and what it might mean to interrupt these thematizations. “Why” questions in this regard might consider among others, such “responsible” questions of why the Canadian government and people instigated and participated in discriminatory policies and practices toward Japanese-Canadians prior to, during, and after the Second World, why the nuclear devastation of Nagasaki and Hiroshima was allowed to happen; and, why Canadians are answerable to these traumatic
times. Indeed, as Chapter Two illustrated, these are the very questions *Obasan* itself generates through its pedagogical structure and ethical address to readers.

I would argue that these are ap/proximal questions because they attempt an answerability to the address of Kogawa's novel, an address that calls upon readers to bring into question the foundations, orientation, and consequences of injustice. In the measure that these questions introduce the possibility of a comprehensive study of socio-historical policies and attitudes that contributed to these events, they seek the interruption of approaches that might be steeped in self-justification. Rather than interrogate Naomi, Aunt Emily, or Kogawa, these questions examine the broader educational and historical institutions in which Naomi was raised and worked, consider the issues of why Aunt Emily had to make her choice to go to Toronto in the first place, why we are given to distrust *Obasan* as a genre of fiction that incorporates historical documents accurately; and, finally, the orientation of Canadian democratic responsibilities. In the context of such an approach, the student who asked her own "why" question: namely, why was Naomi not knowledgable about Japanese-Canadian history, might subsequently be incited to ask what I would consider to be the more comprehensive ap/proximal "why" question concerning the absence of Japanese-Canadian testimony from the school study of Canadian history. Interrupted, then, would be the potential for her initial question to naively and singularly fault Naomi. As Chapter Four maintained, this re-orientation is clearly not to render Naomi's role as a school teacher outside of questioning. Indeed, Naomi herself -- in her process of learning -- comes to interrogate her own ignorance and repression. Rather, this re-orientation is directed toward the complexification of Naomi's school teaching on non-reductive terms. I would argue that these ap/proximal questions resonate differently from those of the guides described at the beginning of this chapter or from self-justification questions in general precisely because they are posed from within the orientative context of a working through approached as work for the other.
These questions of "why" are thus offered in the spirit of a "concluding introduction" to this dissertation. In briefly foregrounding the question of learning, I reveal these ap/proximal questions to be oriented to the radical learning that one can be addressed by others and that one can learn (Clamen, 50). This possibility of learning encompasses a learning-otherwise that is a learning-for-another in answerability to past and present others. In the second chapter of this dissertation, I argued that this was precisely Naorni's traumatizing/astonishing learning following her dream of the "Grand Inquisitor." In Chapter Three, I made a similar argument for Tayo's radical learning in Silko's Ceremony. At the end of this narrative, Tayo must write the conclusion of his own story. I sought to read this conclusion against the grain by showing that Tayo's learning was one in which he centrally became responsive to his responsibilities not to but for others. Further on in the dissertation, I stressed that Tayo's "traumatism of astonishment" resulted in the instantiation of a writerly/readerly "I" defined on the terms of a being-one-for-another. From this responsible/responsive breakage of the frame of dominant ontological discourses, Tayo was able to interrupt the witchery that has been unleashed upon the world. I also undertook a counter-reading of Avey Johnson's remembrance-learning in Paule Marshall's Praisesong for the Widow, illustrating how Avey's restoration to her "proper axis" might be read not as an Afrocentric return-to-roots but alternately as the formation of a responsible/responsive Levinasian personhood.

The Bildung each of these protagonists variably undergoes through their remembrance-learning is one, therefore, that has aspired toward and (fictionally) accomplished an ethical witnessing. Yet, I have also made the argument that the witness-learning of these three protagonists is not that of (reading/learning) subjects insofar as this analogy is rendered on incorporative ontological terms in which readers can claim to know and possess historical moments which they have not themselves experienced. Indeed, witness-learning encompasses the very calling into question of such a pedagogical presumption. The address of these Bildungsromanen requires that pedagogy and reading practice be oriented and accountable to
witness-learning. This situates pedagogical (reading) practice not in the appropriation of witness-learning but in an attempt to approach it, to draw near and aspire to become (im/possibly) vulnerable to serial "traumatisms of astonishment" in practices of working-through understood as work-for-another. This ethico-pedagogical work fundamentally binds reading practice to a project of responsible/responsive answerability.

In sum, my hopes are that the ethico-pedagogical orientation that has been the substantive argument of this dissertation may initiate a productive opening and receptivity to the teachings of the literatures of historical witness, to the indeterminate wisdom apparent and hidden within the length of its "literary knowledge." I hope for the dissertation to offer ways into readings which allow us to be responsive to the difficult experiences of others in ways that are not centrally about us but about each other, and the responsibilities we bear for each other. Derrida maintains,

No justice... seems possible or thinkable without the principle of some responsibility, beyond all living present, before the ghosts of those who are not yet born or who are already dead, be they victims of wars, political or other kinds of violence, nationalist, racist, colonialist, sexist, or other kinds of exterminations, victims of the oppressions of capitalist imperialism or any of the forms of totalitarianism (1994, xix).

Derrida contends that without this responsibility for (and before) others, there would be no sense of posing the question of a future, the questions of "‘where?’ ‘where tomorrow?’ ‘wither?’" (1994, xix). In conclusion, I would add, there would also be no sense of posing the promising question of learning.


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