

The Anxious Body of Modernism: Kafka, Hamsun, and Woolf

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages
Jesus College, University of Oxford
Trinity Term 2018

Short Abstract

This thesis argues that psychological anxiety is a central narrative mechanism for modernist writing, and that this anxiety is expressed through the prominence of the body in texts. Through readings of Knut Hamsun's *Sult*, Franz Kafka's *Der Verschollene*, and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* and its manuscript draft *The Hours*, I argue that anxiety as articulated in key modernist texts is more pervasive and differently distributed than previously thought.

This thesis counteracts the predominant phenomenological approaches to the body in literary studies, which see the body as constitutive of identity, and emphasize bodily agency in writing and thought. Instead, I make the case for a psychologically informed, critical reading of the body through the concept of body image, the study of which began in the modernist period.

Long Abstract

This thesis makes two connected claims: that psychological anxiety is a central narrative mechanism for modernist writing, and that this anxiety is expressed through the prominence of the body in texts. I approach anxiety not as a layer of emotion or a dominant mood that colours narrative events, but as a mode of interpretation: a way of reading, labelling, and distorting reality. Whilst I examine my texts in their contexts which saw anxiety as a disease of modernity, I trace their expression of this anxiety by adapting the core insights of cognitive psychology, which situate psychological expression to thoughts which mediate experience – not below the level of consciousness – to close reading. In doing so, I show that anxiety as articulated in key modernist texts is more pervasive and differently distributed than previously thought.

My work highlights the limitations to the predominant approaches to the body in literary studies, which see the body as constitutive of identity, stress bodily agency in thought, and often consider the body to be more veridical than the mind. Instead, I argue that the body is heavily psychologically filtered in modernist texts. For this reason, the body is best studied by critically engaging with it through the concept of body image, where psychology shapes how the body is experienced and presented.

The first, introductory chapter situates my project within existing research on anxiety and the body in literature. I argue that the current approaches to the body in literary studies have indiscriminately conflated the medical, aesthetic, and social approaches to the body under a single hostile authority which seeks to intervene in the ‘natural’

state of the body. I also argue that narratives of the experience of mental suffering which overlap with the body, disordered eating and body image disturbance in particular, have been uncritically interpreted as authoritative sources on the nature of such suffering in literary studies.

The second chapter uses Knut Hamsun's *Sult*, studied here in its original 1890 form, to explore the relationship between anxiety, the body, and literary expression in more detail. Arguing that anxiety is an interpretative mode through which the experiencing narrator reads his situation, I demonstrate how anxious thinking patterns inhibit his conscious attempts to write in the novel, and redirect his energies to the body instead. I then highlight how the narrator's anxiety shapes the novel's description of the city, which I relate both to a Scandinavian context through a Finnish novel published in the same year, *Yksin* by Juhani Aho, a text unavailable in translation, and to Hamsun's polemical writings on American life.

My reading lifts the novel's hunger from the metaphoric interpretations it is generally given. Instead, I show how the narrator's anxiety causes him to actively deprive his body of nourishment. I counter interpretations which separate the narrative mechanisms of the novel from the emotions they describe, readings which stress the novel's analytic and emotional detachment from the mental processes of the experiencing narrator. This chapter offers a new reading of how the psychological and the textual intersect in *Sult*, but is also a reassessment of the psychology of early Hamsun at large.

My third chapter looks at anxiety and the body in Kafka's writing. By focusing on Kafka's first, unfinished novel, *Der Verschollene*, I show that the body and food are key sites of expression in Kafka beyond texts such as *Ein Hungerkünstler* and *Die Verwandlung*, which have received much critical attention in this area. I read *Der Verschollene* as a post-traumatic text, where psychological trauma is expressed through the protagonist's relationship to his own body and to food.

My reading recalibrates anxiety from a generalization about the atmosphere of Kafka's writing at large to a localized and precise form of expression through the body and food. As productive as the recent visual approaches to Kafka have been, I show that in the study of the body, the visual cannot be separated from the psychological. Approaching *Der Verschollene* by way of Kafka's diaries and the *Brief an den Vater*, in which Kafka famously dramatized a literary self in exaggerated bodily images, I also demonstrate how the desire for bodily freedom on the one hand and the strict regulation of the body on the other, often interpreted as mutually contradictory elements to Kafka's diaries, are products of the same psychological impulse.

In the final chapter, I discuss Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, a novel that explicitly focuses on mental suffering. I look at the Dalloway material in its entirety, paying particular attention to the British Library manuscript draft of the novel, and to short stories Woolf completed after finishing *Mrs Dalloway* in 1925. I argue that psychological expression takes the form of different bodily sociolects in the novel. As I situate Miss Kilman's excessive bodiliness as central to the novel's psychology, my reading nuances the Clarissa-Septimus duality on which psychologically informed

readings of *Mrs Dalloway* largely focus. Whilst Septimus' trauma is also expressed through the body, I show how Miss Kilman's psychological suffering is sedimented as permanent bodily invalidity through ugliness in the novel. Through her character, I demonstrate how the novel's awareness of body image as it differs from physical appearance, and its knowledge of prejudices that overlap with the body, do not necessarily lead to a critical engagement with them.

My reading helps reassess the indiscriminate emotional sensitivity to mental suffering often associated with *Mrs Dalloway*. By looking at the body, I show deficient empathy, even emotional cruelty, sedimented in physiological terms, as central to the novel.

Whereas studies of modernist psychology largely focus on psychological theories contemporaneous with modernist texts, my thesis shows that these novels are more than the sum of the psychological discourses that surrounded them. Many scholars are aware of the dangers of excessive psychologization. My thesis demonstrates the dangers of its absence in the study of the body.

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Acknowledgements

I have benefited from outstanding and extraordinarily inspiring supervision by professors Ritchie Robertson and Laura Marcus, for which I am immensely grateful.

I would like to thank the University of Oxford Humanities Division, the Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages, Jesus College, and Oxford University Press for funding this project through the Clarendon Scholarship, the Jesus College Development Fund Award, the Jesus College Graduate Scholarship, and the Charles Green Award, and for providing further support in the form of travel grants and dining rights.

I am grateful to Daniel Grimley, Joanna Neilly, Richard Lawes, Owen McKnight, Alexandra Lumbers, Sandra Mayer, Mary Rigby, Ali Kulez, Ben Morgan, Kirsten Shepherd-Barr, Katrin Kohl, members of the European Health Observatory, staff at the Oslo University Library and the National Library of Norway, and the TORCH Academic Writing Group at Oxford for support and valuable advice.

For all else, and most of all, I thank my family, for everything.

List of Abbreviations

Chapter 2

- Y Aho, Juhani, *Yksin* (Helsinki: WSOY, 2011)
- A Hamsun, Knut, 'Fra Amerika', in *Hamsuns polemiske skrifter*, ed. by Gunvald Hermundstad (Trondheim: Gyldendal, 1998), pp. 20-45.
- AL ———, *Fra det ubevidste Sjæleliv. Artikler om litteratur* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1994)
- PS ———, *Hamsuns polemiske skrifter*, ed. by Gunvald Hermundstad (Trondheim: Gyldendal, 1998)
- L ———, *Hunger*, trans. by Sverre Lyngstad (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2011)
- B ———, *Knut Hamsuns brev 1879-1895*, ed. by Harald S. Næss (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1994)
- RL ———, *Redaktør Lyng*, in Knut Hamsun, *Samlede Verker 2* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1997)
- S ———, *Sult. I original tekstversjon fra 1890* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2017)
- H ———, *Under Høststjærnen*, in Knut Hamsun, *Samlede Verker 4* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1976)

Chapter 3

- B Kafka, Franz, 'Brief an den Vater', in *Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente II*, ed. by Jost Schillemeit, in *Schriften, Tagebücher, Briefe: Kritische Ausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1992)
- M ———, *Briefe an Milena*, ed. by Jürgen Born and Michael Müller (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1983)
- P ———, *Der Process*, ed. by Malcolm Pasley, in *Schriften, Tagebücher, Briefe: Kritische Ausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1990)
- T ———, *Tagebücher*, ed. by Hans-Gerd Koch, Michael Müller and Malcolm Pasley, in *Schriften, Tagebücher, Briefe: Kritische Ausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1990)
- V ———, *Der Verschollene*, ed. by Jost Schillemeit, in *Schriften, Tagebücher, Briefe: Kritische Ausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1983)

Chapter 4

- CH Woolf, Virginia, *Carlyle's House and Other Sketches*, ed. by David Bradshaw (London: Hesperus Press, 2003)
- CSF ———, *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Susan Dick (London: Hogarth Press, 1985)
- D2 ———, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf. Volume II: 1920-1924*, ed. by Anne Olivier Bell (London: The Hogarth Press, 1978)
- H ———, *The Hours. The British Museum Manuscript of Mrs Dalloway*, transcr. and ed. by Helen M. Wussow (New York: Pace University Press, 2010)
- I ———, 'Introduction (1928)' in *The Cambridge Edition to the Works of Virginia Woolf: Mrs Dalloway*, ed. by Anne E. Fernald (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 356-8.
- L1 ———, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf. Volume I: 1888-1912*, ed. by Nigel Nicolson (London: Hogarth Press, 1975)
- L3 ———, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf. Volume III: 1923-1928*, ed. by Nigel Nicolson (London: Hogarth Press, 1977)
- LH ———, *To the Lighthouse*, ed. by David Bradshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006)
- MD ———, *Mrs Dalloway*, ed. by David Bradshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)
- MDBS ———, 'Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street', in *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Susan Dick (London: Hogarth Press, 1985), pp. 146-153.
- ND ———, 'The New Dress', in *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Susan Dick (London: Hogarth Press, 1985), pp. 164-171.
- OBI ———, *On Being Ill* (Ashfield: Paris Press, 2002)
- R ———, *A Room of One's Own*, ed. by David Bradshaw and Stuart N. Clarke (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2015)
- VO ———, *The Voyage Out*, ed. by Lorna Sage (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)

1. Introduction

Literary understanding of the body has been roughly divided into two periods. The first looked at the body as a shell for the soul; the second sees the body as constitutive of identity:

An alternative way of understanding the body, supported by more recent discoveries in science, medicine and philosophy, is that it participates in crucial ways in thinking, feeling and the shaping of our personalities and that precisely for this reason, the body is in fact constitutive of what we call the self.¹

This view, heavily influenced by Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological approach to the body, is now the predominant one in literary studies relating to the body, and characterizes edited volumes such as the *Cambridge Companion to The Body in Literature* (2015), and *The Body and the Arts* (2009).² It often presupposes both that the experienced body as described in literary texts is more veridical than the mind, and that the body has been underappreciated in scholarship.³ Much of the phenomenologically informed work on the body in literature assumes that when texts

¹ David Hillman and Ulrika Maude, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Body in Literature*, ed. by Maude and Hillman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 1-9 (p. 1).

² Maude and Hillman (2015). Corinne Saunders, Ulrika Maude, and Jane Macnaughton (eds.), *The Body and the Arts* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). For a summary of the mind-body dialectic in philosophy, see Tim Crane and Sarah Patterson, 'Introduction', in *History of the Mind-Body Problem*, ed. by Crane and Patterson (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 1-12. For a recent defense of Cartesian mind-body dualism, see Joseph Almog, *What Am I?: Descartes and the Mind-Body Problem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). For a reassessment of the Christian tradition, often seen as fully denying the body, see David Brown, 'Body as Graced or Vile: Tensions in the Christian Vision', in Saunders, Maude, and Macnaughton (2009), pp. 25-38.

³ For an example of how scholars see the body as underappreciated, see Michel Delville and Andrew Norris, *The Politics and Aesthetics of Hunger and Disgust. Perspectives on the Dark Grotesque* (New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 7-8. This view is also prominent in scholarship on the body informed by Julia Kristeva, for example, Renée Dickinson, *Female Embodiment and Subjectivity in the Modernist Novel. The Corporeum of Virginia Woolf and Olive Moore* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

describe the body, it is simply the experience of the body that is being discussed. Yet what the body is and how we think about it are two very different things. Many cultural signifiers have been assigned to the body, to skin colour in particular, that the body itself does not generate.⁴

This confusion over how the body is imagined and perceived by the self, and what it is, mirrors misunderstandings over the term ‘body image’ in both popular parlance and literary studies. In academic discourse, body image is often confused with the concept of the ‘body schema’, as Shaun Gallagher has argued. Body image is a mental construct, ‘a system of perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs pertaining to one’s own body’.⁵ Body schema, by contrast, is ‘a system of sensory-motor capacities that function without awareness’.⁶ Gallagher has traced the history of this confusion to translations, with Merleau-Ponty’s ‘schéma corporel’ translated into English as body image, as well to the internal contradictions in the work of the psychiatrist Paul Schilder, who first studied body image at length.⁷

In this study, I argue that the body, its image, and related concerns to do with food, which regulates the size of the body, are key ways in which anxious emotion is expressed in three important modernist texts: Knut Hamsun’s *Sult*, Franz Kafka’s *Der Verschollene*, and Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway*. My study focuses not on what the

⁴ Franz Fanon called this process *épidermisation*. In Franz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Seuil, 1965), first published in 1952. David Marriott has recently discussed this process as a ‘re-corporealization of anxiety’, relating it to the psychiatrist Fanon’s use of Freudian psychoanalysis. David Marriott, ‘The Racialized Body’, in Maude and Hillman (2015), pp. 163-176 (p. 164).

⁵ Shaun Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 24.

⁶ Gallagher (2005), p. 24.

⁷ Gallagher (2005), pp. 19-21.

body and its movements are, but on how the body is experienced and presented in texts, as filtered through anxiety. I therefore employ not the phenomenological approaches to the body, but the concept of body image, the study of which was pioneered by Schilder, a contemporary of Kafka and Woolf.⁸

Schilder defined body image as ‘the picture of our own body which we form in our mind’.⁹ He argued that emotions shape the way in which the body is experienced: ‘the immediate experiences of the body can be easily distorted and changed by psychic influence’.¹⁰ He also saw body image as changing and reliant on social comparison:

Body-images and their beauty are not rigid entities. We construct and reconstruct our own body-image as well as the body-image of others. In these perpetual processes we interchange parts of our images with the images of others, or, in other words, there is a continual socialization of body-images.¹¹

Had Schilder known the term, he might have called body image performative:

One should not speak so much about growth and evolution, when one means by it something passive and automatic. One should emphasize the continual activity, the trying out.¹²

Schilder also highlighted clothing and accessories as extensions to the body and its image.¹³ Although today questions of body image are associated with women, and

⁸ A student of Freud who emigrated from Austria to the United States, Schilder authored an essay on body image, *Das Körperschema* (1923), first in German, a work which he then significantly expanded in an English publication (1935). Paul Schilder, *Das Körperschema* (Berlin: Springer, 1923). Schilder, *The Image and Appearance of the Human Body* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2000), first published in 1935. See also Schilder’s preface to the 1935 volume where he discusses his initial essay. In Schilder (2000), pp. 11-16.

⁹ Schilder (2000), p. 11.

¹⁰ Schilder (2000), p. 192.

¹¹ Schilder (2000), p. 268-9.

¹² Schilder (2000), p. 211.

often trivialized and eroticized as a result, Schilder focused on male case studies, such as men who turned to cosmetic surgery in order to improve their marriage prospects.¹⁴

Today psychology understands body image very much as Schilder first described it, as the imagined quality of how our body appears to others. Psychologists also emphasize how distorted body image, the kind Schilder studied, overvalues the importance of the body, and conditions success irrespective of the body to its appearance. That the body is excessively focused on at the expense of other areas of life suggests a psychological bias.

In the chapters that follow, I show that as Schilder argued in his psychological study, concerns about the body, and related worries about food, are not bodily, but expressions of psychological anxiety in these three texts. To this theory contemporaneous with my texts, I incorporate scientific knowledge of how anxiety and body image are understood by psychology and psychiatry today.

For this purpose, I have adapted the current mainstream psychological understanding of anxiety, body image disturbance, and disordered eating to the study of literary texts. Modern psychology and psychiatry see the mechanism of anxiety, like much of mental illness, in terms of highly selective patterns of thinking, and a relationship to this thinking that treats it as an objective fact. This cognitive bias theory, which I discuss in more detail in the second chapter, dates to the 1970s and now forms the

¹³ Schilder (2000), pp. 210-1.

¹⁴ Schilder (2000), p. 257-8.

basis of the scientific understanding of mental illness.¹⁵ Its use allows me to demonstrate that anxiety is not a mood that colours the narrative, nor a fixed existential state, but a selection mechanism and mode of interpretation within it.

Out of Michel Foucault's legitimate criticism of the alignment of medical knowledge with power has come a strong suspicion towards the use of medical knowledge in literary studies. This Foucauldian tradition can reduce historically informed literary scholarship on anxiety and the body to elaborations of past practices of psychiatry and medicine, criticism of methods which the fields in question have often long ago abandoned.

In modernist studies, scholarship of this kind has taken the form of criticizing medical intervention on the body.¹⁶ Tim Armstrong's work on technology, modernism and the body, where he reads 'the body as lack', shaped by technology to better serve the economy, has been particularly influential.¹⁷ Armstrong sees medical attempts to understand the body, such as the X-Ray, as analogous to eugenics in their motivation to intervene in the natural functioning of the body and increase its productivity.

¹⁵ The philosophical and theoretical foundations of the cognitive model of psychology, and well as its historical influences have been recently discussed by William T. O'Donohue and Kyle E. Ferguson, 'Historical and Philosophical Dimensions of Contemporary Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy', in *The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive and Behavioural Therapies*, ed. by Christine Maguth Nezu and Arthur M. Nezu (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 7-27.

¹⁶ Such as Ineke Klinge, 'Female Bodies and Brittle Bones. Medical Interventions in Osteoporosis', in *Embodied Practices: Feminist Perspectives on the Body*, ed. by Kathy Davis (London: Sage, 1997), pp. 59-72.

¹⁷ Tim Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology and the Body: A Cultural Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

Scholars who emphasize the disciplinary or profit-driven aims of medicine and psychology often continue to read medical and aesthetic approaches to the body as interchangeable in their aims.¹⁸ The leading theorists on body image in literature, Maud Ellmann and Sander Gilman, have both separately taken this view in their research into body image, which has recently focused on obesity.¹⁹ Ellmann argues that the adverse health effects of obesity are a construct with no scientific validity, a view shared by historians of the body such as Amy Erdman Farrell.²⁰ This failure to separate the problematic cultural and social constructions of obesity as unaesthetic or morally questionable from the physiological stress it puts on the body weakens their otherwise rigorous approaches to body image in literature.

That scientific knowledge is seen as only ‘historical and local’²¹ can have particularly problematic consequences in studies of anxiety or other mental distress in literature. Too often, literary scholars of anxiety imply that mental suffering is not real but a construct, following Foucault’s criticism of ‘modern psychiatric practices which

¹⁸ For an example of this approach, see Ana Carden-Coyne, *Reconstructing the Body. Classicism, Modernism, and the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 1-17.

¹⁹ Maud Ellmann, ‘Eating, Obesity, and Literature’, in Hillman and Maude (2015), pp. 58-72. Sander L. Gilman, *Fat: A Cultural History of Obesity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). See also Gilman, *Fat Boys. A Slim Book* (Lincoln, Nebr.: University of Nebraska Press, 2004).

²⁰ Ellmann (2015), p. 58. Amy Erdman Farrell, *Fat Shame. Stigma and the Fat Body in American Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2011). Gilman’s sympathies for this view are counterbalanced by his understanding of environmental causes for obesity, evident in Gilman (2008).

²¹ Klinge (1997), p. 59. For a summary of Foucault’s work on the body and its afterlife in critical scholarship, see Colin Jones and Roy Porter, ‘Introduction’, in *Reassessing Foucault. Power, Medicine, and the Body*, ed. by Colin Jones and Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 1-16. For Foucault’s alignment of ‘abnormal’ eating with sexuality, but choice to focus on the latter, see Maria Christou, *Eating Otherwise. The Philosophy of Food in Twentieth-Century Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 2-3.

construct a negative and, therefore, alienating view of madness as mental illness'.²² In his recent work on the literary history of worrying, Francis O'Gorman puts mental health in inverted commas, and dismisses contributions to the subject from the current scientific approaches to mental illness due to past errors in psychiatric practice.²³ Allie Glenny's work on 'eating distress' in Virginia Woolf's work also exemplifies such attitudes:

Anorexia is commonly described as an 'illness' or 'disease' requiring 'treatment' so that the anorexic woman will 'recover.' This is a particularly invidious form of mislabeling because it obscures the powerfully subversive personal and politico-cultural messages that anorexia encodes.²⁴

Literary scholars are wary of excess medicalization, but work on anxiety and the body demonstrates the dangers of its absence. To Glenny, starvation, a form of self-harm, can 'serve women by providing a set of stop-gap boundaries against social, sexual, ideological, and other incursions.'²⁵ She also reads the treatment of anorexia nervosa – on the basis of historical practices no longer endorsed – as inhibiting self-expression and self-realization through starvation.²⁶

Readings where starvation is reduced to the metaphoric are not uncommon in scholarship on anxiety, the body, and food in literature, in discussions of the 'starving artist' trope in particular, as I show in my second chapter. Valuable criticisms of damaging ways in which mental distress was understood and treated, and which many writers of this period, such as Woolf and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, elaborated on, are

²² Lois McNay, *Foucault. A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity, 1994), p. 13.

²³ Francis O'Gorman, *Worrying. A Literary and Cultural History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 42, p. 2.

²⁴ Allie Glenny, *Ravenous Identity: Eating and Eating Distress in the Life and Work of Virginia Woolf* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), p. 1.

²⁵ Glenny (1999), p. 1.

²⁶ Glenny (1999), p. 7.

not advanced by questioning the existence of mental illness. Paradoxically, this often delegitimizes the suffering expressed in literary texts that scholars set out to understand.

We no longer approach anti-Semitic texts of the modernist period with a turn-of-the-century toolkit on race. Instead, we bring a critical understanding of racist discourse of the time to texts to be examined in light of our knowledge today. To speak today of ‘bad nerves’, or to equate mental illness with character, is analogous to the alignment of physical and ethnic traits with character that much of the psychiatry, as well as the literature, of the modernist period participated in.

As the field of modern psychiatry emerged at the same time as literary modernism, the majority of scholarship on the psychology and emotions of modernism relates modernist writing to synchronous developments in psychology and psychiatry.²⁷

Anxiety itself is generally approached through the writings of Freud and Kierkegaard, as I show in my discussions of secondary literature in the following chapters.²⁸ This mirrors the etymology of the words anxiety and *Angst*, the nuances of which Pierre

²⁷ Recent examples include Meghan Hammond’s study on empathy and modernism, Meghan Marie Hammond, *Empathy and the Psychology of Literary Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). Anne Fernihough’s reading of stream of consciousness relates the technique to William James’ *Principles of Psychology* (1890). Anne Fernihough, ‘Consciousness as a Stream’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Modernist Novel*, ed. by Morag Shiach (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 65-81.

²⁸ Sergio Starkstein has assessed Freud’s psychological understanding of anxiety, and Kierkegaard’s existential interpretation of it, against the scientific consensus of anxiety today. Sergio Starkstein, *A Conceptual and Therapeutic Analysis of Fear* (New York: Springer, 2018). See particularly Starkstein’s discussion of the scientific merits of Freud’s work on anxiety, and his reading of Freud not as the ‘inventor’ of anxiety, but as holding views representative of his time, in Starkstein (2018), pp. 231-258.

Pichot has comprehensively discussed, tracing how Kierkegaard's *Angest* and Freud's *Angst* have influenced psychological terminology in German, English, and French usage (*angoisse*).²⁹

The emerging field of cognitive narratology, by contrast, takes an ahistorical view on emotion and literary expression.³⁰ It uses cognitive science to examine literary texts, narrative technique in particular. Emily Troscianko's reading of the 'Kafkaesque' through cognitive science, Lisa Zunshine's work on mind-reading and *Mrs Dalloway*, and Violeta Sotirova's examination of multifocal consciousness in Woolf's writing, are examples of this approach.³¹ All three study the effects of the text on the reader as much as the text itself. Jenefer Robinson's work on emotion in literature, which importantly highlights how literary scholars often discuss emotions without an adequate understanding of what they are, also places its ultimate focus on reader response.³²

My study, by contrast, is interested in how anxiety is expressed in texts themselves. In the chapters that follow, I navigate between a contextual approach to anxiety and the body on the one hand, and one informed by the current understanding of anxiety and

²⁹ Pierre Pichot, 'The Semantics of Anxiety', *Human Psychopharmacology* 14 (1999), pp. 22-28. Pichot also highlights how the Latin term *ango* unites a physical sense of constriction with psychological distress. Pichot (1999), p. 22.

³⁰ Scholarship of this emerging field has been summarized by David Herman. David Herman, 'Cognitive Narratology', in *The Handbook of Narratology*, ed. by Peter Hühn, Jan Christoph Meister, John Pier, and Wolf Schmid (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), pp. 30-43.

³¹ Emily T. Troscianko, *Kafka's Cognitive Realism* (London: Routledge, 2014). Violeta Sotirova, *Consciousness in Modernist Fiction: A Stylistic Study* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 126-158. Lisa Zunshine, 'Theory of Mind and Experimental Representations of Fictional Consciousness', *Narrative* 11.3 (2003), pp. 270-291.

³² Jenefer Robinson, *Deeper than Reason: Emotion and its Role in Literature, Music, and Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

body image, which I adapt to literature, on the other. I examine my texts in their contexts which saw anxiety as a disease of modernity, but trace their expression of it with the use of current scientific understanding of anxiety, body image, and disordered eating. By employing contemporary psychology, I am able to show that whilst these texts responded to the existing discourses of their time, they also significantly nuanced, modulated, developed, and contradicted them.

I begin my second chapter by examining the relationship between anxiety, text, and the body through Knut Hamsun's *Sult*. It thematizes this relationship through a struggling narrator who is trying to write. I show how anxiety inhibits the protagonist's conscious attempts to write in the novel, and argue that his emotions are instead communicated through his body. In this chapter, I use Hamsun's novel to explain my methodology in more detail: I read anxiety not as an existential constant but as a selection mechanism of thoughts and an interpretative mode with which the narrator reads his circumstances, with important consequences for the novel's narrative. Before I conclude with a discussion of Hamsun's portrayal of the city as shaped by anxiety, I read *Sult* alongside Hamsun's journalistic writings on American life, America here as a kind of shorthand for modernity, relating them to George Beard's *American Nervousness* (1881).

In the third chapter I move on to anxiety and the body in Kafka. I do not focus on *Ein Hungerkünstler*, the obvious text for a study on anxiety, the body, and food, or *Die Verwandlung*, which has also generated much scholarship on anxiety and the body. Instead, I examine Kafka's first, unpublished novel, *Der Verschollene*, which has received less critical attention in this area. I read *Der Verschollene* as a post-traumatic

text, the trauma of which is expressed through the protagonist's relationship to his own body and to food. I approach this novel by way of Kafka's diaries and *Brief an den Vater*, in which Kafka famously dramatized a literary self in exaggerated bodily images.

In the final chapter I discuss Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*. I read *Mrs Dalloway* through its genesis, and examine it against its manuscript draft *The Hours*, and short stories Woolf completed after finishing the novel in 1925, all of which differ considerably in their treatment of the body. Focusing on two psychologically distressed characters, Miss Kilman and Septimus Smith, I argue that mental suffering is communicated through different bodily sociolects in *Mrs Dalloway*. Whilst Septimus' trauma is also expressed through the body, Miss Kilman is assigned permanent bodily invalidity through ugliness in the novel, and is made to partake in this view herself. As Woolf presented food and the body as central to her literary project, I pay particular attention to the relative absence of food, striking in a one-day novel which culminates in a party.

The comparative theorist Rita Felski sees comparison as a kind of curation, and it is a highly selective curatorial role that I have adopted to show my methodology at work through close reading.³³ Although this thesis spans original material in six languages – German, Norwegian, English, French, Finnish, and Swedish – I have chosen these three novels as the central texts to my study.

³³ Rita Felski, 'Doing the Humanities (with Bruno Latour)' (Unpublished conference paper, delivered at the 'Recomposing the Humanities with Bruno Latour' conference at the University of Virginia, 2015) <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283424905_Doing_the_Humanities_with_Bruno_Latour> [Accessed 15 May 2018]

In the company of Kafka and Woolf, a writer as prolific as Hamsun risks becoming the ‘peripheral modernist’. It is under this category that Scandinavian modernism is generally shelved.³⁴ To counteract this imbalance, I situate Hamsun’s *Sult* in its Nordic context, and compare it to a Finnish-language novel published in the same year of 1890, *Yksin* by Juhani Aho, a text unavailable in English translation. Throughout this study, I follow this pattern of situating my texts in a context that best serves the key aim of any comparative project – for comparison to help highlight aspects of the texts that would not as easily emerge in isolation.

If modernist studies initially placed emphasis on novelty and radical innovation of style, still a much-repeated argument in Hamsun scholarship, scholars now stress ways in which modernism looked back as much as it looked forward, an argument recently explored productively by Elizabeth Outka in her study on anxiety and nostalgia in modernism.³⁵

³⁴ For ways in which English and continental modernism have been separated from one another in academic discussion, see Pericles Lewis, ‘Introduction’, in *The Cambridge Companion to European Modernism*, ed. by Lewis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 1-9 (p. 6). The long-held awareness of how central Scandinavian writing was to European, particularly German modernism, which I discuss in the next chapter, rarely translates to Scandinavian writing being read in its own, multilingual and transnational context. Instead, this asymmetry is generally addressed by situating single authors as central modernists, as in recent volumes on Ibsen and Strindberg. Toril Moi, *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism: Art, Theater, Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). Anna Westerståhl Stenport, *Locating August Strindberg’s Prose: Modernism, Transnationalism, and Setting* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2010). Leonardo Lisi has discussed this imbalance in modernist studies and the ways in which it is shared by scholars on Scandinavian literature. Leonardo F. Lisi, *Marginal Modernity. The Aesthetics of Dependency from Kierkegaard to Joyce* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), pp. 9-14.

³⁵ Elizabeth Outka, ‘Nostalgia and Modernist Anxiety’, in *Modernism and Nostalgia: Bodies, Locations, Aesthetics*, ed. by Tammy Clewell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 252-261.

In response to the portrayal of modernism as stale against experimental and varied postmodernism, Peter Nicholls has influentially argued that modernism(s) are better defined through diversity than similarity.³⁶ If in the minority, volumes that emphasize modernism through style still appear: Rebecca Walkowitz, Stephen Kern, and Ben Hutchinson have recently explored modernism predominantly through style, even if Walkowitz sees style more broadly as an overall approach that texts take towards the world.³⁷

Whilst Woolf and Hamsun enjoy uncontested status as modernists, Kafka's place within the movement, given his disinterest in stream of consciousness narrative in particular, is contested. My reading, which shows anxiety as a narrative mechanism, and emphasizes the relocation of anxiety to ways in which the body is thought of as central to the modernist project, blurs this distinction between subject matter and style. From this perspective, Kafka emerges as a representative modernist.

I have situated this volume within current debates on the body and anxiety in literature, and have also highlighted its contribution to including 'minor' Scandinavian writing in its transnational context into studies of 'central' modernism. This thesis, its chapters on Hamsun and Kafka in particular, also contributes to the emerging field of food studies, sometimes called gastrocriticism.³⁸ In contrast to

³⁶ Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms: A Literary Guide* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). First published in 1995.

³⁷ Rebecca M. Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006). Ben Hutchinson, *Modernism and Style* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). Stephen Kern, *The Modernist Novel: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

³⁸ Maria Christou has recently surveyed scholarship in this emerging field. Christou (2018), pp. 3-8.

gastrocritics who often interpret food as a metaphor for sexuality, I read food as such, as a physiological necessity.

Much of the scholarship on the body in literature has recently explored bodiliness as generating texts or determinative of them. Describing the process of writing, authors like to explore the idea of the body itself producing text.³⁹ Such explorations of the body are rarely examined through their full implications for disability studies, or the studies of gender and sexuality. The way in which the body is thought of is a mental, not a physical exercise. It is for this reason that the literary study of the body warrants the use of the ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’, critical close reading through the lens of psychology.⁴⁰

³⁹ Often through the analogy of the spoken voice, for example in Al Alvarez, *The Writer's Voice* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005).

⁴⁰ Paul Ricœur's phrase, on which Rita Felski bases her criticism of literary scholarship as the suspicious decoding of text. Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2015).

2. Writing Anxiety: Knut Hamsun's *Sult*

2.1. Introduction

My study reads the literary presentation of the body, its image, and food, as non-intentional sites of expression, where expression takes place but was not originally intended to do so by its experiencing subject. With the exception of Septimus' writings which are only mentioned in passing in *Mrs Dalloway*, of my three main texts it is only in *Sult* that this redirection of expression takes the form of a literary crisis, as the experiencing narrator's failure to produce text. In this chapter I will read *Sult* through this tension between the experiencing narrator's great efforts to write which do not succeed – conscious expression – and what I read as the novel's real expressive surface – that of his anxiety and of his body. The self-referential, meta-literary quality of *Sult* allows me to look at the textual mechanism of anxiety in more detail than with the later novels studied here. In the final section to this chapter, I will look at how the city, presented as a co-author to the novel, is similarly shaped by anxiety, situating it in the context of cities in Scandinavian modernism.

Sult has a self-evident place as a key text for the literary treatment of anxiety and the body. In the global literary space, and in studies of modernism particularly, Hamsun's fortunes have shifted on the basis of two variables: the inclusion of Scandinavian writing in the canon as a whole, and the ways in which critics have negotiated the coexistence of the evident merit and influence of Hamsun's writing with his far-right politics, racism and sexism. Bradbury and McFarlane's *Modernism*, an early landmark among studies of transnational and comparative modernism, situated Scandinavian writers at the heart of the modernist project, even treated them as

pioneers, but on the whole Scandinavia has been seen as peripheral to modernism – keeping in mind that any such treatment sees the majority of Europe as peripheral.⁴¹ This continues to be the case with recent volumes on European literature, or on modernist narrative style. Ben Hutchinson’s *Modernism and Style* (2011), advertised in the jacket as a ‘broad, comparative survey of European modernism’, does not mention Hamsun in its discussion of stream of consciousness, or indeed comment on any Scandinavian writers or thinkers.⁴² Walter Cohen’s *A History of European Literature* (2017), also advertised as offering updated ‘coverage of the entire history of European and Western literature’, rightly mentions Hamsun for his virulent anti-Semitism, but engages little with Scandinavian literature on the whole.⁴³ Jörg Pottbeckers has recently discussed the absence of *Sult* from analyses of the development of stream of consciousness in a European context.⁴⁴

Any comprehensive survey of European modernism is, of course, bound to exclude important regions and texts. Nevertheless, at the turn of the century Scandinavian literature was extremely widely read in Europe, German-speaking Europe in particular, Hamsun amongst other writers.⁴⁵ The oft-cited evidence of Hamsun’s popularity is the two *Festschriften* to Hamsun on his seventieth birthday signed by key literary figures, Thomas and Heinrich Mann, Musil, Gide, and Hesse among

⁴¹ Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (eds.), *Modernism 1890-1930. A Guide to European Literature* (London: Penguin, 1991). First published in 1976.

⁴² Hutchinson (2011). See especially Hutchinson’s discussion of the early proponents of stream of consciousness (pp. 117-125).

⁴³ Walter Cohen, *A History of European Literature. The West and the World from Antiquity to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 407.

⁴⁴ Jörg Pottbeckers, ‘Hatte Leutnant Gustl Hunger? Einige späte Bemerkungen zur Entstehung des inneren Monologs bei Arthur Schnitzler und Knut Hamsun’, *Studia Austriaca* 20 (2012), pp. 85-106.

⁴⁵ For this popularity of Scandinavian literature in Germany, or what she calls the literary historical canonization ‘where the marginal but modern arts of Scandinavia revitalized German culture’, see Westerståhl Stenport (2010), pp. 150-2 (pp. 151-2).

others. Germany was Hamsun's key market. His later support of the Nazi invasion of Norway, which included sending his Nobel prize in literature to Joseph Goebbels, political views which Monika Žagar has found to be in logical continuity to views Hamsun expressed in his early polemical writing, led to a fall from grace.⁴⁶ As Tarmo Kunnas has recently argued, Hamsun was not unusual in his fascist views either in a Nordic or a European context; writers with similar views famously include Ezra Pound and Louis-Ferdinand Céline.⁴⁷ In Norway, Hamsun stood in particularly uncomfortable contrast to the socially progressive writers influential during the country's nation-building period, Ibsen and Bjørnson most famously. Although scholarship from the Scandinavian countries as well as Scandinavian studies departments in the United States and continental Europe continue to produce critical works on Hamsun, he does not occupy as eminent a role in the Anglo-French world republic of letters as the other authors I focus on.

Many scholars whose interests lie in the body and starvation have approached Hamsun in translation, Michael Delville, Andrew Norris, Timothy Wientzen, and Alys Moody most recently.⁴⁸ Translations can flatten the key stylistic tension of the novel: that between Hamsun's experimental narrative style and the conservative register of his Dano-Norwegian. This conservative linguistic register, alongside Hamsun's reactionary views, do not outweigh the novel's status as a pioneer to narrative style, but importantly nuance the 'radical modernism' through which

⁴⁶ Monika Žagar, *Knut Hamsun. The Dark Side of Literary Brilliance* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2009).

⁴⁷ Tarmo Kunnas, *Fasismen i lys* (Jyväskylä: Atena, 2013).

⁴⁸ Delville and Norris (2017). Timothy Wientzen, 'The Aesthetics of Hunger: Knut Hamsun, Modernism, and Starvation's Global Frame', *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 48.2 (2015), pp. 208-223. Alys Moody, *Starving for their Art. Hunger, Modernism and Aesthetics in Samuel Beckett, Paul Auster and J.M. Coetzee* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Oxford, 2013).

Hamsun's novel is often read.⁴⁹ At the same time, Scandinavian scholars generally cite from revised editions of the novel: either from the complete collected works of Hamsun (2009), or from a previous edition of his collected works (1955-6), both of which were revised to modern Norwegian (bokmål).⁵⁰ Readily available reading editions of the novel currently in print are all in bokmål. The available editions for Hamsun's collected works which many critics use print *Sult* in the form in which Hamsun revised it for his 1934 collected works – forty-four years after the novel's original publication and at a very different time in his literary career. The complex history of linguistic revisions to *Sult* has been recently detailed by Lars Frøde Larsen.⁵¹ In this chapter, I will be reading the original 1890 version of the novel which contains the explicit passages Hamsun later excised, and the spelling which resembles Danish as opposed to modern Norwegian.⁵²

Balancing the different aspects of *Sult*: the bodily, the psychological, the social, the urban, and the existential against one another, remains an active area of scholarship in Scandinavian studies. Structuralist, theological and Lacanian readings of the novel have made way for a renewed focus on the sociohistorical context of Hamsun's writing in the 1890s as well as an increased interest in Hamsun's polemical writings. In this chapter, I will make use of articles Hamsun wrote for the newspaper *Dagbladet*

⁴⁹ Martin Humpál's close reading of *Sult*, where the novel is characterized by radical formal innovation, exemplifies this interpretation. In Martin Humpál, *The Roots of Modernist Narrative. Knut Hamsun's Novels Hunger, Mysteries, and Pan* (Oslo: Solum Forlag, 1998).

⁵⁰ Lars Frøde Larsen, 'Et redaksjonshistorisk etterord' in Knut Hamsun, *Sult* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2017), pp. 225-237 (p. 230). A recent exception which quotes from the 1890 Dano-Norwegian original is Peer E. Sørensen, *Hamsuns sultekunstner* (Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 2016).

⁵¹ Larsen (2017), pp. 225-237.

⁵² Although this edition is not readily available in academic bookstores in Norway as of 2018, it can be obtained in reprint on demand from the Norwegian branch of the publishing house Gyldendal.

in the mid-1880s, some of which are contemporary with *Sult*, as well as the novel *Redaktør Lyng* (1893), a satire on the Kristiania (Oslo) literary establishment unavailable in English translation. Unlike most comparative readings of European modernism which make use of *Sult*, I will situate the novel in a Nordic context, with particular attention to a similar short novel published in the same year of 1890 by Hamsun's Finnish contemporary Juhani Aho. This is to avoid using Hamsun as the peripheral author of my thesis, a common structure for comparative monographs where a curiosity text in a smaller language complements central works, not unlike the structure which Spivak has referred to in a postcolonial context as 'Europe and the extracurricular Orient'.⁵³

To say that *Sult* has a great deal of anxiety, or *Angst* in it, is of course far from a radical statement. In Dano-Norwegian, *Angst* is both an everyday expression of anxiety and one of existential dread, both a noun (*Angsten*), an adjective, and an adverb. Examples of the former include the narrator's love interest, Ylajali, responding anxiously within quick dialogue, 'i Angst' (S 18) when the narrator asks about her book, the narrator being anxious about being seen by others through windows – 'angst for, at man skulde have set mig fra Vinduerne' (S 46) – and the narrator asking nervously whether he is guilty: "'Har jeg gjort noget galt?' spurgte jeg angst' (S 59), "'Have I done something wrong?' I asked fearfully' (L 55).⁵⁴ Examples of the latter, existential kind include the narrator feeling 'fuld af Angst for alle Ting'

⁵³ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), p. 6.

⁵⁴ English translations from Knut Hamsun, *Hunger*, trans. by Sverre Lyngstad (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2011). Further quotations from this translation will be referenced in the main body of the text. Where required, I have translated material from primary texts myself, in case of which I have only referred to the original with a page number.

(S 211), ‘fearful of everything’ (L 204). He lets out a hoarse, anguished scream, ‘et hæst Skrig af Angst’ (S 79), suffers under the pain of *Angst*, ‘leder under Angstens Sved’ (S 57), and is hoarse with the emotion, ‘hæs af Angst’ (S 102). At times, such emotions are qualified with the unequivocally morbid adjective ‘dødelig’, deadly. The fear of being caught for having accepted excessive change is described in lethal terms: ‘Jeg blev angst, dødelig forfærdet over mig selv’ (S 141), ‘I felt deadly afraid, appalled at myself’ (L 137).

In this chapter, I argue that anxiety goes beyond such descriptions of mood, emotional reaction, or even beyond being a central theme to the text. I will show that anxiety is not just the emotional register of the novel, but its governing narrative mechanism. *Sult* is often read as a text shaped by the experiencing narrator’s thinking, and among the first stream of consciousness narratives; I show that what are known as ‘cognitive errors’ and anxious thinking patterns are the filters through which its stream of consciousness is selected. I will then go on to argue that instead of expressing his pain in spoken language, in the form of dialogue, the narrator begins to communicate it through the body, which becomes the key medium for his emotions. The bulk of the material on the body in the novel is therefore not about the body itself. When the narrator despairs over his appearance and worries about food entering his body, these are not bodily worries, but ones of the mind.

In the 1880s, mental difficulties of city dwellers were pathologized as neurasthenia. Neurasthenia had a geographic origin: George Beard, who did not invent but actively

disseminated the term, entitled it the ‘American Illness.’⁵⁵ At one stage Hamsun considered himself to have personally contracted neurasthenia in the United States, and he refers to the condition by name in later prose (H 395). Dean Krouk has recently discussed neurasthenia discourse particular to Scandinavia in relation to Hamsun’s later work and politics.⁵⁶

Historians of both medicine and literature have long focused on the overlap between modern psychiatry and modernist writing, highlighting that the two fields emerged almost simultaneously.⁵⁷ More recently, there has been a push to systematize what have been treated as loose family resemblances between the two fields, to ‘move toward an actual dynamics of cultural interaction between aesthetic and psychological modernism.’⁵⁸ By showing how Hamsun’s narrative mechanism is governed by anxious thinking patterns, my study presents a new reading of how the psychological and the textual intersect in the novel. I do this with sensitivity to the psychological discourse of the 1890s, particularly to how neurasthenia was seen to originate in American culture, but with a critical eye to the problematic pathologizations of the time in which Hamsun participated.

⁵⁵ Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra, ‘Introduction’ in *Cultures of Neurasthenia from Beard to the First World War*, ed. by Gijswijt-Hofstra and Roy Porter (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), pp. 1-30 (p. 1).

⁵⁶ Dean Krouk, ‘The Politics of Irony and Nostalgia in Knut Hamsun’s “Markens Grøde” and its Reception’, in *From Weimar to Christiania: German and Scandinavian Studies in Context*, ed. by Florence Feiereisen and Kyle Frackman (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2007), pp. 23-36. See also Sørensen (2016), p. 41, and Shelley Wood Cordulack, *Edvard Munch and the Physiology of Symbolism* (Cranbury, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002), pp. 15-21.

⁵⁷ For a recent summary of the simultaneous emergence of the two fields, see Andrew Gaedtke, *Modernism and the Machinery of Madness. Psychosis, Technology, and Narrative Worlds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 7-11.

⁵⁸ Mark S. Micale, *The Mind of Modernism: Medicine, Psychology, and the Cultural Arts in Europe and America, 1880-1940* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 17. Italics removed.

Neurasthenia no longer has medical validity in the West.⁵⁹ Its historical use as an umbrella term covered not only a number of mental illnesses, but also personality traits and behaviour deemed undesirable. It was also a racial diagnosis. Beard's *American Nervousness* (1881) elaborately addressed the nuances in nervous constitutions of different European migrant groups, but dismissed African-Americans and Native Americans as unintelligent and therefore immune to nervous illnesses.⁶⁰ Seen as the affliction of an elite, the term developed anti-Semitic undertones. Neurasthenia was also extended to pathologize homosexuality. Unrelated physical conditions and questions of bodily appearance were included in its diagnostic criteria.⁶¹ Treatment of neurasthenia was polarized along gender lines, with rest and isolation recommended for women and activity for men. I return to these historical cures to nervous illness in my fourth chapter, as they are explicitly discussed by Woolf.

Neurasthenia was seen as the product of modern, intellectual labour and city life, a result of its speed and technological advancement in particular. Hamsun's treatment of anxiety broadly follows neurasthenic lines with important modulations. Anna K. Schaffner has recently shown how Beard emphasized the economic potential of nervousness, not only attempting to legitimize mental illness by giving it a physical

⁵⁹ For a discussion of how the diagnosis persists in East Asia due to its ability to 'camouflage' other psychiatric illnesses, see Johanna Doerr und Urs Nater, 'Exhaustion Syndromes: Concepts and Definitions' in *Burnout, Fatigue, Exhaustion: An Interdisciplinary Perspective on a Modern Affliction*, ed. by Anna Katharina Schaffner, Greta Wagner, and Sighard Neckel (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 77-104 (pp. 80-6).

⁶⁰ George M. Beard, *American Nervousness. Its Causes and Consequences* (New York: Putnam, 1881), p. 189, p. 118.

⁶¹ In Beard (1881), symptoms of neurasthenia were seen to range from diabetes and hayfever to premature baldness, even the 'unprecedented beauty of American women' (pp. 8-9), the result of not having to do housework (p. 66).

origin but by highlighting the productivity of its sufferers, constructing neurasthenia as a socially aspirational diagnosis.⁶²

In the opening section of this chapter, I show that the experiencing narrator of *Sult* is not a member of the ‘brain-working, indoor-living classes’ Beard describes as neurasthenic, but instead aspires to this position.⁶³ Anxiety is presented as inhibiting to intellectual labour in the novel, not conducive of it. After elaborating how the mechanism of anxiety operates in the novel, I return to Beard and neurasthenia in my final section to show how Hamsun blurs the geographic context of his treatment of anxiety and the city, although he would have been in a prime position to situate it in America directly, having lived in the United States in 1882-84, and again in 1886-88. *Sult*, then, explores anxiety as it relates to the body with thematic similarity to medical discourse of the time, but with considerably greater nuance and with significant modulations, which I highlight through a close reading of anxiety as a narrative mechanism in the novel.

2.2. Crisis of Authorship

Unlike *Der Verschollene* and *Mrs Dalloway*, *Sult* explicitly thematizes the failure to express suffering in language as a failure of authorship. I will begin by arguing that this authorial failure is a product of the experiencing narrator’s sense of self, his cognitive errors and anxious interpretations of his situation. I will then show that this same thinking has the experiencing narrator – here distinguished from the

⁶² Anna Katharina Schaffner, *Exhaustion: A History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), pp. 92-4.

⁶³ Beard (1881), p. 23.

retrospective mature narrator of the novel's opening sentence – divert his energies to the body and to food as opposed to writing.

Rather curiously, the most recent English translation to *Sult* opens with an introduction by a popular crime novelist stating how reading the novel made him want to be an author.⁶⁴ The novel could not make authorship a less attractive prospect: the desperately poor protagonist's efforts to make it as a writer nearly kill him, and the novel ends with him giving up writing for manual labour. I begin my discussion of authorship by exploring the two conflicting models of authorship in the novel which inhibit the narrator: the city's exclusively monetary understanding of the value of writing and the narrator's own model, which mythologizes absolute control and violently amplifies the powers of authorship. I will then show how the anxiety created by these two models in conflict with each other thwarts the narrator's creative efforts. Whilst *Sult* has its narrator long for extremely authoritative authorship, it strips him of such control, and instead suggests an authorship atomized by anxiety, where the narrator's selective, anxious thinking patterns, his body, and the city together generate the text.

The unnamed experiencing narrator, an aspirant writer and journalist, desperately poor and homeless for much of the novel, considers his professional and financial survival in the city in terms that differ strikingly from the views of those around him. The city of Kristiania, modern-day Oslo, is populated by successful wool traders, steamship agents, music dealers, newspaper editors, and their gatekeeping assistants; meanwhile, craftsmen, welders, and artisans are out of work. The dramatic physical

⁶⁴ Jo Nesbø, 'Introduction', in Knut Hamsun, *Hunger*, trans. by Sverre Lyngstad (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2011), p. 9.

demolition of a part of the workforce is the first image of the city that the narrator encounters: his first view out of his apartment into the city is of the burnt-down ruins of a blacksmith's workshop, 'af en nedbrændt Smedje' (S 8). The narrator's first dialogue is with an unemployed welder (S 12-13), who asks the narrator for money. Hesitant over whether he is truly in need, the narrator asks about the man's profession:

'Er De Haandværker?'
'Ja, jeg er Naadler.'
'Hvilket?'
'Naadler. Forresten kan jeg ogsaa gøre Sko.'
'Det forandrer Sagen,' sagde jeg. 'De faar vente her i nogle Minutter, saa skal jeg gaa efter lidt Penger til Dem [...]' (S 13)

Are you an artisan?'
'Yes, I am a welder.'
'A what?'
'A welder. For that matter, I can make shoes, too.'
'That alters the case,' I said. 'Just wait a few minutes and I'll go and get some money for you [...]' (L 9)⁶⁵

The ability to make things by hand instantly elevates the man in the eyes of the narrator; he is suddenly so keen to help that he pawns the jacket off his back. The nature of the man's work transforms the narrator's view of him from a repulsive figure, 'den gamle Krøbling' (S 12), 'the old cripple' (L 8), to someone whose poverty is met with sympathy and understanding. He is a genuine craftsman towards whom the narrator feels immediate affinity, suggesting that the narrator truly values the work of craftsmanship.

Recent critical attention has focused on the historically specific aspects to the narrator's poverty in *Sult*. The novel was written in the mid-to-late 1880s, following

⁶⁵ Lyngstad's 'welter' has been here amended to 'welder'.

two decades of the hardest economic times modern Norway had seen, where increased integration into the global capital market made many traditional professions obsolete, leading to the mass emigration to which the novel's ending refers.⁶⁶ Many, indeed most characters, have fallen on hard times in *Sult*: unnamed acquaintances carry their possessions to be pawned (S 108), a fate from which the narrator is not spared. There is, however, a split within the workforce: intermediaries in trade, characters who deal with the management and the circulation of goods, succeed, whereas those in craftsmanship and manufacturing – like the lame welder – do not.

Yet the narrator of *Sult* never connects his own precarious financial situation and homelessness to the similar situation of those around him. Even in direct comparison, he cannot distinguish himself from those who serve in professions that benefit from the new economic model: 'Var jeg maaske ikke lige saa berettiget til at leve som hvemsomhelst anden, som Antikvarboghandler Pascha og Dampskibsekspeditor Hennechen?' (S 71) – 'Didn't I have the same right to life as anyone else, like Pascha the second-hand bookdealer, or Hennechen the steamship agent?' (L 67). In spite of his sympathy towards those fallen on hard times, he does not view writing as the work of better craftsmen jeopardized by changes to the market, but only compares himself to those who make their living as intermediaries in trade. He measures himself against the individual successes set by the new class of professionals, and does not view himself as a victim of structural poverty.

⁶⁶ The historical and economic conditions that shaped poverty and hunger in Norway at the time have been recently analyzed in Wientzen (2015), pp. 208-223. Poverty and class as they relate to the economic development of Norway in the context of *Sult* have been discussed by Erika K. Gubrium in 'Poverty, Shame, and the Class Journey in Public Imagination', *Distinktion: Journal of Social Theory* 15.1 (2013), pp. 105-122.

By contrast, the narrator's own, romantic understanding of the immediate monetary value of his work is painfully parodied. When the landlady asks him to pay the overdue rent, he responds with an account on writing and creative inspiration:

Aanden kommer muligens over mig imorgen, eller kanske allerede inat; det er slet ikke umuligt, at den kommer over mig engang inat, og da blir min Artikel færdig paa et Kvarter højst. Ser De, det er ikke saaledes med mit Arbejde, som med andre Folks; jeg kan ikke sætte mig ned og faa istand en vis Mængde om Dag, jeg maa bare vente paa Øjeblikket. (S 185)

I may feel inspired to write tomorrow, or maybe even tonight; it's not at all impossible that the inspiration will come sometime tonight, and then my article will be finished in a quarter of an hour, at the most. You see, it's not the same with my work as with other people's; I can't just sit down and get so much done every day, I have to wait for the right moment. (L 179)

The narrator may believe that inspired writing will create value, but the distance between monetary reward and the work of writing only grows as the novel progresses. The first section of the novel finishes when the narrator succeeds in securing a publication, earning the sum of ten Krone, 'ti Kroner' (S 61). Later, the editor gives him an identical amount, merely out of pity, suggesting only as an afterthought that it could be a publication advance (S 160-161). The value of the narrator's writing is further undermined by the endings of the novel's first two sections: the payment for the article closes the first section of the novel, while the second section similarly ends with the narrator receiving money, but this time from an acquaintance (S 109). He is again paid, but not for his written work.

In the surrounding city, textual production is reduced to its monetary value alone, subject to supply and demand like any other product. This is evident in the editor's financially oriented thinking, which the narrator tries to adopt when he refers to his

own article by its price (S 14).⁶⁷ Indeed, the first act of reading in the novel occurs when the narrator stares at advertisements, monetized text, by his door, where newspaper doubles as wallpaper (S 7). Mark Sandberg has shown how advertising of the kind encountered in *Sult*, which creates a distance between the product's place of origin and its place of sale, between maker and product, was uncommon in Norway at the time. Its use in the novel was probably influenced by Hamsun's exposure to American advertising in Chicago,⁶⁸ highlighting the way in which Hamsun's horrified fascination with the American economy in *Fra det moderne Amerikas Aandsliv* (*On the Cultural Life of Modern America*, 1889), which he wrote alongside *Sult*, spills over into the novel.

There is, then, a gulf between the city's reading of the value of writing as purely monetary and the narrator's own understanding. At one point, the narrator puts it in writing that his skills are obsolete in the prevailing market: he backdates a job application to the year of 1848 in a meaningful typographical error (S 52).⁶⁹ Earlier, he scribbled the year in all four corners of a sheet of paper, then obsessively drew the figure on a page with the effect of creating an expressionist poem (S 33-34). *Sult* suggests that just as intermediary roles in trade have taken over those in craftsmanship, or *Handwerk*, and manufacturing, the narrator's work as a writer has become obsolete in the eyes of the city that surrounds him. This has not, however,

⁶⁷ For the relationship between the exchange value of text in *Sult* and the emerging liberal market economy, see Johan Edlund, *Modernitet och myt: avförtrollning och återförtrollning i Knut Hamsuns Sult, Mysterier och Pan* (Lund: Språk- och litteraturcentrum, Lunds universitet, 2015), pp. 154-7.

⁶⁸ Mark B. Sandberg, 'Writing on the Wall: The Language of Advertising in Knut Hamsun's "Sult"', *Scandinavian Studies* 71.3 (1999), pp. 265-296.

⁶⁹ 1848 has particular significance as the revolutionary year, following the failures of which the first wave of global capitalism occurred, as in Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital: 1848-1875* (London: Abacus, 1975).

eliminated the desire for, or the memory of, writing that yields a profit, as critics have suggested.⁷⁰ Instead, *Sult* documents a failure of understanding the process. Having written a few pages, the narrator forces himself to fantasize about the remaining blank sheets of writing paper metamorphosing into money. He makes a cone out of writing paper, and then mentally transforms the blank pages to ‘et helt Kræmmerhus fuldt af Penge!’ (S 66), ‘a whole cornet chock-full of money!’ (L 62). A moment later a police officer checks the cone, finding it empty (S 67). Despite the narrator’s repeated efforts, he fails to convince even himself of the monetary potential of his work.

By contrast, the narrator’s own idea of successful writing is not monetary but defined by a reading of authorship as an overwhelming physical force, a violent amplification of its powers. Authority figures of the novel double as the narrator’s own models of authorship, to which I will now turn: that of the editor and that of God.

As portrayals of power which serve as models of authorship, both the description of God and that of the editor are coloured more by the fear of power than by any demonstration of genuine authority. Having had a formative effect on the narrator (S 115), and now acting as the sole judge of his work, the editor sets the narrator’s standard for successful authorship. Yet the narrator’s perception of the editor is significantly more authoritative than the impression left by the man’s behaviour and appearance on the reader. The epithet the narrator gives him, ‘denne farlige Skribent’ (S 115), ‘this dangerous writer’ (L 111), contrasts with his gentle facial expression, apologetic remarks about the taste of his readership (S 115-6) and occasional if

⁷⁰ See, for instance, Lyngstad, who writes of the narrator’s ‘visceral contempt of material values’ in Lyngstad, *Knut Hamsun, Novelist. A Critical Assessment* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), p. 18.

excessively modest acts of benevolence (S 160). Following a reverent but fearful introduction, the narrator strikingly describes the editor's words as physical violations: he defines the editor as a man 'hvis Ord altid havde slaaet blodige Striber, hvor de faldt ned' (S 115) – 'whose words had always left bloody stripes wherever they struck' (L 111), a description of wounds inflicted on the body.

This description of editorial powers is unique to *Sult*. Even *Redaktør Lynge*, Hamsun's thinly veiled takedown of the newspaper editor Ola Thommessen, finds some humour in the editor's position. Lynge is 'en statsmagt' (RL 11), but his authority is punctured by comedy. He has an assistant nicknamed Leporello, the name of Don Giovanni's servant, and is not physically threatening:

Det var flere mennesker tilstede, endog et par damer; midt i værelset ved et bord ved veggen satt redaktøren selv, Alexander Lynge, den store journalist som hele byen kjendte. Han er en mand på firti år, med et markeret, livlig ansigt og kvikke gutteøine. (RL 10)

Many people were present, even a few ladies; in the middle of the room at a table by the wall sat the editor himself, Alexander Lynge, the great journalist known by the whole city. He is a man of forty years, with a distinct, lively face and boyish, energetic eyes.

However, the conflation of editorial authority and the capacity to inflict bodily harm in *Sult* echoes the creation scene of the novel, a founding myth of the narrator's condition, which shows God violating man in creation. Sitting on a park bench, the narrator despairs over his situation, having explicitly contrasted his mental suffering with the happy disposition of other Kristiania residents. He then imagines himself as the subject of a cruel divine experiment. In dramatic amplification, he visualizes the genesis of his condition:

Gud havde stukket sin Finger ned i mit Nervenet og lempeligt, ganske løseligt bragt lidt Uorden i Traadene. Og Gud havde trukket sin Finger tilbage, og der var Trevler og fine Rodtraade paa Fingeren af mine Nervers Traade. Og der var et aabent Hul efter hans Finger, som var Guds Finger, og Saar i min Hjerne efter hans Fingers Veje. [...] Men han lod mig gaa med Fred, og han lod mig gaa med det aabne Hul. (S 24-25)

God had stuck his finger down into the network of my nerves and gently, quite casually, brought a little confusion among the threads. And God had withdrawn his finger and behold! – there were fibres and delicate filaments on his finger from the threads of my nerves. And there was a gaping hole after his finger, which was God's finger, and wounds in my brain from the track of his finger. [...] He let me go in peace, and he let me go with that gaping hole. (L 20)

In a parody of Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam*, God's finger presses the narrator's brain, damaging some nerve endings, which come unattached as he withdraws his finger: the narrator is then left to go out into the world with a gap in his nerves (S 24-25). The creation of the narrator equally reads as his physical and psychological disabling. In addition, the narrator is shown as physically vastly inferior to the creator-destroyer: this description distorts the physical likeness, or mirroring effect of the figures of Adam and God in the Michelangelo fresco; man, or the narrator, has been dramatically shrunk in scale. Just as the narrator imagined the editor's authority as physical superiority with a capacity for violence, he here links creative authority to violence and a disproportionate use of power. God does not touch his finger as in the Michelangelo fresco – a gesture that emphasizes likeness and interdependence – but presses on his brain from above in a pose that inverts Michelangelo's figures. Gry Hedin has interpreted the novel and its first published fragment in the journal *Ny Jord* as literary experiments where the narrator is made to struggle in a Darwinian survival of the fittest, but this formative scene, which reads as

a belated prologue to the novel as a whole, shows God not only overseeing but authoring the narrator's tribulations.⁷¹

The narrator's own ideal of authorship is inseparable from these readings of authority: combined, the models of both journalistic writing and creation, the editor and the Lord, shape the narrator's ideal of authorship. When he invents a neologism – a rare, genuine moment of authorial creation for the narrator – he directly juxtaposes his own work with that of the Lord, with original creation:

‘Det findes ikke i Sproget, jeg har opfundet det, *Kubooa*. Det har Bogstaver som et Ord, ved sødeste Gud, Mand, du har opfundet et Ord *Kubooa* af stor grammatikalsk Betydning’ (S 77).

‘It doesn't exist in the language, I have invented it – *Kubooa*. It does have letters like a word – God, man, you have invented a word *Kubooa* of great grammatical importance’ (L 73).⁷²

When no existing word is sufficiently dark to express the narrator's suffering in prison, the narrator creates this meaningless word. The meanings he tries to attach to it – from sunrise and God to a livestock show and an amusement park (S 77) – all collapse.

Founding it on an absolute, simplistic, primitive, physically superior and mentally violating idea of power, the narrator equates authorship with brutal dominance. This is the register into which he lapses when trying to impress Ylajali, his Galatea of a

⁷¹ Gry Hedin, ‘Forfatteren som eksperimentator. Tidsskriftet *Ny Jord* som tværfaglig kontekst for Knut Hamsuns *Sult*’, *Edda* 98.4 (2011), p. 333. The religious and biblical references in the novel have been extensively discussed by critics. Martin Nag has read the protagonist as a Christ-like figure, interpreting the narrator's attempts at writing as Christ's uprising against God. Martin Nag, *Geniet Knut Hamsun – en norsk Dostojevskij* (Oslo: Solum Forlag, 1998), pp. 52-7.

⁷² Lyngstad's idiomatic ‘Christ, man’ here revised to ‘God, man’ to retain the effect of the juxtaposition.

love interest, whom he seeks to humiliate as much as impress: ‘Jeg gotter mig grusomt over hendes Forvirring, denne Raadvildhed i hendes Øjne henrykker mig’ (S 18) – ‘I gloat cruelly over her confusion, the bewilderment in her eyes gives me a thrill’ (L 14). His writing plans read first as animalistic, even predatory, then earth-shattering or violent, as he imagines his text as ‘en lang Knurren, der tilsidst skulde ende i en Klimaks saa stejl, saa oprørende som et Skud, eller som Lyden af et Bjærg, der brast’ (S 123) – ‘a long-drawn-out rumble which would finally end in a climax as bold, as shocking, as a shot or the sound of a cracking rock’ (L 118). In this description, a gunshot and the biblical image of a mountain split in two are juxtaposed; physical violence and divine acts are one.⁷³ This all-powerful, even tyrannical model of authorship is both unrealistic and psychologically inhibiting.

The narrator’s aspirations towards authorship are, then, blocked by his particular understanding of power relations, both real and imagined; by a misreading of the economic difficulty he faces and an asymmetrical interpretation of the powers of authorship. His writing is severely inhibited by his need for an author to be all-powerful. Against financial structures which devalue his work but assign him complete responsibility over his economic fate, and a model of authorship where absolute control is mythologized, the narrator reads himself as a failure – a failed author. Even during his one successful bout of writing in the novel, he is unable to reach psychological certainty about the value of his writing:

Var det nu ogsaa sikkert, at Føljetonen var et lidet Mesterstykke af inspireret Kunst? Gud ved, om den ikke havde sine Fejl her og der! Alt vel overvejet behøved den ikke engang at blive antagen, nej, ikke engang antagen, simpelthen! Den var maaske noksaa middelmaadig, kanske ligefrem slet; hvad

⁷³ ‘and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two’, Zechariah 14:4 in *The Bible. New Revised Standard Version* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 1369.

Sikkerhed havde jeg for, at den ikke allerede i dette Øjeblik laa i Papirskurven? (S 43)

Could I be absolutely certain that my story was truly inspired, a little artistic masterpiece? God knows it might have some faults here and there. Everything considered, it didn't even have to get accepted – no, that was it, not even accepted! What if it was quite mediocre or perhaps downright bad; what guarantee did I have that it wasn't at this very moment lying in the wastepaper basket already? (L 39)

Indeed, for a novel about authorship, there is remarkably little writing in *Sult*. Following numerous beginnings and plans, the narrator's writing keeps getting interrupted. It is not for the lack of trying, as his quixotic writing plans border on megalomania. At various points in the text, he is working on 'en Afhandling i tre Afsnit om den filosofiske Erkendelse' (S 15), a 'three-part monograph about philosophical cognition' (L 11) intended to demolish Kant. Aiming to 'knække ynkeligt nogle af Kants Sofismer' (S 15), 'deal a deathblow to some of Kant's sophisms' (L 11), the narrator does not look to engage with, or build on, great authors but to destroy and harm them, following the violent models for authorship I have outlined.⁷⁴ Comically punctured, his attack on Kant doubles as a work of self-help:

Det var ogsaa saa meget, som afgang af denne Afhandling om den filosofiske Erkendelse, maaske flere Menneskers lykke, ingen kunde vide det. Jeg sagde til mig selv, at den kanske vilde blive til stor Hjælp for mange unge Mennesker. (S 16)

So much depended on this monograph about philosophical cognition, maybe several people's happiness, you never knew. I told myself that it might turn out to be a great help to many young people. (L 11-12)

The content of his other literary plans is similarly lofty, with repeated and frustrated attempts to outperform a divine standard of authorship. He plans to write a salacious play set in the middle ages entitled 'Korsets Tegn' (S 193), 'A Sign of the Cross' (L

⁷⁴ Translation amended.

187), about a fallen nun – which is reminiscent of Diderot’s *La Religieuse* crossed with Prévost’s *Manon Lescaut* – and an article on no less than ‘Fremtidens Forbrydelser’ (S 15), the crimes of the future. At one point we are hyperbolically told that he is working on ‘tre eller fire Afhandlinger’ (S 113), ‘three or four monographs’ (L 109) simultaneously, but there is little evidence of successful writing apart from one published article. Indeed, the experiencing narrator is less a writer than someone who is *trying* to write, hampered by his own expectation of the author’s role as a towering, omnipotent giant.

The narrator’s authorship is, then, not limited by material constraints alone, severe though they are, but by debilitating perfectionism, low self-esteem, and anxiety, which sabotage his writing and publishing efforts and are caused by the unattainable model he upholds. When he pitches his next piece to the editor, he anticipates failure. In painfully hesitant terms, he describes it to him as “‘bare en liden Karakteristik af Correggio”’ (S 115), “‘just a short profile of Correggio”’ (L 111). Already correcting, diminishing and even abandoning his piece when pitching its title, he pre-empts its rejection. ‘Correggio’ not only has one think of ‘correcting’ (Italian *correggere*, to correct; *correggo*, I correct), but also has a phonic similarity to *Copégoro*, the name of the ship which takes the narrator away from the city: he is trying to sell a text that will be expelled from the city. Even before the editor has given his opinion on the narrator’s work, he visualizes his work as rejected – and not only as rejected but in ‘denne Dragekæft, der altid stod aaben, altid var færdig til at modtage nye kasserede Arbejder — nye knuste Haab’ (S 114), in ‘these dragon’s jaws which were always open, always ready to receive fresh scrapped writings – fresh blasted hopes’ (L 110). A moment which promises to build up towards genuine authorship-creation, where

the narrator invents a new, unintelligible word, is similarly qualified by psychological hesitancy from the start: 'Jeg indbildte mig at have fundet et nyt Ord' (S 77) – 'I imagined I had found a new word' (L 73).

Just such a scene of a frustrated writing attempt, where writing is blocked by the narrator's anxious thinking, occurs as the elated narrator has positioned himself above the morally dubious citizens of Kristiania (S 120) and appears full of creative confidence. In spite of this arrogance, he ends up working under conditions quite like those of the prostitute he looked down upon a moment earlier, himself now under a street lamp and nervous about the nearby police presence. He makes a kind of kinetic plan for his text, and signals the completion of this plan with a full stop, 'Punktum' (S 123). Despite these preparations, the work itself is interrupted, the words do not come; even as he re-reads aloud what he has written before:

Men Ordene vilde ikke falde mig ind. Jag læste hele Stykket igennem fra Begyndelsen af, læste højt hver Sætning, og jeg kunde slet ikke samle mine Tanker til denne spragende Klimaks. Mens jeg stod og arbejdede med dette, kom ovenikøbet Konstablen gaaende og stilled sig op midt i Gaden et lidet Stykke borte fra mig og spolered hele min Stemning. Hvad kom det nu ham ved, om jeg i dette Øjeblik stod og skrev paa en udmærket Klimaks til en Artikel for "Kommandøren"? Herregud, hvor det var plat umuligt for mig at holde mig oven Vande [...]' (S 123)

But the words wouldn't come. I read through the entire piece from the beginning, read each sentence aloud, but I just couldn't collect my thoughts for this crashing climax. On top of everything, as I stood there trying to work it out, the policeman came up and planted himself in the middle of the street a little way off, spoiling my entire mood. What business was it of his if at this moment I was working on an excellent climax to an article for the 'Commander'? Good God, how absolutely impossible it was for me to keep my head above water [...]' (L 118-9)

A mere attempt at writing has made the narrator debilitatingly anxious: it is not the police but the narrator's thoughts about the police that prevent him from writing. The

description of trying to stay above water reads as hyperventilation – as panic – but also shows how the failure of authorship is interpreted as an existential threat to the narrator.

Not only is the narrator unable to separate authorship, writing as a profession, from writing as a question of artistic productivity: in his anxious misreading, professional and personal worth are conflated. The names he assigns to the people he meets – where the pawnbroker becomes not only the uncle, slang for pawnbroker, but indeed ‘min egentlige “Onkel”’ (S 100), ‘my proper uncle’, and the editor becomes the commander – add emotional authority to what should merely be professional relationships. To have an item rejected by the pawnbroker should feel very different to being rejected by one’s family. By personalizing and emotionalizing these relationships excessively, the narrator’s anxiety makes professional rejections more hurtful than necessary. Rejections of his writing or possessions are interpreted to mean rejections of his person. Consequently, the mere thought of having his writing rejected is translated into an existential rejection, or read as being consumed whole, with the editor’s wastebasket taking on infernal proportions, ‘en umaadelig Papirkurv, der saa ud til at kunne sluge en Mand med Hud og Haar’ (S 114) – ‘an immense wastebasket that looked as though it could swallow a man whole’ (L 110). Critics have celebrated the narrator’s ‘reluctance to be judged under the normal conditions that define identity and social status’ and called his hunger fully asocial, ‘hans sult er et fullstendig asosialt fenomen’.⁷⁵ Instead, the narrator’s anxious conflation of personal and professional worth, the revering names he assigns to others, as well as

⁷⁵ Daniel Rees, *Hunger and Modern Writing: Melville, Kafka, Hamsun, and Wright* (Cologne: Modern Academic Publishing, 2016), p. 94. Øystein Rottem, *Hamsun og fantasiens triumf* (Trondheim: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag, 2002), p. 48.

the romantically evocative image of well-lit homes that closes the novel, reveal a strong desire for conventional professional and familial recognition, where authorship, self-worth, and material success combine.

In fact, the combination of debilitating perfectionism and anxiety has the narrator devote more energy to posing as an author than to the work of writing itself. He aggressively recites his list of publications to anyone who will listen and grows angry when this fails to impress them. There are multiple moments of mock-authoring, where the narrator invents books for their social effect alone. When he first meets Ylajali, he tells her impulsively that she has dropped a non-existent book, confusing her and enjoying her confusion (S 17). When the narrator first goes to the pawnbroker, he invents a publication, persuading the man of his story's plausibility: 'Og Manden synes nok, at han havde hørt Navnet, Titlen' (S 21) – 'And the man thought that, sure enough, he had heard the name, the title' (L 17). The narrator momentarily passes as an author, even if only because of the pawnbroker's politeness or curiosity. There is, however, no physical object in either case: the narrator's invented authorship is never externally verified. There is no material text, only an imagined authorship.

2.3. Anxiety as a Narrative Filter

We have seen that the narrator's aspirations towards authorship are inhibited by his anxiety. The key paradox of *Sult* is, of course, that we have a novel, a piece of writing, documenting this non-writing. I will now go on to look at the novel's narrative and forms of expression in more detail, arguing that anxious thinking is an

important narrative mechanism in the novel. I will show that the two narrative elements that characterize *Sult* and have awarded it pioneer status: its complete interiority, limited to the mind of one protagonist with little external verification, and its use of free indirect discourse, must be qualified as techniques that are shaped by anxious thinking: by a negative bias and what are known in psychology as cognitive errors.

Admiring commentators have mythologized Hamsun's narrative technique, even evaluating it in positive terms as liberating. Generally, Hamsun's free indirect discourse has been isolated from the type of thinking and behaviour it describes. Such mythologizations include descriptions of the narrator documenting, not shaping, the workings of his mind, impartially jotting down every unfiltered sensation, or descriptions of writing not about the mind, but from within it.⁷⁶ A complimentary review of Lyngstad's translation of *Sult* in the *Times Literary Supplement*, signed simply CL, exemplifies such attitudes. It describes Hamsun's narrative technique in terms of unedited, stream-like free indirect discourse:

[...] the reader feels trapped inside the narrator's skull, listening to an endless free indirect discourse and flinching in a mixture of terror and discomfort from the nameless protagonist's sometimes crazy, sometimes clear-sighted, dealings with others.⁷⁷

Here, acknowledgment of complete narrative interiority is coupled with puzzlement over the narrator's erratic behaviour. The narrator is often described as not only unreliable but as odd, where 'a really strange character leads the plot around like an

⁷⁶ For example, in Sandra Tomescu Baciú, 'Knut Hamsun: The Artist and the Wanderer', *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai Philologia* 55.2 (2010), pp. 23-28 (p. 24).

⁷⁷ Anon., Review by CL on Knut Hamsun, 'Hunger', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 6 Dec 1996 (4888), p. 24.

obedient dog’,⁷⁸ who engages in a celebration of performativity, a ‘carnival of gestures’,⁷⁹ or someone whose extraordinary behaviour reads as ‘little more than a temperamental tic’.⁸⁰ At best, his behaviour is described as ‘the protagonist’s unmotivated irrationality’.⁸¹ The *TLS* reviewer describes the narrator’s thinking as ‘extraordinary internal thought-processes: paranoia, exuberance, odd detachment from the physical effects of starvation and intensely lyrical imagination’.⁸² Out of such commentary, *Sult* emerges as a combination of unusual behaviour that goes unqualified (‘crazy’, ‘odd’, ‘intense’), delivered unedited by an endless free indirect discourse, an unselective stream. The illogical, even ‘crazy’ subject matter of the free indirect discourse is, then, entirely separated from its delivery mechanism.

Hamsun’s own portrayals of his method may well have influenced critical commentary which emphasizes the unfiltered nature of his narrative technique. Hamsun was fond of the metaphor of the writer as someone who merely documents, and wrote admiringly of Strindberg being an observer instead of a thinker: ‘Strindberg er ingen Tænkere. Men han er en Observator’ (PS 99). *Sult* itself contains numerous such descriptions of total receptivity, as the narrator describes himself as an observer of city life in similar terms:

Intet undgik min Opmærksomhed [...] (S 19)

Nothing escaped my attention [...] (L 14)

⁷⁸ James Wood, *The Irresponsible Self: On Laughter and the Novel* (New York: Random House, 2005), p. 97.

⁷⁹ Arnold Weinstein, *Northern Arts. The Breakthrough of Scandinavian Literature and Art, from Ibsen to Bergman* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 257.

⁸⁰ Lyngstad (2005), p. 18.

⁸¹ Moody (2013), p. 40.

⁸² Review by CL for *TLS* (1996), p. 24.

[...] foregik der intet omkring mig, uden at jeg lagde Mærke til det. (S 18)

[...] nothing that was taking place around me escaped my perception. (L 14)

Af alt dette, som jeg saaledes stod og iagttog, var der intet, ikke engang en liden Biomstændighed, som gik tabt for mig. (S 188)

In all that I observed in this way, there was nothing, not even a tiny incidental circumstance, that escaped me. (L 182)

The narrator is telling the reader that he has perceptive omniscience, a claim that is both an obvious exaggeration and one that is contradicted by his omissions. Crucial details are left out, such as the real names of himself and Ylajali, which we know are exchanged. More importantly, the novel describes how the narrator edits his thoughts as they come, as he tries to emphasize some thoughts over others: ‘Og der faldt mig ind endel lykkelige Ting, som jeg straks *gjorde Brug af*, et Par tarvelige Ord, Rester inde fra min udsugede Hjerne’ (S 135), ‘Then some happy thoughts occurred to me which I *made use of* right away, a few cheap words, leavings from my dried-up brain’ (L 130, emphasis added).

Hamsun’s stream of consciousness lacks the non-judgmental curiosity for thoughts that associate freely, familiar from the narrator of Proust’s *Recherche*, who celebrates the mind’s capacity to wander, not only syntactically but with genuine intellectual curiosity. In Chapter 4, I will argue that such celebration also characterizes aspects of *The Hours* and *Mrs Dalloway*, indeed in ways that jar with the tragic subject matter of the novel. In *Sult*, the narrator’s stream of thoughts is never received with curiosity, and certainly not with acceptance. Thoughts are clearly painful to the narrator, to an extent that happy thoughts must be clung to when they appear.

The narrator's mind is not, then, associating freely and recording the process. The narrator tries to calm himself by thinking in a certain way, soothing himself by beginning 'at tale mildt til mig selv, holde Formaninger, som en Moder kunde gjort' (S 94), 'to talk gently to myself, giving the sort of admonitions a mother would' (L 90), even through 'nynnende Vuggesange' (S 76), 'humming lullabies' (L 72).

Decades ago such 'strange', hypermobile mental activity could have been viewed as madness, but today it is known that the mind naturally merges external stimuli, memory, emotions, the past and the present. As Mark Williams' widely disseminated research – which exemplifies the 'third wave' of cognitive research into anxiety – has shown, a healthy mind is not silent or inactive, completely calm or empty of negative thoughts.⁸³ Instead, it has a particular relationship to those thoughts. An anxious mind, by contrast, fails to treat thoughts and feelings as mental events and as normal 'waste products' of mental activity but instead treats them as absolute facts. It is not the stimuli or emotions alone but what ones does with them that makes the mind anxious. The narrator of *Sult* exemplifies an attachment to reading thoughts as real. Classic psychological readings of the novel, like Atle Kittang's well-known Lacanian analysis of *Sult* which emphasizes the narcissistic personality of the experiencing narrator, must be balanced against a reading which assigns importance not only to the narrator's attitude and thoughts, but also to the narrator's relationship to his thoughts.⁸⁴

⁸³ Mark Williams, *Mindfulness. Finding Peace in a Frantic World* (London: Piatkus, 2011).

⁸⁴ Atle Kittang, *Luft, vind, ingenting. Hamsuns desillusjonsromanar frå 'Sult' til 'Ringen sluttet'* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1984), pp. 35-71. See also Kittang, 'Knut Hamsun's "Sult": Psychological Deep Structures and Metapoetic Plot' in *Facets of European Modernism. Essays in Honour of James McFarlane*, ed. by Janet Garton (Norwich: University of East Anglia, 1985), pp. 295-308.

Furthermore, the narrator's thinking resembles thinking errors known as cognitive biases, rigid patterns of thinking which exacerbate and maintain mental illness. First identified in 1967 by the psychiatrist Aaron T. Beck, cognitive bias theory is widely implemented in mainstream medical practice today and now forms the basis of the scientific understanding of the mechanisms of mental illness.⁸⁵ In rejecting Freudian psychoanalysis, with its focus on trauma and childhood, the cognitive bias model instead gave agency to the sufferer's way of framing his experiences and responding to them. Beck was heavily influenced by the work of the psychologist Albert Ellis. Ellis' work highlighted the narrow and absolute nature of many irrational beliefs which he saw as psychologically inhibiting.⁸⁶

This cognitive model of psychology emphasizes the role that thinking and interpretation play in psychological experience and in generating emotion. Fear, for example, is a cognitive process, 'the *appraisal* that there is actual or potential danger in a given situation'.⁸⁷ A panic attack is not just a set of bodily sensations, but the

⁸⁵ Its foundations as they relate to anxiety have been summarized by David A. Clark and Aaron T. Beck, 'Cognitive Model of Anxiety', in Clark and Beck, *Cognitive Therapy for Anxiety Disorders. Science and Practice* (New York: The Guildford Press, 2010), pp. 31-57. For a comprehensive scientific account of the cognitive model of psychology, see Clark, Beck, and Brad A. Alford, *The Scientific Foundations of Cognitive Theory and Therapy of Depression* (New York: Wiley, 1999). See also Beck's 2005 discussion of the empirical support for his original model, and how it has been developed by later scholars. Beck, 'Preface to the 2005 Edition', in Beck, Gary Emery, and Ruth L. Greenberg, *Anxiety Disorders and Phobias. A Cognitive Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: Basic Books, 2005), pp. 15-29.

⁸⁶ His main work, widely regarded as seminal, is Albert Ellis, *Reason and Emotion in Psychotherapy* (New York: Lyle Stuart, 1962). It has been fully updated and revised under the same title (New York: Birch Lane Press, 1992). Early figures of the cognitive approach other than Ellis and Beck have been discussed by O'Donohue and Ferguson (2016), p. 18.

⁸⁷ Beck, Emery, and Greenberg (2005), p. 8.

‘catastrophic misinterpretation of bodily sensations’.⁸⁸ The cognitive model demonstrated that it was not events alone, but also how events are framed and interpreted that causes mental suffering. Beck called such framings cognitive biases, defined as ‘habitual ways of thinking function to support core beliefs and assumptions by generalizing, deleting, and/or distorting internal and external stimuli, thus creating cognitive distortions.’⁸⁹ The list of known cognitive distortions, as built by researchers on the Beck model, is now extensive. The best-documented cognitive distortions are thinking patterns such as dichotomous thinking, jumping to conclusions, catastrophizing, comparison (i.e. unfair comparison with others), disqualifying the positive, emotional reasoning, externalization of self-worth, magnification, and selective abstraction.⁹⁰

The thinking of the narrator of *Sult* is shaped by such cognitive errors. He engages in overgeneralization (when he witnesses well-lit homes, he concludes that all others are happy), jumping to conclusions (he interprets the pawnbroker’s laughter as a death sentence), and emotional reasoning. He employs black and white thinking (where others are either divine or devilish) and mental filtering (he sees everything through his own condition). His mind has a strong negative bias and fondness for hyperbole. Even an objectively measurable indicator such as time becomes highly subjective; previous encounters with others are interpreted as being an eternity away. The world is not black, but it starts to look that way: ‘Herregud, hvor det begyndte at se sort ud

⁸⁸ David A. Clark, ‘A Cognitive Approach to Panic’, *Behaviour Research and Therapy* 24.4 (1986), pp. 461-470 (p. 461).

⁸⁹ Carrie L. Yurica and Robert A. DiTomasso, ‘Cognitive Distortions’ in *Encyclopedia of Cognitive Behavior Therapy*, ed. by Arthur Freeman (New York: Springer, 2004), pp. 117-122 (p. 118).

⁹⁰ Yurica and DiTomasso (2004), p. 119.

for mig nu!’ (S 96), ‘God, how black everything was beginning to look for me now!’ (L 92-3).

The narrator’s negative self-view and anxious interpretations of external events create a pre-emptive effect for the narrative, not only filtering but also shaping his experience: interactions with others are negatively interpreted and written in before they occur. Thoughts of a new encounter with Ylajali turn to fearful visualizations of a hypothetical arrest. Even in dialogue, the narrator’s attacks on himself take over the bulk of the passage, and he labels himself ‘en halvt nøgen Stodder’ (S 135-6), a ‘half-naked tramp’ (L 131), anxiously imagining Ylajali’s thoughts. Even before the editor has given his opinion on the narrator’s work, he visualises his work as rejected.

The narrator acknowledges that his negative readings of others shape his social experience: ‘begyndte jeg at finde op alle mulige Fejl ved disse glade Mennesker, som gled mig forbi’ (S 120), ‘I began to see all sorts of faults in these happy people who were gliding by’ (L 115). Characteristically for a mind with a negative bias, the narrator believes that all the passers-by are happy and that their imperfections are creations of his imagination. Similarly, when he is hungry, passers-by all seem to walk with their mouths full of food.

Anxiety, then, is not only a mood or emotional register, but also a narrative mechanism for *Sult*. Cognitive biases shape the narrator’s behaviour and thoughts, and as his mind is the novel’s frame, they also shape the narrative as a whole. The narrator anticipates rejection and being dismissed. He does not take a seat when asked by the editor to do so, and in effect rejects his own manuscript, pre-empting the

editor. He tries to make himself physically smaller when about to make a move on Ylajali. Even the occasional moments of Herculean confidence are punctured by ‘disse Tanker’ (S 143), these thoughts. One moment the narrator feels elated, then we are told how ‘Jeg gejled mig op med disse Tanker’ (S 143), ‘I worked myself up with these thoughts’ (L 138), for the next paragraph to start ‘Fuld og nervøs’ (S 143), ‘drunk and nervous’ (L 138), and soon ‘opførte jeg mig som en vanvittig Mand’ (S 143), ‘I behaved like a madman’ (L 138).

There are some exceptions to such thinking in the novel, as in this passage, where narrator treats thoughts as mental events and does not judge them negatively:

Mit Hoved var atter blevet klart, Tanker kom og gik som sædvanligt, og jeg led ikke synderligt [...] (S 126)

My head was clear once more, thoughts came and went as usual and I didn’t suffer particularly [...] (L 121)⁹¹

Yet the narrator’s thinking lapses into self-doubt already in the next paragraph, and this description of neutral observations of thoughts is followed by the narrator’s unconvincing assurances that he feels no hunger in spite of his starvation.

The narrator’s mental activity and behaviour, which commentators often find bizarre, is consistent with his self-view. Anxiety shapes both the type of thinking, and the way in which the narrator is shown to respond emotionally to this thinking in the novel.

⁹¹ Translation amended to reflect punctuation in the original.

2.4. The Body as an Expressive Surface

For all this anxious emotion and thinking which I have outlined, the experiencing narrator's communication is wordless. At moments when he should be communicating through language, mostly to ask for help – whether from acquaintances, the police, or the clergy – he invariably fails. When he laughs 'ikke en Lyd kom mig fra Struben; min Latter var tyst og hektisk' (S 67), 'not a sound emerged from my throat; my laughter was feverish and silent' (L 63) – there is no utterance. The difficulty of communicating the nature of his pain culminates in the prison scene, a dramatic low point in the novel. Claiming to be a drunken journalist when he really has no home to go to, the narrator refuses the meal ticket that he desperately needs. In his unheated prison cell, he struggles in search of a dark enough word to express his agony – again an attempt at authorship-creation:

Jeg gjorde de mest fortvivlede Anstrængelser, forat finde et Ord, der var sort nok til at betegne mig dette Mørke, et Ord saa grusomt sort, at det kunde sværte min Mund, naar jeg nævnte det. (S 79)

I made the most desperate efforts to find a word black enough to signify this darkness for me, a word so horribly black that it would dirty my mouth when I uttered it. (L 75)

In spite of all this effort to crystallize his emotion into a single word, the neologism collapses. In ultimate authorial failure, the narrator is unable to assign meaning to the word which he himself would be convinced by (S 77-8), let alone one that he could sell to a readership.

I have shown how the narrator's experience is shaped and filtered by anxious thinking. In addition, *Sult* begins to redistribute this anxiety to the body, which

increasingly becomes a communicational surface in the novel, highlighting the narrator's failure to produce text, or indeed language, which others could witness and understand. In a scene which reads like a serious joke about asking for divine intervention, the narrator seeks out the pastor, having thrown himself down the stairs a few pages earlier. The pastor is out; his servant asks whether the request is important, which the narrator denies. Instead, he tries to vocalize his need for help with bodily movement and clothing, by consciously manipulating his physical appearance:

Der stod jeg og der stod hun. Jeg satte med Vilje Brystet frem, forat gøre hende opmærksom paa Knappenaalen, der holdt min Frakke sammen; jeg bad hende med Øjnene om at se, hvad jeg var kommet for; men Staklen forstod ingen Ting. (S 96)

There I stood, and there she stood. I stuck out my chest on purpose to make her aware of the pin holding my coat together. I begged her with my eyes to see what I had come for, but the poor dear didn't understand a thing. (L 92)

Here, the narrator is asking for help through his body alone: at this point, his life depends on it, not merely in figurative terms, but he still cannot get the words out. He is gesturing with his body towards his clothing, to a coat that is falling apart.

Instead of celebrating the communicative powers of the body, the narrator's loss of authorship is highlighted by the equivalent loss of control over the message his body sends. Paradoxically, to those around him the narrator's body ends up revealing more than his words: his shabby appearance and visible malnutrition prompt Ylajali and the editor to give him money, in effect saving his life. His message collapses when he is consciously trying to author it. By contrast, when he does not have authoritative control over his message, it has a chance of finding an audience, further highlighting

how the narrator is stripped of authorship of the kind he values, one of absolute control.

In fact, the narrator's treatment of his body further reveals his view of his own value, undeserving not only of authorship but of elementary comforts, a sense of self defined by the debilitating anxiety I have outlined. He thinks of himself as fundamentally unworthy, and wonders why others do not simply reject him, anticipating sexual rejection from Ylajali by visualizing it pre-emptively: 'Hvorfor vendte hun mig ikke Ryggen' (S 136) – 'Why didn't she just turn her back on me' (L 131). He acts out the figuratively punitive model of authority as physical violence on his body: stabbing himself, throwing his body down the stairs, even cannibalizing it by biting his finger. These attacks on the materiality of the body are an aspect of *Sult* which is occasionally stronger in the original Dano-Norwegian; by necessity, in rendering idiomatic English, Lyngstad's translation downplays the materiality of the body. When the narrator imagines his writing being thrown into the wastebasket, he imagines the basket being able to 'swallow a man whole' (L 110) in Lyngstad's translation, whereas literally translated 'med Hud og Haar' (S 114) means 'with skin and hair'.

The narrator is disgusted and upset by his appearance: 'Dette slattede, næsten ublufærdige Udtryk i mine Haandbage piner mig, volder mig Ubehag' (S 148) – 'This flabby, shameless expression on the backs of my hands pains me, makes me uneasy' (L 143). He systematically focuses on appearances over survival, experiences his body as ugly, wishes to hide it from others, but studies it extensively in private:

Jeg havde undersøgt min Krop for et Par Dage siden, en Middagstid oppe paa mit Rum, og jeg havde staaet og græet hele Tiden over den. (S 147)

I had examined my body a few days ago, at noon up in my room, and I had stood there and cried over it the whole time. (L 143)

The narrator is failing to write for the same reason as he is failing to eat: his view of himself prevents him from doing so. He consistently misses opportunities for food; at one point he is physically hit by a bakery van but still does not ask for the bread he wants (S 153–54). When actually offered food, the narrator says he has already eaten, which we know to be untrue. He gives irrational excuses when rejecting food: he refuses food at the temporary lodgings out of gratitude to a man who threatened him only moments earlier. He avoids eating in public. When he does ask for food, it is of the lowest possible standard: he coweringly requests a leftover bone from the butcher, pretending that it is for a dog (S 154). He consciously deprives his body of nourishment, rest, and shelter.

Without this framework of anxiety as the narrator's main communicative medium, critics still participate in a problematic conflation of starvation and authorship, in an abstraction of the narrator's hunger, reading the novel as hunger artists' ideation where starvation brings greater clarity or helps one write. In his discussion of *Sult*, Arnold Weinstein has argued that 'being incessantly hungry sharpens your vision'.⁹² Ingar Sletten Kolloen celebrates the narrator overcoming 'the earthly demands of the body', while for Paul Auster hunger is 'an existential art' in the novel.⁹³ It is not

⁹² Weinstein (2008), p. 252. Weinstein quotes from the 1967 translation by Robert Bly, which has been noted for its inaccuracies.

⁹³ Ingar Sletten Kolloen, *Knut Hamsun: Dreamer and Dissenter*, trans. by Deborah Dawkin and Erik Skuggevik (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 49. This reading excessively participates in an anorexic fantasy where, even without the religious dimensions of fasting, starvation helps gain greater clarity and independence

uncommon to find *Sult* used as an exemplar of artistic productivity brought about by starvation: ‘the starvation of the protagonist, which almost kills him, is simultaneously the best thing that happens to him [...] because it is here that he finds the fuel for his aesthetic undertaking.’⁹⁴ Martin Humpál also reads starvation in *Sult* in this way:

The hunger which is the central focus of the novel should be understood primarily in figurative terms: the text depicts the main character's existential emptiness, his desire for an authentic way of life and for artistic success.⁹⁵

However, I have shown that instead of the outward expression of authorship, or of writing production, the narrator attacks himself, both by way of his anxious thoughts, and ultimately in the form of physical deprivation and violence. Rather than something to be upheld as a model or a productive part of his authorship, starvation is an act of violence turned inwards.

Some of Hamsun’s commentators have underplayed the significance of starvation. Alys Moody’s aestheticizing reading of starvation in the novel as a form of autonomy, in fact ‘a dream of autonomy and self-sufficiency’ removes self-imposed starvation from its psychological context and from the extremely anxious frame within which it is placed in the novel. Moody places Hamsun among the ‘peripheral modernists’ interested in hunger, food and modernism, against a list that includes Joyce but

from one’s external reality. Paul Auster, ‘Afterword’ in Knut Hamsun, *Hunger*, trans. by Sverre Lyngstad (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2011), pp. 249-261 (p. 261).

⁹⁴ Kristin Veel, ‘Maneuvering in Nervous Times: The Hyperlinks in Reinhard Jirgl’s “Abtrünnig”’, *The German Quarterly* 85.4 (2012), pp. 455-472 (p. 467).

⁹⁵ Martin Humpál, ‘Knut Hamsun’, in *The Literary Encyclopedia. Volume 1.3.5: Norwegian Writing and Culture*, ed. by Jakob Stougaard-Nielsen (First published 12 Sep 2008) <<https://www.litencyc.com/php/speople.php?rec=true&UID=1966>> [Accessed 19 Apr 2018]

excludes Woolf's texts.⁹⁶ Leslie Heywood generalizes starvation to reflect the 'anorexic logic' of society, stretching the concept in a way that dilutes it.⁹⁷

In her discussion of Kafka's *Ein Hungerkünstler*, Emily Troscianko has incorporated eating disorder research to interpreting starvation in texts. Troscianko shows how irrespective of the cause of starvation, be it externally or internally imposed, the sufferer's experiences and behaviour are strikingly similar:⁹⁸

[...] anorexia can be much more closely aligned with starvation than we might think: whether the undereating is voluntary or involuntary, [...] the psychology, like the physiology, are similar to the point of being in many respects indistinguishable.⁹⁹

Troscianko's original and important use of eating disorder research in literary analysis allows her to point out key errors in discussions of *Ein Hungerkünstler* (1924), which I am here applying to *Sult* and the hunger artist trope by extension. She highlights scholars' false insistence that to be anorexic is to eat nothing at all or to feel no hunger.¹⁰⁰ She underlines how commentators tend to read (not) eating as something

⁹⁶ Moody (2013), p. 227.

⁹⁷ Leslie Heywood, *Starving for their Art: The Anorexic Aesthetic in Modern Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

⁹⁸ Emily Troscianko, 'First-Person and Second-Generation Perspectives on Starvation in Kafka's "Ein Hungerkünstler"', *Style* 48.3 (2014), pp. 331-348.

⁹⁹ Troscianko (2014a), p. 334. Troscianko's interests, however, extend beyond the text to reader-response theory and the therapeutic uses of reading. For her purposes, the particularities of the historical context and cultural construction of body image are irrelevant, indeed she assumes that 'on the whole people's understanding of their minds and bodies is fairly unchanging' (p. 332) through history. I have omitted a section where Troscianko puts mental illness in inverted commas from the middle of the quotation here. For a moment, she appears to problematically suggest that mental illness is only 'culturally labelled' (p. 334) as psychological. Sørensen opens his monograph on *Sult* and starving artistry by stating that Kafka referred to the novel, of which there is no evidence. In Sørensen (2016), p. 11.

¹⁰⁰ Troscianko (2014a), pp. 331-5.

other than eating, for example as ‘a moral stance’.¹⁰¹ Such attitudes have long been widespread in Hamsun research. Kittang, for example, reduced the narrator’s hunger to inverted commas: ‘his inner emptiness, his “hunger”’, ‘this inner lack of which the hunger is the main symbol’.¹⁰² More recently, Weinstein has argued that there is no food in the novel, or in fact that the novel is uninterested in food:

We must first of all realize that *Hunger* cares little for food. [...] *Eating* seems textually off-limits, uninteresting, irrelevant. Of course, it does happen that the hero puts food in his mouth, but quite often this results in vomiting.¹⁰³

For Hamsun scholarship in Scandinavia, readings of *Sult* through disordered eating may be marginal but they are not new. Per Mæleng looked at the narrative structure of *Sult* through disordered eating already in 1994. He argued that the novel converts bulimia to an aesthetic experience: ‘i *Sult* konverteres bulimien til estetisk erfaring’.¹⁰⁴ He generalized disordered eating to the way in which the text itself operates, reading *Sult* through a ‘bulimic structure’:

Vi har å gjøre med en artikulasjon som leves og skrives ut i ambivalensen mellom det å innta og avvise, mellom det å spise/skrive uhemmet og det å tømme seg, i motsetning til en anorektisk ytringsform, hvor kontrollen og det minimale inntaket er et nødvendig produksjonsestetisk vilkår, som i deler av Kafkas dagbøker.¹⁰⁵

We are dealing with an articulation that is lived and written out in the ambivalence between taking in and rejecting, between eating/writing without constraint and emptying oneself, as opposed to an anorexic form of expression, where the control and the minimal intake is a necessary condition of aesthetic production, as in parts of Kafka’s diaries.

¹⁰¹ Troscianko (2014a), p. 331.

¹⁰² Kittang (1985), p. 307, p. 302.

¹⁰³ Weinstein (2008), p. 249.

¹⁰⁴ Per Mæleng, ‘Fysiognomier: Kommentarer til kroppen som skriftens scene. Lesning av Knut Hamsuns “Sult”’, *Edda* 94 (1994), pp. 120-33 (p. 121).

¹⁰⁵ Mæleng (1994), p. 121.

Mæleng's reading connects disordered eating, bingeing and purging, with the rhythm of the narrative, but at the same time his reading is distanced from the psychology of disordered eating: '*Sult* er, helt kort, beretningen om den bulimiske deformeringen av kropp og tekst, og rommer, som estetisk erfaring, koden for denne tekstuelle og kroppslige deformering',¹⁰⁶ '*Sult* is, in short, a story of the bulimic deformation of body and text, and contains, as an aesthetic experience, the code for this textual and bodily deformation.'

With an emphasis on the mechanistic as opposed to the psychological, Mæleng assumes that bulimia is primarily a form of bodily behaviour. Understood by psychologists today, however, bulimia is a mental illness that is bodily only in what is most visible to others. In this context, it is striking that Mæleng chooses to focus his close reading on the park bench scene and on 'bulimic dialogue' at the expense of scenes where the narrator describes eating and vomiting.

Faced with the copious material on the body in the novel, what is meant by 'the body' in *Sult* must be carefully qualified as not the body itself but how it is seen and presented by the anxious narrator. Again, Hamsun's own account of how his writing relates to the body at the time of writing *Sult* may have misled critics. In the manifesto-like essay *Fra det ubevidste sjæleliv* (*From the Unconscious Life of the Mind*), also published in 1890, Hamsun proclaimed that his new, psychological literature is directly generated by the body, that it originates from 'Blodets Hvisken, Benpibernes Bøn' (AL 17), 'the whisper of the blood, the prayer of the bone marrow.'

¹⁰⁶ Mæleng (1994), pp. 122-3.

Instead, the body in *Sult* is seen through and distanced by the narrator's anxious thinking and negative self-view. Instead of the narrator being attuned to the body or listening to its messages or whispers, his body is heavily filtered by his negative sense of self and the anxious interpretations I have outlined. When critically examining his hands, they are transformed into a face carrying an expression (S 148), and appear a different body part altogether.

All this material on the body does not show the narrator being in tune with his body or listening to its message, but attaching meanings to it that are shaped by his negative self-view. It is implausible that his still bleeding, self-inflicted stomach wound, which does not heal and is covered by dirty clothing, would not cause any pain as he claims. His attacks on the body – biting his finger, or weakening his body's size and power through starvation – are the result of the same self-view. For this reason, we must critically examine the narrator's subjective sense and experience of his own body, the language he assigns to his body; his body image.

2.5. *Sult* and Body Image

Body image is often erroneously equated with bodily appearance. Morbid obesity, for example – a health problem – is seen in popular parlance as a body image problem. Often, literary scholars also approach body image implicitly through contemporary debates, which emphasize ways in which social norms and media imagery externally impose an idealized body image. For example, Luna Donezal's recent work on the relationship between the body and shame suggests such a normative and external definition of body image:

The body image, understood as the seen body [...] can be both the body as objectified by the judgemental and limiting gaze of the other and the functional social image of the body we have when it is in flow in physical action and social relations.¹⁰⁷

Donezal suggests that the outside world, or ‘the other’, is objectifying, judgemental, or at least limiting, whereas the host of the body experiences it in neutral or positive terms, as active and ‘in flow’. This reads as a very externally driven definition of body image – particularly in the context of bodily shame and embarrassment. The phenomenologist and cognitive scientist Giovanna Colombetti’s definition of body image as ‘our sense of how our body appears to other people’ seems to better qualify body image in terms of an internally generated impression.¹⁰⁸ Colombetti, who works on embodied emotion and more recently on how emotion is distributed to the material world, may not emphasize that this image or ‘sense’ is codified into language by the mind which constructs it, but her definition nevertheless highlights body image as a subjective construct: as the imagined quality of how our body looks to others.

Furthermore, body image distortion is not only a question of imagining the body as unusual, unattractive, or disproportionate, but of how much relative importance is placed on the body irrespective of such evaluations. Other areas of life are marginalized at the expense of food and thoughts of the body. In psychology, this is known as the overvaluation or over-evaluation of physical appearance, defined as ‘judging self-worth largely, or even exclusively, in terms of weight and shape and

¹⁰⁷ Luna Donezal, *The Body and Shame: Phenomenology, Feminism, and the Socially Shaped Body* (London: Lexington Books, 2015), p. 84.

¹⁰⁸ Colombetti, Giovanna, ‘Alluring Objects, Scaffolded Minds: How We Use the World to Transform Our Affective Life’, lecture delivered at The Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities on 31 January 2018.

how to control them.’¹⁰⁹ Body image distortion is, then, a question of both the perceived appearance of the body and of its relative importance. Body image may be experienced as social but it originates from the self.

In *Sult*, bodily appearance and body size take on an exaggerated importance. Although he is starving and homeless, Hamsun’s narrator invests more energy in hiding his body than trying to feed it. Even the narrator’s suicidal ideation is interspersed with concerns over how he will look when discovered:

Jeg lagde mig i de vaade Klæder; jeg havde en uklar Tanke om, at jeg kanske vilde dø om Natten, og jeg brugte min sidste Kraft til at ordne op en Smule i min Seng, saa det kunde se lidt ordentlig ud omkring mig om Morgen. Jeg foldede Hænderne og valgte min Stilling. (S 151)

I went to bed in my wet clothes. I had a vague idea that I might die during the night, and I used my last strength to fix up my bed a little so it would look fairly tidy around me in the morning. I folded my hands and chose my position. (L 146)

The fantasy of a clean, private, honourable death suggests pathological, perfectionist concern over how one appears to others. ‘En Smule’ is here used idiomatically to indicate a small amount or ‘a little’ as Lyngstad translates it, but its literal meaning – a crumb – suggests the narrator tidying the bed of food remains. Finally, although the narrator puts great effort in, ‘min sidste Kraft’, he again belittles the results of his efforts as ‘lidt ordentlig’.

¹⁰⁹ Christopher Fairburn, *Cognitive Behavior Therapy and Eating Disorders* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2008), p. 8. For a clinical definition of the overvaluation of shape and weight, see also pp. 7–22 and pp. 96–101 in the same volume. See also Jenniver Svaldi and Brunna Tuschen-Caffier, ‘Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia Nervosa’, in *The Wiley Handbook of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. Volume II*, ed. by Winfried Rief (Malden, MA: Wiley, 2014), pp. 567–591 (pp. 568–569).

As the body is inflated in importance by the narrator, issues independent of the body – professional and personal success, family relations – become conditional on its appearance and size. By changing and regulating the body, the narrator believes he can change external circumstances. It is in this area, the overvaluation of the body, that *Sult* makes most use of body image distortion as a literary mechanism.

Reading the body as autonomous or independent of the narrator's psychology denies what Øystein Rottem has called 'en "psykofysiologisk roman"'.¹¹⁰ The narrator's starvation, his body and how negatively he views it are not bodily matters but psychological experiences coded into language.

In *Sult* body image has no spectators, instead it has an imagined audience; it is to this social aspect of body image and anxiety that I will now turn. The inhibiting fear of being seen in an unflattering light should not be mistaken for the narrator wanting to be alone.

2.6. Social Performance and the Body

In the remaining sections of this chapter I will discuss ways in which the anxious framework I have outlined shapes the narrator's interactions with his environment. I will begin with his social attitudes before I move on to discuss his relationship with the city in the next section.

¹¹⁰ Rottem (2002), p. 50.

Ostensibly, *Sult* is limited in its social dimension. Particularly against Hamsun's later *Heimatroman* period which spanned several decades, critics have seen *Sult* as devoid of social concerns, a novel of total interiority. To many critics, the narrator is an arrogant loner, someone who 'refuses to enter the paradigms of bourgeois life.'¹¹¹ His hunger has been read as wholly asocial, 'hans sult er et fullstendig asosialt fenomen', his erratic behaviour as 'reluctance to be judged under the normal conditions that define identity and social status'.¹¹² His solitude has been understood as self-imposed, where Hamsun's protagonists simply 'cast themselves out [...] on the enormous wheel of their own pride'.¹¹³ The narrator's interactions with others are indeed characterized by a harshness that borders on belligerence, and when it comes to women, a predatory desire to humiliate or extract a reaction of any kind from them. At the same time, his arrogance is easily punctured. In this section, I will argue that when his behaviour and attitudes are examined through the framework of anxious thinking, the narrator can instead be read as a character motivated by the desire to be social, anxious about the unavailability of conventional family structures.

In contrast to Hamsun's other work of the 1890s – *Pan* (1894), *Victoria* (1898), or *Redaktør Lynge*, with its thinly veiled caricatures of the Kristiania literary and publishing establishment – *Sult* seems less a social novel in that it contains few characters and little dialogue. In *Fra det ubevidste Sjæleliv*, Hamsun presented his authorship in opposition to writing that addressed social and familial issues, espousing a view antithetical to his Norwegian predecessors, notably Ibsen and Lie.

¹¹¹ Humpál (1998), p. 45.

¹¹² Rottem (2002), p. 48. Rees (2016), p. 94.

¹¹³ Wood (2005), p. 104.

Ibsen's *Et dukkehjem* (*A Doll's House*, 1879) and Jonas Lie's *Familien paa Gilje* (*The Family at Gilje*, 1883) put family conflicts at the heart of their literary projects.

When read through the narrator's anxiety, however, *Sult* shows attitudes to the family, and to the role of women within it, that contradict these claims. Without the framework of anxiety I have outlined, this social conservatism of *Sult* is less evident. Reading *Sult* in exclusively stylistic contrast to Hamsun's other novels of the 1890s, as well as in translation, can further conceal its social conservatism.

At the start of this chapter, I showed that the narrator attaches familial meanings to his professional relations, making professional rejections more hurtful than necessary. Beyond his aspirations towards authorship, the narrator casts Kristiania characters as family members: not only is the pawnbroker called 'the real' uncle, but Ylajali, quite possibly a streetwalker, is elevated to a bride of a kind in her black dress – at the time, the colour of wedding dresses in Scandinavia – and ring-embellished umbrella. The powerful final image of the novel has the narrator longingly gaze at the Kristiania skyline formed of well-lit homes:

Ude i Fjorden retted jeg mig op engang, vaad af Feber og Mathed, saa indad mod Land og sagde Farvel for denne Gang til Byen, til Kristiania, hvor Vinduerne lyste saa blankt fra alle Hjem. (S 224)

Once out in the fjord I straightened up, wet with fever and fatigue, looked in towards the shore and said goodbye for now to the city, to Kristiania, where the windows shone so brightly in every home. (L 217)

Again, the narrator's emotional reasoning and overgeneralization shape his vision. The city as he has experienced it has no happy, well-to-do families. Instead, he sees families in flux:

Et Flyttelæs rulled langsomt forbi dem; det maatte være en fordreven Familje, som skifted Bopæl udenfor Flyttetiden. Dette tænkte jeg mig øjeblikkelig. (S 186)

A removals van rolled slowly by; it must have been an evicted family, since they were moving at this unusual time of year. This thought came to me immediately.¹¹⁴ (L 180)

The narrator witnesses a family moving their moth-eaten possessions; he interprets them as ‘fordreven’, evicted or displaced; like the dramatized image of the burnt-down smithy which highlighted changes to the city’s economic structure, a family home has here been dramatically emptied.

Despite the narrator’s elementary human desire for a family and shelter, there is no promise in the novel that such structures are available to him. The only nuclear family in the novel is violent and uncaring: with horror, the narrator witnesses grandchildren tormenting a disabled grandfather, violence in which no one intervenes. Kittang highlights this ‘demonic family life to which he clings desperately’ as means toward a ‘grotesque social integration’.¹¹⁵

Against a narrator with a strong desire for social contact, the city is described as absolutely atomized in its social structure. The odd names given to characters are socially alienating: Ylajali is not far removed in its strange orthography from ‘Kubooa’, the odd name the narrator invents for his suffering, foreign in sound yet resembling no foreign language in particular. The anonymity of the narrator and Ylajali, both distanced by aliases, may echo Hamsun’s own nervousness about a

¹¹⁴ Lyngstad’s ‘moving van’ here revised to ‘removals van’.

¹¹⁵ Kittang (1985), p. 302. Kittang nevertheless reads the scene as ‘positive signification [...] it resques the hero form the dangers of total regression’. Kittang (1985), p. 302.

permanent pen-name – he sometimes published anonymously, changed his name from the original Knud Pedersen first to Knut Pedersen, published some works under the name Kn, and finally gave up on the patronymic altogether in favour of the place-name Hamsund, or Hamsun.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, the name Ylajali – although later familiar to all in Oslo as a celebrated restaurant – is deliberately uncanny. It emphasizes the theatrical and manufactured quality of Ylajali's character, as she waits for the narrator under the street lamp in the manner of an actress ready to deliver her lines.

Even marginal characters are presented as uncaring. They speak very little and barely acknowledge the narrator: the priest is not there, and Cisler, the music dealer, turns his back when he realizes the nature of the narrator's visit. Again, the anxious biases of the narrator colour his social experience. It is before the narrator asks to see the pastor that he has already mockingly adopted the pastor's judgemental voice: 'Og da skal du slaa Hænderne sammen og se ud som en ren Satan til at tro paa Naaden' (S 95), 'And then you shall clasp your hands together and appear like a devil at believing'.

Sult does not glorify solitude, or the experience of interiority, which is made up of spending time with one's own thoughts. Instead, no alternative to isolation is offered. I argued earlier that the narrator's anxious thinking and low self-esteem prevent him from connecting his professional situation to that of others, privatizing his experience of homelessness and unemployment. Similarly, he fails to see himself in others even

¹¹⁶ Richard N. Current, 'Introduction', in *Knut Hamsun Remembers America. Essays and Stories 1885-1949*, ed. and trans. by Richard N. Current (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003), pp. 1-17 (p. 2).

when characters that mirror him exactly appear, inviting self-recognition. The man he meets by the pawn-shop has no name, smells, is hungry, is pawning his possessions, and has failed to pay the rent. His exclamation of disbelief, ““Nej, er det dig?”” (S 108), which Lyngstad translates as ““Oh, it’s you!”” (L 104), seems a recognition of how low the narrator himself has fallen, but this realization fails to register as likeness.

Instead, the narrator prioritizes not looking poor over maintaining social contact. He fears being recognized around the university area and avoids it. He has been understood by Ylajali to be a bohemian drunk, to whom poverty and poor presentation are a choice, revealed by her surprise at his admission of poverty (S 167).

Although its narrative style would allow it, *Sult* does not celebrate the psychological freedoms that the weakening of familial bonds and anonymity could afford the narrator. This positive potential of internal freedom in the city has been emphasized by David Frisby in his glossing of Georg Simmel’s *Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben* (1903):

Simmel proceeds to draw an ostensibly positive connection between the reserve and indifference of much metropolitan interaction and the creation of a kind and amount of individual freedom. [...]

The transition from small town to city coincides with the weakening of the bonds of the individual to the group, the weakening in general of the inner unity of the group and the greater freedom of the metropolitan individual compared to the small town dweller. In the metropolis, the reserve and indifference that contribute to the independence of the individual are felt most keenly in the urban crowd, in which the bodily proximity and narrowness of space make the mental distance especially visible.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ David Frisby, *Cityscapes of Modernity. Critical Explorations* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), p. 154.

Instead, *Sult* reads like a perversion of the flâneur narrative; the narrator is a flâneur who does not want to be seen, but has no other place to go but public places. Unlike the classical flâneur who walks the streets to see and to be seen, the narrator cannot bear an audience. His city strolling is portrayed as devastatingly shameful. His worry about how he is perceived even extends to prostitutes who offer their services to him.

2.7. The City

2.7.1. Introduction

I began by arguing that Hamsun's Kristiania, a city with a modern economy based on the circulation of capital, goods, and people, deems authorship, the work of creative production, to be obsolete. I showed how the narrator's aspirations towards authorship are blocked by his anxious thinking, generated by very particular readings of the power relations he is subject to and a misreading of the economic difficulty he faces. It is only the mature narrator who suggests that the experiencing narrator's suffering may not have been caused by an individual failure alone, but was the product of his environment. The elliptical opening sentence of *Sult*, all we have by way of a more experienced narrator's preface, frames the city as a kind of urban purgatory, which has the same, levelling effect on all who populate it:

Det var i den Tid, jeg gik omkring og sulted i Kristiania, denne forunderlige By, som ingen forlader, før han har faaet Mærker af den ... (S 7)

It was in those days when I wandered about hungry in Kristiania, that strange city which no one leaves before it has set its mark upon him ... (L 3)

Here, the mature narrator suggests that the city itself is a kind of co-author of the narrator's condition, or at least one of the main agents of the narrative. These marks

(Mærker) can be read as bodily, indeed as bruises, as Peter Sjølyst-Jackson has noted.¹¹⁸ Although not representative of Hamsun's opening sentences of the 1890s – *Ny Jord* (*Shallow Soil*, 1893) opens with a description of the city and its traffic as the sun rises, *Mysterier* (*Mysteries*, 1892) by introducing Nagel's character – it is not unique. *Redaktør Lyngre* has a similarly prophetic and elliptical opening sentence:

Så mangt, så mangt som kan hende i verden (RL 7)

So much, so much can happen in this world

The events of *Redaktør Lyngre* are presented as happening in the world, not specifically within the city, although the novel is also set in Kristiania. The city has a self-contained quality from the start in *Sult* which 'verden', this world, does not – *Sult* restricts the events to the city, and it is to this particular reading of a city that I will now turn.

Critics like to note that the Dano-Norwegian 'By' is as much a town as a city, underlining that Hamsun did not call Kristiania a 'Storby', the equivalent of the German *Großstadt*.¹¹⁹ The perceived size of a 'storby' (today's Norwegian and Danish) or a 'storstad' (Swedish) varies slightly across Scandinavia. Beyond legal definitions in classifications of municipalities and cities, even today most capitals of the Nordic countries barely qualify as 'storbyer'.

In the now-classic Lacanian interpretation emphasizing the narcissism of the protagonist and his violently Oedipal relation to the father figures of the novel,

¹¹⁸ Peter Sjølyst-Jackson, *Troubling Legacies. Migration, Modernism, and Fascism in the Case of Knut Hamsun* (London: Continuum, 2010), p. 20.

¹¹⁹ For example, Sjølyst-Jackson (2010), p. 22.

Kittang read the topographical accuracy of the city as the only tangible character in the novel: ‘I ein merkeleg motsetnad til det diffuse og anonyme tekst-eg’et står den topografiske presisjonen i delar av byskildringane’,¹²⁰ ‘The topographical precision of parts of the city descriptions stands in a strange contrast to the diffuse and anonymous textual “I”’. Kittang goes on:

På den eine sida rommer teksten ei ferdig verd, faststøypt med sine gater, bygningar og namn. Men denne verda er hovudpersonen avstengd frå: han registrerer den berre some in straum av detaljar, presise, men utan djupn og tidsmessig fastleik.¹²¹

On the one hand the text comprises a fixed world, solidly cast with its streets, buildings and place-names. But the protagonist is shut out from this world: he experiences it only as a stream of details, precise, but lacking depth and temporal substantiality.

I argued that Hamsun’s narrator is economically and socially rejected by the city: he is cut off from productive participation in the circulation of people and goods that it generates. Participation in the city’s modern economy is neither energizing nor conducive to authorship. Whereas Virginia Woolf famously wrote of *The Hours*: ‘I like London for writing it’, *Sult* presents the city as restrictive, not liberating, to its experiencing narrator.¹²²

2.7.2 The Generic City

Before I move on to city walking as it relates to the image of the body, I will qualify Hamsun’s writing of the city in the context of Nordic modernism. I will argue that although topographically recognizable, the city as presented in *Sult* is generic,

¹²⁰ Kittang (1984), p. 37.

¹²¹ Kittang (1984), p. 37.

¹²² Virginia Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf, Volume II: 1920-1924*, ed. by Anne Olivier Bell (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), p. 301.

divested of a specific national context, and made narrow and constraining by the narrator's anxious thinking.

Situating modernist novels in space is a question of both a country's position within the global literary space, as Pascale Casanova has influentially argued, and that of any particular city within it, as Malcolm Bradbury argued already in *Modernism*.¹²³ Bradbury saw the modernist city as 'the distillation of many capitals and nations'.¹²⁴ This hybrid quality of Kristiania in *Sult* has been commented on by many critics. John Brumo has argued that the urban experience was novel to Norway at the time and is to an extent fictitious: Hamsun wrote much of *Sult* in Copenhagen, a city much more cosmopolitan and greater in size.¹²⁵ Rottem has highlighted how the city itself is not particularly Norwegian in architectural terms: 'Selv hovestaden, Kristiania, var for en småby å regne malt med europeiske mål'¹²⁶ – 'even the capital Kristiania was, for a small city, modelled after a European example'. Situating *Sult* is then a question of both the novel's setting in the city of Kristiania, and of how 'Norwegian' the novel is as a result: two separate, if interrelated, questions.

Whilst retaining a familiar topography, Hamsun anonymizes the Norwegian setting of the novel and reworks Kristiania into a generic European city. The capital is presented

¹²³ Pascale Casanova, *La République mondiale des lettres* (Paris: Seuil, 1999). Malcolm Bradbury, 'The Cities of Modernism' in *Modernism 1890-1930. A Guide to European Literature*, ed. by Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 96-104.

¹²⁴ Bradbury (1991), p. 103.

¹²⁵ John Brumo, 'The Modern Element in Hamsun's Work', trans. by Ruth Johnson, <<http://hamsunsenteret.no/en/knut-hamsun/essays-on-hamsuns-writings/79-the-modern-element-in-hamsuns-work>> [Accessed 3 Apr 2018]

¹²⁶ Rottem (2002), p. 47.

as a city of central boulevards, university quarters, official residences – architecture which cities use to project themselves in relation to one another.

In architectural theory, the phrase ‘generic city’ is associated with Rem Koolhaas’ essay of the same title, part of his monumental 1995 treatise. Although Koolhaas focuses on the postmodern city with their highways and mass car traffic, he connects the ‘generic city’ to urbanization itself: ‘The definitive move away from the countryside, from agriculture, to the city is not a move to the city as we knew it: it is a move to the Generic City’.¹²⁷ Like airports, modern cities are generic in that they resemble each other more than they reflect the countries to which they are attached.

Kristiania is, then, generic not because it is unrecognizable as Kristiania or Oslo, or anonymized by an international architectural style that takes no local form. Instead, *Sult* is set in parts of the city which relate more to other cities than to the rest of the country: the only corners of Norway where a parliament, a royal palace, and a university are all situated on a long boulevard. The narrator’s wanderings, while extending to Majorstuen, then a less central part of town than today, and to the outskirts of the city, are centered around Karl Johan and its surrounding blocks – the part of Oslo that has a generic, even replaceable quality to it; it could be any city.

Furthermore, what distinguishes Oslo from the other Scandinavian capitals is its dramatic natural setting on the fjord, which is underemphasized in *Sult* – in stark contrast not only to Hamsun’s other works but also to other Norwegian novels which

¹²⁷ Office for Metropolitan Architecture, Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau, ‘The Generic City’, in *Small, Medium, Large, Extra-Large*, ed. by Jennifer Sigler (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1998), p. 1250. First published in 1995.

present Norwegian cities and villages held by mountains. A notable example is Jonas Lie's *Familien paa Gilje*, with its emphasis on the uniquely dramatic Norwegian landscape, which dictates where towns can be built:

Luften lå frostblå med lette rosetinter alle de skarpe kanter, skar og topper, der som en rekke gigantiske sneskavler tårn i tårn svimlet opp mot horisonten. Nedenunder klappet bakker og ligger bygden til med hvite vegger, stetse trangere og trangere, nærmere og nærmere, alltid mere stengende.¹²⁸

The air was blue with frost, a pale rose tint on the sharp edges, ravines, and peaks, which, like a row of gigantic piles of snow, tower upon tower, spin up towards the horizon. Below, the hills and slopes shut the village with white walls, ever tighter and tighter, closer and closer, always more enclosing.

In *Sult*, the fjord is only directly mentioned in the final sentence, when the narrator is already out at sea, literally out in the fjord, 'Ude i Fjorden' (S 224). For much of the novel, the most distinctive and Norwegian element of the city is absent altogether.

On the whole, Kristiania does not fulfil the criteria of physical or linguistic displacement that Bradbury set for the modernist novel of the city. Kristiania is not presented as polyglot. The narrator thinks that his accent is noticeable:

Forresten havde han straks hørt, at jeg var fremmed; der var noget i mit Tonefald, som sagde ham det. (S 28)

Anyway, he had heard right away that I was a stranger, something in my accent had told him. (L 24)

The narrator does have an accent, but so would anyone who had moved to the capital from elsewhere in Norway. As 'fremmed' as he may feel, he is not an exile. He has not left his country of origin. He speaks the language and knows people in the city. Instead, he feels exiled in his own national capital solely by virtue of its being a city. I

¹²⁸ Jonas Lie, *Familien på Gilje* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1993), p. 3.

will now move on to discussing how this depiction of the city as generic stands out in the context of Scandinavian modernism.

2.7.3. The City in Nordic Modernism

The reference text on the modern city in Scandinavian literature is August Strindberg's novel *Röda rummet* (*The Red Room*, 1879). *Röda rummet* and *Sult* are often read as interrelated. *Sult* recycles many elements from *Röda rummet*, such as the chapter endings where prices of text are highlighted, its protagonist's nonsense scribbles on paper, even the editor's terrifying scissors.

The city and the self, however, have a dramatically different hierarchical relation in *Röda rummet* from that in *Sult*. The famous opening of *Röda rummet* shows Stockholm, the Swedish capital, at a distance from the Mosebacke park. Titled 'Stockholm i fågelperspektiv', a bird's-eye view of Stockholm, in a single, continuous cinematic shot, the opening passage follows the movement of the light and wind over the city, showing a city brought to life and constructed by the artist's eye. The city is given breath by the narrator in a description that has been compared to 'conventional landscape painting' which owes much to Balzac's Paris.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ Harry G. Carlson, 'Landscape as Mediator in Strindberg's Search for the Other' in *August Strindberg and the Other: New Critical Approaches*, ed. by Poul Houe, Sven Hakon Rossel, and Göran Stockenström (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), pp. 77-89 (p. 82). The Balzacian elements of this scene have been widely documented, for example in Anna Westerståhl Stenport, 'Imagining a New Stockholm: Strindberg's "Gamla Stockholm" and the Construction of Metropolitan Space', *Scandinavian Studies* 74.4 (2002), pp. 483-504 (p. 483).

Distance from the city is, of course, a commonplace literary device which allows the narrative to describe an impression of a whole city: famously in Aschenbach's approach to Venice by sea as opposed to by train in *Der Tod in Venedig* (1912), or indeed in the ending of *Sult*.¹³⁰ Distance permits perspective with which the narrator can look at the city. Here, the same effect is instead achieved by altitude: 'Långt nere under honom bullrade den nyvaknade staden',¹³¹ 'Far below him rose the clamour of the newly awakened city'.¹³²

Strindberg, then, distances the city by altitude, not by time as Hamsun does in the opening sentence of *Sult*. The protagonist Arvid Falk's rejection of the city comes from a place of strength and height, in polar opposition to Hamsun's narrator who never acquires any critical or physical distance from the city in the novel. *Röda rummet* has Falk, inspired and challenged by the energy of the city, curse the city, in fact challenge it to a duel:

[...] allt gjorde ett intryck av liv och rörlighet, som tycktes väcka den unge herrens energi, ty nu hade hans ansikte antagit ett uttryck av trots och levnadslust och beslutsamhet, och då han lutade sig över barriären och såg ner på staden under sina fötter, var det som om han betraktade en fiende; hans näsborrar vidgades, hans ögon flammade och han lyfte sin knutna hand, som om han velat utmana den stackars staden eller hota den.¹³³

all this had the impression of life and movement, which appeared to awaken the energy of the young man, for now his face had acquired an expression of defiance, vitality, and determination, and as he leaned over the railing and watched the city at his feet, it was as if were gazing at an enemy; his nostrils flared, his eyes blazed and he raised his clenched fist, as if he wanted to challenge the poor city to a fight or to threaten it.

¹³⁰ Thomas Mann, 'Der Tod in Venedig' in Thomas Mann, *Frühe Erzählungen*, ed. by Terence J. Reed (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2004), pp. 501-592 (p. 522).

¹³¹ August Strindberg, *Röda rummet. Skildringar ur artist- och författarlivet* (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1957), p. 6.

¹³² August Strindberg, *The Red Room. Scenes of Artistic and Literary Life*, trans. by Elizabeth Sprigge (London: Dent, 1967), p. 2. Sprigge's 'town' revised to 'city'.

¹³³ Strindberg (1957), pp. 6-7.

Under Falk's curse, which recalls Rastignac's defiance of Paris at the end of *Le Père Goriot* (1835), Stockholm becomes a pitiable character, 'den stackars staden', 'the poor city', not the stage for a cruel human experiment as it does in *Sult*. The power relations between the city and the self are diametrically opposed in the two novels.

A much closer comparison to *Sult* in both time, subject matter, and narrative method in a Nordic context is a short novel by the Finnish writer Juhani Aho, published in the same year of 1890. Like *Sult*, *Yksin* (Alone) stands out as a novel of urban experience which evokes full immersion in the city. It contrasts with its prolific author's other work, much of which is set in mythologized versions of remote regions of Finland.¹³⁴ As in *Sult*, *Yksin* has a writer-narrator wander around a city and document his fleeting impressions, which are predominantly negative. His city experience culminates in a relationship with a prostitute which ultimately collapses, as does the relationship with Ylajali in *Sult*. *Yksin* is set in equivalent corners of Helsinki as *Sult* is of Kristiania: along the main boulevard Esplanadi – the little of Helsinki that could be seen as Haussmannian – and the market square and southern harbour.

¹³⁴ Bjørn Rudborg has documented Hamsun's later interest in Aho's work and discussion of Aho in a Dagbladet article in 1918. In Rudborg, *Knut Hamsun og Finland* (Porsgrunn: Norgesforlaget, 2010). The two writers met only later, with Aho's wife Jenny Soldan-Brofeldt serving as Hamsun's simultaneous interpreter when Hamsun visited Helsinki. In Rudborg (2010), p. 77. Tom Conner is surprised that Hamsun would have chosen 'to begin his foreign sojourn in the cultural backwaters of Finland of all places', stressing the country's cold climate, perceived peripherality and backwardness, and the lack of gardens in its capital. In Tom Conner, 'Going Off the Beaten Path. Knut Hamsun's Forays into Travel Writing', *Nordlit* 38 (2016), pp. 182-203 (p. 194). By contrast, Rudborg underlines the existing contacts Hamsun had to Finnish cultural figures, the linguistic connections between Finland and Norway, Hamsun's familiarity with Finnish literature, and his interest in the country's political situation. See Rudborg (2010).

In contrast to *Sult*, the setting of *Yksin* is divided between the Finnish countryside, Helsinki and Paris, where the narrator visits the universal exhibition.¹³⁵ As in Rilke's *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* (1910), where Paris is the city of decay, the morally dubious elements of Aho's narrative are set in Paris.¹³⁶

Paris – here the representative capital of modernity as opposed to a real city with its own local culture – is explicitly compared to Helsinki by Aho, as the rejected narrator tries to turn his prostitute to a wife and the Finnish capital to Paris:

Ja kun tulemme Helsinkiin, niin minä sanon, että hän on minun vaimoni, ja kun kävelemme bulevardilla...
 'Onko siellä bulevardejakin sinun maassasi...?'
 'On siellä bulevardejakin...' (Y 98)

And when we arrive in Helsinki, I will say that she is my wife, and when we walk on the boulevard...
 'Are there even boulevards in your country...?'
 'We do have boulevards, too...'

The strict separation between the two cities is blurred by Aho. This multipolarity of cities, in Scandinavian context nearly always related to Paris, is notably absent in *Sult*.

The absence of such comparisons is not only a product of Kristiania's size. In *Albertine disparue* (1927), Venice is introduced by Proust's narrator as a modulation

¹³⁵ For Paris as a reference city in Scandinavian (here Swedish, Norwegian, and Danish) modernism, see Sylvain de Briens, *Paris: Laboratoire de la littérature scandinave moderne 1880-1905* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2010). De Briens excludes Aho's Parisian novel alongside all writing from Finland from his study, that in Finnish for linguistic reasons, that in Swedish because he sees it as little influenced by Paris. In De Briens (2010), p. 27.

¹³⁶ See Pirjo Lyytikäinen, 'Eiffeltorni ja korpikuusi. Ranskalaisuus ja suomalaisuus Juhani Ahon tuotannossa', in *Pariisista Iisalmeen. Juhani Ahon ranskalainen kausi*, ed. by Jyrki Nummi, Riikka Rossi, and Saija Isomaa (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2011). Ebook edition. Although the ageing narrator's pursuit of an underage girl in Helsinki is presented as innocent, reasoning which Lyytikäinen follows, the reader may have doubts.

of Combray, the small village where the narrator spent his childhood summers. The bell tower of St Mark's Basilica reminds the narrator of the church in Saint-Hilaire; the piazzas recall the market square. The Venetian city dwellers emerge from their houses to stroll:

Comme à Combray les bonnes gens de la rue de l'Oiseau, dans cette nouvelle vie aussi les habitants sortaient bien des maisons alignées l'une à côté de l'autre dans la grande rue [...]¹³⁷

A small market town in France is hardly Venice. But the similar functions of the buildings allow the narrator to observe the opulence of the Venetian façades, while the shared architectural vocabulary allows him to notice and read the differences between the two locations.

By contrast, in *Sult* the same city performs all functions. It has no foil or counterpoint – a role normally served by actual Paris, as in Rilke's *Aufzeichnungen*, where a modern Paris is contrasted with a historical, idealized Denmark, or in the case of my example here, the mythologized Paris of Aho's *Yksin*, where the idea of Paris allows Aho to evade censorship and experiment with moral transgressions.

In sum, the hierarchy between the individual and the city, where the city is powerful and the self is not, and the absence of alternative, mirroring cities or locations, sets the city of *Sult* apart in Scandinavian context. In addition, the narrator experiences the city as a restrictive grid through his anxiety. Even the sky – a conventional image of freedom – closes in on the city, limiting it as opposed to opening it up:

¹³⁷ Marcel Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu* (IV), ed. by Jean-Yves Tadié (Paris: Gallimard [Pléiade], 1989), p. 203.

Gaderne var blanke af Regn, som havde faldt paa Morgenstunden, Himlen hang raa og sid over Byen, og der var ingen Steder et Solglimt at se. (S 40)

The streets were glistening with the rain that had fallen in the early morning, the sky hung raw and heavy over the city, and you couldn't see a glimpse of sun anywhere. (L 36)

Similarly, when the narrator of *Yksin* is desperate, the tree-lined boulevard in Helsinki momentarily morphs to a vaulted ceiling that closes in on the city street:

Bulevardinkadun tuuheat puut ovat synkkänä holvina pääni päällä. (Y 9)

The dense trees along Bulevardi form a dark vault over me.

Boulevards and streets are wide and open, but they are here described as physically and psychologically narrow. In contrast to Woolf, for whom London can be a pleasurable, open, and free city, Hamsun's city is a grid, a psychologically constraining space. What Bradbury called the 'pull and push of the city, its attraction and repulsion' is, then, heavily weighted to the latter by the anxiety of Hamsun's narrator.¹³⁸

The absolute break between leaving and staying in the city emphasizes the restrictive and limiting quality of Hamsun's city. The city and the outside world are strictly separated from each other. Anika Hillmann has recently interpreted the narrator's final departure from the city on the ship *Copégoro* as an open-ended journey.¹³⁹ Yet the Finnish crew of the *Copégoro* is an obvious reference to the mass emigration of

¹³⁸ Bradbury (1991), p. 97.

¹³⁹ Anika Hillmann, *Die Großstadt in der skandinavischen Literatur: Analysiert anhand der Romane Hærværk, Rand, Röda Rummet, Sult und Stuk* (Hamburg: Diplomica Verlag, 2013), p. 24.

Scandinavians to the United States.¹⁴⁰ The problem of emigration was so grave that a society for limiting it, Selskabet til Emigrationens Indskrænkning, was established in Norway in 1908.¹⁴¹

The city of *Sult* creates anxiety without the technological advances with which the period and its literature are so often associated. With the exception of clocks, Kristiania carries few of the technological markers of urban modernity Beard identified as causes for nervousness.¹⁴² By contrast, power lines cut through the market square of Helsinki first as disturbing and alien, but later as integrated into the city in *Yksin*.

De Briens has emphasized the natural environment integrated into the cityscape as the defining feature of the city in Scandinavian modernism:

Contrairement à la prose urbaine de Paris ou de Londres, les descriptions romanesques des villes scandinaves laissent une place importante aux espaces naturels tels que les parcs ou les jardins.¹⁴³

De Briens reads the forest scenes of *Sult* – where the narrator sleeps rough at the outskirts of the city – as an escape from city life. Yet falling asleep requires for the narrator to have ‘kæmped og stred med Vrede og Frygt’ (S 50), ‘fought and battled fear and anger’ (L 45-6). De Briens may mistake the narrator’s desire to give up on life as momentary relaxation; Sjølyst-Jackson has highlighted how Hamsun’s

¹⁴⁰ The Copégoro is manned by a Swedish speaker sailing under the Russian flag, a Finn (S 223).

¹⁴¹ Jonathan W. Moses, *Emigration and Political Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 113.

¹⁴² Beard (1881), p. 96-192.

¹⁴³ De Briens, ‘Topographies littéraires de la modernité. Copenhague, Oslo (Kristiania) et Stockholm lus par August Strindberg, Herman Bang et Knut Hamsun’, *Le Globe. Revue genevoise de géographie* 152.1 (2012), pp. 7-21.

protagonists leave cities or towns more often through suicide or death than for work in the New World.¹⁴⁴ The narrator's desire to sleep in the woods reads as a similar death-wish. The city is never given an alternative in the form of agrarian fantasies of nature within *Sult*, which Hamsun favoured in other novels.

As opposed to the total atomization with which Paris is described, the contained impersonality of the Nordic city is presented as liberating in *Yksin*. The narrator describes his stay at an upscale hotel-restaurant:

Miksi ne sanovat, että ravintolahuoneelta puuttuu personallisuutta? Siksikö, ettei siinä näy asujan omaa leimaa, että se ei herätä muistoja kohtauksista hänen elämässään? Mutta olenhan minä elänyt puolen ikääni ravintoloissa. Nuo tuollaiset mykät tuolit, sohvat ja pöydät, jotka kaikissa ovat toistensa näköiset, ne ovat minulle kuin perintöhuonekaluja. (Y 10-11)

Why do they say that a rented room lacks personality? Is it because no mark of the occupant can be seen on it, it arouses no memories of events in his life? But I have lived half my life in rented rooms. Those mute chairs, sofas and tables, which everywhere look alike, are to me like family heirlooms.

By contrast, the room of the narrator of *Sult* is no place for human habitation, 'mit Værelse, hvor alt var mørkt og tomt' (S 65), 'my completely dark and empty room' (L 61). Rented rooms threaten the narrator's individual identity to the point at which he risks ceasing to exist as an individual:

[...] dette tomme Værelse, hvis Gulv gynged op og ned for hvert Skridt jeg tog henover det, var som en gisten, uhyggelig Ligkiste [...] (S 8)

This empty room, where the floor rocked up and down at every step I took, was like a horrible, broken-down coffin. (L 4)

¹⁴⁴ Sjølyst-Jackson (2010), p. 80.

Any potential for freedom in the anonymity of the city is interpreted as a rejection in *Sult*: the city, modern society and its economy are absolutely atomizing to the narrator.

2.7.4. 'Electric letters' - Writing the City

I have shown Kristiania to be a generic city shaped by anxiety, self-contained and devoid of direct comparisons to other cities, and in particular to Paris, the reference city in Scandinavian writing of the time. As I approach my discussion of Kafka's *Der Verschollene*, set in the United States, I will move on to look at how Hamsun's writings about American life, in particular a series of newspaper articles titled 'Fra Amerika' (1885), satirize but also evaluate innovative authorship as it relates to the modern city. Hamsun lived in the United States on two occasions, from 1882 to 1884, and again from 1886 to 1888. Like most immigrants from the Nordic countries, he lived in the Upper Midwest – first in Elroy, Wisconsin, then in Minneapolis, Chicago, in rural North Dakota, and again in Minneapolis.¹⁴⁵

Scholars have found that Hamsun's exposure to American cities influenced his depiction of Kristiania: in this section I will focus on 'electric letter-writing', an image which made its way from the polemical writings to *Sult* with important modulations. The earliest incarnation of the electric letter-writing scene appeared in

¹⁴⁵ For a detailed account of Hamsun's movements in the U.S., see Richard N. Current, 'Introduction', in Knut Hamsun, *Knut Hamsun Remembers America*, ed. and tr. by Current (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003), pp. 1-9.

an article entitled 'Fra Amerika', which Hamsun wrote for the newspaper *Dagbladet*. It appeared as a two-part serial, on 12 and 14 February 1885.¹⁴⁶

In contrast to Kafka who never visited the country, Hamsun would have been in a prime position to write a novel about nervousness and the Americanized, or even an American city. In *American Nervousness*, Beard visualized the apocalyptic spread of neurasthenia from America to Europe as both an epidemic and a technological invasion: 'as Europe becomes Americanized [...] neurasthenia, with its train of symptoms invades Great Britain and the Continent.'¹⁴⁷

The relation between Hamsun's American experiences and his depiction of city life in *Sult* is a matter of dispute. An early, detailed study examining Hamsun's literary relationship to America by Barbara G. Morgridge denied any influence on *Sult* from Hamsun's American experiences, a view that has been countered by many scholars, notably Monika Žagar and Mark B. Sandberg.¹⁴⁸ However, Morgridge convincingly read Hamsun's American writings as 'severely critical of American materialism at the expense of national distinction in literature and the arts'.¹⁴⁹ Morgridge also showed that Hamsun's later aversion to the American writings had more to do with their inaccuracies and misrepresentations than with a re-estimation of what Hamsun thought of American culture.¹⁵⁰ Conner, who sees Hamsun as a travel writer first,

¹⁴⁶ An English translation is available under the title 'New York City', with the two parts printed together and grouped under Hamsun's 'Critical Reporting', in Hamsun and Current (2003), pp. 24-34.

¹⁴⁷ Beard (1881), p. 57.

¹⁴⁸ Morgridge, Barbara G., *Knut Hamsun's Literary Relationship to America* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Washington, 1965), p. 322. Žagar (2009), p. 38. Sandberg (1999), pp. 265-96.

¹⁴⁹ Morgridge (1965), p. 321.

¹⁵⁰ Morgridge (1965), p. 322.

novelist second, has examined the similarities between Hamsun's America and Kafka's novel, for which he uses Max Brod's title *Amerika* and which he reads in an unattributed translation. His comparison relies excessively on similarities between Karl Rossmann and Hamsun's protagonists: 'Karl is like something straight out of Hamsun, a well-intentioned, earnest, and generous sort of fellow, who may be gullible to a fault, but who is essentially good.'¹⁵¹ For Conner's purposes, Josef K's arrogance and at points predatory behaviour would be a better point of comparison than the childlike character of Karl Rossmann.¹⁵²

As is typical of travel writing, Hamsun's exaggerations about America and its literature allow Norway to become truly European. Against modern American ways Hamsun pits the European 'position of sophistication he so vociferously claims to inhabit'.¹⁵³ Hamsun is critical of social mobility in the United States, particularly into the elite, although it was social mobility on which his career and livelihood in Europe very much depended.

In contrast to the presentation of Kristiania in *Sult*, topographical accuracy appears to interest Hamsun little in his description of New York City. In 'Fra Amerika', Hamsun pays no attention to spelling the place-names correctly, which contrasts with his minute interest in the size of the city's economy. What is printed as 'Sherry Street' in

¹⁵¹ Conner (2016), pp. 199-200.

¹⁵² Conner (2016) calls Karl's expulsion to America a 'self-imposed exile', his traumatic experiences there an 'obstacle course' (p. 200). Even if Karl is a teenager, 'Hamsun's experience of the megacity New York is more naïve and immature' (p. 200) in comparison in Conner's view. His reading of the electric letter writing scene overlooks that the man is trying to invent a kind of hypermodern writing, and is not just 'a poor bum' of New York City (p. 189).

¹⁵³ Sjølyst-Jackson (2010), p. 18.

the article and the *Polemiske skrifter* is corrected to ‘Cherry Street’ in the English translation. Both are streets in greater New York City but Cherry Street, in Lower Manhattan, seems a much more likely candidate for an area Hamsun would have crossed in the total of two days he spent in the city. Sherry Street, deep into Long Island, was inaccessible private land at the time.¹⁵⁴

‘Fra Amerika’ begins with a description of the size of the American economy. It executes this description with culinary images – not, say, with descriptions of industrial raw materials arriving to the port of New York City. Hamsun shows the shipping vessels in New York as overflowing with global foodstuffs:

Fra Bermundasøerne (sic) kommer de ladede med Poteter, fra New Foundland med Fisk, fra Smyrna med Figener, fra Cuba med Apelsiner, fra alle Middelhavslandene med Sydfrugter. (PS 27)

From Bermuda they come loaded with potatoes, from Newfoundland with fish, from Smyrna with figs, from Cuba with oranges, and from all the Mediterranean countries with tropical fruits.¹⁵⁵

The wealth of New York City is presented through cosmopolitan culinary excess. Hamsun’s New York City may be again coloured by Chicago here, the most important grain market in America at the time.

The second part of the article, focusing on the arts, begins with Hamsun posing as a confident, journalistic voice walking the streets of New York, as the flâneur of the New World. With a Prufrockian first person plural that brings the reader in on the city

¹⁵⁴ Critics have rightly stressed that the majority of Hamsun’s American experiences took place in middle America, not the large cities of the Northeast. Conner (2016), p. 191).

¹⁵⁵ Hamsun and Current (2003), p. 26. Translation amended.

walk, the opening combines a named location in New York City, with an imprecise, general time:

Lad os en Vinteraften gaa gjennem Sherry Street [...] (PS 32)

Let us walk down Cherry Street on a winter evening [...] ¹⁵⁶

The narrating observer encounters a planing mill worker who has been bankrupted by an obsession with inventing a new form of writing. Crucially, this financial ruin is not the result of writing a book, but inventing a new format of writing charged with electricity, with ‘*elektriske Bogstaver*’ (PS 32), *electric* letters. In *American Nervousness*, Beard used electricity as a metaphor for modernity at length, a common literary image at the time, the history of which Jennifer L. Lieberman has recently traced. ¹⁵⁷

Although this writing innovation is strongly distanced by irony and the man’s hyperbolic aspirations are comical, his struggles are empathetically portrayed. Against the writings of name-dropping American socialites with texts that Hamsun compares to fabrics – pure style and surface – is a poor man with an idea of a wholly new mechanism of modern writing:

Han fortalte nu, at han havde gjort en Opfindelse, som ruinerede ham – en storstilet Salmebog for ældre Folk, med *elektriske* Bogstaver, som kunde læses i Mørke. Han havde arbeidet med denne Opfindelse, experimentert, beskæftiget Trykkerier og søgt om Patent nu i 7 Aar; men Opfindelsen kom egentlig aldrig fuldt frem, og endnu havde han ikke det rette Lysskjær i Bogstaverne; han troede dog at det engang skulde lykkes. Imidlertid var han

¹⁵⁶ Hamsun and Current (2003), p. 31.

¹⁵⁷ Jennifer L. Lieberman, *Power Lines. Electricity in American Life and Letters, 1882–1952* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017). For Beard’s changing views on the employment of electricity in the treatment of neurasthenia, see Carolyn Thomas de la Peña, *The Body Electric: How Strange Machines Built the Modern American* (New York: NYU Press, 2003), pp. 101-5.

nu ruineret, og det saa grundigt, at han ansaa en Reisning før næsten umulig.
(PS 32)

He proceeded to tell me he had made an invention and it had brought him to ruin – a large-print psalmbook for the elderly, with electric letters that could be read in the dark. For seven years he had worked on this invention, experimented, employed printers, and applied for a patent, but the thing was never quite perfected – he did not yet have the right kind of glow in the letters – though he was confident that it would eventually be a success. For the time being, he was so utterly ruined that it seemed almost impossible for him to get on his feet again.¹⁵⁸

The innovation has failed not because the letters don't conduct electricity, but because they lack 'det rette Lysskjær i Bogstaverne'. This perfectionism, obviously a parody – it is shown as evident that the inventor's ludicrous project will never succeed – is nevertheless portrayed with empathy, and the episode has genuine pathos. The man is malnourished and too lightly dressed for the cold weather. The journalist-narrator goes to a clothing store to buy the man a coat, and refers to the poor as the unfortunates.

This episode about a strange invention, which follows detailed but impersonal descriptions of the city's economy and unequal distribution of wealth, sits awkwardly in 'Fra Amerika' not only for its obviously fictional subject matter but in its emotional register.

In *Sult*, electric letter-writing is one among many ridiculous stories the narrator tells a stranger on a park bench. Here the enterprise reads like a tablet produced by a multinational corporation. The man is polite and follows the narrator, as one would an interlocutor:

¹⁵⁸ Hamsun and Current (2003), p. 32.

Om han havde hørt om den elektriske Salmebog, som Happolati havde opfundet?

Hvad, elek

Med elektriske Bogstaver, som kunde lyse i Mørke! Et aldeles storartet Foretagende, Millioner Kroner i Bevægelse, Støberier og Trykkerier i Arbejde, Skarer af fast lønnede Mekanikere sysselsat, jeg havde hørt sige syv hundrede Mand. (S 30)

Had he heard about the electric hymn book that Happolati had invented?

‘What, an elec—?’

With electric letters that shone in the dark? A quite magnificent enterprise, millions of kroner involved, foundries and printing shops in operation, hosts of salaried mechanics employed, as many as seven hundred men, I’d heard. (L 26)

In the translation, inverted commas have been added to turn the other man’s first remark into reported speech, but they are absent from the 1890 edition of the novel. The discussion is presented as dialogue imprecisely recounted, like the evidently fictional episode in ‘Fra Amerika’.

What is reduced to a ludicrous story the narrator is trying to sell to the man on the park bench in Kristiania, is a genuine if impossible effort in ‘Fra Amerika’, like the narrator’s attempts at putting his suffering into words in *Sult*. ‘Fra Amerika’ shows Hamsun looking at urban life with sympathy and understanding, aware of its challenges. By contrast, *Sult* filters the city through anxiety, a treatment from which its protagonist is not spared.

2.8. Conclusion

When Hamsun tried to defend *Sult* against claims of monotony, he argued it was the result of the novel deriving its richness out of a single emotional source. Hamsun

made the case by way of a comparison, stating that Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (1866) similarly plays on a singular emotional string:

Hvis vi tællede efter, tror jeg ikke, at der skal findes flere sjælelige Rørelser i f. Eks. *Raskolnikov* end i min Bog. I *Germinie Lacerteux* heller ikke. Hvad er det da, som gør, at min Bog er monoton fremfor disse Bøger? Ogsaa i disse er den en eneste dominerende Følelse, ligesom i min. (B 161)

If we counted up, I don't think one would find more instances of inner emotion in, for example, *Crime and Punishment* than in my book. Nor in *Germinie Lacerteux*, either. So what is it that makes my book more monotonous than these books? Moreover in these books there is one dominating emotion, just as in mine.¹⁵⁹

My reading of anxiety, whilst supporting Hamsun's claim that the novel modulates from a single emotion, highlights a key difference between *Sult* and its best-known intertext: the quality of this dominant emotion and the protagonist's relationship to this emotion, which makes *Sult* the novel that it is.¹⁶⁰

Outwardly, the protagonists of *Crime and Punishment* and *Sult* appear strikingly similar. Both are from the provinces and starve in the city, Raskolnikov not having

¹⁵⁹ Knut Hamsun, *Selected Letters. Volume I: 1879-98*, ed. and trans. by Harald Næss and James McFarlane (Norwich: Norvik Press, 1990), p. 114. *Crime and Punishment* and Edmond and Jules de Goncourt's *Germinie Lacerteux* (1865) had been published in Danish translation in 1884 and 1888 respectively.

¹⁶⁰ Critics have long stressed the importance of *Crime and Punishment* to *Sult*. For recent contributions, see Sørensen (2016), pp. 45-46, and Sjølyst-Jackson (2010), p. 14 and 40. See also the productively speculative Nag (1998). Næss has shown the inconsistency of Hamsun's claims of unfamiliarity with *Crime and Punishment* (also known by the title 'Raskolnikov' in Scandinavia at the time). In 1929 – nearly thirty years after its publication – Hamsun claimed that he had read Dostoevsky only after writing *Sult*. Contradicting this claim, the Swedish-American journalist and critic Victor Nilsson remembered lending the book to Hamsun in America. In Harald S. Næss (ed.), *Knut Hamsuns brev 1879-1895* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1994), pp. 101-2. For Hamsun's probable exposure to excerpts of the novel in the US, see also Hamsun, Næss and McFarlane (1990), p. 260. For Nilsson and Hamsun, see David Markle, 'Dania Hall: At the Center of a Scandinavian American Community' in *Swedes in the Twin Cities: Immigrant Life and Minnesota's Urban Frontier*, ed. by Philip J. Anderson and Dag Blanck (St Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2001), pp. 173-97 (pp. 181-2).

eaten in two days at the start of the novel. Raskolnikov is a student, Hamsun's narrator a likely drop-out. Raskolnikov is named unlike Hamsun's narrator, but his comical epithet of 'author, I mean a student, or rather an ex-student' could equally introduce the narrator of *Sult*.¹⁶¹ Raskolnikov tells us how 'he was not really afraid of any landlady' when he is terrified of encountering her.¹⁶² Both protagonists feel guilty, undeserving, and have debilitatingly low self-esteem, barely masked by arrogance.

Nevertheless, the internal torment of Raskolnikov is always connected to the concrete act of murder, whereas the narrator of *Sult* experiences anxiety, objectless fear. The third person narrator on which Dostoyevsky settled makes a clearer separation between internal and external events. Hamsun's experiencing narrator is unable to distance himself from his thoughts but fully identifies with them; anxious readings are not qualified, contextualised, or viewed objectively. Terror of the kind that Raskolnikov's extraordinary situation creates is treated as an everyday phenomenon by Hamsun. Without having committed a crime, Hamsun's narrator is put through the emotional torment of Raskolnikov through no fault of his own, and is made to feel that it is of his own making.

In this chapter, I have shown that anxiety is not just a theme or mood in *Sult*, but its key governing mechanism. I have connected the narrator's anxiety and thoughts about his body to a crisis of literary expression. Few novels of the European canon examine authorship in material conditions as dire as *Sult*, but it is the narrator's anxious

¹⁶¹ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, trans. by Jessie Coulson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 96.

¹⁶² Dostoevsky and Coulson (1998), p. 1.

reading of those conditions and a desire for absolute control, which push him to desperately forage for an authority which the city can no longer give at the expense of his survival. The narrator is stripped of conscious authorial control: instead, his anxious thinking patterns, his body, and the city together generate the text. This atomization of authorship which I have shown to make up *Sult* is never treated as celebratory, but as a great source of anxiety and suffering, with the novel at hand as the only proof of its potential. *Sult* never links authorship to vulnerability as opposed to dominance, nor does it celebrate partial psychological permeability as a road to authorship – readings of authorship and authority that have psychological continuity throughout Hamsun's literary oeuvre, to which *Sult* is often considered an exception.

3. The Hunger that Disappeared: The Body and its Image in Franz Kafka's *Der Verschollene*

3.1. Introduction

In this chapter I will read *Der Verschollene* as a post-traumatic novel, one that is launched and motivated by Johanna Brummer's assault on Karl, which marks his fall and precipitates all the events of the novel. The term 'verführt' (V 7), used in the opening sentence and by Karl's uncle and implying some degree of complicity, is contradicted by the later description of the event, which clearly recounts a sexual assault. I will show how the psychological, social and behavioural manifestations of trauma are expressed in anxiety relating to the body and to food in the novel. Only in the novel's closing section do we meet a Karl of psychological maturity, if not in easier circumstances.

Against scholarship which imprecisely situated all of Kafka's protagonists as helpless victims of obscure bureaucracies and the writer himself as a prophet, critics have moved to explore Kafka's writing with greater nuance and historical precision. In the popular imagination, Kafka's work may still be associated with a universal, generalized atmosphere of fear and withdrawal from active engagement with life. By contrast, research into Kafka's historical situation, and analyses of his involvement with the literary, political, linguistic, social, and religious aspects of his environment,

have re-historicized his work and shown it as actively engaged with the questions of its time.¹⁶³

Scholars with an interest in anxiety and the body in Kafka have generally approached these themes through Freud, either explicitly or implicitly. Studies of Kafka through Freud have a long history. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *Kafka: pour une littérature mineure* (1975), now perhaps a better introduction to Deleuze and Guattari than to Kafka, emphasized the dramatically exaggerated quality of the Freudian conflict in Kafka's texts.¹⁶⁴ More recently, Johannes Türk has explored the simultaneity of psychological anxiety and physical illness in Kafka's writing through immunology.¹⁶⁵ Gerhard Neumann has interpreted *Der Verschollene* through Freud's and the French psychologist Alfred Binet's theories of fetishism, explaining Karl's 'entfremdende[n] Welterfahrung' through sexual trauma and the fetishization of what cannot be said.¹⁶⁶ Anne Fuchs has interpreted the novel through Lacan's symbolic

¹⁶³ The most recent volume is *Franz Kafka in Context*, ed. by Carolin Duttlinger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). For a comprehensive review of scholarship of this kind, on Kafka's Jewish context and the afterlife of his works as 'world literature' in particular, see David Suchoff, *Kafka's Jewish Languages: The Hidden Openness of Tradition* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), pp. 13-63. See also Pascale Casanova's volume which situates Kafka simultaneously in context and in the global literary space. Pascale Casanova, *Kafka en colère* (Paris: Seuil, 2011).

¹⁶⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Pour une littérature mineure* (Paris: Minuit, 1975). Deleuze and Guattari's much-discussed interpretation of Kafka as a solitarily 'minor' writer continues to be reproduced, for example in Aidan Tynan, 'On the Flyleaves of Modernism: Deleuze and Guattari's Kafka', in *Understanding Deleuze, Understanding Modernism*, ed. by S. E. Gontarski, Paul Ardoin, and Laci Mattison (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 61-72 (p. 68).

¹⁶⁵ Johannes Türk, 'Rituals of Dying, Burrows of Anxiety in Freud, Proust, and Kafka: Prolegomena to a Critical Immunology', *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory* 82.2 (2010), pp. 141-156. Türk reads the burrow of 'Der Bau' as both a description of anxiety as a permanent condition that cannot be escaped, one that constitutes the text, and a structure analogous to the body infected with tuberculosis.

¹⁶⁶ Gerhard Neumann, *Franz Kafka. Experte der Macht* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2012), p. 99.

order.¹⁶⁷ Building on scholarship which connected Kafka's writings to those of Leopold Sacher-Masoch in the 1970s, Anna Katharina Schaffner has read *Der Verschollene* through sado-masochism and a Freudian delay of gratification for interpretative certainty.¹⁶⁸ Carolin Duttlinger has discussed the plurality of psychological theories that Kafka was exposed to and his ambivalence towards them, focusing particularly on the contradictory approaches of Freud and experimental psychology.¹⁶⁹

Early readings of *Der Verschollene* treated anxiety as unmoving, unmotivated by particular events in the text.¹⁷⁰ Scholars with an interest in a general atmosphere of anxiety in Kafka's writing often refer to his reading of Kierkegaard. David Tenenbaum, who navigates the simultaneity of confidence and nervousness in Kafka's protagonists by reading anxiety as a mask for egotism, has recently traced the influence of both Kierkegaard and Freud on Kafka's literary treatment of existential anxiety.¹⁷¹ Thomas Anz and Ben Morgan have both contextualized Kafka's reading of Kierkegaard, relating it to the German Kierkegaard boom in the first decade of the twentieth century. Anz shows how Kafka drew on the existential at the expense of the

¹⁶⁷ Anne Fuchs, 'A Psychoanalytic Reading of "The Man who Disappeared"', in *The Cambridge Companion to Kafka*, ed. by Julian Preece (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 25-41.

¹⁶⁸ Anna Katharina Schaffner, 'Visions of Sadistic Women: Sade, Sacher-Masoch, Kafka', *German Life and Letters* 65.2 (2012), pp. 181-205.

¹⁶⁹ Carolin Duttlinger, 'Psychology and Psychoanalysis' in Duttlinger (2018), pp. 216-224.

¹⁷⁰ For example, Fritz Keller, *Studien zum Phänomen der Angst in der modernen deutschen Literatur* (Winterthur: P.G. Keller, 1956), pp. 49-50 (p. 49).

¹⁷¹ David Tenenbaum, *Issues of Shame and Guilt in the Modern Novel. Conrad, Ford, Greene, Kafka, Camus, Wilde, Proust, and Mann* (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009), pp. 120-148.

religious in Kierkegaard's thought, as was characteristic of his time, whereas Morgan has highlighted how Kafka related Kierkegaard's thought to his life.¹⁷²

In recent studies of the body and anxiety in Kafka, an increasing focus on animal protagonists reflects the growing field of 'animal humanities' or animal studies, most frequently through the short story 'Der Bau'.¹⁷³ Thomas Wegmann has helpfully stressed how Kierkegaard's *Begrebet Angest* (*The Concept of Dread*, 1844), which Kafka had read before writing 'Der Bau', argues that animals cannot experience anxiety.¹⁷⁴ The literal 'body writing' of *In der Strafkolonie*, where the condemned man's sentence is to be inscribed on his body in order to be 'understood', continues to be explored by scholars as a central text with which Kafka explored the relationship between the body and literary expression.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² Thomas Anz, 'Identifikation und Abscheu. Kafka liest Kierkegaard', in *Franz Kafka und die Weltliteratur*, ed. by Manfred Engel and Dieter Lamping (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), pp. 83-91. Ben Morgan, 'Kierkegaard in the German-speaking World during the Early 20th Century', in *Kafka und die Religion in der Moderne*, ed. by Manfred Engel and Ritchie Robertson (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2014), pp. 71-115 (pp. 74-5). See also Michael McGillen's discussion of anxiety preceding the biblical Fall, not as its result, in *Begrebet Angest* and Kafka, in Michael McGillen, 'Lapsarian Repetitions. Iterations of the Fall in Kafka and Kierkegaard', in *Kafka und die Religion in der Moderne*, ed. by Engel and Robertson, pp. 93-115 (pp. 102-8).

¹⁷³ For animality and sexuality in Kafka, see Schaffner, 'Seasick in the Land of Sexuality: Kafka and the Erotic', in *Modernist Eroticisms. European Literature after Sexology*, ed. by Anna Katharina Schaffner and Shane Weller (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 80-104 (pp. 90-3). For this interest in the body through animal protagonists, see Jochen Thermann, 'Tiergeschichten und Körpersprache' in Jochen Thermann, *Kafkas Tiere. Fahrten, Bahnen und Wege der Sprache* (Marburg: Tectum Verlag, 2010), pp. 169-198.

¹⁷⁴ Thomas Wegmann, 'The Human as Resident Animal: Kafka's "Der Bau" in the Context of His Later Notebooks and Letters', *Monatshefte* 103.3 (2011), pp. 360-371 (p. 360).

¹⁷⁵ As in Andreas Ackermann, 'Körper als Text? Körper, Rituale und die Grenzen einer Metapher', in *Dem Körper eingeschrieben. Verkörperung zwischen Leiberleben und kulturellem Sinn*, ed. by Matthias Jung, Michaela Bauks, and Andreas Ackermann (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2016), pp. 75-107.

Commentators have also connected Kafka's treatment of anxiety to the nerve discourses of the time, particularly Simmel's *Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben* (1903) and Max Nordau's *Entartung* (1892), which like Beard's *American Nervousness* saw developed societies as generators of mental illness.¹⁷⁶ John Zilcosky has recently explored Kafka's treatment of the role of modern technology in anxiety and the body through train travel, widely thought to have caused psychosomatic symptoms in train passengers at the time.¹⁷⁷

Another rich field of scholarship emphasizes the biological and cultural othering of Jewishness as fundamental to Kafka's anxious treatment of the body. Sander Gilman has extensively discussed the effects of anti-Semitic discourse on how the body and food are presented and monitored in Kafka's writing.¹⁷⁸ Katja Garloff's reading of the many racial elements in Kafka's work, not all of which are critically distanced, as 'racial melancholy' as opposed to racial ideology, is a particularly important recent contribution to this line of scholarship.¹⁷⁹

Exceptionally amongst the authors I focus on, feminist readings of bodies in Kafka were intersectional from the start. Elizabeth Boa has shown how Kafka's literary

¹⁷⁶ For example, John Zilcosky, 'Kafka's Poetics of Indeterminacy: On Trauma, Hysteria, and Simulation at the Fin de Siècle', *Monatshefte* 103.3 (2011), pp. 344-59. Scholars also continue to refer to Kafka's own 'weak nerves', as in Johannes Türk, 'Health and Illness', in Duttlinger (2018), pp. 44-53 (p. 44).

¹⁷⁷ Zilcosky, "'Samsa war Reisender': Trains, Trauma, and the Unreadable Body", in *Kafka for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Stanley Corngold and Ruth V. Gross (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011), pp. 179-206. See also Zilcosky's note where he discusses similarities between Freud and Simmel (p. 204).

¹⁷⁸ Sander L. Gilman, *Franz Kafka, the Jewish Patient* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

¹⁷⁹ 'Racial melancholy means to be stuck in the discursive terms [...] a kind of fixation that at the same time opens up the reconfiguration of these terms.' Katja Garloff, 'Kafka's Racial Melancholy', in *Kafka for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Stanley Corngold and Ruth V. Gross (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011), pp. 89-204 (p. 95).

treatment of women, the body and sexuality interacted and overlapped with his ideas about class and race, in contrast to scholarship that isolated sexuality from power.¹⁸⁰

Boa has also discussed the portrayal of obesity and the seeming polarization of body sizes in *Der Verschollene*.¹⁸¹

Scholarship on a text like *Der Verschollene*, where the question of sexual consent is central to its narrative, is particularly revealing of both changing attitudes towards consent and of the relative weight placed on its importance. Whilst Johanna Brummer's attack was interpreted as 'what would now be called child abuse',¹⁸² over twenty years ago, the framing of the assault as a seduction is often still repeated verbatim by scholars. Many Kafka scholars are aware of the dangers of excessive psychologization, but research into *Der Verschollene* demonstrates the pitfalls of its absence. Susan Gustafson has made a particularly valuable contribution to the scholarship on consent in the novel by focusing on what Karl is forced to see and witness, not only on the physical acts of violence which Karl is subjected to.¹⁸³

Such examinations of the visual elements of the novel, which combine Karl's visual and narrative perspective, have been particularly productive. Emily Troscianko has shown how the reader is made to both share Karl's visual perspective and to look at

¹⁸⁰ Elizabeth Boa, *Kafka: Gender, Class and Race in the Letters and Fictions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

¹⁸¹ Elizabeth Boa, 'Karl Rossmann, or the Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up: The Flight from Manhood in Kafka's *Der Verschollene*', in *From Goethe to Gide: Feminism, Aesthetics and the French and German Literary Canon* ed. by Mary Orr and Lesley Sharpe (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2005), pp. 168-83 (pp. 176-183).

¹⁸² Ritchie Robertson, 'Mothers and Lovers in Some Novels by Kafka and Brod', *German Life and Letters* 50.4 (1997), pp. 475-90 (p. 480).

¹⁸³ Susan Gustafson, 'Watching the Subject: The Mother's Gaze in Dickens's "David Copperfield" and Kafka's "Der Verschollene"', *Monatshefte* 93.1 (2001), pp. 53-72.

him in action.¹⁸⁴ Duttlinger has explored how photographic portraits and photographs of the city mediate *Der Verschollene* both as sources for Kafka and as objects within the text.¹⁸⁵ Gustafson's reading of the visual perspectives in *Der Verschollene* productively studies Karl's moments of apparent ignorance, 'seeing nothing' as psychological rejection mechanisms – without directly referring to them as such – and demonstrates how concerned Karl is with how he is seen, albeit without connecting this to body image and questions of physical appearance.¹⁸⁶

The slippage between life and writing in Kafka studies is well-documented. Mark Anderson's influential study on clothing as the social face of the body, where he argues that Kafka fashioned his physical self-presentation to align with his literary style, exemplifies the fertile but not unproblematic results of reading Kafka's diaries and letters alongside his literary works.¹⁸⁷ Anderson shows Kafka as a socially active, engaged and athletic man of considerable status, an important recasting of Kafka's person, who had been seen alternatively as a saint or a weakling thanks to his editor, Max Brod, and the literary self-fashioning that I discuss in this chapter. Anderson's important recalibration of the author's persona further questions why Kafka shaped the literary self-image in his diaries and in the *Brief an den Vater* in terms of physical inferiority.

¹⁸⁴ Troscianko (2014b), pp. 193-4.

¹⁸⁵ Carolin Duttlinger, *Kafka and Photography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 62-99.

¹⁸⁶ Gustafson (2001), pp. 60-71.

¹⁸⁷ Mark Anderson, *Kafka's Clothes: Ornament and Aestheticism in the Habsburg Fin de Siècle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). For Kafka's work as 'life writing', see Kenneth Paradis, 'Franz Kafka' in *Encyclopedia of Life Writing: Autobiographical and Biographical Forms*, ed. by Margaretta Jolly (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), pp. 515-17.

Kafka's time was characterized by intense debate surrounding masculinity and femininity, race, and health, questions Kafka took up in his writing. To shed light on the extent to which food and body image form the language of anxiety in *Der Verschollene*, I will examine a number of interrelated questions that have to do with the body and its image: dress, food and mealtimes, gendered forms of work, and the appearance of the body.

Scholars rarely dwell on the role that food plays in *Der Verschollene*, particularly in relation to Karl's experience, or connect it to the novel's presentation of the body. Anne Fuchs's insightful if brief reading of food in *Der Verschollene* interprets food largely as metaphoric, a sexual metaphor in particular, rather than as food itself. With a focus on nausea, as well as the echoes of the family conflict in the novel, Fuchs does not show how the female figures connected with food are abusers of power, or relate food to questions of body size and body image in the novel.¹⁸⁸ Neumann has also touched on the unusual food consumption in the novel, which he reads as a culinary anarchy diametrically opposed to bourgeois rituals of the table. His focus is on the character of Robinson and hence distanced from Karl's experience.¹⁸⁹ Whilst Fuchs has importantly highlighted disgust towards food in the novel and Neumann its contrast to bourgeois dining practices, Karl's behaviour around and experience of food, and the extent to which his actions are motivated by food and a view of his own body, have not been sufficiently explored by scholars.

¹⁸⁸ Anne Fuchs, *A Space of Anxiety: Dislocation and Abjection in Modern German-Jewish Literature* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999), pp. 68-70.

¹⁸⁹ Gerhard Neumann, 'Ritual und Theater. Franz Kafkas Bildungsroman "Der Verschollene"', in Gerhard Neumann, *Kafka-Lektüren* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), pp. 159-183 (p. 166-7)

In this chapter, I argue that food and body image are key ways in which anxious emotion is expressed in the novel. I show that given Kafka's narrative perspective, which generally but not exclusively follows that of the protagonist, a distorted relationship to the body, the avoidance and the related focus on food – anxiety surrounding food and bodies, clothing and grooming – contribute significantly to the imagery, characterization, and value judgements of *Der Verschollene*.

By reading the novel through body image, food, and anxiety, I will show that the harsh and punitive attitude to Karl is not only the product of his challenging external circumstances, but reflects his own self-view, with important implications for the narrative. Karl's seemingly stunted, one-dimensional psychology, whereby he remains childlike and passive for large parts of the novel, and quietly suffers much that comes his way, emerges in more nuanced and psychologically congruent terms as a result.

Before I discuss *Der Verschollene*, I begin with a reading of Kafka's diaries and the *Brief an den Vater*. I outline the ways in which Kafka presented his relationship to his body and to food as problematic, amplified prevalent cultural codes relating to health and appearance, and read them with excessive dedication that bordered on fanaticism. The diaries and the *Brief* present body image in disordered terms, with the adult body still viewed as weak, inadequate, and powerless, lacking autonomy and constructed in comparison to others.

In an effort to counteract generalizations about the ‘Kafkaesque’, scholars have sought to reassess Kafka as a comic writer.¹⁹⁰ Erica Weitzman’s reading of *Der Verschollene* as situational comedy, albeit both ‘a lacking comedy and a comedy of lack’ is exemplary of the potential of this approach to Kafka, even as it sidelines much of Karl’s experience of the comic events he is subject to and parodies Kafka scholarship in the process.¹⁹¹

That Kafka’s writing was for so long used as emblematic of unspecific, generalized, existential *Angst* requires such a reassessment. Kafka may be very funny on occasion, and his writing often employs comic structures. Yet when studied comparatively, Kafka is no prophet of joy. The bulk of anxiety that many associate with Kafka’s writing must be instead precisely located and studied not as a general atmosphere but as particular to each narrative, considerably varying across Kafka’s oeuvre. Michael Minden has highlighted how Kafka wrote from a ‘place of desolation with assurance and artistic skill’, and it is with confidence and precision that Kafka locates anxiety in food and the image of the body in his texts.¹⁹²

3.2. The Body in Kafka’s *Tagebücher* and *Brief an den Vater*

Although Kafka’s literary texts are the focus of this chapter, I begin with his diaries to show how Kafka represented and dramatized body image as shaped by anxiety within them. In the diaries, eating habits and discomfort with the body form a vocabulary

¹⁹⁰ For example, Astrid Dehe and Achim Engstler, *Kafkas komische Seiten* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2011).

¹⁹¹ Erica Weitzman, ‘Almost Necessary: Kafka’s Kantian Situation Comedy’, *MLN* 126.3 (2011), pp. 590-613 (p. 609).

¹⁹² Michael Minden, *Modern German Literature* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011), p. 123.

with which Kafka presents anxiety about his person. I then move on to *Brief an den Vater* to discuss some of the most powerful elucidations of bodily images in Kafka's work.

Against the more existentially oriented approaches to anxiety I outlined in the introduction to this chapter, questions of body image and food can seem like marginal concerns in Kafka's texts. Kafka's diaries show an extensive preoccupation with personal development through his physical appearance. Kafka writes of being hungry and is obsessed with his 'körperlicher Zustand' (T 286). He worries about signs of ageing on his face, and presents eating in public as an exhibitionist performance (T 661). When he ranks his personal ailments in a diary entry, digestion outranks not just a skin condition but psychological concerns such as nervousness and insecurity:

1. Verdauung 2. Neurasthenie 3. Ausschlag 4. innere Unsicherheit
(T 561)

Kafka's adherence to health fads has been widely documented. He exercised obsessively, following the fitness regime of the Danish self-help guru Jørgen Peter Müller, author of *Mit System* (1904), in whose view poor health was self-inflicted, 'Sygdom er i Reglen selvforskyldt'.¹⁹³ He diligently followed the chewing routine espoused by Horace Fletcher, to which I return in my fourth chapter. Kafka was also a vegetarian, an unusual choice at the time.¹⁹⁴ The diaries document obsessive and time-consuming grooming: 'Die Nachmittage die ich mit den Haaren verbrachte' (T

¹⁹³ J. P. Müller, *Mit System. 15 Minutters dagligt Arbejde for Sundhedens Skyld* (Copenhagen: Tillges Forlag, 1904), p. 6. Kafka's adherence to Müller's methods has been documented in Anderson (1992), pp. 79-84. 'Furcht vor dem 2 stündigen Abendspaziergang, den ich jetzt für mich eingeführt habe' (T 367).

¹⁹⁴ For a recent discussion of Kafka's eating and sport habits, vegetarianism in particular, see Dehe and Engstler (2011), pp. 18-24.

414), and excessive, obsessive hygiene practices: ‘Jetzt abends vor Langeweile dreimal im Badezimmer hintereinander mir die Hände gewaschen’ (T 422). Kafka’s famous diary entry of 3 January 1912, where he prophetically exclaims how writing excludes him from all other aspects of life ‘reads like a birth announcement: Birth of the Writer Franz Kafka’,¹⁹⁵ but also takes the form of a health-oriented New Year’s resolution: ‘Jedenfalls darf ich aber dem nicht nachweinen [...] daß ich zum Sylvester Schwarzwurzeln mit Spinat genachtmahlt und ¼ Ceres dazu getrunken habe’ (T 341), kicking the new year off with vegetables washed down with a drink made of skimmed milk.¹⁹⁶ Unsurprisingly, such descriptions have attracted posthumous medical attention, relating Kafka’s accounts to how disordered eating is understood today.¹⁹⁷

Food is often presented as dangerous in the diaries, particularly when it is unhealthy, or worse, when its contents are not known. Fears of eating something unidentified are realized in a narrative where young men at an inn are accidentally served coffee with goose blood:

Als die Stube ein wenig gereinigt war, bekamen sie zwei große Kaffeetöpfe bis hinauf gefüllt auf den Tisch gestellt. Wie sie aber mit dem Löffel in ihrem Kaffee herumrührten, kam immer von Zeit zu Zeit etwas großes, dunkles, rundes an die Oberfläche. Sie dachten, es werde sich mit der Zeit aufklären, und tranken mit Appetit, bis sie angesichts des halbleeren Topfes und der dunklen Sache doch Angst bekamen und die Magd um Rat fragten. Da zeigte

¹⁹⁵ James Olney, *Memory and Narrative: The Weave of Life-Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 321.

¹⁹⁶ T.J. Reed, ‘Nietzsche’s Animals: Idea, Image and Influence’, in *Nietzsche: Imagery and Thought. A Collection of Essays*, ed. by Malcolm Pasley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 159-219 (p. 208).

¹⁹⁷ Works where medical professionals have read Kafka as an anorexic include Anthony Storr, ‘Kafka’s Sense of Identity’, in *Paths and Labyrinths: Nine Papers from a Kafka Symposium*, ed. by J.P. Stern and J.J. White (London: Institute of Germanic Studies, 1985), pp. 1-24, and Manfred M. Fichter, ‘The Anorexia Nervosa of Franz Kafka’, *International Journal of Eating Disorders* 6 (1987), pp. 367-77.

es sich, daß das Schwarze altes geronnenes Gänseblut war, das von dem vortägigen Festessen her in den Töpfen geblieben war und über das man im Morgendusel den Kaffee einfach eingegossen hatte. Sofort liefen die Jungen heraus und erbrachen alles bis auf das letzte Tröpfchen. (T 441)

This is a kind of poisoning, with food as an unspecified, menacing threat, ‘etwas großes, dunkles’ (T 441). Finding goose blood in your coffee is revolting, but the image is here extended to a taboo, to eating something ‘unsafe’. The incident evokes associations with the libels claiming that Jews wanted to drink the blood of Christians at Passover. It also echoes criticisms of Jewish slaughtering practices, and the anti-Semitic elements of the animal rights discourse of the time, which Gilman has discussed.¹⁹⁸

This presentation of food, animal products in particular, as dangerous coexists with fantasies of being surrounded by food, behaviour which seems contradictory but characterizes disordered eating as it is understood today. Over a decade later, Kafka wrote of plans for relocating to Palestine and of working in a restaurant, which is not only a dream of emigration and simple living, but also one of being surrounded by food.

Anxiety about the future is expressed as bodily inability: ‘Wie wollte ich sie mit diesem aus einer Rumpelkammer gezogenem Körper ertragen?’ (T 266).¹⁹⁹ Kafka’s

¹⁹⁸ Sander Gilman, ‘Franz Kafka’s Musical Diet’, *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 4.3 (2005), pp. 291-308 (p. 301). See also Ritchie Robertson, *Kafka: Judaism, Politics, and Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 11.

¹⁹⁹ The ‘Rumpelkammer’ episode is the much-discussed homoerotic fantasy of corporal punishment in *Der Process*, where the fat bodies of two men, Franz and Willem, are whipped by a leather-clad man. Franz and Willem first arrived to arrest Josef K. after his breakfast, normally brought by Frau Grubach’s cook, failed to arrive. In the ‘Rumpelkammer’, the two men are punished precisely for eating this breakfast (P 111).

back problems emerge as a kind of imagined deformity, the result of growing tall and lanky in puberty.

Kafka dates this experience of bodily inadequacy to his childhood.²⁰⁰ The diaries present Kafka's father contrasting his body against those of his children, as it bears the signs of poverty, cold, and hard work:

Unangenehm ist es, zuzuhören, wenn der Vater, mit unaufhörlichen Seitenhieben auf die glückliche Lage der Zeitgenossen und vor allem seiner Kinder von den Leiden erzählt, die er in seiner Jugend auszustehen hatte. Niemand leugnet es, daß er jahrelang infolge ungenügender Winterkleidung offene Wunden an den Beinen hatte, daß er häufig gehungert hat, daß er schon mit 10 Jahren ein Wägelchen auch im Winter und sehr früh am Morgen durch die Dörfer schieben mußte [...] (T 323).

The father presents his own superiority in terms of his body. Only suffering felt by and seen on the body is legitimate. Mixed with boredom with this often-repeated family mythos is the suggestion that against the father's battle-hardened body, the body of the son has not suffered enough.

The conventionally handsome adult body of the author – based on photographs, the descriptions of others and on the female attention Kafka received – is still presented as weak and inadequate in the diaries. In the same diaries, Kafka recounts being set to pose nude as a model for St. Sebastian, a traditional homoerotic icon: 'Ich soll dem Maler Ascher nackt zu einem heiligen Sebastian Modell stehn' (T 359). Kafka had

²⁰⁰ For Kafka's interest in alternative models of childhood pedagogy and children's literature in particular, see Katharina Laszlo, 'Childhood, Pedagogy and Education', in *Franz Kafka in Context*, ed. by Carolin Duttlinger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 241-248. For the literary influences of the physical description of the father in early Kafka, see Robertson (1985), p. 71.

enjoyed greater opportunities than his father and had achieved higher social status as a result, yet he presented a persistent sense of inferiority in bodily terms.

The diaries, then, discuss less the body itself than its image, filtered and shaped by anxiety about the self. At key moments of unrelated crisis or accomplishment, the body and food take centre stage at the expense of the crisis. In the days leading up to the writing of *Das Urteil*, the diary entries obsessively associate eating with disgust. Meat-eating is again a taboo that borders on cannibalism. In anatomical detail, Kafka recounts an office anecdote of a stonebreaker eating a frog by a road with bare hands, starting by biting and gulping down the frog's head (T 439). As with the goose blood incident, the fear over the true contents of one's food is crystallised by layering images of disgust that break social and moral convention, images that mount to a final corrective purge. A cat – a pet and taboo meat as such – is killed with bare hands – a repugnant image, which is followed by the grotesque consumption, where the meat takes over the body of its consumers, and must be purged out:

Vier aßen einen fein hergerichteten Katzenbraten, aber nur drei wußten, was sie aßen. Nach dem Essen fingen die drei zu miauen an, aber der vierte wollte es nicht glauben, erst bis man ihm das blutige Fell zeigte, glaubte er es, konnte nicht rasch genug hinauslaufen, um alles wieder herauszubrechen und war zwei Wochen schwer krank. (T 439)

When Kafka is much shaken by the breaking off of his engagement to Felice Bauer, his diary concentrates on observation of bodies (T 660) at the expense of the emotional.

The *Brief an den Vater*, to which I will now turn, develops these themes through three key images. In the first the son, having kept his parents awake by whimpering and

asking for water, is taken out of his bed and left to stand on the balcony in his nightshirt. This scene is often viewed as fundamental in Kafka's exaggerated oedipal mythos, the 'dramatic climax' of the letter.²⁰¹

Ich winselte einmal in der Nacht immerfort um Wasser, gewiß nicht aus Durst, sondern wahrscheinlich teils um zu ärgern, teils um mich zu unterhalten. Nachdem einige starke Drohungen nicht geholfen hatten, nahmst Du mich aus dem Bett, trugst mich auf die Pawlatsche und ließest mich dort allein vor der geschlossenen Tür ein Weilchen im Hemd stehn. (B 149)

Anthony Storr has compared this scene to the *drame du coucher* of the narrator in Proust's contemporaneous *Du côté de chez Swann* (published in 1913, when Kafka was working on *Der Verschollene*). Both scenes exclude the child from parental intimacy, which Storr interprets as founding myths to the two authors' identities.²⁰² Just as the son is rejected by the father in the *Brief*, Proust's young narrator is 'rejected' by his parents through momentary isolation, physical exclusion, as they entertain guests.

Separation anxiety, which Freud began to note only in 1926, is a developmental stage that children must learn to tolerate.²⁰³ Yet Proust's narrator rebels against this exclusion, demands parental attention – at the cost of their rage, in his anxious, catastrophizing mind risking being sent to boarding school, even if it kills him – and gets it. The young protagonist of Rilke's *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* has a strikingly similar experience. The boy succeeds in recalling his parents

²⁰¹ Carolin Duttlinger, 'Badly Healed Wounds', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 26 June 2015 (5856), pp. 8-9 (p. 8).

²⁰² Storr (1985), p. 8.

²⁰³ Kirsten M. VanMeenen and Nathan A. Fox, 'Separation Anxiety' in *The Corsini Encyclopedia of Psychology and Behavioral Science 4*, ed. by W. Edward Craighead and Charles B. Nemeroff (Chichester: Wiley, 2000), pp. 1490-1492 (p. 1491). See also Peter Gay's discussion of separation anxiety as integral to childhood in Freud, in Peter Gay, *Freud: A Life for Our Time* (London: Dent, 1988), p. 487.

from a grand ball by feigning illness, and gets the maternal embrace he was after. The parents are ultimately understanding, and in Marcel's case the father is baffled by the intensity of the son's anxiety, startled to find his son so upset and practically orders his wife to sleep in their son's bedroom. Proust's narrator is unconditionally accepted with his anxious flaws, if with resignation, and Malte at least by his mother.

By contrast, the son in Kafka's letter experiences total rejection, a physical expulsion from the family home, which he fears will be repeated. Even as it is narrated in the first person, the son's need to be with the parents is described from a flustered parental point of view as whimpering, and as thirst, which requires action from the parents, as opposed to the child's perspective, where the child presumably misses the warm, fragrant mother Proust and Rilke so evocatively describe – as separation anxiety narrated through the child's point of view. In the *Brief*, the son takes the parents' point of view against himself.²⁰⁴

The second key image of the *Brief* is one of bodily comparison between father and son as they undress in a cabin to go swimming. It is formulated as a simple contrast: 'Ich mager, schwach, schmal, Du stark, groß, breit' (B 151). The son is weakly, skeletal, afraid and uncertain, with a bodily appearance presented in alignment with mental weakness: 'ein kleines Gerippe, unsicher bloßfüßig auf den Planken, in Angst vor dem Wasser, unfähig Deine Schwimmbewegungen nachzumachen [...]' (B 151). Body image characteristic of childhood – being smaller and dependent on a parent, with the promise of future likeness – is here described as humiliatingly

²⁰⁴ Boa has stressed how the mother, the parent who read the letter, also takes the side of the father. In Elizabeth Boa, 'Women', in *Kafka in Context*, ed. by Carolin Duttlinger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 26-34 (p. 33).

disempowering to the son. Nevertheless, the unrealized potential for violence that the balcony scene suggested is here mixed with aspirant admiration and pride in the body of the father: ‘auch war ich stolz auf den Körper meines Vaters’ (B 151). Often the use of the parental body in the *Brief* is reduced to its violent potential, but it is also an aesthetic model for the son.²⁰⁵

The third and final bodily image of the letter dramatically exaggerates the size of the father’s body. The father is stretched across the map of the world, his perceived power made literal in the form of his body or within an arm’s reach of it:

Manchmal stelle ich mir die Erdkarte ausgespannt und Dich quer über sie hin ausgestreckt vor. Und es ist mir dann, als kämen für mein Leben nur die Gegenden in Betracht, die Du entweder nicht bedeckst oder die nicht in Deiner Reichweite liegen. Und das sind entsprechend der Vorstellung, die ich von Deiner Größe habe, nicht viele und nicht sehr trostreiche Gegenden und besonders die Ehe ist nicht darunter. (B 210)

The father’s enormous body leaves little room for anyone else. The mutual sexual and commercial exclusion through which Kafka dramatized the identities of father and son, evident in *Das Urteil* in particular, is here made literal not in the physical confines of the family apartment but against the whole world.

The *Brief*’s insularity and obsessive focus on the self, with the father as its foil, is presented as a great source of anxiety. In Proust, whose literary work can also be extremely insular and autobiographically focused in its subject matter, heightened subjectivity and hyperawareness of the body are celebrated and eroticized through pleasure, or at least explored with curiosity. Kafka, by contrast, reports relief when momentarily freed of self-obsession (T 347). At best, the body disappears:

²⁰⁵ As in Laszlo (2018), pp. 242-243.

‘Gewichtlos, knochenlos, körperlos zwei Stundenlang durch die Gassen gegangen und überlegt, was ich nachmittag beim Schreiben überstanden habe’ (T 425). This ideation goes beyond extreme slimness, or being skin and bones (‘bis auf die Knochen abgemagert’), to having no anatomy at all.

In sum, Kafka’s diaries show a body image that is not fully autonomous, but formed in contrast to others, here the father as its foil. Negative thoughts or stress about one’s life situation are frequently expressed through the image of the body and in food. Like the father who presented his mental superiority in terms of his body, the son’s perceived inadequacy and inferiority is expressed in bodily terms, dramatized and exaggerated in the diaries as well as in the *Brief*.

3.3. Fashioning the Body

Kafka’s interest in fashion has been connected to his father’s business, which sold *Galanteriewaren* – fashion accessories worn for their social effects rather than their functional purpose.²⁰⁶ In *Kafka’s Clothes*, Anderson argued that the young Kafka took his appearance very seriously and consciously purged himself of markers that would reveal his father’s modest social background. Anderson underlines how even when Kafka lived in poverty in Berlin with Dora Diamant, with ‘hardly enough money to buy butter or a newspaper, Kafka insisted on being well dressed and had his suits made by a first-class tailor.’²⁰⁷ Kafka, then, prioritized his appearance over elementary self-care and nourishment. Anderson builds a parallel between Kafka’s evolving

²⁰⁶ On Hermann Kafka’s business and its commercial success, see Peter-André Alt, *Franz Kafka. Der ewige Sohn* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2005), pp. 30-32.

²⁰⁷ Anderson (1992), p. 219.

literary style, clothing and body weight, following Kafka's self-proclaimed 'dieting in all directions' where fin-de-siècle flourish slims down to a more economical style.

Kafka may well have felt that his diet and exercise regimes and focus on outward presentation were part of a literary purge and fusion of life with art. Yet he took this bodily transformation very literally, and much more seriously than his peers. The dieting in the diaries is not just symbolic. His aestheticization of slimness and vegetarianism could also legitimize dietary restriction.

Interpreting Kafka's physical presentation in relation to the anti-Semitic climate, Sander Gilman reads Kafka's desire to dress well at a considerable cost as protection against being outed as a Jew.²⁰⁸ Gilman highlights how the racialization of Jewish people portrayed the Jewish body as not fully human, which to Gilman sheds light on Kafka's transformation narratives and texts where the protagonist has the body of an animal. That stigmatized groups are more reliant on their outward presentation is well-documented: plastic surgery had a strong racially homogenizing dimension at the time, as it does today.²⁰⁹ If today minorities with non-Western hair are under pressure to euphemistically 'relax' their hair, Kafka's time saw hairdressing manuals aiming to change the appearance of the physiognomy of one's skull. In this regard, dress and grooming are situated on the same continuum as invasive alterations of the body.

In Kafka's literary texts, visits to a tailor, or having one's clothes soiled or stolen, read like violations of the body itself. Where Kafka recounts an experience of being

²⁰⁸ Gilman (1995), pp. 10-12. See also Gilman (2005), pp. 291-308.

²⁰⁹ Sander Gilman, *Making the Body Beautiful: A Cultural History of Aesthetic Surgery* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 85-156.

badly dressed in contrast to his peers as a child, the unattractive clothes are not separated from the appearance of the body:

Ich merkte natürlich, was sehr leicht war, daß ich besonders schlecht angezogen gieng und hatte auch ein Auge dafür wenn andere gut angezogen waren, nur brachte es mein Denken durch Jahre hin nicht fertig die Ursache meines jämmerlichen Aussehens in meinen Kleidern zu finden. Da ich schon damals mehr in Ahnungen als in Wirklichkeit auf dem Wege war, mich geringzuschätzen, war ich überzeugt, daß die Kleider nur an mir dieses zuerst brettartig steife dann faltighängende Aussehen annehmen. Neue Kleider wollte ich gar nicht, denn wenn ich schon häßlich aussehen sollte, wollte ich es wenigstens bequem haben und außerdem vermeiden, der Welt, die sich an die alten Kleider gewöhnt hatte, die Häßlichkeit der neuen vorzuführen. (T 334)

The son refuses new clothes as they would not make a difference to his bodily appearance, which he has already labelled 'jämmerlich', wretched. With a body experienced as irreparably repulsive, clothing has limited powers.

As with food, which is both extensively dwelled on and strictly controlled, the diary entries present Kafka both wanting to buy clothes and feeling anxious about the thought of clothes on his body: 'Der Schneider war desto begriffstütziger, als ich bisher neue Kleider immer mit verschämter Flüchtigkeit, ohne Anmerkungen und Wünsche mir hatte anmessen und anprobieren lassen' (T 338).

A careful reading of his diaries suggests that Kafka was less in control of his relationship to body and food than he and critics saw it. The dieting, obsessive exercise, despair over body shape, and the recurrent use of motifs that fetishize thinness – the fantasies of weightlessness and the admiration for gymnasts – should not be read simply as figurative or symbolic, as entirely unmotivated by a desire to be

very thin.²¹⁰ Such exclusively symbolic readings are analogous to the bowdlerization of the homoeroticism in Kafka's writing by his editor Max Brod and later scholars.²¹¹ The body and its desires can be literal – Kafka's diaries show him looking at men with desire, and desiring for the body to be very different from how it was experienced.

Anderson's work brings out the apparent contradiction in Kafka's views of his body. There is dietary restriction and on the other hand the desire 'to nourish, strengthen, "fatten" the body with healthful food'.²¹² Either Kafka fashioned the body to a strict standard or then wished it to be entirely free of constraint, exemplified by his interest in the nature movement, clothing reform, and his pastoral fantasies.

From a psychological perspective, these tendencies are not contradictory. Adhering to an excessively rigid dietary regime or to none at all, grooming the body to perfection or accepting its flaws completely, with a utopian absence of criticism, all demonstrate inflexible, all-or-nothing thinking I highlighted as characteristic of Hamsun's narrator.

²¹⁰ For a recent discussion on Kafka's weight, his desire to be thin, and the 'Luftmensch' imagery, see Dieter Lamping, *Kafka und die Folgen* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2017), pp. 105-7. Lamping sees the idealization of thinness as an escape from and resistance to sexuality.

²¹¹ Although he had relationships with women and visited brothels, Kafka's literary works and diaries contain a lot of homoerotic material. For more on the comparatively open way in which homosexuality was discussed in Kafka's time, and how readings of Kafka as a closeted homosexual ignore this environment, see Mark Anderson, 'Kafka, Homosexuality and the Aesthetics of "Male Culture"', in *Gender and Politics in Austrian Fiction*, ed. by Ritchie Robertson and Edward Timms (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), pp. 79-99. For just how important marriage was in Kafka's Jewish social context, see Dagmar C. G. Lorenz, 'Kafka and Gender', in *The Cambridge Companion to Kafka*, ed. by Julian Preece (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2002), pp. 169-88 (p. 179), and Boa (2018), pp. 28-29.

²¹² Anderson (1992), p. 87.

Kafka was understandably drawn to the nudist movement: unconditionally accepting or fully rejecting the body are two sides of the same, perfectionist coin.

3.4. Bodily Performance

I have shown that the body of the son is presented as heteronomous in Kafka's diaries, lacking autonomy and only existing by way of comparison. Just as the appearance of the body had to be constructed and maintained, the diaries explore gendered bodies in similarly laborious terms, as a form of performative work.

The performative aspects to gender in Kafka's writing, that gender 'is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body', through habits and rituals, have been well-documented by critics.²¹³ Dagmar Lorenz argues that in 'Kafka's writings gender and species are operative as positions of power and dominance rather than qualitative differences',²¹⁴ and in the diaries, Kafka 'casts himself in all the gender roles available in his literary texts: as transgressor and victim, seducer and seduced, masculine and feminine.'²¹⁵ More cautiously, Boa notes that to 'a certain extent [...] Kafka aligns masculinity and femininity, or childishness, with the distribution of social power, so de-essentializing traditional gender attributions.'²¹⁶ When Kafka describes women working in the factory he unhappily

²¹³ Judith Butler, 'Preface (1999)', in Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 7-26 (p. 15). In this 1999 introduction to the second edition of *Gender Trouble*, first published in 1990, Butler elaborates on the background to her theory of gender performativity. She specifies how Derrida's reading of Kafka's *Vor dem Gesetz* (1915) influenced her work, with gender as the authority that is anticipated before its arrival – where the 'the anticipation conjures its object'. In Butler (2014), p. 14.

²¹⁴ Lorenz (2002), p. 186.

²¹⁵ Lorenz (2002), p. 185.

²¹⁶ Boa (2005), p. 179.

helped to manage, he presents their transformation from defeminized and dehumanized factory workers to women again by way of a makeover (T 373-4).²¹⁷

This transformative potential is unavailable to the writer himself. In a period of intense reading of Goethe whom he idolized, Kafka portrays Goethe's towering spirit – ability, natural aristocracy and extraordinary productivity in exclusively bodily terms:

Goethes schöne Silhouette in ganzer Gestalt. Nebeneindruck des Widerlichen beim Anblick dieses vollkommenen menschlichen Körpers, da ein Übersteigen dieser Stufe außerhalb der Vorstellbarkeit ist und diese Stufe doch nur zusammengesetzt und zufällig aussieht. Die aufrechte Haltung, die hängenden Arme, der schmale Hals, die Kniebeugung. (T 372-3)

Mixed with admiration at the natural ease with which the author's body is held is disgust at the physical perfection which Goethe here embodies. With now 'Goethe, his literary father [...] representing a standard of excellence which he could not hope to reach', this description mirrors the bodily comparison between father and son.²¹⁸ For Kafka to present Goethe – whose intellectual and artistic accomplishments surely outweighed the bodily – as a bodily and postural standard, unachievable in its perfection, reveals the power with which he invested the appearance of the body.

²¹⁷ See also Elisabeth Lack's discussion of this description, in Elisabeth Lack, *Kafkas bewegte Körper. Die Tagebücher und Briefe als Laboratorien von Bewegung* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 2009), p. 174-5.

²¹⁸ Robertson (1985), p. 26.

3.5. Mapping Karl's Mind

I will now move on to examine how these tensions between the body, its image, food, an anxiety are laid out in Kafka's early, unfinished novel *Der Verschollene*. A travel narrative, and the closest Kafka ever came to writing a *Bildungsroman*, the novel centers around the teenaged Karl Rossmann who has been expelled from Europe to America by his family for fathering a son with a servant, Johanna Brummer.²¹⁹ Karl must make a life for himself in the New World. As in Hamsun's 'New York City', America represents less a strict geographic entity than the feared and desired centre of modernity. With limited skills and an education that proves obsolete in America, Karl needs to learn English, make a living, build familial, social and professional connections, and grow accustomed to a new culture.²²⁰ In this environment, self-improvement is not a choice. Yet Karl spends much of his mental power elsewhere, on the body and on food, questions often discussed in relation to other Kafka texts but which critics often overlook with *Der Verschollene*.

Typically for Kafka, the narrative perspective of *Der Verschollene* is one where the protagonist's vision, knowledge, and value system limit the narrative to a great extent,

²¹⁹ For this notion of the novel as a *Bildungsroman*, and a discussion of European standards of education against the business-oriented self-idealization in America, see Charles Brion's recent reading of the novel against *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795-6). In Charles Brion, "'Le Disparu' de Franz Kafka: un anti-'Wilhelm Meister'?", *Revue de littérature comparée* 357.1 (2016), pp. 31-46. See also Neumann (2013), particularly his discussion of the sexual and corporeal aspects of the *Bildungsroman* tradition (pp. 172-3). Lamping has also argued that Karl is exceptional amongst Kafka protagonists in that he develops. In Lamping (2017), p. 26.

²²⁰ Betiel Wasihun has productively interpreted *Der Verschollene* as a migrant experience narrative, through Karl's attempt to integrate and his pursuit of the 'American Dream'. In Betiel Wasihun, 'Kafka's Failing Migrant and Spaces for Integration in Contemporary German and American literature', *Neohelicon* 42 (2015), pp. 463-479 (pp. 467-471).

but not exclusively.²²¹ Many scholars have explored this mechanism. Troscianko has shown how the reader both shares Karl's visual perspective and is able to observe him in action.²²² Gustafson has demonstrated that Karl is concerned with how he is seen, but has not connected this observation to body image or outward appearance.²²³ Schaffner interprets Kafka's protagonists as bad readers of signs. She productively reads Karl as 'sexually illiterate' and compares him to the animal of 'Der Bau'.²²⁴ The latter is 'a persistent misreader, unable to interpret details, signs and noises, and yet it unremittingly tries to make sense of its surroundings.'²²⁵ Yet this inability to read his surroundings, as well as Karl's desire to punish himself, are to Schaffner not results of Karl's individual psychology or age, but generally characteristic of Kafka's protagonists and shared with Josef K. and K. of *Das Schloß*. Daniel Medin has valuably noted that relative body size, 'the protagonist's sense of physical smallness vis-à-vis his surroundings', representative of children's perspective, affects the narrative.²²⁶

The impersonal narrative voice is grammatically detached from Karl but close to him in all other aspects: events generally unfold to us as they do to him. No outsider's description of Karl's physical appearance is given. Beyond his uncle's account we hear nothing of the child Karl has fathered, and fatherhood is clearly as peripheral to Karl's experience as it is to the narrative. At other times, the narrative can be more

²²¹ Manfred Engel, 'Der Verschollene', in *Kafka-Handbuch. Leben - Werk - Wirkung*, ed. by Manfred Engel and Bernd Auerochs (Stuttgart and Weimar: Metzler, 2010), pp. 175-191 (p. 182).

²²² Troscianko (2014b), pp. 193-4.

²²³ Gustafson (2001), pp. 60-72.

²²⁴ Schaffner (2010), p. 342.

²²⁵ Schaffner (2010), p. 345.

²²⁶ Daniel Medin, 'The Woman Who Disappeared: Traces of Kafka in Yoko Tawada's "Das Nackte Auge"', *Études germaniques* 2010/3, no. 259, pp. 627-36 (p. 631).

distant from Karl. The sexual assault, depicted with immediacy in a flashback through Karl's point of view, is introduced through an authoritative, psychoanalytic gloss: 'Im Gedränge einer immer mehr zurückgestoßenen Vergangenheit [...]' (V 41). Karl is also directly addressed by the narrative, and there is commentary that is beyond his line of vision or experience: when the country house is introduced it is described as typical of the New York area, which Karl would be unequipped to do having just arrived in the country.

If the reader can generally judge when Karl is acting unsuitably or against his own interest, Karl himself lacks understanding not only of the injustices that he is subjected to but also of his own mind. When told that someone is monstrously obese but attractive to others, we must proceed with caution, especially with Kafka's deceptive narrative strategies in mind, where bodily disgust often masks and punctures desire, as Winfried Menninghaus has argued.²²⁷

The main emotional register of the novel is distress. Karl has debilitatingly low self-esteem: he feels he deserves to be in a squalid inn with the tramps Robinson and Delamarche, 'daß er hier wirklich an seinem Platze war' (V 136). His preoccupation with punishing himself and working himself to exhaustion in the hotel leaves him socially isolated, with cause and effect blurred:

Oft verbrachte Karl fast die ganzen zwölf Stunden mit Versuchen, einige Stunden Schlaf zu gewinnen, trotzdem es ihn auch sehr lockte an den Unterhaltungen der andern teilzunehmen; aber immer wieder schien es ihm, daß alle andern in ihrem Leben einen Vorsprung vor ihm hätten, den er durch fleißigere Arbeit und ein wenig Verzichtleistung ausgleichen müsse (V 193).

²²⁷ Winfried Menninghaus, *Ekel: Theorie und Geschichte einer starken Empfindung* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002), pp. 333-404.

Karl also deprives his body of comfort: he is ‘Trotz allem fest entschlossen, nicht zu schlafen’ (V 134), which suggests a harsh and punitive relationship to the self.

Karl’s behaviour also shows elements of obsessive-compulsive checking, and an exceptional preoccupation with cleanliness. The secret pocket of his jacket is well worn, implying repeated checks to see if its contents are still intact. Karl does a great deal of checking and obsessively looking over the contents of his suitcase. In the ‘Ramses’ episode, Karl is horrified to find that his suitcase appears to be disorganized. We are told that he had spent hours arranging its contents – a very disproportionate amount of time. Somehow the chaos is still beyond his control, presented as a great source of anxiety:

Wieviele Stunden hatte er während der Überfahrt darauf verwendet, den Koffer zu ordnen und wieder neu zu ordnen und jetzt war alles so wild durcheinander hineingestopft, daß der Deckel beim Öffnen des Schlosses von selbst in die Höhe sprang. (V 130)

This chaos within the suitcase is not real, but an illusion created by a suit added later on top of its contents. The psychological search for absolute security and certainty, where Karl performs checks and actions to gain a greater sense of security than can ever be quite achieved, mirrors the uncertainty of his overall situation.

Instead of missing items, the contents of the suitcase are contaminated by a much more potent destructive force - by food:

Das einzig Bedauerliche war, daß die Veroneser Salami, die auch nicht fehlte, allen Sachen ihren Geruch mitgeteilt hatte. Wenn sich das nicht durch irgendein Mittel beseitigen ließ, hatte Karl die Aussicht monatelang in diesen Geruch eingehüllt herumzugehn. (V 131)

A mere reminder of food, the smell of salami, could contaminate Karl's existence for months, an extraordinarily long time span. Karl's fear of this smell has recently been interpreted as symbolic, representing alternatively Europe, the mother who gave the sausage to Karl, or a religious tradition, but it could also simply show Karl fearing the smell of food and the hunger it would arouse in him.²²⁸ Karl certainly thinks of order here in catastrophising, black-or-white terms – either the suitcase is in perfect order, as originally prepared by Karl, or it is in a state of chaos – in thought patterns that I have shown as characteristic of the psychological anxiety and perfectionism which inhibit Hamsun's narrator.

In fact, Karl has a double role as a mediator between food and those who eat it. Food mediation is not a role Karl was assigned in America but one he already had in his childhood home. It is revealed in flashbacks that it was Karl, not a servant, who fetched water from the kitchen for his father, and who delivered messages to kitchen staff from his mother. This traffic of food between the kitchen – a room closely associated with the woman who assaults him, Johanna Brummer – and other spaces is coded with hierarchies through food even without the suggestion of sexual violence, to which I turn in the next section.

Brummer's status as a cook combines low status, low pay, and an expectation of subservience with limited but important authority over food, particularly from the child's point of view.²²⁹ A cook is in charge of planning how much and what each

²²⁸ Suchoff (2012), pp. 100-101.

²²⁹ Gerhard Rieck has discussed the prevalence of eroticized female servants (Dienstmädchen) and cooks and their biographical sources in Kafka. In Gerhard Rieck, *Franz Kafka und die Literaturwissenschaft: Aufsätze zu einem kafkaesken Verhältnis* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2002), pp. 13-20, and pp. 33-35.

diner will eat, deciding matters of portion size, course order, timing, and presentation, even the temperature at which food is served. At the same time, cooks themselves did and often still do not eat in the dining room, but in kitchens or bedrooms. Whilst their exposure to food sensitizes them to its quality, the food they themselves eat is often of lesser quality than the food they prepare for others, and consists of leftovers or inferior cuts of meat. Gender exacerbates this hierarchy. Particularly where resources are scarce, women and girls are not a nutritional priority within the family, as the economists Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen have argued.²³⁰ In this way, Karl is both feminized and infantilized in his relationship to food, but also sensitized to food as a tool for power.

The family dynamic of the dinner table has followed Karl to America and marks his life there, even when he is in the role of a customer rather than a son, in what should be a purely economic interaction. The landlady at the inn threatens not to serve coffee if Karl, Robinson and Delamarche fail to obey her orders. This is not the way one behaves in an inn, but how a family often might, with parents threatening to deny dessert or treats if children misbehave.

If Karl is read as an ‘eternal son’ as Peter-André Alt describes Kafka, he would have an image of himself and his own body that is still owned and controlled by his

²³⁰ Sen and Drèze show how the unequal distribution of food within the family unit puts girls at a particular disadvantage: ‘One of the difficult fields of “food battle” is that of intrafamily divisions. While economic models are often constructed on the assumption that the distribution of commodities among different members of the family is done on the basis of equalizing well-being or need-fulfilment, there is considerable evidence that intrafamily divisions often involve very unequal treatments.’ Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *Hunger and Public Action* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 51-2.

parents.²³¹ This relationship has an inbuilt asymmetry. Parents can make unilateral decisions – the kind the diaries presented as humiliating – about dress, shelter, rest and nourishment that directly affect the body of the child. These decisions may appear trivial to adults, but can have momentous consequences from the children’s point of view.

In what now reads like a Freudian convention, nocturnal flashbacks reveal Karl’s true loyalties. Embracing the parents’ picture calms Karl and enables him to fall asleep, a kind of familial embrace, the closest he can come to physical contact with his parents, which really further highlights their absence.

Karl has to maintain his identity and to provide structure and order in his life without the aid of a family or a home. As Boa has argued, ‘the struggle for recognition is played out across multiple dimensions of identity: family upbringing and personal history, gender and sexuality, nationality, class, race, institutional status, and those incalculable gaps that leave space for self-performance.’²³² Faced with this task, Karl’s anxiety spills over into thinking and behaviour that normally would be automatized, such as eating and sleeping, and it is to its genesis, the assault suffered by Karl, that I now turn.

²³¹ Alt (2005).

²³² Boa (2005), p. 170.

3.6. The Assault

Karl's fall, although narrated in retrospect as traumatic events, first suppressed, often are, launches the novel and is the cause for his expulsion. The ambiguous opening sentence of the novel frames the incident as seduction:

Als der siebzehnjährige Karl Roßmann, der von seinen armen Eltern nach Amerika geschickt worden war, weil ihn ein Dienstmädchen verführt und ein Kind von ihm bekommen hatte [...] (V 7)

This sentence qualifies the parents of Karl as poor in the sense of 'pitiable' rather than giving an exclusively socioeconomic statement, described by Kafka in a letter to Milena Jesenská as showing 'ein unverstehendes Mitleid das auch Karl mit seinen Eltern hat' (M 16). This suggests that the description of the assault also takes others than Karl into account and is in fact sympathetic to his parents, and coloured by their embarrassment. Given that his son is mentioned, this is most likely not Karl's version of the events: the child never features in Karl's mind and is clearly peripheral to the novel and to Karl's experience, only mentioned once in passing by his uncle.

Critics have highlighted how Karl's own paternity is not discussed in the novel. By examining the legal implications of Karl's paternity were it subject to Habsburg law, Wolf Kittler has suggested that the silence surrounding Karl's paternity echoes not only the social but also the legal repercussions of Johanna Brummer's pregnancy. Given that the child is illegitimate and the father himself is a minor, legal and financial responsibility under Habsburg law would have fallen not only on Karl's parents but also on his paternal and maternal grandparents, 'auf die ganze Familie

Roßmann' before that of Johanna Brummer.²³³ The suppression of Karl's paternity would then align with the interest of his family both economically and legally, reflecting the parental interest more than risks to Karl's reputation. The opening sentence is certainly adjusted to the frame of reference of someone other than Karl, with the term 'verführt' (V 7) misleadingly suggesting complicity.

Things look very different when the novel returns to the assault in retrospect, where it clearly recounts as an assault narrated from the point of view of someone without an understanding of what is about to happen. Having led Karl to her bedroom and locked the door behind her, Brummer chokes Karl – 'Würgend umarmte sie seinen Hals' (V 42) – and undresses him. At this point Karl, who cannot see well, is asked to do things against his will – to press himself into Brummer's chest, to tell her intimate secrets – and can bring himself to do neither, but is still only uncomfortable, 'sich unbehaglich in dem vielen warmen Bettzeug fühlte' (V 42). Karl cannot put two and two together and appears unable to predict where this is leading. The worst is yet to come, as Brummer

[...] drückte ihren nackten Bauch an seinen Leib, suchte mit der Hand, so widerlich daß Karl Kopf und Hals aus den Kissen heraus schüttelte, zwischen seinen Beinen, stieß dann den Bauch einige Male gegen ihn, ihm war als sei sie ein Teil seiner selbst und vielleicht aus diesem Grunde hatte ihn eine entsetzliche Hilfsbedürftigkeit ergriffen. Weinend kam er endlich nach vielen Wiedersehenswünschen ihrerseits in sein Bett. (V 43)

²³³ Wolf Kittler, 'Dead Beat Father. Zu Kafkas Roman "Der Verschollene"', in *Für alle und keinen: Lektüre, Schrift und Leben bei Nietzsche und Kafka*, ed. by Friedrich Balke, Joseph Vogl, and Benno Wagner (Zürich: Diaphanes Verlag, 2008), pp. 161-176 (p. 164-5). Charles H. Hammond's recent reading emphasizes Karl's absent father in *Der Verschollene* and Karl's desire to please him, overlooking Karl's existing paternity. Charles H. Hammond, 'A Soldier and His Suitcase: Karl Rossmann's Arrival in and Deliverance from Kafka's "Amerika"', *Pacific Coast Philology* 47 (2012), pp. 52-74.

Just as Therese, watching her mother about to kill herself, is unable to process what her eyes are forced to witness, Karl's assault is described like an alien invasion with marked estrangement. This is not just defamiliarized sexual experience, intercourse made strange: something Karl does not understand is being done to his body. Disgusted by Brummer's touch, Karl is crying, paralysed and helpless – his reactions are those of a victim of sexual violence.

Given the ambiguous way in which the assault is first referred to, commentators do not always view Karl unconditionally as a victim. It is generally accepted that 'in Karls Erinnerung gleicht der Vorfall allerdings eher einer Vergewaltigung',²³⁴ but critics still suggest that Karl had agency in the attack. Commentators have implied that Karl is no perfect victim, that the event did not take place if the victim underplays it, and have even suggested that men cannot be raped, reducing sexual consent to an anatomical response. The scene continues to be referred to as a seduction, or a 'transgression' of Karl's, who is punished 'for not resisting sexual seduction.'²³⁵ Seth Berk emphasizes Brummer's pleasure and subversion in gaining 'a child freed from patrilinear inheritance', and describes Karl as a psychologically impotent character whose sexual initiation by Brummer is ultimately liberating.²³⁶ Whilst arguing that Karl was sent to America 'wegen eines "widerlichen", an Vergewaltigung grenzenden Mißbrauchs' Menninghaus concludes that Karl's resistance has a euphemistic function, where his incomprehension masks desire.²³⁷ For Boa, who stresses the power someone of Karl's social standing would have had over Brummer, the boy only

²³⁴ Engel (2010), p. 178.

²³⁵ Wasihun (2015), p. 468.

²³⁶ Seth Berk, 'Verschollen unter Amazonen: Transformations of the Feminine and Deconstructive Autopoiesis in Kafka's "Der Verschollene"', *German Quarterly* 88.1 (2015), pp. 60-81 (p. 64).

²³⁷ Menninghaus (2002), p. 378.

‘plays the innocent’.²³⁸ Gerhard Kurz’s recent analysis, with its emphasis on parable, reads Johanna Brummer’s attack on Karl as a ‘seduction motif’ distanced from psychology.²³⁹ In Schaffner’s view, such ‘violation of boundaries and loss of consciousness’ is integral to how sexual encounters are described across Kafka’s novels, not the product of Karl’s assault.²⁴⁰

At twenty years Karl’s senior, Brummer gains Karl’s trust under the auspices of parental authority like the perpetrator of child abuse.²⁴¹ Although Karl’s age is given inconsistently in the novel as either fifteen or seventeen, he has been called a child protagonist – he is an adolescent but remains childlike in psychological terms for much of the novel, particularly sexually.²⁴² From Karl’s point of view, Brummer is described as having a great deal of power over Karl’s body, which she touches at her will even prior to the assault. She also has power over Karl as the mistress and gatekeeper of the kitchen which Karl must visit, as I have highlighted.

The novel continues to echo Karl’s initial sexual assault to such an extent that it could be read as a post-traumatic text – even the homoerotic nocturnal boxing leads someone to land on the sleeping Karl and soil his bedsheets with blood. In presumed loss of virginity at the hands of Brummer, Karl was initiated by force into adult sexuality. Even Robinson suggests that Karl has failed to develop adult sexuality: he has a quite understandable reason not to do so given his experience. That Karl has

²³⁸ Boa (2005), p. 174.

²³⁹ Gerhard Kurz, ‘Therese’s Story in “Der Verschollene”’, in *Franz Kafka: Narration, Rhetoric, and Reading*, ed. by Jakob Lothe, Beatrice Sandberg, and Ronald Speirs (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2011), pp. 94-107.

²⁴⁰ Schaffner (2012), p. 89.

²⁴¹ Robertson (1997), p. 479.

²⁴² Clayton Koelb, *Kafka: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum, 2010), p. 5.

fathered a son further highlights this loss of bodily autonomy: he has anatomically participated in but not psychologically consented to the act.

The assault is echoed throughout the novel, emphasizing its devastating significance in Karl's life. The scene where Karl loses his coat has an element of bodily violation to it, an effect reinforced by Robinson and Delamarche groping the housekeeper, to whom they sold Karl's suit, right after the scene. Karl is woken up by a stranger touching him when he is sleeping: 'Geweckt wurde er früh durch ein Kitzeln unter der Achsel' (V 136). The narrative voice is heavily tinted by what we assume is Robinson and Delamarche talking Karl out of his suit. 'Sie halfen Karl, der auch rücksichtlich des Kleides noch nicht ganz entschlossen war, aus dem Kleid heraus und trugen es davon' (V 137). Karl is undressed against his will.

There is an uncomfortable border between acquiescing, not resisting, and failing to express refusal here, one that often accompanies sexual abuse or coercion and the related psychological shock. Karl is beaten by Delamarche, and wakes up not unlike a rape victim who has been violently initiated to prostitution, unjustly blaming himself for what happened. Karl is still drowsy, 'ein wenig schlaftrunken' (V 137), gets dressed and is full of self-reproach for what has happened, 'machte er sich Vorwürfe das Kleid verkauft zu haben' (V 137-8). To add insult to injury Robinson and Delamarche hand him half a dollar, having obviously profited from the sale. As Brunelda and Delamarche are having sex Karl suffers a further assault that again echoes rape; having taken hold of Karl and wrestled him, Robinson 'gab Karl noch rasch und ganz rücksichtslos mit dem Knie einen vollen Stoß in den Bauch' (V 321),

after which Karl lies still in order to get over the blow, in a passive state of shock that is characteristic of victims of assault.

A key failure of analysis, which Karl commits again and again to the frustration of the reader, is his fundamental misunderstanding over agency. He unjustifiably or disproportionately blames himself for injustices he is subject to. Just as Karl blamed himself for selling the suit, when he was in fact coerced into giving it up and hardly got any profit out of it, he again fails to defend himself. Assertive when standing up for the Stoker, when helping others, Karl is unable to do the same for himself, suggesting a post-traumatic mental state. Many commentators are puzzled by Karl's inability to be proactive and his submission to what amounts to slavery: the trauma he experienced and its effects offer a psychologically coherent explanation for his behaviour.

Karl is an unusual protagonist for Kafka for this lack of analytical distance to the injustices he is subject to. This is in stark contrast to Josef K. of *Der Process*, a kind of fantasy figure of rationality, a successful, aggressively confident professional, an adult male ideal.²⁴³

Karl's subservience is highlighted in the abuse of his body by others, be it through excessive or unpaid work or sexual abuse. Unlike Josef K., Karl does not initiate sex or act in a predatory fashion, but remains a victim throughout. When Klara initiates sexual contact with Karl, Menninghaus reads Karl's freezing and immobility as

²⁴³ For a reading of *Der Verschollene* as a kind of trial, relating it to *Der Process*, see Elfie Poulain, 'L'enfer du procès dans "Le Disparu" et "Le Procès" de Franz Kafka', *Germanica* 24 (1999), pp. 147-155. Kafka wrote the 'Oklahoma' segment, which I discuss at the end of this chapter, alongside *Der Process*.

submission ‘die in Verbindung mit Klaras Lust am Schlagen recht direkt an sadistische Fesselungspraktiken erinnert’,²⁴⁴ but if we read Karl as a traumatized victim of sexual violence, his shocked response and consequent passivity come as no surprise. That Karl appears to dismiss the assault seems the result of an understandable desire to suppress or forget a traumatic experience.

Karl is defined by his victimhood, and his innocence adds to this pathos. Highlighting the novel’s theme of psychological and bodily trauma is the character of Therese. Another victim and trauma survivor, a sister figure and not unlike Karl, Therese has been traumatized by her mother’s suicide, which she had to witness. Her mind is described as filled with obsessive worry: ‘Therese, die doch in ihren eigenen Angelegenheiten so peinlich war und ein nicht ganz eindeutiges Wort der Oberköchin wochenlang in ihren Gedanken drehte und untersuchte’ (V 251). In this sense, the violence has not quite ended, neither for Therese nor for Karl. In Karl’s case his distress is most evident in his unusual behaviour around meals, to which I will now turn.

3.7. The Role of Food: Butterford and Missed Meals

Food itself plays an important role throughout the novel, popping up in unexpected places: Brunelda used to be married to a cocoa manufacturer, and an episode takes place in a town called Butterford. There are repeated references to Karl not eating, and he gives a variety of excuses to avoid food. ‘Der Fall Robinson’ begins with just such an episode:

²⁴⁴ Menninghaus (2002), p. 385.

Da klopfte ihm jemand auf die Schulter. Karl, der natürlich dachte, es wäre ein Gast, steckte den Apfel eiligst in die Tasche und eilte, kaum daß er den Mann ansah, zum Aufzug hin. (V 209)

Karl is approached not with the means of language but by someone silently touching his body. Karl does not respond but walks to the lift, assuming it is a hotel guest wanting to use it – having been presumably identified as a lift-boy on the basis of his uniform. Here, Karl was almost eating, even just about to take a bite of the apple, but now puts it back in his pocket. Karl's non-eating is particularly prevalent in the 'Butterford' episode, key for my analysis with its repeated meals, and the focus of this section.

Karl has an abnormal preoccupation with food. His observations on others eating border on the fetishistic: in the middle of their dialogue Karl is able to describe Robinson, 'der eine große Bonbonmasse auf der Zunge wälzte und hie und da ein Stück, das aus dem Mund gedrängt wurde mit dem Finger wieder zurückdrückte' (V 304), in anatomical detail. When Delamarche and Robinson eat Karl's salami, Karl pays close attention also to the amount each one of them is eating, and in fact notices a page later still, quite unnecessarily as the narrative has moved to the city and its unfamiliarity, that Robinson has not quite finished eating: 'Robinson begann im Anschluß daran mit vollem Mund ein Lied zu singen' (V 145). Yet Karl thinks it too petty to ask for some food for himself, evidently not understanding why he feels this way. There are multiple thoughts pulling Karl: believing he does not deserve food, embarrassment at asking for what he judges petty, and irritation at this embarrassment, all surrounded by an extreme preoccupation with food – Karl must be very hungry.

Throughout the novel, mealtimes are narrative high points, concentrations of anxious energy. Karl loses the Veronese salami – something that he brought with him and ought to belong to him – to Delamarche, who attacks it with a dagger-like weapon. Dagger fantasies are frequent in Kafka, repeated ad nauseam to the reader of the diaries and famously ending *Der Process*. The way in which Karl must unpack the food – again, prepare it – adds to the humiliation:

Karl mußte sie auspacken, der Franzose nahm sie zu sich, um sie mit seinem dolchartigen Messer zu behandeln und fast ganz allein aufzuessen. Robinson bekam nur hie und da eine Schnitte, Karl dagegen, der wieder den Koffer tragen mußte, wenn er ihn nicht auf der Landstraße stehen lassen wollte, bekam nichts, als hätte er sich seinen Anteil schon im voraus genommen. Es schien ihm zu kleinlich, um ein Stückchen zu betteln, aber die Galle regte sich ihm. (V 142)

In a fashion so fundamental it borders on the metaphysical, Karl is not entitled to food – he has had his share, or taken his share, and consumed food in excess. This passage is preceded by a description of American road traffic seen through the eyes of an outsider who keeps using his European experience as a reference point, comparing it to ‘Karls Heimat’ (V 141), a perspective that is evidently Karl’s. We can therefore assume that it is in Karl’s personal view that he is either too proud to ask for food or does not feel deserving of it. Food, an elementary human need, is here an entitlement.

Meals themselves suggest conviviality and pleasure, but also a fixed time, *Mahl* or *Mahlzeit*, a given duration and regulated pace, and ritualized behavior. In ‘Zur Soziologie der Mahlzeit’ (1910), Simmel argued that whilst meals are the lowest common denominator for all people – we all have to eat – civilized eating is regimented irrespective of bodily needs: ‘Von sehr tief stehenden Völkerschaften wissen wir, dass sie nicht zu bestimmten Stunden, sondern anarchisch, wenn ein jeder

gerade Hunger hat, essen.’²⁴⁵ Simmel lists eating without tableware and cutlery, from shared bowls as opposed to individual plates, alone or whenever one pleases, as primitive behaviour.

Within this context, this scene reads like a perversion of the social contract that constitutes a meal. Individually prepared portions are a central part of meal structure across the industrialized West; one rarely has to fight for one’s share. By contrast, Robinson and Delamarche act like animals around their prey. At the table, Karl’s European manners put him at an evolutionary disadvantage.

Here, Kafka’s treatment of the meal approaches his literary treatment of sexuality. Removed is the conviviality of the former and the personal connection – not to mention romance – of the latter. With the human elements removed, only a mimicry of the act of eating or copulation remains, a skeletal re-enactment of the bare bones of the act. Such animalistic eating rituals repeat themselves when Karl and his companions have their next meal. They stop at an inn ‘und aßen davor im Freien an einem, wie es Karl schien, eisernen Tisch fast rohes Fleisch, das man mit Messer und Gabel nicht zerschneiden, sondern nur zerreißen konnte’ (V 147), a defamiliarized description of underdone steaks.²⁴⁶ They do not eat indoors and eat meat that must be torn apart, again as if it were prey.

There is, of course, a direct link between hunger and poverty in the America of Karl’s time – as in Hamsun’s America – as illustrated by the experience of both Therese and

²⁴⁵ Georg Simmel, ‘Zur Soziologie der Mahlzeit’, in *Soziologische Ästhetik*, ed. by Klaus Lichtblau (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2009), pp. 155-162 (p. 156).

²⁴⁶ Alt (2005), pp. 350-1.

Karl. In a rare moment of insight from Robinson, when asked by Karl why one would want to become a locksmith, he answers: “‘Warum ich Schlosser geworden bin?’” sagte Robinson, “‘doch gewiß nicht deshalb, damit meiner Mutter Sohn dabei verhungert’” (V 146).

Nonetheless, there are poor characters who do find food and drink; Karl’s non-eating appears self-imposed, in what would read as morally or ethically driven in the absence of the psychological framework I have situated it in. In Karl’s eyes the food itself is dangerous, potentially violent, even deadly: rather unusually given the shortage of cutlery at the inn, ‘in jedem Brotlaib steckte ein langes Messer’ (V 147), which echoes the dagger imagery that accompanied Delamarche devouring Karl’s salami. Threats of violence or harm to the body by the food even apply to the Coca-Cola they drink: ‘Zu diesem Essen wurde eine schwarze Flüssigkeit gereicht, die im Halse brannte’ (V 147). Again the narrative pays close attention to the appetites of Robinson and Delamarche, creating a comparison between their eating and Karl’s eating, which we hear little about. In fact, Karl is distracted by observing the other diners and their consumption of Coca-Cola, the traffic, and the bill, and then again manipulates the pace of the meal, rushing to the end of it in his thoughts: ‘Verbittert wurde das Essen für Karl außerdem dadurch, daß es sehr fraglich war, wie das Essen gezahlt werden sollte’ (V 147). Karl is resentful, as he was when his salami was eaten, only this time due to the bill.

Furthermore, Karl takes on the role of having to prepare meals, not due to an order from Robinson but because of implicit expectation, or perhaps even a desire to control his dietary intake. Here, Karl offers himself as a volunteer because of his youth:

Als der Jüngste und da sich auch sonst niemand meldete, zögerte Karl nicht sich für diese Besorgung anzubieten und gieng, nachdem er eine Bestellung auf Speck, Brot und Bier erhalten hatte, ins Hotel hinüber. (V 152)

The German for errand here, *Besorgung*, has one think of *Sorge*, care or worry. Again a mealtime scene is described as hostile and threatening. American food, available from buffets, consumed in excess and hurry, and doused in vinegar, has a considerable degree of verisimilitude here. Karl's mind associates the diners, with their elbows on the table, with his Latin class: dining is then both a test and a performance. Errors in eating risk corporal punishment.

By taking on a role in food circulation Karl gains some much needed power. He attempts to manipulate the pace of the meal that Robinson and Delamarche consume, perhaps to stop himself from being exposed to food for a long period of time. The Head Cook wants the food basket back by the next morning at the latest – “Spätestens morgen früh muß ich ihn haben” (V 160), and sees Karl off with an “Auf Wiedersehn morgen!” (V 160), yet Karl rushes the others further, and can only think of the end of the meal: “Essen Sie rasch auf, ich muß den Korb zurückgeben” (V 162). Oddly, an elusive figure of a man appears who claims he has been in search of Karl for a long time to retrieve the basket under an order from the Head Cook, almost as if desired and created by Karl's anxious mind.

At his peril, Karl applies outdated European standards to American life, which mirrors the failings of Hamsun's narrator to understand the harsh economic logic of his environment which I highlighted in the previous chapter. Even Karl's idea of work as a lift boy is hopelessly aestheticized and romantic: ‘Übrigens hatten die Liftjungen Karl immer gefallen, sie waren ihm wie der Schmuck der Hotels vorgekommen’ (V

173). Karl's failure to understand the buffet, however, either exemplifies extraordinarily poor perception skills, or is motivated by a desire to delay and complicate his access to food. Karl tries to get hold of the waiter – at a buffet of all places – whilst others help themselves to food. Karl laments that there is no food for him, only to reject fish right under his nose for a variety of reasons ranging from cost to appearance.

Karl stand eng ans Büffet gedrängt, denn kaum hatte er sich angestellt, war hinter ihm ein Tisch aufgestellt worden und der eine der dort sich niederlassenden Gäste streifte schon, wenn er sich nur ein wenig beim Reden zurückbog, mit seinem großen Hut Karls Rücken. Und dabei war so wenig Hoffnung vom Kellner etwas zu bekommen, selbst als die beiden plumpen Nachbarn befriedigt weggegangen waren. Einigemal hatte Karl einen Kellner über den Tisch hin bei der Schürze gefaßt, aber immer hatte sich der mit verzerrtem Gesicht losgerissen. Keiner war zu halten, sie liefen nur und liefen nur. Wenn wenigstens in der Nähe Karls etwas Passendes zum Essen und Trinken gewesen wäre, er hätte es genommen, sich nach dem Preis erkundigt, das Geld hingelegt und wäre mit Freude weggegangen. Aber gerade vor ihm lagen nur Schüsseln mit häringsartigen Fischen, deren schwarze Schuppen am Rande goldig glänzten. Die konnten sehr teuer sein und würden wahrscheinlich niemanden sättigen. (V 154)

Again, Karl's distress is mixed with a heightened concern for the food consumption of others. The reasons why Karl fails to eat are manifold: the possible cost of the food, the look of it, the failure of a particular food to satisfy one's appetite. These show a classically anorexic multitude of excuses for refusing food: the presentation of the food is poor, it looks unappetizing, the temperature or the texture of the food is not right, and so on. Again, the food is simultaneously fetishized, described in mouth-watering terms: 'Nun stand er gar in einer Gegend wo ringsherum an den Tischen warme Fleischspeisen mit schönen gelben Kartoffeln gegessen wurden, es war ihm unbegreiflich wie sich das die Leute verschafft hatten' (V 155).

Karl is both fascinated and horrified by the food on offer, but in his behaviour again acts against his appetite. Once Karl finally finds food with the aid of the Head Cook, he orders a more simple meal than he would like, as we can judge from his having just admired the offerings. In fact, he pays attention to the obesity of the Head Cook – ‘Sie war sehr dick’ (V 156) – and then requests very ordinary fare:

Karl war versucht im Anblick der vielen Eßwaren, die hier sorgfältig in Regalen und auf Tischen aufgeschichtet lagen, für seine Bestellung rasch ein feineres Nachtessen auszudenken, besonders da er erwarten konnte von dieser einflußreichen Frau billig bedient zu werden, schließlich aber nannte er doch wieder, da ihm nichts passendes einfiel, nur Speck, Brot und Bier. ‘Nichts weiter?’ fragte die Frau. ‘Nein danke’, sagte Karl, ‘aber für drei Personen.’ (V 156-7)

The Head Cook labels this meal ‘ein Essen für Sträflinge’ (V 157), presumably because of its simplicity. She labels the food as unclean and spoiled, the same food which was appetizing only moments earlier. Karl is then doubly denied this meal, with eating now presented as both unsanitary and criminal.

Having laboriously brought the food to Robinson and Delamarche, Karl anxiously watches them eat it, describing Robinson’s eating in anatomical detail, but again eats nothing himself:

‘Haben Sie schon zu ende gegessen?’ fragte er, als sich die beiden einen Augenblick verschnauften. ‘Haben Sie denn nicht schon im Hotel gegessen?’ fragte Delamarche, der glaubte, Karl beanspruche seinen Anteil. ‘Wenn Sie noch essen wollen, dann beeilen Sie sich’, sagte Karl und gieng zu seinem Koffer. ‘Der scheint Launen zu haben’, sagte Delamarche zu Robinson. ‘Ich habe keine Launen’, sagte Karl, ‘aber ist es vielleicht recht in meiner Abwesenheit meinen Koffer aufzubrechen und meine Sachen herauszuwerfen.’ (V 162)

The reader, like Delamarche, is under the impression that Karl is demanding his share of the contents of the basket. Yet this is not the case; he wants to discuss other

matters. The narrative hides Karl's role in his own hunger quite effectively, but Karl's value judgements are clear: in their hunger, Robinson and Delamarche acted like thieves.

These meals on the road resemble the one Karl consumed when still under the protection of his uncle, in a familial or certainly more social setting in one key aspect: that Karl behaves strangely in comparison to others at mealtimes. Used to dining alone when staying with his uncle – rather unusually given the affluence of his uncle and the care he first takes in introducing Karl to American life – Karl is suddenly ordered to dine with his uncle and his rotund business associates:

Eines Tages kam der Onkel knapp vor der Zeit des Essens, das Karl wie gewöhnlich allein einzunehmen gedachte und forderte ihn auf, sich gleich schwarz anzuziehn und mit ihm zum Essen zu kommen, an welchem zwei Geschäftsfreunde teilnehmen würden. (V 68)

Oddly for someone whose integration to American life is taken so seriously, Karl is allowed to focus on his food 'als sei er ein Kind, das sich vor allem ordentlich sattessen müsse' (V 69), a role with which he seems rather content. Getting children to eat can be notoriously difficult: Karl appears to have similarly low standards to meet at the table. He is only expected to finish his meal, not talk shop or even socialize.

Disordered eaters often view mealtimes as familial battles, even quantitatively measuring their eating against that of other family members. The 'Landhaus' section of *Der Verschollene* includes a textbook definition of such behaviour, where Karl is to dine as Pollunder's guest.

In this 'Landhaus' section, Karl is the target of two simultaneous and unpleasant bodily advances, the sexual ones by Klara – who like Johanna Brummer is involved in food preparation – and, worse, by the food on offer. Eating is a terrifying prospect to Karl: prison imagery frames the mealtime scene. Green shoves Karl and Klara into the dining room and shuts any connection to the outside world, the open windows Karl has been admiring. Karl must be physically held in place by others during the scene when he begins to feel unwell: 'Ihm wurde fast übel und er stand auf. Fast gleichzeitig griffen Herr Pollunder und Klara nach seinen Händen. "Sie müssen noch sitzen bleiben", sagte Klara' (V 82). Karl is distraught enough to have to be reminded by Klara 'daß der Braten vor ihm stand und er bei einem Abendessen war' (V 81), of where he is and what he must now do: to eat.

Karl's explanations of why he is unable to eat, such as that he cannot swallow – 'konnte keinen Schluck der goldfarbigen Suppe hinunterbringen' (V 80) – read as physiological excuses. The perceived inability to swallow, or the fear of choking, are frequent explanations anorexia sufferers give for refusing food. The soup – a food that cannot be fletcherized – is golden in colour, and appears again at the hotel buffet. Ultimately Karl does force himself to eat:

Dann wollte er sich aber wieder nichts anmerken lassen, wie gestört er sich fühlte und begann die Suppe stumm in sich hineinzuschütten. Das Essen verging langsam wie eine Plage. (V 80)

The meal ultimately becomes a socially induced act of force-feeding. Its torturously long duration is stressed. Green's dominance of the scene contrast with Karl's pained eating and uncertain social position. Ultimately Karl's lack of appetite becomes a

point of social disagreement and confusion, which involves Klara, Green, Pollunder, a servant, perhaps even the senator, disturbing the entire social schema:

Aber Herr Green [...] bedauerte öfters, ohne vom Teller aufzusehen, die auffallende Appetitlosigkeit Karls. Herr Pollunder nahm Karls Appetit in Schutz, trotzdem er als Gastgeber Karl auch zum Essen hätte aufmuntern sollen. Und tatsächlich fühlte sich Karl durch den Zwang, unter dem er während des ganzen Nachtmahls litt, so empfindlich, daß er gegen die eigene bessere Einsicht diese Äußerung Herrn Pollunders als Unfreundlichkeit auslegte. Und es entsprach nur diesem seinen Zustand, daß er einmal ganz unpassend rasch und viel aß und dann wieder für lange Zeit müde Gabel und Messer sinken ließ und der unbeweglichste der Gesellschaft war, mit dem der Diener, der die Speisen reichte, oft nichts anzufangen wußte.

‘Ich werde schon morgen dem Herrn Senator erzählen, wie Sie das Fräulein Klara durch Ihr Nichtessen gekränkt haben’, sagte Herr Green und beschränkte sich darauf, die spaßige Absicht dieser Worte durch die Art, wie er mit Besteck hantierte auszudrücken. (V 83)

Green can make fun of Klara ‘mit der Kraft des Gesättigten’ (V 84), whereas the meal seems only to have weakened Karl further. Food has the opposite effect on Karl to the one it has on other people. Green’s appetite, influence, sexual advances to Klara, and treatment of Karl ‘als Kind’ (V 84) group maturity, sexual power, social position – Green is a lawyer – and the city, all against Karl’s weakness, foreignness, and childlike submission, all of which are conveyed through how they eat. Pollunder seems to think that all the action is on the plate:

Vergebens suchte sich Karl das Benehmen Herrn Pollunders zu erklären. Der saß vor seinem Teller und sah in ihn, als geschehe dort das eigentlich Wichtige. (V 84)

Pollunder is quite right: against the force-fed Karl, Green is carving a pigeon energetically and talking not about the meal they are consuming but about his meal practices at home, explaining how the food-related work is divided between his elderly housekeeper and the kitchen staff. Eating whilst talking about food, Green is

also the first to get up. In a dictatorial fashion, he has the power to decide unilaterally when the meal is over, which further highlights Karl's inferiority.

On the other hand, this tortuous episode is followed by a fantasy sequence of familial intimacy and of Karl being accepted fully by his uncle, which takes the form of a meal:

Vielleicht würde er zum erstenmal gemeinsam mit seinem Onkel frühstücken, der Onkel im Bett, er auf einem Sessel, das Frühstück auf einem Tischchen zwischen ihnen, vielleicht würde dieses gemeinsame Frühstück zu einer ständigen Einrichtung werden, vielleicht würden sie in Folge dieser Art Frühstück, was sogar kaum zu vermeiden war, öfters als wie bisher bloß einmal während des Tages zusammenkommen und dann natürlich auch offener mit einander reden können. (V 86)

Karl now fantasizes elaborately about eating, having left the table only moments ago; he may in fact be very hungry. Furthermore, this breakfast with the uncle is elevated to something greater than a meal: with the table bridging the two, it would allow for unprecedented closeness and honesty between Karl and his uncle. Free of power play, the meal would instead reinforce familial bonds.

At the same time, in this sequence Karl assimilates good relations with his uncle to a particular type of eating pattern, overemphasizing the importance of 'eating right', which should hardly dictate one's relationship to one's family. In Karl's view, if he continues to behave unusually during meals he will not be able to reach such a level of closeness with his uncle – a fear that is verified as, soon enough, Karl becomes the target of a further expulsion.

To demonstrate how unusual this focus on food without its consumption is, I will compare Karl to Proust's narrator once more. An adolescent like Karl, the narrator is extraordinarily interested in food and its preparation and pays great attention to both. The women who prepare food are likened to artists. Meals are compared to performances: leaving food on one's plate in the presence of Françoise, the family cook, would be akin to leaving a concert performance under the composer's very eyes. Meals also reinforce social bonds: Charles Swann, an art lover, intellectual and the most idealized character of the novel, brings the narrator's family meal ingredients and recipe recommendations. The young narrator visits Françoise's kitchen to enquire about meals, an activity that excites him day after day, and is here compared to the excitement created by reading the news or upcoming celebrations: 'je descendis à la cuisine demander le menu du dîner qui tous les jours me distrayait comme les nouvelles qu'on lit dans un journal et m'excitait à la façon d'un programme de fête.'²⁴⁷

For Proust's gourmand narrator, the suggestion of an abuse of power from the family cook momentarily threatens to puncture her role as the origin of culinary pleasure. When he witnesses Françoise killing a chicken in a fit of rage, he is momentarily taken aback by her cruelty. Yet these ethical concerns are quickly watered down by the thought of the delicious food that Françoise prepares: 'Mais qui m'eût fait des boules aussi chaudes, du café aussi parfumé, et même... ces poulets?'²⁴⁸ – ethical concerns are easily outweighed by appetite and the pleasures of the table. Neither his appetite nor his attachment to Françoise are shaken by this suggestion of violence. By

²⁴⁷ Marcel Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu* (I), ed. by Jean-Yves Tadié (Paris: Gallimard [Pléiade], 1987), p. 120.

²⁴⁸ Proust (1987), p. 120.

contrast, the original maternal task of providing nourishment is tainted in the role of the Head Cook, a motherly figure who first takes Karl under her wing, only to betray him later.

Women who prepare food are the most dangerous characters in *Der Verschollene*. Johanna Brummer is already terrifying as a mother and whore in one, an amalgamation of sexual aggression and quietly threatening maternal authority. She is made ever more threatening through her association with food. Menninghaus argues that the apron ‘ist das von Kafka meistbenutzte Attribut für die Artikulation der rein-unrein-Differenz’.²⁴⁹ First worn by Line the kitchen maid, aprons are sexually suggestive throughout *Der Verschollene*. As Karl and the Stoker pass through the kitchens of the ship, its underbelly, we are told that the flirtatious girls working there have deliberately made their aprons dirty. Line’s apron is then made into a drag prop of sorts to ridicule a sailor: ““Das ist ja ekelhaft, da haben sie mir eine Mädchenschürze umgebunden”” (V 50). Later, even Delamarche is disgusted by women who wipe their dirty hands on aprons. By contrast, when we meet Therese, her innocence is underlined as ‘ihre Schürze war sehr sorgfältig gebügelt’ (V 170). An apron in use suggests the unwelcome arrival of a meal: contact with women who prepare food could coerce Karl into eating.

Karl’s dietary control reaches the heights of paranoia in a scene that echoes the balcony expulsion of the *Brief*. Delirious with fatigue, Karl has finally been allowed to sleep on a pile of curtains – a form of theatrical or operatic debris – in Brunelda’s apartment. He is awoken by Delamarche and Brunelda having sex and then told to go

²⁴⁹ Menninghaus (2002), p. 380.

to the balcony so as not to disturb them. Karl sinks into an armchair. For once, he is slightly more physically comfortable than others, as Robinson is left to sleep on the cold stone floor. Yet Karl pays a high price for allowing himself to rest in relative comfort. When let go, his body is unreliable and in potential danger. Karl sleeps through the day and only wakes up in the evening, admonishing himself:

Wie unvorsichtig war er gewesen, alle Ratschläge der Oberköchin, alle Warnungen Thereses, alle eigenen Befürchtungen hatte er vernachlässigt, saß hier ruhig auf dem Balkon des Delamarche und hatte hier gar den halben Tag verschlafen, als sei nicht hier hinter dem Vorhang Delamarche, sein großer Feind. (V 297)

When Karl wakes up, we find out where he had fallen in his slumber: the chair contains Robinson's food stash, from which Robinson now pulls 'eine geöffnete aber noch gut gefüllte und von Öl überfließende Sardinenbüchse und eine Menge meist zerdrückter und zu einem Ballen gewordener Bonbons' (V 297-8), half-eaten food which is subsequently offered to Karl. Karl has been sleeping on top of food without knowing it; it is as if the food nearly got into his body without his knowledge. Even Robinson comments on Karl's lack of appetite – caught off guard, Karl is at risk of both getting the rest he needs and of having food approach his body.

3.8. The Lift Boy's Body

There is an important further element to Karl's anxiety, that of perceived body size. Throughout the novel, Karl often moves to make space for others. This reaches a climax of sorts at the buffet: upon entering the room, Karl experiences his body as excessively large. In symbolic terms, Karl feels he has no place in the meal. In concrete terms, there is no space for his body between the tables. Karl is pressed right into the buffet, other guests shove him around, and another diner's hat pokes him in

the back. Yet others do get food and manage to move around. In Karl's subjective experience, his body takes up too much space.

Karl's relationship with his own body is characterized by distortion and extreme discomfort with its size. The episode with the hotel tailor exemplifies Karl's sense of his own body. A detailed reading reveals a considerable amount of distress:

Beim Hotelschneider wurde ihm die Liftjungenuniform anprobiert, die äußerlich sehr prächtig mit Goldknöpfen und Goldschnüren ausgestattet war, bei deren Anziehen es Karl aber doch ein wenig schauderte, denn besonders unter den Achseln war das Röckchen kalt, hart und dabei unaustrockbar naß von dem Schweiß der Liftjungen, die es vor ihm getragen hatten. Die Uniform mußte auch vor allem über der Brust eigens für Karl erweitert werden, denn keine der zehn vorliegenden wollte auch nur beiläufig passen. Trotz dieser Näharbeit, die hier notwendig war, und trotzdem der Meister sehr peinlich schien – zweimal flog die bereits abgelieferte Uniform aus seiner Hand in die Werkstatt zurück – war alles in kaum fünf Minuten erledigt und Karl verließ das Atelier schon als Liftjunge mit anliegenden Hosen und einem trotz der bestimmten gegenteiligen Zusicherung des Meisters sehr beengenden Jäckchen, das immer wieder zu Athemübungen verlockte, da man sehen wollte, ob das Athmen noch immer möglich war. (V 184-5)

In spite of having his uniform made to measure by the hotel tailor, Karl ends up with clothing so tight he can hardly breathe. The uniform seems handsome to the outside, but its interior – the part that touches the body – is dirty, indeed irreparably dirty, marked with the memory of someone else's body.

Given that Karl's experience of the uniform quality drastically differs from its outward appearance just as his experience of the uniform being tight differs from the view of the tailor, who appears to have high standards for his work, we can assume that Karl subjectively experiences the clothing as suffocating and constricting. Trying on clothes in the presence of others, and presumably being measured and being compared to the sizes of previous lift-boys, is a source of anxiety for Karl. This sense

of clothing as constricting is repeated when Karl speaks of lift-boys' boots being too tight, in apparent contrast to American fashions.

Karl's desire to avoid his own body – seeing, touching or experiencing it, being aware of its dimensions – contrasts with the attention he pays to the bodies of others, practicing the social comparison I highlighted as constitutive of body image in the *Brief*. In the very next paragraph, the first thing we learn about the Head Waiter is that he is slim and attractive, and Karl again notices the elegant suit worn by his colleague, Giacomo.

Throughout the novel, Karl is either in a state of undress or wearing structured uniforms or suits. In his diaries, Kafka paid attention to uniforms that manipulate the appearance of the body. Having seen a play titled *Die Sternenbraut* by Christian von Ehrenfels, whose cast includes a sick officer, Kafka noted in his diaries how the uniform forces the body towards both health and decisiveness, to admirable physical and mental faculties: 'Der kranke Leib in der gespannten, zur Gesundheit und Entschlossenheit verpflichtenden Uniform' (T 412), the uniform shape here reflecting an ideal body shape. Uniforms, of course, manipulate the appearance of the body, creating the illusion of good posture, broader shoulders, and a narrower waist.

If women associated with food commit sexual violence, Karl's body and its clothes keep being taken by force also by men: in America Karl is kidnapped twice, first by the Head Porter and then by Robinson. He is even groped on the train to 'Oklahoma'. When Robinson approaches him from the bed, drunk, Karl notes: "“Sie scheinen Lust zu haben, mich durchzuprügeln”" (V 164). The Head Porter's sadism is one of taking

over parts of Karl's body – “Und ich kann Dir den Mund stopfen” (V 263). His inspection of Karl's pockets reads like a forced penetration of Karl's body: the seams of Karl's pockets burst, he blushes and is enraged enough to protest.

Brunelda, whose name itself echoes the predatory Brummer, has a body that further amalgamates sloth, gluttony and sexual deviance. Boa has found ambiguity in this caricature of obesity by connecting it to the novel's composition history, as it overlaps with *Die Verwandlung*:

Brunelda may be Kafka's most misogynistic creation, yet the echoes and cross-connections with later work suggest unfinished business, even secret empathy with the otherness of this fearful creature trapped in her monstrous body. Kafka returned only intermittently to *Der Verschollene* and finally put it aside once respectable Karl and repulsive Brunelda had merged in the composite figure of decent Gregor Samsa and his indecent body.²⁵⁰

On the whole, the suffering of others is presented without empathy in *Der Verschollene*, revealing Karl's uncompromising attitudes to weakness. Robinson's alcoholism is portrayed in highly unsympathetic ways through a sloppy national caricature of an Irishman. When Robinson vomits into the hotel elevator – where his body poses a direct risk to the efficiency of the hotel – Karl is horrified to see him unable to control his body (V 212), and appears to question the legitimacy of addiction. When Robinson has ended up in bandages and on a stretcher, his bandages are a joke, his hangover both imaginary and laughable. Gerhard Neumann has read Robinson and Karl as similarly infantilized characters in their lack of independence,

²⁵⁰ Boa (2005), p. 183.

but Robinson's dependency on others is much less sympathetically portrayed than that of Karl's.²⁵¹

Kafka appears to be constructing a double standard of bodily suffering. Firstly there is the kind that the father of the *Brief* experienced, a result of poverty-led hunger, the cold and hard manual labour, which he used as a weapon against his son. The exploitation he suffered had a crude, unequivocal physical clarity to it, which Karl's modern American life lacks. When it comes to addiction, weakness, tiredness, to bodily suffering that has a mental component, pain is dismissed as irrelevant, unimportant, and contemptible.

This logic of pitiable bodily dependence is exemplified in a story within Kafka's diaries, 'Erinnerung an die Kaldabahn', where a railway employee binge drinks as a psychological release mechanism after stressful inspections of his station. The desire to drink is described as a mere bodily impulse, unsympathetically and without any further reflection. The desire invades the body like an alien, 'Der Durst nach einer solchen Nacht war fürchterlich; es war als ob in mir ein zweiter Mensch wäre, der aus meinem Mund seinen Kopf und Hals streckte und nach etwas Trinkbarem schrie' (T 685). Similarly, Karl systematically disassociates the mind from the body, making him often oblivious to his own innocence. If the suffering has a mental component, he appears to have no understanding of it, let alone the language to describe it.

²⁵¹ Neumann (2013), p. 166. See also Neumann's discussion of Robinson as an infantile character through a Freudian oral fixation, in Neumann (2013), pp. 168-9.

3.9. The Body at Work

In my previous chapter, I showed a growing gap between the writing work of Hamsun's narrator and the compensation he receives. Karl's wealth and the type of work he undertakes also decline as the novel progresses. Unlike in *Sult*, *Der Verschollene* charts Karl's financial decline in gendered terms. Karl is first sponsored by a wealthy male patron, who enables him to study and play music, is then employed at a business, before he has to take on unpaid domestic work, physical labour akin to slavery. What many commentators interpret as 'eine Parodie auf die bürgerliche Familie'²⁵² is hard work for Karl. With food preparation and involvement in sex work, Karl takes on roles normally left to women of the lowest socioeconomic status.

Kafka compared writing to childbirth – in the case of *Das Urteil* 'die Geschichte ist wie eine regelrechte Geburt mit Schmutz und Schleim bedeckt aus mir herausgekommen' (T 491). Childbirth is here described as highly unpleasant, dirty, and physical work – labour in a literal sense – but also, of course, as creation. Although Kafka could be seen to blur the gender binaries of work – sex work is not limited to women, as the hotel employee Renell is suspected of doing something of the kind – in *Der Verschollene* women's work is generally used as a literary motif to highlight Karl's ever-accelerating degradation.

Even as a lift-boy Karl was restricted to work associated with women, to domestic tasks that often relate to food:

²⁵² Kittler (2008), p. 173.

Oft bedauerte er größere Aufträge nicht übernehmen zu können, da hierfür eigene Diener und Botenjungen bestimmt waren, die ihre Wege auf Fahrrädern, ja sogar Motorrädern besorgten, nur zu Botengängen aus den Zimmern in die Speise- oder Spielsäle konnte sich Karl bei günstiger Gelegenheit verwenden lassen (V 189-90).

No motoring for Karl, only food and work relating to entertainment. Later, Karl accompanies Therese on her errands, a task in which he proves to be very useful. The novel further highlights Karl's humiliation by having Brunelda order Karl to stop looking at the demonstration and go make the beds, forcing him to physically turn his back on public life. Robinson and Delamarche dress and groom Brunelda alongside Karl. Their labour suggests that women's work is only culturally designated to women, in reality just unpaid or badly paid work done by those at the bottom of the pyramid.

In assessing his work Karl again practises social comparison. He appears to have constructed a narrative around the superiority of other lift-boys and his inferiority in comparison to them, mirroring the unfair bodily comparison I highlighted in the *Brief*. Karl responds to this presumed inferiority by placing further constraints on himself, working his body harder, and to abstaining from pleasure. Karl lists 'Essen, Schlaf, Vergnügen und Nebenverdienst' (V 190) as the activities lift-boys engage in, but excludes himself from pleasures and exchanges of food, sleep and the night.

Karl cannot separate performance at work from his value as a person. The trial-like confrontation at the hotel, with its forced reading of the law reminiscent of *In der Strafkolonie* and the sentencing of *Das Urteil*, is experienced by Karl as being fundamentally about him as a person rather than his actions, not the individual crime or offence. Once again, this key scene is framed around a meal not consumed by Karl,

now enjoyed by the Head Waiter, who begins by drinking coffee and then turns to a slice of cake.

In fact, both Therese and Karl blame themselves excessively for circumstances and events beyond their control. Therese feels that had she treated her mother differently she would still be alive. The heart-breaking passage of her mother's suicide, a kind of terrifying *Erlkönig* narrative, has Therese and her mother, only with the parent sick this time, possibly tubercular, frantically roam around New York in search of shelter together. The scene is peppered with Therese's self-criticism; she could have acted more intelligently, she should have thought of sneaking into temporary accommodation, and so on.

Therese was forced to witness her mother's suicide. Gustafson has showed how Karl is forced to witness things that are damaging to him, interpreting Brunelda's voyeurism and opera glasses as 'a visual rape' that echoes Brummer's abuse.²⁵³ Although Gustafson does not connect Karl's experience to Therese's forcible exposure to her mother's suicide, her reading helps valuably to highlight the similarity in their experiences.

The narrative style of the scene, which mirrors Karl's astonished and childlike way of viewing both America and the abuse he suffered, adds to this pathos. Even ten years after the event, Therese recounts the horrific episode with childlike astonishment, not appearing to understand that the story is that of her mother deciding to take her own

²⁵³ Gustafson (2001), p. 69.

life. There is no complaint lodged against the mother about the unimaginable cruelty that Therese was subject to in having her mother commit suicide in front of her.

Kurz's recent close reading of Therese's narrative is distanced from psychological trauma. To Kurz, the narrative 'plays both on the mother's numbed subjection to circumstance and on her determined pursuit of release from her situation'.²⁵⁴ If Therese is 'narrating with two voices' as Kurz argues, these two voices are not the mother wanting to give up and actively commit suicide, but Therese both observing what happens, or what her mother does, and attempting to understand it.²⁵⁵ Even when Kurz notes that Therese is crying when she tells the story and mentions her feelings in the final paragraph of his discussion, there is no awareness of childhood or trauma affecting the narrative.²⁵⁶

Therese's psychology, where her mind is still that of the child, unable to accuse those in power of wrongdoing, even sympathetic to the point of view of the adult, is sister to Karl's own psychology, embodied in Karl's limited autonomy and continuous exposure to harm. Claudia Nitschke emphasizes Karl's grammatical competition with Therese, noting that 'Karl's thoughts and reactions to Therese's heartrending story about the death of her mother are not related in the text'.²⁵⁷ That the pathos is communicated through Therese alone reinforces the psychological family resemblance between her and Karl.

²⁵⁴ Kurz (2011), p. 102.

²⁵⁵ Kurz (2011), p. 104.

²⁵⁶ Kurz (2011), p. 106.

²⁵⁷ Claudia Nitschke, 'Friendship', in *Franz Kafka in Context*, ed. by Carolin Duttlinger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 18-25 (p. 23).

Kafka's texts were long erroneously read as victim narratives throughout, their protagonists subject to oppressive bureaucracies without agency – Josef K., who is himself drawn to the court, in particular. Schaffner has recently emphasized 'the constantly fluctuating hierarchies and roles' across Kafka as 'a deconstructive attack on binary thinking'.²⁵⁸ This applies well to many of Kafka's characters, including those in the emblematic body text in Kafka, *In der Strafkolonie*: the officer takes the place of the condemned man in the *Apparat*, self-immolating in the process. Similarly, the explorer, having been sympathetic to the condemned man and the soldier guarding him, wields the rope against the two at the end of the narrative. Whilst Karl's fortunes change in *Der Verschollene*, his character has psychological continuity throughout. It is only in the 'Oklahoma' segment, the focus of my final section, that we witness psychological development in Karl's character.

3.10. Oklahoma

The unfinished novel ends with a peculiar passage on the Theatre of Oklahoma.²⁵⁹

Half advertisement, half prophecy, the institution promotes itself like a religious cult

²⁵⁸ Anna Katharina Schaffner, 'Kafka and the Hermeneutics of Sadomasochism', *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 46.3 (2010), pp. 334-350.

²⁵⁹ 'Oklahoma' is one of several misspellings which Kafka copied from Arthur Holitscher's travelogue *Amerika: heute und morgen* (1912). As Duttlinger has shown, the work also contains a photograph captioned 'Idyll aus Oklahoma' of two lynched black men, where the body of one is held on to and displayed for the camera by the lynchers. This implies a similar end for Karl, who been known as 'Negro' for some time and takes up this name in the chapter. In Duttlinger (2007), pp. 98-99. Mark Christian Thompson has explored the similarities between Jewishness and blackness in his discussion of the novel. In Mark Christian Thompson, 'The Negro Who Disappeared: Race in Kafka's "Amerika"', in *Contemplating Violence: Critical Studies in Modern German Culture*, ed. by Stefani Engelstein and Carl Niekerk (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), pp. 183-198.

– ‘Verflucht sei wer uns nicht glaubt!’ (V 387) – or a communist utopia, where everyone has to work but nobody gets paid.

Karl’s behaviour sets him apart from others once more. There is a large crowd looking for job ads, and most of them are not drawn to the Oklahoma poster with no mention of wages, whereas Karl seems very much emotionally and psychologically drawn to the idea of redemption, of absolute and unconditional acceptance. Oklahoma is the perfectionist’s impossible dream: acceptance of Karl just as he is, an absolute absence of shame and criticism, and annulment of the past – in other words, not real life.

The theatre of Oklahoma is advertised as a psychological heaven, just as unrealistic as Karl’s ideal body was, a body free of shame, constraining clothing, hunger, and sex. As such, the theatre seems like a joke on idealism and the idea of the perfectibility of institutions. Yet Karl surprises the reader with some insightful management of expectations:

Mochte alles Großsprecherische, was auf dem Plakate stand, eine Lüge sein, mochte das große Theater von Oklahoma ein kleiner Wandercirkus sein, es wollte Leute aufnehmen, das war genügend. Karl las das Plakat nicht zum zweitenmale, suchte aber noch einmal den Satz: “Jeder ist willkommen” hervor. (V 388)

Karl knows that he might be deceived. He again takes a subservient role: he agrees to go and enquire about employment opportunities alone on behalf of a family he does not know when asked by his mother. Upon boarding the train Karl still wants to stay out of the way and avoid bodily contact with the crowd, and he could use some help in defending himself against other young men in his train compartment.

At the same time, there is a sense that Karl has matured. Karl is now mediating between a family and the outside world as opposed to within it. He appears to understand that to do well in his charade he has to protect himself with a social mask. He poses as an engineer, uses an obviously false name instead of exposing himself to possible rejection, now performing an evidently socially constructed role. He has developed a tolerance to critical, negative thoughts and comments, and is able to dismiss a mean-spirited remark from a servant from his thoughts and the narrative. There is a meal, and even as food takes up an unusually significant part of the theatre director's speech, quite simply 'Karl vergaß das Essen nicht' (V 413). Although his future is uncertain, and there is a suggestion of limited bodily autonomy again as he is pinched hard in the leg on the train by another man, Karl's thoughts are able to extend beyond the immediate environment of the train compartment:

Alles, was sich in dem kleinen, selbst bei offenem Fenster von Rauch überfüllten Coupee ereignete vergieng vor dem was draußen zu sehen war.
(V 418)

By standing up for himself and boldly stating his childhood aspiration of becoming an engineer, Karl appears to have learned to defend himself but also to an extent unite his past with his current sense of self. Threatening schoolmasters aside, there seems to be a sense of a positive connection with Karl's past and the present. He is surrounded by people he knows: Giacomo seems a better partner in crime than Robinson and Delamarche, and Karl recognizes one of the angels, Fanny. Such an ambiguous ending may leave the reader guessing with regard to Karl's future, but judging by Karl's thoughts and behaviour he is now better psychologically equipped for life on the road than ever before.

3.11. Conclusion

Der Verschollene appears to recount Karl Rossmann's sexual fall, which in fact reads as a sexual assault. This act of violence carries serious psychological after-effects which make up much of the novel. As opposed to being emotionally limited due to a psychologically immature protagonist, *Der Verschollene* is a post-traumatic text whose rich vocabulary for psychological suffering is expressed in Karl's disturbed body image, his abnormal preoccupation with food, and his insistent avoidance of eating.

Karl's unexpressed hunger paints food all over the novel: just he is the target of unwanted sexual advances, food lurks around every corner and tries to enter his body, though he goes to great pains to resist it. Against itself, the novel is full of food, with meals as hostile and dangerous altercations, either rushed or torturously stretched in time. Women associated with food and food preparation are portrayed as sexual aggressors, even rapists, with food a dangerous tool for the abuse of power. Sexually active women are always connected to food – to its preparation, its being served, or to its excess consumption. Disgust masks hunger and appetite as much as it conceals sexual desire. If the family is perverted to an abusive power structure and sexuality is separated from love, food and eating are just as importantly removed from the contexts of care, conviviality, family and pleasure.

Situated in a harsh environment of competition and social atomization like *Sult*, *Der Verschollene* expresses anxiety about this environment in psychological terms through dietary restriction and discomfort with the body. Karl's degradation is

elucidated by having him internalize the harshness of his environment as harshness towards himself, characterized by unsustainable perfectionism, competitiveness and social comparison.

Karl's bodily ideal is a psychological armour of impenetrability that would prevent him from ever again being hurt. If 'Brunelda's gross corporeality spills over into the world around her',²⁶⁰ Karl wants a body that cannot be entered, cannot be hurt, fully resistant to outside pressures: immune to exhaustion, disintegration, and pain.

²⁶⁰ Carolin Duttlinger, *The Cambridge Introduction to Franz Kafka* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 54.

4. Men With No Guts, Women With Too Many: *Mrs Dalloway*

4.1. Introduction

What is about to happen? By what name can I call it? This terror, this ~~profound~~ ecstasy? It is Clarissa. For there she was. (H 251)

~~that~~ <the> dread, ~~that horror~~ <the terror>
(H 388)

In the manuscript draft of *Mrs Dalloway* known as *The Hours*, Woolf is struggling to find a word that adequately captures a sense of an impending but unspecified threat. Various dread, terror, and horror, all words used by translators of Kierkegaard and Freud attempting to translate *Angst*, or the Danish *Angest*, into English. In the final novel, Woolf chose for Clarissa to feel ‘that something awful was about to happen’ (MD 3), which today reads as a textbook definition of the experience of psychological anxiety.

In my previous chapters on Hamsun and Kafka, I have found that the body, the male body in particular, its image and its relationship to food are the main vocabularies with which anxious emotion of the kind Woolf describes here is expressed. In this final section of my thesis I will go on to examine how the body, its image and food are used as similar sites of emotional expression in *Mrs Dalloway*, but in ways both more localized and variable, often to a problematic and unsympathetic effect.

This chapter looks at the Dalloway material in its entirety, making particular use of the British Library manuscript draft of the novel, *The Hours*, transcribed by Helen Wussow, the emotional register of which differs in important aspects from the final novel. I also study *The New Dress*, one of nine short stories Woolf began to work on

in early 1925 after she had finalized corrected proofs of the novel, the precursory short story *Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street*, and also refer to the novel *The Voyage Out*, where the Dalloways first appear.²⁶¹

I will show that the body is often left to do the talking in the final novel: when Clarissa details her inadequacies with an unfavourable comparison to Lady Bexborough, her physical and psychological foil in *The Hours*, she describes herself as too emotional (H 268). In *Mrs Dalloway*, only a physical comparison remains, leaving Clarissa exclusively defined by the language of her physiognomy. The ailing Evelyn Whitbread moves from being seasonally depressed – if in very anatomical terms, ‘that indescribably dried up little woman’ (H 266) – in *The Hours* to being menopausal in the final novel, having her state fully dictated by the body alone. Yet when read against the whole of the Dalloway material, characters presented as excessively bodily in *Mrs Dalloway* appear considerably toned down from the monstrous animality of their draft form, elements again amplified when Woolf returned to the Dalloway material in short story form in 1925.

For a novel that so explicitly focuses on mental illness, the body is given a great deal of power in *Mrs Dalloway*, most elaborately in the characters of Doris Kilman and Septimus Smith, who together form the focus of this chapter. In the concluding section, I go on to suggest how the potential for ecstasy in anxiety suggested by the

²⁶¹ For the composition history of the Dalloway material, see Anne E. Fernald (ed.), *The Cambridge Edition to the Works of Virginia Woolf: Mrs Dalloway* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 97-103. For a chronology of *The Hours*, see Virginia Woolf, *The Hours*, transcr. and ed. by Helen M. Wussow (New York: Pace University Press 1996), pp. 29-30. For the different editions of the novel, see also Daniel T. O’Hara, *Virginia Woolf and the Modern Sublime. The Invisible Tribunal* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 29-31.

opening quotation, absent in *Der Verschollene* and *Sult*, sets *Mrs Dalloway* apart in its treatment of mental suffering and the body.

Even more than with Kafka, the boundary between life and writing is porous in scholarship on anxiety and the body in Woolf. This is due both to ways in which Woolf theorized illness and the body as materials for literature, and to her own mental breakdowns, which were closely documented by those around her. The enormous bulk of 'life writing' by Woolf and her circle both helps and exacerbates this overlap between life and text. Daniel Ferrer has discussed how the knowledge of Woolf's illness and eventual suicide has inevitably informed scholarly approaches to her work.²⁶² Hermione Lee has connected Woolf's intellectual interest in how the mind and the body interact to Woolf's own illnesses. Lee acknowledges illness as a major narrative within Woolf's life but separates her identity from it, qualifying Woolf as 'a sane woman who had an illness.'²⁶³

Within the biographically informed school of scholarship, Ferrer's sensitive, Freudian navigation of Woolf's own 'madness' as intrinsic to her writing, interpreted more as a subversive narrative strategy and predisposition to the world than madness as such, and Thomas Caramagno's reading of Woolf's oeuvre through bipolar disorder, then known as manic depression, have been particularly influential. Caramagno wrote in direct opposition to psychoanalytic interpretations of Woolf's life and texts, Louise

²⁶² Daniel Ferrer, *Virginia Woolf and the Madness of Language*, trans. by Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 6-7.

²⁶³ Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1996), pp. 175-299 (p. 175). Lee, 'Introduction' in Virginia Woolf, *On Being Ill* (Ashfield: Paris Press, 2002), pp. 11-32. Lee resists posthumous diagnoses of anorexia by stating that Woolf showed no obsession with the body, and instead simply 'could not eat' as a result of her depression, an understanding of anorexia which Allie Glennie has criticized. Lee (1996), p. 176. Glennie (1999), p. 9.

DeSalvo's thesis on sexual abuse in particular.²⁶⁴ Today, Caramagno's reading appears restrictive and single-minded in exploring Woolf's literary texts through the lens of bipolar disorder only. This is particularly evident in his discussion of the body, limited to hypochondria, which contrasts with Ferrer's insightful remarks on psychological reflections of the body in *Mrs Dalloway*.²⁶⁵ Caramagno's work nevertheless valuably highlighted how illness cannot be interpreted as a form of communication alone. The psychiatrist Kay Redfield Jamison has also approached Woolf's work through manic depression, and Woolf's writing continues to be commented on by the antipsychiatry movement.²⁶⁶

Recently, critics with an interest in Woolf's own health have moved on to emphasize her framing and experience of illness, if often in uncritical terms. Kimberly Engdahl Coates has discussed ways in which Woolf explored the productive potential of illness, an aspect to Woolf also emphasized by Sarah Pett.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁴ Thomas C. Caramagno, *The Flight of the Mind. Virginia Woolf's Art and Manic-Depressive Illness* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), pp. 234-9. Louise DeSalvo, *Virginia Woolf: The Impact of Childhood Sexual Abuse on Her Life and Work* (London: Women's Press, 1989). The most recent evaluation of Woolf's own health against today's understanding of bipolar disorder is by a group of Brazilian psychiatrists, Manuela Vianna Boeira, Gabriela de Á Berni, Ives C. Passos, Márcia Kauer-Sant'anna, and Flávio Pereira Kapczinski, 'Virginia Woolf, Neuroprogression, and Bipolar Disorder', *Revista Brasileira de Psiquiatria* 39 (2017), pp. 69–71.

²⁶⁵ Caramagno (1989), p. 57. Ferrer (1990), pp. 15-16.

²⁶⁶ Kay Redfield Jamison, *Touched with Fire. Manic-Depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), pp. 224-7. The psychiatrist Thomas Szasz has used Woolf to attack his own field and what he considers the social construction of mental illness. Thomas Szasz, *My Madness Saved Me: The Madness and Marriage of Virginia Woolf* (New York: Routledge, 2017), first published in 2006.

²⁶⁷ Kimberley Engdahl Coates, 'Exposing the Nerves of Language: Virginia Woolf, Charles Mauron, and the Affinity Between Aesthetics and Illness', *Literature and Medicine* 21.2 (2002), pp. 242-263. Sarah Pett uses Woolf as the key theorist of illness in literature. Sarah Pett, *Reading and Writing Chronic Illness, 1990-2012: Ethics and Aesthetics at Work* (Unpublished dissertation, University of York, 2014) <<http://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/6645/>> [Accessed 20 May 2018]

This is, of course, what Woolf wrote in *On Being Ill* (1926), where she put illness at the forefront of her literary enterprise.²⁶⁸ Even if ‘melancholia’ (OBI 5) is mentioned, being ill is a physical condition in this essay, and the bodily qualities of this text, its imagery in particular, have been stressed by critics.²⁶⁹

For a text about physical illness, where Woolf argues that the body has been ignored by literature, there is remarkably little pain in *On Being Ill*. Instead, physical illness is explored in terms of its mental effects. Jeanne Dubino has noted this discrepancy:

Even in illness, when, one would think, one becomes closer to the body [...] the narrator grows more detached not just from the experience of the body but from experience altogether.²⁷⁰

On Being Ill aestheticizes feverish hallucinations, and physical suffering is explored in terms of the visions it can bring out, an aspect to the essay Janine Utell has recently emphasized.²⁷¹ Proust is mentioned by name in the text as the exemplary writer who has addressed illness. Yet Woolf’s use of Proust echoes the description of

²⁶⁸ First published in Eliot’s *Criterion*, Woolf revised and condensed *On Being Ill* under the title ‘Illness: An Unexploited Mine’ in 1926, available in *The Body in the Library. A Literary Anthology of Modern Medicine*, ed. by Iain Bamforth (London: Verso, 2003), pp. 191-200.

²⁶⁹ Lee (2002), pp. 11-32. Jane Elizabeth Fisher has recently related *On Being Ill* to *Mrs Dalloway* through the 1918 influenza pandemic. Jane Elizabeth Fisher, *Envisioning Disease, Gender, and War: Women’s Narratives of the 1918 Influenza Pandemic* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 73-104.

²⁷⁰ Jeanne Dubino, ‘On Illness as Carnival: The Body as Discovery in Virginia Woolf’s “On Being Ill” and Mikhail Bakhtin’s “Rabelais and His World”’, in *Virginia Woolf. Emerging Perspectives*, ed. by Mark Hussey and Vara Neverow (New York: Pace University Press, 1994), pp. 38-43 (p. 41). For Dubino, this distance from bodiliness illustrates Woolf’s dislike for the materiality of the body as relished in by Joyce.

²⁷¹ Janine Utell, ‘View from the Sickroom: Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Wordsworth, and Writing Women’s Lives of Illness’, *Life Writing* 13.1 (2014), pp. 27-45 (pp. 31-2).

disassociation from the body through sexual fantasy and sleep in *La Recherche* more closely than its descriptions of ill health.²⁷²

Scholarly interest in illness in Woolf's texts has often focused on the anti-authoritarian elements to its depiction, particularly as it overlaps with a criticism of patriarchy.²⁷³ As *On Being Ill* parodies the standardization of health, critics often stress how the text sides with the sufferer. Lorraine Sim has recently interpreted the essay as a political defence of the ill against 'the social paranoia about infection and illness'.²⁷⁴ Sim reads the essay against contemporaneous issues of the medical journal *The Lancet* and public health campaigns of the time:

The sense one receives from looking at journals such as *The Lancet* in 1925 and 1926 is that illness, even common illness, is viewed by both professionals and the middle-class public as a problem to be managed and avoided, and that the sick are to be kept away from the healthy as much as possible.²⁷⁵

Sim's analysis does not quite separate the damaging and erroneous cultural framing of disease as a matter of social class from how infectious disease spreads. Like the articles she justly criticizes, her discussion risks conflating the two. Sim also follows Woolf's idea of illness as ultimately enlightening.²⁷⁶ In this chapter I show that Woolf's theoretical exploration of the body and of illness does not always translate into sympathy towards ill or excessively bodily characters in *Mrs Dalloway*.

²⁷² Proust (1987), pp. 4-7.

²⁷³ For this overlap, see Laura Marcus, 'Woolf's Feminism and Feminism's Woolf', in *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Susan Sellers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 142-179 (p. 143).

²⁷⁴ Lorraine Sim, *Virginia Woolf: The Patterns of Ordinary Experience* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 83-93 (pp. 85-6).

²⁷⁵ Sim (2010), p. 86.

²⁷⁶ Sim (2010), p. 98.

As with the scarcity of illness in texts, Woolf criticized the ways in which food is overlooked by writers a number of years later in *A Room of One's Own* (1929) (R 8). Here, unappetizing food forms both a concrete part of the inferior material conditions that keep women from writing, but also symbolizes the immaterial resources that women lack:

For surely it is time that the effect of discouragement upon the mind of the artist should be measured, as I have seen a dairy company measure the effect of ordinary milk and Grade A milk upon the body of the rat. They set two rats in cages side by side, and of the two one was furtive, timid and small, and the other was glossy, bold and big. Now what food do we feed women as artists upon? (R 39)

The rats' bodies align the psychological with the physical: the poorly fed rat is as furtive and timid as it is small. The famous educational comparison in *A Room of One's Own*, where an all-male Oxbridge college is juxtaposed with a modest women's college, is also communicated through dietary means. The all-male Oxbridge college first appears fully disengaged from the body. This is soon revealed to be the product of scholarly distance which the narrator parodies, everyday phenomena defamiliarized by stifling critical thinking (R 5). In fact, bodily pleasure is prioritized at Oxbridge: the college nourishes the bodies of male students with delicious, beautifully presented food. This association of food with pleasure and beauty is conversely missing from the dire fare on offer at the women's college.

Mrs Dalloway does not focus on food at Clarissa's party, its narrative high point. Most scholars with an interest in food in Woolf choose not to discuss *Mrs Dalloway* as a result, and refer to the novel only tangentially.²⁷⁷ Alice Lowe's recent discussion

²⁷⁷ As in Lisa Angelella's recent study, where Lady Bruton's lunch is heavily coloured by the meal in *To the Lighthouse*. Angelella argues that Lady Bruton's lunch

emphasizes the positive and pleasurable aspects to ways in which food is presented in Woolf's work. Lowe's criticism of the overly ready association of anxiety and food in Woolf scholarship is based on interpreting a minute interest in food in unequivocally positive terms.²⁷⁸

More common are discussions of disordered eating in relation to Woolf's writing, many of which are interested in its metaphoric application in texts. Allie Glenny's influential analysis lacks critical and analytic distance from anorexic thinking. Still much quoted, Glenny interpreted anorexia as a productive response to patriarchal pressures, hampered by attempts to treat it, a condition only socially constructed as an illness. Interpreting Clarissa as an anorexic, lesbian woman, and studying Miss Kilman only in passing, Glenny emphasized anorexia as a positive outlet, even an ecstatic experience.²⁷⁹ Susan Rubinow Gorsky's more recent survey on disordered eating in Woolf's work rests on the outward and physical manifestations of these conditions. Gorsky argues that Woolf's texts portray a healthy appetite in positive terms, and says little of how the eating behaviours she points out are presented. Her brief discussion makes no note of Miss Kilman's eating, and does not mention body image.²⁸⁰

'creates not only a social bond but a physical merging' – a lunch to which Clarissa is not invited. Lisa Angelella, *Alimentary Modernism* (Unpublished dissertation, University of Iowa, 2009) <<http://ir.uiowa.edu/etd/225>> [Accessed 15 May 2018]

²⁷⁸ Alice Lowe, "'A Certain Hold on Haddock and Sausage': Dining Well in Virginia Woolf's Life and Work', in *Virginia Woolf and the Natural World. Selected Papers from the Twentieth Annual International Conference on Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Kristin Czarnecki and Carrie Rohma (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), pp. 157-162.

²⁷⁹ Glenny (1999), pp. 1-11, pp. 117-132.

²⁸⁰ Susan Rubinow Gorsky, 'The Mask/Masque of Food: Illness and Art', in *Woolf in the Real World. Selected Papers from the Thirteenth International Conference on Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Karen V. Kukil (Clemson: Clemson University Digital Press, 2005), pp. 50-55.

Other scholars have noted Miss Kilman's bodily portrayal and odd eating habits in the novel. Heather Levy has identified Miss Kilman's physique as 'typical of domestic servants and lesbians' in Woolf.²⁸¹ Although I approach the body with greater scepticism, Patricia Moran's work on body language and queer bodies in *Mrs Dalloway* has touched some of the questions that I discuss at length in this chapter. Moran has importantly highlighted Miss Kilman's obsession with food, which Moran connects to her homosexuality, and has discussed her size, if without reference to body image. In contrast to my reading, Moran interprets Miss Kilman's large size as ultimately advantageous, resembling the physicality of Lady Bruton.²⁸²

Scholars with a direct interest in body image in *Mrs Dalloway* have generally focused on the title character. In what now reads as a representative feminist approach to the novel of its time, Nancy Taylor suggested that Clarissa suffered from poor body image as the result of patriarchal pressures, and did not discuss Miss Kilman in these terms.²⁸³ Renée Dickinson's more recent reading of Clarissa's body image applies the concept to many ends. Dickinson first explores Clarissa's body in terms of bodily absence and failure, then as a symbol of English national identity.²⁸⁴ Dickinson then connects the narrative shape of Woolf's writing to the female body shape, 'a new kind of feminine form' in the Cixous tradition.²⁸⁵ Dickinson also touches on Miss Kilman's

²⁸¹ Heather Levy, *The Servants of Desire in Virginia Woolf's Shorter Fiction* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), p. 182.

²⁸² Patricia Moran, *Word of Mouth. Body Language in Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), pp. 78-86 (p. 81).

²⁸³ Nancy Taylor, 'Erasure of Definition: Androgyny in "Mrs. Dalloway"', *Women's Studies* 18.4 (1991), pp. 367-377 (p. 370).

²⁸⁴ Renée Dickinson, *Female Embodiment and Subjectivity in the Modernist Novel. The Corporeum of Virginia Woolf and Oliver Moore* (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 25-51 (p. 38).

²⁸⁵ Dickinson (2009), p. 44, p. 50.

poor body image, which she connects to her political undesirability.²⁸⁶ Dickinson ultimately reads *Mrs Dalloway* as a subversive text generated by the female body, resistant to the ‘anorexic aesthetic’ of Modernism.²⁸⁷

Scholars, then, continue to employ a rich variety of approaches to study body and emotion in *Mrs Dalloway*. Sowon S. Park’s recent neuroscientific account of the novel sees no gap between the body and the mental or literary construction of it, where ‘we do not have a body but are a body’.²⁸⁸ Kirsty Martin’s reading emphasizes shared bodily experience in *Mrs Dalloway*, overlooking that the diversity of bodies in the text is one of its key differentiators.²⁸⁹

In this chapter, I argue that the body and food are not used indiscriminately, let alone celebrated, in *Mrs Dalloway*. Instead, I show that in a novel of relatively uniform speech habits, lacking in idiolects as Ferrer has argued,²⁹⁰ Woolf creates different idiolects of body image, through which emotional and psychological distress are communicated.

²⁸⁶ Dickinson (2009), p. 42.

²⁸⁷ Dickinson (2009), p. 49.

²⁸⁸ Sowon S. Park, ‘The Feeling of Knowing in Mrs Dalloway: Neuroscience and Woolf’, in *Contradictory Woolf. Selected Papers from the Twenty-First Annual International Conference on Virginia Woolf*, ed. Stella Bolaki and Derek Ryan (Clemson: Clemson University Digital Press, 2012), pp. 108-14 (p. 113).

²⁸⁹ Kirsty Martin, *Modernism and the Rhythms of Sympathy: Vernon Lee, Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

²⁹⁰ Ferrer (1990), p. 23.

4.2. Miss Kilman's Problematic Body

I will begin by considering how Doris Kilman, Elizabeth's tutor, functions as an excessively desiring and needy body in the novel. I first examine ways in which her bodiliness is portrayed as unaesthetic, and show how she is made to share this view herself through a negative body image. I then assess the relative importance placed on her body against other aspects to her character which the novel views with suspicion; her socioeconomic status, age, and sexuality. I conclude my discussion on Miss Kilman by assessing the extent to which her bodiliness can be separated from her Germanic background.

Like that of the obese Brunelda in *Der Verschollene*, Miss Kilman's body is too large for the novel. She is allocated an excessively bodily role although she is the most intellectual woman of the novel and is also given the best analysis of mental health within it: 'When people are happy they have a reserve' (MD 110). She is also the only character who, if in reported speech, talks about the war, the elephant in the room. Her analysis of the title character – 'who have trifled your life away!' (MD 106) – does not drastically differ from that of Peter Walsh.

Yet Miss Kilman is unsympathetically portrayed as unaesthetic in her corpulence. Clarissa, Elizabeth, and the novel as a whole look down on Miss Kilman for looking drab and unattractive. 'Heavy, ugly, commonplace' (MD 106), Miss Kilman is badly dressed and overweight, 'over forty' (H 199). She is surrounded by persistent condemnations of her appearance: 'Miss Kilman swelled and looked very plain' (MD 111). Perspiring, 'clumsy' (H 202) Miss Kilman's body is unable to adapt to social

norms. Even her hands – a motif much used by Woolf – are large (MD 111), although it is quite unusual for hands to become so large from eating that one makes a note of them. Large size is not just an aspect to Miss Kilman's appearance, but is also her psychological and social effect: 'Miss Kilman was quite different from anyone she knew; she made one feel so small' (MD 111).

In addition to being described as unattractive to others, Miss Kilman is made to share this view, to suffer from low self-esteem and desperately poor body image. She 'minded looking as she did beside Clarissa' (MD 109). She describes her own body not only as unsightly but as unlovable, 'her unlovable body which people could not bear to see' (MD 109). Miss Kilman ultimately assesses herself in the same terms as Clarissa would, terms which she knows to be unjust. She is made to repeat the term "the flesh" many times, and is even reduced to a body capable of direct speech, 'the body of Miss Kilman standing still in the street for a moment to mutter "It is the flesh"' (MD 109).

Like Hamsun's narrator and Karl in *Der Verschollene*, Miss Kilman directs her criticisms – which she is elsewhere capable of powerfully articulating – to her body. Psychologically overwhelmed by the city crowd, she experiences her distress as a bodily failure, contrasting it to the agility of others:

Pinioned to her rock; ~~& ugly, <& clumsily ugly & clumsy~~, she could only grimace, & suffer & watch other mocking people pass (H 222).

Similarly, Elizabeth's rejection leaves Kilman feeling 'paralysed' in *The Hours* (H 221). Not only is Kilman's body presented as lacking, but permanently and intrinsically so, unaffected by grooming or clothing. Like Kafka's accounts of the

body that cannot be improved through dress, Miss Kilman's ugliness is presented as permanent: 'No clothes ~~looked well on her~~. suited her. She might buy anything' (H 214).

Although it seeks to merely fulfil the universal desires of food, sex, and comfort, Miss Kilman's body is described as more needy than that of others. She displays a harsh, punitive relationship to the body, articulated in biblical language which traces this relationship to the body to her faith: '~~But no. One must fight. There had been overcome the flesh.~~ But one must fight; wrestle, vanquish, have faith in God' (H 214). In an awful vision of religious faith, piety offers no comfort to Miss Kilman but leaves her alone with her 'fleshly desires' (MD 213).

Miss Kilman's relationship to food is presented as disordered, both obsessive and erratic. Eating is her world: 'Sometimes lately it had seemed to her that, except for Elizabeth, her food was all that she lived for' (MD 109). She either denies herself food or indulges in it. Known to 'starve herself for the Austrians' (MD 10), she wolfs down pastries later in the novel. Refusing to share food with a child, her appetite breaks normative codes. When 'a lady and a child sat down and the child took the cake, could Miss Kilman really mind it? Yes, Miss Kilman did mind it. She had wanted that cake – the pink one' (MD 110). Pink cakes are not just foods of indulgence; they have a similarly deviant connotation in the short story *The String Quartet*, where they are associated with loose behavior, 'to dance, laugh, eat pink cakes, yellow cakes, drink thin, sharp wine' are alternatives to 'an indecent story, now' (CSF 133).

Within *Mrs Dalloway*, eating incorrectly is more than a social faux pas, as revealed by a passage on the character of Hugh Whitbread in *The Hours*. Whitbread visits society ladies,

praising the cake, though ~~he~~ Hugh might eat cake with a duchess any day of his life; &, to look at him, probably ~~spent a~~ <did spend> a good deal ~~of his~~ time in that agreeable occupation. He ~~was always~~ <handed cakes.> an adept at ~~handing cake~~. <Re That was his epitaph.> (H 363)

As satirical as this description is, it shows cake as the currency of Clarissa's world: eating cake correctly is both an occupation for Whitbread, as well as his posthumous legacy. Miss Kilman's estimation of Clarissa, 'who have trifled your life away' (MD 106), suggests a similar meaning at least etymologically, a world where frivolous desserts define her role in life. In the final novel, Hugh Whitbread spends time with women 'remembering trifles' (MD 147) and complimenting what is now 'home-made cake' (MD 147), having stayed 'afloat on the cream of English society for fifty-five years' (MD 87). Whitbread's name itself suggests bread made out of the finest flour, as Anne Fernald has noted, and knowing how to talk cake reinforces his role as the backbone of the establishment.²⁹¹ By contrast, Mr Bankes' idiocy in *To the Lighthouse* is highlighted by having him undervalue such occasions, considering eating with others merely 'trifling' (LH 73). Kilman's behaviour also contrasts starkly with that of Peter Walsh, one of the few characters who eats in the novel. Walsh is admired for 'addressing himself seriously, not gluttonously, to dinner' (MD 135).

Miss Kilman's erratic eating has an exhibitionist quality in the novel. Eating that is normally private and hidden, or at least covered by shame, is made public, an effect strengthened by conveying it through the narrative perspective of others. When Miss

²⁹¹ Fernald (2014), p. 190.

Kilman has tea with Elizabeth in a café – a public place – her eating is viewed through Elizabeth’s horrified fascination, which borders on fetishization: ‘She must not let parties absorb her, Miss Kilman said, fingering the last two inches of a chocolate éclair’ (MD 111).

As with Karl’s observation of others eating in *Der Verschollene*, which I read in terms of his own hunger, Miss Kilman’s éclair feast reveals as much about the observing Elizabeth as it does of Miss Kilman. Elizabeth thinks only of ‘whether Miss Kilman could be hungry’ (MD 110) – not of her own bodily needs. She pays for the éclairs but doesn’t touch them. The meal is torturously long for Elizabeth, and her discomfort is evident: she would like to leave, the air feels stuffy, and her posture is stiff. Elizabeth’s discomfort highlights the sexual subtext of the scene, but it could also suggest her own avoidance of food. She is certainly paying close attention to the rapidly disappearing food and drink: ‘Miss Kilman opened her mouth, slightly projected her chin, and swallowed down the last inches of the chocolate éclair, then wiped her fingers, and washed the tea round in her cup’ (MD 112) – a description that mirrors Karl’s minute observation of Robinson when he does not allow himself to eat in *Der Verschollene*. Having escaped the situation at last, Elizabeth comments on the fresh air in terms of its taste: ‘The fresh air was so delicious’ (MD 115).

If Kilman’s body gets in the way of others in the final version of the novel, in *The Hours* her body is even harder to constrain. Elizabeth’s horror at the scale of Miss Kilman’s appetite for cake is also more directly conveyed in *The Hours* than in the final novel, here dehumanized, ‘as if an animal which lived in her suddenly became absorbed & gluttonous’ (H 219). Miss Kilman’s new petticoat is placed on the café

table, unlike in the final novel, where it is only mentioned before and after the scene. Even if it is wrapped and unworn, the underwear on the table emphasizes Miss Kilman's unwelcome appetite, and highlights her inability to draw alimentary and sexual boundaries: 'they sat at the table with Miss Kilmans horrid parcel between them, & the cups & the things' (H 221, sic). This resembles the off-putting girls' aprons that appear out of context in *Der Verschollene*.

The positioning of the petticoat next to the pastry also directly connects Miss Kilman's eating to the size of her body, emphasized as '~~so~~ large' (H 220) in *The Hours*, a description omitted from *Mrs Dalloway*. Emory Reginald Abbott has helpfully contrasted Miss Kilman's petticoat shopping with that of other women in the novel, with Miss Kilman 'the grotesque opposite of the young women who, during Clarissa's visit to Bond Street, are "buying white underlinen threaded with pure white ribbon for their weddings"' (MD 15).²⁹² Abbott's astute reading of Miss Kilman as a failed consumer who shops at the unglamorous Army and Navy Stores, however, misses the evident bodily dimensions of both underwear itself and of walking in a crowded city. It is not only her failure as a consumer that blocks Miss Kilman, as Abbott suggests. When 'Miss Kilman cannot merge into the spectacle'²⁹³, it is due to her own view of her body. The account of "'all those people passing – people with parcels who despised her'" – and eventual fragmentation of self in the community of shoppers involved in the commodity spectacle'²⁹⁴ (MD 112) – is her subjectively experienced psychological reading of the scene. The market may reject Miss Kilman as Abbott reads it, but often the main voice of this rejection is her own. The

²⁹² Emory Reginald Abbott, 'What Miss Kilman's Petticoat Means: Virginia Woolf, Shopping, and Spectacle', *Modern Fiction Studies* 38.1 (1992), pp. 193-216 (p. 204).

²⁹³ Abbott (1992), p. 206.

²⁹⁴ Abbott (1992), p. 205-6.

presumption of ugliness, her imagining what ‘all were thinking’, just like the imagined opinions of others that Mabel of *The New Dress* invents when thinking of “‘What a fright she looks!’” (ND 164), are her own thoughts.

The interior monologue of Miss Kilman, to which quite a bit of space is allocated – a privilege not given to all characters – rarely takes her side. Paul Saint-Amour has argued that ‘penetrating narration’ is not necessarily empathetic in *Mrs Dalloway*, and that the novel’s multiple focal points are not necessarily ‘democratizing, dissident, or emancipatory’.²⁹⁵ Whilst her sadness at being rejected by Elizabeth echoes Clarissa’s pain at Septimus’s death, Kilman’s interior monologue mostly displays cruelty towards herself that borders on vivisection.²⁹⁶

Clarissa’s view of Miss Kilman is directly dehumanizing. She presents Kilman as a worse alternative for Elizabeth’s affections than a dog – ‘better poor Shag than Miss Kilman’ (H 269). This comparison is stronger in *Mrs Dalloway*, where the dog’s name is changed to Grizzle, no longer Shag after the Stephen family pet: Kilman is then the alternative to a mongrel, a hairy, fecund animal. The comparison to a dog does not suggest an endearment from Clarissa: in *The Voyage Out*, the early, caricature prototype version of her character laments: ‘It’s a pity, sometimes, one

²⁹⁵ Paul K. Saint-Amour, “‘Mrs Dalloway’. Of Clocks and Clouds’, in *A Companion to Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Jessica Berman (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), pp. 79-94 (p. 84). Saint-Amour has also explored the narrator’s all-seeing gaze in terms of indiscriminate, total war, here employed for pacifist purposes. Saint-Amour, *Tense Future: Modernism, Total War, Encyclopedic Form* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 110-120. For the selective elements to the narrative omniscience in the novel, see Ferrer (1990), pp. 17-19.

²⁹⁶ When Elizabeth leaves the table, Miss Kilman’s sadness is palpable, ‘suffused by shocks of suffering; <wh.> ~~beating-ticking one two three in her as she~~ through her body’ (H 223), a description that resembles how Clarissa receives the news of Septimus’ suicide (MD 156) which I discuss in the next section.

can't treat people like dogs!' (VO 50). Even Elizabeth, who certainly feels greater sympathy or at least pity towards Miss Kilman, thinks that she 'had never met ~~either~~ ~~at home or at~~ anyone with so careless <in the first place> of her personal appearance' (H 226).

Miss Kilman's physical portrayal and its animalistic undertones are more damning and revealing in their horrified fascination in *The Hours* than in *Mrs Dalloway*. Clarissa wonders:

[...] how Miss Kilman could stand, heavy, shapeless, but with the power, the taciturnity of some pre-historic hippopotamus, who armoured for primeval warfare remains obdurate & monolithic ~~confronting the mod in~~ there on the stairs [...] (H 478)

In the final novel, Kilman is no longer compared to a hippopotamus, but to a primitive monster, with 'the power and taciturnity of some prehistoric monster armoured for primeval warfare' (MD 106). A very similar image of terrifying body size, a hybrid animal-woman, appears in Woolf's unpublished sketch *The Frenchwoman in the Train*, where a train passenger has 'earrings swinging as in the large lobed ears of some pachydermatous monster' (CSF 236) – an image of extraordinary misogyny, which is hard to square with Woolf's feminist reputation.²⁹⁷ Fernald has noted how Miss Kilman takes on a diabolical dimension in *The Hours*, with cloven feet, like a centaur 'linked to Satan'.²⁹⁸ Elizabeth compares Miss Kilman to a 'gloomy leviathan' (H 218) in *The Hours*, to a biblical monster sized like a whale.

²⁹⁷ Susan Dick suggests that the sketch may have been written in 1937. In Susan Dick (ed.), *The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf* (London: Hogarth Press, 1985), pp. 300-301.

²⁹⁸ Fernald (2014), p. 203.

Recent scholarship into Miss Kilman's clothing helps further highlight this physical portrayal. Miss Kilman is repeatedly seen wearing a mackintosh, a functional, waterproof military coat, 'originally a stiff, awkward and ugly garment because of the limited flexibility of the rubberised fabric.'²⁹⁹ Although her reading of Miss Kilman's body as childlike is puzzling – Miss Kilman may appear polymorphously perverse, like a child, but she is constantly trying to silence her bodily desires – Celia Marshik has convincingly read the coat as a reminder of war and poverty, an overcoat that does not cover but instead reveals.³⁰⁰ Worn by lower-ranking soldiers during the war, a mackintosh was less expensive than the Burberry trench worn by and now associated with officers. David Trotter has also shown how rubber, out of which the mackintosh was made, was simultaneously technologically modern and primitive in its colonial origins, marketed at the time as 'a bit of wildness on the Golf course and tennis court'.³⁰¹ Now out of fashion to the extent of being an eyesore, Miss Kilman's rubber mackintosh has the texture of a pachydermatous animal's skin. It is the overcoat equivalent of a prehistoric hippopotamus, an out-dated style fit for an untamed, animalistic body.

Miss Kilman's character illustrates the extent to which the ostensibly conflicting messages about female bodies in *Mrs Dalloway* are aligned. The views of Miss Kilman's religious counsel, Mr Whittaker, and those of Clarissa on the importance of appearance could not differ more starkly. Yet even faith, as the novel presents it, fails to protect Miss Kilman from judgment on the basis of her body. In what would be Mr

²⁹⁹ Fernald (2014), p. 202-3.

³⁰⁰ Celia Marshik, 'The Modern(ist) Mackintosh', *Modernism/modernity* 19.1 (2012), pp. 43-71.

³⁰¹ David Trotter, 'Techno-Primitivism: À Propos of "Lady Chatterley's Lover"', *Modernism/modernity* 18.1 (2011), pp. 149-166 (p. 157).

Whittaker's realm, in the 'bodiless' (MD 113) Westminster Abbey, a place where one is 'to aspire above the vanities, the desires' (MD 113) – a safe space like the psychologically prefaced '~~shore of safety~~' (H 218) that is Mr Whittaker's back room – Miss Kilman is condemned for her appearance. She is looked down upon by a man called Mr Fletcher, identical in name to the diet guru Horace Fletcher, here an official retired from the Treasury, who is as upset by her dumpy appearance as Miss Kilman has come to expect of others (MD 113-4).

There are, then, four main issues created by Miss Kilman's body: firstly, her body is repulsive. Secondly, it is permanently so. Thirdly, her body is hard to control; it expands the limits that it should adhere to; for Clarissa, Miss Kilman is 'unwieldy' (H 269). Finally, Miss Kilman's perceived failures are always attributed to her body. Although her thoughts are raging, Miss Kilman is at pains to assure herself that it is the body that is producing these desires, not the mind: "It is the flesh – it is the flesh" she muttered, trying to subdue this turbulent passion as she walked down Victoria Street' (H 213). Miss Kilman is given no psychological awareness of or distance from her body image. Instead, her anxious reading of her body is matched by the opinion of the outside world and sedimented in her physical portrayal.

Exactly how will Miss Kilman's body end up being articulated in language – does Clarissa feel anger or hatred? Woolf is not quite sure: 'For now that the body of Miss Kilman was not before her, the hatred ~~horror~~ of her came back' (H 208). In *The Hours*, Kilman's interior monologue at Westminster Abbey is riddled with corrections, which modulate her negative thoughts about the body to words spoken out loud:

It is the flesh, ~~thought~~ <said> Doris Kilman. (H 210)

<muttered> ~~said~~, aloud, “It is the flesh” the sound died. (H 211)
This utterance about the body, which Miss Kilman repeats multiple times in *Mrs Dalloway*, is carefully reworked. The notes on Miss Kilman’s anxiety over her own body, which intersect her thoughts about Clarissa and Elizabeth, are generally heavily edited in *The Hours*:

to rid herself ~~of the weighty & cumbrous body~~ <of> ~~which~~ <the heats & chills> loved & hated [...] that grinding despair []> ~~& clumsy~~, & (H 225)

Managing and attempting to repress Miss Kilman is unquestionably important to the novel. At the same time, this repression is complicated in three important ways. Firstly, her repression takes a particular form: it reduces the origins and genesis of Kilman’s failure to her body. Secondly, she is made a participant and active in her own repression, a self-flagellatory, masochistic character who generally can only attack herself in the novel. Finally, Kilman’s repression is a failed one. Like the doctors, Kilman stands out as an unusual target of undiluted, intense and sustained revulsion, which even the city fails to mute, someone who ‘undermines Clarissa’s ability to like herself’,³⁰² a repository for Clarissa’s discontent. The circulation of people and goods which characterizes the novel’s London and has a numbing effect on the narrative, and which even drowns the shock of the suicide of Septimus in its midst, is threatened by the thought of Miss Kilman, ‘this brutal monster’ (H 272) failing to fade into just another face in the city.

³⁰² Sybil Oldfield, ‘From Rachel’s Aunts to Miss La Trobe: Spinsters in the Fiction of Virginia Woolf’, in *Old Maids to Radical Spinsters. Unmarried Women in the Twentieth-Century Novel*, ed. by Laura L. Doan, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), pp. 85-102 (p. 92).

Images of bodily inappropriateness persist and follow Miss Kilman to the end of the novel. The Joshua Reynolds portrait – to Miss Kilman an engraving – where a young girl has her hands in a muff, is to Miss Kilman simply an image of luxury and inherited wealth. To Clarissa, however, this ‘Sir Joshua (sic) picture of the little girl with a muff brought back Kilman with a rush; Kilman her enemy. That was satisfying’ (MD 148). Although the image of a privileged girl could simply bring Elizabeth to the forefront of Clarissa’s thoughts, ‘the little girl with a muff’ could also hint at female masturbation, echoing imagery familiar from Kafka. With fur as a stand-in for body hair – as Kilman was first compared to a dog – the image suggests an imbalance of sexual power. Gregor Samsa of *Die Verwandlung* is much attached to a portrait of a woman covered in furs, a dominant figure that critics have connected to Leopold von Sacher-Masoch’s novel *Venus im Pelz* (*Venus in Furs*, 1870).³⁰³ Here, the girl with the muff has Clarissa think of ‘~~that odious woman~~’ (H 367), and the novel is generally quite explicit about what is happening when Elizabeth, ‘out of breath’ (MD 106), emerges blushing from having spent time with Miss Kilman. In *The Hours*, the Reynolds painting is of ‘the little girl in a hood’ (H 367), perhaps a costumed portrait suggesting innocence soon lost, or indeed eaten as in the fairy tale.

In a novel so sympathetic to the suffering of characters whom the outside world fails to comprehend, such as Septimus and Rezia, Miss Kilman’s treatment seems disproportionately harsh and unsympathetic. Unlike the doctors, here angels of death who in effect kill the patient, Miss Kilman kills no man. Unlike Clarissa and most other characters, she has lost a family member in the war, her brother, who fought for the British.

³⁰³ Peter B. Waldeck, ‘Kafka’s “Die Verwandlung” and “Ein Hungerkünstler” as Influenced by Leopold von Sacher-Masoch’, *Monatshefte* 64.2 (1972), pp. 147-152.

Miss Kilman is not the only financially independent, educated woman in the novel. There are positively viewed examples of professional women – Elizabeth thinks of the tradition of public service on her father’s side of the family. There are, after all the ‘abbesses, the Principals’ (H 234), ‘Head Mistresses’ (H 234), and ‘other dignitaries [...] of the [...] republic of women’ (H 234), a list that the final novel retains in full (MD 117).

Nor is Miss Kilman the exclusive target of the casual class-based condescension that Clarissa casts on the breastfeeding women in the park, which is even more strongly worded in *The Hours*, or on Mrs Dempster’s unglamorous lunch. Woolf’s portrayals of the poor as ugly have justifiably been much discussed by critics. John Carey has argued that the educated Miss Kilman is ‘just the sort of woman Virginia Woolf, as a campaigning feminist, might be expected to champion. But the social prejudices of an upper-middle-class intellectual prove stronger than feminism’.³⁰⁴ A criticism of this reading has found sympathy for Miss Kilman in the novel because she shares Woolf’s feminism, a view that can at best be sustained through tangential evidence, if at all.³⁰⁵ There may be a hint of critical distance to the unfair dismissal of Miss Kilman – which is much more directly ‘~~an absolute scandal~~’ (H 219) in *The Hours* – but there is little sympathy on offer for Miss Kilman as a whole in the novel.

Miss Kilman’s repulsive body and its unstoppable need for food have understandably, but perhaps too easily, been connected to her desire for Elizabeth. Eileen Barrett has

³⁰⁴ John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses. Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880-1939* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p. 19.

³⁰⁵ Elizabeth Primamore, ‘A Don, Virginia Woolf, the Masses, and the Case of Miss Kilman’, *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory* 9.2 (1998), pp. 121-137.

connected Miss Kilman's self-hatred to the pathologization of homosexuality, prevalent at the time, an internalization of 'the case studies of the sexologists and their perversions of lesbian desire'.³⁰⁶ To Barrett, Miss Kilman enables Clarissa to 'contain her own sexuality within acceptable private boundaries', her homosexuality makes Clarissa more heterosexual by contrast.³⁰⁷

Yet homosexual or bisexual feelings are not always treated negatively in the novel: not in the implied case of Evans and Septimus, or with reference to Clarissa's feelings for Sally Seton. The latter are comfortably separated from Clarissa's marriage: 'It was not like one's feeling for a man. It was completely disinterested [...]' (MD 29). In contrast to Clarissa and Sally's dalliance, and to Elizabeth's attachment to Miss Kilman, which is dismissed as a transitory if unfortunate phase by Richard Dalloway, Miss Kilman's homosexual needs are presented as being in poor taste. This suggests a rejection of lesbian desire that is not momentary experimentation, but just as powerful and exclusive as heterosexual desire, desire that has less to do with the perhaps enticing or fashionable bi-curiosity.

Miss Kilman's portrait as a homosexual is particularly damning in *The Hours*. Her desire is presented as a bodily failure: it is suggested that if Kilman were not so ugly she would be with a man. Her failures take a very anatomical form in *The Hours*, in a misogynist image of a sexually inactive, barren woman: 'That her body had dried by years of anguish ~~was going to~~ <wd.> split apart ; that ~~her voice would~~ she would give one <great> cry' (H 222). Although drought and dryness are images Woolf uses in the

³⁰⁶ Eileen Barrett, 'Unmasking Lesbian Passion: The Inverted World of Mrs Dalloway', in *Virginia Woolf: Lesbian Readings*, ed. by Barrett and Patricia Cramer (New York: New York University Press, 1997), pp. 146-164 (p. 161).

³⁰⁷ Barrett (1997), p. 161.

diaries to describe her inspiration waning: ‘In three weeks from today I shall be dried up’ (D2 249), in the context of the novel they take a particularly offensive form.

Miss Kilman’s unaesthetic body excludes her from the sexual liberties given to other characters. With the exception of her character, *Mrs Dalloway* subscribes to a fluid definition of sexual orientation which stresses imagination over action. It does so in the vein of *La Recherche*, where nearly all characters other than the narrator are revealed to have bisexual tendencies by the final volume of the novel. Such a fluid understanding of sexual orientation has been described by Judith Butler as ‘not simply an attribute one has or a disposition or patterned set of inclinations. It is a mode of being disposed toward others, including in the mode of fantasy, and sometimes only in the mode of fantasy’.³⁰⁸

Miss Kilman’s unaesthetic body is also presented as the root cause of her unmarried status. Calling attention to her status as a spinster, she is referred to by the patronym, and only three times by her first name, Doris, outside of her interior monologue. Being a Miss at her age is presented as a lack, as Sybil Oldfield has argued:

Unfortunately, it would seem that at this point in her writing Virginia Woolf did endorse the vulgar consensus: because ugly in body, a spinster; because a spinster, ugly in soul. It is not unfeminist to portray a hate-filled woman with a need for power, but it is unfeminist to portray such characteristics as the necessary product of heterosexual failure.³⁰⁹

Against the much-discussed Sapphist undertones to the novel, heterosexual rejection is unequivocally translated to a total rejection for Miss Kilman: ‘And for a woman, of

³⁰⁸ Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2015), p. 33. First published in 2004.

³⁰⁹ Oldfield (1991), p. 93.

course, that meant never meeting the opposite sex. Never would she come first with *anyone*' (MD 109, emphasis added).

Rather traditionally, there is also an element to Miss Kilman as the first partner of a daughter who threatens to throw the nuclear family off its comfortable balance. Her sexual desire suggests an end to Elizabeth being a child. It echoes Mrs Ramsay's desire for her children never to grow up, and fear of them becoming 'long-legged monsters' (LH 49). Like a father who resents his daughter's suitor, or a mother who thinks no partner is good enough for her child, Clarissa detests Kilman, a woman 'with all that power, Elizabeth's seducer; the woman who had crept in to steal and defile' (MD 148). That Elizabeth has a sexual life, a sphere of life from which her parents are excluded, is underlined by Kilman's desire, highlighted by the motif of the colour pink. Kilman is wearing a pink dress, even if it is seen as red as by a party guest. The pastries she eats are pink, and Elizabeth turns pink on Kilman's arrival (MD 101). This treatment spares Clarissa from thinking of Elizabeth's desire; Miss Kilman is its sole generator.

Miss Kilman's body is also that of an unwelcome outsider to the family home: she has succeeded in infiltrating the nuclear family. In *Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street*, Clarissa thinks of undesirable guests: 'It would be intolerable if dowdy women came to her party' (MDBS 151), the 'people she didn't want would come; the others wouldn't' (MDBS 151). When Clarissa is thinking of whom to invite to the party in the final novel, Miss Kilman is already in her house: 'That woman Kilman was upstairs' (MD 100). Given the extreme importance of who gets to invited to what party in Clarissa's world, with Clarissa herself excluded from a society lunch, Miss Kilman's unwanted

presence reads like a home invasion. When Elizabeth comes to address her mother ‘the door was ajar, and outside the door was Miss Kilman, as Clarissa knew; Miss Kilman in her mackintosh listening to whatever they said’ (MD 104). Like the lodgers in *Die Verwandlung* who bring the outside world of competition and commerce into the family home, or Hamsun’s narrator who is horrified to find street violence within the context of the family home he is lodging at, Miss Kilman’s body contaminates the Dalloway home.

Miss Kilman is also an employee, if a skilled one, which adds a further element to her role as a home invader. Mary Wilson has recently analysed ways in which servants cross physical thresholds in the family home in *Mrs Dalloway*. Although Wilson does not discuss Miss Kilman in these terms, her reading of uncrossed thresholds highlighting ‘their penetrability by others’³¹⁰ applies equally to Miss Kilman’s character:

Woolf’s fictional servants tend not to cross thresholds themselves, but their presence materializes the thresholds Woolf enables other characters to cross; that is, servants mark physical entrances and exits – Lucy stands at the door when Clarissa leaves and when Peter enters, for example.³¹¹

I showed earlier how Kafka’s Karl mediated between the kitchen and the living quarters as a child, bridging the family and its employees. Miss Kilman’s problematic physical presence as the employee within has the same effect.

There are, then, many reasons why Kilman would be considered a threat to the form of life which Clarissa represents: her sexuality, her poverty, her class, her

³¹⁰ Mary Wilson, *The Labors of Modernism. Domesticity, Servants, and Authorship in Modernist Fiction* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), p. 44.

³¹¹ Wilson (2013), p. 38.

unglamorously fervent religious convictions, her lack of social graces. Her bodily appearance still weighs more than any of the factors above, as Woolf's omissions in *The Hours* show:

~~Her large heavy body crushed her down. Her body was so large, so clumsy; & Her hands were extended in a~~ <Her large hand opened & shut upon the table.>' (H 220)

Up until now I have largely discussed Miss Kilman's bodily portrayal in isolation within Woolf's work, but Woolf uses similar imagery of the irreparable body as connected to food elsewhere in the form of racial stereotypes, to which I will now turn. I will examine two instances here; the character of Abrahamson in *The Years*, and that of Mrs Loeb of 'The Jews'.

In the 'Present Day' section to *The Years*, Abrahamson's bath is heard, listened to and commented on by Sara and North whilst they drink coffee. Like Kilman's underwear on the café table, the meal, or here a coffee break, is punctured by the sounds of a bathing neighbour, a deliberately off-putting soundtrack. The effect is not far removed from Mrs McNab 'drinking soup out of a basin' (LH 47) in *To the Lighthouse*, where the connection between food and bodily hygiene is made literal.

Miss Kilman could not alter her appearance through grooming; Abrahamson's bath is presented as failing to clean his Jewish body. Viewed as irreparably, metaphysically dirty, its imprint cannot be washed off; it leaves greasy residue and hair behind: 'North felt a shiver run through him. Hairs in food, hairs on basins, other people's hairs made him feel physically sick' (Y 239). Abrahamson is in the tallow trade, where animal fat, or food by extension, is used to cleanse the body. His presumably

Jewish fiancée works in a tailor's shop – also in the business of commodities to do with the body (Y 239).

In Miss Kilman's character, bodily ugliness has intrinsic permanence; by contrast, Elizabeth is described in terms of a well-bred racehorse (H 229). Abrahamson's Jewish body is presented as uniting all repulsive bodily characteristics: dirt, illness in its coughing, food, and fecundity as suggested by his impending marriage. Woolf recycles this imagery as inherent to a particular group elsewhere: 'Its (sic) odd how much the Scandinavians wash, scrape, scent, gurgle, and clean at night before bedtime considering the results next morning: as hard as a board, and as gray as a scullery pail' (L3 361).

The evident anti-Semitism of Abrahamson's bathing scene in *The Years* has drawn critical attention, in context with the anti-Semitism of Woolf's other writings, such as the sketch 'Jews', and given her marriage into a Jewish family.³¹² With good reason, Phyllis Lassner asks why there is 'no narrative distance from the "sinister

³¹² Phyllis Lassner stresses the ambivalence in Woolf's treatment of Jewish figures. The scene of Abrahamson's bath was written 'when Woolf was aware that ambivalence towards Jews endangered them as never before'. Lassner, "'The Milk of Our Mother's Kindness Has Ceased to Flow': Virginia Woolf and Stevie Smith", in *Between Race and Culture. Representations of 'the Jew' in English and American Literature*, ed. by Bryan Cheyette (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), pp. 129-44 (p. 133). In Maren Tova Linett's view, 'the drawing-room anti-Semitism like Sara's need not necessarily be connected to Mosley-style fascism, and the novel does not connect this anti-semitism to the British Union of Fascists.' Linett, *Modernism, Feminism, and Jewishness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 54. In David Bradshaw's reading, Woolf ultimately links Jewish exclusion to that of women and homosexuals. Bradshaw, 'Hyams Place: "The Years", The Jews and the British Union of Fascists', in *Women Writers of the 1930s: Gender, Politics and History*, ed. by Maroula Joannou (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press: 1999), pp. 179-91 (p. 189).

implications” of his portrait’.³¹³ Critics often argue that Abrahamson’s portrayal is typical of the stereotyping and bigotry of the time, as summarized by Julia Briggs:

Woolf’s anti-Semitism is characteristic of her class and her moment – casual, unsystematic, and apparently thoughtless. It was invisible to her as sexism was to the rest of Bloomsbury.³¹⁴

In her study of the stereotyping of Jews in postcards, Estelle Pearlman has identified ways in which ‘anti-Semitism was sustained at the same time as liberal attitudes’.³¹⁵ Briggs stresses that anti-Semitism was an attitude Leonard Woolf himself absorbed from his social group and replicated in his early writings.³¹⁶ Kafka’s description of going into swimming pools, which I discussed in the previous chapter, where he expressed disgust over the physical appearance of Jewish swimmers, reveals similar attitudes.

A directly anti-Semitic, early sketch not intended for publication titled ‘The Jews’³¹⁷ describes an overweight, repulsive body connected to food familiar from Miss Kilman’s characterization, but also unites it with direct anti-Semitism of the kind we see in Abrahamson’s bath in *The Years*. The sketch depicts Mrs Loeb, a wealthy Jewish woman serving dinner at a party where the narrator is a guest. ‘She is a fat Jewess, aged 56 (she tells her age to ingratiate herself), coarsely skinned, with drooping eyes, and tumbled hair’ (CH 14). Like Miss Kilman, she is presented as out of place among the wealthy: ‘One wonders how Mrs Loeb became a rich woman. It

³¹³ Lassner (1996), p. 135.

³¹⁴ Julia Briggs, *Virginia Woolf. An Inner Life* (London: Penguin, 2005), p. 310.

³¹⁵ Estelle Pearlman, ‘The Representation of Jews on Edwardian Postcards’, in *The Image of the Jew in European Liberal Culture, 1789-1914*, ed. by Bryan Cheyette and Nadia Valman (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2004), pp. 217-243 (p. 237).

³¹⁶ Briggs (2005), p. 309.

³¹⁷ David Bradshaw, ‘Commentary’, in Virginia Woolf, *Carlyle’s House and Other Sketches* (London: Hesperus Press, 2003), pp. 25-49 (p. 44).

seems an accident' (CH 14). Her body is similarly presented as being out of place, in terms of both physique and class: 'She might be behind a counter' (CH 14).

As with Miss Kilman's inescapable bodiliness, this description of Mrs Loeb as a physical misfit in her setting persists. The sketch obsessively returns to criticism of her body even when it tries to comment on her behaviour. With 'a voice that rubbed away the edges of all her words and had a falling cadence' (CH 14), her speech is eroded by her physicality, reducing the linguistic meaning of her words to a bodily sound. Even her drawing room is 'florid' (CH 14), a term that unites an excessively elaborate taste in furnishings with the thought of a flushed face. When the sketch moves on to describe Mrs Loeb's social behaviour, it cannot resist returning to her eating habits (CH 14). Later, when her socializing is described, it is again done in terms of her appetite, of 'moving in a circle of city people; "young people" tickle her coarse palate' (CH 14).

I suggested earlier that the éclair scene is as much about Elizabeth not eating as it is about Miss Kilman's problematic desire alone. Although the sketch criticizes Mrs Loeb for being overweight, she is most dangerously described as someone who forces food on her guests:

Thus at dinner she pressed everyone to eat, and feared, when she saw an empty plate, that the guest was criticising her. Her food, of course, swam in oil and was nasty. (CH 14)

This loaded description layers revulsion in a style familiar from the force-feeding scene and descriptions of food in *Der Verschollene*. If in *Der Verschollene* the physical intimidation by food must be deduced from the narrative through Karl's

reactions, here the tension of the meal is unequivocal. Mrs Loeb threatens other women with her food. Her attempts at marrying off Miss T., who is described as a person ‘used to protecting herself’ and untouched, ‘a chocolate box young woman’, is presumably protecting herself from being pushed to suitors but perhaps also from the culinary threat of Mrs Loeb and ‘her fat arms’ (CH 14).³¹⁸

Critics such as Linett and Schröder ultimately connect Woolf’s treatment of the Jewish body to a ‘discomfort with bodiliness and sexuality’³¹⁹ or with food and the body in general.³²⁰ This goes quite against Woolf’s own project of putting the body and food at the forefront of her literary enterprise, discussed at the start of this chapter. Figures like Abrahamson and Mrs Loeb show not an aversion to the body as such, but to a particular kind of body.

To return to *Mrs Dalloway*, the persistence of Miss Kilman’s bodily ugliness is particularly striking given that Kilman is explicitly introduced as a construct of Clarissa’s mind:

For it was not her one hated but the idea of her, which undoubtedly had gathered in to itself a great deal that was not Miss Kilman; had become one of those spectres with which one battles in the night; one of those spectres who

³¹⁸ Reading ‘Jews’ through Woolf’s lived experience, critics have speculated on models for the character of Mrs Loeb, ranging from Woolf’s mother-in-law to the Loeb family, a wealthy, cultured family of Frankfurt bankers settled in Britain. Bradshaw (2003), pp. 41-2.

³¹⁹ Linett (2007), p. 183. Linett has traced a connection between Jewishness and bodiliness, or strong sexuality, to Virginia Stephen’s contemplation of marriage with Leonard: ‘Woolf began linking Jews to bodiliness when she was still Virginia Stephen [...]’ and ‘linked his sexual desire to his Jewishness’. Linett (2007), p. 183, p. 184.

³²⁰ Leena Kore-Schröder, ‘Tales of Abjection and Miscegenation: Virginia Woolf’s and Leonard Woolf’s “Jewish” Stories’, *Twentieth-Century Literature* 49.3 (2003), pp. 298-327 (p. 303).

stand astride us and suck up half our life-blood, dominators and tyrants [...]
(MD 10)

There is much in Kilman, then, that ‘was not Miss Kilman’ (MD 10), revealed by this overtly psychological description. Here, she morphs into a nocturnal demon, an incubus figure, a symbolic rapist ‘astride us’. This momentary lapse into a nocturnal Gothic horror reveals the depths which Kilman threatens to reach within the novel. Critics can be affected by this portrayal, too, and have aligned Miss Kilman with the doctors: ‘Miss Kilman and Sir William Bradshaw are two of the major oppressors in the novel’³²¹ – this of a character dependent on Clarissa’s family who disappears for the last third of the novel, with the single exception of Clarissa’s momentary memory of her (MD 148).

Finally, Kilman emerges as a religious zealot, perhaps even someone whose radical politics or thirst for power masquerade as religion. Her criticism of Clarissa takes this form: ‘at the same time rose in her a more violent & over mastering desire to overcome her, <to> convert her’ (H 205). Miss Kilman’s motivations, to ‘ruin her; desolate her’ (H 205), ‘to subdue; to overwhelm, to make act feel her mastery’ (H 205), are terms more suited to political domination than to religious fellowship.

When all of Miss Kilman’s character traits are added together; being large, poorly dressed, ugly, masculine, fervently religious, and politically aggressive, even expansionist, they amount to a racialized national stereotype. Kilman emerges as a caricature of a German woman, although her Germanic origins go far back in time:

³²¹ Prem Kumari Srivastava, ‘Intellectual Angst and Mental Despair: Virginia Woolf’s “Mrs Dalloway”’, in *Health Psychology*, ed. by Surila Agarwala, Ira Das, and Kavita Kumar (New Delhi: Allied Publishers 2009), pp. 310-322 (p. 315).

It was true that the family was of German origin; spelt the name Kiehlman in the eighteenth century; but her brother had been killed. (MD 105)

Eileen Sypher has showed how Miss Kilman functions ‘as a metaphor for the German military – earlier she is referred to as a “battleship”’³²² (MD 110), again not without making note of her size. Miss Kilman is also frugal, charitable (H 478), poor at small talk (H 228), boring and theoretical, with a habit of lecturing people. Angry, militant, religious, full of knowledge, large, too reliant on thought, and lacking in finesse and elegance, Miss Kilman is a Prussian stereotype. It is even suggested that she chose an Anglican place of worship only out of necessity. Miss Kilman turns from the Catholic Westminster Cathedral to Westminster Abbey not happily but ‘doggedly’ (MD 113), and the Abbey appears a second-rate option to her, ‘that other sanctuary’ (MD 113).

Petra Rau has productively compared the portrayal of Miss Kilman with Woolf’s observations of German women while visiting the Bayreuther Festspiele. In Woolf’s remarks on the festival audience, German women are reduced to their body type, whereas the ‘Englishwoman whom Woolf cannot quite place is identifiable as English in her familiar leanness.’³²³

In Bradshaw’s reading, Miss Kilman adds to the number of people who are victims of the war, victimized because of her German origins and affinity with German culture.³²⁴ Yet such affinity is given little space within her interior monologue. Rezia has also left her home country of Italy, and we get romantic, evocative sketches of a

³²² Eileen Sypher, ‘Shifting Boundaries: “New” and Traditional Women in Virginia Woolf’, *Women's Writing* 3.3 (1996), pp. 297-310 (p. 302).

³²³ Petra Rau, *English Modernism, National Identity and the Germans, 1890-1950* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), p. 133.

³²⁴ David Bradshaw, ‘Introduction’ in Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 11-45 (p. 12).

Milanese childhood, from behind enemy lines. Kilman remembers that ‘the only happy days of her life had been spent in Germany!’ (MD 105), an emphatically delivered but generic memory by contrast. There are no nostalgic lines in German, the ‘stamm’ aus Litauen’ of *The Waste Land*, or memories of summers by Lake Starnberg, showing an intimate, emotional connection to German culture.³²⁵

Recent scholarly attention on race in *Mrs Dalloway* has focused on subjects of the empire, such as Rezia’s moment of despair by a colonial memorial, and on the fiancée of Peter Walsh, who is the target of Clarissa’s casual racial slur. Valerie Reed Hickman has recently applied Spivak’s thesis on the necessity of the foreigner as a foil, ‘the other woman’, to *Mrs Dalloway*:

Gayatri Spivak situates her 1981 discussion of French feminism and its reception in the United States by raising the question of the relationship of Western feminists to women outside the West, insisting that ‘there has to be a simultaneous other focus: not merely who am I? but who is the other woman?’³²⁶

Hickman mentions Miss Kilman only in passing and makes no reference to her stereotypical portrayal. Rezia is also missing from this analysis. These are important omissions, as Hickman focuses on transnational otherness in female characters, and her examination of the ‘other woman’ is readily applicable to Miss Kilman. It is the undesirable Germanic woman who allows the novel to carve a place out for Clarissa, suspended between the sensual, exotic seductresses of the East and the South – the

³²⁵ T.S. Eliot, ‘The Waste Land’, in *The Waste Land and Other Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972). 12, 8-10.

³²⁶ Valerie Reed Hickman, ‘Clarissa and the Coolies’ Wives: “Mrs Dalloway” Figuring Transnational Feminism’, *Modern Fiction Studies* 60.1 (2014) pp. 52-77 (p. 54).

mistress of Peter Walsh, Rezia, the exotic-looking Lady Bexborough – and Kilman, the defeminized German.

In her study of feminism and eugenics, Angelique Richardson has examined how eugenicist discourse permeated socially progressive thinking. Richardson shows that racial language was ‘readily used to distinguish groups of varying social as well as ethnic backgrounds’³²⁷ – including the poor. ‘The othering of the poor along biological or racial lines was eased by the fluidity of the concept of race in nineteenth (sic) century. It might be used to denote the human race, different ethnic Europeans, or wider ethnic differences, even differences between species’.³²⁸ Such casual application of Darwinist discourse to human appearance is evident in *To the Lighthouse*, a novel permeated by the same aestheticized sense of biological expiry as *Mrs Dalloway*. As Mr Banks considers dining together with others a waste of time, he wonders ‘Are we attractive as a species? Not so very, he thought, looking at those rather untidy boys’ (LH 73). The portrayal of Miss Kilman as physically unsatisfactory is not an exception to this pervasive use of racial discourse.³²⁹

At the same time, Miss Kilman is not the only tutor of Germanic origin who ends up teaching something other than originally intended in the novel. Clarissa’s little formal education came from someone at least culturally German, ‘the few twigs of knowledge Fräulein Daniels gave them’ (MD 7), and in what proved a more

³²⁷ Angelique Richardson, *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century. Rational Reproduction and the New Woman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 24-5.

³²⁸ Richardson (2003), p. 24.

³²⁹ Lee has connected Woolf’s eugenicist language to her own fear of losing control of her own illness. Lee (1996), p. 188.

formative education, she fondly remembers her childhood German tutor, in fact more of a family friend:

Joseph Breitkopf certainly was, for he came every summer, poor old man, for weeks and weeks, and pretended to read German with her, but really played the piano and sang Brahms without any voice. (MD 30)

At the party, Clarissa thinks of Breitkopf again, reminiscing ‘the garden; the trees; old Joseph Breitkopf singing Brahms without any voice’ (MD 154). The sketch for this scene in *The Hours* retains and repeats the German title of the song, “‘Ich grolle nicht’” (H 329) – Heine set to Schumann delivered with ‘immense passion’ (H 329). Breitkopf’s influence on Clarissa was not limited to an appreciation of *Lieder*:

She made old Joseph tell her the names of the stars, which he liked doing very seriously. She stood there: she listened. She heard the names of the stars. (MD 31)

With his aged voice and a name recalling Breitkopf & Härtel, the oldest music publisher in the world, Breitkopf may be a relic and have stereotypical German qualities of seriousness and musicality, but he also taught Clarissa the ‘names of the stars’, one of the most sublime images of the novel. Clarissa imagines ‘glittering stars’ (MD 15) when she thinks of the occupant of the car and the highest echelons of power. The writings of Septimus that he wants burned, but Rezia finds beautiful, include drawings of the ‘suns and stars’ (D 125). In *To the Lighthouse*, Mrs Ramsay stops herself from pointing out the star to her husband (LH 59). Within the timeline of *Mrs Dalloway*, Breitkopf belongs to the Sally Seton category of characters: he gave Clarissa the ability to name stars, and is associated with the garden, with summer, and a childhood lost, bringing Marie’s childhood memories of the Germanic *Hofgarten*

from *The Waste Land* to mind.³³⁰ Rau's astute reading of Kilman as a Germanic stereotype overlooks these other references to German culture in the novel, references untainted by Miss Kilman's body.³³¹ As problematic as Miss Kilman's portrayal as a Germanic woman is, it is the appearance of her body and its appetite that is most damningly treated in the novel.

4.3. *The New Dress*

If Kilman's treatment seems isolated and disproportionately harsh in the novel, it is best compared to that of Mabel in *The New Dress*, one of nine short stories Woolf wrote in 1925, after she had sent final proofs of *Mrs Dalloway* back to both her British and U.S. publishers.³³² This return to the Dalloway material focuses on body image explicitly, further highlighting its importance to the novel.

The first stories describe anxiety over physical presentation as experienced by party attendees or would-be-attendees. *Happiness* has its main character, Stuart Elton, worry about ageing, and imagine how his posture and habitus would affect how others see him. He twice flicks an imaginary thread off his trousers – in the first paragraph and again when he speaks of visiting Kew Gardens (CSF 172-3). Self-conscious and worried about his own value, he gradually builds a sense of still passing as valuable,

³³⁰ Eliot (1972), 8-13.

³³¹ Rau (2009), pp. 128-131. See also Emma Sutton's discussion of the ways in which German culture and cultural products are presented in the novel, where 'the xenophobia of the post-war London public is contrasted with Clarissa's youthful relationships with Germans'. Emma Sutton, *Virginia Woolf and Classical Music: Politics, Aesthetics, Form* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p. 75.

³³² Anne Fernald, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Edition to the Works of Virginia Woolf: Mrs Dalloway*, ed. by Fernald (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 39-96 (p. 79).

how 'He had it still' (CSF 174), like Clarissa 'having that gift still' (MD 147, H 366). His body image is restored as robust, if temporarily; by contrast, the short story *The New Dress* describes permanent bodily invalidity, the kind we see with Miss Kilman.

The New Dress opens with a same kind of sinister foreboding of anxiety as *Mrs Dalloway*, a 'serious suspicion that something was wrong' (ND 164). This anxiety takes a directly bodily form. *The New Dress* focuses on Mabel, a modulated Kilman in her unglamorous religiosity and politics, which are presented as a way of escaping sexual rejection. Like Miss Kilman, Mabel is first compared to a dog, here a physically deficient animal; 'as if she were a beaten mongrel' (ND 167). Like Miss Kilman, Mabel is always seen in the same coat. In 'the Chinese cloak she had worn these twenty years' (ND 171), Mabel is only *démodée*, not as incriminatingly dressed as Miss Kilman in her war-animal uniform. Both Miss Kilman and Mabel experience severe social anxiety as an attack on the body: if Kilman felt that her heart was pierced, Mabel imagines being 'issued out into the room, as if spears were thrown at her yellow dress from all sides' (ND 167).

Mabel has a perfectionist, black-or-white relationship to the body, which mirrors the all-or-nothing fantasies of bodily freedom or complete restriction in Kafka. She responds to her nervousness about appearance with a fantasy of bodily withdrawal: she 'would be absolutely transformed. She would wear a uniform; she would be called Sister Somebody; she would never give thought to clothes again' (ND 170).

Furthermore, Mabel participates in maintaining and generating the bodily hierarchy by looking down not on only herself, like Miss Kilman, but also on others. She

describes another woman by contrast: ‘Of course a thing like a dress was beneath Mrs Holman’s notice, with her family always tumbling downstairs or having the scarlet fever’ (ND 168), positioning herself above those clumsy and prone to disease, disease of the kind that leaves marks on the body.

Like Miss Kilman, torn between religious modesty and the desire to please with her appearance, Mabel is divided between the mutually contradictory pressures of modesty and attractiveness, of looking fashionable yet rejecting it as ‘an orgy of self-love’ (ND 165).

Mabel, then, invests heavily in her appearance whilst condemning herself for it. Designing and having the dress fitted is laborious and time-consuming, ‘for ever so many hours, she had planned with the little dressmaker how it was to go’ (ND 164). These efforts are futile. The dress in *The New Dress* is already out of date. Like the fitting of Karl’s hotel uniform in *Der Verschollene*, a claustrophobic experience where the presumably new tailor-made uniform felt already stained, clothing is tainted by its connection to the body. The body is presented as unchanging, unaffected by clothes, let alone by one’s thoughts.

This anxiety over the body in *The New Dress* contrasts with Clarissa’s visit to the glove shop in *Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street*, the short story written in 1922, where Clarissa’s character made her second appearance after *The Voyage Out*.³³³ It is the thought of buying gloves, not flowers as in the final novel, that commences the action in the short story. Gloves may seem like an unimportant accessory, or less connected

³³³ I discuss *The Voyage Out* in the conclusion to this chapter.

to the body than a dress worn to a party, but in the typescript to *The String Quartet*, Woolf wrote of gloves: 'I draw on my gloves with a sense of drawing on my body' (CSF 294).

In spite of this importance of gloves and hands, omnipresent in the *Dalloway* material, Clarissa does not focus on appearances during the glove-fitting. Mabel imagines that women like Clarissa, who appear to care about little other than clothing, would also have a mental life dominated by it. She thinks it

petty-minded to care so much at her age with two children, to be still so utterly dependent on people's opinions and not have principles or convictions, not to be able to say as other people did, 'There's Shakespeare! There's death!' (ND 166)

In fact, Clarissa of *Bond Street* thinks of abstract metaphysical suffering, death, and war whilst buying gloves and socializing with other patrons. Her distracted and abstract thoughts at the glove-shop contrast with Mabel's direct anxiety at the dressmaker's. Mabel's discomfort mounts and intensifies into nightmarish imagery familiar from Miss Kilman's character, a kind of mental panic:

We are all like flies trying to crawl over the edge of the saucer, Mabel thought, and repeated the phrase as if she were crossing herself, as if she were trying to find some spell to annul this pain, to make this agony endurable. Tags of Shakespeare, lines from books she had read ages ago, suddenly came to her when she was in agony, and she repeated them over and over again. [...] If she could say that over often enough and make herself see the flies, she would become numb, chill, frozen, dumb (ND 165).

When Miss Kilman repeats her bodily mantra in *Mrs Dalloway*, its psychological function to her is not directly stressed. Here, Mabel's thoughts of flies on dishes, or of fragments of texts have a clear psychological purpose: to dull the pain, even to annul it.

The New Dress also layers images of disgust with clothing and food. The room where the dress is tried on has the odour of food, ‘smelt of clothes and cabbage cooking’ (ND 166). Like the theatrical debris and poor food that fills Brunelda’s apartment in *Der Verschollene*, *The New Dress* – really a text about anxiously choosing what to wear to a party – combines the body, clothing, and its nourishment, food, through disgust. Its most powerful image closely resembles the most often-repeated topos of Kafka’s oeuvre: a transformation into a monstrous buglike creature. In Mabel’s moment of ecstasy at finding a flattering dress, the dressmaker becomes buglike: ‘that she should be crawling on the floor with her mouth full of pins, and her face red and her eyes bulging’ (ND 166), just as the *Bond Street* shop-girl was likened to a snail, ‘There were little brown spots on her arm. And the girl crawled like a snail’ (MDBS 152).

It is telling that when Woolf returned to the *Dalloway* material after she had finished the novel, she felt it necessary to create a character to whom the body was an even greater source of distress than it is to Miss Kilman, isolating this distress from the ethnic, religious, and sexual undertones it carries in *Mrs Dalloway*.

Miss Kilman’s character is restricted to her body in spite of her mental faculties which exceed the perceived limitations of her body. There is another, if minor, character who is similarly excessively defined by her body and its failings, but whose mind and language are made to match the calibre of her body as it is presented. One among many minor characters or perhaps ‘characters whose existence is marked as minor’ to borrow Rachel Bowlby’s phrase, Carrie Dempster appears only once in the

novel, eating (MD 23).³³⁴ She eats her lunch out of a bag, seated on a bench at Regent's Park, an image repulsively echoed by Woolf's sketch on lunching, *Waiting for déjeuner*, 'when the old man impaled a paper bag in the public gardens' (CSF 236). Like that of Miss Kilman, her eating is portrayed as unsophisticated, even bordering on the animalistic: she eats outdoors, without cutlery, and shares her lunch with the squirrels.

The low status of Mrs Dempster is conveyed through a life defined by bodiliness and a connection to food. She is all body like Miss Kilman, but this bodiliness is not complicated by any desire of surpassing the boundaries given to her. Food colours Mrs Dempster's thoughts relating to both the present and the past. Husbands cheat on wives with cooks, and life is a disappointing sequence of satisfying bodily needs, a series of 'eating, drinking, and mating' (MD 23), for which one ought to lower one's expectations, 'be a little stout' (MD 23). She feels she has given her body – here defined only in terms of its sexual attractiveness – away in marriage, and has received a bad deal in return. This reductive bodiliness resembles Molly Bloom's exhaustive account in *Ulysses*, where her experience of life never surpasses her biology.

Miss Kilman is the only character shown desiring food in the present, rather unusually for a one-day novel which details meals. Mrs Dempster appears to eat on autopilot, unmotivated by hunger. As a young girl Sally Seton may have stolen 'a chicken from the larder because she was hungry in the night' (MD 154), but this reads as a comical act of rebellion, likened to how she 'smoked cigars in her bedroom' (MD 154).

³³⁴ Rachel Bowlby, 'Untold Stories In "Mrs Dalloway"', *Textual Practice* 25.3 (2011), pp. 397-341 (p. 398).

Elsewhere, Woolf presents hunger as humiliating and reductive, even dehumanizing. Woolf's most powerful piece on hunger as opposed to food is a short, unpublished sketch titled *Waiting for déjeuner*. In the sketch, animal imagery, disgust and ostensibly civilized eating practice coexist disjointedly, without any logical narrative connection. A French couple is about to have lunch served to them at a restaurant. They are served tripe, a dish made out of the stomach of a cow, itself an image of food that has already been eaten: the stomach of a masticating, Fletcherizing animal. Motionless, the couple appears to be doing little: 'Monsieur and Madame Louvois stared at the mustard pot and the cruet; at the yellow crack on the marble topped table' (CSF 236).

This information about the lunchers, however, comes only later. The sophisticated, fine-dining Francophile title, *Waiting for déjeuner*, is followed by a mounting description of a dizzying array of extraordinarily sonic wildlife, where birds of prey, humming birds, elephants, but also people made animal are eating and hunting. This material is not prefaced. Grouped under the same category as animals are a 'Persian woman' and a child, and an 'animal-eyed savage' off to hunt in a canoe (CSF 236). This text combines the child-like physical excitement familiar from Kafka's sketch on Native Americans in 'Wunsch, Indianer zu werden' with images of poor bodily hygiene, as a 'woman picked a louse from the hair of the child' (CSF 236), where the body is parasitically consumed by another species.³³⁵

³³⁵ Franz Kafka, 'Wunsch, Indianer zu werden', in *Drucke zu Lebzeiten*, ed. by Hans-Gerd Koch, Wolf Kittler and Gerhard Neumann, in *Schriften, Tagebücher, Briefe: Kritische Ausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1994), pp. 32-33.

Are these images of uncontrollable wilderness, hunt, aggression, poor hygiene in head lice, and inedible meat in the form of a carcass, not out of place in a story about a French couple having lunch in Paris? What does this wild physicality of the hunt and unclean bodies have to do with the setting? Would Woolf not achieve the same effect of puncturing the meal with an aversion to food with the figure of the waiter alone, repulsive with 'his creased shirt, shiny coat, apron tied in the middle and sleeked back hair spat on his hands then wiped the plate to save the trouble of rinsing it' (CSF 236)?

Waiting for déjeuner presents hunger as monstrous and dehumanizing. The wildlife momentum builds up to a moment when 'the eyes on Monsieur and Madame Louvois lit with lustre; for down on the marble topped table in front of them the sleek haired waiter slapped a plate of tripe' (CSF 236). We see not the eyes of the couple but the eyes on them; their desire for food has transformed the couple into pure bodies of hunger. The rumbling urge of hunger, barely controlled by the civilized setting of the scene, is viewed through a lens of fear and disgust. Woolf may seem very much unlike Kafka in terms of narrative style, but at such moments which blend disgust and desire in a psychological reading of hunger, the two are not far removed from each other.

4.4. The Suffering Body

In this section I will move on to look at ways in which the male body and its image are used to express anxious emotion and psychological suffering through the character of Septimus. To an extent that would be comical if it were not for a post-war

context where bodies were mutilated by war, the healthy bodies of young men are a currency in Clarissa's world.³³⁶ Peter Walsh is admired for having maintained his figure, Hugh Whitbread is introduced through his 'very well-covered, manly, extremely handsome, perfectly upholstered body' (MD 5) and Sally Seton's self-evaluation can be quantified in the number of sons she has. Her first line of direct speech at the party, "'I have five enormous boys'" (MD 145) – boys lined up like in the wrapping of a popular chocolate at the time³³⁷ – underlines that although some characters have lost sons in the war (MD 4), the surviving are robust. Observing boys who have laid a wreath on the Cenotaph, that bodiless 'empty tomb', Peter Walsh comments on their weak physique and compares it to his own (MD 43-4).

Clarissa suffered no personal loss in the war. This is a curious choice for a novel about trauma and family psychology in post-war society. It is an antidote to the direct, exclusively personal empathy of thinking of lives lost in war in terms of sons, husbands, brothers, or fathers. Instead, Clarissa relates to Septimus through psychological family resemblance.

The famous mirroring of these two characters is developed in *The Hours*. The final line of the novel, where Clarissa returns to the party, refers here to Septimus by the window: 'There he was' (H 317). Just as Clarissa faces an old woman as she looks out the window in the final novel, 'There was a man in the house opposite staring with his

³³⁶ For a recent account of this post-war context to *Mrs Dalloway*, see Paul Saint-Amour's discussion of 'false alarms' and other echoes of war in the novel. In Saint-Amour (2015), pp. 110-120.

³³⁷ Five boys, like in the wrapping of a popular chocolate, scarce during the war: 'From 1902 to 1976, Fry's sold a popular milk chocolate bar called "Five Boys"'. Fernald (2014), p. 301.

an expression of horror, of terror, at him, Septimus' (H 316-7). The suicide of Septimus is coloured by Clarissa's meditation on how it could have been her own.

Karen DeMeester's insightful reading of *Mrs Dalloway* and trauma, where she suggested that Septimus' pain stems 'not from a psychological pathology but from psychological injury', overlooked the psychological similarities of Clarissa and Septimus.³³⁸ Emma Sutton has read the connection between the two characters in terms of a fugue, fugue being the musical structure associated with Bach made up of 'two distinct units of musical material that remain separate but which are increasingly interwoven and elaborated as the work unfolds.'³³⁹ Whether the character relationships are intentionally constructed as a fugue in the novel or not, Sutton's reading productively explores the connection between Clarissa and Septimus in terms of its infrastructure, a 'gradual recognition of "the bonds" between apparently unrelated components, the thematic and structural tightness of the text',³⁴⁰ not through a feeling of empathy between two characters who never meet, as is popular in current scholarship.³⁴¹ Be their likeness interpreted as psychological or merely structural, it takes a directly physiological form in the novel: Septimus is 'beak-nosed' and 'pale-faced' (MD 12), and Clarissa is fair with a 'little face, beaked like a bird's' (MD 9).

As Clarissa chooses life, it is left to Septimus, her metaphysical twin, who shares initials with her love interest Sally Seton, to be the body that the war kills off. Rezia

³³⁸ Karen DeMeester, 'Trauma and Recovery in Virginia Woolf's "Mrs. Dalloway"', *Modern Fiction Studies* 44.3 (1998), pp. 649-73 (p. 653).

³³⁹ Emma Sutton, 'Shell Shock and Hysterical Fugue, or Why Mrs Dalloway Likes Bach', *First World War Studies* 2.1 (2011), pp. 17-26 (p. 20).

³⁴⁰ Sutton (2011), p. 20.

³⁴¹ For example, Richard Rankin Russell, 'Radical Empathy in Virginia Woolf's "Mrs. Dalloway"', *Genre* 48.3 (2015), pp. 341-381.

directly attributes his death to the war, and gives Septimus the burial of a fallen war hero, if only in her thoughts. Thinking of flags flying at half mast, to how ‘men killed in battle were thus saluted, and Septimus had been through the War’ (MD 127), she equates him to those fallen in battle.³⁴²

Although cruelly belittled by many characters, Septimus’s illness, which now reads as post-traumatic stress disorder with its vivid flashbacks of battlefield horrors, the feelings of numbness, and the tendency to self-harm, is generally accepted by characters in the novel as being psychologically caused, a fact often lost on readers. Instead of having ‘developed manliness’ (MD 73) on the battlefield, the war has ruined and emasculated him. Septimus notes with painful irony that the ‘last shells missed him’ (MD 73), leaving him with shell shock. He was left physically unscathed by the war, and is therefore uninjured in bodily terms. In other words, now that the war is over, there should be nothing wrong with him, certainly not with his body.

Yet it is precisely the unscathed body of Septimus that becomes the locus of mental suffering. Unlike Clarissa whom we meet casually, amid her party chores, Septimus is formally introduced as ‘Septimus Warren Smith, who found himself unable to pass’ (MD 12), as a man unfit for London’s traffic of bodies. When distressed, he imagines his body as blocking the way of others and obstructing it:

³⁴² For a novel about the First World War, where the protagonist has not lost a family member, the choice of the Italian front as the flashback battlefield is also unconventional. Bradshaw emphasizes Woolf’s choice of Italy and the battle of Vittorio Veneto not only ‘to further amplify the Virgilian/Dantean ring of the novel’ but for choosing a front of ‘comparative obscurity’. The hilly landscape is not one immediately associated with the war, particularly not with trench warfare. In Bradshaw, ““Vanished, Like Leaves”: The Military, Elegy and Italy in “Mrs Dalloway””, *Woolf Studies Annual* 8 (2002), pp. 106-25 (p. 119).

It is I who am blocking the way, he thought. Was he not being here looked at and pointed at; was he not weighted there, rooted to the pavement, for a purpose? (MD 13)

In Septimus's view his body has caused everything to grind to a halt; he is the one obstructing traffic. Yet we know from descriptions by other characters that it is the elusive car that has attracted the attention of the crowd. Clarissa merely notes that 'the street was blocked' (MD 14) in the passive – but Septimus feels both that he is blocking the way, and that he is 'weighted' and 'rooted', unable to move from being the centre of the attention. All eyes are on his body.

Although Septimus is introduced in the novel with a physical appearance 'both distressed and distressing – "with hazel eyes which had that look of apprehension in them which make complete strangers apprehensive too"'³⁴³ (MD 12) as Ferrer has noted – this immobilizing, agoraphobic experience of the body as obstructive was not always there. In contrast, there are memories of Septimus and Rezia partaking in the Milanese *passeggiata*, an evening stroll but also a kind of social fashion show, and of the two visiting tea-shops in Italy. Unlike the permanently tainted bodies of Miss Kilman and Mabel of *The New Dress*, Septimus was still physically performing as normal in Italy right after the war. Only his feelings of numbness and his apocalyptic choice of reading – Dante's *Inferno* – reveal the state of his mind.

In the present day, however, his sense of imminent threat is one of impending corporal punishment: 'The world has raised its whip; where will it descend?' (MD 12). Even when his thoughts have little connection to objective reality, Septimus's own analysis of what is happening is presented in terms of bodily decay.

³⁴³ Ferrer (1990), p. 22.

‘Scientifically speaking, the flesh was melted off the world. His body was macerated until only the nerve fibres were left. It was spread like a veil upon a rock’ (MD 58). Here, Septimus’ role as the mediator of humanity, part of his psychotic delirium where he thinks of himself as the Lamb of God, takes the form of bodily suffering. Maceration, softening by soaking in liquid, makes one think of both fasting and food, here also of the changing composition or broken-down texture of the body.³⁴⁴ Elizabeth Outka has interpreted this scene as a direct reference to the war, not ‘reflecting his horrific war experience but as the experience itself’:³⁴⁵

Yet as the metaphor becomes more concrete for Septimus, it also grows more horrifying, making his experience feel not like an emotional maceration – which indeed is what it is – but an actual, physical melting of flesh. [...] As burn victims from the war visually recorded, the war had in fact melted the flesh off many soldiers. Woolf’s description of actualized metaphor captures here how the war could destabilize experience and imagination; what was real (in the war) produces delusion (for Septimus) that in turn seems real (to Septimus).³⁴⁶

Septimus has general difficulty differentiating between bodily response and external reality. The ‘rising and falling, rising and falling’ (MD 19) of the elm trees appears to describe his distressed breathing as much as what he observes, which he at first fails to recognize. When the connection is made, it again reads as psychotic, of ‘the leaves being connected by millions of fibres with his own body’ (MD 19).

The novel offers a clear contrast to Septimus’ bodily experience in the aeroplane scene, which shows multiple characters following and echoing the movements of the

³⁴⁴ Fernald has discussed the intertext to this image, Book V of *The Odyssey*, where Ino gives Odysseus a protective veil. With maceration, Septimus adds an image of food to the scene. Fernald (2014), p. 251.

³⁴⁵ Elizabeth Outka, ‘Dead Men, Walking: Actors, Networks, and Actualized Metaphors in “Mrs. Dalloway” and “Raymond”’, *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 46.2 (2013), pp. 253-74 (p. 261).

³⁴⁶ Outka (2013), p. 260.

plane in their minds. Septimus's heightened anxiety and his physical experience of the aeroplane are accompanied by the narrowing of perception that characterizes the start of a panic attack: 'the gradual drawing together of everything to one centre before his eyes' (MD 13), which then builds into a suspended expressionist painting of a metropolitan scene. Septimus's experience of reality, where 'the world wavered and quivered and threatened to burst into flames' (MD 13) is also his description of how he experiences his body at this moment: short of breath, overheated, and trembling, Septimus follows his body with his emotions. Mrs Dempster's reaction to the aeroplane is bodily but calm, even dull, a case of physical vertigo or motion sickness, to which no emotional response is attached: 'It swept and fell. Her stomach was in her mouth' (MD 24). Mr Bentley also thinks of flying in terms of the body, but as an escape from it through scientific progress, of getting 'outside his body, beyond his house' by means of 'Einstein, speculation, mathematics' (MD 24). Much like Miss Kilman and Mabel, Septimus is locked in the body by contrast.

This scene has been interpreted as socially unifying. Woolf's 1922 plan for the novel, which focuses on Septimus and Clarissa, claims as much: 'They are linked together by the aeroplane' (H 414). For Kirsty Martin the aeroplane 'is not just an *image* of people's shared participation in 1920s London, but instead physically affects people, binding people together by the generation and shaping of a type of energy'.³⁴⁷ Yet its creation of bodily hierarchy does exactly the opposite. The aeroplane is unifying only in narrative terms, which other critics have highlighted. Jane Goldman has emphasized how the aeroplane focalizes the same senses of sound and vision in multiple characters on a single object, which Laura Marcus has identified as a

³⁴⁷ Martin (2013), p. 102.

cinematic technique, 'a montage sequence, from the viewpoints of a cross-section of individuals'.³⁴⁸ The effect does not unify but differentiates the bodily responses in question.

Septimus' psychological descent is most clearly described through Rezia's perspective, where it takes a bodily form. Aside from Clarissa's metaphysical knowledge, which really has no power to help Septimus, Rezia is the only character who develops an understanding of Septimus's condition during the novel. She is given one of the markers of a sensitive soul, a love of flowers, which she shares with Clarissa, but initially her focus is on how to present Septimus's illness to the outside world, translating it euphemistically as a result of "working too hard" (MD 20) to her family in Italy. Rezia first physically holds Septimus in place so as not to attract attention in the park, but by the final scene, she is physically protecting her husband from the doctor by blocking the doctor's way.

Seen through Rezia's lens, the descent of Septimus renders his body foreign to her. Rezia recalls a romantic memory of sharing an overcoat, an affectionate image of two bodies clothed in one: 'Only last autumn she & Septimus had stood on the embankment wrapped in the same cloak' (MD 13). Now, she is an outsider looking at his body: 'she saw him sitting in his shabby overcoat alone, on the seat, hunched up' (MD 20). With an arm that is only 'a piece of bone' (MD 14), Septimus is not only thin, but barely hanging on to the land of the living.

³⁴⁸ Jane Goldman, 'From "Mrs Dalloway" to "The Waves": New Elegy and Lyric Experimentalism', in *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Susan Sellers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 49-69 (p. 58). Laura Marcus, *The Tenth Muse: Writing about Cinema in the Modernist Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 120.

Mental illness is not something that only afflicts Septimus in the novel. There is a broader, equalizing epidemic of a kind: ‘even the Royal Family has summoned the assistance of the distinguished nerve specialist’.³⁴⁹ When a child runs to her in the park, Rezia thinks: “‘Everyone is afraid’” (H 41). Many characters feel that they know what Septimus is going through, and consider his illness a matter of choice. At one point, even Rezia’s understanding of Septimus’s illness was just that: ‘Septimus let himself think about horrible things, as she could too, if she tried. [...] Yet he could be happy when he chose’ (MD 56). To an extent, the novel retains this unsympathetic suggestion of mental health as a choice, where Septimus has allowed himself to go under, echoing Miss Kilman’s unkind portrayal. Even the final novel implies that this could have been Clarissa’s suicide, ‘once she had walked on the terrace at Bourton’ (MD 157), which she chose against.

It is tempting to read Septimus as an effeminate, psychologically fragile character who has always been that way, but in *The Hours*, a more complicated psychological portrait of a decorated soldier emerges. Prior to the war, Septimus was ‘vain, callous, aspiring’ (H 105), a man lined up for a career ascent and high office – ‘in ten or fifteen years’ (H 108) as Woolf wrote in the margin, if all goes as planned.

4.5. Treatment as Mistreatment

As with Hamsun’s narrator and Kafka’s traumatized Karl, Septimus’s mind is preoccupied with anything but food during meals. First referred to in *The Hours* as a character looking at the table cloth, Septimus can only think of the death of Evans

³⁴⁹ Bradshaw (2000), p. 23.

when the food is brought in. He ‘could not taste, could not feel’ (MD 75), much like his co-suffering wife Rezia who ‘had grown so thin’ (MD 20) despite liking ‘ices, chocolates, sweet things’ (MD 74).³⁵⁰ Although Septimus ‘was always thin’ (MD 124), he is now ‘fasting one day, drinking another’ (MD 72).

In Woolf’s damning portrayal of the medical profession, the emotional and psychological illiteracy of doctors takes the form of a brutish and mechanical relationship to body size. ‘If Dr. Holmes found himself even half a pound below eleven stone six, he asked his wife for another plate of porridge at breakfast. (Rezia would learn to cook porridge)’ (MD 77-8). A standard to which others must adapt, Septimus himself has learned to associate psychological resilience with a higher body weight.

This comparison between types of male bodies is carried to the tragic end. With what was earlier described by Septimus as her ‘little black body’ (MD 120), Rezia tries to block Dr Holmes from entering the room. Holmes, ‘a powerfully built man’ (MD 126) forces his way through nevertheless. The final image of the suicide scene is that of Rezia seeing Dr Holmes’s body, making note of its size: ‘She saw the large outline of his body dark against the window. So that was Dr. Holmes’ (MD 128).

Although the doctors attribute the illness to Septimus’s mind, their treatment – what today reads as supervision and attempts to reform his mind in the *Surveiller et punir*

³⁵⁰ In ‘Portrait 6’ of *Portraits*, however, Woolf associates Italians eating ices with poverty and poor hygiene, ‘like one of those ices wrapped in frilled paper – it’s true they said the Italians kept them under their beds in Bethnal Green’ (CSF 239).

tradition – in fact take the form of bodily control: Foucault’s argument exactly.³⁵¹ Septimus’s weight is seen as inadequate, and the goal of Bradshaw’s treatment is a modification of the body ‘until a man who went in weighing seven stone six comes out weighing twelve’ (MD 84). Similarly, Rezia’s much more sympathetic means of helping Septimus also read as bodily control. Rezia holds Septimus physically in place, ‘Happily Rezia put her hand with a tremendous weight on his knee so that he was weighted down’ (MD 19) – there is obviously nothing happy about what Rezia is doing – and manages his body so as not to attract attention, ‘trying to make him sit down’ (MD 60).

Septimus’s body is feminized and infantilized as its management is outsourced to his wife and his doctors, a likely echo of Woolf’s own family monitoring her body, and a case famously put forward by Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *The Yellow Wall-Paper* where the narrator’s husband, who doubles as her doctor, subjects her to the rest cure.³⁵² Yet the blame for his weakness is placed entirely on Septimus himself, a painful application of discourses that saw health as a question of individual choice.

The rest cure offered by the specialist involves a rebirth of a kind. It is a back to infancy cure, where Septimus is to ‘drink milk in bed’ (MD 85) and rest. In *The Hours* the milk still has raw eggs beaten into it (H 99), but in the final novel Septimus is to be fed like an infant – earlier in *The Hours* Rezia ‘fed him like a child’ (H 57)

³⁵¹ Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir: naissance de la prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975).

³⁵² Charlotte Perkins Gilman, ‘The Yellow Wall-Paper’, in Gilman, *The Yellow Wall-Paper and Other Stories*, ed. by Robert Shulman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 3-19.

following a breakdown. This reversal, where a grown man is subjected to such a treatment, emphasizes the embarrassing puniness of his current bodily state.

The evident connection of this portrayal to Woolf's own illness and her being subjected to the counterproductive Weir Mitchell Cure, which encouraged inactivity, social exclusion and overfeeding, has attracted much critical attention. Hermione Lee has shown that whilst the war and cases of shell shock brought forward a more sympathetic and Freudian psychiatric modernism to Britain, a watershed moment for the treatment of mental illness, in practice the 'conservative and authoritarian' treatment offered for mental illness continued to the 1930s.³⁵³ As Fernald summarizes: 'VW's depiction of Sir William Bradshaw draws heavily on her own consultations with Sir George Henry Savage. [...] His treatment for mental illness – over-feeding, isolation from the city and social life, rest and prohibitions on reading and writing – was typical at the time although much hated by VW when she was in his care'.³⁵⁴

At the same time, the nerve specialist's attitudes seem also a characteristic of his social position, not products of his profession alone. The very same 'value of moderation' (MD 149) matters a great deal to Professor Brierly, the off-putting Milton scholar, a guest at Clarissa's party. Soon he is retitled 'the Professor on Milton; the Professor on moderation' (MD 150), highlighting how widespread the attitudes that Bradshaw displays were. Fernald notes that Savage was a family friend,³⁵⁵ not only adding a particularly problematic complication to the patient-doctor

³⁵³ Lee (1996), pp. 182-3.

³⁵⁴ Fernald (2014), p. 248.

³⁵⁵ Fernald (2014), p. 248.

relationship, but also strengthening the impression of such views as characteristic of the professions and the society at large. In this conflation of the personal and the professional, Woolf's portrayal of the medical profession differs from that of Proust, whose presentation of illness she described in admiring terms in *On Being Ill*. The narrator of *La Recherche* and his family accept that in spite of his failings as a person, the family physician, Cottard, is a capable doctor: 'Et nous comprîmes que cet imbécile était un grand clinicien.'³⁵⁶

Daniel Ferrer argues that the scenes with the doctors involve an abuse of narratorial power, with 'a very obvious authorial intrusion, openly taking the part of Septimus against his adversary, the madman against the psychiatrist'.³⁵⁷ 'Septimus takes up in condensed form [...] the content (and tone) of the long diatribe of the narrator against Sir William Bradshaw, thus inverting the relation of inclusion according to which the *narrator* can take up and comment on the words of the characters, but not vice versa.'³⁵⁸ Commenting on *The Hours*, Helen Wussow has highlighted how the 'tension in Woolf's hand and compositional style noticeably increases during the exchange between Septimus and his doctor. Marginal insertions abound, as do lengthy deletions, indications of Woolf's misgivings over the dialogue'.³⁵⁹ Evelyn Chan has found that 'the balance which the stream-of-consciousness technique strikes between

³⁵⁶ Proust (1987), p. 490. The opposite view has been taken by Emily Dalgarno, who reads Proust and Woolf as near-identical in their depiction of the medical profession and illness at large. In Emily Dalgarno, *Virginia Woolf and the Migrations of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 101.

³⁵⁷ Ferrer (1990), p. 28.

³⁵⁸ Ferrer (1990), p. 30.

³⁵⁹ Helen M. Wussow, 'Introduction', in Virginia Woolf, *The Hours. The British Library Manuscript of 'Mrs. Dalloway'*, transcr. and ed. by Wussow (New York: Pace University Press, 1996), pp. 9-27 (p. 20).

characters as individuals and as interconnected, both with each other and with the narrator, breaks down once Woolf describes the two doctors.’³⁶⁰

It is of course true that Holmes fails to diagnose the condition and dismisses it dangerously, and that the two doctors give contradictory orders: activity and rest. Yet Bradshaw, a Harley Street nerve specialist, makes an accurate diagnosis immediately, an understanding of the severity of Septimus’ condition (MD 81). He correctly suspects that Septimus is suicidal and thinks Septimus needs in-patient care (MD 82). Dr Holmes diagnoses the illness as mental, too, but problematically qualifies this with a reductive statement of ‘nerve symptoms and nothing more’ (MD 77) – an idea of mental illness that persists to this day, as in Hilary Mantel’s strange reading of Woolf the author being less ill because her illness was not bodily, which Stella Bolaki has rightly criticized.³⁶¹

The problem is not, therefore, that anyone thinks Septimus’s state is caused by overwork, the life of ‘work; work, work!’ (MD 37) that Peter Walsh has experienced, an acceptable excuse for male exhaustion, but that psychological illness and trauma are not taken seriously enough, or read as legitimate. In a novel where exact timelines are hard to pin down, the development of Septimus’s illness is presented in strikingly

³⁶⁰ Evelyn T. Chan, ‘The Ethics and Aesthetics of Healing: Woolf, Medicine, and Professionalization’, *Women’s Studies* 43.1 (2014), pp. 25-51. Chan goes on to argue that the ‘narrative break is then the aesthetic equivalent of the rift they will need to bridge to negotiate a mutually beneficial balance between professionalism and intimacy’, and confusingly argues that not being close to a doctor is the key failure in Septimus’ treatment. Chan (2014), p. 39.

³⁶¹ Hilary Mantel, ‘Diary’, *London Review of Books* 32.21 (2010), pp. 41-42. Stella Bolaki, “‘When the Lights of Health Go Down’: Virginia Woolf’s Aesthetics and Contradictory Illness Narratives”, in *Contradictory Woolf: Selected Papers from the Twenty-First Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Bolaki and Derek Ryan (Clemson: Clemson University Digital Press, 2012), pp. 115-21 (p. 118).

clear terms by those around him. Bradshaw knows enough of ‘the deferred effects of shell shock’ to push for new legislation (MD 155). Even if he felt numb in Italy, Rezia’s recollection of Septimus from the time they met is positive: ‘Nobody ever made her laugh as Septimus did’ (MD 121), ‘how good, how brilliant, how charming, how cheerful, Septimus used to be’ (H 31).

The treatment options, which seem contradictory – encouragement of activity and eventual rest cure – mirror how the treatment of ‘nervous illness’ was polarized by gender. Where Weir Mitchell recommended the rest cure to his female patients in the United States,

Less well known is Mitchell’s method of treating nervous men. While Mitchell put worried women to bed, he sent anxious men out West to engage in prolonged periods of cattle roping, hunting, roughriding and male bonding.³⁶²

Unsurprisingly, this cowboy lifestyle of a ‘West Cure’ produced better treatment outcomes than isolation and inactivity, or at the very least caused less harm.³⁶³ The treatment suggestions offered first by Holmes, such as physical activity and a good diet – which Woolf surely meant as inadequate, but also ill-advised and even brutish – are of course wholly insufficient for Septimus, but not as directly detrimental or unsupported by those who know Septimus best. Rezia is trying to make Septimus engage with the outside world and pay attention to his surroundings, for ‘Dr. Holmes had told her to make him notice real things, go to a music hall, play cricket’ (27). This is the kind of advice Woolf gave also to her circle of friends, here to Violet Dickinson: ‘O melancholy creature why do you see specialists? I wish to god you

³⁶² Anne Stiles, ‘Go Rest, Young Man’, *APA Monitor on Psychology* 43.1 (2012), pp. 32-33 (p. 32).

³⁶³ Stiles (2012), p. 32.

wouldn't. What you want, probably, is air and food and good society' (L1 306).³⁶⁴

That Septimus eventually graduates to the rest cure further highlights his feminization.

Treatment was not begun against Septimus's will, as he reluctantly accepts that 'now other people must help him. People must be sent for' (MD 77). The doctors are generally read as nothing short of murderers in the suicide scene, to which I will now turn.

4.6. Killing the Body

The Hours makes it clear that Septimus's suicidal ideation is not new. As his treatment nears, he recalls 'Mrs Filmers nice clean bread knife' (H 316). The final novel further emphasizes that Septimus has studied the knife in the past and can remember it with precision, here thinking of 'Mrs Filmer's nice clean bread-knife with "Bread" carved on the handle' (MD 126). Rezia is aware of these thoughts as the doctor's arrival nears – 'Rezia had probably packed his razors' (H 316). The constant references to plunging of the final novel are less anaesthetized and romantic in *The Hours*, and are instead explicitly ones of 'death as a plunge into a pond' (H 198).

Unusually for someone about to commit suicide, Septimus 'did not want to die' (MD 127), and the suicide scene reads as Dr Holmes making the invasion that kills Septimus, with the doctor as an angel of death. Woolf omits the direct medical order to jump from the final novel, which Septimus visualizes as physical stage direction in

³⁶⁴ As quoted by Chan in her discussion of Woolf's distrust of the medical profession. Chan (2014), p. 33.

The Hours, ‘It was to the window that the joint hands of Holmes & Bradshaw pointed’ (H 317), but its psychological effect is retained.

The doctors do not proceed unaided; to a striking extent, the suicide involves the neighbour Mrs Filmer, a character so marginal she generally disappears into the sea of faces of the novel. Dr Holmes is not just any doctor, but her doctor (MD 77). Septimus does not jump out of the window into emptiness, but ‘violently down on to Mrs. Filmer’s area railings’ (MD 127); her railings are the object which finally mutilates the body, the suicide weapon of choice. When Septimus contemplates methods for taking his own life, her kitchen knife comes to him first before thoughts of gas and razors (MD 126). Immediately after the suicide, the doctor and Mrs Filmer physically collide, and it is to Mrs Filmer that Dr Holmes asserts that no one is to blame for what has happened (MD 127).

Prior to the suicide Mrs Filmer has been mostly associated with the kitchen: she brings grapes to Rezia and Septimus, and whilst she is in the kitchen Agnes, the kitchen maid, updates her on the ailing Septimus’ condition. In the suicide scene, otherwise so economical, Mrs Filmer’s apron is referred to twice, even as a morbid fan to disperse what we presume is either the horror of the event or its smell. Like Johanna Brummer in *Der Verschollene*, the kitchen maid turned rapist, Mrs Filmer is not only connected to, but in fact by proxy committing the greatest act of violence and mistreatment in the novel.

Mrs Filmer’s emotional cruelty is even greater than that of the doctors. In *The Hours*, Dr Holmes may be hapless in his ignorance, and painfully condescending towards the

‘poor chap’ (H 323), but still has a strong emotional reaction to the suicide, ‘had never been so upset in his life’ (H 322), and there is even a deleted ‘sob’ (H 324). In *Mrs Dalloway* proper, he is ‘white as a sheet, shaking all over’ (MD 127). By contrast, Mrs Filmer’s pooh-poohing and apron-flinging, behaviour out of a comedy of manners, is here wholly out of place and genre; coupled with her ideas of how Rezia should take a good look at the body, described as ‘horribly mangled’ (MD 127), her cruelty is unparalleled.

There are, then, more actors involved than just Septimus, or the doctor as a would-be murderer. If not collectively caused, the suicide is not limited to the actions of Septimus. The kinship between Clarissa and Septimus is made explicit when she hears of his death, presented in terms of a shared bodily experience.

Clarissa is hardly known for sympathy for victims of violence or others in general, even if her general emotional sensitivity has been confused with empathy by critics.³⁶⁵ Informed of the Armenian genocide by her husband, she ‘cared so much more for her roses than for the Armenians. Hunted out of existence, maimed, frozen in their mountains, the victims of unjust laws; no, she could feel nothing for the Armenians’ (H 477). The multiple images of suffering contrast starkly with Clarissa’s lack of response and evident annoyance at her husband’s interest in the issue (MD 102). *The Hours* has Clarissa even consider her horticultural focus as a form of aid (H 477). The emotional basis on which Clarissa assesses the suffering of Armenians is further stressed in the final novel, as her mention of the legal situation is omitted (MD 102), but the vivid images of suffering are retained.

³⁶⁵ Russell interprets Clarissa as a ‘habitual empathizer’. Russell (2015), pp. 341-381.

By contrast, the suicide scene as felt by Clarissa is the closest we come to the victim's own account. Clarissa forms a mental montage of the mutilation of the body, which borders on the cinematic:

He had killed himself – but how? Always her body went through it first, when she was told, suddenly, of an accident; her dress flamed, her body burnt. He had thrown himself from a window. Up had flashed the ground; through him, blundering, bruising, went the rusty spikes. There he lay with a thud, thud, thud in his brain, and then a suffocation of blackness. So she saw it. (MD 156)

Only halfway through this description does the personal pronoun switch from the feminine to the masculine; first we get Clarissa's own body burning, then a graphic visual that must have met the falling Septimus, 'up had flashed the ground', then a note on the texture of the spikes, here like bayonets used in war, something Clarissa must have observed earlier herself. We then enter the body of Septimus to experience his heartbeat, the 'thud, thud, thud' of the brain. Fully in Septimus now, the blackout as he loses consciousness ends the sentence, with Clarissa metamorphosed into Septimus's body.

This transformation is often read as exemplary of Clarissa's sensitivity to the pain of others. Kirsty Martin has discussed the relationship between sympathy and the body in Woolf extensively, the 'complex descriptions of feeling, which are both based in the body and suggest something that extends beyond the body, which track emotion as a type of force which proceeds through the body, and which record sensation in terms of rhythm', which Martin associates with vitalism.³⁶⁶ For Martin, this scene shows Clarissa sympathizing with Septimus; but sympathy may be the wrong word. Clarissa is not feeling 'for' Septimus. The experience 'went through her dress' –

³⁶⁶ Martin (2013), p. 98.

Septimus was not in a dress. Clarissa does not just feel sympathy, a proxy emotion, for Septimus, or have bodily sensations like him: the two look alike, suggesting a connection Saint-Amour has called ‘affiliative politics’ between the two.³⁶⁷ Martin’s reading overlooks that Clarissa’s sympathies are limited to those who physically resemble her, and is also excessively charitable to the body in the novel, often used to problematic and reductive ends. Septimus’ agoraphobia renders his body foreign to him, Miss Kilman’s life is negatively dictated by her body, and the body and its decay are also a source of distress for Clarissa.

In a climax that levels the mind’s suffering with that of the body, Septimus’s body is now as ‘horribly mangled’ (MD 127) as his mind, creating a final, horrific alignment of the two. Tragically, it is only the suffering of the body, or a brutalized body image made literal, that truly shocks those present. As a result, a great deal of time in both the final novel, and *The Hours* in particular, is dedicated to who sees the body, should see it, or will not see it. Ironically enough, in death Dr Holmes at last makes a correct decision by preventing Rezia from seeing the body. Mrs Filmer has the role of the sadist, thinking that Rezia really should see her husband’s body: ‘Married people ought to be together’ (MD 128). In *The Hours*, the medicated Rezia is either losing consciousness or trying not to look – she sees Dr Holmes ‘passing through her eyelashes’ (H 324): ‘If the man <husband> should ask for her, she could come’, and perhaps an ‘~~English~~ woman would’ (H 324).

In Woolf’s sketches for this scene in *The Hours*, her notes read like stage directions, taking into account who is in the line of vision of the audience: ‘But we haven’t seen

³⁶⁷ Saint-Amour (2016), p. 90.

Clarissa' (H 368). In the margins, Woolf adds that 'the ambulance was coming – wd. not allow them to bring in a bloody body' (H 321), the only reference to blood, omitted from the final novel. When Peter Walsh sees the ambulance go past and his thoughts are intermingled with those of the public, Woolf makes a note in the margin of 'a sort of lust too ~~over~~ the visual corpse' (H 325). Now referred to as a corpse and a body no longer, when the suffering has mangled Septimus' body and not only his mind, the public would in fact like to see it.

Later in the novel, the overvaluation of physical violence is addressed by Peter Walsh. Following a description of Hugh Whitbread attending a tea party, a comical, flippant passage, Whitbread is suddenly made worse than the perpetrators of brutal violence, in a striking comparison: 'God knows, the rascals who get hanged for battering the brains of a girl out in a train do less harm on the whole than Hugh Whitbread and his kindness!' (MD 147). The entry in *The Hours* is even more revealing, where such violence is connected to the behaviour of privately educated people at large, not only to Hugh Whitbread: "'The ~~horr~~ rascals who get hanged for battering the brains of a girl out in the train, ~~are often superior, & do <have done> less harm on the whole than <the> Hugh Whitbreads who have been to Eton & Balliol & who are & his kindness~~' (H 365).

In the final version of the novel, Woolf eliminated the rust from the spikes and spared the reader from seeing the body. The body is purged from the pages very suddenly. The result approaches the famously sudden death of Mrs Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse*, where no body is seen. Once the body is in the ambulance, the narrative moves through Rezia's free indirect discourse to Peter Walsh's thoughts, and the body

is swept up by the traffic of the city. It is here that the novel's treatment of the suffering body most starkly contrasts with its otherwise sensitive portrayal of Septimus' pain. Peter Walsh's thoughts purge the text of the suicide, diluting and even aestheticizing it, turning the life of Septimus into a mere passing second: 'How did it go? ~~That life~~' (H 327). Great crises, even suicides, do not interrupt the mystical, samsara-like flow of the city, which one death cannot halt, 'some deep silent process, to interrupt which would have been impious' (H 346), more explicitly referencing religion in *Mrs Dalloway*, 'some sacred ceremony to interrupt which would have been impious' (MD 139). Septimus' passing is one death amongst many; aesthetics anaesthetize pain.

The violent death, a corpse on the pavement, never obstructs the timely continuity of life in the city. Peter Walsh gets ready for dinner. Disrespectfully, the margin reads: 'That the crises are never real' (H 336). Septimus's death is further diluted by a city where many are half-dead already: there are 'ladies; wrapped like mummies in shawls' (MD 139), not far removed from Eliot's half-dead City workers crossing London Bridge.³⁶⁸ The sequence concludes: 'One must press forward; one must go on' (H 349).

There is no capsizing hearse as in *Ulysses*, but the narrative and emotional dilution of the effect of Septimus's death, surrounded by the aestheticized city, as well as its structural failure to put an end to the novel, are striking given the sympathy his suffering has been awarded throughout. The novel and Clarissa go on to live, and it is to her character's relationship to ageing and bodily decay that I will now turn.

³⁶⁸ Eliot (1973), 62-3.

4.7. Surviving, Ageing, and Living On

Unlike Karl who can expect continued bodily abuse but is better psychologically equipped for the journey in *Der Verschollene*, and in contrast to Hamsun's narrator who chooses to eject himself from the city which taught him the language of bodily suffering, Septimus is given no tools nor an escape route other than that of the window. We must look for these in Clarissa, his metaphysical double. Clarissa's escapist fantasies of a different form of life are translated to fantasies of looking different, to having a larger, darker, stronger body – revealing a serious misreading of how forces independent of her appearance limit her:

Oh if she could have had her life over again! she thought, stepping on to the pavement, could have looked even differently!

She would have been, in the first place, dark like Lady Bexborough, with a skin of crumpled leather and beautiful eyes [...] slow and stately; rather large; interested in politics like a man; with a country house; very dignified, very sincere. Instead of which she had a narrow pea-stick figure; a ridiculous little face, beaked like a bird's. (MD 9)

Lady Bexborough's image is an obvious foil to that of Clarissa, but also one of power – in Clarissa's assessment, Lady Bexborough is in fact 'quite shabby' (MDBS 150), but she is an autonomous, fully sealed body, 'no one can pick a hole in her after all these years' (MDBS 150), a bodily sovereign, the polar opposite of which is Mabel of *The New Dress* feeling 'like a dressmaker's dummy standing there, for young people to stick pins into' (ND 165), or the horrific image of a body pierced by spikes.

Although Clarissa describes feeling 'like a nun who has left the world' (MD 25), images of youth – feeling 'a little skimpy [...] schoolgirlish' (D 5) or like a 'girl of

eighteen' (MD 5) are ones of humiliation in the novel. Mabel also feels 'like a schoolgirl' (ND 167), in her case both humiliated and powerless, much like Kafka's portrayal of childhood in the *Brief* and the diaries as a physical and psychological humiliation.

Many critics have conflated Clarissa's thoughts about ageing with an unthinking admiration of youth. Kathleen Williams Renk emphasizes Clarissa's attempt 'to come to terms with the declining health and social value that accompany aging'.³⁶⁹ She overlooks that the characters Clarissa most envies are not young women, as does Katherine Sedon in her article on ageing in *Mrs Dalloway*.³⁷⁰ The women who have most power and whom Clarissa looks up to, Lady Bexborough, Lady Bruton – by whom Clarissa is snubbed, but forced to express gratitude over at the party (MD 152), as well as Clarissa's memories of catching a glimpse of Queen Victoria as a child, are all older than her or of the same age. These figures resemble one another: Lady Bexborough, in the *Bond Street* short story, is 'like a Queen at a tournament, raised, regal', a simile that is twice repeated in the text (MDBS 150). Watching her, 'Clarissa would have given anything to be like that' (MDBS 150). Sedon argues that due to her age, 'Clarissa is no longer visible to others – and even, to an extent, to herself'³⁷¹ – this of Clarissa the society hostess whose party the prime minister attends, and whom old love interests visit. Clarissa has both an active social life and control over the

³⁶⁹ Kathleen Williams Renk, "'Blackberrying in the Sun'? Modernism and the Ageing Woman in Rhys's "Good Morning, Midnight", Woolf's "Mrs Dalloway" and Sackville-West's "All Passion Spent", *Women: A Cultural Review* 27.3 (2016), pp. 317-28 (p. 322).

³⁷⁰ Williams Renk (2016), p. 322.

³⁷¹ Katherine Sedon, 'Moments of Aging. Revising Mother Nature in Virginia Woolf's "Mrs. Dalloway"', in *Virginia Woolf and the Natural World*, ed. by Kristin Czarnecki and Carrie Rohma (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), pp. 163-168 (p. 166).

social lives of others. Ellie Henderson thinks of Clarissa ‘being so sought after’ (MD 143). Clarissa may no longer be of childbearing age and she may feel old, but she is at the height of her social and financial powers, especially in contrast to the young, to Elizabeth, barely a fully fledged character in the novel, or to figures such as the young shop-girl in the *Bond Street* short story.

The novel’s suggestion of the non-reproductive female body as obsolete – images of drought and nuns – reduces and abstracts the body to the level of a biological organism of reproduction. Nowell Marshall has argued that Clarissa ‘is unable to see herself as a woman’ and that her femininity is frail and under threat; but if anything is certain, it is that Clarissa is a woman, and she is treated as one and seen as one, an aspect to Clarissa’s portrayal Renée Dickinson has recently stressed.³⁷² Unlike the masculinity of Septimus which is presented as under threat, be it by illness, his intellectual interests, his aversion to sport revealed in *The Hours*, or by homoerotic desire, biological womanhood is hard to escape.

Nevertheless, the parallels made between human bodies and the natural world are not to other mammals, but to plants or the natural world at large. Drought and changing seasons end natural life cycles, suggesting a biological decay that does not differentiate between species. Ageing itself, a stronger theme in the *Bond Street* short story than it is in *Mrs Dalloway*, is compared to seasons. Childhood is rather conventionally associated with spring and summer, the ‘hour was fresh as if issued to children on a beach’, just as ‘June was fresh’ (MDBS 146). In contrast to ‘A happy

³⁷² Nowell Marshall, ‘Refusing Butler’s Binary: Bisexuality and Performative Melancholia in “Mrs. Dalloway”’, *Journal of Bisexuality* 9.3-4 (2009), pp. 317-341 (p. 328). Dickinson (2009), p. 27.

childhood', and whilst 'there is nothing to take the place of childhood', 'Middle age is the devil' (MDBS 148). Still, Clarissa is middle aged and the city has an intoxicating effect on her, as exhilarating to her as her memories of riding and dancing as a girl. Middle age is dangerous more for its proximity to death, the expiry of life, which the end to biological reproduction foreshadows. It also offers no protection from pain. Another of the 1925 short stories, *Together and Apart*, has a character think of the 'cool peace of middle life, with its automatic devices for shielding mind and body from bruises' (CSF 187), but this is not the case in *Mrs Dalloway*. Age offers no foolproof emotional protection for Miss Kilman or even Clarissa herself.

In her introduction to the U.S. edition to the novel, Woolf claimed that 'Mrs. Dalloway was originally to kill herself, or perhaps merely to die at the end of the party' (I 357).³⁷³ Woolf presents these options as similar, but they are in fact two radically different endings. 'Merely to die', together with the final image of the elderly woman at the opposing window, suggests a natural death through old age, of Clarissa living into and ultimately dying of old age, an expiry. By contrast, suicide is a premature, unnecessary death that requires a violent intervention with the body, here its piercing.

I have argued that both Hamsun and Kafka present a desire for the body to be sealed, protected against outside intervention. Peter Walsh imagines Clarissa as hermetically sealed, 'this coldness, this woodenness, something very profound in her, which he had felt again this morning talking to her; an impenetrability' (MD 52). As problematic as

³⁷³ Ferrer has questioned this claim and called it a 'retrospective invention', arguing that there was no thought of suicide in the Dalloway material before the character of Septimus appeared. Ferrer (1990), p. 9.

this description is with its accusation of frigidity, it shows Clarissa as having an ability not to react to her external environment, a psychological and emotional autonomy presented as bodily independence. Characters of strength in the novel, both male and female, have ‘robust’ physiques. Their bodies are resistant both to the external environment and to internal desires. For Septimus his ‘interpreting’ for mankind ‘with agony’ (MD 58) is one where ‘flowers grew through his flesh’ (MD 58). The world enters the body; his experience is one of a bodily invasion, which becomes horrific reality through the impact of Mrs Filmer’s railings.

4.8. Bodies in Traffic

In this final section to my discussion of *Mrs Dalloway*, I will turn to the physical performance of city life: to walking the streets of London as it relates to anxiety and the body. Since Rachel Bowlby’s readings of *Street Haunting* and *A Room of One’s Own* as flâneuse texts in 1991, critics have been applying the flâneur trope – Baudelaire as filtered and shaped by Benjamin – to *Mrs Dalloway*.³⁷⁴ Identifying Clarissa Dalloway as a woman ‘who likes to dally along the way’,³⁷⁵ Bowlby focused not on women who are visually consumed by the male flâneur but on the woman herself watching the city – ‘*the passante out of focus to make way for something like a feminine flânerie*’.³⁷⁶ More recently, Lauren Elkin has discussed the physical experience of flânerie and *Mrs Dalloway* in a work titled *Flâneuse*, where she conflates Clarissa’s flânerie with that of Woolf as familiar from the diaries:

³⁷⁴ Rachel Bowlby, ‘Walking, Women and Writing. Virginia Woolf as a Flâneuse’, *Tropismes* 5 (1991), pp. 207-232.

³⁷⁵ Bowlby (1991), p. 219.

³⁷⁶ Bowlby (1991), p. 219.

Woolf reminds us that there is something physically absorbing that keys us into the throb of the city, [...] flail your arms in a city, and you will come in contact with it, or, equally likely, with its inhabitants. We flail. We hit up against its limitations, against our own limitations. The city surrounds us and seeps in. Are we touching it or is it touching us?³⁷⁷

There is, of course, also a much more elementary way in which Clarissa and others engage physically with the city and its inhabitants when walking down and crossing the streets of London. Walking in a city forces one to coordinate bodily movement with this traffic. This choreography allows for the collective flow of movement which, as I argued earlier, Septimus feels he is blocking with his body.

Mrs Dalloway presents a less anxious relationship to movement of the modern city, its intense circulation of goods and people, than *Sult* or *Der Verschollene* do. Woolf's famous statement on *Mrs Dalloway* in the diaries, 'I like London for writing it' (D2 302) is followed by a description of how the city forces her out of her own thinking patterns:

And I like London for writing it, partly because, as I say, life upholds one; & with my squirrel cage mind, it's a great thing to be stopped circling. Then to see human beings freely & quickly is an infinite gain to me. And I can dart in & out & refresh my stagnancy. (D2 302)

Here, the ability to participate and not participate, 'dart in & out & refresh my stagnancy', going in as well as out of the city's social space, is psychologically and emotionally invigorating. By contrast, the metropolitan experience generates anxiety and only causes the mental register of Hamsun's narrator to deteriorate. Seeing people pass 'freely & quickly' is experienced as a physical rejection by Hamsun's narrator.

³⁷⁷ Lauren Elkin, *Flâneuse. Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice, and London* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2016), p. 84.

Clarissa is presented as an authoritative physical participant in the workings of the city. Throughout *Mrs Dalloway of Bond Street*, Clarissa seamlessly takes part in the movements of the city, as in the passing moment with the policeman:

The admirable policeman raised his hand and Clarissa acknowledging his sway, taking her time, crossed (MDBS 149).

Psychologically, the *Bond Street* Clarissa reads as a flâneuse in the classical, nineteenth-century sense: although she is one among many within the traffic of the city, the city exists for her. She can cross its streets languidly, manipulating its pace. Its policemen serve her as much as they serve the city. Whereas Hamsun's narrator felt continuously pestered by the paternal and well-thinking police force of the city, and Karl had difficulty staying on the right side of the law in spite of his best efforts, Clarissa moves in tandem with the officer.

As with much Woolf scholarship, critical opinion on Clarissa's flânerie depends on whether commentators emphasize Clarissa's high social status or limitations posed by her gender. In a study on domestic servants in Woolf's shorter fiction, Heather Levy argues that urban mobility is conditional on financial status in the novel. She reads Elizabeth as 'economically agile':

Graceful movement through middle class space [...] represents emotional and intellectual freedom. Just as Elizabeth Dalloway quickly escaped from the stultifying vapour of Doris Kilman and her Army and Navy undergarments [...] Elizabeth, certainly has another shilling to carry her down the Strand.³⁷⁸

If for Levy Elizabeth and Clarissa have the means to navigate the city, Andrew Harrison has recently argued that Clarissa is socially sidelined by the modernity of the

³⁷⁸ Levy (2010), p. 33.

city, with a ‘fundamental inability to grasp her modern social world or to respond to it in an appropriate fashion’.³⁷⁹ Harrison trivializes Clarissa’s enjoyment of the city, citing Clarissa’s ‘psychological adherence to anachronistic codes [...] she is emotionally bound to earlier forms of behaviour, even while she enjoys the superficial freedoms of the modern metropolis’.³⁸⁰ On the contrary, Clarissa is neither struggling to adapt to the city, nor lagging behind in its development: the whole city is physically drawn to her.

In the final novel, Clarissa generates movement in the city. In the buildup to the party, the novel’s climax, which we approach through the thoughts of Peter Walsh, London is seen coming together under the command of Clarissa, hardly an image of marginalization or backwardness:

[...] it was her street, this, Clarissa’s; cabs were rushing round the corner, like water round the piers of a bridge, drawn together, it seemed to him, because they bore people going to her party, Clarissa’s party (MD 139).

It is not only that Clarissa is ‘feeling part of something larger’³⁸¹ in her city, as Anna Snaith has argued; her social power and exhilarating flânerie places her at the centre of the city’s traffic, even in control of it.

Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street shows Clarissa as the main agent of continued London life, the character who keeps the wheels of the city turning when its continued flow is

³⁷⁹ Andrew Harrison, ‘Urban Spaces, Fragmented Consciousness, and Indecipherable Meaning in “Mrs Dalloway”’, in *Reassessing the Twentieth-Century Canon. From Joseph Conrad to Zadie Smith*, ed. by Nicola Allen and David Simmons (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 43-55 (p. 50).

³⁸⁰ Harrison (2014), p. 49.

³⁸¹ Anna Snaith, *Virginia Woolf: Public and Private Negotiations* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), p. 36.

psychologically threatened. When she is out shopping for gloves, the sound of an explosion startles Londoners and halts the narrative. Finalizing her gloves purchase, Clarissa is the one to recover first: ‘There was a violent explosion in the street outside. The shop-women cowered behind the counters. But Clarissa, sitting very upright’ – here in explicit physical contrast to everyone else in the shop – ‘smiled at the other lady. “Miss Anstruther!” she exclaimed’ (MDBS 153). Clarissa adopts the physical posture of Lady Bexborough, who was transported across the city while she ‘sat in her carriage, upright’ (MDBS 150), the ultimate image of power. When others react with physical fear, crouching down with the war in fresh memory, Clarissa punctures this fear with her authoritative posture and by initiating conversation with a fellow shopper, bringing the present-day social frame back on the scene.

In the comparative context of this study, feeling rejected by the city is a more representative flânerie experience. In *Mrs Dalloway*, this flânerie is exemplified by Peter Walsh, who feels separated and excluded from the interactions on the street. Critics often note that his predatory flânerie is a foil to that of Clarissa: it is Peter Walsh who is representative of flânerie in my comparative context, not Clarissa’s authoritative posturing and empowered enjoyment of the city.

4.9. Flânerie as a Physical Rejection

To conclude my discussion on Clarissa as a main agent of London life, I will turn to looking at flânerie as a physical rejection for Peter Walsh and Hamsun’s narrator. Walking in their respective cities, both characters experience a point of transition from day to night, a special moment which simultaneously intensifies the traffic of

bodies in the city and suspends them to the observer. For Peter Walsh this is the new evening hour, a moment extended by the transition to British Summer Time, to which he was not exposed in the colonies: 'The prolonged evening was new to him. It was inspiriting, rather' (MD 137). To the narrator of *Sult*, the more explicitly named nocturnal 'Parringstiden' (S 119), the 'mating hour' (L 115), takes place at 'den stille, svangre Nat' (S 119), the 'tranquil, pregnant night' (L 115). In London, 'it was so hot that people stood about talking' (D 139), in Kristiania, 'Hele Gaden var en Sump, hvorfra hede Dunster steg op' (S 119), 'The entire street was a swamp, with hot vapours rising from it' (L 115). In both novels, it is through the flâneur's anxious gaze and sense of physical exclusion that the city changes character from day to night, from work to play or search thereof.

The traffic of bodies and that of the city were already directly connected to one another in *The Voyage Out*, where the Dalloways first appeared. As the evening falls, 'Red and yellow omnibuses were crowding each other in Piccadilly; sumptuous women were rocking at a standstill' (VO 122). Not only suggestive of the physical movements of their profession, 'rocking at a standstill' shows the prostitutes both having to move and not being able to. Peter Walsh remembers Sally advocating for those 'poor girls of Piccadilly' (MD 62) in *Mrs Dalloway*; with the exceptions of prostitutes, solitary night-time strolling is a male preoccupation.

Flânerie conflates the social traffic of bodies with the actual traffic of the city. The predatory nature of the city walking of Peter Walsh and Hamsun's narrator has been rightly emphasized, but it nevertheless reads as a sexual rejection; both feel partially

or fully excluded from the promise of bodily exchange. Both watch the movements of others intensely, here Hamsun's narrator:

der vandred Mennesker omkring overalt, stille Par og larmende Klynger om hinanden. Den store Stund var indtraadt, Parringstiden, naar den hemmelige Færdsel foregaar og de glade Æventyr begynder. (S 119)

people were strolling about everywhere, a jumble of quiet couples and noisy groups. The great moment had arrived, the mating hour when the secret traffic takes place and the jolly adventures begin. (L 115)

In the case of Peter Walsh,

women came; men waited for them, with their coats blowing open, and the motor started. Everybody was going out. What with these doors being opened, and the descent and the start, it seemed as if the whole of London were embarking in little boats moored to the bank, tossing on the waters, as if the whole place were floating off in carnival. (D 139)

Peter Walsh's gaze defamiliarizes London, which he last knew before the war, to an exotic city. This new London blends with a mythologized version of Venice, with its boats taking off to a carnival, floating like gondolas suspended in time. The celebratory mood and excitement involves everyone, or indeed 'everybody' but him. Peter Walsh is not young and freshly off work like the young people he watches; he is not in the private rooms but out on the street, observing others. Through windows he witnesses 'a sense of pleasure-making hidden [...] young people slowly circling, conversations between men and women' (MD 138).

This sexual excitement is punctured by a sense of exclusion, which is packaged as moral condemnation by Hamsun's narrator as he observes prostitutes and their genteel clientele. His pursuit and pestering of Ylajali is a modulated version of the behavior of Peter Walsh, who disapprovingly describes women's bodies out of place, here not

only out at night but fighting and intoxicated, indeed criminal: a 'shindy of brawling women, drunken women; here only a policeman and looming houses' (MD 139). With no means to hire a prostitute, Hamsun's narrator is doubly excluded from the sexual traffic of the city.

In *Mrs Dalloway*, the city itself is personified as the body of an undressing woman, which again conflates the traffic of the city with the female body:

One might fancy that day, the London day, was just beginning. Like a woman who had slipped off her print dress and white apron to array herself in blue and pearls, the day changed, put off stuff, took gauze, changed to evening, and with the same sigh of exhilaration that a woman breathes, tumbling petticoats on the floor, it too shed dust, heat, colour; the traffic thinned; motor cars, tinkling, darting, succeeded the lumber of vans. (MD 137)

This metamorphosis, the rebirth of the city at evening, breathes like the body of an apron-wearing woman reorienting for the night. Hamsun's narrator witnesses 'denne Luft, der er fyldt af Hvisken, Omfavnelser, skælvende Tilstaaelser, halvt udtalte Ord, smaa Hvin' (S 119), 'this air filled with whispers, embraces, trembling confessions, half-spoken words, little squeals' (L 115), the air of the city speaking. He also describes the transition from day to night in terms of the female bodies on Karl Johan, the main boulevard of the capital, with its 'secret traffic':

Raslende Pigeskørter, en og anden kort, sandselig Latter, bølgende Bryster, heftige, pæsende Aandedrag; langt nede ved Grand en Stemme, som raaber: 'Emma!' (S 119)

Rustling skirts, a few bursts of sensual laughter, heaving breasts, excited, panting breaths; far down, by the Grand Hotel, a voice calling, 'Emma!' (L 115)

Typically for Hamsun, women alone are the origin and source of sexual exchanges.

Fascinated by but distanced from London's modernity, Peter Walsh provides a foil to the central role that Clarissa plays in the bodily hierarchy of the city. What is an absolutely atomizing city, one of prostitutes and unfaithful women, which can only offer rejection to Hamsun's narrator and disappointment to Peter Walsh, is in *Mrs Dalloway* a city whose traffic is drawn to Clarissa.

4.10. Conclusion

As I conclude, I would like to revisit the earliest incarnation of Clarissa's character in *The Voyage Out*, where she reads as a borderline Salome of a kind, orientalized in her physical superiority: 'Mrs. Dalloway was a tall slight woman, her body wrapped in furs, her head in veils' (VO 39). She sees the world through paintings, in terms so aestheticizing they distort reality. This approach is not unlike that of the narrator's grandmother in *La Recherche*, who finds paintings of famous locations and landmarks better guides than photographs – and this is a novel about travel titled *The Voyage Out*.³⁸² Clarissa's own thoughts of herself appear to follow the same aestheticizing lines: when she thinks of studying Plato, 'For an instant she saw herself in her drawing-room in Browne Street with a Plato open on her knees' (VO 45). Here, Clarissa imagines herself not as an experiencing reader but in the pose of one, as seen from the outside.

In physical terms, this caricature of Clarissa is presented as her robust husband's bodily foil. Her husband labels her a 'coward' (VO 45) for failing to eat when seasick. With unthinking authority if not medical at least paternal which echoes that of the

³⁸² Proust (1987), p. 40.

doctors in *Mrs Dalloway*, Richard Dalloway stresses how one must eat even when queasy, against disgust and revulsion; emotions rather out of place in *The Voyage Out*.

This obvious satire on the couple does not lessen Clarissa's very real effect on others, particularly on how others feel about themselves in her presence, a form of intimidation by physical appearance:

Again, the arrival of the strangers made it obvious to Rachel, as the hour of dinner approached, that she must change her dress; and the ringing of the great bell found her sitting on the edge of her berth in such a position that the little glass above the washstand reflected her head and shoulders. In the glass she wore an expression of tense melancholy, for she had come to the depressing conclusion, since the arrival of the Dalloways, that her face was not the face she wanted, and in all probability never would be. (VO 39-40)

Clarissa Dalloway thus began as a woman in fur, as a physically superior being who thought of little else than appearance, a conventional society lady with a suitably low appetite in whose presence others felt physically inferior.

By contrast, *Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street* shows Clarissa, a flâneuse buying gloves and interacting with shop assistants and patrons, perfect in her outward appearance and behaviour, in fact thinking about death and the meaning of life while shopping. She has an internal life that one would not expect of her on the basis of her behaviour and physical presentation. A single sentence shows this radical split between her thoughts and her behaviour, where her thoughts about the nature of habitually enforced social authority are interspersed with a line of direct speech about shopping:

How one can tell from a voice when people are in the habit, thought Clarissa, of making other people – “It’s a shade too tight,” she said – obey. (MDBS 152)

From a female peacock in *The Voyage Out*, really seen from the outside even by herself, Clarissa develops to a character whose inner life is meditated on at length, but whose physical performance remains intact.

As I argued in the introduction to this chapter, of all my three authors Woolf most clearly set out to focus on the body, eating, and meals, explicitly outlining these themes as central to her writing in *On Being Ill* and later in *A Room of One’s Own*. By virtue of its time-frame alone, *Mrs Dalloway* could be expected to show a heightened awareness of the body and of eating. During a twelve-hour period, habitual contact with the body – eating, grooming, and resting – should take up time. For a one-day novel punctuated by social gatherings in an affluent setting, there is curiously little food and drink in the novel. Neither the title character nor Septimus experience hunger, and there certainly is none of the digestive detail which made *Ulysses* infamous. *Mrs Dalloway* is set on a hot summer’s day, and we could expect the heat to cause the body to make itself known. In *On Being Ill*, the narrator notes how the body ‘turns to wax in the warmth of June’ (OBI 4), the month in which *Mrs Dalloway* is set, if inconsistently. *The Great Gatsby*, published just six weeks earlier than *Mrs Dalloway*, makes much of the effects of more sweltering heat: “it’s so hot [...] everything’s so confused”³⁸³ with Nick imagining the butler exclaim ““The Master’s

³⁸³ F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 94.

body! [...] far too hot to touch this noon”’.³⁸⁴ The near-absence of food at the final party is striking, in comparison to *To the Lighthouse* in particular.³⁸⁵

Instead, the body is used in ways both particular and selective in *Mrs Dalloway*, primarily through its image and the distortion of this image. The body is not a reliable source of information but heavily psychologically and socially filtered in the novel, often in damaging and unhelpful ways.

In this chapter, I have shown how *Mrs Dalloway* creates different idiolects through which the body is seen. Clarissa’s body can be elegant and strong when compared to some, and weak and failing in contrast to others. When she recovers from Septimus’ death in *The Hours*, she has to put her body back together (H 484). Miss Kilman, by contrast, emerges as a horror figure of distorted body image made real. She cannot escape her psychologically constructed physiological identity, a nightmarish body image sedimented in her physical appearance and reinforced by distributing it to the minds of multiple characters.

Like *Der Verschollene* and *Sult*, *Mrs Dalloway* locates much of its emotional pain to the body and its image. By reading eating behaviour and body image disturbance as its key vocabularies of suffering, I have found that whilst Septimus is ill, so is Miss Kilman. She states this explicitly, describing herself ‘like a wheel without a tyre, jolted by every pebble’ (MD 110, H 219), but scholars rarely compare her treatment

³⁸⁴ Fitzgerald (1998), p. 91.

³⁸⁵ Charlotte Boyce has recently discussed food in *To the Lighthouse*. Charlotte Boyce, “‘To the Lighthouse (1927) and “The Waves” (1931)’, in *A History of Food in Literature. From the Fourteenth Century to the Present*, ed. by Boyce and Joan Fitzpatrick (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 259-264.

in the novel with that of Septimus. For all the sympathy dedicated to the suffering of Septimus in the novel, none is extended towards Miss Kilman. With her murderous name, she is a character made out of extraordinary fear and misogyny, both of which are located in her body and its appetite. It is only for the lack of idiolects in the novel that her language fails to take a bodily shape, the kind Woolf describes in her diaries, of a woman 'delivering herself of rounded periods which would be queer enough in themselves were they not delivered in the oddest rotundity of diction, as of one speaking from a tub' (DI 289).

In its considerable afterlife as well as in the popular imagination, *Mrs Dalloway* is a novel of great emotional nuance and sensitivity, with great sympathy for fragile characters whose body and health are policed. But the novel's own hierarchy is sedimented not through emotions but through physical appearances. Clarissa maintains the physical standards of the city more than any other character. It is Clarissa and not, say, the Prime Minister, who judges other characters on the basis of their appearance. This view of Clarissa as the excessively dedicated backbone of a physically performed social hierarchy is one Peter Walsh and Sally Seton share, and even Richard Dalloway agrees upon. Sally and Richard both consider Clarissa's unglamorous cousin to whom she is reluctant to extend an invitation:

Clarissa was really very hard on her. She was a cousin, very poor. Clarissa *was* hard on people. (MD 162)

'Poor Ellie Henderson,' said Richard— it was a very odd thing how much Clarissa minded about her parties, he thought. (MD 101)

Even Sally Seton herself feels snubbed by Clarissa although she is Clarissa's main love interest in the novel, described in famously orgasmic terms (MD 27). Clarissa's

party has Sally remember her comparative poverty, how she ‘used to be in rags and tatters’ (MD 159), also recalling the modest background of her husband (MD 161).

Clarissa’s adherence to a physical hierarchy pays off. Elizabeth’s final appearance stuns her father:

[...] he had thought to himself who is that lovely girl? And suddenly he realized that it was his Elizabeth, and he had not recognized her, she looked so lovely in her pink frock! Elizabeth had felt him looking as she talked to Willie Titcomb. (MD 164)

Elizabeth metamorphoses to a woman not unlike her mother, not only because of her pleasing appearance but also in her heightened awareness of being watched and admired by Richard Dalloway. Similarly, the novel ends with Clarissa as she is seen by others, admired by Peter Walsh; a victory of a kind for the earliest incarnation of her character.

The high point of Clarissa’s day is a physical performance; escorting the Prime Minister through her party. Clarissa realizes that she is now envied and at the top of her game (MD 148), expressed with understatement as ‘all those people rather inclined, perhaps, to envy’ (MD 148) – envy of which we know through Ellie Henderson’s character, and through admiring guests who think of Clarissa as ‘charming to look at!’ (MD 150). Clarissa envisioned this moment already at the beginning of the novel, when the car passed her by: ‘so she would stand at the top of her stairs’ (MD 15), perhaps thinking of absolute rule. What were ‘the stairs’ to Clarissa when Peter Walsh makes his inopportune morning visit (MD 34), are now again ‘her stairs’ (MD 145), and support Clarissa in her stature.

This moment where others see Clarissa at the height of her powers risks, however, being punctured by her own thoughts. Clarissa's momentary but important sense of having power, which occurs when she realizes that her party is off to a good start, is one where she almost forgets about her physical appearance:

[...] couldn't help feeling that she had, anyhow, made this happen, that it marked a stage, this post that she felt herself to have become, for oddly enough she had quite forgotten what she looked like' (MD 145).

[...] though she loved it and felt it tingle and sting, still these semblances, these triumphs (dear old Peter, for example, thinking her so brilliant), had a hollowness; at arm's length they were, not in the heart and it might be that she was growing old, but they satisfied her no longer as they used; and suddenly, as she saw the Prime Minister go down the stairs, the gilt rim of the Sir Joshua picture of the little girl with a muff brought back Kilman with a rush; Kilman her enemy (MD 148).

Clarissa is at risk of forgetting 'what she looked like'. She must summon Miss Kilman, who disappeared from the novel thirty pages earlier, to remind herself of her stature once more, revealing Miss Kilman's crucial psychological function to her and to the novel at large.

In Woolf's 1928 anti-introduction of an introduction to the American edition of *Mrs Dalloway*, a meditation on the nature of textual introductions and glosses, she writes through a male authorial voice: 'All he has to say has been said as fully and as well as he can in the body of the book itself' (I 356). The *Dalloway* material reveals a number of bodies, bodily idiolects through which anxiety is expressed. When read through its genesis, the novel in its best known form expresses them in a comparatively muted fashion – making Miss Kilman's feared body all the more striking within it.

5. Conclusion

This thesis makes two connected claims: that anxiety is a central narrative mechanism for key modernist texts, and that this anxiety is expressed by ways in which the body is prominent. It takes the opposite view to prevailing literary approaches to the body, which see the body as constitutive of the self. Instead, it makes the case for a critical reading of the body in texts through the concept of body image, the psychological study of which began during the modernist period.

In the first, introductory chapter, a scholarship review of the field, I outline the limitations to the current approaches to anxiety and the body in literature. I argue that a psychological reading of the body as filtered by anxiety, where the mind shapes how the body is experienced and presented, is better suited to the study of modernist writing than the predominant phenomenological approaches, which study bodily agency in emotion and thought.

I show how much of the leading scholarship on body image in literature has conflated the aesthetic, moral, and medical approaches to the body into a single hostile authority that intervenes in the ‘natural’ state of the body. I highlight the limitations of the deconstruction of now obsolete medical and psychiatric practices, and argue that this Foucauldian paradigm of the medical humanities can reduce mental illness to a social construct. Paradoxically, an awareness of the physiological components in mental illness has led more scientifically minded scholars to the same conclusion, even to dismissing mental illness as a concept.

If in the field of history the ‘memory boom’ has been criticized for blurring the distinction between the witness and the expert, I show how narratives of the experience of mental illness have been taken for an authoritative source on its nature in literary studies. In particular, I argue that the most-cited scholarship on eating disorders in literature is more descriptive than analytical, and lacks critical distance from the experience of mental illness. Such scholarship repeats and even politicizes the thinking patterns which characterize disordered eating.

I then apply my methodology through three case studies, each of which in turn develops my reading of anxiety as a textual mechanism distributed to the body. The second chapter examines the most self-evident modernist text on mental suffering and the body, Knut Hamsun’s *Sult*. I show anxiety to be the mode through which the experiencing narrator interprets his experience, and a selection mechanism for the narrative as a result. I do this by adapting the cognitive bias theory from psychology to a narrative bias in the text. I then show how anxiety inhibits the narrator’s attempts to write, and how his emotional expression is redirected to the body. I argue that a disturbed body image and a simultaneous avoidance of and intense preoccupation with food are the mediums through which the narrator’s anxiety is expressed.

A more insecure and emotionally vulnerable *Sult* emerges as a result. I lift the novel’s hunger from the metaphoric interpretation it is generally given, and argue that the narrator’s harsh and punitive self-view causes him to actively deprive his body of comfort and nourishment. I counter readings that stress analytic and emotional detachment from the mental processes of the experiencing narrator. Instead, I show

extreme psychological distress, insecurity and the fear of social humiliation as central to the novel, a new reading of the psychology of early Hamsun.

My third chapter makes the case for a psychological reading of Franz Kafka's *Der Verschollene*, one motivated by sexual trauma. I recalibrate anxiety from a generalization about Kafka's writing at large to a localized and precise form of expression through the body and food. I demonstrate that food and eating are central to Kafka's emotional vocabulary beyond *Ein Hungerkünstler*. As productive as the recent visual approaches to Kafka have been, I show that in the study of the body, the visual cannot be separated from the psychological. I also show how the desire for complete bodily freedom on the one hand and strict regulation of the body on the other in Kafka's diaries, which have been seen as mutually contradictory by scholars, are products of the same psychological impulse.

My third chapter shows that a psychological reading of early Kafka through anxiety need not be reductive or indiscriminately derivative of the writer's life. That Kafka has been appropriated as a prophet of doom has led scholars not only to focus on the density of his environment, but also to search for anomalies to counteract bland generalizations about his writing as dark and apocalyptic.

The fourth and final chapter of this thesis discusses Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, which I compare to its manuscript draft *The Hours* and to related short stories Woolf completed in 1925. The novel directly focuses on mental illness, and criticizes the brutality of its treatment. Its emotional sensitivity has been interpreted as indiscriminate empathy. By contrast, my reading unveils deficient empathy and even

emotional cruelty as central to the novel's psychology. I show how the novel, which has multiple characters but few distinctive speech patterns, creates sociolects of the body, which conflate the psychological with the physical. Through Miss Kilman's character, I highlight how the novel's awareness of body image as it differs from physical appearance, and its knowledge of prejudices that overlap with the body, do not necessarily lead to a critical engagement with them.

Modernism is often associated with great emotional and psychological sensitivity. If not always taking a direct interest in psychology, the ways in which psychological discourse saturated the environment of my authors has been well-documented. In this thesis, I show that canonical modernist texts are very rich in psychology, and more anxious than previously thought. At the same time, they are not particularly dynamic in their psychological approach, but characterized by psychological and emotional rigidity. Although they make much of anxious emotion, they aspire to psychological and emotional invulnerability, which they sediment in bodily terms.

By adapting the cognitive bias theory to literary texts, I have approached anxiety not as a layer of emotion that adds to narrative events, but as a mode of interpretation: a way of reading, labelling, and distorting reality. At the subjective level on which the modernist project focused and which it problematized, I have shown anxiety to be channelled to ways in which the body is prominent. This method, whilst adapted from psychology, is particularly well suited to literary texts in that it blurs the distinction between style and content. Approaching modernism through anxious emotion offers a better way of situating writers who differ from the movement in narrative aspects, here Kafka in particular, but fit it thematically.

I have developed a template approach to modernist texts, which enables a similar amount and quality of attention to be given to materials that differ in language and cultural context. The historicization and contextualization of modernism, and a renewed focus on culture, have shed important light on the circumstances which produced and surrounded texts. Advances in literary sociology have made visible the mechanisms which have enabled success in the global literary space. In combination, these methods have proved a productive way of studying literature through its ingredients, surroundings, and distribution mechanisms. At the same time, the demand for a large amount of contextual knowledge has put smaller languages at a disadvantage. This focus on cultural and historical specificity, in its resistance to universalization, has reinforced national and linguistic boundaries to modernism. Comparatively small literatures, like those from the Nordic countries, have been left to the specialists. Ideas of national textual belonging and ownership, widespread outside English-speaking academia, even the misplaced fear of cultural appropriation, can further exacerbate this effect. If Franco Moretti found distance to be ‘a condition of knowledge’ in his criticism of close reading, I see close reading from a cultural distance as particularly beneficial to the study of smaller literatures.³⁸⁶ Conversely, proximity has overwhelmed much-researched authors in surrounding material at the expense of the texts themselves. In Woolf’s case, such an approach has combined with an excessive and one-sided interest in the writer’s person and its overlap with her work.

Whilst Kafka scholars have a long-standing interest in contesting his position on the map of world literature, my readings of Hamsun and Woolf suggest that their

³⁸⁶ Franco Moretti, ‘Conjectures on World Literature’, *New Left Review* 1 (2000), pp. 54-68 (p. 57).

positions need to be clarified by similar recalibration. By looking at the embodiment of a Germanic character as central to the psychology of *Mrs Dalloway*, which adds to the well-documented intertexts of Dante and Proust in the novel, I found *Mrs Dalloway* to be as interested in its relationship to Europe as to the Empire, a dimension of the novel that has received little attention in recent years.

My thesis responds to long-standing criticism of the Eurocentrism of modernist studies, particularly to the sense that canonical European modernism has been ‘done’, in two ways. Firstly, I have studied European modernism as a linguistically and culturally diverse field. I have looked at three literatures in detail, and material in six languages – German, Norwegian, English, French, Finnish, and Swedish – in this thesis. My sample of texts shows that the most sustained attention has focused on a minority, not the majority of European languages. Too often critics of Eurocentrism understand Europe to be Britain and France, in the most narrow cultural and geographic definition of these countries. I have also paid attention to the internal asymmetries within ‘small literatures’ by comparing Hamsun to a Finnish contemporary who enjoys similar literary status within his country but has received little outside attention even from specialists on Scandinavian modernism. In doing so, I have suggested that linguistic divisions have been misinterpreted as cultural, an error unlikely to be unique to the Nordic countries. Moreover, the unequal attention that a writer as prolific as Hamsun has received in English-language scholarship in contrast to Kafka and Woolf, a question of quality as much as quantity, shows that the study of European literatures is not only complementary to, but essential to the ongoing attention to asymmetries within world literature.

My second response to this pressure on the European canon is methodological. I hope to have questioned the claim that well-known texts no longer speak to us, or only do so as historical artefacts. Such a view is the product of scholarly approaches as much as the texts themselves, as the metaphoric readings of hunger in *Sult*, or the glossing over of sexual violence in scholarship on *Der Verschollene* most clearly illustrate. I hope to have shown the value of sharing a set of reference texts well-known to many, as new methodological and theoretical insights can be conveyed through and, I hope, debated against them.

Unlike many of the scholars from whose work this volume has benefited, I write at a time when discussing body image is part of popular culture. This popular interest has largely stayed on the visual level, in analysing media imagery and advocating for greater diversity within this imagery. It has not sufficiently questioned the function of this imagery, or our relationship to it. As body image is framed as a women's issue, it is approached in terms more aesthetic and erotic than intellectual or psychological. By contrast, images intended to humiliate other groups are more readily recognized as such.

My thesis questions the widely held assumption that the humanities are automatically more humane and empathetic than the sciences. This is the underlying argument of much of the scholarship that deals with literature, the body, and mental illness, or indeed of scholarship that aims to build bridges between the humanities and psychology, medicine, and psychiatry. In particular, my thesis questions the impulse of the medical humanities to call for the removal of authority to examine the body

from the hands of medicine and psychology.³⁸⁷ My reading shows that to make literature an authority on the body is not without risk, as texts look at the body through the mind's often distorting eye.

Literary scholars often resist mental illness as a category. This resistance reveals an antiquated understanding of mental illness as an unalterable part of character and personality, not in terms of harmful patterns of thought and behaviour that can be unlearned. This is, of course, an erroneous and unsympathetic approach to mental suffering itself. But its implications for literary analysis are also significant. It reveals a fixed understanding of psychology, which locates psychological activity below the level of consciousness, and equates it with identity. It can lead to insufficient sensitivity to the exact ways in which psychological biases operate at the textual level, and to ways in which psychological orientation emphasizes and distorts elements in texts. In this thesis, I have demonstrated that this absence of psychological awareness has led to insufficient critical engagement with the function of the body in texts.

In contrast to the occasionally indiscriminate interdisciplinarity that characterizes research connecting literature and the sciences, I have employed a more cautious approach, which accounts for the fundamental differences between disciplines. Sensitive to the limitations of my training, I have been careful not to blur my object of study; it remains the text, not the reader, nor the psychology that I have adapted for literary purposes. Instead of applying individual scientific studies to texts, or findings

³⁸⁷ For example, as forcefully advocated in a recent volume by Sarah Atkinson, Jane Macnaughton, Jennifer Richards, Anne Whitehead, and Angela Woods (eds.), *The Edinburgh Companion to the Critical Medical Humanities* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016).

so recent that they have not been extensively debated, and which as a literary scholar I would not be competent to assess, I advocate the application of the central insights of other fields of knowledge only when they are firmly enough established that the field in question is confident to disseminate them to non-specialists and to the public.

The literariness of Freudian psychology has been extensively documented – psychoanalysis is now used more by literary studies than by any other field. I hope to have shown that the core insights from cognitive psychology are equally if not more suited to literary studies. That psychology, as a selection mechanism and an interpretative style, can guide but also significantly distort experience, is a literary insight. It further justifies the continued centrality of attentive, critical close reading to literary study.

At its core, cognitive psychology emphasizes the exact nuances of our reading and interpretation of reality as constitutive of how we experience and see the world. This theory of psychology based on selection, framing and interpretation is one that modernist literature anticipated. The modernist project emphasized individual experience as formative of reality, the subjective use of language as constitutive of grand narratives, and as I have shown, the body and its image as an important site of emotional and psychological projection.

Just as Ibsen's *Et dukkehjem* accounts for women's experience in ways that the feminism of its time did not fully capture, the texts I have looked at are more than the sum of the psychological discourses that surrounded them. Studying them through contemporary psychology, whilst being sensitive to their historical situation, has

allowed me to best identify the precise location of their psychological expression, and to fully detail its richness.

My thesis shows that what texts focus on, and what kind of narrative they tell, are psychological questions. In particular, the use of psychology has helped me identify an enormous amount of literary material on the body, and to show it as more indicative of the mind than the body itself, contradicting current approaches to the body in literary studies. The body is unlikely to be the only blind spot of this kind, the psychological significance of which has been overlooked.

The cognitive bias model of psychology has come under much criticism for overemphasizing individual agency. This is a substantial weakness for a psychological theory, but not necessarily as serious a weakness for the study of literary texts. Subjective interpretation and the exact psychological framing of events and external conditions shapes literature to a greater extent than it shapes lives. This variation in individual experience as fundamental to literature is something modernists highlighted, overemphasized, and even parodied. My application of contemporary psychology to modernist texts is not a final, all-encompassing theory of literature, but it does highlight an important layer of psychological orientation that has been underappreciated in literary scholarship. I hope to have shown it to be highly complementary to existing methods, but also a dimension to literary expression that cannot be ignored.

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